

## **Chapter 1: An Introduction to Late British Associationism and Its Context**

This is a story about philosophy. Or about science. Or about philosophy transforming into science. Or about science and philosophy, and how they are related. Or were, in a particular time and place. At least, that is the general area that the following narrative will explore, I hope with sufficient subtlety. The matter is rendered non-transparent by the fact that that the conclusions one draws with regard to such questions are, in part, matters of discretionary perspective – as I will try to demonstrate.

My specific historical focus will be on the propagation of a complex intellectual tradition concerned with human sensation, perception, and mental function in early nineteenth century Britain. Not only philosophical opinion, but all aspects of British intellectual – and practical – life, were in the process of significant transformation during this time. This cultural flux further confuses recovery of the situated significance of the intellectual tradition I am investigating. The study of the mind not only was influenced by a set of broad social shifts, but it also participated in them fully as both stimulus to and recipient of changing conditions. One indication of this is simply the variety of terms used to identify the ‘philosophy of mind’ as an intellectual enterprise in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> But the issue goes far deeper into the fluid constitutive features of the enterprise - including associated conceptual systems, methods, intentions of practitioners, and institutional affiliations. In order to understand philosophy of mind in its time, we must put all these factors into play. A failure to do this completely enough, I will argue, has resulted in the masking of a highly significant element in the nineteenth century British intellectual landscape. The study of the mind in this context has been characterized as moral philosophy, as proto-psychology, and as epistemology, but it has rarely been taken on its own terms. This, I think, has obscured the historical position of such work relative to neighboring social domains, as well as the degree to

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Philosophy of mind’ here serves as a place-holder for a domain of inquiry that went by many names. Other candidates for this purpose would include ‘pneumatology’, ‘psychology’, ‘mental science’, ‘moral science’, ‘physiological epistemology’, ‘the science of human nature’, and ‘human science’. In all of these interrelated pursuits, questions about the foundations of sensation and perception were central. I have chosen philosophy of mind here for its relatively neutral connotations.

which it has influenced many present-day background assumptions. To see this, we must step back to consider those related elements of the intellectual landscape of the period that have received more thorough treatment.

The standard account of the history of British philosophy (particularly, but not exclusively, as regards knowledge) between 1700 and 1900 emphasizes several interrelated movements:

- (1) The development of an ‘empiricist’ school of thought stemming from Hobbes and Locke (among others), and including Berkeley and Hume.
- (2) The flourishing and extinction of a ‘Scottish Enlightenment’ featuring an ongoing debate between the ‘Humean’ school of thought and a rival ‘Common Sense’ tradition best exemplified by Thomas Reid.
- (3) Persistent emphasis on ‘Newtonian’ and ‘Baconian’ experimentalist perspectives in the production of knowledge.
- (4) The rise of a socially-involved liberal Utilitarian movement among British thinkers prominently including Jeremy Bentham, James and John Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer. Also, the existence of a corresponding conservative counter-movement, in which Carlyle and many figures in the British Romantic movement took part.
- (5) This Romanticism itself as a literary-philosophical movement (Wordsworth, Coleridge, De Quincey, Shelley, *et al.*) participating in intellectual debates over metaphysical issues of nature and humanity.
- (6) An increasing scientific historicism, associated most strongly at first with geological and anthropological work, biblical exegesis, and comparative linguistics, but with significance more broadly construed (for example, by Whewell as the ‘palaetiological’ method). This was influential upon
- (7) the proposition of ‘evolutionary’ models of nature forwarded by the likes of Erasmus – and later Charles – Darwin and Herbert Spencer.
- (8) An increasing commitment to methodological approaches to science (‘logics’) as reflected by the work of such thinkers as William Whewell, John Herschel,

and John Stuart Mill. Herein, the roots of standard English-language philosophy of science.

and (9) The elaboration of an scientific discipline of psychology (among several new aspirant ‘social sciences’), separate from philosophy but arising from earlier philosophical issues active in Britain, France, Germany, and America.

By all appearances, in this encapsulated history, British philosophy would appear to shift from eighteenth century examinations of the natural grounds for knowledge (“Locke to Reid”) to disconnected nineteenth century social movements (“Bentham”), logics (“Whewell”), and historicisms (“Darwin”).

However, a cursory examination of primary publications in the first half of the nineteenth century lends various support to the contention that ‘philosophy of mind’ here played a more pivotal and connective role than it has been accorded. First, as emphasized by George Davie [2001], the Scottish Enlightenment controversies over human nature remained active through the nineteenth century. On the associationist (nominally Humean) side, such figures as James Mill, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, and Alexander Bain carried on a longstanding debate with figures from the Common Sense (faculty psychology) tradition including Dugald Stewart, Thomas Brown, and Sir William Hamilton. Also involved in these discussions were contemporaries such as James Ferrier whose positions are less easily placed in a traditional camp. Indeed, the nineteenth century demonstrated an increasingly sophisticated synthesis of the two perspectives, with no participant adhering unerringly to either extreme.

Second, most work in this period stemmed from attempts to create systematic philosophies, so that thinkers today remembered exclusively as social theorists or psychological pioneers were typically involved in a much broader spectrum of activity. In the former case (of social activism), for example, we find the political and educational work of James Mill emphasized over his work on mind. In the latter, Alexander Bain’s reputation as philosopher has been eclipsed by his influence on the then-incipient discipline of psychology. Both of these occurrences are evidence of a presentism in the history of ideas that deserves examination, as I will develop more fully later.

Third, nineteenth century work in ‘philosophy of mind’ can be seen as a companion to the methodological treatises that have received most attention in the philosophy of science. For example, the controversies in scientific logic involving Whewell, Herschel, and J.S. Mill proceeded alongside related controversies about sensation and perception involving the younger Mill, his close associate Bain, and their interlocutor Hamilton. As witnessed by the cross-referencing of Mill’s *Logic* and Bain’s *The Senses and the Intellect*, their defense of a particular brand of associationism was essentially a war fought on two fronts – one against alternate conceptions of human nature and one against competing versions of logical and experimental method. This interconnectedness of the two domains goes unnoticed in most histories of nineteenth century thought.

To paint in very broad brush strokes, then, I believe that a revised narrative of the trajectory of work on sensation and perception in nineteenth century Britain would go something like this: The eighteenth century saw the origination of certain philosophical controversies about human nature – as influencing knowledge conditions, the origination of belief, and our emotional, moral, and aesthetic proclivities. This discussion, most active at first in Scottish philosophical circles, convolved the material and mental regimes in an attempt to examine how the human mind interacts with the world. As such, the role of sensory and perceptual mechanisms in bridging this gap was centralized. Nineteenth century British philosophy inherited these still-active controversies and witnessed a concerted attempt to synthesize the competing perspectives that had been proposed. In this historical context, though, issues of sensation, perception, and epistemology were only components of comprehensive philosophical systems that also included social, moral, political, logical, and metaphysical aspects. Thus, we cannot isolate developments in ‘philosophy of mind’ from contemporaneous work in other domains. Rather, the co-evolution and interdependence of these domains should be of primary interest.

It is these affinities of late British associationism that I will be exploring more fully in what follows. In the process, I will touch on a number of constitutive factors underlying the associationist enterprise – including the coalescence of modern scientific and philosophical institutions (including modern psychology, and modern philosophy of science), the dynamic interfaces of these two intellectual streams, the various structures

through which the associationist tradition was transmitted, and the public self-conception of the philosophers or scientists (more neutrally, intellectuals) who were involved. If I am successful in my aims, we will be able to revisit the initial contentions of the previous paragraph in much more detail. To begin this task, the following sections will explore source materials; attention that associationism has received in the critical literature on science and philosophy; and some methodological concerns. I will then delineate the central questions that I will pursue in subsequent chapters, and briefly consider how these reflect the particular focus of attention I have chosen.

