

News of the Profession: Eloge



SAULO DE FREITAS ARAUJO (1971–2024)

When reminiscing about the personality of philosopher and psychologist William James, his son Henry argued that his father had never attempted to establish a distinct, closed clan:

He never tried to win disciples, to compel allegiance to his own doctrines, or to found a school. But he taught countless young men to love philosophy, and helped many a troubled soul besides to face the problems of the universe in an independent and gallant spirit. He helped them by example as well as by precept, for it was plain to everyone who knew him or read him that his genius was ardently adventurous and humane.¹

Something similar can be said about Brazilian historian of science and psychology Saulo de Freitas Araujo, whose passing during early May 2024 deprives the intellectual field of one of those rare amalgams between ideas and personality, between intention and will.

Saulo de Freitas Araujo was born on November 26, 1971, in the small city of Leopoldina, countryside of Minas Gerais. He was originally trained as a psychologist and was “brought” to the field of the history of science through one of its close but problematic relatives: the philosophy of science. During his undergraduate years at the Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora (UFJF) and as a fellow of the *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* (CNPq) in the late 1990s, Araujo became interested in the philosophical analysis and criticism of psychoanalysis, focusing on Karl Popper’s famous and Adolf Grünbaum’s not-so-famous critiques of Freudianism. Indeed, his first published papers dealt squarely with “the fragilities of psychoanalysis as a science and as a treatment method.”² This, in turn, led his research towards the philosophy of mind, psychology, and psychoanalysis (1999–2004), the topics of his MA in philosophy at the Universidade Federal de São Carlos (1998–2000). It was Araujo’s discovery of Wilhelm Wundt’s reflections on the mind-body problem that cemented Araujo’s interest in the history of European psychology as a whole, becoming the topic of his PhD at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (2001–2007). This marked the beginning of Araujo’s most substantive contributions to the historical field: his systematic

¹ Henry James, “Introduction,” in *The Letters of William James* (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920), 30.

² Saulo de Freitas Araujo, “As fragilidades da psicanálise como ciência e como método de tratamento: críticas de Popper, Grünbaum e Eysenck à psicanálise” [Weaknesses of Psychoanalysis as Science and as Treatment Method: Popper’s, Grünbaum’s and Eysenck’s Critiques of Psychoanalysis], *Ética e Filosofia Política* 1 (1996): 111–122.

reconstruction of Wundt's psychological program in the context of Germany's rich and complex philosophical tradition.³

Funded by the German Academic Exchange Service, Araujo worked at Universität Leipzig under Professor Ortrun Riha during the early 2000s, carrying extensive archival research on Wundt's historical collections and in the process perfecting his German to have an unmediated access to the philosopher and physiologist's writings. Araujo's fundamental claim – that Wundt was primarily interested in devising an overarching philosophical project, one in which psychology was an important but single component – was a refreshing philosophy-of-science take in a field mostly dominated by sociological and cultural approaches. Although every historical narrative is inherently incomplete and therefore open to improvement, Araujo's rigorous yet balanced reassessment of both classical and contemporary interpretations of Wundt's oeuvre, combined with his meticulous archival research, led him to engage with the works of Arthur Blumenthal, Mitchell Ash, Kurt Danziger, and Daniel Robinson, among others, while unquestionably setting a new benchmark for Wundt scholarship in the process. Saulo's international publications on the topic made him the first Latin American scholar to win the Society for the History of Psychology's Early Career Award in 2013, with his 2016 *Wundt and the Philosophical Foundations of Psychology* being shortlisted for the American Psychological Association's award for best book. Moreover, his international contributions led to his election as the second-ever Latin American fellow of the aforementioned scholarly society in 2018. Araujo was a consummate academic diplomat. Through invitations and reciprocal visits, he linked historians of psychology in Brazil with those in North America and Europe.

