Towards a Better Understanding of the Philosophy of Psychology

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Abstract

Over the past few decades, we have witnessed the dynamic development of a new philosophical discipline, which has been called the philosophy of psychology. Although it is relatively new as a formal discipline, the subject matter with which it concerns itself has a much longer history. In the following paper I intend to sketch an outline of the history of the philosophy of psychology, the changes it has undergone, and to offer a few proposals to widen its horizon of study, to include those elements of psychology that, in my opinion, merit attention. With this goal in mind and based on appropriate examples, I will present four hypotheses regarding the beginnings of the philosophy of psychology, its present state and possible future. My aim is to arrive at a proposal for a more inclusive approach to the philosophy of psychology.

For many years we have witnessed a dynamic development in the scientific study of the human being along with the emergence of academic disciplines that embarked on the study of *homo sapiens* from new perspectives. They include, among others: psychology, cultural anthropology, sociology, neurobiology, and cognitive science.

Certain particular sciences have achieved admirable development thanks to a limiting of their field or scope of study to a small fragment of the studied reality. Questions concerning proximate causes turned out to be heuristically prolific. The success of these particular sciences may be ascribed, no doubt, to their emancipation from an integral vision of the studied reality, which was traditionally the domain of philosophy. The discipline of psychology is a case in point.

Philosophers have tried to keep abreast of these changes, engaging in a dialogue regarding issues that border both philosophy and psychology. In fact, the founders of scientific psychology (e.g. Wundt, James) did not want to abandon the field of philosophy completely, convinced that this would be to the detriment of any subsequent development of psychology. As a result we have witnessed the birth of a new, specialized philosophical discipline dedicated precisely to this endeavour, namely, to a dialogue between philosophers and psychologists regarding issues of common concern. Although formally relatively young, this new discipline has already experienced major changes and developments.

As psychological research has become an increasingly inclusive endeavor, encompassing a broad range of inquiries – from molecular-level investigations to social and organizational psychology – philosophy of psychology has grown well beyond its original set of core concerns. Today, the philosophy of psychology has its own agendas and is motivated by concerns which can be distinguished from those problems and questions that informed its roots in philosophy of mind. No longer is
philosophy of psychology directed solely towards questions of rationality, modularity, nativism and intentionality. This is probably the most obvious change in the thirty years since the publication of Block’s anthology (Symons, Calvo 2009: ix).

The purpose of this article is to explore the above statement, discuss different views related to the age of the philosophy of psychology, its subject matter, as well as to outline its possible future. This will require a certain kind of historical, meta-methodological reflection, without getting into a technical analysis of any particular concept taken from the philosophy of psychology. To begin this task I will use a broader concept of the philosophy of psychology, understood as research into the philosophical foundations of psychology (Bermúdez 2009). In the subsequent part of the discussion a more precise definition will be developed.

**How old is the philosophy of psychology?**

In order to respond to this question I would like to present four hypotheses and analyse them one after the other. The first two are concerned with the subject matter of psychology (content), whereas the other two are related to certain historical events. I propose to name them: ancient, modern, formal, and contemporary.

It should be quite obvious that the philosophy of psychology cannot be older than psychology itself. The first question one would pose about this discipline relates to estimating the age of psychology as a science as such. Naturally, the first question would therefore be, “where and when does psychology begin?” In my analysis I would like go beyond the popular conviction that attributes the beginning of psychology as a science to the symbolic opening of Wilhelm Wundt’s experimental psychology laboratory in 1879; a point which is open to further discussion. The purpose of this exercise is to provide as broad a historical background as possible to the issue in question.

One possible point of reference could be the first appearance of the word “psychology” in printed literature in R. Goclenius’ 1590 volume entitled, Psychologia, hoc est homini perfectione, anima et imprimis ortu, (Marburg). However the usage of the word does not necessarily mean that its significance had been fully developed. The same applies to the term the philosophy of psychology. Let us now explore the four aforementioned hypotheses.

(1) Hypothesis of its antiquity: The philosophy of psychology is almost as old as philosophy itself.

This hypothesis is grounded in a widespread conviction that the origins of psychology go as far back as other anthropological and epistemological disciplines within the history of philosophy. A case in point is Aristotle’s Περὶ Ψυχής. Indeed, some authors (e.g. Brentano 1867, Clarkson 2003, Hatfield 2009) consider this work to be the earliest known treatise on psychology. Some would even consider Aristotle to be the father of the term “psychology”, which etymologically means “a science of the soul” (λόγος, ψυχή). In his Λόγιον it was already a well-established discipline concerned with rational research into the soul, Λόγος περὶ ψυχής (Hatfield 2009: 4). The beginnings of the concept of a philosophy of psychology are linked to the first auto-reflection on anthropological and epistemological issues related to the human mind and to human behaviour and on their methodological status.
The psychology of Aristotle included the study of sensory, vital and cognitive human functions (Clarkson 2003: 211). Aristotle posited a close relationship between memory and imagination that served for both recollecting and creating mental pictures. This idea remains quite valid in contemporary research (Danziger 2002). In the classic Aristotelian view, psychology was, for the most part, incorporated into the discipline of biology (perception, emotions). Today, this approach is generally considered vitalistic, that is to say, the soul conceptualized as a form of the body, in charge of supplying energy for both the body and the mind. For Aristotle, the cognitive functions of the soul became the subject of a separate logical study thus, in a sense, paving the way for contemporary cognitive neuroscience.

(2) Hypothesis of its modernity: The philosophy of psychology is only as young as modern philosophy. Descartes’s philosophy limited the conception of psychology to the human mind, namely, to its sensory, affective and cognitive dimensions. In contrast to Aristotle, he narrowed the subject matter of psychology to the contents of consciousness, which subsequently became a standard way of understanding psychology as such (Clarkson 2003: 211).

