

CHAPTER 7

WUNDT AS AN ACTIVITY/ PROCESS THEORIST

AN EVENT IN THE HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL THINKING

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INTRODUCTION

The first time I met Kurt Danziger was at the 1981 conference of Cheiron in River Falls, Wisconsin. One day, I found myself walking next to Kurt on the way to the campus restaurant for lunch. I frantically introspected for a striking line to start a conversation and finally came up with “I admire your work on Wundt”. It worked.

About 15 years later, Wundt played a different role. In a paper on the future of the history of psychology Danziger (1994) noted that over the past decade professional historians had become increasingly salient in psychology. Until the 1980s the field had virtually been the exclusive domain of psychologists in the reflective phase of their life-cycles. Since a similar change from insider to outsider historian had occurred in the natural sciences too, Danziger questioned the relation between the two historiographies. In a comment I argued that the picture of the insider/scientist-scholar painted by Danziger was fairly bleak and called for a touch of colour (Van Rappard, 1997). Setting out to add some, I referred to a couple of lines in Danziger’s paper where he observed that while Weber and Durkheim, and Smith and Ricardo are still studied by sociologists and economists, “Newtonian studies are not part of physics but belong to an altogether *different* discipline, the history of science” (Danziger, 1994, p. 472, emphasis added). These lines formed the *Blickpunkt* of my comment. Why mention sociologists and economists, I asked,

but not psychologists? Cannot it be easily observed that in our field classics like Wundt, James and Vygotsky frequently feature in the foundational, theoretical and/or critical studies that are still abundantly published in psychology? And I added that in such works, Wundt, James and Vygotsky (and many others) are not studied because of their purely historical interest but because of their paradigmatic views on the field. Pertaining to sociology Kuklick wrote, “the founders of the discipline—and particularly the so-called ‘holy trinity’, composed of Weber, Marx, and, above all, Durkheim—are regarded as *still-active participants* in sociological debates” (Kuklick, 1999, p. 232, emphasis added). I contend that this holds for psychology too. According to Zuriff (1985),

“... the science of behavior has made significant strides over the past seventy years, and the behavioral scientists of 1920 have very little of interest to say to their counterparts of today concerning behavioral theory. However, on the conceptual level, behaviorism (and psychology in general) has not shown similar progress. The fundamental questions concerning the nature of psychology have not been answered, nor is it obvious that progress is being made. Instead, certain recurring themes are discussed, debated into a numbing stillness, and dropped unsettled, only to reappear years later in a different guise and under a new terminology. Therefore, the behaviorist of 1920 may have much of relevance to say to the modern psychologist formulating a conceptual framework for psychology. Indeed, early behaviorists often are more explicit on the reasons behind a particular position than later works, which may adhere to a behaviorist tenet out of a sense of loyalty to a school even though the original reasons have long been forgotten or may no longer be valid”. (p. 5)

Just like in sociology and economics, contemporary psychologists often think it useful to dig out the conceptual veins that can be mined from the works of the classics in order to participate in current debates. It should be clear that I am referring to the debates on ‘the fundamental questions concerning the nature of psychology’ (Zuriff), which, although neglected by mainstream researchers take place among theoretically inclined psychologists (e.g., Barbalet, 1999; Greenwood, 1999; Harré, 2000). By their very nature such questions border on philosophy, where, according to Haldane (2000), “... there is hardly anything new under the sun—or in our thoughts about our ideas of it” (pp. 468–469). This explains, I think, the place of the classics in the theoretical debates in psychology, sociology, and economics as well as, of course, philosophy. In many cases the participants in these debates are not, and given their purpose need not be, concerned about the strictures of current historiography. After all, these ‘still-active participants’ most often are scientist-scholars who are interested in the classics of their field from an insider point of view, that is, they take a science-related perspective. As I see it, it is in this context that the contemporary relevance of history for psychology may be understood, along with the place of the insider historian. In this regard the distinction made in economics between the economic and social *history* of the field on the one hand, and the history of economic *thinking* on the other, may be useful

to keep in mind. Kelley (2002, p. 12) has drawn an analogous distinction between cultural and intellectual history, whose relationship is described in terms of each other's 'outside' and 'inside', respectively. Fitting in with this suggestion, a practical difference between economic history and the history of economic thinking is that economic history tends to be taught by professional historians—economic outsiders in other words—but the history of economic thinking by economist-historians, that is, economic insiders.

