Chapter 6
History for "Polycentric" Psychological Science: An "Outsider's" Case

Irina Mironenko

> In a sense, modern psychology is returning to the position from which it began: a polycentric position in which there are diverse but intercommunicating centers of psychological work that reflect a diversity of local conditions and traditions. (Danziger, 1994, p. 477)

Is the purpose of the history of psychology to serve current psychology, rather than to contribute to historical knowledge? Being a practising scientist in phosyclogy and addressing in my research the history of this science, I have no other answer but "Yes." If there are any other purposes, they are well beyond the area of my professional interests.

However, I must admit that my point of view is not the only one, and it does not prevail in the professional community. Historical discourse in psychological journals and science conferences shows that contemporary history of psychology is more and more immersed in personal details, in facts and biographies, laying great store on historical reconstructions of the lives of psychologists but attaching too little attention to the roots and shoots of their ideas. I dare say that too many papers on history of psychology are now of little *professional psychological* interest outside a very narrow circle of readers. Then, why complain that not many people read our papers if we write only for a few? This can be proved by the fact that the highly esteemed journal *History of Psychology* is continuously ranked by SJR for Quartile 1 for history and only Quartile 3 for psychology.[1]

I would rather reformulate the question, as *how and why does the history of psychology serve the current development of psychological science*? What factors determine whether the development of the history of psychology tends toward

[1] The SCImago Journal and Country Rank is a portal that includes the journals and country-scientific indicators developed from the information contained in the Scopus® database (Elsevier B.V.). These indicators can be used to assess and analyze scientific domains.

I. Mironenko (✉)
St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg, Russia
e-mail: i.mironenko@spbu.ru

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historical science or toward psychological science? In addition, what kind of future can we anticipate for the discipline?

The works of Kurt Danziger cast light on these questions. In a much cited paper (1994), Danziger justly remarks that in the majority of natural sciences, like physics, chemistry, etc., practising scientists hardly take any notice of the work done by historians of their disciplines. Galilean and Newtonian studies are not part of physics today.

> [This is because the] way in which a scholarly (or any other) community relates to its own history depends on the way in which tradition is mobilized to support an ongoing pattern of community life. One such pattern, most successfully developed in the natural sciences, involves the maximization of consensus around the formulation of what is already known and what is still uncertain. The shallow history of the research paper helps the achievement of this kind of consensus. (Danziger, 1994, p. 471)

However, when we turn from the natural to the human sciences, like sociology and economics, we observe a very different pattern. Here the fields are structured mostly in an agonistic manner and are characterized by deep divisions between alternative schools of thought. Here we find a critical historiography of considerable chronological depth, which also supports contemporary professional community life: "In this way [… scholars] they give maximum visibility to fundamental differences among alternative schools of thought and highlight the availability of conceptual alternatives. For such fields deep historical studies can have considerable contemporary relevance" (Danziger, 1994, p. 471).

Danziger puts the case for the history of psychology somewhere in between these two poles, between physics and sociology. He assesses the recent past of the discipline in the context of a "monocentric" mainstream of the second part of the twentieth century. "The period when scientism and positivism reigned supreme in regulating the life of the discipline was also the period when psychology had become to all intents and purposes an American science. […] The historical work that bears the stamp of this period quite naturally equated the celebration of a certain conception of science with the celebration of psychology as an American science" (Danziger, 1994, p. 476). From this point of view, the mainstream history of psychology could be nothing but shallow in its concern with psychological theory, and historical research naturally flowed along the track of general history: "[historians of psychology] often produce intrinsically more valuable history, but they do so at a price. The price is isolation from the community of scientists" (Danziger, 1994, p. 470).

As for the future of the history of psychology, the historical context has changed and the new situation calls for new solutions. Danziger denotes these processes as a "decline of the insider history": "the transformation of psychology from an essentially national science to an international and intercultural enterprise as having a particularly important corrosive effect on the monolithic nature of intra-disciplinary authority […] It is when that authority becomes questionable, when the professional community is divided in some profound way that a critical disciplinary history has a significant contribution to make" (Danziger, 1994, p. 478).

