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## HISTORY AND PSYCHOLOGY: SHALL THE TWAIN EVER MEET?

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As all detectives (fictional or real) know, every story contains at least an element of truth, and the most likely is usually the most truthful. Those trying to cover their tracks know or discover to their dismay that interrogators use that principle to their own advantage. Early in Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, the disguised Huck realizes this simple reality when he first returns to town after his faked death and "pumps" Mrs. Judith Loftus for information: "Somehow it didn't seem to me that I said it [his name] was Mary before," Huck relates; "seemed to me I said it was Sarah; so I felt sort of cornered, and was afeared maybe I was looking it, too." ([Garden City, NY: Nelson Doubleday, nd], p. 56). Huck's outlandish fabrications always land him in trouble. As Jack Higgins has the redoubtable Liam Devlin note of his "cover" in The Eagle Has Flown, "the best kind of lie is the one that sticks closest to the truth."(p.165, 1991).

Various disciplines have various methods, or tools, for assessing truth and thus telling likely stories to explain the facts at hand. Again as all good detectives know, the more tools at one's disposal, the greater the probability of ascertaining and constructing a credible account of the world. This article urges adding the tool of historical methodology to students' research repertoires. Our urging is based on our conceptions of the scholar as detective, of man as human, of student as scholar, of history and psychology as disciplines, of cognition, and of research. Some of this may sound heretical; we ask your indulgence and your assent that heresies contain some element of truth.

Our first heresy denies the assertion of psychology as science: psychology is science and something more. In a recent general psychology textbook, Peter Gray offers what we submit is a more accurate characterization of psychology than psychology-as-science: psychology as science and humanity. The discipline stands at the intersection of the various disciplines of intellectual labor and informs all those divisions equally. We do not assert that psychology informs the humanities or that the humanities inform psychology--both assertions are correct, as even a cursory examination of Freud's work and influences reveal. We contend that if psychology is to grapple fully with the richness of behavior and experience, then the discipline must incorporate and utilize the perspectives and methodologies of humanistic pursuits.

This argument is far from unique, or even new. Wundt's division, deriving from

his roots in German idealism, of psychology into Naturwissenschaften and Geisteswissenschaften accented this conception of the field. In his autobiography, Harvey Carr expressed doubt that even as fine a tool as the experimental method could be psychology's sole tool. More recently, Jim Korn made the argument in a 1985 Teaching of Psychology essay. In speaking of the implications of the humanities for "a whole of psychology," Korn noted the need to recognize "the place of psychology at the intersection of all disciplines that deal with the human mind and the behavior of living things." He called for a change in thinking that would result in psychologists teaching the discipline from scientific and humanistic perspectives. Korn cries for a humanist model that shows students "perspectives and experiences in other minds and other times," exploring "values, the meaning of life, and images of humanity" through qualitative as well as quantitative methodology. Haltingly, Korn even mentions the possibility of a course in narrative portrayal and criticism to "replace one of the many courses we require in statistics and experimental design." The test of significance, he concludes, is personal, with stories used to enhance understanding. As teachers, we may not reject science, but we must balance empirical and nonempirical approaches to our discipline: "The complete psychologist could do both and would teach both." [FTN NEEDED!!!]

We argue for an understanding of the complexity of humanity. As Edwin O'Connor's priest, Father Hugh Kennedy, characterizes his relationship with his parishioners in The Edge of Sadness, "it's true that I had never been deliberately unkind or cruel."(p.131). "I'd always behaved well, I'd never hurt them or scandalized them, I'd always treated them with decency and kindness."(p.427). Then, comparing himself to antebellum plantation-owners, he noted that "decency and kindness can be overrated," for one "small fault" he shared with decent and kind slaveowners was that he "didn't regard [his parishioners] as human beings like himself."(p.427). Kennedy's close friend and fellow priest, John Carmody, shared his common fault. As John's sister Helen described it, "he was wonderfully intelligent...but he just wasn't much good about people. About what they were really like, or why they did certain things. He wasn't very interested in them to begin with, and I guess you have to be that if you're going to find out anything about them." (pp.441-1). As Huck Finn revealed, "After supper she [Widow Douglas] got out her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers, and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by and by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn't care no more about him, because I don't take no stock in dead people."(p.2)

Our second heresy maintains that a cognitive psychology that does not deviate

from an analysis of cognitive structure and the measurement of real-time mental operations will fail to address the richness of the thought process. In his 1986 book Actual Minds, Possible Worlds, Jerome Bruner submits that there exist two modes of thought that are irreducible to one another: logico-scientific and narrative. One deals with arguments, the other stories; one validates its propositions by appeal to formal and empirical tests, the other by plausibility and coherence of analogy; one investigates functions, the other purpose. Bruner illustrates the distinction by noting the difference in meaning of the word “then” in “if x, then y” versus “the king died, then the queen died.”

