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Philosophy of Psychology and Psychiatry

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Abstract

This chapter examines the history of philosophy of psychology and philosophy of psychiatry as subfields of philosophy of science that emerged in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The chapter also surveys related literatures that developed in psychology and psychiatry. Philosophy of psychology (or philosophy of cognitive science) has been a well-established subfield of philosophy of mind since the 1990s and 2000s. This field of philosophy of psychology is narrowly focused on issues in cognitive psychology and cognitive science.

Compared to the thriving subfield of philosophy of cognitive science, there has been a lack of corresponding interest among philosophers of science in broader methodological questions about different paradigms and fields of study in psychology. These broader methodological questions about psychology have been addressed in the field of theoretical psychology, which is a subfield of psychology that materialized in the 1980s and 1990s. Philosophy of psychiatry emerged as a subfield of philosophy of science in the mid-2000s. Compared to philosophy of psychology, the philosophy of psychiatry literature in philosophy of science engaged with issues examined in an older and more interdisciplinary tradition of philosophy of psychiatry that developed after the 1960s. The participation of philosophers of science in the literature on theoretical psychology, by contrast, has been limited.

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This chapter examines philosophy of psychology and philosophy of psychiatry as distinct subfields of philosophy of science that emerged in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The chapter also surveys related literatures that developed in psychology and psychiatry. Since the 1990s, philosophy of psychology (or philosophy of cognitive science)—which is narrowly focused on issues in cognitive psychology and cognitive science—has been a well-established subfield of philosophy of mind. Compared to the thriving subfield of philosophy of cognitive science, there has been a lack of corresponding interest among philosophers of science in broader methodological questions about different paradigms and fields of study in psychology. These broader methodological questions have been addressed in the field of theoretical psychology, which is a subfield of psychology that materialized in the 1980s. Philosophy of psychiatry emerged as a subfield of philosophy of science around the mid-2000s. Compared to philosophy of psychology, the philosophy of psychiatry literature in philosophy of science engaged with issues examined in an older and more interdisciplinary tradition of philosophy of psychiatry that developed after the 1960s. The participation of philosophers of science in the literature on theoretical psychology, by contrast, has been limited.

The history of philosophy of psychology is complicated by the fact that philosophy and psychology were not clearly distinguished disciplines until the early twentieth century. The American Psychological Association was founded in 1892 and the American Philosophical Association was founded in 1900. Prior to 1921, *The Journal of Philosophy* was titled *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* (1904-1920). Moreover, ‘philosophy of psychology’ refers to distinctive subfields in philosophy of mind and philosophy of science. In examining philosophy of psychology and psychiatry, I focus on subfields that are most closely related to twentieth century philosophy of science, which emerged as field of analytic philosophy

in the 1930s with the rise of logical empiricism and was eventually supplanted in the 1960s and 1970s by the history and philosophy of science (HPS) tradition of philosophy of science associated with Kuhn and others.

Philosophy of Psychology

In contemporary analytic philosophy, ‘philosophy of psychology’ has developed largely as a subfield focused narrowly on philosophical questions concerning cognitive psychology and cognitive science more generally (Block 1980a, 1981; Margolis 1984; Botterill and Carruthers 1999; Bermudez 2005; Thagard, 2007; Robins, Symons, and Calvo 2020). Questions addressed in this subfield significantly overlap with questions examined in philosophy of mind (e.g., the mind-body problem, the status of folk psychology, intentionality, innateness, mental representation).¹ While philosophy of cognitive science has been well established and thrived as a subfield since the 1990s, there has been comparatively little interest among philosophers of science in broader methodological questions concerning the historical paradigms of psychology (i.e., structuralism, functionalism,² psychoanalysis, behaviorism, cognitive psychology) or the different fields of psychology (e.g., personality psychology, biological psychology).³

¹ Block (1980b) argues that philosophy of psychology is a *broader* field than philosophy of mind, and hence, we have good reasons for regarding philosophy of mind as a subfield of philosophy of psychology, rather than vice versa. Jackson and Rey (1998) argue that ‘philosophy of mind’ and ‘philosophy of psychology’ refer to the same general area of philosophical inquiry (cf. Wilson 2006).

