

Reviews

The Book is the Message

SIGMUND KOCH AND DAVID E. LEARY (EDS), *A Century of Psychology as Science*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1992. 1021pp. ISBN 1-55798-171-X.

The origins of this volume go back to the flurry of commemorative activity with which American psychologists marked 'the hundredth anniversary of scientific psychology'. At the 1979 national convention of the APA some 40+ symposiasts and invited lecturers contributed their 'retrospections and reflections' on the topic of 'a century of psychology as science'. After revision and the addition of two or three additional manuscripts these contributions were eventually published in book form in 1985. Soon after this the commercial publisher ceased promoting it, although it had actually won an Association of American Publishers Award. The book was rescued from early oblivion by the APA, which republished it, unaltered except for a brief postscript, to mark its own centennial in 1992.

Clearly, this is no ordinary book, this is a monument; a carefully crafted monument erected by American academic psychology to itself. As the senior editor puts it in his summing up: 'The message of this book is the book' (p. 928). A review of such a work will therefore have to proceed in two steps: first a review of the book as book, and then a review of the book as message—or monument.

As a book, this volume amply deserved its prize. The contributors were all prominent figures who were able to speak with authority. In some cases this means that their contributions have considerable value as historical documents, in addition to their interest as expositions of a theoretical position. This is true, for example, of the longest chapter in the book, a 70-page piece by Saul Rosenzweig on 'Freud and experimental psychology' which even contains facsimiles of Freud's famous (notorious?) notes to the author on this topic. Rosenzweig's long dual involvement in psychodynamic theory and experimental psychology forms the basis for a unique contribution that is illuminating on several levels.

Not all the articles gathered in this volume have that kind of weight. But overall, their scholarly value is such that they have aged well. Most of them can be read with as much profit today as on the day they first appeared. As a collection of primary sources representing the thinking of American psychologists circa 1980 the book has no equal. For 'history and systems' type graduate courses this volume is still a far better reference source than any secondary text. Phenomenology is represented by Giorgi and Zaner, mathematical modeling by Luce, Gestalt psychology by Henle, behaviorism by Kendler, J.J. Gibson by J.J. Gibson, and cognition by Newell, to mention only a few examples. There are also several papers devoted

to general questions of particular theoretical interest, such as that by Robinson on explanation, and that by Toulmin and Leary on 'the cult of empiricism'.

The editors of the book were obviously concerned to avoid disciplinary narrow-mindedness, and they have achieved this, not only by their selection of contributions, but also by their coverage. One of the four sections of the book is devoted to the relationship of psychology to other disciplines, namely philosophy, mathematics, the neurosciences, evolutionary biology, linguistics and aesthetics. Another contains two pieces that discuss 'psychology and the public good' as well as four brief chapters by humanists. In view of the historical origins of the volume this demonstration of broad-mindedness is certainly impressive. But ultimately this broad-mindedness can operate only within the boundaries imposed by a very specific historical situation. As already indicated, this volume is something like an official monument for American academic psychology. This means that its horizon cannot but reflect the horizon of what it represents. Part of the value of the book lies in the insights it provides into the characteristics of that horizon. Because of limitations of space only glimpses of these characteristics can be offered here.

There is, for example, the distinction made by the senior editor between 'fundamental' and 'implemental' psychology, a distinction that parallels the more usual one between 'pure' and 'applied' psychology, which serves to rationalize the exclusion from the volume of areas like clinical, educational and organizational psychology. This kind of distinction reflects common preconceptions regarding the nature of 'science' and the relationship between psychological knowledge and psychological practice. Science is regarded as an essentially theoretical endeavor which is to be sharply separated from mere practice. Insofar as this is the message of the book as a whole, it certainly functions more as historical monument than as an indicator of current trends.

Another way in which the book reflects its very specific historical origins is in its parochialism. Although certain European contributions are seriously discussed in many of the papers, these contributions are given a purely *historical* significance. There is no information on any ongoing, living projects for psychology anywhere but in the United States. This is all the more remarkable as the *quantitative* decline of American psychology relative to the rest of the world is duly noted. The implication seems to be that for the last half-century psychology outside the United States has lacked significant intellectual and scientific content. That is not a criticism of the book (except for the misleading omission of the word 'American' in the title); it is a comment on the limitations imposed by the circumstances of its genesis.

A third great absence which defines the horizon of these contributions is that of the social sciences. This strikes the reader all the more forcefully as the volume is exceptionally broad-minded in exploring the relationship of psychology with the biological sciences and with the humanities. The volume's intellectual generosity extends to aesthetics and poetry, not to speak of the multi-faceted exploration of psychology's philosophical links, but there is no indication that anthropology, economics, history or sociology might have something to say to psychology, or it to them. Were one to go on the evidence of this book as historical document one would have to conclude that at least one imperative has not changed in the one hundred years of American psychology's existence: Avoid contamination by the social sciences like the very plague!

An individualistic science then? Only in a strangely paradoxical sense, because

the one thing that the science represented by this book is not is a science of individuals. The objects discussed here are conceived as general processes or phenomena which, though instantiated by or localized in individuals, obey their own laws operating across individuals. The individual is ever present as an abstract postulate, but only in one or two of the contributions to this volume is there any hint that real individuals, that is, individuals as variously structured social agents, can form the basic objects of systematic or 'fundamental' psychological inquiry. One of the more important effects of the cultural and disciplinary boundaries that define the psychological science of this book is to keep real individuals out.

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How the *American Psychologist* Saw B.F. Skinner

K. A. LATTALL (ED.), 'Reflections on B.F. Skinner and Psychology',
Special Issue of *American Psychologist*, 47(11), November 1992.

In November 1992 the *American Psychologist* devoted the entire issue to what were referred to as 'Reflections on B.F. Skinner and Psychology' under the guest-editorship of Kennon Lattal. The 24 essays comprising the collection were chosen from 'nearly 90 submissions' and were intended 'to reflect on and celebrate the scientific and intellectual impact of B.F. Skinner on Psychology' (Lattall, 'B.F. Skinner and Psychology', p. 1269). No contributor drawn from scholarship either in the history or philosophy of psychology found a place within this 300-page undertaking, nor is there even one contribution clearly designed to identify those of Skinner's contributions that many would regard as negative or jejune. We are offered a celebration—one starkly lacking in critical reflection and intellectual seriousness.

If so consistently panegyric offerings admit of classification, they can be reduced to three general categories, to wit: *What Skinner Never Said*, *Skinner's Originality* and *How to Preserve the Movement*. Only two articles are explicitly intended for the first category (J.T. Todd and E.K. Morris's 'Case Histories in the Great Power of Steady Misrepresentation' and 'Setting the Record Straight'), but nearly all of the articles have defensive or apologetic passages, or passages intended to fold behaviorism into some more respectable tradition within the history of ideas. In 'Case Histories. . .', Todd and Morris go so far as to recommend strategies for the behaviorist who would win friends and influence people: 'Avoid the unnecessary use of such terms as *control* because their unwanted connotations distract attention from more fundamental issues' (p. 1450). Howard Rachlin, in an essay which defends something called 'teleological behaviorism', finds Aristotle understanding a final cause to be 'a form of movement. . . abstractly conceived' (pp. 1371–1372), a claim that is either meaningless or wrong, depending on how the adverb is to be understood. All in all, however, articles in this category fail in one or both of two ways: either by pointing to a non-existent critic or by saving Skinner from implications prominently featured in his principal works.

The essays striving to establish Skinner's originality tend to do so at the expense of allegedly deficient alternative approaches or by elevating the humdrum. The