In spite of the historiographic debates since the 1980s the greater part of what passes for 'history' of psychology does not live up to the demands of professional history (Coleman, Cola & Webster, 1993) and I contend that it had better be called 'history of psychological thinking'. Although the professional history of the field has become much more sophisticated over the years, as a theoretical psychologist I am more deeply concerned with the insider history of psychological thinking than with the outsider professional history and its particular strictures. Since it still holds true that many historical issues "are not distant problems for psychology" (Young, 1966, p. 21) I think it is important that such issues are studied by psychologist-scholars, reporting to psychologists. After all, in contradistinction to the former, professional historians work in a different field than psychology and "claim to have found a privileged view from the outside" (Kelley, 2002, p. 13). I have therefore never quite understood why the programmatic statements of critical historians, new historians, educated psychologists, or professional historians had to be so markedly exclusive. Would it not have been more productive to discuss what historiography is geared to what type of issue? Would not the 'new historians' have been well-advised to focus on the relative merits of the various historiographies rather than 'old history' bashing? And vice versa for that matter? Had these debates sounded a more inclusive tune, I cannot help thinking, the insider/outsider debates might have been more pragmatic-methodological and, perhaps, the fields of history and psychology might not have drifted apart (Van Rappard & Van Strien, 1993, p. 2).

In view of the above, it seems fitting to focus once more on Wundt. An additional reason is that, as we will be able to note in the following pages, Wundt features prominently in Danziger's oeuvre. In this essay, Wundt's mature psychology will be shown to allow description as a coherent system, based on activity-psychological assumptions. Moreover, this description is intended as an instance of the history of psychological thinking.

ACTIVITY PSYCHOLOGY

Elsewhere I have argued, concurring with Danziger (1980a), that the German tradition in psychology whose philosophical foundations were laid in the writings of Leibniz and Hegel conceived of the mind as activity (Van Rappard, 1987; Bem & Van Rappard, forthcoming). This does not mean that the contents of the

mind, stressed by the empiricist ‘way of ideas’, were denied but that activity was considered the fundamental one of the activity-content distinction. This assumption did not function as a straight-jacket. Activity can be called a ‘category’, that is, paraphrasing Danziger (1997, p. 6), it operated at the level of the pre-understanding of that which a number of continental psychological theories were theories of. Operating at a deeper and more comprehensive level, the activity-category was spacious enough to accommodate a variety of psychological elaborations, which, however, tended to have a limited number of characteristics in common.

One of these characteristics comes to the fore in the general acknowledgment of the dynamic nature of consciousness. For instance, Wundt and Dilthey stressed consciousness as a formative activity. Activity as a formative force may be noted in some schools within the broad Gestalt-psychological movement too, even if the best-known one, the Berlin-school, happens to not quite fit in with the overall activity-scheme. Moreover, activity is seen in Brentano’s ‘acts’, Külpe’s ‘determining tendency’, Freud’s ‘libido’ and, though less clearly, in Ebbinghaus too. To some extent a line may be drawn from the drive for self-unfolding in Leibniz and Hegel to activity in German psychology around 1900 as well as Vygotsky’s Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Bem & Van Rappard, forthcoming). It is also worthy of note that activity provided what may perhaps be called the ‘ground-layer of consciousness’. By this I mean that according to the activity tradition the mental contents that are introspected are never experienced as disconnected parts of the mind but as contents that, along with other contents, are situated in the dynamic ground of mental activity. Conceiving of activity as the ground-layer of the mental contents implies the existence of two layers or levels of consciousness: the level of the focally perceived contents on the one hand, and the ground-layer that one can only sense or be tacitly aware of on the other.

The lower level comprises a larger and more comprehensive field than the higher-level one, which tends to be identified with attention (apperception). At this level, the mental contents are attentively or focally known but also, and this is theoretically important, as ‘originating from and hence still forming part of the ground-layer’. Even at the high level of apperception the mental contents are never experienced as isolated and therefore ‘elemental’ parts of consciousness but always as parts of a larger whole. The typically German recognition of the ground-layer of consciousness has brought with it the equally typical German stress on holism. As can already be seen in Leibniz, and on a grander scale in Hegel, consciousness is never a kaleidoscope of disconnected elemental contents but always an interconnected totality. Hegel stressed that since dialectical truth can only be found in the Whole (*das Ganze*), the interconnectedness of our knowledge was never to be lost sight of. Since the acquisition of empirical knowledge cannot but entail a curtailment and thus a distortion of the Whole, the object of study should be approached with great care. Because it should be left as much intact as possible, the researcher was urged to remain relatively passive. Instances

