

An Inspirational Companion

A review of



The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Psychology

by John Symons and Paco Calvo (Eds.)

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Reviewed by

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Like genetically identical twins who, separated, grow distinct in behavior while being raised in different cultures, psychology and philosophy share genotypes but display differing phenotypes. In the last half century, the twins have reformed and reengaged one another, largely because the cognitive “revolution” (or rebellion, as it may turn out to be) gave philosophy the opportunity to use its classic gift of logical analysis along with its fixed and piercing gaze on how psychologists go about modeling the human mind.

One may argue that the core of psychological thinking is a melding of epistemology and phenomenology in which the human observer wants to understand how we “know” mental states, our own and especially those of others. Some philosophers, once attuned to the logic of psychology as a science, for the last few decades have found analysis of cognition to be a fruitful inquiry. Having dismissed logical positivism in the 1960s, philosophers have shown a shift in psychological thinking toward describing the mind as a

set of cognitions that is the current source and embodiment of the philosophers' stone, the recipe that turns lead into gold.

Choosing a Companion

Titled "A Companion," at a little over three pounds in weight, this tome is not something to stuff in your backpack for an afternoon hike. *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Psychology* is more suitable as the only book you are allowed to take on a winterlong polar expedition. If someone were to ask me to select a book to be placed in a cornerstone or time capsule to be opened 100 years hence, this book would be on my short list, for it will offer the intellectual historian working in 2110 a clear view of how the mind of our time is understood.

The text carries 42 chapters in 678 pages, divided into six parts. I shall comment briefly on each topic at the expense of individual authors and chapters. Part I, titled Historical Background to the Philosophy of Psychology, is distinguished by its breadth (rational, empirical, and experimental approaches) along with discussions of Freud's development of the idea of the unconscious and, more analytically, the quale, kinds of behaviorism, and cognitivism.

The scholarship is both sound and engaging. I was pleased to read the development of dualistic psychophysical thought from Weber and Fechner to Stevens, for the presentations understood and explored its scientific beauty and current relevance. These reaches toward a model of the human mind are today rarely taught: all the pity because, properly considered, the development of psychophysics shows how psychology got to be where it is and how psychological science can build upon itself. These seven chapters would form a highly useful text in itself, showing, as they do, the recent evolution of empirical psychological thought.

Explanatory Principles

Explanation in psychology, ranging from folk psychology, computational psychology, neuroscience, connectionism, the extended mind, and statistics, forms the second part. The section on statistical inference dives deftly and awesomely into the logic of inference; that is, to what sample might we justifiably generalize the findings of the variety of experiments and data collection from human beings.

The authors are too polite to say this, but I think authors and editors, and therefore readers, of psychology journals not only frequently infer incorrectly but, perhaps worse, fail to see the depth and promise of their own data and analyses. Finding significance means

possible publication, but parsing the implication of “insignificant” findings may reveal far more. Psychology could improve in sophistication a hundred times over with an enforced understanding of the philosophy of statistical inference, well described herein.

The Beauty of Inference

Part II contains also a chapter on the current interest in extended mind, a topic whose veracity (or truth value) yet lies uncertain, and a chapter on kinds of explanation in psychology. Here we find statistical evidence that psychology has moved away from its hopes to be a unified science. The evidence is based on the decreasing occurrence of the word *law* in psychological abstracts 30-fold since 1900, along with analyses of the differing, if longstanding, ways in which psychology is satisfied with various explanatory principles, such as psychophysics, neurology, or information processing. These, and others, are forms of explanation that carry with them often unrecognized and therefore dangerous assumptions.

Thought Experiments

Part III emphasizes issues of philosophic interest, such as mental representations (Does my dog’s mind see or imagine a leash when I say “Let’s go walking?”). Representational thought is visited repeatedly and is among the philosophers’ favorite puzzles.

The method for solution here is often of the type called *thought experiments*—in other fields known as analogies, similes, and metaphors, passing as experiments. Not surprisingly, thought experiments produce thought data, thought conclusions, and thought inferences, as, of course, they have the interpretive benefit of being data free. However engaging such thoughts may be, they are an acquired taste of a flavor not likely to stimulate data-oriented psychologists to further thought or action.