For Descartes, “mental” meant “conscious”. Mind was considered searchable thanks to introspection. Descartes is well known for his famous distinction of two substances: res cogitans and res extensa. This resulted in two distinct directions for research into the human individual – the discipline of psychology (although not directly named so), and that of physics (science). In a broader sense Descartes may be considered to be the founder of modern psychology because he individuated its subject matter, i.e. limiting it to conscious mental life. All the same, it was still an a priori discipline.

Nolens volens. Descartes also paved the way for what was later to become experimental psychology. In fact, he developed a new “spatial” concept of matter, thus opening a new gate for scientific research, moving it well beyond Aristotelian physics, which considered matter as vivacious (animated). This change of perspective marked the development of experimentation related to perception in animals, thus treating the human senses as a physical mechanism. The most significant developments were noted when mathematical tools were applied to the field of optics and visual perception (Hatfield 2002, 2009).

Aristotle and Descartes were simultaneously philosophers, psychologists and scientists, which permits us to name them philosophers of psychology as well. The same may be said about the British Empiricists: Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. Locke and Hume developed psychological theories of association, and Berkeley proposed those regarding visual perception. Both remain valid today, at least in a general sense (Bermúdez 2009).

The hypothesis of modernity is particularly supported by Allport (1955) and later reflected in a volume published by Symons and Calvo (2009), where the concept of psychology and related reflection on it, may be traced back to the modern period of the history of philosophy, which focused primarily on rationalist and empiricist points of departure. Even if the authors of the latter volume do not explicitly name it as the “modernity hypothesis”, they certainly give greater attention to the way modern philosophical concepts, resulting from the tension between rationalist and empiricist approaches, significantly affected the way that the contemporary philosophy of psychology developed. We shall return to Allport’s thought later on in this paper.
(3) The formal hypothesis: The philosophy of psychology appeared in tandem with the first historical appearance of scientific psychology in 1879. The year 1879 is generally considered to be the formal historical beginning of scientific psychology, when Wilhelm Wundt first opened his laboratory of experimental psychology in Leipzig. In some circles, however, 1859 is considered the year in which scientific psychology was born, linking it to the beginnings of psychophysics. The other significant historical moment for scientific psychology was the publication of Wundt’s *Philosophische Studien* in 1881. In fact, the birth of scientific psychology may also be seen as a result of the first historical use of physiological measurements and scientific methodology in psychological studies (Ebbinghaus 2000). This meant a shift from merely explaining psychological phenomena to their actual empirical description (Hatfield 2009).

In the United States William James, who brought over many new ideas from Germany, is often considered to be the father of scientific psychology. In fact, before James, psychology in America was almost exclusively focused on morality and mental philosophy drawing from ethics and theology (Sexton 1978). This changed, when in 1892 James wrote: “I wished by treating psychology like a natural science, to help her to become one” (James 1892: 146).

The German psychologist Jochen Fahrenberg, on the other hand, has a significantly different opinion about the beginning of psychology as a science. According to him, psychology as a distinct science is the fruit of a creative discussion that took place between two groups of researchers: one in Königsberg (*Königsberger Konstellazion*) and the other in Leipzig (*Leipziger Konstellazion*). The first group was made up of Christian Wolff, Immanuel Kant, and Johann Friedrich Herbart; the second of Ernst Heinrich Weber, Gustav Theodor Fechner, and Wilhelm Wundt. According to Fahrenberg, Kant believed that psychology could not be based either on mathematics or experiments. Wundt, on the other hand, was convinced that psychology was a field for scientific study and therefore in need of both experimental methodology and mathematical formulae. For Kant psychology was essentially pragmatic anthropology, while for Wundt it was an empirical humanistic science (Fahrenberg 2008).

In his *Antropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* Kant introduced many concepts now accepted by contemporary psychology, such as: character traits, psychopathology, social psychology, etc. This way of understanding psychology, however, had already been developed by Christian Wolff, who in his *Psychologia empirica, Psychologia rationalis* (1732-1734) conceptualized psychology as an “experiential knowledge of the soul” (*Erfahrungsseelenkunde*) or a metaphysical science of the soul (*Seelenwissenschaft*).

As Kant’s successor in Königsberg, Johann Friedrich Herbart was convinced that a close relationship existed between metaphysics and psychology. In a sense, psychology was bound to the regulative role of philosophy. In order to develop sound theories, philosophy would have to be the interpretative key for empirical psychological research. This could also serve as a good starting point for our contemporary discourse.

Herbart, for example, was against the psychologization of epistemology, and yet he tried to mathematize psychology. Indeed, the historical beginning of philosophical psychology (meta-epistemology) may be attributed to him. While Herbart disputed with Kant about the possible mathematization of psychology, Wundt disputed the possibility of making psychology experimental. In fact, it was Weber who paved an experimental path for psychology in his physical psychology through
the use of experiments regarding the sense of touch. Fechner, Wundt’s predecessor, did the same with his psychophysics, in which he attempted to functionally link the physical and psychological levels of human acts. Thus, using the work already accomplished by his predecessors, Wundt developed his own experimental approach to psychology, by focusing on the measurement of simple acts of perception (Sachs-Hombach 2005).

Gary Hatfield was another researcher who did not agree with the traditional opinion about the beginnings of scientific psychology. According to him, Wundt’s experimental psychology is a natural continuation of philosophical psychology and he considered the so-called polarization between philosophers and psychologists at the time to be an exaggeration.

Unlike psychologists, physicists, biologists or chemists do not indicate formal dates for the beginning of their field of study. Rather, they speak in terms of milestones that marked the development of their sciences. Thus, they do not hesitate to go as far back as Aristotle.

This means that, despite its contemporary manifestation, their subject matter was already established very early in the history of the sciences. In this way Hatfield would, to an extent, be in favour of my first hypothesis, namely, that the philosophy of psychology may date back to the ancients. Moreover, in his opinion, the immediate predecessors for Wundt were Johann Steinbuch, Caspar Tourtual, Hermann Lotze, and in the case of James – Alexander Bain and Christian Wolff (Hatfield 2002), which would push the date of the historical birth of scientific psychology even further back.