### 1.1 The textual tradition in eighteenth and nineteenth century Associationism

The main evidence I will be using in my reconsideration of associationism, and related intellectual traditions, consists of a set of texts on the operations of the human mind. A survey of the eighteenth and nineteenth century shows a thriving record of publication on this topic, extending from Locke's (late seventeenth century) *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1690] forward. Only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century did this stream of texts dry up, with final contributors including Alexander Bain and Herbert Spencer. A short list of significant participants in this textual tradition would include the following figures – listed chronologically by order of birth:

John Locke	[1630-1704]
Bernard Mandeville	[1670-1733]
Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury	[1671-1713]
Samuel Clarke	[1675-1729]
George Berkeley	[1685-1753]
Joseph Butler, Bishop of Durham	[1692-1752]
Francis Hutcheson	[1694-1746]
Henry Home, Lord Kames	[1696-1782]
David Hartley	[1705-1757]
William Cullen	[1710-1790]
David Hume	[1711-1776]
John Gregory	[1710-1773]
Thomas Reid	[1710-1796]
Adam Smith	[1723-1790]
Adam Ferguson	[1723-1816]
James Hutton	[1726-1797]
Alexander Gerard	[1728-1795]
Joseph Black	[1728-1799]

Edmund Burke	[1729-1797]
Joseph Priestley	[1733-1804]
Jeremy Bentham	[1748-1832]
Dugald Stewart	[1753-1828]
William Blake	[1757-1827]
William Wordsworth	[1770-1850]
Samuel Taylor Coleridge	[1772-1834]
James Mill	[1773-1836]
Thomas Brown	[1778-1820]
John Abercrombie	[1780-1844]
Thomas de Quincey	[1785-1859]
Sir William Hamilton	[1788-1856]
Archibald Alison	[1792-1867]
John Herschel	[1792-1871]
William Whewell	[1794-1866]
John Stuart Mill	[1806-1873]
James Ferrier	[1808-1864]
Alexander Bain	[1818-1903]
Herbert Spencer	[1820-1903]
Grant Allen	[1848-1899]

Fully half of these figures did their most significant work after 1800, undercutting suggestions that British philosophy stagnated after the conventionally-recognized height of the Enlightenment period (which we might take to end with the French Revolution). While some contributed far more to other fields than to the study of mind, all were implicated in the active debates of the time over the mental capacities of humanity and their relationship to knowledge, belief, emotion, and behavior.

The texts produced by this general group are a rich set of resources on the investigation of the mind. Importantly, too, the scope of the domain as conceived by these authors encompassed far more than we would expect of contemporary psychology or neuroscience. Matters of theology, aesthetics and art, scientific method, sexuality and animality, education, and economy all interacted in this field of study – which began the eighteenth century conceived as a distinctive branch of philosophy and ended the nineteenth submerged, or dispersed into, in a variety of contexts.

It would be impossible here to explore all the dimensions of this literary tradition (or set of interlocked traditions). Instead I have narrowed my attention to the propagation of one particular trend in a circumscribed time frame. Thus, while there might be six or more identifiable thought traditions in British studies of the mind, I will limit myself to

three closely interrelated ones – those stemming from the work of Hume, Hartley, and Reid. The former two are typically considered ‘associationist’, while the last is usually referred to as the ‘Common Sense’ school. Each, though, represents a distinctive approach to the study of mind, as I will show. Hartley’s system – religious and physiological – is structured quite differently from Hume’s secular conceptual one. Reid’s appeals to a sensation-perception distinction and to innate faculties ascertainable through mundane observation strike a quite different chord from either. Nonetheless, since they were constituted (in part, at least) in terms of their mutual inter-distinctions, they are difficult to understand in isolation from one another. Despite a strong identification of the central debates with the ‘Scottish Enlightenment’, these traditions flourished north and south of the borders of Scotland.

In the period 1820 to 1860 – a time of rapid intellectual restructuring in Britain – the most important figures in these debates included Thomas Brown, James Mill, Sir William Hamilton, and Alexander Bain. The roots of their deliberations can be traced to those of Hume, Hartley, and Reid by intellectual descent through such intermediate figures as Joseph Priestley and Dugald Stewart. In their own times, their work on the mind was closely affiliated with figures usually considered in other domains – including evolutionary theory and sociology (Herbert Spencer), logic and political theory (John Stuart Mill), and pure metaphysics (James Ferrier). The works that I will be using as exemplars of the philosophy of mind in the nineteenth century fall into two generational pairs. In the earlier generation, a helpful contrast can be made between the positions of James Mill (*Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* [1829]) and Thomas Brown (*Sketch of a System of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* [1820]). In the later period, similar divisions appear in the works of Sir William Hamilton (*Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic* [1856]) and Alexander Bain (*The Senses and the Intellect* [1855] and *The Emotions and the Will* [1859]). These five texts, in themselves and in their relation to existing traditions, provide the central evidence I will use to examine the practice of mental philosophy in these transitional decades of the nineteenth century.

Other associated texts will provide further insight into this enterprise. Hume’s *Treatise* [1739/1740], Hartley’s *Observations* [1749], and Reid’s *Inquiry* [1764] each represent a different intellectual stream contributory to the nineteenth century work.

Modulations of the basic positions of these contending schools of thought can be seen in the work of other important figures in the tradition, such as Dugald Stewart, as well as in alternate articulations including Priestley's [1774] abridgement of Hartley; Bain's [1869] footnoting of James Mill's *Analysis*; and the reconsiderations of already established positions by Hume (in his first *Enquiry* [1748]), Reid (in his *Intellectual Powers* [1785]), and Bain (*Mental Science* [1868]). In addition, a large role will appear for statements of intention to be found in autobiographical and biographical works from the period under investigation. Also helpful in this last regard will be the inaugural volume of the journal, *Mind*, founded by Bain in 1876; these first issues of what proved to be the founding professional journal of English-language psychology are revealing in their establishment of an ideology for the study of mental process.

My goal in surveying the formalized study of the mind through these texts is to develop a better sense of what was at stake in such work in its moment. While an extensive secondary literature has been emerging in recent years on the earlier ('high Enlightenment') phase of this work, little serious scholarly attention has been paid to its nineteenth century propagation.<sup>2</sup> Thus, as a characteristic endeavor of its time, the later work is not well understood. Given the participation of mental philosophy in central realignments of intellectual fields in nineteenth century Britain, this situation deserves correction. I will begin this attempt by examining the 'standard story' that has been developed around the associationist movement and its competition. This will lead us first to the history of psychology and then to the history of philosophy of science. The positioning of mental philosophy in each of these domains has characteristic inadequacies that I will draw out in the following sections.

## **1.2 Associationism in the History of Psychology and the Social-Behavioral Sciences**

If the figures I am considering here have received – as I am arguing – less than their due share of critical attention, they do nonetheless make a significant appearance in one domain – that of the history of psychology or, more broadly, the social and behavioral sciences. In such historical investigations, thinkers such as Thomas Brown and Alexander Bain often appear in the role of precursors to the modern discipline of

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 3 for a review of some of the contemporary secondary work.

psychology. However, this attribution of place in the historical record is problematic. One of my main contentions here is that viewing British associationism, and related intellectual movements, in such a light misses significant dimensions of the work and – worse – amounts to a viciously presentist perspective. Thus, at least to some extent, the history of psychology as it has been written presents me with an adversary. It will be necessary to confront the ‘standard story’ formed in this domain of inquiry to see how it might be improved or supplemented. Therefore, in this section, I will provide a brief survey and critique of recent accounts of associationism in this domain.

It is something of a truism in science studies circles that the history of psychology has been written mostly in a self-justificatory mode by historically-inclined professional psychologists, concerned primarily with placing their own discipline alongside the natural sciences as an objective scientific field. Happily, like most truisms, this depiction turns out to be overly simplistic if not simply false. While it *is* possible to find instances where such a story plays out, they are relatively rare these days, if they ever in fact held sway.<sup>3</sup> One prominent contemporary contributor to the field, Thomas Leahey, attributes the turn to more sophisticated approaches in history of psychology to the impetus of Laurel Furumoto’s 1989 lecture, “The new history of psychology.” Therein, Furumoto argued for a more inclusive and socially-grounded approach to the past of the discipline, incorporating insights from bordering fields such as gender studies and STS. On the evidence, though, Furumoto’s contribution is indicative of a widespread shift that was already ongoing.

What, then, is the state of the art in historical approaches to the discipline of psychology? I will confine my attention here to a dozen or so recent surveys of the field to try to suggest the common dimensions of the field, especially as regards the

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<sup>3</sup> One case in point, exemplifying the unreflective internalist mode of history, is Michael Wertheimer’s article, “Historical Research – why?”, in the collection, *Historiography of Modern Psychology* [1980], edited by Brozek and Pongratz. While Wertheimer argues in favor of the value of historical research, he nonetheless is able to begin his argument with the following statement: “Psychology is, as all psychologists know, a relatively new science. As an empirically based discipline, one of the *Naturwissenschaften*, it is only about a century old.” [Wertheimer, 1980, p.3]

significance of work in early nineteenth century Britain.<sup>4</sup> These include historical narrative accounts, historiographic and philosophical reflections, and guides to primary sources, as well as both contributions attending strictly to psychology and those reviewing the social and human sciences in ensemble. I will comb this set of works to tease out some salient features including: when does psychology become a distinct enterprise?; why does this occur and on what grounds?; what was the role of my subjects?; what preceded the emergence of psychology proper?; how should the history of psychology in general be approached, and with what resources?