Our third heresy contends that the experimental method as the exclusive tool for psychological research impoverishes the discipline. Psychologists often define their discipline as the *scientific* study of the behavior and experience of organisms. We submit that psychology as *systematic* study might more closely address the character of psychological phenomena. The scientific method utilizes observation, literature searches, and experimentation to produce an account that is most consistent with current data. Good science uses rigorous methodology to avoid premature judgments based on opinions rather than facts. Its explanations are only as good as the data, always subject to change, and determined by good analysis and interpretation.

Scholarship need not interpret the scientific method in only one way to achieve rigor and exactness. Granted, measuring the increase in foot-candles needed to perceive an increase in a stimulus’s intensity may seem more exacting than assessing the influences prompting a given decision by a specific individual in a unique context at a known place and time, but such is not the case. The subject matter of the humanities--that is, the comings, goings, and doings of humans qua humans--does not readily yield itself to 2x3 factorial designs. Nevertheless, even if one cannot be scientific in the narrower sense, one can rely on the broader reaches of the scientific method--and systematic research can reveal much about behavior and experience that is inaccessible to scientific variable manipulation. It can produce, as Stephen Jay Gould noted of biological insights in The Mismeasure of Man (which he called a “historical analysis of conceptual errors.” [p.317]), “fruitful analogies.” (p.327).

Assuming that these heresies have truth, that psychology is one of the humanities and that accounts of psychological relevance can emerge from systematic research and narrative formation, how might psychologists teach this method of inquiry to their students? We contend that the most readily-adaptable course is that of historical research.

The word “history” has four general usages: an event, a scholarly account of an

event, the process of examining evidence of the event and producing an account, or colloquial accounts of events (folk history, origin myths, and the like). History takes the totality of human experience as its subject: human nature and the record of what humankind has thought, said, and done. As historian George M. Trevelyan noted, history has for its object “everything that is intimate, everything that is passionate, everything also that is trivial or daily occurrence, all the color and all the infinite variety of the past” (p.121). History studies the character of an individual; or a race, people, family or other group; or of a period (age, reign, administration). It endeavors to understand humans as individuals and as members of a variety of social units. It seeks the important or significant in human existence and illuminates it for analysis. It finds significance and importance in both typical and atypical, for each illustrates something of the human condition. In sum, history investigates and records past human activities, and the causal relations and development of these activities in relation to their time and location in a search for significance. Our focus is history as record and process: as a tool for acquiring knowledge about human behavior and experience.

Historical method is the systematic body of principles and rules designed to aid in gathering effectively the source-materials of history, appraising them critically, and presenting a synthesis of the results achieved. Three major operations mark the method: the search for sources from which to draw information (heuristic); the appraisal of sources and their contents for evidential value (criticism); and the formal statement of findings (communication). These operations often overlap and are not mutually exclusive. Historical training is thus aimed at providing skill in source assembly, at critical assessment, and at results presentation with effect. Failure at any one of the three operations damns the effort. Historical study, apart from a few terms used in methodology, lacks technical terminology, and, jargonless, stands as an effective means of communicating with all disciplines.

Caveats and assumptions now intrude. First, history is not an ex post facto dynamic analysis of an individual’s psychological machinations, so we exclude out-of-hand what has sometimes been called *psychohistory* (e.g. Freud’s treatment of Michelangelo or Woodrow Wilson). Second, despite a currently-popular assertion that specific cultural cliques create “facts,” historians (like all detectives) must stick to “the facts.” Historians elicit from primary source material facts that are demonstrable and verifiable, though generally irreproducible. Third, historical events are a constant; how much we know or what we think is a variable. Fourth, historians realize that historical research resembles listening to seashells--what one hears of the past is pale imitation of event. Different cultures, individuals and eras place different emphases and

interpretations on the sounds. In short, our understanding of events (facts) is conditioned by our world view. Fifth, historians must approach with care any subject in which they have some emotional investment. Honest historians always ask “Am I trying to know or judge?” Finally, all these assumptions being made, the historian like the detective falls back on one criterion in collecting clues (facts) and making cases--the principle of honest solution: would a reasonable individual, given the same clues and circumstances, come to a similar conclusion?

