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Article Review: “ Has Psychology Failed?” by Jastrow

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The article “ Has Psychology Failed?” by Jastrow (1935) addresses the issues facing applied psychology and the limitations imposed by different schools of psychology, such as behaviorism and the psychoanalytic school. Even though he commends Watson’s desire to move psychology from theoretical science to applied science and Freud’s appreciation of the importance of emotions and subconscious mental processes in structuring the human mind, Jastrow believes a naturalist perspective would benefit psychology as a unified science with practical implications. However, most of the article is dedicated to lamenting the current state of psychology without providing adequate support for the arguments against dividing schools of psychology while the solution is presented in a single paragraph. The only evidence Jastrow appears to show in favor of the proposed naturalist approach in psychology is the fact that schools of psychology limited their scope of research and dismissed important variables, but he had failed to examine the implementation and practical implications of his own approach, leading to an inconclusive ending and lack of practical implications of his article. Jastrow begins describing the discontent of his colleagues, namely William James and Stanley Hall, and his own discontent at the present state of affairs in the science of psychology. Although psychology became an academic discipline once William Wundt explored the human mental structure extensively, Wundt’s student Titchener supported the theoretical aspects of psychology and resisted the introduction of applied psychology. However, psychologists interested in exploring applied psychology at the time were

discontent at their inability to conduct experiments relevant to the real world.

Jastrow's paper is an important work because it points out two significant flaws in the early stages of psychology development. First, even though psychologists managed to introduce empirical experimentation methods to psychology, mainly because of Watson's (1913) insistence of measuring and analyzing only observable behavior, Jastrow argues that factors are not necessarily significant just because they are measurable. Because practical situations are different from the laboratory experimental settings used to observe human behavior and cognition, which would mean that it is not possible to generalize the laboratory findings to real world application. Consequently, that would mean that applied psychology cannot accurately translate its findings to practical situations.

Even though Jastrow is discontent with theoretical psychology and encourages the development of applied psychology, he is also discontent because the schools of behaviorism and psychoanalytic psychology are rejecting various ideas because of logic deficiencies. Jastrow commends Watson for rejecting the limitations imposed by theoretical psychology, but does not agree with his approach because it clearly cannot produce accurate results if basic facts are dismissed. For example, if heredity, imagery, consciousness, and similar unobservable facts are dismissed from further research, Jastrow believes behaviorism studies will not offer reliable or applicable results.

The research from leading behaviorist psychologist during the first half of the 20th century supports Jastrow's opinion regarding behaviorist science.

Jastrow explains how behaviorists took Pavlov's discovery conditioning and over-emphasized its importance to psychology. Most of Watson's and Skinner's work relied on investigating the role of external stimuli in learning, so the reward and punishment system in parenting and education based on their ideas disregarded the role of unconscious mental processes in human learning, even though Tolman (1934) formulated the latent learning theory after finding that those processes are significant determinants of human behavior. Therefore, the criticism of behaviorism as an incomplete part of psychology is valid.

Furthermore, Jastrow criticizes Freudianism because the premises made by Freud were followed by false logic, and even though Freud ventured into unexplored areas of psychology, he disregarded other aspects of the psyche while focusing on abnormal minds and subconscious functions. Freud also did not expand the implications of his work on anything else other than infant sexual development, which is a narrow perspective and does not account for the totality of human development or mental functions.

Jastrow does not provide any specific examples of Freud's false logic, but it is known that Freud's psychoanalytic theories were developed with a blend of empirical evidence and subjective interpretation based on the humanistic philosophy of human freedom, even though Freud stated that he had rejected philosophy in favor of science and never publicly disclosed his theoretical positions (Tauber, 2010). The presence of subjective interpretations in Freud's psychoanalysis could possibly lead to false interpretation of empirical result, especially because even contemporary measures based on psychodynamic constructs are questioned in terms of

validity and reliability (McKay, 2011). That is why the argument that Freud's contribution to psychology is only partial and can never describe the psyche in its entirety is correct. However, Jastrow does commend Freud's work because it reintroduces the emotional factors and subconscious influences into the field of psychology, and he predicts that the valid aspects of Freud's school will make a significant contribution to the scientific development of psychology.

After outlining the problems regarding the division of schools and their practices of dismissing critical variables and narrow perspectives on the functions and the structure of the mind, Jastrow proposes a unitary form of psychology that utilizes the naturalist perspective. In other words, both emotions and intellect must be accounted for in psychological research. The composition of the mind is determined by origins, mechanisms, and service, and Jastrow believes that all significant measures are associated with that composition.

There are several fallacies in Jastrow's reasoning that supports his discontent for the state of psychology as a science at the time. The argument that laboratory conditions cannot completely substitute human situations, which would imply that applied psychology cannot be translated to practice, is an example of a false premise based on incomplete reasoning. The role of experimental settings is to isolate key variables observed in a study, which would be impossible to perform in unregulated settings. The findings can be obtained only in experimental settings because they remove the noise and help researchers determine the causal relationships between variables they are investigating.

Furthermore, Jastrow criticizes the division of psychology into different schools. It is true that most founders of different approaches, including Watson in behaviorism and Freud in psychoanalysis, were biased and considered their systems superior to others without presenting adequate evidence to support their positions. A single school of psychology cannot replace the entire discipline of psychology, but a single school can offer a certain perspective that makes a contribution to its main discipline.

Therefore, the division among schools of psychology itself is not an issue, especially during the early stages of psychology when the psyche is not yet clearly defined.

Most importantly, Jastrow sometimes fails to provide support to his statements critical of other schools and offers only a brief and unsupported explanation of his personal vision of psychology as a unified science. He criticized other schools based on their decisions to neglect important psychological data in their experiments or had a limited scope of their implications, but those critiques would have been better accepted had he proposed a more detailed solution to the identified problems.

Most of the article focuses on accurate criticism of early psychologists, and Jastrow's arguments can be supported by contemporary research in psychology. For example, Jastrow argues that a significant misdirection in psychology was rejecting the role of biological factors in determining cognitive and behavioral traits. Today, the biopsychosocial model explains that psychological outcomes are determined by the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors. The only limitation is that it is still uncertain whether the physical factors are causal or reactive, but it is evident that they

determine predispositions to psychological resilience when pressured by external events (McKeever & Huff, 2003). Therefore, the role of biological factors in psychology must not be neglected.

Although the article "Has Psychology Failed?" accurately points out the fallacies in accepting trends proposed by the dominant schools of psychology, it lacks practical implications because the author fails to provide an outline of the proposed naturalist approach in psychology. The author's idea does not clarify how unified psychology will adhere to the scientific method, the research agenda of such an approach, or anything other than identifying origins, mechanisms, and service as the key aspects of the mind. Even then, the author does not offer the definition of his terms or how they will be studied in unified psychology. Perhaps the only implication of this article is a call to action for other discontent psychologists to reconsider the importance of biology, evolution, and theoretical models in psychology, but without a specific outline, the article does not offer any actionable solutions to the issues of dividing psychology into different schools that narrow its scope of research and understanding of the human mind.

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