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THE WILEY HANDBOOK OF  
*Theoretical and  
Philosophical Psychology*

*Methods, Approaches, and New Directions  
for Social Sciences*

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# 1

## **Editors' Introduction**

Jack Martin, Jeff Sugarman, and Kathleen L. Slaney

In recent years, theoretical psychology has begun to emerge as a distinctive subdiscipline within organized psychology. Yet, its methods, and the purposes that animate them, are poorly understood by many psychologists and students of psychology. After all, aren't all psychologists necessarily theoreticians who need to formulate understandings of those psychological states, processes, and operations that interest them? Although it is true that all psychological inquiry and intervention are to some extent theory-driven, there is much more to the conduct of theoretical psychology than the necessity of taking a theoretical attitude toward particular psychological phenomena. Theoretical psychology, properly understood, is concerned with the ways in which psychological phenomena and practices are conceptualized, how persons (as the wielders of psychological capabilities) are understood, how understandings of psychological phenomena are constructed, how the activities of psychologists interact with focal phenomena, and similar philosophical and conceptual questions. Theoretical psychologists also employ a variety of historical, philosophical, social psychological, and narrative methods in their attempts to reveal the nature of psychological entities, processes, and practices, and to subject these phenomena to the kind of critical scrutiny that is the hallmark of serious scholarly and scientific study. In this edited volume, the methods that theoretical psychologists use to accomplish these important and necessary tasks are described and illustrated by acknowledged experts in the

area of theoretical and philosophical psychology. By explaining clearly and succinctly, and providing examples of, the various methods that define the scholarly practices of theoretical psychologists, this unique volume promises to reveal and clarify the “inner workings” of theoretical psychology for psychologists, students of psychology, and others interested in psychological inquiry and its applications. By opening up the “tool box” of theoretical psychologists, the editors and contributors invite readers to examine critically what theoretical psychologists do, and provide an introduction to ways of approaching the study of psychological phenomena and psychology itself that are not widely understood by most psychologists and students of psychology.

Particularly over the past two decades, there has been a proliferation of ways of conducting theoretical investigations in psychology. What tends to typify these contemporary methods is a focus on the concrete particulars of specific programs of research and investigations in both scientific and professional psychology. Gone are the days in which theoretical studies in psychology consisted only or mostly of general philosophical speculation and broad interpretations concerning how it might be possible to understand other minds, whether or not free will exists, or where psychology ought be placed alongside other natural and social sciences. Such deliberations have been, and to some extent remain, the province of that branch of traditional analytic philosophy concerned with psychological matters in general and speculative terms. In partial contrast, many contemporary approaches to the conduct of theoretical studies in psychology are grounded in what psychologists actually do in the laboratory, field, and clinic. Such methods are specifically focused on psychologists’ conduct and understanding of the scientific and professional practices

that constitute their research and applied investigations. Not only does this volume include chapters that describe particular conceptual and philosophical methods of theoretical psychology (including philosophical anthropology, hermeneutics, ethical inquiry, and phenomenology) in specific detail, but it also includes fine-grained descriptions and illustrations of a number of history-based approaches within theoretical psychology (e.g., historical ontology, conceptual and critical history, historiometry), social psychological and narrative methods (e.g., life stories, narrative and cultural hermeneutics, positioning theory, dialogical self theory, life positioning analysis), and explores the use of mixed methods (focused on the theoretical study of psychological and psychotherapeutic practices and assumptions, and utilized in psychoanalytic and feminist studies in theoretical psychology). Together, these methods and applications define contemporary work in theoretical psychology, but they also provide a concretely accessible entry into the nature of and ways of conducting an increasingly diverse array of theoretical studies in psychology more generally. Consequently, an understanding of these methods constitutes an understanding of the practices of theoretical psychologists and illuminates the field of theoretical studies in psychology in terms of its concrete particulars, providing a previously unavailable resource to those who would understand in specific detail this increasingly important and influential area of psychological scholarship.

What this book will do, which no previous book has even attempted, is to provide readers with a comprehensive set of specific, concretely exemplified discussions of why and how theoretical psychologists do the kinds of work they do, and how psychologists interested in conducting theoretical studies might pursue such inquiries. After many years of teaching advanced undergraduate and graduate courses in

theoretical psychology, we the editors are united in our view that this is the book that students in such courses, together with colleagues in other areas of psychology, need to give them the understandings and tools that will allow them to read critically the work of theoretical psychologists and to conduct theoretical investigations of their own. In fact, each of us has received numerous inquiries from our students and colleagues over the past decade about how they might better understand and possibly adopt some of the approaches and methods of theoretical psychology in their areas of interest. In particular, those students and colleagues who recognize and value the necessity and importance of rigorous, critical inquiry for improving psychological science and practice want to equip themselves with a broader repertoire of ways to conceptualize and conduct critically constructive examinations of the particular programs of theory, research, and application in those areas of psychology to which they are devoted.