One of the most oft-used analogies in speaking of the historian’s task is that of detective, or intelligence-officer (it is no accident that Tom Clancey’s Cold-War hero is a trained historian). The historian constantly searches for information, seeking clues in all manner of places and sorting out those that turn up. The metaphor (like all metaphors) is imperfect, but good teaching requires capturing student imagination--and besides, who said scholarship can’t be fun?

The methodology behind “honest solution” involves a series of questions. Historical methodology rests not on formal hypothesis, but upon a fundamental question, or topic, which prompts other questions in the search for truth. Arriving at the crime scene (defining your focus) requires formulating good questions and asking the right ones. Initially those questions are reducible to three: means (what happened, the manner in which events occurred), opportunity (how did it happen, the conditions, context, or as Robert Penn Warren once observed, “the milieu,” which fostered and facilitated both event and behavior), and motive (why did it happen, the implicit and explicit reasons for behavior, that part of the process over which all historians argue--causation).

Surveying the crime scene involves recognizing relevant data. Anything that changes has a history, but like any skilled perpetrator those events are mute. The detective or historian must seek traces left behind in documents or other sources, extracting every nuance of detail to make the case or tell the story.

What is evidence? You notice a grenadine stain on the rug, recall that last night your best friend vomited after three tequila sunrises, and conclude that in the future you’ll have to ration drinks. You’ve just committed an act of history: you reconstructed a prior episode and made generalizations based on your reconstruction. Evidence is simply that which assists in establishing a sequence of events and deciding what to do next. Historical work is not always as neat and clearcut, but the principle is the same.

To detectives, every fact initially carries the same weight. Even if clue becomes red herring and following it to closure fails to solve the mystery, information has been

gathered and possibilities eliminated. History is as much what did not happen as what did. As the detective works toward a solution to the mystery, a rank-ordering of the clues emerges. The extraneous can be eliminated and the relevant remains like panned gold to make the case.

A clue's source plays an important role in this rank-ordering. Like detectives, historians must ask "How valid (reliable) are my sources?" Reliability rests on several criteria. First is the issue of primary (eyewitness) versus secondary (hearsay) sources. Second is the issue of bias. Primary sources are inherently more reliable than secondary ones, but even they contain bias. The historian-detective must ask "Why was the record preserved and by whom?"

Just as the detective has a crime laboratory, so has historian; the historian's is a library, and more specifically an archives, which houses most primary sources. Because most primary sources are unique materials, they require special handling and safeguards. The climate controls and security of an archives meet those needs. To that end, each collection within the archives has its own finding aid. For most collections, a hint of their usefulness can be found in the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, where most archives register their collections along with basic information--including the existence of a finding aid.

Were primary sources found only in archives, undergraduates would find historical research at any meaningful level impossible. Fortunately many primary materials have been published; one thus has access to the letters of luminaries such as William James, James McKeen Cattell, Hugo Munsterberg, and Edward Bradford Titchener. Outside psychology one can find a plethora of letter collections, papers, diaries, autobiographies, newspapers and obscure journals. Some archives have even made parts of their collections available on microform. Finally, for some events an interview (oral history) with a participant or witness is a possibility.

Often the primacy of sources rests on their use rather than the arbitrary categorization noted above. All academicians are familiar with a textbook writer copying another textbook writer who is copying yet another for the account of a given event in the latest edition, the Watson-Rayner rat-rabbit problem and the depictions of Pavlov's apparatus being glaring examples. Clearly textbooks are a secondary source. But what if one is attempting to examine what the discipline said about itself and then analyze how that telling has evolved? What about the evolution of our contemporary notion of what constitutes an acceptable experiment through the various editions of Robert S. Woodward's textbook? In this instance, textbooks become primary sources because of their use.

The question of source bias is perhaps best illustrated with eyewitness accounts and autobiography. Recall Elizabeth Loftus's demonstration that eyewitness accounts are not wholly trustworthy, or Frederick C. Bartlett's that we innocently reconstruct events to match our world view, or Marcia Johnson's that autobiographical memory fails to distinguish between intentions and actions. The autobiographical accounts of which psychologists are so fond would appear to be incredibly poor historical accounts, though they are wonderful points of triangulation when sorting through materials. Like detectives, historians are interested in truth, be it open or concealed behind untruth.