A few common features are immediately evident. For one, all of the standard works make a distinction between the established discipline and its subject matter. The distinction is usually encapsulated by reference to ‘Psychology’ as the professional field, established as an independent academic and clinical enterprise practiced by people calling themselves psychologists, and ‘psychology’ as study of subject matter related to the workings of the human mind.<sup>5</sup> Richards neatly encapsulates the latter enterprise as a perennially evident “reflexive discourse.” When these historians speak of the birth of ‘Psychology’ from ‘psychology’, they may be making a point that is trivially true or a more meaningful statement. It is certainly the case that no recognized profession called Psychology and practiced by persons called psychologists existed prior to the end of the nineteenth century. But – a rose by any other name still being a rose – this leaves open questions as to whether the enterprise changed, in itself, prior to being given its name. Less trivial statements about the birth of Psychology point to identifiable changes in practice, self-conception, and intention on the part of practitioners. Thus, Wundt’s work in the 1870’s is often taken to represent the fundamental starting point of the discipline – the moment when questions about the human mind were moved into the laboratory. Other possible foundational moments include John Stuart Mill’s endorsement, in 1843, of the study of the mind as authentically scientific. But, as we will see, these are complex

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<sup>4</sup> The list consists of Danziger [1997], Hergenhahn [2000], Hunt [1994], Jones and Elcock [2001], Leahey [2001], Manicas [1987], Reed [1997], Richards [1992, 1997], Robinson [1976/1995], Smith [1997], Taylor and Shuttleworth [1998], and Watson [1978].

<sup>5</sup> The terminology here is still problematic, since ‘mind’ itself as an identifiable subject is a creature of the modern period. This is witnessed in the title of Reed’s [1997] *From Soul to Mind*.

issues that require a great deal of specificity to approach. For the time being, it is sufficient to indicate unanimous agreement that no such enterprise as modern psychology existed in 1800, while by 1900 it did.

Equal unanimity is evident in the notion that inquiry into human nature in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain, importantly including the movement known as associationism, is a precursor – in some sense – of modern psychology. However, differential views are evident in the details behind such a claim, pertaining most clearly to the questions of *why* this work forms a backdrop to the later discipline and *to whom* the credit goes in this regard. Some authors – including Danziger [1997], Hunt [1994], and Manicas [1987] – give a relatively complete catalog of the associationist movement, but treat it briefly in their overall account. Others – among them Reed [1997], Richards [1992, 1997], Robinson [1976/1995], and Smith [1997] – go into greater detail in describing the specific achievements and influence of the figures involved. Still another group – represented by Hergenhahn [2000] and Leahey [2001] – omits mention of figures who prominently feature in other accounts. In such histories we find nothing about Thomas Brown, Sir William Hamilton, James Mill, or Alexander Bain; while others (most prominently Reed and Richards) maintain that exactly these figures made the salient contributions to the development of the field. So, there is dissention below the surface despite a general recognition that *something* important for future psychology occurred in this neighborhood. I will return to these details, too, in my attempt to flesh out the significance of associationism.

A third point of general concord relates to the role of national context in forming the modern discipline. It is universally agreed that development occurred differently in the ‘leading’ European nations – Britain, France, and Germany. However, again, there are various interpretations of how, why, and to what extent. Some narratives suggest sequential development from place to place, and some emphasize parallel contemporaneous progress along different lines. Some place the differences between contexts in the intellectual regime (different countries, different concepts) while others point to material or practical distinctions (different countries, different techniques or different degrees of institutional support). While these differences of interpretation, as a rule, are not in direct conflict – they need not be viewed as mutually exclusive – there is

still a significant amount of ambiguity about what to view as important. Furthermore, closest to my own subject, there is even disagreement over whether associationism flourished in one unified national context (Britain) or two divergent ones (England versus Scotland).

The only way to begin sorting through these issues is to dig deeper into the details of several of the standard accounts to see how each critical lens provides a slightly different picture of the situation. Rather than describe each work in isolation here, I will provide a comparative analysis on several key points. These are: the explicit historiographic reference points evident in the set of works I have identified; their various accounts of the ‘origin’ of modern psychology, and of common use of the *term* psychology; the relationship they describe between philosophical ‘proto-psychology’ and the later scientific discipline itself, and – in particular – the role of associationism therein. I will conclude with a brief survey of this last issue taken from what is perhaps the most sophisticated account available in the literature, Graham Richards’ *Mental Machinery* [1992].

The ‘new’ history of psychology makes use of a wide range of historiographic approaches, most rooted in the mainstream STS literature. While Reed’s *From Soul to Mind* is a fairly straightforward narrative history of the field, using Hobsbawm as its primary methodological referent, most other works are explicitly rooted in contemporary science studies approaches. The majority refer (not uncritically) to the older school conceptions of such figures as Hempel, Kuhn, and Popper.<sup>6</sup> In only a few cases do we observe broader acquaintance with new conceptions generated in science and technology studies. Smith [1997], an historian of science, ranks Kuhn alongside Marx and Foucault in his treatment of methods. Leahey [2001], as already noted, cites Furumoto [1989] as a major influence – the latter’s work coming directly from the traditions of critical-feminist history of science and gender studies. The most sophisticated historiographic palette is

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<sup>6</sup> Kuhn, importantly, is featured most prominently, with Jones & Elcock [2001], Leahey [2001], and Smith [1997] all citing his profound influence. None of them, however, make the simplistic self-justificatory move that histories of psychology are often accused of – using Kuhn’s work as license to depict the late nineteenth century as a period in which a ‘normal’ psychology emerged from a preparadigmatic phase. This, despite the fact that – like the earlier generation of historians of the discipline (who might be more accurately accused of this maneuver) – they are (all but Smith) psychologists by training.

displayed in Jones & Elcock [2001]. They begin their account with a survey of old school (1960's) history of science, but proceed further to indicate the contributions of newer (1980's, 1990's) work in STS by figures such as Knorr-Cetina and the Edinburgh SSK school. The overall picture gleaned from examination of recent works in the field is that a transition is underway in the critical analysis of psychology, but that it has yet to reach full fruition. The preponderance of methodological referents dating to 40 or more years ago, and the extent to which historical work by professional psychologists is the norm, both suggest that an infusion of serious contemporary critical attention – along lines hinted at by Jones & Elcock – would be valuable.

This is not to say, of course, that these scholars have the story wrong. Not necessarily. But a look at the divergence of opinion evident on fundamental issues does suggest that the story is, as yet, unclear. For example, on the issue of when modern psychology ('Psychology') came into its own, there are many interpretations. Jones & Elcock [2001] refer to two "origin myths" that have held way in professional psychology: one the notion that Wilhelm Wundt's transposition of the study of mind to the laboratory (circa 1879) is a true founding moment, and the other that the new discipline divorced itself utterly from prior models in becoming scientific (what they call "brash modernism").<sup>7</sup> Instead, they favor a more complex story involving the propagation and mutation of previous traditions. Reed [1997] too denies the old standard story (origin myth #1), indicating that it distorts the situated intent of Wundt and his contemporaries. Their work, he says, was viewed in the moment as a twin revival of philosophy and physiology, alongside serious parallel trends in logic and phenomenology. Psychology-as-discipline was, on this view, a later accident of history. Other scholars prefer to subdivide the origin of the profession into several streams. Leahey [2001] suggests three founding moments for particular aspects of the field – those attributable to Wundt (on consciousness, c.1879), Sigmund Freud (on the unconscious, c.1899), and William James (on adaptation, c.1876). Smith [1997], similarly identifies three branches that together coalesced into modern psychology, but his involve Wundt (for his experimentalism), J.B.

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that the 'pseudo-Kuhnian' historical move of which psychologists are often accused actually predates Kuhn. The Wundt myth appeared in E.G. Boring's *A History of Experimental Psychology* [1929], and had the Kuhnian apparatus of paradigm acquisition grafted onto it later.

Watson (behaviorism), and a general trend in physiological investigation. He notes that a fourth arm of phenomenology (Brentano, Stumpf, *et al.*) was influential in its moment but was ultimately left in the regime of philosophy. Danziger [1987] too cites Wundt's wide influence, but also refers prominently to the work of Herbert Spencer and Hermann Helmholtz. All three of these scholars introduce a multitude of secondary figures into their accounts. There is thus, I would argue, significant tension in the literature over two related points – what work to view as significant for the emergence of Psychology, and how to view that work in its own context.