Danziger's paper was written more than 20 years ago. Since then, Danziger's prognosis has come true. The world is becoming globalized and so is psychological science. The polycentric, multi-paradigmatic nature of psychological science can hardly be doubted today. Substantial contributions to development of the critical history of psychology have been made by Western colleagues, "the insiders" of the mainstream of the history of psychology (Hilgard, Leary, & McGuire, 1991; Joravsky, 1989; Smith, 1997, 2013; Valsiner, 2012).

However, global challenges call for "the outsiders" to contribute to the development of critical history of psychology. These "outsiders," remaining obscure in relation to mainstream psychology for decades, had no chance to ignore mainstream psychology, described by Danziger as American psychology of the post-World War II period, because it was to be reckoned with by anybody professionally affiliated with psychology. "The outsider's" vision of psychological science was built initially on antagonistic structuring and fragmentation, because he or she belonged to a fragment ignored by the mainstream. Thus, should we not expect to find here "a critical historiography of considerable chronological depth, which is also supporting the ongoing pattern of professional community life"?

A noteworthy example of an "outsider's" critical historiography is the works of Mikhail G. Yaroshevsky, which regrettably stay obscure for the majority of the international professional community because of the language barrier. Yaroshevsky (1915–2001) did research in critical history of psychology for many decades. He laid the foundations of the Russian school of the history of psychology. All psychological education in the USSR, since the first faculties of psychology were opened in Moscow State University and in Leningrad State University in 1966, was grounded on his books on history of psychology (1966, 1996). His vision of the development of psychology was that of a process, initially antagonistic and built on dialectical contradictions. Thus, he believed that the history of psychology should serve divided psychological science as its memory, as its self-consciousness, linking together fragmented psychological knowledge.

Psychology has always been fragmented since it left the path of the introspective, associative paradigm of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. Morbid experiences of the schism of scientific schools permeate the entire history of our science, engendering the endless "crisis" discourse. Moreover, because of the position of psychology at the intersection of natural sciences and humanities, which are different in methods, the development of psychology has always been quite dramatic and replete with methodological discussions. The discourse of the "understanding" psychology (humanitarian, teleological) versus the "explanatory" psychology (clinging to natural sciences, causal) has entailed endless debate over the criteria for verification and the adequacy of knowledge. The new reality of the globalized world has exacerbated the problem with new challenges of ethical relativity and the cultural diversity of the implicit foundations of psychological theories.

The ideal that there can be theoretical or disciplinary unity in our science has been extensively debated since the foundations of psychology. Perhaps the most wonderful thing is that psychology, thus torn apart, still maintains the identity of *a science*. Should psychology cling to this integrated identity? By no means should it

become a monolithic one. I consider the very idea of an "all in one solution" for psychological science as truly reductionist, but, luckily, unrealizable (Mironenko, 2004, 2006, 2007). It is like the idea to get rid of the multiplicity of human languages by constructing some sort of an artificial language. Every language is an embodiment of a unique human culture, and the way to mutual understanding is the art of translation, not unification. In the same way, every school in psychological science contributes to understanding of psyche, and its contribution is unique and valuable, and the way to integration leads through dialog and efforts for mutual understanding.

However, if in the dispute on whether psychology should stay *a science* or rather be divided into a bunch of *psychological sciences*, the former point of view prevails, a cure for the disease of the fragmented identity of our science should be hunted for.

What could serve to link together a kaleidoscope of diverse existing psychological theories and empirical data? What links together different moments of a personal life, which is spent in different social surroundings, doing and experiencing things so different that it raises doubts about the very existence of personality as an integrated whole? Memory does, and only memory can. Reflecting on our past, we understand our present and ourselves and make plans for the future. Self-consciousness builds on memory.