After ascertaining what happened at the crime scene and reviewing possible relevant data (clues), the detective begins active sleuthing for clues and the historian-detective begins data gathering. Just as the detective searches exhaustively for clues, so the historian asks "Where might one find facts; who might have recorded portions of the tale, and where might that data survive?" No source is too mundane or too far-fetched to escape perusal. The historian-detective pursues the suspect through the bibliographical labyrinth. That labyrinth contains chambers of books, articles, newspapers, documents, oral history, memorabilia and other physical evidence; the good historian-detective always goes to the crime scene.

Sleuthing's first step is to find what is already common knowledge about this person, place, thing, issue, event, practice, or institution. The second step is more intuitive: does this sound like the complete story, convincing, credible, authoritative, with no loose ends? Are points in conflict, or does the story sound too "pat"?

As data-gathering continues, a primary question becomes "Do I have enough evidence to make a case?" The answer often depends on the jury. If, after finding grenadine on your rug, you're making a case to your spouse that your best friend can't hold his liquor, then perhaps all you'll need is the spot. If you wish to make the case to your friend, a pattern of spots might be in order. If you're attempting to make the case before a magistrate that your friend has a drinking problem and should be tossed into detox for six weeks, not even the pattern would likely be enough. When do you have enough?--when you've established the sequence of events and satisfied the profession's demands for a complete, convincing, credible, authoritative, documented story. If a crucial piece of evidence is missing, the case is not complete; if contradictory evidence exists, you must have an explanation--you CANNOT ignore it. Only when you have tied up all loose ends is the case complete.

Also as sleuthing continues, witnesses must be interrogated; the historian-detective must constantly evaluate the evidence--first for authenticity, and only then for



significance and meaning. Like detectives, historians are more than mere questioners. Like the detective, the historian turns inquisitor, ferreting out each clue as if by torture. Both seek to separate fact from fiction, guarding self and source from bias and prejudice insofar as possible. Recognizing the existence of those forces which would taint the study, the historian-detective stands ever vigilant, watcher in the shadows, anxious to preserve the study's purity.

Historical research is a lonely task uncongenial to group efforts. Anyone who has ever sent another to the library to obtain a copy of an article known to be there, only to have that messenger return with the assertion that no such journal exists, knows what we mean. Whoever is familiar with the data is best equipped to judge a source's validity and thus a given piece of information's place, if any, in the puzzle. Historians are generally suspicious of editors and research assistants.

One reason for this truism is that the moment of data collection is often the foundation moment of evaluation. How a collection is arranged, for example, can offer insights into the data. Letters are most useful if they're found in a collection untouched by organizing hands other than those of the originator or recipient. Individual items can best be understood in the context of their larger corpus, that original organization which historians and archivists call *provenance* in a collection. Those who insist on keeping all the money in their billfold turned or folded in a certain way, for example, can certainly be differentiated from those who stuff wadded clumps of currency into random pockets of a twenty-two pocket vest!

Assuming a document's authenticity, the historian-detective must ask to what end it was written, to what end preserved. What author's concerns, what assumptions about the recipient shaped the item? Was the intent to explain or persuade, abide by convention or speak from the heart? William Byrd of Virginia, for example, kept two sets of diaries--one for "public" consumption, the other (in code) for his own.

The moment of data collection is the foundation moment for interpretation as well as analysis or evaluation. Interpretation is based on the historian-detective's principal tool--self-awareness--since one's worldview governs the perception of one's clues. To illustrate, a perhaps apocryphal story from Kenneth Spence's lab, where a dead rat hung from a nail on the bulletin board beneath the inscription "This rat showed latent learning." To paraphrase E.C. Tolman, the worst assumptions are implicit assumptions; they can get a detective killed or torpedo a historian's entire effort. Consider the historian's "pathetic fallacy," sometimes referred to as presentism. Various forms of this error exist, but the basic idea is to analyze the past apart from its context, or with personal or contemporary values. An example is the attempt of some

authors of experimental papers to show, in their introductions, the long line of great studies that logically lead to the study the author is about to describe.

As a discipline, history relies upon certain philosophical tenets which inform interpretation. Historians must possess a critical sense which ranges between hypercritical rejection and uncritical acceptance of all, and which recognizes that suppressing truth is asserting falsehood. Historians must possess a detached and neutral attitude toward their subjects; while they cannot be free of all prejudices, they cannot indulge those predispositions and must always be on guard against them. Judgments and conclusions, though allowed and even required, must rest solely upon the evidence. Historians must possess industry, for the nature of historical research requires application and time for grubbing in libraries and archives, tracking down elusive facts, deciphering texts, collating data and reducing it to unity and meaning. Historians must possess concentration, that increasingly-rare facility of mental alertness which seizes upon all information from all sources which help one master the subject. All these tenets come to bear at the point of data collection, but also instruct the last phase of the case.