As one can see, it is not altogether clear that 1879 marks the formal beginning of scientific psychology. By the same token it is difficult to estimate the exact age of this type of philosophy of psychology, which might better be labelled as a philosophy of scientific psychology and understood as a meta-reflection on the ways and means for the implementation of scientific, i.e. experimental standards into the discipline of psychology. In fact, as we have illustrated above, this kind of reflection really began when the founders of scientific psychology became concerned with its mathematical and experimental dimensions. Indeed, one might say that this type of philosophy of scientific psychology even anticipated the birth of scientific psychology itself. The concept of a philosophy of scientific psychology or, more precisely, a philosophy of cognitive science is also represented by some contemporary authors, whose insights will be looked at later in this article.

(4) The hypothesis of its contemporaneity: The philosophy of psychology is only ca. 30 years old.

From around the middle of the 20th century a number of studies emerged which attempted to link expressis verbis to the problems related to psychology with philosophy. At that time, one did not speak of the philosophy of psychology, but, at the very most, of a philosophical or rational psychology relating to metaphysical, methodological, conceptual or anthropological issues present in the field of psychology (Marc 1949; Arnold, Gasson 1954; Donceel, 1955; Eacker 1975).

A possible conclusion following from an acceptance of one of the hypotheses presented earlier in this paper could be that psychological issues were present in philosophical discourse practically from the very beginning. However, the first time that the term the philosophy of psychology appeared in published form was in 1974. It was the title of a collective effort edited by S. C. Brown. The first monograph on the subject was entitled Philosophy of Psychology, by J. Margolis (1984) and appeared
only one year after the publication of a work representing the former metaphysical approach: *Problems of Metaphysics and Psychology* (Eacker 1983). The title *Philosophy of Psychology* was later used quite regularly in monographic publications (Robinson 1985; Bunge, Ardila 1987; Botterill, Carruthers 1999; Bermúdez 2005, 2009) as well as in collections of readings (Block, 1980 - vol. 1 and 1981 - vol. 2; Bermúdez 2006). It was also used once in a chapter of a manual of 20th century philosophy (Mason, Sripada, Stich 2008) and twice in a collective work by O'Donohue and Kitchener (1996) and one by Symons and Calvo (2009). A book in Italian with the same title was also published in 2003 (Marraffìa), one in German as a translation from the English in 1990 (Bunge, Ardila), and a thematically allied book in French in 1996 (Engel). In Poland a book was published under the title *Filozofie psychologii/Philosophies of Psychology* in 2006 (Trzópek). It was also used in reference to a posthumous collection of Wittgenstein (1980).

The evidence presented above allows one to formally trace the contemporary beginnings of *the philosophy of psychology* to as far back as 1974. The problem, however, as we have already tried to illustrate, remains much broader. In fact, the contents of the contemporary concept of *the philosophy of psychology* seem to be much older than its formal published beginning in 1974, or if one wishes in 1980, in relation to Block’s *Readings*.

For example, Elizabeth Valentine, who authored a manual of philosophy of psychology although titled *Conceptual Issues in Psychology* in 1982, was herself already teaching about psychological theory in 1966. Her courses included philosophical issues, which she later explicitly titled *the philosophy of psychology* (e-mail communication).

Although some would propose Block’s *Readings* as a formal beginning of *the philosophy of psychology*, when one looks at the content of this book it becomes clear that the texts gathered there go much further back into the past. Some examples of this include works by: C. G. Hempel (1972), H. Putnam (1965), B. F. Skinner (1953), N. Chomsky (1959), D. Davidson (1970). Because these were included in Block’s volumes, one can legitimately place the formal beginning of *the philosophy of psychology* to a much earlier date. Although most of the readings date to the 1970s, the oldest contribution goes back to 1953 to B. F. Skinner’s, *Science and Human Behavior*. This pushes back the date of the formal historical beginning of *the philosophy of psychology* to the 1950s, making it more or less as old as the philosophy of mind. Earlier works of Fodor and Dennett demonstrate this point.

Block himself seems to advocate a longer history for *the philosophy of psychology*, when he links it to the philosophy of mind, opening his volume with:

> It is increasingly clear that progress in philosophy of mind is greatly facilitated by knowledge of many areas of psychology and also that progress in psychology is facilitated by knowledge of philosophy. [...] A host of crucial issues do not “belong” to either philosophy or psychology, but rather fall equally well in both disciplines because they reflect the traditional concerns of both fields. The problems will yield only to philosophically sophisticated psychologists or to psychologically sophisticated philosophers (Block 1980: v).

Here again any attempt to pinpoint a formal beginning to *the philosophy of psychology* encounters many difficulties, making it more reasonable to refer to the content rather than to the usage of the expression *philosophy of psychology* as such.
Bringing the discussion around the four hypotheses to a conclusion, it should be obvious that any attempt to formally pinpoint a historical beginning to the discipline of philosophy of psychology becomes very problematic and depends much on how one defines it. As we have illustrated, there is enough evidence to abandon any attempt to put forward any concrete dates and, following Hatfield’s proposal, to speak rather in terms of milestones in the history of psychology as the very subject matter of the philosophy of psychology. No doubt, there were significant periods in the development of the science of psychology related to modern and contemporary philosophy and to the beginnings of experimentalism in psychology. However, when we conceptualize it more generally as a reflection on the foundations of psychology, it becomes clear that this discipline dates at least as far back as Aristotle, notwithstanding a lack of any explicit references to it by name.

The present state of the philosophy of psychology

Let us look at the contents of Block’s Readings. In the first volume he divides all of the material into three parts: behaviourism, reductionism/physicalism, and functionalism; and in the second volume into four parts: mental representation, imagery, the subject matter of grammar, and innate ideas. Sixteen years later published readings edited by J. L. Bermúdez contain the following parts: pictures of the mind, commonsense psychology, representation and cognitive architecture. In the latter volume Block’s physicalism, reductionism and functionalism form the first part of the readings and are summarized under the umbrella of the theories of the mind. Behaviourism is not mentioned in the second.