Yaroshevsky aimed at developing a history of psychology that would serve the fragmented contemporary psychological science as its memory, as its self-consciousness. He created an integrated methodological system for the history of psychology (1966, 1971, 1996). He proposed precise definitions of its subject, objectives, and key methodological principles. He defined the subject of the history of psychology as the process of generating scientific knowledge of mental phenomena. Thus, he considered the history of psychology as the history of scientific psychological thinking. Scientific thinking differs from other ways of understanding mental life, e.g., those typical for religion, art, or mundane cognition. Yaroshevsky substantiated the specificity and borders of scientific knowledge, defining it as empirically verifiable and rational knowledge.

Whether these borders are needed and, moreover, whether it is possible to define what they are and whether psychology can and should be *a real* science are much debated today and have been debated since the very beginning of the history of psychology. I share Yaroshevsky's belief that the borders between psychology and other forms of psychological knowledge—which are valuable, important, powerful, but not scientific—should be transparent and permeable, but they should be preserved (Mironenko, 2006, 2008)! Blurring these boundaries would mean the loss of the status of science for psychology and thus a lacuna in the general system of human science and the destruction of the integrity of the latter. "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, there is no way to make it salty again." Psychology is a necessary and essential part of the science in general demanded by other sciences, which turn to psychology with problems, when appropriate. Scientific psychological knowledge is not perfect, ideally logical, rational, and verified. However, no science is perfect, ideally logical, rational, and verified. In the postmodern perspective, we regard science as a continuous generation of a plurality of interpretations, none of

which can be perfect and ultimate. To be scientific, these interpretations must just comply with certain rules. The essence of the scientific method is the compliance with the rules, which, in their turn are constantly being revised. No science possesses absolute truth, all sciences deal with relative truths, gradually, step by step, approaching to the unattainable ideal. Scientific criteria should be applied more to the direction and the method of search than to the products.

Scientific psychology can neither substitute for the other types of psychological knowledge nor pretend for superiority. Let psychological practices scoop from all sources. However, psychological *science* has its own value, its field and domain, and it cannot be denied that it also contributes to psychological practices.

Yaroshevsky identified scientific knowledge primarily as deterministic knowledge, i.e., knowledge grounded on the idea that every event is necessitated by antecedent events and conditions, the regularities of which are understood as the laws of nature. Determinism appears primarily in the form of causality, as a presumption that the cause of an event is a set of circumstances that precede the event in time. Basing work on this principle, we can formulate hypotheses and prove them in scientific research.

Science has its own mental tools and means to penetrate into the recesses of the psyche. Over centuries, these have gone through changes and been developed by the scientific community. These tools constitute intellectual structures that can be called thinking historical systems of scientific. A change from one system to another occurs in due course, logically. Yaroshevsky named the study of the sequence of these systems of scientific thinking the first and primary task of the history of psychology. In his monographic work, *History of Psychology*, first published in 1966 and republished several times, as it was the main textbook used for psychological education in Soviet universities, he traced the history of psychological knowledge from ancient oriental psychological thought to the present. He assessed a sequence of stages in the development of science, tracing logical changes in the implementation of the principle of determinism in theoretical, constructed models of psychic phenomena.

Yaroshevsky identified the first stage as pre-mechanical determinism. It lasted from antiquity to the seventeenth century. Democritus put forward the first causal theory of sensory processes, which he understood as a stream of moving atoms of subtle fire. He understood sensory processes (perception of colors, smells, etc.) as the result of atoms from outside hitting sensory organs.

The scientific revolution of the seventeenth century created a new form of determinism, mechanical determinism. The invention and the use of technical devices with preassigned actions became the prototype for cause-mechanical interpretation of the living body and its functions.