Consequently, we believe that this book will appeal to many psychologists who find it difficult to relate to highly abstracted and generalized philosophical and historical analyses of psychology and its subdisciplines. The contributors all demonstrate a thorough-going understanding of the scientific and professional activities of psychologists, in ways that ensure their critical probes, questions, and ways of doing theoretical psychology are likely to resonate with psychologists who are and wish to be similarly attentive to the details of their assumptions and practices. Again, the core idea is to offer an accessible entry into theoretical methods that is grounded in a detailed understanding of the particulars of psychologists' traditions of scientific inquiry and professional intervention, but that raises important questions, suggests possibilities for clarification, and advances alternatives that

emerge from detailed conceptual, historical, and theoretical study.

## **Theoretical Psychology: A Brief History**

A brief and selective history of theoretical psychology is instructive in that it makes clear that something dramatic has occurred in theoretical and philosophical psychology during the last three decades of the 20th century and has gathered additional momentum during the first part of the 21st century. Nonetheless, this recent surge in popularity, including some of the changes of tactics it represents, should not obscure the long history of philosophical psychology. Questions concerning the nature of human beings, their distinguishing capabilities, and the origins of these defining features have proved fascinating and enduring from antiquity to the present. Debates about psychological matters which have long pedigrees with few signs of deterioration include how the body relates to the mind, the nature and functions of consciousness, the possibility of free will (even within a determined world), the nature and limits of human thought and action, and the duties, rights, and responsibilities of persons. At the dawn of disciplinary psychology in Germany during the late 1800s, psychology was tightly interwoven with both psychophysics and philosophy. Individuals like Wilhelm Wundt and William Stern, despite doing much to develop theoretical perspectives and methodologies that enabled the emergence of psychology as an independent area of inquiry and academic study, remained strongly wedded to philosophy. Their written works, despite the relative neglect of anything other than their methodological and technical achievements in early North American histories of psychology, consisted mostly of philosophical reflections

and arguments concerning the nature of psychological phenomena, persons, and their conditions and contexts. Indeed, in the works of these early German psychologists, their colleagues, and immediate predecessors, almost all the important questions concerning psychology as a scholarly discipline and human science are well documented and considered. Is a science of psychology possible, despite the reservations of Kant? What are the basic structures and functions of mind? What methods are best suited to investigations of psychological phenomena? How much can be learned empirically and in what contexts with what tools? What is the relationship between persons and their societies? What constitutes human experience and what are its properties and characteristics? Is it possible to mathematize psychological phenomena, and if so how might this be done? What warrants psychology as an independent discipline and how should it be situated in relation to other traditions of scholarship?

When organized psychology developed in the United States, many of its leading practitioners, including William James and John Dewey, also privileged philosophical work and insisted on a comprehensive and critical analysis of the language and research practices and ambitions of more strictly empirical psychologists of their day. James theorized about the nature of human experience and (like his student Mary Whiton Calkins) developed highly influential ideas about the nature of selfhood which continue to repay attention. Dewey took his brand of pragmatism and functionalism to Chicago and then to Columbia, developing instructive analyses of human experience, relationships between selves and societies, and an account of human conduct that eschewed, but was later overcome by, stimulus-response psychology. Other prominent, early American psychologists, such as Granville Stanley Hall, James McKeen Cattell, James Mark Baldwin,

Leta Stetter Hollingworth, and Lightner Witmer, promoted applications of psychology in law, education, and business, and developed theoretical frameworks that attempted to link scientific and applied psychology, in some cases including suggestions for ethical practice. In short, during its infancy, disciplinary psychology had little need for a separate subdiscipline of theoretical psychology because many of the leading psychologists of the time were first and foremost philosophers who ensured that their psychological theorizing and research were conducted in tandem with their philosophical analyses and interpretations.

Of course, as is well known, while much German, English, and French psychology continued a close partnership with philosophy, American psychology fell under the sway of a narrow interpretation of logical positivism that led to a lengthy period of behaviorist hegemony during the early and middle years of the 20th century. However, even here, major philosophical debates continued to attend psychological inquiry and practice, especially during the days of neobehaviorism during which time individuals like Clark Hull and Edward Tolman formulated ambitious research agendas in terms of hypothetical-deductive models of inquiry that emphasized the importance and study of intervening variables. By the 1940s and 1950s, the glorious failure of Hull's program (especially notable given the unusually precise and rigorous nature of his theoretical and empirical edifice) and the comparative success of Tolman's early cognitive hypothesizing about "expectancies" and "cognitive maps" spawned a spate of theoretical inquiry concerning the nature of intervening variables and hypothetical constructs (e.g., MacCorquodale and Meehl 1948), theoretical inquiries that partially prompted the establishment of latent variable theorizing and construct validation theory, still hotbeds of theoretical inquiry closely linked to the research and analytic



strategies employed by many psychologists. Even radical behaviorists aligned with B. F. Skinner's program of operant conditioning were pursuing philosophical analyses and frameworks for their inquiries, as demonstrated by the brief popularity of Willard Day's journal *Behaviorism* during the 1960s into the 1970s - a publication devoted to seeking and explicating parallels between psychological behaviorism and the philosophies of Wittgenstein as represented in both his early and later writings.