Historians are not content with finding out the story; they must tell it as well. In its telling, historians find themselves most closely allied with the humanities. While historians may seek truth creatively, and use sources creatively to discover the story, creativity also comes in the telling. It is here that historians call upon their skills to create anew that bygone time, to reconstruct that reality and make it intelligible to all and sundry. Historians hold that jargon obfuscates and that clarity must be the aim of the narrative. If the story is told but not comprehended, then of what use is the telling? The historian's audience determines the appropriate level of language, but narrative possessing force and clarity is always in vogue. As always, the act of writing brings form to understanding; one writes to know.

In a literary criticism of James Fenimore Cooper entitled "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," Mark Twain cites rules for writing which he then applied to Cooper's prose. Those rules have their place in this discussion, for they have great application to history as a humanities-oriented discipline, and to the place which historical research can have in teaching undergraduates about psychology.

Saying that nineteen rules govern literary art (and observing that some say there are twenty-two), Twain humorously notes that Cooper violated eighteen of them in the space of two-thirds of a page. Twain then goes on to note the eighteen: 1. That a story accomplish something and arrive somewhere (linear development); 2. That the episodes be necessary, and help develop the story; 3. That the personages be alive,

except for the corpses, and that readers always be able to tell the corpses from the others; 4. That the characters, both dead and alive, “exhibit a sufficient excuse for being here” (why are the characters there; produce those germane to the case); 5. That conversations be germane, interesting, have a discoverable purpose and meaning, and terminate gracefully; 6. That the conduct and conversation of individuals match their character as described; 7. That characters be consistent in their actions and conversations; 8. That “crass stupidities” not be “played upon the reader” (like multiple shots from a single-shot pistol without reloading); 9. That the story confine itself to possibilities “and let miracles alone” (or if miracles be ventured, let them be “so plausibly set forth as to make it look possible and reasonable”); 10. That the author make the story and its characters interesting; 11. That characters be predictable in their actions; 12. That the author SAY what he proposes to say, “not merely come near it”; 13. That the author “use the right word, not its second cousin”; 14. That the author “eschew surplusage”; 15. That the author “not omit necessary details”; 16. That the author “avoid slovenliness of form”; 17. That the author “use good grammar”; and 18. That the author “employ a simple and straightforward style.”

These rules call for attention to the things that undergraduates do most poorly--and most infrequently. They call us all, and especially our students who lack experience, to focus on the matter at hand; make our study clear and believable; include only relevant items, and make the reader see their relevance; not insult the reader’s intelligence; make our study interesting; and write carefully, clearly and accurately. Next to the difficulty of selecting a topic and bringing it into focus, students find most difficult the concept of focus and movement in a paper. The logic of writing (that you have something to say, that you write in such a fashion that your reader can follow the story and indeed is drawn inexorably to your conclusion, and that the reader must agree with your conclusion at the end because your argument is so tightly woven and well-supported) escapes them.

We began, as all good historians begin, with a question: “is the story we tell our students--the glimpse we give them of the discipline--complex enough to be complete?” Our negative answer put us, like all good detectives, on the trail of a crime, for we believe that short-changing the intellectual development of our students is nothing less than a crime. Our clues, gathered from careful bibliographic work, we presented as three heresies: that psychology is not a science, but something more; that too narrow a focus fails to address the richness of the thought process; and that using a single research method impoverishes the discipline. Our solution to the crime is to include historical research and a narrative presentation of results in the psychologist’s

teaching repertoire. To that end we've pointed out the salient parts of the process, and hinted at possible applications. All that remains is to issue a warning.

In the broadest and most basic sense, scholarship means playing by the rules. Each method of scholarly inquiry has its own set of rules. Our students are more likely to recognize the reality of and necessity for playing by the rules if they have multiple examples. As any detective knows, an un-Mirandized "collar" is no "collar" at all. Failure to play by the rules of evidence gets one's case thrown out of court. An appreciation for playing by the rules will improve our students' scholarship.

Historical work, like detective work, is a solitary business. But then, again as in detective work, the fun is in the hunt. Endeavoring to eliminate, while thriving on, ambiguity is a large part of the game--all the while remembering that reconciling conflicting statements is not always the answer (a tactic that assumes that both are true rather than both false). We hope you'll see some benefit for your students. Grab your calabash, your deerstalker and your ulster; step into the fog of human behavior!