² ‘Functionalism’ refers to different positions in psychology and philosophy. In psychology, functionalism refers to the Darwinian paradigm of psychology—associated with William James, John Dewey, and James Rowland Angell—that emerged in the United States in the late nineteenth century (Green 2009). In psychology, functionalists focused on studying the evolutionary function of psychological states and how they help humans adapt to the environment. In philosophy of mind, functionalism is the metaphysical view that emerged in the 1960s—associated with Hilary Putnam, David Armstrong, and Ned Block—that mental states are functional states that play a causal role in a cognitive system.

³ For exceptions, see Flanagan (1991), Hatfield (1995), and O’Donohue and Kitchener (1996).

Outside of philosophy, there has been significant interest since the 1980s—among philosophically and theoretically oriented psychologists—in addressing philosophy of science issues (e.g., the demarcation problem, theory testing and measurement, reductionism, explanation) as they arise in psychology. This is evidenced by the founding of institutions, such as *The Society for Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* of the American Psychological Association (established in 1963) and *The International Society for Theoretical Psychology* (established in the early 1980s). These institutions founded affiliate journals: *The Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* (established in 1986) and *Theory & Psychology* (established in 1991). The philosophy of psychology literature spearheaded by psychologists in the 1980s and 1990s is referred to as ‘theoretical psychology’ (Baker et al., 1988, Slife and Williams 1997). Topics addressed in this literature include social constructionism (Gergen 1985, Danziger 1990, Stam 2001), positivism in psychology (Tolman, 1992, Michele, 2003), operationalism (Green, 1992, Feest 2005), paradigms and psychological revolutions (Buss 1978, Flanagan 1981, Leahey 1992), the unity/ disunity of psychology (Sternberg 2005, Green 2015), and values in psychology (Howard, 1985, Osbeck 2019).

In the founding years of logical positivism and analytic philosophy of science in the 1930s, interest in philosophy of psychology was robust. Carnap (1932/33) and Hempel (1935) offered their classic analyses that emphasized the empirical meaningfulness of psychological concepts stated in *physical language*. The consensus of the Vienna Circle’s protocol sentence debate (1931-1935) was that the physical language was the ‘universal’ (protocol) language in which sentences from all natural sciences (e.g., physics, biology, psychology) should be translated (Carnap 1934). From this perspective, Carnap (1932/33) argued that empirically meaningful psychological concepts should be formulated in the behaviorist (physical) language.

Similarly, Hempel (1935) argued that sentences from empirical psychology are reducible to sentences in a physical (or behaviorist) language. Carnap and Hempel's analyses articulated a position on the demarcation problem: to be a natural (or experimental) science, psychology should formulate empirically testable concepts stated in a physical (behaviorist) language. From this positivist standpoint, Feigl (1934) argued that the traditional mind-body problem ("the psychophysical problem") could be transformed into a scientifically tractable problem. This was an early version of Feigl's celebrated defense of the identity theory ('monism'): all sentences about phenomenological ('mental') concepts are identical to sentences about behavioral or neurophysiological ('bodily') concepts (Feigl 1958).

From the 1940s through the 1950s, interest in psychology among philosophers of science was significant. Gary Hardcastle (2007) notes that in the first four years of the journal *Philosophy of Science* (1934-1938) at least ten full-length articles (out of approximately 100) discussed psychology (p. 230). The 1940s and 1950s saw a comparable proportion of articles on psychology being published in the journal. Articles in this period addressed a broad range of topics, such as the subject matter of psychology, psychological concepts, psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology, social psychology, and clinical psychology. During this period, Carnap's and Hempel's classic ('behaviorist') analyses of psychology were translated into English (Hempel 1949; Carnap 1959). The first volume of the *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* (Feigl and Scriven 1956) was focused on topics of philosophy of psychology and psychoanalysis and included contributions from notable psychologists, such as B. F. Skinner and Albert Ellis.