When the crisis in social psychology hit American psychology in the early 1970s, American psychologists entered a new kind of theoretical and philosophical terrain. Many of the critical concerns that marked the crisis drew inspiration not only from Wittgensteinian, but also from hermeneutic, poststructuralist, and home-grown pragmatist perspectives on the holistic activity of persons in sociocultural contexts and the implications of studying and interpreting such activity within and beyond the rather narrow laboratory confines of experimental social psychology (see Danziger 2000). Soon thereafter, a new generation of critical, feminist, narrative, sociocultural, and postcolonial psychologists began to explore the larger role of psychology and psychological research in American society, something that already was well underway in many parts of Europe and other parts of the world. Increasingly, psychology itself and its most cherished assumptions and aspirations as a hegemonic social science capable of empirically explicating human experience and action through tightly controlled experimentation and psychometric measurement became the focus of a wide variety of theoretical and philosophical analyses. Analytically inclined theoretical psychologists like Daniel Robinson, Paul Meehl, and Sigmund Koch questioned the progressive claims and accounts of leading experimentalists, and commanded a good deal of the

attention of mainstream psychology through highly provocative and well-argued writings in major psychological journals like the *American Psychologist* (e.g., Koch 1993). Such works drew attention to troubling differences between the ways in which physical scientists conducted their inquiries and used mathematical models and procedures in contrast with the comparatively imprecise and liberal uses located in reports of psychological research (Meehl 1967).

Others, like Smedslund (1979) and Bennett and Hacker (2003), inspired by Wittgenstein's later writings, mounted sustained critiques of more particular areas of psychological theory and research (from social to developmental to cognitive neuroscience) in terms of a number of salient conceptual confusions that rendered much psychological theory and inquiry non-informative. As the 20th century wound down and the 21st got under way, many younger psychologists found new inspiration in classic critiques of psychology, not only by Wittgenstein, but also by Vygotsky, Holzkamp, and others, rediscovering important currents of theoretical inquiry that had continued relatively unabated in Europe but about which the vast majority of American and Canadian psychologists had been mostly unaware. This undiminishing interest in theoretical activity (especially after the second World War) had acquired an increasingly critical edge. Critical theoretical psychology encouraged and demanded a more historical, sociocultural, and ethical investigation of psychology as an increasingly influential social, institutional practice with complex relations to social organization and political governance, that also included the self-governance of persons who increasingly understood themselves as psychological subjects. All in all, by the turn of the 20th into the 21st century, contemporary theoretical psychologists had rediscovered and put new

twists on established programs of philosophical and historical work conducted by existential-phenomenological, hermeneutic, pragmatist, critical, poststructural, and postcolonial scholars.

One especially important feature of the landscape of theoretical psychology by the end of the 20th century was the increasing use of historical methods and perspectives in major works in theoretical psychology such as Ian Hacking's (1995) *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory*, Kurt Danziger's (1997) *Naming the Mind: How Psychology found its Language*, and Ellen Herman's (1995) *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts*. Such volumes illuminate the ways in which major programs of psychological research and professional practice are deeply enmeshed within everyday social, political, and linguistic contexts. They immerse readers in the concrete, readily accessible particulars of psychologists' conceptualizations of focal phenomena and their inquiry and therapeutic practices. Such works are riveting stories of fascinating particulars, not abstracted, intellectually removed discourses accessible only to the elite few. Moreover, because of their accessibility and closeness to what psychologists actually do, they command the attention of a broad readership of psychologists of all stripes. Studies in theoretical psychology that combine historical and biographical-narrative methods also have become increasingly popular in the first years of the 21st century – for example, Ian Nicholson's (2003) *Inventing Personality: Gordon Allport and the Science of Selfhood* or James Lamiell's (2003) *Beyond Individual and Group Differences: Human Individuality, Scientific Psychology, and William Stern's Critical Personalism*. What these works succeed in doing is examining important topics in psychology (such as the language and methods of personality psychology, the

use and interpretation of statistical analyses of data concerning group difference, and the nature and consequences of psychotherapeutic intervention) in historical detail so that the theoretical analyses offered are grounded in the actual research and intervention practices of psychologists themselves. In short, the combination of historical and theoretical-philosophical methods employed in such works brings an accessibility and clarity to theoretical work in psychology that is often lacking in more purely philosophical analyses.

It is our opinion that this new and relatively recent emphasis on the conduct of theoretical psychology in the context of historically situated research programs and practices is of great significance for the evolution of theoretical psychology. It positions theoretical inquiry in psychology where it needs to be positioned, in full recognition of the historically established nature of psychology itself. It makes clear that psychology is a part of our collective and individual evolution and development as self-interpreting beings interested in understanding ourselves and our human condition. In this way, such historically informed work in theoretical psychology fits nicely with the large body of work in philosophical and theoretical psychology that focuses on human nature, selfhood, agency, and personhood (e.g., Martin and Bickhard 2013; Richardson, Fowers, and Guignon 1999) and currently popular trends toward more critical (e.g., Rose 1998; Teo 2005) and narrative, qualitative emphases and methods in theoretical psychology (e.g., Brinkmann 2012). Indeed, it is the opening up of avenues for just such expanded inquiry that makes this volume both timely and different from previous works in theoretical psychology that have focused solely or primarily on the methods and concerns of Anglo-American analytic philosophy or have consisted of collections of studies in the subdiscipline such

as those important, but frequently disparate, volumes published regularly by various organizations of theoretical psychologists (e.g., Smythe 1998; Stenner et al. 2011). We turn now to an exploration of the roles and functions that theoretical psychology currently is well positioned to undertake in future decades, with what we believe will be importantly positive consequences for psychology in its scientific, professional, and scholarly guises.

