

Research on Psychological Duality: Retrospect and Prospect

Haiqiang Sun*

School of Foreign Languages, Yancheng Teachers University, Yancheng 224002, China

*Corresponding author: Haiqiang Sun, 453101287@qq.com

Copyright: © 2024 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: The theory of dualism (not to be confused with Plato's dualism) is a relatively new theory in the field of psychology, which provides new ideas and methods for understanding and solving problems related to human psychology. This theory finds application in many fields and has far-reaching influence. This essay provides an overview of the theory of dualism followed by an analysis of its connotations, characteristics, and significance. Subsequently, its development at home and abroad is described. Finally, its main applications and prospects are outlined, hoping to provide references and insights for the further development of this field.

Keywords: Dualism; Overview; Development; Application; Prospect

Online publication: March 29, 2024

1. Introduction

Dualism (not to be confused with Plato's dualism) is a theory about the structure of human psychology that is derived from reflective psychology. Dualism believes that human psychology is composed of two independent parts: external and internal awareness. External awareness mainly involves the understanding of the objects and phenomena in the external world, while internal awareness involves subjective experience and the psychological state of the person. This theory is important for understanding human psychology, and it also contributes to the development of other fields. This paper aims to explore the topic of dualism in order to provide reference and ideas for the development of this field.

2. An overview of dualism

Dualism is a theory that is derived from the reflective psychology. Reflective psychology was proposed and developed in the late 20th century by the Reflective Psychology Research Group of the Institute of Psychology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. When studying the nature and mechanism of human cognition and emotion, this research group found that the human mind is not a monistic structure as traditional psychology believes, but a complex structure composed of two different mental systems (external and internal awareness).

These two mental systems are both interrelated and independent. External awareness refers to one's cognition of the external world, while inner awareness refers to one's understanding of his/her thoughts and mental state. This theory was developed based on cognitive science and neuroscience. Research shows that the human cognitive process is affected by various factors such as external environment, cultural background, knowledge, and experience, and these factors are interrelated, so it is impossible to describe the nature and mechanism of human cognition with a single and unified concept. Neuroscience research has found that neural networks in humans are not made of simple input-output structures but complex structures composed of multiple neurons with different functions^[1]. Therefore, reflective psychology proposes the theory of dualism, which aims to explore the complexity and multidimensionality of human psychology and provide new ideas and methods for understanding and addressing problems related to human psychology.

2.1. Connotations of psychological dualism

Dualism advocates that human psychology is composed of two independent but interrelated psychological systems: external and internal awareness. External awareness focuses on cognitive processes such as perception, thoughts, and memory, examining the objective material world. It emphasizes objectivity, universality, and logic. On the other hand, internal awareness involves emotions, will, motivation, and other internal psychological phenomena. It acknowledges subjectivity, individuality, and non-logicality. Scientists emphasize more on the external aspects of psychology, while psychologists emphasize on thoughts and mental activities. These two psychological systems are interrelated and interdependent, together constituting the human psychology^[1].

2.2. Characteristics of dualism

Dualism is a relatively new theory in the field of psychology, which has the following characteristics. Firstly, it believes that psychology is composed of two independent parts, namely external awareness and internal awareness. Secondly, it advocates the interdependence of internal and external awareness, which constitute a complete psychological activity. Thirdly, it advocates for a shift in focus within psychology towards the exploration of the inner universe, proposing novel research ideas and methodologies. Fourthly, it upholds introspection and reflection as primary research methods in psychology, facilitating a deeper understanding and apprehension of the inner world. Lastly, it emphasizes the dynamic and intricate nature of psychological processes.

2.3. Significance of dualism

The significance of the theory of dualism is extensive, permeating many other fields. Firstly, it breaks through the limitations of monistic psychology and provides a more comprehensive and objective description of human psychological activities. Secondly, it has an important influence on the qualitative nature, research subjects, and research methods in psychology. Thirdly, it facilitates the understanding of human mental activities, which are complex and dynamic.

3. Development of psychological dualism

3.1. Development process of overseas research

The roots of psychological dualism in the Western tradition can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy, particularly during the era of thinkers like Plato and Aristotle, who delineated a binary division within the human psyche. In Plato's writings, such as the dialogues found in *Timaeus*, he introduced the concept of the