of such a ‘methodological passivism’ can be seen in Wundt, phenomenology, the human sciences, and Vygotsky and other Soviet psychologists. It comes to the fore in what nowadays is variously called, unobtrusive research, qualitative research, and ‘object-adequate’ research. The last term is especially telling because it draws the attention to the stress on the research object in contradistinction to the research method that can generally be seen in activity psychology. Faced with the perplexing difficulty of adequately studying human consciousness by means of natural-scientific methods, psychology has all too often one-sidedly stressed either the method or the object of investigation. Whereas activity psychologists tend to focus on the latter, their American colleagues put their money almost exclusively on method (Eisenga & Van Rappard, 1987). With regard to Wundtian psychology Danziger (1990, p. 36) noted a “tension between method and subject matter” but, as mentioned, such a tension is certainly not limited to Wundt. Moreover, speaking of a mere ‘tension’ would seem to be putting things mildly. Rather, as is particularly apparent in phenomenology and the human sciences, the words ‘gap’ or ‘dilemma’ would be more fitting since the investigators working along these lines were clear about their conviction that the natural-scientific approach by itself was incapable of adequately studying the mind. It was assigned a mere auxiliary role. Their solution to the ‘object-method gap’ typically was a firm stress on the object. A similar stress, although often in a somewhat weaker form, is characteristic of virtually all activity psychologists. It is of course part and parcel of their holism.

The characteristic topics of German psychology that were mentioned above may all be found in Wundt. But there is yet another one, typical of philosophers as Leibniz, Kant and Hegel, which has not yet been noted. I am referring to the conspicuous synthesizing tendency in their works. And surely, an attempt at the synthesis of various strands from the mental-activity as well as the mental-content traditions does also stand out in Wundt.

I am aware that pointing out the importance of the activity-category in Wundt cannot lay claim to being an original observation. In the late 1920s Boring (1957) has already mentioned much of what was said above, while Danziger (1980a, 2001a) too, is abundantly clear on it. The aim of this essay is to take activity-in-Wundt a step further by demonstrating that it lies at the basis of his psychology as a coherent system. That is, activity makes it possible to overcome what Danziger (1980d, p. 36) called, Wundt’s ‘conceptual duality’.

THE CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION OF WUNDT’S PSYCHOLOGY

On the basis of his elaboration of Tetens’s distinction between inner and outer perception (Van Rappard, 1976), Kant inferred that psychology was incapable of developing into a natural science. The attempts by early nineteenth century

psychologists as Herbart and Fortlage to escape from this verdict proved unsuccessful. The widely accepted inner-outer duality remained an obstacle. My description of Wundt's mature system will take its starting point in his concept of immediate experience, because it was geared to liberate psychology from its solitary confinement to the inner world which had by then lasted for almost a century.

IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE

As Wundt saw it, all sciences are grounded in experience—and this holds no less for natural science than for psychology. This well-known position entails that instead of basing the difference between natural science and psychology on their (outer or inner) domain, Wundt traced it to their perspective. In every instance of experience he assumed two aspects: the objects and the experiencing subject (*die Erfahrungsobjecte und das erfahrende Subject*). But these aspects are not disconnected. Wundt is not a dualist (Van Rappard, 1976). Subject and object merely constitute different perspectives on experience. The natural sciences study the objects of experience abstracting from the subject and, since their perspective is mediated by this abstraction they are called mediate. The significance of psychology may be seen in the fact that it nullifies this abstraction and thus studies experience in its non-mediated reality. Hence, psychology is called immediate and phenomenal (*anschaulich*). Often, the immediate-mediate pair is treated as essential for coming to grips with Wundt. I propose however, that it does not constitute the central theme, or rather, that the distinction is just one of several ways in which the central Wundtian theme comes to the fore. As will be elaborated below, Wundt's psychological system was built on a limited number of distinctions running parallel to the immediate-mediate pair. The most important ones are voluntarism-intellectualism, apperception-association, and psychic-physical causality. It will be demonstrated that these distinctions are all aimed at the synthesis of allegedly contradictory concepts by assuming them to be in what at this point can best be likened to a set-subset relation. I will return to this at a later stage. It bears repeating that the immediate-mediate distinction does not entail a duality. On the contrary, mediate experience may be thought of as that particular part of immediate experience that has been 'mediated' by scientific concepts. For instance, we may immediately experience that it is hot outside but if we wonder just how hot it is and look at a thermometer, the reading of 27 degrees centigrade is an instrumentally and conceptually mediated experience. The 'immediate' in Wundt's concept of immediate experience is equivalent to 'qualitative', while immediate experiences are similar to what is called in current debates in the cognitive sciences 'qualia' (e.g., Johnson, 1997).

In the description of immediate experience an important characteristic may be noted. Concurring with the Leibniz/Hegel view of consciousness as activity Wundt impressed upon his readers that "immediate, inner, or psychological experience" does not consist of static contents but is a dynamic interconnection of processes

(Wundt, 1918, p. 17). In *Psychic Causality and the Principle of Psychophysical Parallelism* (1894) he argued that the subject, “or to use its former term the soul (*Seele*)” is an ongoing interconnection of mental processes (p. 102). Moreover, and this adds another activity touch, this interconnection is also described as a synthesising process, a ‘psychic synthesis’. Clearly, immediate experience, mental activity, interconnection, and the synthesising process are closely related.