## **Contemporary Roles and Functions of Theoretical Psychology**

In an article in the *American Psychologist*, published toward the end of the 20th century, Brent Slife and Richard Williams (1997) envisioned and advocated a more central role for theoretical psychology as a recognized subdiscipline within organized psychology. Although recognizing that “there has always been a theoretical psychology of sorts” (117) and referencing the philosophically attuned work of Wundt and James, together with a nod to the “grand theorizing” of psychological scholars like Freud, Skinner, and Piaget, Slife and Williams assert that contemporary psychology “has moved away from grand, subsuming theories in the traditional sense and moved toward models, techniques, and microtheories in the more modern sense” (118). Slife and Williams opine that applied areas of psychology have foregone theoretical analysis of differences among treatment and intervention approaches to embrace an eclecticism and pluralism that might benefit from more critical reflection and that experimental psychologists now tend to eschew the construction of broad theoretical frameworks in favor of increasingly specific models of particular kinds of learning, memory, and so forth, in areas such as cognitive neuroscience. In the former case, more exacting theoretical

analysis tends to be viewed as limiting or restricting possibilities for innovative practice; in the latter case, belief in a progressive march of science has rendered large-scale theorizing passé and replaced it with a more rigorous search for detailed explanations of particular mechanisms. Either way, to propose a subdiscipline in theoretical psychology at this late stage in the evolution of psychological practice and science is likely to be perceived as a threat to both the professional and scientific aspirations and status of psychologists.

Nonetheless, Slife and Williams find two good reasons to propose an enhanced relevance for theoretical psychology as a distinctive subdiscipline in contemporary psychology. The first is that psychology continues to cling to an outdated version of positivism that insists “a method, a logic, is the pathway to truth” (119). Following Koch (1959), Slife and Williams view this tendency to settle on methods (in this case, a scientific method broadly understood as similar to that utilized in certain areas of natural science) before the discipline had decided on its questions as a long-standing constraint on the scientific progress of all areas of psychology. They argue that the scientific method itself is a kind of philosophical argument, the limitations of which if not constantly attended can lead psychologists to confuse the application of a methodological orthodoxy with scientific success in an unquestioning way. The damage wrought by such a conflation on the overall health of psychology as a scholarly and scientific undertaking is sufficiently important and complicated that it partially warrants a subdiscipline of theoretical psychology populated by individuals with “expertise in both theory and the unique requirements of psychology” (121).

The second reason Slife and Williams (1997) use to support their call for the establishment of theoretical psychology as

a formal subdiscipline of psychology at the end of the 20th century also is closely related to the problems of positivism, or more precisely the problems bequeathed by psychology's long-standing disciplinary attachment to it. For, by the end of the 20th century, "There is a widespread weakening of agreement about methodological assumptions in the mainstream of the discipline (i.e., "positivism") as well as a long-standing lack of consensus, at least an explicit consensus, about any disciplinary paradigm" (121). At such a time and in such a context, the role of theoretical psychologists and a subdiscipline of theoretical psychology would be to pursue "increased understanding of such consensus and disagreements" - "the clarification of issues that are fundamental to the discipline, so that the people engaged in the discipline can themselves decide how the discipline should be conducted" (121). Citing the increasing fragmentation of disciplinary psychology and the challenges of new "postmodern" theories, "qualitative" methods, and "globalization" of the discipline, Slife and Williams conclude that, "skilled specialists are needed to focus and clarify these discussions and to make sure that they find their way into the disciplinary discourse" (122).

Following an anticipation and consideration of eight likely objections to their proposal, Slife and Williams document evidence of an increasingly robust subdiscipline of theoretical psychology. They cite a wide array of contributions made by theoretical psychologists to debates about the nature and directions of psychological science and professional practice and to discussions concerning alternative articulations of psychological phenomena and methods. They then point to the promulgation of organizations, journals, conferences, and programs of study focused on these and related matters.

At the very end of their 1997 article, Slife and Williams turn to the more specific roles and training of theoretical psychologists. With a unique blend of expertise in psychology and social science, philosophy of science, the history of psychology and science, ethical and moral theory, together with a willingness to continuously hone such understanding, theoretical psychologists would take on the central roles of “clarify[ing] what the discipline is currently doing,” “attempting to discern what the future of the discipline might be,” and “promot[ing] debate and discussion about where the discipline should be going” (126). Thus, Slife and Williams propose that theoretical psychology and psychologists span a temporal trajectory that knits historical, philosophical, sociological, institutional, and related analyses into a comprehensive understanding of psychology’s past, present, and future.