Disagreement is even apparent over how to treat 'psychology' as a term for study of mental processes. Smith [1997] places its origins in the German protestant scholasticism of the sixteenth century, noting the later division – in Johann Alsted's 1630 encyclopedia – of pneumatology (the study of the soul) into *psychologia* (treating the immaterial soul) and *empsychologia* (treating the corporeal soul). Danziger [1987] – with an apparent eye on modern usage – claims the term was not current before 1700, moving then from Germany to France to Britain, where it was popularized only by Sir William Hamilton in the 1840's. Leahey [2001] simply claims the term dates from the nineteenth century. Other related terms are similarly problematic to place chronologically. Danziger traces the transition in associationist circles from talk of passions (a Hutchesonian legacy) to that of emotions during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Reed [1997] intimates that, prior to the twentieth century, moral philosophy 'meant' social science in the same way that natural philosophy 'meant' natural science. None of these issues is easily resolvable, as much recent work in STS has amply demonstrated.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The relationship between evolving patterns of language and evolving institutional structures is a theme common to such influential recent work as Peter Dear's *Discipline and Experience* [1995] (on 'experience' and 'experiment'), Lorraine Daston's "The Naturalized Female Intellect" [1992] (on 'intelligence'), and Daston & Galison's "The Image of Objectivity" (on 'objective knowledge'). The next chapter of this work will treat the problematic 'natural philosophy-science' distinction through the work of Cunningham [1988, 1991]. The notion, in general, is that such referents are historical artifacts. Important examples for the present work include – in addition to 'psychology' – 'mind', 'soul', 'science', 'philosophy', 'human nature', 'moral', 'emotion', 'passion', 'sensation', and many others.

Whatever the particulars might be of emergence of the term and of the professional discipline, it is usually assumed that scientific psychology grew out of long-standing philosophical inquiry into human nature (a ‘reflexive discourse’). That is, on most accounts, a philosophical psychology preceded a scientific one. This depiction of the roots of psychology in general philosophy appears in its purest form in Robinson’s [1976/1995] ‘intellectual history’ of the field. Robinson traces the development of theories about the mind and human nature from their Western origins among the Greeks to the present day, viewing the recent science as an emergent outcome of this lengthy tradition. Leahey [2001], in a similar spirit, suggests that psychology has its direct roots in Renaissance individualism, which developed over several centuries into a distinct intellectual discipline. There are, though, dissenters to this depiction of a science coming from philosophy. Reed [1997], in particular, calls this story a “false reading”, claiming that there was – in fact – no such thing as philosophy before 1879 (a date he deploys in reference to Wundt). Instead, on his view, philosophy and psychology both (and relatedly) became codified as disciplines after that time. Further, he identifies the salient development in inquiry into human nature during the nineteenth century as being not so much its change from speculation to experimentation (read: philosophy to science), but rather its secularization (a notion neatly anticipated by his title, *From Soul to Mind*). So, both ‘Psychology’ as science and ‘psychology’ as philosophical discourse are still at issue too.

As already noted, though, the influence of work in what we might call reflexive discourse is universally acknowledged, even if the identification of this discourse *as philosophy* is not. The specific input provided by the associationist movement looms large in such arguments. Robinson [1976/1995] contends, not without reason but still debatably, that Alexander Bain’s primary intention in his career was to bridge the gap between physiology and psychology to form a new science. If we accept this, Bain then becomes a true proto-psychologist. Reed [1997] too finds Bain significant, but as the final link in a chain extending back to Thomas Brown and James Mill, arguing for a muscle sense in humans that provides a fundamental mechanism for active engagement with the world. The fullest account of the influence of associationism on psychology, though, is found in Richards [1992]. To understand Richards’ views properly, it will be

necessary to examine his depiction of nineteenth century psychological developments as a whole.

Richards identifies Germany, France, and Britain as the sites of three fundamentally different, but complementary, traditions. German thought on the subject is characterized by a distinct metaphysical bent (one stemming from Leibniz and Kant and including the romantic, existentialist, and phenomenological schools), a strong and diverse level of academic support in the universities, and a trajectory toward experimental work. France shows instead an outgrowth from the medical disciplines and the philosophies of *ideologie* and positivism, resulting in a focus on the clinic and the study of abnormality in human subjects. Britain, which I will focus on here, shows yet a third set of inclinations.

British thought is divided by Richards into three schools – associationism, common sense, and Kantian or post-Kantian.<sup>9</sup> The first camp cleaved to the ideas of Locke, Hume, and Hartley. The second – coalescing around Thomas Reid – formed in explicit opposition to the first. The third represented a more diverse set of concepts imported from Germany into the work of figures such as Sir William Hamilton, William Whewell, and S.T. Coleridge. Developments in Britain were largely the result of dialogue among these positions according to Richards.

There are, on his view, five fundamental tensions apparent in such development. A religious-secular divide existed, reinforced by the ties of the educational system to the established Churches of England and Scotland. Holistic and reductionist approaches conflicted with each other over where properly to site studies of human nature. Similarly, intuitionist (introspective) approaches were at odds with analytical (empirical materialist) ones. Most evident at the end of the period was a conflict between evolutionary and non-evolutionary models of the origins of human characteristics. Finally, a political tension between conservative and radical movements permeated the intellectual dialogue of the period. While Richards treats each of these tensions as independent of the others, there

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<sup>9</sup> Later, I will argue for a different categorization, in which two relatively independent streams of associationist thought are evident. I will also leave aside the post-Kantian romantic movement in Britain while incorporating some aspects of work influenced by Kant into the common sense movement. These differences in interpretation are more a matter of focus than of fundamental disagreement.

are relatively stable affiliations of the three intellectual schools with positions on one side or the other of these debates. Associationism, by and large, can be identified with a secular, reductionist (physiology-based), analytical, anti-evolutionary (environmental), and radical position.

The developments that ensued as a result of these productive tensions in Britain are evident in four distinct domains. In the conceptual arena, Brown, Hamilton, and J.S. Mill are given primary attention by Richards. In studies of madness (incipient psychiatry), he highlights the work of Prichard and Laycock. Prichard is also important to the advancement of anthropological work, along with Lawrence. Finally, in the physiological regime, Bell, Hall, and Braid are emphasized. Thus, we observe in Britain a multifaceted and productive state of affairs, evident in a variety of contexts – political, theological, academic, experimental, and more – and stemming from a rich set of dialogues over fundamental issues. The British situation is, in Richards' depiction, congruent with what we would expect from a progressive, democratic and intellectually diverse nation-state.

Again, Richards' is the deepest account of the impact of associationist thought now available. But even it has its weaknesses. On specifics, especially his attributions of influence and his divisions of the landscape are debatable. His ranking of J.S. Mill, rather than either James Mill or Mill's associate Alexander Bain, as a leading conceptual light is perhaps problematic (although both the elder Mill and Bain are discussed in light of their relationship to him). His interpretation of the dominant schools of thought could also be reoriented to a less rigorous division incorporating greater diversity, given what I will argue was the ongoing propagation of a conceptual synthesis. More generally, the 'national character' standpoint from which psychological work in Europe as a whole is construed has its own limitations. Nonetheless, Richards provides a relatively sturdy template for considering associationism, if we are content to view it in the context of psychology alone.

However, there are bigger problems at hand. The general lack of consensus apparent over most, if not all, of the fundamental issues in the history of psychology is one. We have seen that a host of divergent interpretations appear in even the most sophisticated recent work on the subject. Furthermore, the situation is not much

improved by backing up to regard the social sciences (human sciences, behavioral sciences) more generally; the contributions of Smith (on ‘human science’) and Manicas (on ‘social science’) provide a broader view of other work, but they too leave the contributions of associationism within the context of psychology. This is an important hole in the story, given what I will detail later as the intent and scope of the thinkers I am addressing. Depicting associationism as merely a precursor to psychology is viciously parochial. It decontextualizes the movement – ignoring the intentions and aspirations of the practitioners in their own time – in favor of a presentist picture in which the contributions of Brown, Mill, Hamilton, Bain, and others are significant only as anticipatory of a later science. Sadly, too, this is the domain in which the associationists and their interlocutors have received the most attention in the historical literature. Thus, if we are to develop a better picture, we will need to look elsewhere and we will need to look carefully. It is that project to which I will now turn, shifting my attention first from the history of psychology to the history of the philosophy of science, and then to some other issues about how to approach the central questions, figures, and texts that I will address in the body of this work.