An important figure in the history of philosophy of psychology—and philosophy of psychiatry—is the clinical psychologist, Paul Meehl, who was a close colleague with Feigl at the University of Minnesota. Feigl, Wilfrid Sellars, and Meehl founded the Minnesota Center for

Philosophy of Science in 1953. Besides being a prolific and influential twentieth century psychologist and pioneering psychometrician, Meehl was an important philosopher of psychology who published in philosophy of science venues (e.g., see Meehl 1967, 1999), including regular contributions to the *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* series (e.g., see Feigl and Scriven 1956). Meehl (1991) presented himself as a “positivist, Popperian, Reichenbachian, or disciple of Lakatos” (p. xxiii). His pioneering work in philosophy of psychology (Meehl 1991) addressed a broad range of topics, including freedom and determinism, the mind-body problem, hypothesis testing, hypothetical constructs and intervening variables, statistical psychology and criminal law, and methodological problems with psychoanalysis. Meehl’s pioneering work on construct validity (Cronbach and Meehl 1955) remains a topic of interest in philosophy of science (Sullivan 2016; Stone 2019).

After the ‘historical turn’ of philosophy of science in the 1960s—associated with Kuhn and the emergence of the HPS tradition—the subfield of philosophy of psychology became more narrowly focused on issues in philosophy of mind and philosophy of cognitive science. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the journal *Philosophy of Science* published a small handful of articles on psychology (e.g., see Meehl 1967; Swoyer and Monson 1975). By the late-1970s and early 1980s, most of the articles on psychology being published in the journal addressed issues in philosophy of mind and cognitive science (e.g., see Richardson 1979; Kitcher 1980, 1985), especially issues related to functionalism (see note 2). By the end of the 1990s, it is only a slight exaggeration to say that interest in psychology within philosophy of science had significantly narrowed to topics in philosophy of mind and cognitive science. Since the 2000s, the literature in philosophy of cognitive science expanded to address topics such as mechanisms in psychology,

evolutionary psychology, neuroscience, and embodied cognition (e.g., see Bickle 2003; Bechtel 2008; Craver 2009; Margolis, Samuels, and Stich 2012).

It is an irony of the history of philosophy of psychology that during the HPS era of philosophy of science (c. 1960-present)—when philosophers of science professed that philosophical analyses of science should be closely engaged with the history of science—philosophers of science largely failed to provide analyses of the major historical paradigms of experimental psychology (e.g., structuralism, functionalism, psychoanalysis, behaviorism, cognitive psychology) or different historical fields of psychology (e.g., personality psychology, social psychology, developmental psychology).⁴ The affinity of philosophers of science towards somewhat narrow topics in the philosophy of mind and cognitive science (e.g., functionalism, mental content, mental representation) after the 1960s is explained by various factors. Most significantly, Ned Block's agenda-setting *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology* (Block 1980a, 1981) firmly established ‘philosophy of psychology’ as a disciplinary subfield of philosophy of mind in the early 1980s. Subsequent books on philosophy of psychology have followed Block’s model of the field. Moreover, interest in philosophy of psychology increased after the ‘cognitive revolution’ in psychology and rise of cognitive science in 1960s. This coincided with influential criticisms of behaviorism in the 1960s by Putnam (1975) and Fodor (1968) and the hegemonic rise of functionalism in philosophy of mind. During this period, it is unsurprising that philosophers of science would gravitate towards analyzing the most scientifically promising psychological paradigm.

⁴ These topics have been addressed by historians of psychology and theoretical psychologists (e.g., see Rychlak 1968, Gergen 1973, Buss 1978, Lerner 1983, Danziger 1990, Leahey 2001, Robinson 2001).

Philosophy of Psychiatry

The history of philosophy of psychiatry is largely independent from the history philosophy of psychology. My survey focuses on philosophy of psychiatry as a subfield of philosophy of science that emerged in the mid-2000s. This field has been shaped by an older, more interdisciplinary tradition of philosophy of psychiatry.