Given the rhetorical nature of Slife and Williams’ (1997) article and its purpose of creating a receptive climate for the possible welcoming of a subdiscipline of theoretical psychology by psychologists in a wide variety of different subdisciplines and specialties, it is understandable that the roles they ascribed to theoretical psychologists were stated in reasonably general terms of enhancing understanding of psychology’s past, present, and possible future. However, in a later reflection on the Slife and Williams’ (1997) article and its aftermath, Slife (2000), after recounting both positive and negative responses to that previous work, gives a more specific formulation of the roles of the theoretician in psychology.



Actually, theoretical psychologists have two main purposes: The first is to formulate, and help others formulate, the theories that ultimately get tested empirically – whether through quantitative research or qualitative research. The second is to examine, and help others examine, the *nonempirical* issues that currently facilitate or stymie the work of psychologists. (100)

At first reading, this more recent formulation of purposes and roles for the theoretical psychologist might seem rather modest in comparison with the possibilities sketched in Slife and Williams (1997). However, the remainder of Slife (2000) offers an expanded interpretation of these two functions, especially the latter focus on nonempirical matters.

Much of the rest of Slife's (2000) article is devoted to an explication of the possibilities for work that theoretical psychologists might engage in with other psychologists and the public at large with respect to nonempirical issues that might be seen as contributing to or limiting the possibilities for a kind of psychology that might make a positive impact not only to social science and professional practice, but also to the common good of our broader communities. With respect to the former (and among other suggestions), Slife advocates that theoretical psychologists must become more accepting of duties and responsibilities in their own departments and organizations that will bring them into contact with others who may not share their convictions concerning the utility and roles of theoretical psychology, and that they must engage in interactions that are truly dialogical. With respect to the latter, Slife demurs that "we have a moral obligation to the public" that is difficult to frame, but might involve acting as "skilled and humble" public intellectuals and/or writers, speakers, and participants in worthwhile public forums and projects (111). For Slife (2000), the theoretical psychologist has

both traditional roles related to the enhancement of psychological research and practice and emergent roles related to informing psychologists and the public about psychology as a form of social, moral, and political praxis and encouraging active, engaged, and informed citizens to contribute to our collective well-being.

Another, more recent attempt to formulate the roles and tasks of theoretical psychology is directly related to the current volume. Martin (2004) offers a taxonomy and illustrated summary of “a wide variety of theoretical tasks [that] is inescapably part of psychological research, practice, and public policy initiatives” and also promotes “theoretical psychology as an orientation toward, and set of understandings and tools with which psychologists might approach an appropriately contextualized self-understanding of their practices as researchers and practitioners” (1). Like Slife and Williams (1997), Martin draws attention to the fact that disciplinary psychology’s historical attachment to positivist empiricism was always contentious and began to erode during the second half of the 20th century. Moreover, after the second world war,

...organized psychology’s increasingly influential social impact and interests placed it on a collision course with more pragmatically and hermeneutically attuned sociologists, anthropologists, and political theorists. Here, the base empiricism of psychology met with a more fundamental challenge with respect to the adequacy of its data and methods as sufficient warrants for both its scientific claims and public policy pronouncements. (2)

The upshot of all of this was that during the last decades of the 20th century and into the 21st, a distinctive subdiscipline of theoretical psychology began to emerge,

“with its own associations, journals, conferences, and websites” (2).

Martin (2004) then proceeds to lay out a taxonomy of roles and tasks for the theoretical psychologist that he groups into three areas that are “progressively more removed from particular programs of research in psychology” (3). The first grouping of tasks is directly related to empirical work in psychology. These include the conceptualization of phenomena of interest, the formulation of hypotheses, the determination of “testing conditions and procedures, formulation and analysis of models and criteria for empirical confirmation and disconfirmation, theoretical amplification and simplification, distinguishing necessary from contingent propositions, clarification of presuppositions and assumptions, and the evaluation of competing paradigms” (3). Martin illustrates some of these first-level tasks by more detailed examination of (1) *theoretical reductions* in psychology, such as the attempt by some neuroscientists to dissolve psychological phenomena by failing to distinguish the actions, experiences, and agency of persons from patterns of neuronal activity and (2) the *modal status of claims and hypotheses*, giving examples of the penchant of psychological researchers to treat all claims and hypotheses as if they were legitimately contingent, and therefore proper objects of empirical research, when many of the hypotheses investigated empirically in psychology are actually logically and/or conceptually necessary.

Martin’s second grouping of theoretical tasks relates directly to the professional practices of psychologists, with particular attention paid to the much vaunted idea of the scientist practitioner model advanced by the American Psychological Association since the Boulder Conference in 1949 that marked the formalization of training programs in clinical psychology. Here, Martin highlights roles for the

theoretical psychologist that move from the conceptual, ontological, and epistemological to the moral and political.