These two volumes testify to a significant shift in the interest shown in the philosophy of psychology, which moved into cognitivistics, linguistics, and the philosophy of science. The range of texts included in Bermúdez’s volume varies from 1969 (Dennett) to 2003 (Bermúdez himself), whereas the main accent remains on the 90’s. The main focus of this volume is on folk psychology and models of the mind.

Now let us have a look at the collections on the philosophy of psychology and compare three of them. The first, edited by W. O’Donohue and R. F. Kitchener (1996), contains quite a large range of issues researched by the authors and is a good example of a broadening the spectrum of the philosophy of psychology. Apart from epistemological and cognitive issues, it contains sections on behaviourism, folk psychology, clinical psychology and ethics. These last two topics are an example of the philosophy of psychology beginning to touch upon humanistic issues. I will develop this broadening of perspective later on.

The second work, edited by P. Thagard (2007), is a very different example of a collection presenting the philosophy of psychology, focusing primarily on cognitive science. This volume deals with such problems as representation, the role of mechanisms in psychological explanation, realization, reduction, consciousness, simulation, emotion, some issues from cognitive neuroscience, evolutionary biology and artificial intelligence. The very concept of the philosophy of psychology draws from the philosophy of science and may be a good example of the philosophy of experimental psychology.

The latest collection was edited by J. Symons and P. Calvo (2009). The content of this volume is very broad and also very different from the two preceding ones. Furthermore, it contains reflections on the history of psychology including sections on rationalist and empiricist roots of modern psychology, as well as the origins of experimental psychology. It next touches upon classical issues for the
philosophy of psychology like folk psychology, psychological explanation, relationship to neuroscience, behaviourism, and models of the mind. Interesting sections are dedicated to statistics, neuroimaging, evolution, and the process of learning in psychology.

Alongside of traditional problems related to thought, language, and consciousness, the volume also contains something new: an extensive approach to the perception issue in its different modalities (auditory, visual, attention). One section is dedicated to the “inner world” and embraces such topics as introspection, memory, emotions, the unconscious, etc. Of particular interest is the section on the psychology of the self, which contains selected anthropological issues, such as personal identity, moral judgments, and even some Buddhist perspectives.

Let us now move on to monographs. Chronologically the oldest one was written by M. Bunge and R. Ardila (1987). It may be the only book among those explicitly concerned with the philosophy of psychology that offers a deeper reflection on what psychology as a science actually is and includes a discussion on the definition of psychology. It also has a large section on methodology in psychology, which includes a systematic presentation of the methods used in psychology followed by a critical appraisal of them. In this volume an interesting division of the field of psychology was presented, namely, mentalism and behaviourism. It also includes a section on psychobiology and on the social dimension of psychology.

Chronologically, the next monograph to be published was that of G. Boterill and P. Carruthers (1999). This volume contains such topics as folk psychology, nativism, modularity, mind-reading, rationality, naturalisation of the content of psychology, representation and consciousness. According to these authors, the philosophy of psychology is a reflection “on the problems which are raised for philosophy by the results and methods of psychology” (Boterill, Carruthers 1999: ix).

The last monograph was written by J. L. Bermúdez (2005). It contains such problems as the levels of psychological explanation, folk psychology, representation, functionalism, neural networks, rationality, perception and action, propositional attitudes, thinking and language. Bermúdez tries to define the difference between philosophy of mind and philosophy of psychology by saying that,

> many of the issues that dominate the philosophy of mind have to do with the metaphysics of mind. (...) the concerns of the philosophy of psychology are more directly focused on the activity of cognition and on the explanation of behaviour. (...) The Philosophy of psychology (...) differs from the philosophy of mind in two basic ways (...). First, the philosophy of psychology is concerned primarily with the nature and mechanism of cognition, rather than with the metaphysics and epistemology of the mind. Second, and as a direct consequence of the previous point, the philosophy of psychology lacks the insulation from scientific research and concerns that more traditional debates in the philosophy of mind possess in virtue of their metaphysical and epistemological dimension (Bermúdez 2005: 14-15).

Nonetheless there is some overlap between the two fields of philosophy and Bermúdez himself dedicates a substantial part of his Contemporary Readings to the models of the mind, which usually forms part of the philosophy of mind (e.g. The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind which even includes a section on folk psychology).
Traditional questions studied in contemporary philosophy of psychology according to Symons and Calvo (2009) were: rationality, modularity, nativism and intentionality. This was a fruit of an inspiration coming from the field of the philosophy of mind combined with some findings in cognitive psychology. Today, as is illustrated by their book, the philosophy of psychology studies a broader spectrum of issues: historical, methodological, ethical, and even anthropological, which to an extent leads to picking up some traditional metaphysical issues.

Some problems with the subject matter of the philosophy of psychology

The 20th century bore witness to a dynamic development of psychology as a scientific discipline. At the time, it had to struggle with methodological and theoretical challenges, many of which were the subject of philosophical interest through emerging concepts and at times through a critique of fundamental presuppositions or dominating explanation strategies. Part of this reflection was also dedicated to the study of the philosophical implications that emerged from empirical discoveries in the field of psychology regarding important philosophical questions that treated the subject of the human being. The philosophy of mind and experimental psychology are a case in point. Both began to take advantage of each other’s achievements (Mason, Sripada, Stich 2008).

According to Block (1980) the philosophy of psychology concentrates solely on the philosophical analysis of concepts adapted by psychology, concepts that overlap both fields of study, and not only borderline issues. Philosophers are generally better equipped for conceptual analysis than are psychologists, particularly those who veer towards the pragmatic. This relates in a particular way to theories of mind, which for centuries were the subject of philosophical reflection, particularly on concepts such as mental representation and qualia.