duality of the soul. According to Plato, the human soul comprises two distinct components: reason and desire. Reason represents the rational aspect capable of understanding and logical thinking, while desire embodies the more sensual and impulsive aspect, governing emotions and appetites. Plato proposed that these two facets of the soul collaborate to form a complete individual human being ^[2]. Aristotle, in his work *On the Soul*, elaborated his views on human psyche. He believed that the human psyche can be divided into two main parts, namely rationality (*logos*) and sensibility (*pathos*). Rationality, the highest mental capacity of humans, governs behavior, providing purpose and planning. The perceptual soul, a physiological mechanism, processes external stimuli, generating emotions and desires, all under the guidance of rationality ^[3]. The study of modern Western dualism began in the first half of the 20th century, when some psychologists began to conduct in-depth research on human thought processes and behavioral manifestations in an attempt to understand human psychology. Among them, the most representative are Wilhelm Wundt (German psychologist), Carl Jung (Swiss psychologist), and Erich Fromm (American psychologist). In his book *Principles of Physiological Psychology*, Wundt proposed that human mental activity can be divided into two basic processes, namely sensation and perception. Sensation refers to a direct response to an external stimulus, while perception refers to the organization and interpretation of sensory information. Wundt believes that sensation and perception are the two basic processes of mental activities ^[4]. Jung proposed the concept of the “collective unconsciousness” in his book *Collective Unconsciousness*, arguing that the human mind is made up of a series of universal and hereditary archetypes that have had a wide influence on human history and national culture. Jung argues that these archetypes play an important role in dualism, reflecting the objective reality of the external world on the one hand, and the subjective reality of the internal psyche on the other ^[5,6]. In his book *The Art of Loving*, Fromm argues that the human mind has two basic needs: cognitive needs and emotional needs. Cognitive needs refer to one’s curiosity and desire for knowledge about the outside world, while emotional needs refer to the need for love, a sense of belonging, respect, etc. These two needs interact and influence each other in the human psyche, forming the internal motivation of human behavior. Fromm refers to this phenomenon of dualistic psychology as the “cognitive-affective dual system” and considers it to be the basic unit of human behavior and psychology ^[7]. In addition, the Adam Altman (American psychologist) also conducted an in-depth study of dualism in his book *The Enigma of the Mind*. Altman argues that the human psyche is made up of two parts: the narrative self and the observer self. The narrative self refers to the subjective feelings and interpretations of one’s life experiences and behaviors, while the observer self refers to the objective perspective and position when observing the external world. Altman argues that the narrative self and the observer self interact and influence each other in the human psyche, forming human cognition and understanding of themselves and the external world ^[8].

3.2. Development process of domestic research

Dualism is a fundamental feature of Chinese philosophy. Many schools of Chinese philosophy use “two” as the basic concept. For example, dualism is mentioned in Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching* that “Tao gives birth to one, one to two, two to three, and three to all things,” where “two” refers to two interdependent and mutually opposed things or phenomena ^[9]. Philosophers such as Chuang-Tzu, Huineng, and Lu Jiuyuan have all discussed psychological duality. Chuang-Tzu believes that human cognition consists of two parts: the outer world and the inner world. The former refers to the knowledge of the external world, and the latter refers to the cognition of self-consciousness. According to Chuang-Tzu, the outer world and the inner world are two aspects that are interrelated and interdependent. It is only through practice that these two aspects can be combined to achieve the state of unity ^[10]. Huineng, on the other hand, divides human psychology into “heart” and “meaning”,

arguing that “heart” refers to the inner nature, while “meaning” refers to the external appearance^[11]. Lu Jiuyuan divides human psychology into “temperament” and “destiny,” where “temperament” refers to human instinct and perceptual experience, while “destiny” refers to man’s inner rationality and morality^[12]. Zhang proposed in his book *Educational Psychology* that the three elements of human intelligence, emotion, and needs are dualistic. First of all, as far as intelligence is concerned, he believes that human intelligence is dualistic, that is, a person has two sets of intelligence: “material intelligence” (external intelligence) and “spiritual intelligence” (internal intelligence). Secondly, emotions and needs also have their duality, which is mainly manifested in the interaction between the inner world and the external world^[13]. Yu and Song discussed dualistic psychology from the perspective of mental health, arguing that psychology has duality, which is composed of two systems: “positive psychology” and “negative psychology,” which are interdependent and interacting^[14]. From the perspective of cognitive psychology, Zhu proposed a dualistic cognitive psychology. He believes that the cognitive process is a dualistic process from the shallow to the deep, from the surface to the inside, from the concrete to the abstract, from the external stimulus to the internal subjective experience, from the individual to the general, from the phenomenon to the essence^[15]. Wang put forward the dualistic psychology of youth for the first time in the book *Youth Psychology*, arguing that young people have two psychological systems: “id” and “superego.” The “id” represents primal, instinctual drives, encompassing life, emotions, and sexual desires. It operates in a self-interested manner, driven by pleasure. The “superego” develops from external pressures and experiences, shaped by societal norms and ego regulation, aiming for social conformity. It embodies self-awareness, influenced by external upbringing and education, built upon the foundation of the innate “id,” and reflects personal ideals and aspirations^[16].

