

Review

An early work [1910–1913] in *Biological Psychology* by
pioneer psychiatrist, criminologist and philosopher
José Ingenieros, M.D. (1877–1925) of Buenos Aires

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Abstract

One of the earliest recorded works in *Biological Psychology* was published in 1910 by Argentine psychiatrist José Ingenieros (1877–1925), Professor of Experimental Psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires. Ingenieros, a multifaceted personality and prolific author and educator famous for his lapidary aphorisms, has been considered a ‘luminary’ for generations. Trained as a physician, he was the first scientist to establish a comprehensive psychological system in Latin America. His long list of publications includes more than 300 titles generally divided in two periods: studies in mental pathology and criminology (1897–1908) and studies in philosophy, psychology and sociology (1908–1925). His works were never made particularly available to English-speaking audiences, despite the fact that certain of his books are still best-sellers in the Spanish-speaking world. We present an overview of Ingenieros’ life and work, and a detailed account of his profoundly interesting work *Principios de Psicología Biológica*, in which he analyzes the development, evolution and social context of mental functions. We also provide an English translation of the Introduction contributed by Nobel laureate Wilhelm Ostwald (1853–1932) to the 1922 German edition of the work, pertinent to the energetic principles Ingenieros used and the study of Psychology as a natural science. It is a hope, 80 years after Ingenieros’ parting, to bibliographically resurrect this champion of reason, who, until now, has not been given his due placement in the international psychological and biomedical literature.

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1. Introduction

Eighty years after his death, José Ingenieros (Fig. 1), one of Argentina's estimable intellectuals and highly read author, continues to be a luminary of Latin American generations. The present study aims at bibliographically resurrecting this champion of reason and at 'rediscovering' one of his earlier works, *Principios de Psicología Biológica* (Ingenieros, 1910, 1913a). Being the first attempt to establish a comprehensive psychological system in South America (Sánchez Sosa and

Valderrama-Iturbe, 2001), that work places emphasis on the biological basis of mental phenomena.

Slightly before that time, specifically in 1895, two other pioneers of the brain sciences had independently conceived works on neurobiological schemes of the mind: Cajal with his 'Conjectures on the anatomical mechanism of ideation, association and attention' (Ramón Cajal, 1895), and Freud with his posthumously published theoretical treatise 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (Freud, 1966). In a manner not unrelated to the scope of Ingenieros' Psychology, Freud had written: "The intention is to furnish a psychology that shall be a natural science: that is, to represent psychic processes as quantitatively determinate states of specifiable material particles, thus making those processes perspicuous and free of contradiction". What Freud had in mind, according to Barondes (1993), was that the units of such a natural science, the "specifiable material particles", would be nerve cells, the structure and organization of which he had helped elucidate in his own histological studies (Triarhou and del Cerro, 1985; Guttman and Scholz-Strasser, 1998).

In the aftermath of *fin-de-siècle* physicochemical and neurobiological repercussions on psychology, titles on 'Biological Psychology' ensuing the writings of José Ingenieros include works by Lungwitz (1925) and Bleuler (1932) in German and McDowall (1941) in English.

In *Principios* Ingenieros weaves a synthetic psychological system from positivist philosophy and physical chemistry, inditing mental phenomena at ontogenetic, evolutionary and social levels. At a time when Psychology was still closely associated with Philosophy, from which it had sprung, efforts to draw it towards biological energetics and biological generative processes were avant-garde.

In a refreshing style, the highly learned and copious writer of works from politics to philosophy, neuropsychiatry, criminology, morals and sociology, produced, almost a century ago, a proposition for psychology as a natural science. In our opinion, Ingenieros deserves a place in the tradition of physicians-psychologists – *quod vide* Ernst von Feuchtersleben, Wilhelm Wundt, William James, Ivan Pavlov, Vladimir Bechterew, Sigmund Freud, Eugen Bleuler, Jean Piaget and the akin – who have made valuable contributions to the emergence of psychology as a biological science in its formative years in the 19th and in the 20th centuries. We trust that this report may signal the proper placement of *Principios* among key historical works in Biological Psychology.



Fig. 1. José Ingenieros (1877–1925). Photo from cover of special issue of *Nosotros* (Editorial, 1925). Signature from dedication of doctoral thesis to friend Emilio Zucarini. (Original in the author's archive).

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