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Generative Theories in Cognitive Psychology

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Modern cognitive psychology has strictly adhered to the experimental methodology of the natural sciences. Often, contributions in T&P have addressed shortcomings and possible remedies of this predominant approach and its emphasis on 'effects'. My comment will contrast this approach with the generative theories (cognitive simulation models) developed in cognitive science about thirty years ago and still not widely accepted in psychology. I'm going to characterize these generative theories, and discuss their weaknesses and their advantages over the usual way of theorizing in cognitive psychology. I hope to convince at least some readers that (i) in order to proceed in this sense, you need not to buy a ready-made 'cognitive architecture', and (ii) that this approach results in a much more rigorous theorizing (although still well countable as a scientific endeavor).

A flourishing field of science

Cognitive psychology has probably been the fastest growing sub-field of scientific psychology, and one that has almost exclusively opted for a natural science approach. Its standard methodology consists in experimentation and statistical techniques for data analysis. Much has been written in *Theory & Psychology* and elsewhere, concerning the pros and cons of that methodology, its relation and possible amalgamation with qualitative or even hermeneutic techniques, and on the drawbacks of rigidity and sometimes even senselessly adhering to the usual methods of statistical hypothesis testing. My feeling (which I have sometimes shared with authors when reviewing articles) is that, in spite of all this valuable work, the impact of these articles will remain minor because (i) most of these articles discuss negative examples without giving positive ones, (ii) a well-reflected application of statistical models is more difficult indeed than just reporting what has always been done, and (iii), even editors of prestigious journals are sometimes happier with a 'standard' analysis even when its underlying model (say, GLM) can be shown to be inadequate for the data under scrutiny.

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BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

David J. Murray, *A History of Western Psychology*.
Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1982.

Reviewed by Kurt Danziger
York University

David J. Murray obtained his Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Cambridge in 1964. He then joined the Department of Psychology at Queen's University of Kingston, Ontario, where he is now Professor of Psychology. He has carried out a number of experimental studies on human memory and has published work on the history of psychology, including a January 1982 article in *Canadian Psychology* entitled "Vives (1538) on Memory and Recall."

There are two entirely different ways of approaching the history of a field of human activity that has a present as well as a past. It is always possible to treat the past as a series of more or less faltering steps that culminated in a present practice whose inevitably limited horizon sets the terms on which the past is allowed a hearing. On the other hand, one can permit the past to call into question those generally unnoticed horizons of the present which are about to become history in their turn.

These two approaches cater to different interests. The first approach, looking out from within current practice, will be likely to confirm the practitioner in whatever he or she is doing and to socialize the novice in the established perspectives of the field. The second approach is apt to subordinate the special concerns of the field to wider philosophical and historical interests.

In the historiography of the sciences the first approach has by now very largely yielded to the second, but this cannot be said of the historiography of psychology. During the period when psychology was struggling to establish its status as a profession and as an experimental discipline, interest in its history was virtually restricted to the retelling of certain narratives that often had more in common

with tribal origin myths than with scientific historiography. More recently this has changed — probably as significant a sign of maturity as any one is likely to find. But established traditions do not die overnight, and it will be some time yet before the general quality of scholarship in the historiography of psychology will be uniformly at the level long taken for granted in fields like the history of the physical and biological sciences.

Judged against the criteria provided by this background Murray's *History of Western Psychology* puts in a creditable performance. One of the ways in which it compares favourably with some others in the field is that its author usually describes historically important works on the basis of first hand acquaintance rather than on the basis of second or third hand accounts. The repetition of errors, distortions and howlers, which has sadly disfigured some other products in this area, is therefore successfully avoided. At the same time, the results of modern scholarship are taken into account so as to achieve a more accurate historical understanding than would have been provided by traditional preconceptions. Given the brief space in which a vast subject matter must be covered in a book of this kind, the work is remarkably free of that air of relentless superficiality which one has come to associate with texts in this area.

In two respects this is a highly traditional book. First of all, the parts of the subject that are singled out for serious consideration are the most venerable core areas of experimental

CPIPC reviews books by Canadian psychologists. Authors of 1983 volumes are asked to inform the Editor-elect, Helen Amnis, of recent and forthcoming works so that reviews can be initiated.

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