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ACADEMIC PRESS

HANDBOOK OF PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY

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PREFACE

This Handbook was conceived in the early 1980s, during a time when personality psychology was under heavy attack as a scientifically worthless endeavor. Researchers had trouble publishing in mainstream journals or getting grant proposals funded, and the discipline seemed in danger of disappearing from the intellectual radar scope.

Such a state of affairs seems very strange given that: (1) the conclusions reached by anthropology, criminology, economics, history, political science—indeed, all the social sciences—depend heavily on assumptions about human nature; (2) scholars in these fields rarely examine their psychological assumptions; and (3) personality psychology is the one discipline that takes the self-conscious evaluation of human nature as its central intellectual task. This point highlights the significance of personality psychology in modern social science.

It is hard to imagine a more important topic. Despite the overwhelming significance of the topic, personality psychology, as noted above, almost disappeared in the 1970s and early 1980s. The reasons were varied, but the biggest problem was the enthusiasm of American psychology for behaviorism. Behaviorism is the antithesis of personality psychology; it argues that what people do depends primarily on their social circumstances. It also denies that there are stable structures inside people that can explain their behavior.

Behaviorism is a useful methodology for training animals to perform, but as a model of human nature it is seriously inadequate. The problem is that it ignores evolutionary theory, one of the most important developments in the history of science. Evolutionary theory, combined with human behavior genetics, reveals sensible and reproducible evidence for stable tendencies within individuals.

Over the past 10 years personality psychology has made a remarkable comeback. There are probably two reasons for this. First, social psychologists have discovered individual differences and have learned that, by incorporating personality measures in their experiments, they get better results. Second, industrial/organizational psychology has discovered that well-constructed measures of person-

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