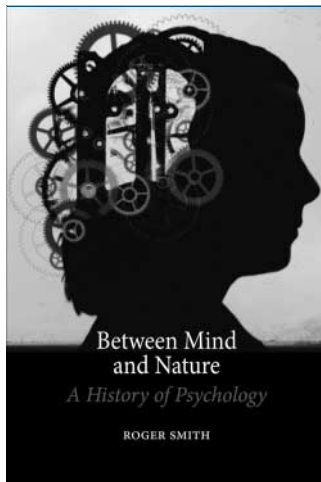


Book review

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
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**Between Mind
and Nature:
A History of Psychology**

By Roger Smith.
Reaktion Books. 2013.
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In this erudite and compelling account, Smith argues that psychology has no founding father and remains, even now, a subject unable to give a unifying account of its methods or goals. But rather than this being a reason for any perceived failure, this critical history celebrates the greatness of figures, such as William James, who had the philosophical sophistication to balance different ways of thought, even if mutually contradictory. Wundt, the German 19th-century experimentalist, often cited as the true

originator of an objective science of psychology, is shown in reality to have been a complex figure who held a chair in philosophy, lectured on ethics and excluded thought, feelings and volition from his experiments. To answer questions about these aspects of his subject, he turned to the legacy of the German philosopher, Johann Herder – a figure generally found in histories of anthropology – and saw culture and language as an expression of a historically rooted mind.

As presented here, the history of psychology, though always various, suffers from the longing of its practitioners to reduce its scope to one mission statement. It took one generation for the followers of Wilhelm Wundt to throw aside his caution and apply his experimental approach to complex mental processes.

As Smith terms it, a psychological society has now developed whose form affects who we are, and therefore the questions generated by psychology itself. Most impressively, there is an attempt to step outside the opposition between progressive science and relativistic post-Foucaultian thinking, which can dominate histories of this kind. Space is made for the contributions from phenomenology and psychoanalysis, as well as recognising some crossover with concerns in theology. Smith ends with the point that human beings tell stories about themselves. Values are implicit in these. While science may claim objectivity and openness, when studying subjectivity it, at least in part, creates its categories and its own modern form of what is natural and what is true. Both psychologists and psychiatrists should read this book.

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