As philosophers of applied science, theoretical psychologists must recognize and help others to understand that the subject matter of psychology is not invented [or discovered] in the psychological laboratory and exported to the life world via engineered technologies, but has emerged in the life world and is thus available to the interpretive activity of psychologists...human experience and action, and questions surrounding them, are of interest precisely because they are the very stuff of our lives. The concerns of psychology are the concerns of people attempting to make sense of their lives. They do not exist outside of historically and socioculturally evolved traditions of knowing and understanding, and the kinds of experiences and actions embedded and constituted within such traditions [and ways of life]...[This] means that psychology itself must be regarded as one recent, mostly Western tradition of understanding, amongst many others, some of which have converged at this particular time in human history to permit the emergence of disciplinary psychology...As moral and political philosophers, theoretical psychologists have an obligation to interpret and critique specific applications of psychological science that seem not to acknowledge important moral and political aspects of psychological practice. (7)

Some of what Martin (2004) says toward the end of the foregoing quote leads directly into his third grouping of theoretical tasks related to the public presence of psychology. The focus of this third set of roles and tasks concerns how psychology has affected persons and societies more generally than through its specific programs

of research and professional ministrations. Here, Martin asserts that many of our relations to ourselves and others now reflect psychological conceptions and practices that were unavailable to persons in previous phases of human history.

Conceptions and practices [related to] the Freudian unconscious and Skinnerian reinforcement are now as familiar and common as airplanes and antibiotics, and even more likely to be involved in the ways we govern ourselves and others...Where once we wrote letters, kept diaries, and went to confession, contemporary persons increasingly also take stock of themselves and attempt to manage themselves according to the...discourses [of psychology]. (9)

What flows through Martin's (2004) delineation of roles and tasks of theoretical psychologists is a core idea of persons, understood as social and psychological beings, as the primary subject matter of psychology. As social and psychological beings, the lives of persons unfold through their activities and interactivities in the biophysical and sociocultural world as embodied and embedded participants in historically established ways of living. In this sense, psychology is nothing more or less than an institutionalized set of scientific and professional practices directed to an understanding of persons and the human condition. Consequently, theoretical psychology, as mentioned at the outset of this chapter, must be understood as directed at interpreting, understanding, and describing those specific conceptions, contexts, and practices in which psychologists engage to produce what they regard as findings and insights that warrant their scientific, professional, and broader public activities. This is why theoretical psychology recently has taken a historical and sociocultural turn toward studying the specific contexts

within which the actions, assumptions, aspirations, and strategies of psychologists unfold as they work to advance their particular interpretations of psychological science, services, and psychologically informed social policies.

As Teo (2009) puts it, theoretical and philosophical psychology is a situated “*reflection* on theories, and on the history, status, connection, and development of psychological concepts, methods, ideas, and worldviews” (1). In other words, contemporary theoretical psychology is as much a sociocultural and historical undertaking as it is a philosophical and theoretical endeavor. It uses all of these orientations and methods to examine critically the historical development and contemporary status of psychological concepts, methods, research, theories, and interventions. Today’s theoretical psychology consists not only of ontological, epistemological, ethical-practical, and aesthetic-psychological reflections concerning psychological theories and research (cf. Teo, 2009), but also of intensive studies of the concrete particulars of psychologists’ scientific and professional practices, together with a critical examination of the assumptions that attend their use. The overall purpose is to help all psychologists and interested members of the general public to better understand and engage in informed discussions concerning psychological research and intervention and the ways in which the institutional, scientific, and professional understandings and practices of psychology have become entwined within our personal and collective lives. In this sense, the purpose of this volume is entirely consistent with Blaine Fowers’ (2013) recent call for the community of theoretical and philosophical psychologists to engage in activities aimed at collectively seeking and furthering human goods in the areas of knowledge, collective identity, community, and meaningful contribution to human flourishing. As Fowers argues, the kind of reflection,

clarification, and multiperspectivity required in good theoretical inquiry and practice requires sustained dialogue within a diversity of possibilities and practices. In the various chapters that comprise the body of this volume, such emphases are on full display.

## **Organization, Content, and Invitation**

We have organized the rest of this Handbook into four major parts or sections: (I) Philosophical/Conceptual Approaches; (II) Historical Approaches; (III) Narrative and Social Psychological Approaches; and (IV) Theoretical Studies of Scientific, Professional, and Life Practices. It is our opinion that this organization captures effectively the various innovations and elaborations of theoretical and philosophical inquiry in psychology that have appeared during the past several decades and which have been summarized previously in this introductory chapter.

[Part I](#) opens with two chapters that describe and extend Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous philosophical insights to contemporary psychological issues. In [Chapter 2](#), Matt LaVine and Michael Tissaw discuss Peter Hacker's appropriation of Wittgenstein in developing a "philosophical anthropology" that examines the concepts and underlying logic by which human actions and psychological features are made intelligible. LaVine and Tissaw detail five distinctions central to Hacker's account: empirical versus grammatical propositions, sense versus nonsense, surface versus depth grammar, inner versus outer, and descriptive versus expressive functions of language. LaVine and Tissaw then consider how Hacker's philosophical anthropology has been applied to critique problematic Cartesian assumptions and a kind of "scientism" pervasive in psychological theorizing and research.