Outside of philosophy of science, an interdisciplinary tradition of ‘philosophy of psychiatry’ emerged in the wake of influential criticisms of psychiatry by Szasz, Laing, and Foucault in the 1960s. Thomas Szasz and R. D. Laing were central figures of the ‘anti-psychiatry’ movement, which questioned the scientific and medical legitimacy of psychiatry. Szasz (1960) argued that the medical concept of ‘mental illness’ that explains abnormal behaviors in terms of diseases is invalid (a ‘myth’). His countersuggestion was that ‘mental illness’ refers to socially disapproved conduct (‘problems in living’), which require social rather than medical solutions (Szasz, 1961). Analogously, Laing (1967) argued that ‘schizophrenia’ is not a medical disease, but an oppressive social label used to explain and justify differential treatment of social deviance. Contemporaneously, Michel Foucault’s *Histoire de la folie* was introduced to the English speaking world in *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault, 1965).⁵ Foucault (2006) argued that the *exclusion* of the mad in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe (the ‘classical age’)—and the separation of madness from reason—was a necessary condition for categories of madness to emerge as *an object of scientific inquiry* (i.e., ‘mental illness’) in the nineteenth century (Gutting 2005). Foucault’s history complemented antipsychiatry by providing a critical history of the medical model of abnormality in psychiatry.

⁵ *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault 1965) is the highly abridged translation of Foucault’s *Histoire de la folie* (Foucault 1961). A complete English translation of the second edition of *Histoire de la folie* (Foucault 1972) was published in 2006 (Foucault 2006).

The critical works of Szasz, Laing, and Foucault in the 1960s gave rise to a robust interdisciplinary philosophy of psychiatry literature. From the mid-1960s to the late-1980s, contributions were made by philosophers (Engelhardt 1973, Edwards, 1981), psychiatrists (Kendell 1975, Guze 1978, Spitzer and Endicott 1978), clinical psychologists (Blashfield 1984), political scientists (Sedgwick 1982), and sociologists (Scheff 1966, Gove, 1975). This interdisciplinary literature established a set of canonical topics (e.g., see Edwards 1982, Miller 1992), including the definition of mental illness, disease explanations of abnormal behavior, and the ethics of psychiatric practices. Philosophy of psychiatry was further entrenched by the establishment of formal institutions (Perring 1998). *The Association for the Advancement of Philosophy and Psychiatry* (AAPP) was founded in 1989 and *The International Network for Philosophy and Psychiatry* (INPP) was founded in 2002. Significantly, these institutions established publication venues: the AAPP affiliate journal, *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* (founded in 1994) and the INPP's *International Perspectives in Philosophy and Psychiatry* (IPPP) book series at Oxford University Press (established in 2003). The 1990s and 2000s were a particularly fruitful period for philosophy of psychiatry. Samuel Guze (1992) published his famous defense of the medical model of mental disorders, and Jerome Wakefield (1992) published his prolific evolutionary psychological ('harmful dysfunction') theory of mental disorder (Wakefield 1992). More generally, philosophy of psychiatry in this period expanded to address topics such as diagnosis and classification (Sadler, Wiggins, and Schwartz, 1994), natural kinds in psychiatry (Zachar 2000, Haslam 2002), psychiatric explanation (Kendler and Parnas 2008), and values in psychiatry (Sadler 2002, 2005). The interdisciplinary field of philosophy of psychiatry was arguably cemented by the publication of an influential companion

(published in the IPPP Oxford University Press book series) edited by the philosopher Jennifer Radden (2004).