### **1.3 Associationism and related trends in philosophy as such**

I will be arguing that, to properly understand nineteenth century British associationism, we must treat this work not as proto-scientific (or proto-psychological, in particular) but as philosophy and philosophy *of* science. This argument is, however, one of degree rather than absolute distinction. While the next chapter will problematize the very notions of science and philosophy down to their roots, my general sense here is this: The associationist thinkers (and their ‘loyal opposition’ in other schools) who produced significant texts on the study of the mind in this period were doing so with an intent and a scope of interest that fits much better into a philosophical context than a scientific one. The many subtleties involved in this claim will emerge later, but for now I will turn to consider how associationist thought fits into the (possibly) accepted bounds of philosophical work.

The attention that nineteenth century studies of the mind have received, aside from the psychological domain already addressed, has come primarily from political and

religious perspectives. The former approach is one of long-standing, formalized most fully in Elie Halevy's classic *The Growth of Philosophical Radicalism* [1901-4/1949], which portrays empiricist thinking in the period as intimately connected to reform initiatives. This account – reflected without much distortion in many later works on nineteenth century British philosophy – emphasizes the role of Bentham's Utilitarian movement, and of figures such as Herbert Spencer and the Mills.<sup>10</sup> And it is undoubtedly true that many or most of the contributors to mental philosophy in the period did so with the practical intent of improving the human and social conditions. This much is evident not only from secondary accounts, but also from statements made by the historical figures themselves.<sup>11</sup> This perspective, too, leads off in fruitful ways towards studies of the practical impact of new thinking in political economy and statistics.<sup>12</sup> What it does *not* do is to shed much light on the detailed development of theories of human nature – either in terms of conceptual foundations or specific intended ends. While there may be an implicit connection between social commitments and theories of mind, these do not emerge clearly from viewing associationism and its intellectual compeers simply through the lens of political philosophy.

Some advantage might be gained by attending to the theological commitments of the thinkers under consideration here. This tack has been taken recently by scholars interested in the specific impact of associationist thought in nineteenth century educational and religious contexts.<sup>13</sup> Such studies have coupled the arguments deployed by various figures in mental philosophy to doctrines specific to different Christian denominations and institutions. Other contributions have been viewed as participating in an ongoing process of secularization in the period. Again here, the results have been

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<sup>10</sup> See, for a few examples, Cooper, Nelson & Patten [1979], Schabas [2003], and Simon [1960]. This is also effectively the view offered by Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* [1979].

<sup>11</sup> The nineteenth century was pregnant with autobiographies and personal biographies of close associates, and many of the subjects I am considering left behind their own accounts of motives and contributions.

<sup>12</sup> Here, special emphasis is granted instead to such figures in the 'Scottish Enlightenment' as Adam Smith. See especially Poovey [1998].

<sup>13</sup> See Dixon [2001], Nartonis [2000], and Rylance [2001].

useful, but represent only one dimension of the intellectual activity of the time. A considered history of mental philosophy cannot rely upon theological controversy alone.

Fortunately, there are indications that mental philosophical work is beginning to attract attention from a wider scholarly community. There has recently, for example, been something of a renaissance in studies of the Scottish Enlightenment. However, most of this work concentrates on eighteenth century groundwork, either denying or ignoring the propagation of these traditions into the following period. Only one full length treatment of nineteenth century Scotland has appeared to date – George E. Davie’s *The Scotch Metaphysics: a century of Enlightenment in Scotland* [2001]. Davie gives the first detailed contemporary account of the development of new ideas by Dugald Stewart, Thomas Brown, Sir William Hamilton, Alexander Bain, and David Ferrier. He argues that the Scottish philosophical program was far from exhausted by 1800, but rather continued to bear fruit into the latter half of the century. Unfortunately, his story eliminates from the story the related work appearing in England at the time. Even more unfortunately, his contribution stands alone except for a handful of short journal articles on these figures (see Bibliography).

Given the dearth of work on the propagation of the associationist tradition (and related schools) in the nineteenth century in recent histories of philosophy, it is worthwhile to consider the reasons behind this neglect. While it is, of course, always possible that these developments have been ignored because they are insignificant or of no value, this seems a peremptory judgment. A perhaps better explanation would be that the attention they have received within the history of psychology has siphoned off attention from within studies of philosophy. But this too seems an inadequate story. In order to provide a more satisfactory account, it will be valuable to consider what mainstream history of philosophy (and, in particular, history of philosophy of science) has attended to instead among the various possible foci in the early nineteenth century. To identify a different – and, I think compelling – explanation of the relative silence of the historical record on associationism as philosophy, it will be sufficient to turn now to one especially vigorous and influential depiction of the period. This will indicate a concentration on alternative subjects that has, I suggest, effectively allowed work in the associationist tradition to disappear.

Larry Laudan's 1983 collection of essays, *Science and Hypothesis*, lays out a clear agenda for the study of philosophy of science in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>14</sup> In these essays – written over an extended period prior to their compilation – Laudan argues for the importance of working scientists to the progress of philosophy, concentrating in particular on the development of the 'method of hypothesis' as the dominant guideline for research in the early 1800's. In the process, he draws some strong, but problematic, distinctions among different species of philosophical work. These distinctions, I think, help to explain how work in mental and moral philosophy has been shunted aside in the existing historical record, despite some indications that they are precisely where we need to concentrate to understand how philosophy of science has developed. That is, Laudan comes very close to a program statement that would centralize associationism and related schools, but makes certain moves that lead away from rather than toward such a conclusion. I want to reconsider this path.

For example, Laudan prefaces to his collection of essays an epigraph from Karl Mannheim, which begins "Every theory of knowledge is itself influenced by the form which science takes at the time and from which alone it can obtain its conception of the nature of knowledge." It is precisely the investigation of such influences (those of science on philosophical discourse) that I propose to concentrate on here as one aspect of my narrative. However, my topical focus is sharply distinct from Laudan's, as further investigation of his assumptions in *Science and Hypothesis* – as laid out in the introduction – will reveal.

Laudan begins by proposing that it is a grievous mistake to overemphasize the role of 'great philosophers' in determining the history of the philosophy of science.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Recognize that no such field identified as 'philosophy of science' existed prior to the very end of this period. Nonetheless, many philosophers *were* actively involved in the examination of the roots and fruits of natural philosophy and science throughout it.

<sup>15</sup> "[T]his book suggests by example the necessity for re-thinking some pervasive stereotypes about the nature of philosophy of science. In the overwhelming majority of scholarly studies, the history of the philosophy of science is regarded simply as a part of the history of philosophy. Indeed, many writers have set out to tell the history of the philosophy of science by asking the question: what have the great philosophers said about science? That is an interesting question, to be sure, but it hopelessly obscures one's historical understanding, for over and over again the decisive and incisive moves within the philosophy of science have come from thinkers – whether scientists or philosophers –

Instead, he maintains, the ideas of scientists themselves, and of other peripheral figures, have largely determined intellectual shifts in this area. Thus, history of philosophy of science must be treated differently from the history of philosophy in general.<sup>16</sup> These injunctions have been followed up across the board in studies of science and technology since the time of Laudan's writing, and sensibly so. Militations against the 'great man' theory and for the investigation of 'average practice' within intellectual circles have proven quite successful, to the extent that – twenty years later – Laudan's suggestion here might seem almost quaint.

Some of Laudan's more specific claims, however, demand further scrutiny. In particular, we should recognize that his specific concern is to explain methodological shifts and that he produces an argument for the importance of this demesne that is perhaps out of proportion. According to Laudan, the history of the philosophy of science, as a scholarly discipline,

has two distinct and relatively disjunct parts. One important part of the philosophy of science – one with which this book is *not* concerned – might be called 'the conceptual foundations of the sciences'. Typical examples would be the philosophy of physics or the philosophy of biology. To engage in conceptual foundations is to explore the ontological and epistemological implications and presuppositions of particular scientific theories. [Laudan, pp.2-3]

To be clear, it is perfectly fine that Laudan has chosen to focus on the matter he identifies; he is entitled to a concern with one issue over another. However, in the course of opening the ground for his own development, he has also subtly minimized an entire other stream of philosophical concerns. Two fundamental points of contention: (1) the notion that work on methodology and work on conceptual foundations are "relatively disjunct"; and (2) the notion that work on conceptual foundations can be appropriately

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who were well outside the philosophical mainstream. More specifically, the philosophy of science, as the etymology of the phrase suggests, is tied much more closely to developments *within science itself* than many scholars have recognized." [Laudan, pp.1-2; emphasis in original]

<sup>16</sup> Or, alternately, though Laudan does not say this, we must rethink the way we write the history of philosophy as a whole. Such an initiative might lead to a more socially-oriented depiction of philosophy, emphasizing the fundamental interaction between intellectual systems and shifts in broader social, cultural and material variables. Some ideas of this sort are explored in the next chapter.

described as limited to investigating background assumptions in the particular theories of particular sciences.