VOLUNTARISM

The fundamental activity-nature of the mind comes out particularly well in Wundt’s voluntarism. Just like immediate experience, voluntarism brings out the dynamic nature and the interconnectedness of the mind. What the notion meant, was that it is primarily the volitional processes that are given in immediate experience and further, that this ‘given’ precludes the deduction of data from representations and other mental contents, as practised by intellectualistic psychologists (Wundt, 1893–5, III, p. 52). However, voluntarism was not intended to replace a bias towards cognition by another bias towards volition. What Wundt had in mind was rather to make room for the volitional processes and the feelings and affects connected to them. But since this had far-reaching consequences, ‘making room’ is putting it mildly. What Wundt intended was to establish a basis for a comprehensive view of mental life (*Gesamtauffassung des geistigen Lebens*), a basis which should form a supplement (*Ergänzung*) to intellectualism and which could be possible only on the basis of the recognition of feeling (*Gemüth*). He argued that psychology would remain incapable of getting an adequate picture of its aim until the discipline realised that volition constitutes the central process of the mind (Wundt, 1893–5, III, p. 165). Using the term ‘voluntaristic psychology’ Wundt suggested that the mind was to be understood in the light of the volitional processes, that is, as ‘fleeting events’ (*fließende Ereignisse*).

Next to its dynamic, fleeting nature, the unity of the mind constitutes the second viewpoint advanced by voluntarism. In his *Definition of Psychology* (1896) Wundt maintained that the mental processes form a ‘unitary process’ (*ein einheitliches Geschehen*). Since representations, feelings, and will can only be approached as separate processes on the basis of analysis and abstraction, feeling and will, he said, were entitled to the same priority as sensation and representation, which had been stressed almost exclusively in the past (Wundt, 1896, p. 51). Moreover, since the various mental processes are inseparably connected parts of a single unitary process, the psychologist should keep in mind that it is in the synthesis of these parts that the basic condition of psychological research is found.

ACTIVITY AND PROCESS

The actuality and fleeting nature of the mind clearly point to Wundt’s activity stance, and more indications will be seen below. But at this juncture I would like

to digress from the main line of my argument in order to demonstrate that activity psychology can be philosophically contextualised as ‘process metaphysics’.

Just like the former, process metaphysics is a broad movement comprising many approaches. It can be traced to early Greek philosophy, especially Heraclitus, whose *panta rei* is a well-known, if not very substantial summary of process metaphysics. The guiding idea is that the furniture of the world can best be understood in terms of processes rather than fixed entities and that change is its predominant feature. As put by Rescher (1996, p. 8), “process is both pervasive in nature and fundamental for its understanding”. The most important instance of process theory in early modern philosophy is Leibniz’s *Monadology*. According to this metaphysics, the universe is composed of ‘monads’, which are ‘centres of force’, or bundles of activity. Monads possess an inner drive or *appetitus*, which makes for never-ending change. All monads develop according to a ‘programmed harmony’ as individual centres of activity operating at different levels of rationality within a cosmic whole. Hegel’s dialecticism does not know stability either. Reality, now including human society, is seen as a process which continuously merges conflicting opposites into an unstable fusion. Dialecticism added the historical dimension that was still lacking in the *Monadology*. Other important processualists, as Rescher calls them, are William James and John Dewey. In 1903, the latter wrote to James, “It may be the continued working of the Hegelian bacillus of reconciliation in me, that makes me feel as if the conception of process gives a basis for uniting the truths [conceptual dualities] of pluralism and monism, and also of necessity and spontaneity” (in Rescher, 1996, p. 4). The philosopher Alfred Whitehead (1861–1947) is the inspiration of most current thinkers in process metaphysics. There are important links between his philosophy and Leibniz. Among other communal themes, Whitehead envisioned a ‘philosophy of the organism’ in that everything that exists not only forms part of an organic organisation but constitutes itself an organism too. “[It] is the pervasiveness of the growth/decay cycle operative throughout nature that marks this metaphysics of organism as being a metaphysic of process as well. The conception of an experientially integrated whole—a unit that is an organically systemic whole—represents a line of thought that links Whitehead closely to Leibniz and Bergson” (Rescher, 1996, p. 21).

As mentioned, process philosophy is a broad and hard to define movement. But a number of common characteristics can be stated, including interactive relatedness, wholeness, activity, and innovation/novelty (Rescher, 1996, p. 35). It is not difficult to relate these characteristics, at least in a general way, to crucial Wundtian notions such as, the interconnection of the mental processes and their nature of “*fliessende Ereignisse*”, and concepts referring to creativity and novelty as creative synthesis, apperception, and psychic causality.