This called for a new type of theoretical model. Then, in the nineteenth century, the concept of organism changed under the influence of two great doctrines, those of Charles Darwin and Claude Bernard. Life was now understood as an inherent expediency, an ineradicable tendency of the organism to self-preservation and survival. According to Yaroshevsky, the era of biological determinism began. This was a radical innovation—it was teleological determinism, in which events that have not

yet occurred determine what is happening at the moment. By contrast, mechanical determinism knows no other cause than the preceding and actual circumstances. Teleology was also implicit in another radical innovation in the comprehension of the principle of determinism, which understood the bind between the environment and the living being not as a fixed relation but as a probabilistic outcome, due to the inner biological activating factors. This opened up space for the wide use of statistical methods, and their introduction into the psychology entailed great changes.

Yaroshevsky assessed the last, ongoing stage in the development of psychological science as "psychological" determinism, taking into account psychological theories not only of common biological and environmental conditions but also individual psychic factors.

Yaroshevsky's another major methodological development was the multilevel categorical system (1971), revealing the hierarchical structure of the field of psychological science, which he related to the context of natural sciences and humanities. The theoretical model is presented in Table 6.1. It must be noted that the translation of the words I use here is not fully comprehensive or absolutely consistent with the original. The vocabulary used by the Russian activity theory (AT) school is very specific, and the conceptual apparatus, the language, is very different from the one used in international science (Mironenko, 2010, 2013). Terminology was a matter of prime importance in Russian psychology. The conceptual apparatus was sophisticated and subtly crafted in the cause of specially organized methodological discussions which took place in Soviet psychology in the 1970s and early 1980s and which resulted in the preparation and publication of thesaurus dictionaries edited by leading methodologists. The most popular was the *Concise Psychological Dictionary* edited by two luminaries of scientific methodology, academicians Petrovsky and Yaroshevsky (Kratkij psikhologicheskij slovar 1985). This dictionary was meant for professional use only, more for clarifying difficult and contentious issues, which abounded in AT discourse, than for early reading. Working with this dictionary required a substantial knowledge of AT. That is why the *Dictionary*, though translated into English (Concise Psychological Dictionary 1987), was of little help for English-speaking colleagues and was hardly ever used in the mainstream.[2]

[2] There are great difficulties in the English-language literature with the definition and meaning of "activity." To account for this we have to remember that A. N. Leontiev's AT, as he himself acknowledged, was based on the theoretical reasoning of his great predecessors, S. L. Rubinstein and L. S. Vygotsky. AT disseminated in international science through the works of Leontiev, first, through his book, *Activity*, *Consciousness and Personality*, which was translated in the USSR into many languages and published in large print runs in the late 1970s. This is why, in the context of international science, the term AT actually turned out to comprise the whole trend dominating Soviet psychology for the greater part of the twentieth century, based on ideas of the procreative role of vital activity of a living being for psyche formation, while the latter in its turn was reduced to Leontiev's theory. This is the cause of much misunderstanding of AT in international science (Mironenko, 2013).

Note that the *Concise Psychological Dictionary* gives two definitions for AT:

(1) the principle of psyche research, which was based on the concept of purposeful activity developed by Fichte, Hegel, and Marx (M. Ya Basov, S. L. Rubinstein, A. N. Leontiev, and their

Table 6.1 Yaroshevsky's categorial system of psychological science

	Noosphere							
Types of categories	Substantiality	Directionality	Activation	Cognition	Subjectivity	Eventfulness	Reality	
Sociocentric	Human being	Ideal	Freedom	Intelligence	Existential	Complicity	Oecumena	Psychosphere
Metapsychological	Pesonality	Vaue	Activity	Consciousness	Feeling	Communication	Personosphere	
Basic psychological	Self	Motive	Act	Image	Experiencing	Interaction	Situation	
Proto-psychological	Individuality	Need	Reflex	Sensation	Affectivity	Coexistence	Subject relation	
Biocentric	Organism	Requirement of an organism	Metabolism	Signal	Selectivity	Synergy	Environment	
	Biosphere							

