Preface and Acknowledgments

What contributes to the development of the discipline of psychology? Traditional answers suggest that it is new empirical evidence. However, a closer look at the history of psychology over the last two hundred years indicates that the accumulation of facts, problem solutions, induction, and the explanation of anomalies play only supporting roles. Indeed, studies on the social, political, and economic factors that have shaped the discipline have contributed significantly to an understanding of the theoretical and practical dynamics of psychology. With the shift to externalist explanations, problem-oriented historical and theoretical analyses have fallen out of grace. However, if one agrees with Gould’s (1996) statement that “science moves forward as much by critiquing the conclusions of others as by making novel discoveries” (p. 25), then an analysis of the history of the critique of psychology becomes central. Thus, the focus in this book is not on socio-historical contexts, but on arguments, more specifically, critical arguments, regarding the problems of mainstream psychology at different stages of its development—a critique that has been combined often, but not always, with a vision for a better psychology and the promise to solve the theoretical, methodological, and practical problems of the discipline. Such a program requires emphasizing the logic, structure, and flow of rhetoric, which takes on an important function in psychology’s history and contributes to an understanding of the modifications of the mainstream but also the margins. A focus on arguments does not mean that socio-historical traditions are not important. On the contrary, external dimensions are significant for recognizing changes, but they are not the center of attention in the following reconstructions.

Enough material has been accumulated that allows for a history of the critique of psychology since the second half of the 18th century. Thus, the idea that the critique of psychology is an intellectual movement that emerged only in the last forty years in Europe and in North America, and is based on a postmodern spirit, should be rejected. All selected critiques
of psychology in this book share dissatisfaction with the dominant views of psychology at a certain time, but they have endorsed different, even contradictory epistemologies, ontologies, and ethical-political worldviews. The proposed systematic history and theory of the critique of psychology can only provide a brief snapshot of some of those influential and multifaceted critiques and arguments.

A history of the critique of psychology could distinguish between critiques that have been successful from those that have been influential. Success might be defined in terms of critiques that have led to a change of the whole discipline, whereas influential might mean that discourses have shaped reflections and practices of groups of psychologists. The book covers both dimensions in discussing critiques that have been successful such as Kant’s and, even more clearly, the natural–scientific critique of psychology in the 19th century, and in presenting and reflecting on influential critiques such as the human–scientific, Marxist, feminist, postmodern, and postcolonial critiques of psychology, which have inaugurated new research programs in psychology but have never formed the mainstream. This book does not address whether certain critiques should or should not have been influential, or how these critiques should be ranked or evaluated. This is a metatheoretical task left to the reader.

The history and theory of the critique of psychology is intended as a positive project, performed not for the sake of constructing problems, but in order to provide intellectual tools that help to develop the discipline of psychology. Critiques have shaped the field, are changing the discipline, and will continue to be relevant to the future of psychology. Critics have an important role to play when they identify faults in the discipline, and some of them provide ideas how psychology’s shortcomings can be overcome. Certainly, it is not beneficial to any discipline to ignore and repress its faults, with the hope that they will take care of themselves. It is an intellectual obligation to point out in an honest and open reflection that psychology may be submerged in problems, even when no solutions are provided, rather than assuming a priori that psychology is doing just fine.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The book contains arguments and summaries of some of my research over the last few years, literature overviews, new and original research, and, hopefully, innovative perspectives. Some chapters contain summaries and adaptations of previously published material by me. Despite substantial revisions, some ideas presented in Chapter 2 were originally published by me as “Functions of Knowledge in Psychology” in New Ideas in...
Psychology (Vol. 17, no 1, pp. 1-15). I thank the publisher Elsevier for granting permission to reproduce part of that material (copyright © 1999 by Elsevier). Parts of my 2002 article “Friedrich Albert Lange on Neo-Kantianism, Socialist Darwinism, and a Psychology without a Soul” in the Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences, 38, 285-301, were used for Chapter 4. John Wiley & Sons has permitted me to reuse that material (copyright © 2002 by Wiley). Portions of my chapter “Karl Marx and Wilhelm Dilthey on the Socio-Historical Conceptualization of the Mind” in the book edited by C. Green, M. Shore, and T. Teo, The Transformation of Psychology: Influences of 19th-Century Philosophy, Technology and Natural Science (pp. 195-218), Washington, DC, American Psychological Association, were used in Chapters 5 and 6. Those parts were adapted with permission (copyright © 2001 by the American Psychological Association). Parts of my article “Klaus Holzkamp and the Rise and Decline of German Critical Psychology in the journal History of Psychology” (Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 235-253) were summarized in Chapter 6. Those parts were adapted by permission (copyright © 1998 by the Educational Publishing Foundation). Chapter 9 contains summaries of my book chapter “The Historical Problematization of ‘Mixed Race’ in Psychological and Human-Scientific Discourses” in A. Winston’s edited book Defining Difference: Race and Racism in the History of Psychology (pp. 79-108), Washington, DC, American Psychological Association. Those parts were adapted by permission (copyright © 2004 by the American Psychological Association). Selections of my and Angela Febbraro’s article “Ethnocentrism as a Form of Intuition in Psychology,” originally published in the Theory and Psychology (Vol.13, pp. 673-694) and used in Chapter 9, were adapted and reprinted by permission of Sage Publications (copyright © 2003 by Sage Publications). I appreciate the permission given by all these publishers. However, it is important to note that the chapters in this book do not contain simple reprints of these articles but assimilate and accommodate ideas of those publications into this book. Readers concerned with copyright issues should compare the original and the adapted material.

The book is my sole responsibility, which also means that presentations and misrepresentations are my fault. I am grateful to the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for providing a Standard Research Grant that covered costs associated with parts of the research. I would like to thank Angela Febbraro for her useful and critical comments on the manuscript, especially Chapter 7. I appreciate the many fruitful discussions that I have had with my students over the last several years, especially in the undergraduate course Theories of Human Nature, and in the graduate course Historical and Theoretical Foundations of Contemporary
Psychology at York University. I particularly express my gratitude to Jason Goertzen and Leeat Granek for their valuable editorial work and for compiling the indexes for this volume.

Thomas Teo