Prior to the mid-2000s, there were scattered analyses of psychiatry by philosophers of science (e.g., Macklin 1972, Laudan, 1983, Schaffner 1993). In his classic analysis, “Fundamentals of Taxonomy,” Hempel (1965, ch. 6) argued that psychiatric classification systems should begin with purely descriptive stages and progress towards taxonomic systems organized by theoretical principles, which provides a means for formulating empirically testable classificatory concepts. Hempel’s analysis has been influential in framing debates about the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder* (DSM), both inside (Murphy 2006; Tsou 2011) and outside (Follette and Houts 1996; Wakefield, 1998) of philosophy of science. Paul Meehl offered numerous analyses of psychiatry and clinical psychology. In the 1950s, Meehl (1954) argued that statistical (i.e., actuarial) methods of prediction would outperform clinical (i.e., subjective and informal) methods of prediction in clinical psychology, which was subsequently vindicated by meta-analyses (Grove 2005). Meehl (1995, 2004) also pioneered statistical (‘taxometric’) methods for identifying categorical groups for psychiatric classification that opposed the DSM’s polythetic and descriptive method of classification. Christopher Boorse’s celebrated biostatistical theory of disease (Boorse 1977) and mental disorder (Boorse 1975, 1976) remains the most influential naturalistic account of disease and mental disorder in philosophy of medicine and psychiatry. Adolf Grünbaum’s trenchant methodological criticism of Freudian psychoanalysis (Grünbaum 1984) remains influential.

An important philosopher of science in the philosophy of psychiatry literature is Ian Hacking, whose pioneering analyses in the 1990s set the stage for subsequent work. In *Rewriting the Soul*, Hacking (1995a) examined the historical emergence and evolution of the multiple

personality classification as it appeared in psychiatry from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century. One of Hacking's concerns in *Rewriting the Soul*, was the 'looping effects of human kinds' (Hacking 1995b): the process by which the meaning of human science classification (e.g., 'multiple personality,' 'homosexuality,' 'autism') changes the experiences and behavior of classified individuals, which then require revisions to the classification. According to Hacking, looping effects are exclusive to human science classifications. Whereas the objects of classification in the natural sciences ('natural kinds' or 'indifferent kinds') are stable, the objects of classification in the human sciences ('human kinds' or 'interactive kinds') are constantly changing and evolving because of looping effects (Hacking 1999, ch. 4). Subsequent philosophers of psychiatry engaged with Hacking's analysis of human kinds and looping effects in formulating their own positions (Murphy 2001, Cooper 2004, Tsou 2007, 2013, Tekin 2011, 2014).

By the mid-2000s, philosophy of psychiatry was an established subfield of philosophy of science. Rachel Cooper's *Classifying Madness* (Cooper 2005) and Dominic Murphy's *Psychiatry in the Scientific Image* (Murphy 2006) were agenda-setting books that established canonical topics (e.g., the nature of mental disorder, natural kinds, causal versus descriptive approaches to classification, the theory and value laden character of psychiatric categories). Since the mid-2000s, philosophy of psychiatry has flourished and grown rapidly. This subfield engaged with issues articulated in the interdisciplinary philosophy of psychiatry literature and articulated new issues (e.g., see Fulford et al. 2013, Murphy 2020). In this period, issues addressed include natural kinds in psychiatry (Kendler, Craver, and Zachar 2011; Kincaid and Sullivan 2014), psychiatric explanation (Cooper 2007, Murphy 2010), realism (Hood 2009, 2013), interventionist accounts of causation (Woodward 2008, Tsou 2012), evolutionary explanations (Murphy 2006;

Varga 2012), functional accounts of mental disorder (Tsou 2021, Garson 2022), cross-cultural issues (Cooper 2010; Murphy 2017), the Research Domain Criteria (RDoC) approach to psychiatric classification (Tabb 2015, 2019), pluralism (Tsou 2015, Bueter 2019a), neurodiversity (Washington 2016), epistemic injustice (Bueter 2019b), and the projectability of psychiatric classifications (Tsou 2021, 2022)

Conclusion

This chapter provided a historical survey of philosophy of psychology and philosophy of psychiatry as subfields of philosophy of science. One contingent fact about the philosophy of psychology is that it developed in the 1980s as a subfield narrowly focused on issues in cognitive science, rather than a subfield focused broadly on the methods adopted in the history of experimental psychology. It is regrettable that philosophers of science were not more active in the theoretical psychology literature. By contrast, philosophy of psychiatry has emerged as a well-defined subfield of philosophy of science, which was more closely engaged with the issues articulated in the older, more interdisciplinary philosophy of psychiatry literature.

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