Philosophy of Psychology

Psychology as a Science
What is a science?

Root of *science* is *scio*—to know

But there are many domains of knowledge that are not considered sciences (although they may make use of science):
- theology
- law
- engineering
- medicine

What makes science different from other domains of knowledge?
What is Science? 2
The Futility of Definition

Goal of a definition:
To specify the conditions needed and that suffice to make something an instance of the kind in question

Test of a definition:
Are there any counterexamples?
• Items that meet the definition by are not instances of the kind in question
• Items that are instances of the kind in question but that fail to meet the definition
Defining GAME

Two definitions from *The American Heritage Dictionary*
“A way of amusing oneself; diversion”
“A sport or other competitive activity governing by specific rules”

Are there ways of amusing oneself that don’t count as games?

Are there games that lack competition or specific rules?
Defining *Human Being*
If not a definition, what?

Exemplars—Physics, chemistry, physiology

Similarity to examples
  but need to specify dimensions—astrology is,
  on some dimensions, similar to astronomy

Theories about the phenomena—sciences
  involve modes of inquiry that seek to explain
  phenomena in the world in terms of other
  phenomena and ??
What is Explanation?

Two (sometimes agreeing, sometimes conflicting) traditions:

• To explain is to bring under a law
  \[ f = ma \]
  \[ f = k \left( \frac{m_1 m_2}{d^2} \right) \]
  \[ PV = nRT \]

• To explain is to characterize the causal mechanism that brought the phenomenon about
What is Psychology to Explain?
What modes of inquiry does psychology have available?
Research Traditions

Scientific inquiry has a historical dimension

New investigations build upon previous ones

The successive investigations frequently share some things

Assumptions about what the goals of inquiry are
Views about what counts as evidence
Assumptions about what an explanation should look like

But sometimes there are radical disagreements about how to proceed—different research traditions
Research Traditions in Psychology

17th-19th centuries: ideas, how they are formed, manipulated, etc.
  Rationalism—Descartes
  Empiricism/Associationism—Locke, Hume, Reid, Mill

Analyses of conscious mental states: Wundt, James

Introduction of a dynamic unconscious: Freud

Repudiation of the Mental—Behaviorism: Watson, Hull, Skinner

Cognitive psychology and Cognitive neuroscience