In [Chapter 3](#), Timothy Racine presents Wittgensteinian conceptual analysis as an approach to deciphering the meanings of psychological concepts and assessing the legitimacy of their applicability. Racine discusses how conceptual analysis can assist in distinguishing claims requiring empirical validation from those whose merits are judged by analytic or definitional criteria, settling spurious theoretical disputes, and formulating programs of research less likely to be vulnerable to conceptual missteps. Racine also defends conceptual analysis from acute criticism and demonstrates by example its conduct and relevance in psychology.

In [Chapter 4](#), Frank Richardson introduces hermeneutics as the theory of interpretation. Richardson traces philosophical hermeneutics from its origins in Continental thought and concern with the epistemological aims of interpretation, through a shift in emphasis to ontological matters, to addressing the inescapable and irreducible evaluative and ethical dimensions of interpretation. In light of hermeneutics, Richardson asserts that social and psychological inquiry does not consist of methods as independent and objective instruments for validating knowledge of phenomena. Rather, social and psychological theory is revealed as a “form of practice” saturated with social and historical values, and simply one among a number of means by which humans have endeavored to understand themselves.

In [Chapter 5](#), Blaine Fowers outlines a program of work in which he has augmented hermeneutics with a “eudaimonic” ethics adopted from the philosophy of Aristotle. According to Fowers, hidden ideologies of individualism and instrumentalism compromise psychology’s commitment to value-free inquiry. As an alternative to the impossibility of ridding psychology of value commitments, Fowers shows how Aristotle’s



philosophy not only offers an account of how all human activity, including psychology, is motivated by desirable ends, but also, how it can be of benefit in determining which ends are choiceworthy.

In [Chapter 6](#), Frederick Wertz explains phenomenology as based on two core forms of analysis devised to investigate consciousness and “lived experience.” “Phenomenological reduction” is a method by which the question of the reality of the phenomenon of interest is set aside in order to permit the investigator to focus on how the phenomenon presents itself meaningfully to consciousness - what is given in experience. “Eidetic analysis” looks to reveal the essence of experience; that is, the structure common across all experiences designated by the phenomenon. Wertz also discusses the domain or “regional ontology” comprising psychological life and at which phenomenology is appropriately directed, the range of topics to which phenomenological investigation has been applied, and steps by which the method is implemented.

In [Chapter 7](#), Anna Stetsenko elaborates an approach inspired by the insights of Lev Vygotsky that conceptualizes social science as a “non-neutral, transformative activist” project shaped by the endpoints or ideals to which research is oriented. Seeking to transcend objectivism and relativism, as well as bridge the gap between theory and practice, the project Stetsenko describes is founded on a distinctive view of persons as agents whose psychological capacities are formed in interaction with others, but who also become capable of actively transforming their world through a “dialectical process of mutual co-constitution.” As the product of posing questions, imagining possibilities, and acting in the pursuit of endpoints defined by the interests and values of individuals and their communities, Stetsenko reveals how theory and knowledge become instruments of broader ethical-political aims and practices,

where validity is gauged in terms of the kind of future to which they contribute.

In [Chapter 8](#), Michael Billig and Cristina Marinho decode the rhetoric of psychological writing, revealing its consequences (e.g., exaggerating results, concealing what happens in experiments, treating humans as things), and showing its parallels with ideological writing more generally. Billig and Marinho observe that by relying on technical nouns (especially those fashioned from verbs) and passive voiced verbs, authors convey opinions in ways that conceal their identities and actions, and make their accounts seemingly impersonal and objective. In a detailed analysis of “manipulating” versus “manipulation,” Billig and Marinho argue for the merits of a language of acts rather than a language of things, and for greater use of verbs over nouns in psychological writing.

[Part II](#) begins with [Chapter 9](#) by Thomas Teo who distinguishes among five “thought styles” of historical thinking by which psychological issues can be considered: history of science, history of the present, history as reconstruction, history of the politics of difference, and historical psychology. As an illustration, Teo analyses the concept of “objectivity” in light of these varieties of historical thinking, showing complexities and shifts in meaning of the term over time and across traditions. Teo also shows, through the views offered by these differing historical lenses, how the meanings of objectivity have been set variously in relation to conceptions of subjectivity and he discusses implications for psychological theorizing.

In [Chapter 10](#), Adrian Brock presents an approach pioneered by Kurt Danziger that investigates the history of “psychological objects.” As Brock expounds, psychological objects (e.g., perception, memory, learning, motivation) are different from natural objects in that they have linguistic

and cultural features making them susceptible to historical change in ways that purely natural objects are not. In this way, Brock explains, studies of histories of psychological objects refute the sort of naïve naturalism widely assumed in psychology, by which psychological objects are treated like other natural objects; that is, as if they stand outside of history, and exist independently of, and unaffected by, psychologists' theories of them. Brock discusses the liberating potential of this insight and other implications this avenue of historical investigation holds for psychological theory.