In general, there are numerous studies on psychological dualism at home and abroad, and different schools, philosophers, and psychologists have studied and discussed the dualistic nature of human psychology from different perspectives. Although they differ in their interpretations and applications of mental duality, they all acknowledge that the human psyche has some degree of duality.

4. Application of psychological dualism in practice

Dualism is not only of great significance in theory, but also is widely used in practice. In the field of education, it can help educators to better understand students’ learning process, improve educational methods, and cultivate psychological quality. In the medical field, it helps psychologists to better diagnose mental disorders, develop treatment strategies, and evaluate treatment effects. In the field of human-computer interaction, it improves the user experience and optimizes the interaction design. In the judicial field, the psychological dualism can be used to explain the psychological state and behavior motivation of the criminal suspects to better gauge the severity of their crime and their sentencing. In the field of human resources, psychological dualism can help enterprises to better understand the psychological needs and ability characteristics of employees, so as to develop more appropriate recruitment, training and management strategies. In addition, psychological dualism can also be applied in marriage and family therapy, career planning and other fields.

5. Prospects for future research directions

As a theory full of vitality, psychological dualism will continue to lead future research and development, and its future research will mainly focus on the following aspects:

- (1) Research on the in-depth understanding of psychological dualism.

Although psychological dualism has been widely applied and studied, there are still many deficiencies

in people's understanding of it. Future research can deepen the understanding of psychological dualism and explore the mechanisms and processes of the interaction between extrinsic and intrinsic psychology, as well as their impact on human cognition and behavior.

(2) Research on the application field of psychological dualism

The theory of dualism has been widely applied, but there is still a lot of room for expansion. Future research can further expand the application dualism and apply it to explore human emotions, motivation, creative thinking, and other aspects, so as to promote the development of related fields.

(3) Cross-cultural research on psychological dualism

Psychological dualism may have different manifestations and meanings in different cultural contexts. In the future, cross-cultural research can be carried out to compare the understanding and application of dualism among people of different cultural backgrounds and to explore the mechanism and boundary conditions of the influence of cultural factors on dualism, so as to promote the cross-cultural application and development of psychological dualism.

(4) In-depth research on dualistic psychology from the perspective of neuroscience

In recent years, great progress has been made in the field of neuroscience, which provides new opportunities to explore the psychological dualism from the perspective of neuroscience. Future research can explore the neural basis and mechanism of extrinsic and intrinsic psychology from the perspective of neuroscience, and further deepen the understanding of psychological dualism.

6. Conclusion

As an important theory of human psychology, psychological dualism has been widely applied and studied. Reviewing past research, we can see that the theory of dualism plays an important role in understanding the human psychological processes and promoting the development of related fields. Looking into the future, deepening understanding, expanding application, cross-cultural research, research from the perspective of neuroscience, and application innovation will become important directions of research on dualism. With the progress of science and technology and the development of society, dualism will continue to play its guiding role and make greater contributions to the development and progress of human society.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Du XY, 2013, *Mind Control*, Publishing House of Electronics Industry, Beijing.
- [2] Xie WY, 2003, *The Timaeus*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, Shanghai.
- [3] Wang HS, 1998, *On the Soul*, Xi'an Publishing House, Xi'an.
- [4] Wundt W, 1999, *Principles of Physiological Psychology* [Trans. Titchener EB], China Social Science Press, Beijing.
- [5] Jung C, 1954, *Collective Unconsciousness*, in *Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Bollingen Series, Princeton.
- [6] Zhang N, 2019, *Jungian Psychology*. Jiangxi Fine Arts Publishing House, Nanchang.
- [7] Li JM, 1987, *The Art of Love*, The Commercial Press, Beijing.
- [8] Altman A, 2019, *The Enigma of the Mind*. Hachett Book Group, New York.
- [9] Wang FQ, Jiao JP, 2016, *Tao Te Ching*, Guangming Daily Publishing House, Beijing.

- [10] Wang XQ, 2009, Chuang-Tzu, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, Shanghai.
- [11] Gu RR, 1996, Tanjing, Hunan Publishing House, Changsha.
- [12] Lu JY, 1980, Lu Jiuyuan set, Zhonghua Book Company, Beijing.
- [13] Zhang DJ, 2015, Educational Psychology (3rd Edition), People's Education Press, Beijing.
- [14] Yu GL, Song ZS, 2008, The Mental Health Education for Modern Teachers, Educational Science Press, Beijing.
- [15] Zhu ZX, 1980, Piaget's Review of Children's Thinking Psychology, Journal of Beijing Normal University, 1980(01): 71–82.
- [16] Wang JS, 1983, Youth Psychology, China Social Sciences Press, Beijing.

Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.