Saulo's historiographical efforts in recent years branched into two distinct enterprises. The first one was in Brazilian Portuguese. Through his edition of books dealing with philosophical and historical aspects of Psychology, he collaborated with the establishment of the *Núcleo de História e Filosofia da Psicologia Wilhelm Wundt (NUHFIP)* at UFJF.⁴ He also started the curation of Portuguese translations of primary sources by classic and significant authors in the history of psychology such as Wilhelm Wundt, John B. Watson, Edward B. Titchener, Lev S. Vygotsky, and William James, many of which were not yet available in Portuguese, thus stimulating the history of psychology field in Brazil. A second project was reflected by his English publications. Even as he continued to publish on Wundt and co-edited an unprecedented collection of essays on the contributions of Christian Wolff to psychology, Saulo's topics of choice kept touching upon what, in a chronological sense at least, was the "heart" of European and North American psychology and its allied sciences.⁵

Although focused on Germany and the United States, Saulo's work was not bound by geographical or "national" frontiers and ultimately aimed at the "big picture" of history, in Roger Smith's sense.⁶ Going beyond the study of the reception and discussion of foreign figures in Brazilian circles, Saulo chose to focus and study those figures in their respective contexts and historical times – be they Wundt, E. B. Titchener, Hermann Lotze, Christian Wolff, or Vladimir Bechterev, among many others. In other words, he did not try to adapt the research problem to his circumstances, but the other way around.

Saulo's passions of late focused on the thought of William James. Undaunted by the existence of a broad range of scholarship, Saulo set out to conduct a fresh though systematic reading of the entirety of

³ Saulo de Freitas Araujo, *Wundt and the Philosophical Foundations of Psychology: A Reappraisal* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2016).

⁴ Saulo de Freitas Araujo, ed., *História e Filosofia da Psicologia: Perspectivas Contemporâneas* (History and Philosophy of Psychology: Contemporary Perspectives) (Juiz de Fora, Brazil: Editora UFJF, 2012); and Saulo de Freitas Araujo, Fátima Carapreso, Gustavo Arja Castañón, and Richard Theisen Simanke, eds., *Fundamentos Filosóficos da Psicologia Contemporânea* (Philosophical Foundations of Contemporary Psychology) (Juiz de Fora, Brazil: Editora UFJF, 2014).

⁵ Saulo de Freitas Araujo, Thiago Constância Ribeiro Pereira, and Thomas Sturm, eds., *The Force of an Idea: New Essays on Christian Wolff's Psychology* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2021).

⁶ Roger Smith, "The Big Picture: Writing Psychology into the History of the Human Sciences," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 34 (1998): 1–13.

James's scholarship, including the often-overlooked early essays that precede *The Principles of Psychology* for which he was first widely celebrated. Saulo wrote thoughtful original essays on the role and function of introspection in James's early writings, the connection of his psychical research to his conception of a science of mind, James's efforts to address the problems of psychological language, and the variety of ways James's psychological concepts informed his philosophical commitments.⁷ Araujo's recent book on pluralism highlights the variety of pluralism concepts evident in James as well as in contemporary thought, including psychology.⁸ It tracks James's varied references to pluralism across his writings and correspondence, and, as with Araujo's work on Wundt, Araujo and Osbeck's *Ever Not Quite* was also nominated for the American Psychological Association's Division 1 William James Book Award in 2024.

Saulo's historical scholarship is infused with philosophical insight, representing an approach he formally defended on several occasions – “a philosophical history of psychology” – despite criticism from other historians of psychology.⁹ Backed up by the philosophically informed historiography of scholars such as Theodor Arabatzis and Hasok Chang and paraphrasing the latter's 2016 Jaako Suolahti Lecture, Saulo attempted to “put Psychology back in History of Psychology,” transcending the internist-externist dichotomy and reintegrating the “substance” of psychology, with all its technicalities and fine-grained implications, into the historical analysis of the discipline – technicalities and implications that were sometimes lost in a sea of social, anthropological, and cultural histories.¹⁰ This philosophical interest, which he half-jokingly described as a “defecto de formación” – a systematic “internalized bias” or a “pervasive bad habit” you get as a byproduct of your education in a particular intellectual tradition – kept him in dialogue with the philosophical community, philosophy of science, and theoretical psychology in addition to the deep respect he garnered for his contributions to the history of psychology. A recent example of his philosophical scholarship is his work on fact-value relations, drawing on the pragmatism of James as a means of overcoming a dichotomous positioning. For theoretical psychology, recent years found Saulo writing critically and constructively on the “psychological humanities,” the future of cognitive science, and “post-truth” controversies in and beyond psychology.¹¹

Going beyond the breadth of his scholarly production per se, Saulo will be remembered by the preciseness and exhaustiveness of his archival and research work, his willingness to embark in thorough criticism, and his commitment to scholarly debate and collaboration. He believed that all knowledge was to be held tentatively and recognized that a complex and multidimensional world requires various levels of analysis,

⁷ Saulo de Freitas Araujo and Rayssa Maluf de Souza, “. . . to rely on first and foremost and always”: Revisiting the role of introspection in William James's early psychological work,” *Theory & Psychology* 26 (2016): 96–111; and Saulo de Freitas Araujo and Lisa Osbeck, “William James and the Role of Psychology in Philosophy,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.831>.