Why should it be important that Wundt’s activity psychology allows philosophical contextualisation as process metaphysics? Although this needs more work and can only be lightly touched on in this essay, I think that approaching Wundt

as a process thinker might shed additional light on (1) the Wundt-James relation, and (2) immediate experience.

- (1) James's well-known impatience with Wundt's work would seem to provide little reason to suspect that both may also have something in common. But this has been suggested by psychologists as wide apart as Judd (1905) and Hilgard (1987). The topic has been extensively treated by Danziger (1980d) as well. Indeed, it is not difficult to perceive similarities between Wundt and James, such as—limiting myself to some that were not mentioned by Danziger—the concepts of immediate and pure experience, their activity/process stances, and their roots in Romanticism (on Wundt, see Van Hoorn, forthcoming; on James, see Goodman, 1990). In view of James's irritation with Wundt, there is irony in Judd's (1905, p. 69) praise for the latter for having taken up "very much more fully [than James] the details of discussion which issue from his fundamental thesis". In sum, there seem to be more than superficial similarities between Wundt and James. And since the same holds for James and Whitehead (Eisendraht, 1971), it is not unlikely that similarities between Wundt and Whitehead may also be found.
- (2) In his attempt to unsnarl the (mind/body) world-knot, the Whiteheadian philosopher David Griffin (1998) argued that process theory may offer an intelligible solution. Accordingly he constructed a view which claims to break down the dualism by demonstrating how mind and body share common characteristics. This is achieved by collapsing them into one category of momentary units of rudimentary sentience, which are initially subjective but may subsequently become objective. These units are construed as experiential, that is, as *events* rather than substances. As such, they provide the basis for understanding how mind and matter may arise from the same stuff. Clearly, this view entails a panpsychism, or, as Griffin prefers to call it, panexperientialism. Rather than, say, taking the insentient brain for a starting point and asking how conscious experience could possibly arise from it, the question should be, how does conscious experience arise from basic units that are themselves comprised of experience? It is important to see that consciousness is not considered a basic unit—it emerges in various degrees of complexity from a rudimentary sentience. Incidentally, perhaps a trace of the Leibnizian *petites perceptions* is perceptible here.

Whitehead defined nature strictly in terms of our direct intuitions. "What is not intuited but *only thought* is nature as consisting of absolutely insentient stuff or process. No such nature is *directly given* to us" (Griffin, 1998, p. 149, emphasis added). It seems to me that this process-perspective may help to understand the relation between Wundt's immediate and mediate experience.

Just as in process theory, in Wundt the mind is that which is directly or immediately intuited. But once that intuition is conceptually mediated, or ‘only thought’, it becomes a constant thing of the past. As Whitehead (1929/1978, p. 162) wrote, “those elements in our experience which stand out clearly and distinctly in our consciousness are not its basic facts; they are . . . derivative modifications which [are] not the order of metaphysical priority”. In other words, the mind/body problem can arise because we have taken an abstraction for a basic fact.

Now, in Wundt matter is not a substance existing next to and apart from mind. Whatever Wundt meant by ‘psychophysical parallelism’, it was not a dualism (Van Rappard, 1976). Fundamentally speaking, immediate experience is all there ‘actually’ is and it is from that ‘stuff’ that all conceptual things, both mental and material, are constructed. In other words, immediate mind is the present, mediate matter is a thing of the past. This enables me to elaborate on what was said earlier about the immediate/mediate relation being to some extent comparable to a set/subset relation: since mediate matter basically forms part of immediate mind, both belong to the same, single reality. Hence, the immediate/mediate relation may be likened to a set/subset relation because matter is a (mediate) construction out of the immediate mental. If there is any merit in this view, Wundt might well deserve a place among the ‘still-active participants’ in the mind/body debates currently raging in the philosophy of mind.

I now return to the main line of my argument.

APPERCEPTION

Earlier I observed that the central concepts of Wundt’s psychological system are closely connected and it will shortly become clear that apperception is no exception to this. The apperception process occupies such a central place that Wundt opposed ‘apperception psychology’ to the intellectualistic psychology of Wolff, Herbart, and others that he rejected. Thus, from a foundational point of view apperception can be said to correspond to voluntarism. The apperception concept was gradually developed in the editions of the *Principles of Physiological Psychology* (Van Hoorn & Verhave, 1980). Wundt described apperception as “the psychological process that, when considering its objective aspect, consists of a clarification of the mental content and whose subjective aspect lies in certain feelings which, in relation to this content, are referred to as state of attention” (Wundt, 1911, I, p. 381, transl. vR).