Yaroshevsky considered the field of psychology as the "psychosphere," locating this in the space of "biosphere" and "noosphere" interactions.[3] The central place in the field of psychology is constituted by the "basic" categories: self, motive, action, image (representation), experiencing,[4] interaction, and situation. These denote *psychic* phenomena, whose main characteristic is their subjective, introspective nature. The categories of the metapsychological and proto-psychological levels are not *psychic* phenomena but *psychological*, constructed by psychological science during the course of its methodological and theoretical development, and they structure and constitute the subject of psychological science. Metapsychological categories structure the field of psychology in the spheres where it connects with the social sciences and humanities, and proto-psychological categories are related to the spheres of interaction between psychology and the natural sciences.

According to Yaroshevsky, each of the basic phenomena can be traced "downwards," linking psychology to the natural sciences, and "upwards," linking psychology to the social and humanistic sciences. For example, the class of activation is constituted by the category of metabolism on the biological level, by the category of reflex on the proto-psychological level, by the category of action on the level of basic psychological entities, by the category of activity on the level of metapsychological categories, and by the category of freedom on the societal level.

The system of categories is an "open" one, subject to rethinking, revision, and reconsideration in the course of historical investigations. Yaroshevsky first built it on four basic phenomena, and he then added others.

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students); (2) theory considering psychology as the science of the generation, structuring, and functioning of psyche in the course of the activities of individuals (Leontiev).

So, the term "activity" in translations of Russian AT texts can have different meanings, depending on the context.

There is also an important point of linguistic origin which has caused confusion in the international literature. There are two key words in the context of Russian AT: "*sub'ektnost*" (субъектность) and "*dejatelnost*" (деятельность). The translation of both usually turns out to be the same: activity. But in Russian these words differ in their meaning. Moreover, there is another Russian word, "*activnost*," which is precisely translated as "activity." The English translation does not allow us to obtain the right understanding of the differences. The concept of *sub'ekt* (and *sub'ektnost* for a quality to be a *sub'ekt*) is associated with Rubinstein, whose main idea was that psyche is a procreation of active interaction of individual and environment. *Sub'ekt* means somebody who is choosing and pursuing his own aims, serving his own purposes: a self-determined and self-actualizing agent. Unfortunately the term "*sub'ekt*" is often translated as "subject", the meaning of which may be very different, and *sub'ektnost* as "subjectivity" (though the proper language equivalent for the latter in Russian is *sub'ektivnost* (субъективность), so the translation renders methodological texts meaningless. "*Dejatelnost*" means a process of active and purposeful treatment of the environment, outward activity, and it was the main concept in Leontiev's theory.

[3] A postulated sphere or stage of evolutionary development (frequently with reference to the writings of Teilhard de Chardin) dominated by consciousness, the mind, and interpersonal relationships.

[4] The semantics of the word I have chosen for the translation here is somewhat different from the Russian, "perezhivanie," used by Yaroshevsky, which lays more stress on emotional aspects. In general, I think Russian words are better transliterated.

In his comprehensive books, Yaroshevsky presented detailed analysis not only of the general logic of the historical development of psychological science but also made structured assessments of the historical development in partial areas, related to six basic categories.

Yaroshevsky's work on the historical development of psychological categories could well contribute to the issue which Danziger identified as important for the future critical history of psychology in his 1994 paper, cited above, and to which he repeatedly turned (Danziger, 1997, 2008). In 2013, he referred to it once again: "The categorical, object-constituting, language of disciplinary communities is, like all language, historical in character […] Every one of these terms has a history within the discipline and a history outside the discipline, and often the latter begins before the discipline existed. Here there is a rich field for historiography in psychology that has only been patchily explored" (Danziger, 2013, p. 836).

