

BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTEs RENDUS

David J. Murray, *A History of Western Psychology*.
Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1982.

Reviewed by Kurt Danziger
York University

David J. Murray obtained his Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Cambridge in 1964. He then joined the Department of Psychology at Queen's University of Kingston, Ontario, where he is now Professor of Psychology. He has carried out a number of experimental studies on human memory and has published work on the history of psychology, including a January 1982 article in Canadian Psychology entitled "Vives (1538) on Memory and Recall."

There are two entirely different ways of approaching the history of a field of human activity that has a present as well as a past. It is always possible to treat the past as a series of more or less faltering steps that culminated in a present practice whose inevitably limited horizon sets the terms on which the past is allowed a hearing. On the other hand, one can permit the past to call into question those generally unnoticed horizons of the present which are about to become history in their turn.

These two approaches cater to different interests. The first approach, looking out from within current practice, will be likely to confirm the practitioner in whatever he or she is doing and to socialize the novice in the established perspectives of the field. The second approach is apt to subordinate the special concerns of the field to wider philosophical and historical interests.

In the historiography of the sciences the first approach has by now very largely yielded to the second, but this cannot be said of the historiography of psychology. During the period when psychology was struggling to establish its status as a profession and as an experimental discipline, interest in its history was virtually restricted to the retelling of certain narratives that often had more in common

with tribal origin myths than with scientific historiography. More recently this has changed — probably as significant a sign of maturity as any one is likely to find. But established traditions do not die overnight, and it will be some time yet before the general quality of scholarship in the historiography of psychology will be uniformly at the level long taken for granted in fields like the history of the physical and biological sciences.

Judged against the criteria provided by this background Murray's *History of Western Psychology* puts in a creditable performance. One of the ways in which it compares favourably with some others in the field is that its author usually describes historically important works on the basis of first hand acquaintance rather than on the basis of second or third hand accounts. The repetition of errors, distortions and howlers, which has sadly disfigured some other products in this area, is therefore successfully avoided. At the same time, the results of modern scholarship are taken into account so as to achieve a more accurate historical understanding than would have been provided by traditional preconceptions. Given the brief space in which a vast subject matter must be covered in a book of this kind, the work is remarkably free of that air of relentless superficiality which one has come to associate with texts in this area.

In two respects this is a highly traditional book. First of all, the parts of the subject that are singled out for serious consideration are the most venerable core areas of experimental

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psychology — above all, sensation, and to a slightly lesser extent, memory and other aspects of cognition. Social psychology gets less than 1% of the total space and such areas as developmental, applied and personality psychology are hardly glanced at. There is however a whole chapter on psychoanalysis.

A second traditional feature of the book is expressed in its commitment to the view that the history of psychology is to be treated purely as intellectual history. This means that the broader historical context of psychological ideas is not explored. Unfortunately, even the purely intellectual context is kept within

rather narrow limits, so that the book conveys no sense of the importance, for the genesis of psychological ideas, of such areas as natural philosophy, moral philosophy, aesthetics and political theory. A six page prologue covering several thousand years of European “political history” only serves to accentuate the lack of historical context for the exposition of the psychological content in the text itself.

If one is prepared to accept these very clear limitations on what the book sets out to do, it can be used as a clearly written and reliable introduction to those aspects of the history of psychology which it chooses to emphasize.

John McLeish, *The Development of Modern Behavioural Psychology*.
Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1981.

Reviewed by William Marshall
Queen's University

The title of McLeish's book contains two terms that may be somewhat misleading. Describing his efforts as encompassing the “Development” of ideas suggests that the approach is historical, while the term “Modern Behavioural Psychology” might be taken to mean almost anything depending upon one's restrictive use of the term. McLeish, as it turns out, attaches a very restrictive meaning to “Behavioural Psychology”.

There will probably always be argument about what constitutes a proper historical approach but I doubt that the tact McLeish takes will ever satisfy. In the first place only slightly more than half the book can be said to be a history. From page 125 onwards McLeish concentrates on what is essentially a quite uncritical presentation of Skinner's radical behaviourism, particularly as it applies to the analysis of language, mixed with some rather dogmatic statements concerning the nature of science and at times quite silly declarations about how to evaluate psychology. For instance he says that “the test of a true and useful psychology is not only that it is empirical, but that it *conceptualizes reality as it is*” (p. 108 italics added). If we knew reality well enough to evaluate whether or not our psychology conceptualized it “as it is”, then we would hardly need a science of be-

haviour. Added to this there are some naive speculations about emotional and neurotic difficulties which can only serve to embarrass clinical behaviour therapists. Why it is that behavioural theoreticians, basing their notions entirely on non-clinical, and often only animal research, feel the urge to expostulate on matters unfamiliar to them is beyond me. On this point McLeish makes the preposterous suggestion that Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) “can be described as the pioneer of ‘behaviour modification’” because his religious preaching practices reflected a wisdom about how to change people's views. One might as well suggest that the writer of Genesis was the originator of behaviour modification because he understood how the serpent might tempt Eve. One can only wonder how McLeish imagines the human species got along at all before radical behaviourism opened our eyes to the “truth”.

In his review of the history of radical behaviourism, McLeish highlights the work of some writers who have not been given a prominent place by other historians, and discusses, or notes only in passing, authors who have ordinarily been considered prominent. To compound this McLeish offers only the most superficial account of each writer's views and frequently fails to point out their