With regard to the objective side of the apperception process, a distinction is found between the ‘field of attention’ (*Blickpunkt*) and the ‘field of consciousness’ (*Blickfeld*). The difference between the two concerns the degree of clarity and distinctness with which the mental contents are perceived. Apperceiving, some mental contents get more clearly outlined and hence, are distinguished as field of attention (also called, focus of consciousness, or inner focus) from the rest of the initial pre-apperceptive mental contents which may then be called, field of

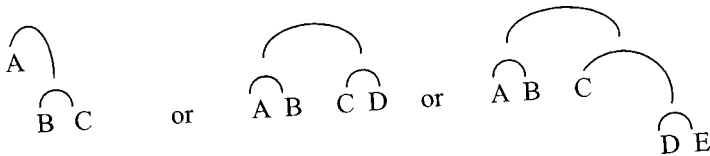
consciousness (Wundt, 1918, p. 252). The attention is never directed towards a single content but always to a narrow field.

ASSOCIATION AND APPERCEPTION

The substance of the previous paragraph can be found in any decent text on the history of psychological thinking and there would be no reason to spend time on it, were it not for the association-apperception distinction. According to Wundt, the mental clarification process may assume two markedly different forms, association and apperception, whose point of difference provides an important building-block of his psychology as a coherent system.

This is not difficult to appreciate once it is seen that association and apperception are distinguished in the same way as the fields of consciousness and attention, respectively. The two pairs may be thought of as similar distinctions, which, however, stem from different perspectives or problem-contexts. Association, a concept referring to a particular form of thought-processes shares the feature of a lack of distinct delimitation with the field of consciousness, whereas such a delimitation is seen as distinctive of both the apperception and the attention-field.

The importance of delimitation can be demonstrated as follows: Apperception is subject to the 'binary law' (*Gesetz der Zweigliederung*), which Wundt also called the 'apperception law'. The law entails that each time the analysis of mental contents produces at least three parts, their connection is binary, that is, initially just two parts are distinguished of which one in turn acts as part to be bisected, and so on. In the categories of grammar the binary connection obtains as well. These categories always go back to two connected representations. A first analysis produces subject and predicate, after which the subject may be further analysed in, for instance, nomen and attribute (cf. Blumenthal, 2001). But in the associative train of thought representation B associates with A, after which C does the same with B, etc. Because it runs without direction, the A-B-C... association could in principle continue infinitely. It lacks delimitation. Apperception on the other hand, pursues a different course. At each stage of an apperceptive train of thought we are dealing with a distinctly delimited whole. The mental content in question is analysed into A, B, C... in such a way that at any point of the analysis only two parts are produced:



Clearly, in apperception no linear progression is found but rather a directed thought-process. In this direction the counterpart can be seen of the delimitation that marks the attention-field. Wundt emphasised that the apperception process is

always directed at the representation of an objective. One may of course abstract from the purpose of the apperception but only at the price of ending up with a heap of identical and hence elementary ‘associative’ connections—the initial meaningful whole of the apperceptive interconnections would be lost.

Whereas the parts of the association-chain are connected at random, the apperception-process tries to fit in with the previous connections and if possible even with the beginning of the train of thought. Apperception thus changes an associative chain into an interconnected structure of ideas (Wundt, 1893–5, I, p. 71). In some cases, the apperception may even add independently a (third) act of thought, for instance, A-C or C-A to the judgements A-B and B-C. It is not difficult to recognise here a syllogism.

PSYCHIC AND PHYSICAL CAUSALITY

We now come to the distinction between psychic and physical causality, which, together with the two key-distinctions discussed above forms the foundation of the conceptual structure erected by Wundt.

Contrasting psychic to physical causality, Wundt demonstrated the static nature of the connections abstracted from the stream of mental processes. Because of this abstraction, relatively permanent or constant (*beharrlich*) conditions are assumed as ‘causes’. Such constancy also determines the form of physical causality, which concerns a relation between substantially thought and mutually reducible concepts. But reduction is not applicable to psychic causality. In this case, the connected conditions can be arbitrarily taken out of a complicated interconnection at any distance from each other without the need to consider the intermediate links.

Wundt’s view on psychic causality may be understood on the basis of the holistic quality he thought characteristic of the apperceptive connections, as shown above, whereas physical causality was conceived as analogous with the associative connections. In contradistinction to the ‘constant’ physical causes abstracted from the stream of connecting mental processes, psychic causality is creatively intertwined with the whole of the *Seele*. And yet another similarity between psychic causality and the apperceptive connections may be pointed out: both aim at creating connections that are as complete as possible. Wundt thought that psychic causality was typical in that near and distant mental contents (*Nahes und Entferntes*) are interconnected in the same manner and this, of course, entails that there can be no linear cause-and-effect chain. On the contrary, it is possible that causal conditions that are far off in time exert a larger influence than more recent causes. In a psychic-causal interconnection, the scientific abstractions of temporal contiguity and *causa aequat effectum* make way for the immediately given reality of the (apperceptive) intertwining of all connections. What obtains in such cases is, put in the terms of Dilthey, a dynamic *Lebenszusammenhang*. In his *Introduction to Psychology*, Wundt therefore called the psychologist “a prophet turned towards

the past". From the very beginning (Wundt, 1862) one of the focus points of his interests was the development of this interconnection (*Zusammenhang*), which he also called 'creative (apperceptive) synthesis'. With regard to *Völkerpsychologie*, it is important to note that this interconnecting process is not, according to Wundt, limited to the individual mind but also 'creatively synthesizes' the super-individual minds or volitional communities.