The case that I am investigating points to entirely different conclusions. First, nineteenth century work on the philosophy of the mind appears to be entirely complementary to the philosophy of method, rather than being in any sense disjunct. We should understand the work of my subjects as an interrelated activity to the development, within philosophy of science, of modern methodology. That is, ‘mental philosophy’ (as propagated within associationism and its interlocutory traditions) is, on my view, a conjoined twin of modern method. This view – as I will show – is supported by the parallelisms of texts in the two domains, by cross-references between them, by interconnected debates between figures on either side of this divide, and by statements of intent made by major figures in the traditions I am investigating.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, like its companion field of methodology, nineteenth century philosophy of mind did aspire to be non-content-specific in an important sense. That is, the study of the mind in this period was oriented toward wholesale questions about the foundations of knowledge and belief. While this enterprise did deal in what Laudan refers to as ‘epistemological and ontological implications’, this goal was *not* referred to the ‘presuppositions of particular scientific theories.’ Instead, it was construed as an overarching pursuit of how science, and other domains reliant on human nature, could be grounded in the possibility of knowledge (an epistemological implication) within the restrictions imposed by both the constitution of the world and the constitution of humans (ontological implications). This sort of inquiry cannot be understood in the same terms as, say, the philosophy of physics or the philosophy of biology, because the entailments flowing from it have relevance to all human enterprises and indeed underwrite the philosophy of method rather than being distinct from it. Simply put, the methods we use depend on nature of the world and ourselves, and the relationships between nineteenth century philosophy of mind and philosophy of method reflect this.

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<sup>17</sup> On this last point, for example, we can refer to Hume’s famous characterization, in the *Treatise*, of human nature as “the only science of man”. Hume’s study of mental processes – impressions, ideas, and passions – was directed toward the end of explaining the bases of knowledge and science, impacting methodology but concerned most directly with conceptual foundations.

Laudan's failure to recognize this connection results in a misinterpretation of the singular significance of methodological work. Specifically, it causes him to restrict his claims about the significance of scientific contributions to philosophy to that particular domain.<sup>18</sup> Laudan is willing to recognize that the sciences have influenced studies of conceptual foundations with respect to particular theoretical constructs, but not the broader influence of scientific input on conceptions of what knowledge is in general. Conversely, given his circumscription of the role of ontologically-oriented philosophy (its supposed disjunction from method) he is able to maintain that the problem generated by ignoring the influence of scientific input is relevant only to methodological concerns.

I think Laudan's position represents an all-too-common prejudice that has resulted in the virtual erasure of nineteenth century work on the mind from the history of philosophy of science. Instead, we can and should – I think – extend Laudan's program for the improvement of the history of philosophy of science to include concerns relevant to conceptual foundations, and the nineteenth century associationist tradition in studies of mind in particular. This would draw such historical work still closer to the history of science, and create a more dynamic model of the interactions of various intellectual fields. Laudan's basic proposal is as follows<sup>19</sup>: Set aside 'purist' conceptions of

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<sup>18</sup> As when he says “theories of scientific methodology...are not meant to be content specific in the sense in which the conceptual foundations of science clearly are. Unfortunately, however, the relative autonomy of theories of methodology from the assertive claims of the specific sciences has led many...to conclude that the development of methodology has been, and indeed ought to have been, largely independent of the history of science.” [Laudan, p.3]

<sup>19</sup> “[B]oth philosophers of science and much of the historical scholarship about the philosophy of science presuppose a certain *purist model* of scientific methodology. That model has several prominent features: (1) it regards the theory of methodology primarily as a philosophical activity and not, except incidentally, as a scientific one; (2) it tends to identify the central themes in the historical evolution of scientific methodology by looking to the writings of the ‘great philosophers’, paying little more than lip service to the methodological contributions of all but a tiny handful of scientists; (3) it tends to imagine that whenever methodological beliefs have changed – as they often have – these changes must have been grounded in some prior shift in metaphysics and epistemology.” [Laudan, p.7; emphasis in original]

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philosophy in favor of a model that expects philosophy of science to be significantly influenced by scientific practice, even to the extent that philosophical systems serve primarily to legitimate *post facto* existing practical methods. Recognize too that philosophies of science have served more a descriptive function than a prescriptive one in most cases. Also, attend closely to the historical relationship between philosophy and science, such that the two cannot – in certain periods and contexts – even be distinguished. All we need do to make these suggestions wholly sensible is to remove Laudan’s restriction of them to the domain of method. If we simply acknowledge that the philosophy of science as such is not merely the development of methodological procedures, but also includes ontological elements (most directly through the study of the mind-world relationship), we can then fully take to heart Laudan’s observation that “it is shifting *scientific* beliefs which have been chiefly responsible for the major doctrinal shifts within the philosophy of science.” [Laudan, p.9]

Regarding associationism and its intellectual companions as part of the intellectual mainstream of philosophy of science provides a number of advantages over other interpretations. We saw in the previous section some of the limitations of viewing the philosophical study of mind as proto-psychology. But there are other interpretations

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“I would suggest a pragmatic, symbiotic model for the history of methodology. Its central tenets would be these:

- (1) That the original and influential contributions to the development of methodology have come as much from working scientists as from philosophers (insofar as any clear historical distinction can be...drawn between scientists and philosophers).
- (2) That the epistemological theories of an epoch have frequently been parasitic upon the philosophies of science of that epoch rather than vice versa, i.e., that the methodological ideas of working scientists have often been the source of major epistemological theories.
- (3) That the traditional role for the philosopher of science has been predominantly descriptive, explicative and legitimative, rather than prescriptive and normative; his avowed aim has been to make explicit what is already implicit in the best scientific examples, not to reform the best extant scientific practices.
- (4) That the reception of methodological doctrines, even by the ‘great’ philosophers, has been determined more by the capacity of those doctrines to legitimate a preferred scientific theory than by their strictly philosophical merits. Correlatively, when methodologies are rejected it is often because of their inability to rationalize what is regarded intuitively as good scientific practice.”

[Laudan, pp.8-9]

that might also obscure the significance of this work to philosophy of science. For example, while it is certainly valid to concentrate on the religious and political motivations of my subjects, this speaks more directly to the question of *why* they pursued the projects they did than to *what* the specific trajectory of the philosophical traditions were.<sup>20</sup> Even if such factors are in part constitutive of intellectual positions themselves, they underdetermine the development of particular conceptual modifications. These, I argue, can be examined better by considering the input of new scientific information into the debates and the ensuing dialogues between different positions on the subject of mind. The next chapter will consider some methods to be used to focus this inquiry into associationism as philosophy of science. First, however, we must consider some possible concerns about the source material I am proposing to use to this end.

#### **1.4 Quentin Skinner and the study of intellectual history**

As noted in section 1.2, my primary material for the study of late associationism (*et al.*) in Britain is a set of texts produced over a forty-year span in response to debates among three relatively distinct traditions. This use of texts demands that I contend with a classic historiographic dilemma posed by Quentin Skinner in a series of papers written in the 1960's and 1970's. Skinner argues that single-minded interpretations of textual evidence, whether on a contextual or presentist basis, must fail in their attempts to generate real understanding. In this section, I will outline Skinner's argument and conclusions and try to formulate a response that avoids the pitfalls he describes.

Skinner first articulated his position in a 1969 paper, "Meaning and Understanding". There, he begins by suggesting a general procedural problem in the history of ideas.<sup>21</sup> The two standard approaches to intellectual works – trying to develop

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<sup>20</sup> The religious element, for example, is pursued in Rylance [2001]. The classic political interpretation remains (astonishingly) Halevy [1901-4/1949].