⁸ Saulo de Freitas Araujo and Lisa Osbeck, *Ever Not Quite: Pluralism(s) in William James and Contemporary Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

⁹ Saulo de Freitas Araujo, “Toward a Philosophical History of Psychology: An Alternative Path for the Future,” *Theory & Psychology* 27 (2017): 87–107; Adrian Brock, “Alternative Path for the Future or a Return to the Past? Araujo's ‘Philosophical’ History of Psychology,” *Theory & Psychology* 27 (2017): 108–116; and Catriel Fierro and Saulo de Freitas Araujo, “Psychoanalyzing Science Itself: Psychoanalysis, Philosophy of Science and Scientific Research in the Institutionalization of Argentinian Psychology (1962–1983),” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 58 (2022): 404–431. For the impact of Araujo's proposal on the historiography of psychology, see Annette Müllberger, “Debate y diversidad en ‘Historia de la Psicología’: Un diagnóstico del estado actual” [Debate and Diversity in “History of Psychology”: A Diagnosis of its Current State], *Revista de Historia de la Psicología* 44 (2023): 2–12.

¹⁰ Michael Sokal, “History of Psychology and History of Science: Reflections on Two Subdisciplines, Their Relationship, and Their Convergence,” *Revista de Historia de la Psicología* 5 (1984): 337–347.

¹¹ Saulo de Freitas Araujo, “Truth, Half-Truth, and Post-Truth: Lessons from William James,” *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* 35 (2022): 478–490; Lisa Osbeck and Saulo de Freitas Araujo, “The Future of Cognitive Science is Pluralistic, but What Does that Mean?” *Rivista Internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia* 14 (2023): 11–26; and Saulo de Freitas Araujo and Lisa Osbeck, “What Is in a Name? Psychological Humanities and the Logic of Presentism,” *Rivista Internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia* 15 (2024): 24–38.

a plurality of viewpoints and perspectives. Nevertheless, Saulo made a careful distinction between pluralism and at least extreme forms of relativism. He interpreted James as promoting a view of knowledge as inherently limited by vantage point (cultural, historical, personal) and constantly evolving while denying that all claims are equally valid.

Such a Jamesian outlook helps explain Saulo's most salient personality characteristics: his quiet but inquisitive demeanor, his remarkable generosity, his indefatigable work schedule, and his never-ending sense of unbound curiosity. A person not easily swayed by "fads," "waves," or "turns" – be they linguistic, pragmatic, or social – Saulo was a firm believer of the claim that one could not talk about historiography "in the abstract." He seems to have conceived historical research itself as a way of thinking and analyzing historical sources through narratives and claims that could be checked, assessed, and improved just like any other scientist does when checking and improving his discourse and knowledge claims about his chosen subject matter. To Saulo, we were all fallible: this was what kept the ball rolling and made the constant renewal of the discipline essential—through "new blood," young researchers, and bold perspectives. Saulo's legacy will endure through the work of these researchers and his lasting contributions to the historiography of science and psychology.

Catriel Fierro
Rodrigo Miranda
Lisa Osbeck
Michael Pettit

Catriel Fierro is Beatriu de Pinós Postdoctoral Fellow at the History of Science Institute at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain. His research focuses on the history and philosophy of early twentieth-century clinical psychology, with a particular emphasis on the life and work of Carl R. Rogers and his contributions to the development of psychotherapy research.

Rodrigo Miranda is a full professor in the Graduate Program in Psychology at Universidade Católica Dom Bosco and professor in the Undergraduate Psychology Program at Universidade Estadual de Mato Grosso do Sul. He is also a CNPq Research Productivity Scholarship Holder (PQ2). He conducts research on the history of psychology training and the profession in Brazil during the twentieth century.

*Lisa Osbeck is a professor of psychology at the University of West Georgia. She co-authored *Ever Not Quite: Pluralism(s) in William James and Contemporary Psychology with Saulo de Freitas Araujo* (Cambridge University Press, 2023). With Nancy Nersessian, she is currently studying how interdisciplinary commitments impact the contributions and lives of those who pursue them.*

*Michael Pettit is a historian of the human sciences. He is a professor at York University in Toronto, Canada. His most recent book is *Governed by Affect: Hot Cognition and the End of Cold War Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 2024).*