Summarising this section on the conceptual foundations of Wundt's psychology, I contend that the various key-distinctions that were introduced all appear to be most intimately interconnected and, more importantly, they all run parallel to each other in such a way that they can be said to come down to a single crucial idea, approached from different angles. One way to phrase this idea might be that all distinctions are geared to safeguard in their own province that the psychological and the natural-scientific perspectives are mutually irreducible. Thus, the independence of psychology would seem guaranteed.

PSYCHOLOGY

I will now continue the description of Wundt's psychology as a coherent system taking the perspective that it comprises two markedly different approaches, which, however, correspond with the distinctions discussed above. These psychologies are of course, the *Psychophysical Experiment* and the *Völkerpsychologie*, which will be shown to run parallel with mediate and immediate experience (and related distinctions), respectively.

I mentioned earlier that Wundt did not accept Kant's distinction between inner and outer perception but instead took immediate experience for his starting-point. The immediate/mediate and the inner/outer distinctions are tangential since the former was intended to bridge the gap entailed by the latter. However, Wundt did agree with Kant and many others, that unqualified introspection was incapable of yielding data of scientific significance. He therefore distinguished between the traditional type of introspection as found in eighteenth and nineteenth century psychology on the one hand, and 'inner perception' on the other. Given his rejection of the duality entailed by the concept of inner/outer perception, Wundt's use of the term inner perception would seem somewhat unfortunate.

As the story is told by Danziger (1980b, 1980c, 1990), in order to be able to establish a scientific, that is, experimental psychology, the transformation was required of inner perception into something like scientific observation. Wundt therefore conceived of a way to manipulate the conditions of inner perception so that they approximated the conditions of 'external' observation. This approximation is essentially what constituted the Psychophysical Experiment. Another important requirement for a scientific approach to inner perception is that the specific experiences obtained by a particular research project allow replication in order to

observe them. The laboratory offers the possibility to produce sufficiently similar subjective experiences by means of simple, identical external stimuli. “The general idea was that inner perception could yield acceptable data for science only insofar as experimental conditions permitted a replication of inner experience at will” (Danziger, 1990, p. 35). But this could only be achieved at the cost of restricting the scope of the experimental approach since the experimental conditions were necessarily limited to simple sensory stimuli. Only physical stimuli lent themselves to uncomplicated identical repetition and hence could be assumed to trigger identical experiences.

Clearly, the Wundtian experiment was a highly controlled affair. Only well-trained observers were allowed into the laboratory, where they were presented with carefully controlled physical stimuli. Moreover, they were required to report their inner perceptions in terms of a very restricted vocabulary, consisting largely of size, intensity, and duration. Recalling the example given above of the observation ‘it is hot outside’ as an instance of immediate experience and ‘the temperature is 27 degrees’ as an instance of mediate experience, it will be clear that the experimental subjects had to report in terms of mediate experience. Thus, not only the psychological domain covered by Wundt’s experiment is restricted but its experiential range is severely limited too. But all strictures were geared to making the observer ‘master’ of the seemingly unmanageable mental flux.

“(The psychophysical experiment) creates external conditions that look towards the production of a determinate mental process at a given moment [and] it makes the observer so far master of the general situation, that the state of consciousness accompanying this process remains approximately unchanged.” (Wundt, 1910, p. 45)

Although it is possible that we basically agree on this point, with regard to this quotation I would not, as Danziger did above, explain the function of the experimental conditions as an attempt to make inner perception approximate external observation. Rather, my activity point of view makes me think that Wundt’s experimental procedure is intended to make the otherwise unmanageable stream of consciousness fit for observation by bringing it to a stop. The *fliessende Ereignisse* of the mind allow observation only to the extent that they are, as Wundt said above, “approximately unchanged”. However, unchanged (*beharrlich*) is precisely what the mind, according to his foundational assumptions, is not. Thus, the psychophysical experiment is a paradoxical affair: On the one hand, it claimed to make possible the experimental, that is, scientific study of the traditionally enigmatic topic of consciousness. On the other hand, however, the design of the experiment required the subjects to report their inner perceptions in terms of “unchanged” or mediate experience, whereas consciousness had been defined in terms of immediate experience. Phrased yet differently, consciousness, which according to Wundt constituted a stream, activity, or process was, for reasons of methodological feasibility investigated in a way that was incapable of coming to grips with its essential features. For methodological reasons activity/process had been reduced to static,

‘experimentally frozen’ contents. That is, the integrity of the object had succumbed to the demands of method—a clear instance of the object-method gap mentioned above. In *Völkerpsychologie*, however, consciousness-as-activity could, according to Wundt, be studied in a way that was rather more adequate to its object.