Calvo and Symons challenged Block’s opinion (2009: xxii): “Today, the philosophy of psychology is more than simply the analysis of the concepts employed by psychologists. It has become a collaborative effort involving the contributors of psychology, linguistics, neuroscience, engineering and other disciplines”. In other words, the philosophy of psychology should become a part of cognitive science. In this context the philosophy of psychology may be understood as an analysis of bordering conceptions, which some would limit to only cognitive issues (Bermúdez 2009).

Following O’Donohue and Kitchener (1996) we can delineate between hard and soft approaches to understanding the subject matter of the philosophy of psychology. The hard version, for instance, could be represented by Thagard when he asserts that the,

…philosophy of scientific psychology must be distinguished from enterprises that have been popular in philosophy: ‘philosophical psychology’ and armchair philosophy of mind. These enterprises assume that it is possible to learn about the mind from introspection, ordinary language, or thought experiments that generate conceptual truths about what minds must be like. In contrast, psychology is largely practiced today by means of behavioral and neural experiments […] The point of philosophical psychology is not to develop conceptual truths about minds, but rather to deal with philosophical issues through close attention to
developments in scientific psychology and the allied areas of cognitive science (Thagard 2007: x).

The hard version of the philosophy of psychology may denote that section of cognitive studies, which attempts to deal with folk or common-sense psychology and other explanation strategies used in psychology related to the structure and function of the mind. This refers to an analysis of discoveries drawn from experimental and cognitive psychology rather than to issues of applied or clinical psychology. Such an approach could be named a philosophy of experimental psychology rather than simply the philosophy of psychology.

Nowadays, the philosophy of experimental psychology focuses mainly on the issue of scientific explanations in psychology, i.e. all “isms” like reductionism, naturalism, functionalism, mechanism, anomalous monism, computationism, modularism, and connectionism. Apart from that it deals with introspection and folk psychology understood as a first-level or first-person explanation referred to human beliefs (propositional attitudes). Along those lines Dennett (2003) develops his heterophenomenology and Rupert (2007) reflects on ceteris paribus laws in psychology.

Although this understanding of the philosophy of psychology may appear limited in scope, it is difficult to imagine it without any reference to empirical achievements, mainly because it can never be related to purely conceptual analyses. In fact, it is really an attempt to integrate different levels of theory, explanation or description, which nevertheless refer to the same subject.

Bermudez provides another proposal for a definition of the hard version of the philosophy of psychology when he writes:

On the view developed in this book, the philosophy of psychology is the systematic study of the interplay between philosophical concerns and psychological concerns in the study of cognition. This interplay comes about because there are certain key concepts that feature both in the philosophical study of cognition and in the psychological study of cognition and what we cannot understand using the resources of either discipline on its own (Bermúdez 2009: 1).

Notwithstanding that this limited conception of the philosophy of psychology is currently dominating the scientific world, there are some voices that call for a widening of its subject matter, one that includes metaphysical, methodological and ethical issues. I refer to this as the soft version of the philosophy of psychology:

Although there are several very good anthologies in the field of “Philosophy and Psychology”, most of them, with few exceptions, center on issues related to Cognitive Psychology and Cognitive Science. Although securing a central place for these interdisciplinary relations, we also believe they are somewhat broader and incorporate several other areas. Consequently, we have tried to be more sweeping in our selection of contributions and to stress the rather unlimited ways in which psychology and philosophy are related to each other […] Our experience has been that these issues have not been widely discussed by philosophers and psychologists (O'Donohue, Kitchener 1996: viii-ix; emphasis mine).
The “softening” of the philosophy of psychology is in itself a very interesting issue. However, before we proceed to a deeper reflection on the matter, it would be important to first propose some reflections on psychological methodology, which in my opinion, illustrate very well the challenges present when developing the concept of psychology and, subsequently, of the philosophy of psychology. Therefore it would be most opportune to first investigate methodological issues that could themselves be the subject matter for the discipline in question.

Dialectics of explanation and interpretation

Wundt wanted psychology to remain under the umbrella of philosophy rather than physics, because he was convinced that only philosophy is capable of expressing the uniqueness of human experience. Moreover, something less known about Wundt is that he actually believed that psychology could be an adequate mediator between science and the humanities (Wundt 1920).

At the very time Wundt was developing his experimental psychology, Franz Brentano attempted to define it in his, *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* (1874). With his theory of intentionality Brentano once again put the stress on the content of consciousness. In so doing, he revived rational psychology, sometimes also known as mentalism or phenomenological psychology, as an alternative to its experimental counterpart. His method was principally descriptive and received favourable reception by Gestalt psychologists, humanists, existentialists and some cognitivists. Brentano’s intention was to make psychology independent of the material world, without, however, narrowing it to the purely subjective realm. For Brentano, psychology was fundamentally a study of the content of consciousness. Thus, the two possible ways of approaching psychology initiated by Descartes received full historical expression: one developed by Wundt by his experimental psychology and the other taken directly from Descartes by Brentano in his phenomenological psychology.

From the beginning, Brentano’s view met with strong opposition, as well as significant support. Thus, for all practical purposes, psychology developed along these two lines. Brentano’s critics accused him of armchair psychology. They would have psychology break completely from metaphysics, to become a fully independent, objective, experimental science (Sexton 1978).

From its very beginning, the formal history of psychology had many scientists who advocated the acceptance of a dialectical approach to psychology. One of them was William Stern (1935) who was convinced that psychological experiments needed phenomenological description in order to be complete. If the human person, which he considered to be a unity of spiritual and material components (unitas multiplex), was to be the subject matter of psychology, there should be room for both approaches, because only then would the whole human person become the subject of study. Stern proposed such concepts as act, disposition, phenomena, and self. Even today his ideas find some application in narrative psychology (Lee, Harré 2010).

From a methodological point of view, the same opinion was expressed by William James, who was convinced about the need for a plurality of methods in psychology. He was also an early advocate of interdisciplinary dialogue between philosophy and psychology (Crosby, Viney 1992).