<sup>21</sup> "My aim is to consider what I take to be the basic question which necessarily arises whenever an historian of ideas confronts a work which he hopes to understand... [W]hat are the appropriate procedures to adopt in the attempt to arrive at an understanding of the work?... There are of course two currently orthodox (though conflicting) answers... The first...insists that it is the context...which determines the meaning... The other...insists on the autonomy of the text itself... My concern in what follows will be to consider these

them ‘in context’ or, alternately, viewing the text as autonomous – share, on Skinner’s view, the same weakness. The attempt to straightforwardly ‘read’ (interpret) classic texts always imposes the interpreter’s background assumptions into the equation.<sup>22</sup> Oftentimes, this amounts to a ‘reading in’ of coherence into an author’s intellectual work where none need have existed in the text itself.<sup>23</sup> Even if the text appears coherent, there remains the possibility that its meaning is disguised in some fashion.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the appeal to context is – by definition – extra-textual.<sup>25</sup> Not only does this method identify the text as an inadequate unit of analysis, but it still fails to resolve the issue of authorial intention.<sup>26</sup>

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two orthodoxies in turn, and to argue that both in effect share the same inadequacy.” [Skinner, 1969, p.3]

<sup>22</sup> “[I]t will never in fact be possible simply to study what any given classic writer has *said* (especially in an alien culture) without bringing to bear some of one’s own expectations about what he must have been saying. This is simply the dilemma, familiar to psychologists as the (apparently inescapable) determining factor of the observer’s mental *set*... [T]hese models and preconceptions in terms of which we unavoidably organize and adjust our perceptions and thoughts will themselves tend to act as determinants of what we think or perceive. We must classify in order to understand, and we can only classify the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar.” [Skinner, 1969, p.6; emphasis in original]

<sup>23</sup> “It will become [under the condition that we seek to elaborate ‘characteristic’ doctrines] dangerously easy for the historian to conceive it as his task to supply or find in each of these texts the coherence which they may appear to lack.” [Skinner, 1969, p.16]

<sup>24</sup> Skinner here identifies what he terms ‘oblique strategies’ as a particular issue: There may be irony, double-meaning, implicit referentially, or other linguistic coding associated with the text. One need not imagine a world of intentionally perverse intellectuals to see the danger involved here.

<sup>25</sup> “If we are...led...to doubt that the texts do convey in what they say what they were intended to mean, this is to adopt an interpretation on the strength of evidence quite outside the texts themselves. But if we now wish to go on insisting that the texts do mean what they say, we are now left with the problem of trying to account for the peculiar implications of this view. The point is that whichever view we now take, the text in itself is shown to be insufficient as the object of our inquiry and understanding... Any attempt, in intellectual biography, to concentrate on the texts themselves thus completely fails to deal with the problems raised by what I have called oblique strategies.” [Skinner, 1969, p.35]

<sup>26</sup> “[E]ven if we could decode what a given statement must mean from a study of its social context, it follows that this would still leave us without any grasp of its intended illocutionary force, and so eventually without any real understanding of the given statement after all. The point is, in short, that an unavoidable lacuna remains: even if the study of the social context of texts could serve to *explain* them, this would not amount to

In the place of either of these approaches to the text, Skinner proposes his own alternative, which emerges from what he perceives as two positive conclusions of his argument.<sup>27</sup> First, he maintains that an understanding of intellectual works must be obtained by the recovery of ‘complex intentionality’ rather than by cleaving strictly to the text itself or tracing individual concepts through series of texts. This proposed synthetic method involves consideration of a range of communications both within the text and between the text and broader context, viewing the problem of understanding as fundamentally (and multifariously) linguistic in nature. Second, he argues strongly for the locality – the situated significance – of intellectual work.<sup>28</sup> There are no universal or perennial problems in Skinner’s view. Rather, particular historical moments have a constitutive effect on the concepts explored within them. This leads Skinner to a quasi-anthropological conclusion about the value of (proper) intellectual history in general:

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the same as providing the means to *understand* them. [Skinner, 1969, p.46; emphasis in original]

<sup>27</sup> “If my argument so far has been correct, two positive and general conclusions can now be shown to follow from it. The first concerns the appropriate method by which to study the history of ideas. On the one hand, it must be a mistake even to try either to write intellectual biographies concentrating on the works of a given writer, or to write histories of ideas tracing the morphology of a given concept over time... On the other hand, it does not follow, as is sometimes claimed, that no particular way of studying the history of ideas is any more satisfactory than any other. My first positive conclusion is rather that the whole trend of my arguments points to an alternative methodology which need not be open to any of the criticisms I have so far advanced... The essential aim, in any attempt to understand the utterances themselves, must be to recover [the] complex intention of the author. And it follows from this that the appropriate methodology for the history of ideas must be concerned, first of all, to delineate the whole range of communications which could have been conventionally performed on the given occasion by the given utterance, and, next, to trace the relations between the given utterance and this wider *linguistic* context as a means of decoding the actual intention of the given writer. Once the appropriate focus of the study is seen in this way to be essentially linguistic and the appropriate methodology is seen in consequence to be concerned in this way with the recovery of intentions, the study of all the facts about the social context of the given text can then take its place as a part of this linguistic enterprise.” [Skinner, 1969, pp.48-49]

<sup>28</sup> “My main conclusion...is that the critique I have mounted already serves to suggest a much more obvious and less remote point about the philosophical value of studying the history of ideas... [I]t has I think become clear that any attempt to justify the study of the subject in terms of the “perennial problems” and “universal truths: to be learned from the classic texts must amount to the purchase of justification at the expense of making the subject itself foolish and needlessly naïve.” [Skinner, 1969, p.50]

The study of ideas in other contexts serves to highlight the constraints of our own.<sup>29</sup> Thus, not only are there means of ensuring against the primary stumbling blocks in writing the history of ideas, but there is an intrinsic social value in attempting to do so.

Skinner reinforces his argument in later work further detailing methodological necessities in avoiding his two stumbling blocks. His 1974 essay, “Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action”, can also – I think – be applied to the problem at hand here (in a scientific-philosophical context as well as a purely political one). Here, he identifies several specific procedural needs in the history of ideas.<sup>30</sup> First, we must attempt to produce a record of actual human activity. Viewing an account of ideas alone as self-vindicating amounts to reification. Second, we must recognize strongly that such activity contains an ideological element. Human activities – such as politics, science, and philosophy – contain a human factor, including value commitments and value reinforcement. Third, we must try to break out of a tendency to focus exclusively on ‘canonical’ texts. A broader view is necessary to avoid a naïve depiction of intellectual activity. Even with these contextualist injunctions in place, though, we must recognize that an element of our own intellectual commitments will enter into the story through the decisions we make about the relevance of subject material.<sup>31</sup> Taken together, these

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<sup>29</sup> “[I]t is a commonplace – we are all Marxists to this extent – that our own society places unrecognized constraints upon our imaginations. It deserves, then, to become a commonplace that the historical study of the ideas of other societies should be undertaken as the indispensable and the irreplaceable means of placing limits on these constraints.” [Skinner, 1969, p.53]

<sup>30</sup> “We can hardly claim to be concerned with the history of political theory unless we are prepared to write it as real history – that is, as the record of an actual activity, and in particular as the history of ideologies... It is clear, however, that the chief obstacle to writing such a history of social and political ideas is constituted by our continuing tendency to concentrate on the received canon of classic texts. They impose a distorting perspective...[a]nd they encourage the adoption of a naïve diffusionist account of the relations between the work of leading social theorists and the popular acceptance of new social and political attitudes.” [Skinner, 1974, p.280]

<sup>31</sup> “It seems essential...to place a very strong emphasis on what seems to be a very obvious point: that the decisions we have to make about what to study must be our own decisions, arrived at by applying our own criteria for judging what is rational and significant.” [Skinner, 1974, p.281]

recommendations and observations provide a reasonable set of cautions to the scholar attempting to draw meaning out of texts.

My own response to Skinner's dilemma, then, is to employ a multivalent approach in the study of chosen texts in mental philosophy.<sup>32</sup> I will develop this response fully in the next chapter, using a variety of recent historiographic perspectives on science and philosophy as a launching pad. I will encapsulate my strategy here to anticipate the results that will emerge. First, my investigation of texts will not be restricted simply to the domain of ideas. My analysis of evolving conceptual structure will be placed alongside a consideration of expository structure, referencing practices, and intellectual genealogy. Also, I will be attempting to consider conceptual systems in the broadest possible light, connecting them both together and outward toward the social backdrop in which they occurred. This approach is 'relativist' in a technical sense: The interrelations developed among concepts (and putative facts) – their relative positions in the overall scheme – will be given at least as much significance as the individual concepts themselves.