In [Chapter 11](#), Jeff Sugarman explicates “historical ontology” as concerned with the study of how possibilities for existence arise in history. Historical ontology assumes that personhood is an historical project, that the forms personhood takes vary across place and time, and that features of personhood are made possible by particular psychological descriptions. As an approach to psychological inquiry, historical ontology investigates persons through the ways they are described psychologically; more specifically, where, when, and how psychological description occurs, the purposes it serves, how it is implemented and sustained, and its effects. Sugarman outlines the origins and development of historical ontology and demonstrates its application to contemporary issues in psychology.

In [Chapter 12](#), Dean Keith Simonton introduces readers to “historiometry.” Historiometry is a correlational methodology by which quantitative analyses are performed on data obtained about historical individuals to test nomothetic hypotheses. As Simonton specifies, “historical individuals” refers both to people and events that have had significant impact on civilization. Nomothetic hypotheses are abstract generalizations divested of particulars and expressed as statistical associations. In addition to

explaining the method, its foundations, and history, Simonton also elaborates and illustrates its use, assesses the method critically, and forecasts opportunities for its applicability.

In [Chapter 13](#), James Lamiell employs history, conceptual analysis, and a hypothetical case to reveal a perennial error in psychology resulting from a failure to recognize the difference between general-type and aggregate-type knowledge claims. Through his explorations of William Stern and other notable progenitors of psychological methodologies, and analysis of the concepts at work, Lamiell shows how this error occurred and, moreover, why aggregate statistical knowledge (i.e., knowledge obtained of populations) is unsuited to deriving knowledge about individuals (i.e., general lawfulness sought at the level of the individual). Lamiell shows how resolving significant issues in psychology can benefit from conceptual investigation abetted by historical investigation.

[Part III](#) includes chapters that collectively highlight and promote the value of methods based in narrative analysis and critical social psychological theory. [Part III](#) opens with [Chapter 14](#), in which authors Ruthellen Josselson and Brent Hopkins advocate an approach to theoretical inquiry within which people are understood as meaning makers and story tellers. Josselson and Hopkins present a review of the theoretical and philosophical foundations and literary theory of the study of life stories and personal narratives. Then, drawing on contemporary work, they illustrate concrete applications of this approach in psychological research.

Mark Freeman extends the discussion of narrative methodology in [Chapter 15](#), but with a more specific focus on what he calls “narrative hermeneutics,” which underscores the interpretative and temporal nature of

narrative approaches to psychological inquiry. Freeman provides a sketch of the broad philosophical perspective on which narrative hermeneutics is based, followed by several concrete illustrations of the applications of this approach from his own work. He concludes by exploring the possibilities for narrative hermeneutics to provide a “methodological bridge” between empirical inquiry in psychology and theoretical and philosophical issues that are at the core of the discipline.

In [Chapter 16](#), Jack Martin describes Life Positioning Analysis (LPA), a theory-driven, social-psychological approach to analyzing the lives of persons, which underscores the particular positions and perspectives occupied by persons within the broader sociocultural contexts in which they engage with others. After a description of Position Exchange Theory, which provides the theoretical foundation of LPA, Martin describes the five phases of LPA in the context of three case studies. Finally, he considers the promise and potential for LPA as a method for conducting theoretical and philosophical work within psychology.

In [Chapter 17](#), Rom Harré explores the potential for Positioning Theory – the systematic study of the interplay between socially defined rights and duties and persons – as a method for understanding encounters between social beings. Harré describes the four components of the “positioning frame”: *positions* as clusters of beliefs concerning rights and duties, *repertoires* of speech-acts and other social meanings, *story-lines*, and the presentation of *selves*. Harré also describes several methods appropriate for conducting positioning studies, and provides an illustrative example of positioning analysis in discursive therapeutic practices.

In [Chapter 18](#), Hubert Hermans describes a relatively new research procedure known as the Personal Position Repertoire (PPR), which is based on Dialogical Self Theory. After outlining the essentials of Dialogical Self Theory and showing how PPR is grounded in this theoretical context, Hermans demonstrates applications of PPR from four research projects, and proposes that PPR provides an example of how understanding human experience, action, and development can be facilitated by moving through theory-method-research cycles.

In [Chapter 19](#), Suzanne Kirschner explores the question of how psychology can properly acknowledge and understand human experiences as socioculturally constituted, while at the same time preserving the view of persons as possessing interiority, agency, individuality, and emotional complexity. In response, Kirschner makes a case for a psychology of socioculturally constituted subjectivity that considers how subjectivities are generated through individuals' *identification* as particular "kinds of people," *responsivity* to the ways they are identified, and *remainders*, i.e. those aspects of one's ascribed identity that are seemingly incongruous with that ascribed identity.

[Chapter 20](#) by Paul Stenner rounds out [Part III](#) with a description of a transdisciplinary psychosocial approach, which emphasizes the consideration of psychological inquiries alongside questions raised by other social and human sciences and the humanities. Stenner presents a 'tool-kit' of six core transdisciplinary concepts (transition, liminality, transaction, transposition, foundation by exclusion, primary abstraction, and transgression), which he illustrates with examples from the history of psychology.

The chapters in [Part IV](#) address, each in its own way, the potential value and utility of applying theoretical and philosophical tools to inquiries concerned with scientific,