The methodological dialectics of psychology may also be linked to its reflexivity:
A particular difficulty is due to the reflexivity of psychology. Not only is it the case that the observer and the observed are often members of the same species, but also that actually doing psychology constitutes part of its subject matter. This means at the very least that psychological theories must be self-referring in the sense of explaining the psychologist’s own behaviour […] (Valentine 1992: 4).

The turn of the 20th century witnessed a transformation in the understanding of science. Humanistic thinkers attacked positivistic scientific paradigms, which excluded anything that could not be measured or observed by the senses. The natural sciences, which were held up as paradigms for certainty and true knowledge had to nevertheless accept disciplines with differing methodologies. W. Dilthey, W. Windelband and H. Rickert demonstrated that humanistic sciences possess a different object of interest, that which is unique, unrepeatable, and appropriate to its own method of study, which was centered around understanding phenomena, rather than on their explanation.

What happened to methodologies that governed the hard sciences, also occurred in psychology. Alongside the up-to-then medical-natural approach, a more integral and holistic understanding of the suffering person emerged. Indeed the static understanding of reality that emerged with the study of physics, which also became a basis for psychophysical and physiological studies, made way for a more dynamic and functional thinking. Instead of speaking of structure, academics began to speak of fields, the balance of functioning forces, and of the meaning and function of specific parts (e.g. the brain).

The human sciences normally don’t employ experiments or any kind of mathematical apparatus. In fact, they may even be pursued without leaving one’s desk. Their goal, to develop a greater understanding of the products of the human spirit, is descriptive and interpretive. This approach is taken by some contemporary schools of psychology - e.g. psychoanalysis, humanistic, or existential psychology (Bunge, Ardila 1990).

The above mentioned dispute between naturalist and humanistic approaches continues to divide psychologists. On the one hand there is a tendency to reduce psychology to physics, or at least to biology, and on the other hand, there is a movement towards creating an alternative methodology for psychology based on an interpretation of meaning (hermeneutics), in which the human being moves intentionally (phenomenology). Finally, it involves a new way of looking at this science as such. The philosophy of psychology may thus become a place for an articulation of aporia present in psychology, which are related to an understanding of human nature and are specifically related to the mental faculties.

**A look into the future of the philosophy of psychology**

Let us now consider the process of a possible “softening” of the philosophy of psychology mentioned earlier.

As some newer publications illustrate, there has been a substantial shift and broadening of the subject matter of the philosophy of psychology. For example, the volume edited by O'Donohue and Kitchener (1996) contains sections on clinical psychology and ethics. The clinical section is dedicated mostly to Freudian psychoanalysis, whereas the ethical part concentrates on the professional codes of conduct in psychological praxis. Furthermore, one section in a volume prepared by
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Symons and Calvo (2009) focuses on the “inner world” and deals with introspection, memory, emotions, the unconscious, etc. The most “softening” part of this volume deals with a psychology of the self and includes a number of anthropological issues like personal identity, moral judgments, and even the Buddhist view.

If the philosophy of psychology is to broaden its subject matter it should be undertaken in a more systematic way. My concern is for the average psychologist (mainly the clinical psychologist) who, when taking in hand any of the volumes of *philosophy of psychology* would be hard pressed to find any help for a better understanding of the issues that they deal with daily (e.g. psychopathology). Except for the two above mentioned collections and *Conceptual Issues in Psychology* (Valentine 1992), it would be difficult for the average clinical psychologist to profit extensively from the content of such books. Naming them *philosophy of psychology* would be misleading, suggesting that they are dealing with all major currents in psychology, which they are not. Therefore, for the title to be transparent and fully understandable, one should label them *a philosophy of cognitive science* as was desired by Thagard.

Nonetheless it is possible to develop an authentic *philosophy of psychology*, which would include “the philosophy of major psychological approaches” without ruling out any of them. It would be very difficult, however, to include every single approach in one study alone. But attempts could be made to be more inclusive.

A major field that could be integrated into the philosophy of psychology is personality theories. This field of psychological research, to which psychoanalysis traditionally belongs, is well developed even on the experimental level. It has undergone substantial growth which, for the most part, may be linked to a number of philosophical ideas. To have a more inclusive version of the philosophy of psychology, not only Freud, but other psychologists such as Adler, Jung, Allport, Maslow, Rogers, May, Frankl, etc., should be included, as well as those who belong to post-modernistic currents in psychology (e.g. Higgins, McAdams, Hermans). This would mean integrating humanistic, existential, phenomenological, and narrative approaches in psychology into the philosophy of psychology.

There are in fact several examples of philosophical studies of psychological approaches of the humanistic type related to individual psychologists. One of these is the monumental work of Paul Ricoeur (1965) and those similar to his (Lauret 1977; Choza 1978; Newell 1986; Hans 1989; the journal *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology*, etc.). Other philosophers compared and analysed the views of Freud, Jung and others from the perspective of different philosophical disciplines, e.g. ethics (Gouin 1999). The pioneers of psychoanalysis have entered into manuals of the history of philosophy. Thus, the work of the philosophy of psychology in the field of personality theories should also include issues related to personality, e.g. freedom, decision making processes, human destiny, dignity, identity, mortality, the search for the meaning of life and the attribution of meaning to events, etc.

Apart from personality theories, the ethical part of the philosophy of psychology could be enriched by a number of additional issues, associated mainly with counselling and psychotherapy. These could include the role of a worldview in therapy, the relationship between psychological and ethical normativity, aretology, the virtues, etc. Some good examples are already available (e.g. Ivey, Ivey, Simek-Downing 1980; Sandage, Hill 2001; Fowers 2005).

Let us now take two examples of personality psychologists who are very aware of the philosophical foundations of their theories. The first is Gordon W. Allport, the founder of the personality psychology and the second is Hubert Hermans,
representing the contemporary narrative approach. They could easily become part of a broader approach to the philosophy of psychology and would provide examples of how one might proceed in analysing these issues.