As for the accusation that this method still amounts to the external imposition of coherence Skinner warned us of, I can only plead that I am attempting to do this in a non-vicious manner. That is, I do not intend it as a means so much of 'understanding the text' (in Skinner's terms) as one of describing it. Even if we fail to approach a definitive interpretation of the work given in the texts I am considering, we will have gained some idea of how they might differ from our own concepts – linguistically, structurally, and in terms of evident entailments. Besides, the combination of conceptual evidence with other codes in which a given work participates is intended to produce just the sort of evidence for intentionality that Skinner seeks. These various structures will be further supplemented by the reflections of the subjects themselves whenever possible, as another level of assessment of intentions.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> As I will detail in the next chapter, my responses to Skinner are shored up and fleshed out by arguments from an array of contemporary scholars, including Andrew Cunningham, Thomas Gieryn, Richard Rorty, Randall Collins, and Peter Barker.

<sup>33</sup> Here, I must make certain appeals to the vaunted earnestness of the Victorian Briton: While I will not be 'taking them at their word' in my analysis, I will – by and large –

The next section will enter into more specifics on my choices of subject matter, questions to be posed, and the scope of the project as a whole. This will explain my choice of focus, and what is needed to accomplish the goals I have set for the following work. My interpretive framework for achieving these ends will be fleshed out at the end of the following chapter, after I have discussed a number of analytical options available in the STS literature.

### **1.5 Central questions and foci of attention for the present work**

In very general terms, my two central questions are: What was the contemporary significance of the study of the mind in early nineteenth century Britain, and what technical resources were employed in the practice of this work? These are, of course, broad topics and – especially given the wealth of unexplored territory in this area – it would be impossible to address all the many dimensions involved. Nonetheless, by concentrating on the development of one central tradition and examining its affinities with adjacent domains in a particular timeframe, I hope to develop a perspectival portrait that begins to do justice to these complexities.

As my opening remarks in this chapter indicated, the study of mind stands in relation to at least nine major tendencies in nineteenth century intellectual work.<sup>34</sup> These tendencies – despite their interconnections – are a heterogeneous group, oriented variously to issues of conceptual foundations and investigative procedure as well as political and cultural concerns and institutional factors. They range from potentially all-encompassing scope (empiricism or historicism) to highly specific theoretical commitments (Newtonianism or Darwinian evolution). Some are construed as locally situated but deeply constitutive of a multifaceted intellectual heritage (as with the Scottish Enlightenment) while others are viewed as very specific in their intellectual applicability but universal in their social impact (scientific psychology). Certain currents

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accept that they are attempting to be un-ironic and factual. I do recognize that earnestness, too, is a rhetorical strategy.

<sup>34</sup> These nine interrelated streams – evident in currently ascendant accounts of the period – might be labeled (1) empiricism, (2) experimentalism, (3) historicism, (4) evolutionism (5) logicism of method, (6) utilitarianism, (7) romanticism, (8) discipline formation (scientific and philosophical), and (9) national culture (Scottish Enlightenment).

– such as the romantic movement – do not fit easily into contemporary categories, given their equivalent participation in what we would distinguish as artistic, scientific, philosophical, theological and political domains. Simply put, the influential factors in nineteenth century British intellectual history do not form an intrinsically unified set. And there is no reason for us expect that they should. As Quentin Skinner has counseled (see previous section), it is a mistake to impose coherency on an historical subject that need exhibit none. Nonetheless, these factors do form an historical landscape, and one into which associationism must fit.

To begin a survey of this landscape from the vantage point of the associationist tradition, we must make some decisions about which aspects to attend to and which to leave aside. I have already suggested (section 1.1) that I will concentrate on a relative few texts concerned centrally with the role of sense-perception in mental function. These were selected as indicative of the debates within, and regarding, associationism in a distinct period. This orientation immediately backgrounds the standard account of philosophy of science as methodology and logic, and also decentralizes the work of certain figures whose work borders closely on other fields (Spencer, Ferrier, J.S. Mill). The focus on British work alone further obscures important inputs from Continental Europe, including the French traditions of sensationism, *idéologie*, and positivism and the German intellectual schools following Kant (including Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and others), which became especially pronounced by the mid-nineteenth century. Also peripheral to my picture are such succeeding intellectual movements as pragmatism and phenomenology (usually associated with America and Germany, respectively), which took up issues from the debates occurring in British circles. Within Britain itself, I will mostly be leaving aside questions about political and social movements, and about the undeniably critical shifts in scientific method across the board and in theory in particular sciences.

With these restrictions in place, it might appear that – instead of the complex account advertised – I am offering a rather insular depiction of associationist thought. To deflect this allegation, it is important to recall what an initial sketch of the remaining territory still includes. Every story must begin somewhere, and this is where I have chosen to begin: The intellectual traditions I am tracing in the early nineteenth century

form a micro-social context for the discussion of some critical historical issues. First, the flux of cultural boundaries in the period (between, for example, philosophy and science) can be advantageously investigated from the perspective of associationism – a movement that contributed actively to this fluidity. A variety of intellectual and institutional fields could be caught up in this maelstrom of social change, but I will concentrate on the science-philosophy relationship and its immediate neighborhood. This neighborhood does still include, though, (as sections 1.2 and 1.3 have hinted and subsequent chapters will demonstrate) a variety of theological, political, and professional concerns. Second, the changing conceptual and ideological features of the traditions help indicate the mechanisms of their propagation. The maintenance of intellectual movements takes work, and this work can be revealed by the systems employed to justify it (in all senses of the term ‘justify’). Third, the complementarity of work on sensation with that in methodological philosophy is of special concern here. As argued at the outset of this chapter, the enterprise of mental philosophy can be regarded as parallel to the mainstream tradition canonized as philosophy of science. Fourth, with respect to the sciences generally, my approach will seek to highlight the role played by material (scientific) data in intellectual (philosophical) discourse in the period. Relatedly, the possible divisions between natural and social science *vis a vis* the role of mind will be of direct concern. Last, the constitutive contributions of nineteenth century studies of the mind to present day science studies bear a degree of reflexive exploration. A focus on these features will, I hope, still shed light on my two basic questions regarding contemporary significance and technical resources.

To draw out such features clearly, I will require a model of the evolution of intellectual fields. Such a model will be sensitive to the codification of these fields in texts and language – in terms not just of conceptual structure but also of rhetoric and the understood social categories of the time. It must also be sufficiently precise to allow for meaningful distinctions between intellectual enterprises in terms of identifiable features of practice, but without essentializing such distinctions. In short, it must be capable of providing answers to such more specific questions as: how did practitioners conceive of their work?, how did they achieve it and by what means?; how was a stable social space established for the enterprise, if it was?, what was the intended force and scope of the

results?, how were texts to be received, and by whom? what was construed as success or progress?

The development of a model that can satisfy these concerns is the task of the next chapter. There, I will assess various analytical approaches appropriate to the questions I have raised and attempt to synthesize them into a coherent set of tools. Once I have established these methodological resources, I will be able to lay out a precise investigative path to pursue. To anticipate those results: My approach will include a multivalent conception of intellectual structure including conceptual, expository, iconic, and genealogical aspects as well as the self-image projected by practitioners. It will consider these with respect to the domains of philosophy and psychology in particular, attending secondarily to the influences of methodological codification, professionalization, and secularization of intellectual activity in the period. The nineteenth century career of associationism, alongside related traditions, will then serve as a historical problematic to pursue within this model. A close consideration of the associationist project will reveal interfaces among historically evolving intellectual domains that have been under-recognized in standard accounts of the period.

To anticipate the results that will emerge from the analysis described in the following three chapters: Since a formal distinction between science and philosophy emerged in the nineteenth century, the description and institutionalization of this distinction has remained a significant academic project. Chapter 2 approaches this project from the standpoint of historiography, surveying how prominent figures in the field of science studies have suggested we might identify salient characteristics of science or philosophy within various contexts. This survey – taking into account prominent historical, philosophical and sociological perspectives from the work of Thomas Kuhn to the present day – introduces a set of increasingly detailed questions about the two interrelated enterprises of science and philosophy. Beginning with the notion that these two human endeavors can be reasonably distinguished, I first ask how and what way this distinction might be characterized. This process leads to the development of a four-pronged analysis sensitive to conceptual, textual, iconic, and genealogical networks and structures. Chapter 3 deploys this analytical framework in the context of eighteenth and nineteenth century British empiricist studies of the human mind, and seeks to identify

affinities of such work with ongoing scientific and philosophical programmes. Chapter 4 continues this process by returning explicitly questions about the science-philosophy relationship and how it was framed differently as work on the human mind yielded new results. This reconsideration of how a fundamental dichotomy was established between the two pursuits brings the discussion full circle, since many contemporary analytical perspectives are predicated on these long-established ways of drawing distinctions between the scientific and the philosophical.