

The 2008-2009 Klopsteg seminar series in
SCIENCE IN HUMAN CULTURE presents:

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“On the Disciplinary Identity of Psychology: 1732-1933”



Friday,
May 8, 2009
12:00 -
1:30p.m.
Humanities Room
Kresge 2-370
1880 Campus Drive
Evanston Campus
Lunch will be provided

ABSTRACT: “On the Disciplinary Identity of Psychology: 1732-1933,”

In previous work, I have proposed that psychology existed from antiquity as a subdiscipline of physics, that it was “remade” during the eighteenth-century to occupy various disciplinary loci within different intellectual settings, that these ongoing psychologies contributed a substantial amount of theoretical content to the “new psychology” of the latter nineteenth century, and that the new experimental psychology had asserted its own status as an independent experimental, natural scientific discipline at the turn of the twentieth century. These proposals have been met with skepticism by some historians of psychology (e.g., Smith 2005, Teo 2007), who argue that psychology achieved disciplinary status later than I suggest (perhaps in 1824 for the “old psychology” in Germany, perhaps much later, in the 1930s, for the “new psychology” in Germany). I will return to this debate and suggest some ways of thinking about disciplinarity that arise by taking seriously the self-conceptions found implicitly or explicitly within various intellectual practices that conditioned or were embodied by psychological thought. In particular, I will propose that appropriate standards of disciplinarity should be indexed to social and institutional structures as these are found in various times and places, and that changes in such structures offer changing contexts for and changing standards of disciplinarity. By contrast with this historicizing approach, some historians of psychology appear to work with atemporal conceptions of disciplinarity, in effect projecting backwards from the type of institutionalizations that were forged ca. 1850 to 1950. I hope to have time at the end of my talk to discuss a tendency in recent history of science and cultural and intellectual history to emphasize particularity and difference, thereby masking continuity and relation.