Focusing on revealing the historical growth of scientific psychological thinking, Yaroshevsky also highlighted the second task of the history of psychology: to explicate how the social situation and the culture influence the generation of psychological theories. He defined the third task as the study of the personality of psychologists, because personal circumstances and life story have a great impact. After all, the psychologist's own psyche is the only one known at first hand, and psychological theories largely reflect their creators. He therefore considered the field of the history of psychology to be threefold. But the most important aspect was the history of theoretical thinking and empirical research, linking together scattered pieces into a logically connected integrated whole of *a science*. The history of psychology should be the history of the legacy of ideas and mental tools, not only the biographies of psychologists, if we believe that psychology is *a science*.

Another important function of the history of psychology for Yaroshevsky was to separate the wheat from the chaff. One aspect is to prevent old ideas posing as new ones. He wrote that the lack of knowledge of history leads to tautologies in science, inter alia to the fact that old concepts are posed as discoveries. Then science becomes clogged, idles, and does not undertake its main task, namely, the production of new knowledge. The other aspect is clearing up the borders of scientific thinking in psychology. Psychology is closely connected with other forms of knowledge of mental phenomena like art, religion, and mundane cognition. These contribute to psychological practices. However, psychology as a science should preserve the specific character of scientific knowledge (deterministic, rational, and verifiable), which is necessary for psychology to be part of the integral system of sciences.

Thus contemporary science offers a variety of deep and comprehensive methodological developments in critical history of psychology, such as those described above in the work of Yaroshevsky or in the abovementioned English-speaking authors better known to Western readers. These could become the bases for historical analysis of the contemporary state and problems of psychological science and could allow us to better understand the present and to predict tomorrow.

If the future of the history of psychology is at stake now, it is primarily a matter of the choice of those who work in this profession. If the history of psychology does not serve current needs of psychological science, its bright future in the domain is

highly unlikely. I believe that the tendency in the development of the history of psychology which has made it contribute more to general historical knowledge than to current psychology is already being replaced by the other tendency, turning the history of psychology toward becoming a *psychological* discipline. It is not that I am against facts and biographies. However, I believe that it deserves to be declared that we should not be contented limiting our research to these. History of psychology should aim to reveal the general logic of the development of psychological science, which would serve the fragmented contemporary psychological science as its memory, as its self-consciousness. Who would then call into question the centrality of history for theory construction in our science?

Roger Smith, in his introductory chapter to this volume, names ten points explicating how history of psychology can relate to psychological science. The history which I am talking about, the "cognitive" history which I perceive as a part of theoretical psychology and as an instrument for understanding the present and anticipating the future of psychological science, relates mainly to points 4 (history as the means to maintain unity in diversity), 5 (history as a resource for contemporary research or practice), 6 (perspective and critique), 8 (psychology's subject matter is historical in nature), and 9 (psychological statements have meaning as part of historically formed discourse). Developments in these directions aim to contribute to the methodology of psychological science and the development of psychological knowledge.

As for points 1 (history as celebration) and 2 (history as the record of the discipline of psychology), they are definitely of primary importance for the history which Danziger identified as "the insider's" history. But their importance for the history of psychology in general cannot be doubted anyway, because it is on these data that any historical argument can be built. I would attribute to this group point 10 (history of psychology is an end in itself or, at least, no arguments are needed beyond those that support the humanities in general).

There are two more points in the list: 3 (the record of scientific progress and advance of humane values) and 7 (the contribution to human self-knowledge and well-being), which primarily address a wider audience than the professional psychological community. These purposes are not specific to the history of psychology; they are more general and can be allocated to all the humanities. However, their importance in our discourse is unquestionable, not only for overall humanitarian reasons, but also for psychological science as such—especially in relation to attracting resources for the development of the history of psychology in all its varieties, including cognitive history. This cognitive history is unable to attract public attention, resources, and funds, as its discourse addresses directly only a small group of methodologists of science and its results are very far from direct practical use.

Thus, my call is not to abandon "historical" history of psychology. I am just concerned about the type of history of psychology I love. I believe it deserves a little more attention and appreciation than it has now, if we want the history of psychology to stay *a psychological* discipline.

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