The requisite for any science is an agreed-upon method of verification, whether logic, statistical probability, or measurement. At times, considering this section, I thought I could have been reading the early phrenologists. (Although by the end of the 19th century, phrenology had become a commercial success and scientific failure, from, say, 1820 to 1840, it represented a serious, if then untestable, set of hypotheses about the structure of the mind.)

Some authors writing for this section want us to debate in terms of modules, ice-cream cones, domain mechanisms, encapsulatedness, and encodingism. These may be heuristic devices, as I think the authors hope, but I cannot see how they lead to verification rather than to merely more thought metaphors. (Where are the logical positivists when we

need them? How does one disprove a metaphor?) These are examples of why the twins Philosophy and Psychology parted methodologies.

Among the more instructive chapters, at least for psychologists, are those that attempt to clarify the meaning of terms that tangle psychological thought, such as *nativism* and *memory*. These complement one chapter each on attention, introspection, and dreaming, for each topic demonstrates a rich history of psychological thought, all victims of recent neglect.

Some Insights for Contemporary Psychology

The Biological Basis of Psychology (Part IV) coupled with Perceptual Experience (Part V) contain 15 chapters, each analyzing a topic of interest to working psychologists. Several return to the problem of representation—of how and where sensations become ideas—and some of these are grounded in neurology, some in imaginative models.

The final section (Part VI) is titled Personhood, a title one suspects was invented to account for five chapters whose common theme is that they don't fit easily elsewhere. Examples are chapters on moral judgment, confabulation (false memory), experiments on free will, and Buddhism. Each offers the psychologist evidence of how easy it is for our thinking about the mind and behavior to become provincial; each chapter offers a description or analysis that some would label as metapsychology, yet I think the tent that covers psychology is both high and broad enough to encourage visits from topics that reveal aspects of psychological thought that normally escape what we are taught to be the core.

Details and Defects

After almost 700 pages of text, it may seem a matter of self-flagellation to suggest that more pages are wanted, but I find the indifference to the evolution of life in preference for the almost-sole preference for human cognition to be limiting. True, evolution and animal minds are mentioned herein, but in passing and as examples of something else, not for what might be applied to the evolution of the human mind. (There is a chapter that specifically considers the logical underpinnings of what is called evolutionary psychology as applied to human beings.) There is, not in philosophy as a whole, but in this book, a seeming indifference to theories of the nonhuman mind and its evolution, a pity when such can be very instructive, especially in terms of methodology, and provide an overarching way of understanding.

At the same time, although there is a single chapter on consciousness, I sense that the philosophy-of-psychology thinkers have embraced the issues that the study of consciousness presents with the enthusiasm they once gave to cognition. To be sure, consciousness is

considered throughout the book, but more often tacitly and fractionally than obviously and with intellectual clarity.

As the editors state in their instructive introduction, the focus on human cognition is the philosopher's choice and a historical fact, but cognition, however defined, is far from the whole story of the mind. Overreliance on models of the cognitive aspects of the brain may mask the richness of what we might come to know.

References to published literature appear only at the end of each chapter, making it difficult to locate the corpus of citations to an author. Far worse, I checked random pages for the listing of persons in the index whose work is discussed (as opposed to merely being referenced) and found only five of the first 10 examined. Cross-referencing in such a work is essential, and this task seemed to be handled appropriately. Also, on the positive side of the ledger, a Suggested Readings section follows each chapter.

You, the reader with the sense and pluck to pack this book for that next polar winter, will do well to take along many pens as well, for most pages generate ideas to be noted, ideas to be cultivated, and explications of disagreement. And be certain to *return*, and *with* the book, for you will want to revisit its and your ideas in the leisure of your home longitude. After all, who makes a more interesting, knowledgeable, and valued companion than a group of 49 thinkers who encourage you to grasp the insights and tools of the philosopher of psychology?