Allport divides the ontological background of the theories of personality into two main philosophical conceptions which he names the Lockean tradition and the Leibnizian tradition. As we well know, Locke postulated the human mind to be a tabula rasa at the moment of birth. Therefore, in this theory, the mind is subject to external influences such as sensations, impressions, and perception. For Locke, the human organism is basically passive (tabula rasa) and reactive, because all mental content comes from learning or training (Jastrzebski 2011).

According to Allport, the Lockean tradition was accepted by the majority of psychologists who represented associationism, environmentalism, behaviourism, genetic psychology, or in brief, by experimental psychology. In Allport’s view those currents of psychology underline how different external factors create human behaviour and thinking (Allport 1955: 7–10).

Leibniz, on the contrary, was convinced that the human being was not a passive blackboard, ready to be written on, but an active subject who thinks, makes plans, and strives towards fulfilment. Allport believes that this concept was generally accepted by existential and humanistic psychology, where the human being is seen as a free agent guided by a hierarchy of values that influence motivation. As an example of psychology oriented toward the Leibnizian tradition in the United States Allport points to Gestalt psychology (ibidem:12–17).

Allport was obviously sympathetic to the Leibnizian tradition and rejected the naturalism and instinctivism of Freud. According to Allport, fashionable models which are derived from animals and machines, over-stress the reactive side of personality, and, in so doing, handicap the psychologist in his or her efforts to understand and improve the human lot (Allport 1960: 55).

The second example of a philosophically well-informed psychologist is Hubert Hermans, the author of Valuation Theory and the Self-Confrontation Method (Hermans, Hermans-Jansen, 1995). The history of philosophy and science after Descartes greatly influenced the development of his thinking, turning it away from pure objectivism towards a more subjective approach, especially expressed by the American pragmatists (e.g. Dewey) and the French structuralists (e.g. Derrida). Based on these theories and on the process of the decentralization of the self in theories of personality, Hermans has been developing a contemporary concept of the self in the field of narrative psychology which he defines as “a dialogical phenomenon that works according to the principles of intersubjective exchange and dominance” (Hermans, Kempen, 1993: 98). The process of the decentralization of the self had begun in philosophy, was then subsequently developed in psychology and has led to some interesting insights into the human being, conceived as a complex system of inner dialogues, structures, substructures or actors on the stage.

Psychology, with its access to empirical research tools that differ from a philosophical conceptual analysis, was able to delineate the human personality and its complexity more distinctly. No doubt, theories of personality often give rise to philosophical reflection that would also be included in the subject matter of the philosophy of psychology.

Another possible way of conceiving a more inclusive philosophy of psychology would be developing some sort of psychological anthropology which would serve as a philosophical foundation for personality theories. This was already an idea conceived by Herbart, but developed more in depth by Adrian van Kaam and
partly by Victor Frankl in his meta-clinical analysis. It was van Kaam in particular, who in his *Existential Foundations of Psychology* (1969) tried to lay a foundation for developing an anthropological psychology that, according to him, was to become a common language of discussion among different psychological schools.

A broader task for the *philosophy of psychology* would include helping psychology to apply philosophical concepts more adequately for the resolution of anthropological problems. It would thus broaden psychology beyond the confines of its experimental incarnation by containing historical, methodological, epistemological, anthropological (personality theories) and ethical sections. This would include developmental, social, clinical and personality psychology, as well as psychotherapy.

**Concluding remarks on the relationship of philosophy and psychology**

Wilhelm Wundt asserted that anyone who teaches psychology should possess a solid philosophical formation in order to maintain an essential rigour in formulating arguments when developing psychological theories. He was convinced that without such formation, psychologists would risk becoming myopically focused on their own limited field of expertise (Wundt 1921). Indeed, today there are many psychologists who assert that one cannot engage in the study of psychology without taking into account the philosophical foundations on which it stands.

Some authors referred to the relationship between philosophy and psychology by way of metaphor, using terms such as “marriage” and “divorce” (e.g. Sexton 1978, Engel 1996, Marraffa 2003). This type of language illustrates how sensitive the issue really is. Indeed, there is a great divide regarding the relationship between philosophy and psychology: starting from an absolute separation of both disciplines from one another, all the way to a meshing of the two (Foucault). This holds especially true for ontology, epistemology and methodology. The problems related to an interdisciplinary approach are particularly acute when it comes to the social sciences, which draw from both empirical and humanist disciplines.

Some thinkers (Quine 1951) postulated naturalization, that is, a reduction of epistemology to the status of an empirical science (psychology); others (Gardner 1985) defended the self-sufficiency of philosophy, not wanting to reduce psychology to the level of a natural science. In our post-modern context, however, this rather artificial antagonism between philosophy and psychology is no longer as stringent as it once was and a greater openness to cooperation between the disciplines is emerging.

Psychology, immediately after breaking its original ties with philosophy, soon returned to it, albeit “through the back door”. Logical positivism, phenomenology, and existential philosophy became essential sources for psychological concepts and methodologies. Even today, scientific psychology needs a *philosophy of psychology* in order to clarify its fundamental concepts and their place among the different sciences and science in general (Spiegelberg 1972: 32).

Reflecting on the relationship between philosophy and psychology one should never forget that issue also has sociological implications. For example, in academic institutions in the United States, psychology was quickly separated from philosophy, whereas in Europe, the home of Wundt’s postulate, psychology remained part of philosophical departments for many years, thus prolonging their eventual separation, which gave birth to psychology as an independent science (Sexton 1978).

Today there is significant cooperation between philosophers and psychologists in the field of cognitive studies: epistemology, the philosophy of mind, and
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experimental psychology. Philosophers of mind with an empirical predisposition easily find a common language with theoretically predisposed cognitive psychologists (Botterill, Carruthers 1999).

Philosophy influences psychology through its hypotheses related to the nature of the human mind and how it may be discovered, as well as through a generally understood conception of doing science, or the standards of the scientific endeavour. Philosophy proposes to psychology a number of fundamental conceptions that provide a more adequate understanding of the nature of the human mind (consciousness) and its relationship to the body (organism). Consequently, “[…] psychology cannot be completely divorced from philosophy either in its history or in its present functioning” (Watson 2000: 11).

Philosophy always finds itself within meta-systemic psychological presumptions, which have an influence on both the way reality is studied as well as on the practice of psychology (Smith 2010). A philosophical underpinning is generally revealed when psychologists begin to engage in an advanced conceptual analysis or in a theoretical systematization on higher levels of generalization, which may become a subject of the “philosophical audit”. Thus, any change in methodology or subject matter used by psychology would necessarily engage philosophy, whether self-consciously or not (Hatfield 2009: 218). In this regard, Petruska Clarkson (2003) demonstrates that evolutionary psychologists often become prey to spurious conclusions, logical fallacies, or categorical errors: argumentum ad populum, ad misericordiam, ad ignorantiam, ad baculum, petitio principii, etc. History also demonstrates, that many scientists who were instrumental for the emergence of psychology as an independent discipline, themselves became philosophers in their later years. This was the case for W. James, G. Fechner, W. Wundt, H. von Helmholtz and others.

In order to further facilitate a good rapport between philosophy and psychology, philosophers should first become acquainted with the current state of psychological research and the different currents within the discipline of psychology, whereas, psychologists need to embrace philosophy in order to be better grounded conceptually. Only then is there hope for a robust and fruitful interdisciplinary engagement. In other words, psychologists should not attempt to play amateur philosophers, arbitrarily using inadequate concepts outside of the age-old philosophical tradition. It also means that philosophers should not limit themselves in their reflections to common-sense psychology or to out-dated psychoanalytic theories.

What has been argued above is also demonstrated by the emergence of the psychology of philosophy, delineating more clearly the line between philosophy and psychology along with their respective methodological differences. From a broader perspective, the psychology of philosophy is a part of the psychology of science (e.g. Gorman 1996), whose task includes researching topics such as intuition and the context of scientific discoveries (heuristics). One would hope that this fruitful cooperation between psychologists and philosophers would prevent, or at least lessen the repetition of mistakes made in the history of science and the acquisition of knowledge.

For the past ten years or so, a group calling itself “experimental philosophers” has surfaced. One might say, in jest, that philosophers have been converted by psychology, or at least by its methodology. This academic current is easily placed within the ambit of a psychology of philosophy. These philosophers are able to use psychological inventories and surveys in their study of the content of folk intuitions, which is really the point of departure for conceptual analysis, in order to discover
possible over-simplifications. In this context the word “experimental” can be misleading, because this type of research relates more to the psychology of personality than to its experimental counterpart, which uses different research directions, including those related to epistemology (perception), ethics, language studies, and cognition.

A particularly significant issue for experimental philosophy is the role of common-sense beliefs, their precise individuation, and their impact on philosophical theories. Its aim is to use statistical methodology to research how selected common-sense concepts, which then become a point of departure for philosophical reflection, are actually appropriated by people in general and by specific cultural groups (Knobe, Burra 2006; Nadelhoffer, Nahmias 2007; Shieber 2010).

This brand of philosophy, notwithstanding its valour, has been the target of significant criticism (e.g. Kauppinen 2007), which argues that such research adds nothing to meaningful philosophical discourse, and that psychological surveys, in fact, only scratch the surface of the subject of human intuition. Indeed, statistical methodology employed by psychologists, and subsequently by experimental philosophers, is the focus of a more general criticism related to the reliability of its findings (e.g. Danks and Eberhardt 2009).

The development of experimental philosophy and naturalized epistemology may indicate a significant shift in both disciplines. One might even ask if philosophy will one day be replaced by psychology. Who knows? For the time being this development could simply mean that philosophy has accepted the significance of empirical discoveries made by psychologists, while, on the other hand, psychology may be admitting a need for a stricter analysis of psychological concepts.

Let us conclude with the words of an author already cited in this article:

With the present century, psychologists have accumulated vast stores of research and insight. But unless I am mistaken, philosophical personalists have not used these findings to any extent, as a testing ground for their own theories. And vice versa, nearly all of this psychological accumulation has taken place without the benefit of the hard thinking of those philosophers who have centered their attention to an equal degree upon the person. It seems as though two separate disciplines have evolved around the same subject matter, each with a distinctive contribution but scarcely aware of the other’s existence (Allport 1960: 18).

Interdisciplinary research appears to have been a catalyst for very promising research into the nature of the human being, with all of his or her complexity. This, however, presents a number of significant methodological and linguistic challenges. These by no means indicate that contemporary academic thinkers ought to retreat from pursuing further interdisciplinary anthropological studies. Nevertheless, history clearly indicates that they should remain sensitive and respectful of each other’s particular scientific specialty and its particular methodology.

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References


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Given the well-documented relationship between temperament (i.e. core personality traits) and psychopathology, research investigating the neurobiological substrates that underlie temperament is potentially key to our understanding of the biological basis of mental disorder. 

Critics and interpreters of Mill's philosophy of logic have been unable to reach a verdict on the question whether Mill was a psychologistic thinker. Recent work by David Godden (2005) provides a detailed explanation for this lack of agreement: Mill's position on the relationship between (deductive) logic and psychology is 'fractured'. Some elements in Mill's thought push him towards a strongly psychologistic viewpoint, other elements pull him away from it. A central theme of the Grundlagen is a detailed criticism of Mill's philosophy of mathematics. Frege argues that mathematical truths are not empirical truths and that numbers cannot be properties of aggregates of objects. First, Frege denies Mill's claim that mathematical statements are about matters of fact. Understanding philosophy of science. 'This is the best introduction to philosophy of science I have read. I will certainly use it. The writing is wonderfully clear without being sim-plistic. It is not at all too difficult for second and third year students.' In this exceptionally clear and engaging introduction to the philosophy of science, James Ladyman explores the philosophical questions that arise when we reflect on the nature of the scientific method and the knowledge it produces. He discusses whether fundamental philosophical questions about knowledge and reality might be answered by science, and considers in detail the debate between realists and antirealists about the extent of scientific knowledge.