Stressing the limited scope of the Wundtian experiment provides a useful starting point for going into the division of labour between the experimental and *Völker*-psychological approaches.

When a sensory stimulus enters the field of consciousness it may be perceived or ‘apprehended’—if the attention then focuses on it, the perception of the stimulus is brought to the attention field where it is apperceived. The apprehension is passively determined by the stimulation, along with the prevailing physiological and psychological conditions of the subject. One responds to a stimulus quite automatically and it is ‘mindlessly’ associated with the other mental contents which happen to be around in the consciousness-field at that time. Thus, the experimental manipulation of experience is geared to the relatively low level of mental activity, which is characteristic of the field of consciousness. Only processes of short duration that can be triggered by simple sensory stimuli, that is, sensation and perception, met the conditions for experimental scrutiny.

In contradistinction to apprehension, apperception is assumed to be a voluntary act. Once the attention is focused on a stimulus, it is ‘thoughtfully’ apperceived and thus gets woven into a mental interconnection or structure. It is at this point that thinking takes place, as distinguished from mere association. Although attention proved to some extent amenable to experimental manipulation, thinking was not. Apperceptive thought, in which the creative synthesis came to the fore could not be linked to the simple stimuli used in psychophysical experimentation. Thus, a general partition is seen to emerge between the field of consciousness, research topics as sensation, perception, and simple affective processes, and the psychophysical experiment on the one hand, and the field of attention, research topics as thinking, and the more complex affects, and the ‘historical method’ of *Völkerpsychologie* on the other hand.

VÖLKERPSYCHOLOGIE

Wundt’s earliest notions of what was to become the *Völkerpsychologie* some forty years later (Wundt, 1863) built on the work of Lazarus and Steinthal in the 1850s. The premises of their work have been summarised by Eckardt (1988) as follows:

- 1) Humans are societal (*gesellschaftlich*) beings and thus are determined by the ‘social whole’ (*Gesamtheit*).
- 2) The determining factor of the societal nature of individuals is the collective mind of the people (*Volkgeist*).
- 3) The essential form of human society is the people (*Volk*).

As will be clear from this summary, the work of Lazarus and Steinthal can hardly be called 'psychology'. Even by the standards of the mid-1800s it lacked a psychological perspective.

Starting in his late sixties, Wundt finally published ten volumes of *Völkerpsychologie*, variously translated as Folk-, Group-, Social-, Cultural-, or Ethnic Psychology. For all their inadequacy, these translations indicate that *Völkerpsychologie* was designed to study super-individual functions. In language, being a product of the super-individual or collective mind the operation of these functions may be observed. The study of language and language-as-objectified in custom, myth, religion, and other products of the collective mind on the one hand, and psychophysical experimentation on the other hand, were not conceived as disconnected approaches. It is worthy of note that the latter was not designed to test hypotheses. It was what is currently called, a demonstration experiment, that is, it was designed to 'demonstrate' certain mental phenomena and make possible their observation by stopping the mental flux. But in *Völkerpsychologie* the constancy required for observation cannot be created experimentally because of the limited scope of the experimental stimuli. Fortunately however, it is possible to observe the collective mental functions indirectly in the historical development of their linguistic products, and this is precisely what the 'historical method' amounts to.

Danziger (1983, p. 306) mentions that early in his career Wundt did already entertain the notion of the necessary complementarity of experimental and *Völkerpsychologie*. In a later paper (Danziger, 2001a, pp. 85 ff.), this complementarity is explained by Wundt's conviction that basically there are only minds in interaction. I have no reason to dispute this explanation but I would like to propose, in keeping with the aim of this essay, that another and perhaps stronger connection between experimental and *Völkerpsychologie* may also be inferred: Both are geared to the same goal of making possible the 'observation' of the mind, even if they do this in different but complementary ways. As Danziger points out, Wundt never abandoned his conviction that experimental psychology "needed to be supplemented by a branch of psychological studies that was devoted to the study of human mental processes in their social aspects; and . . . that this latter type of study was able to make use of data that were no less objective than the data of experimental psychology" (Danziger, 1983, p. 307).

Wundt has tried to transform the work of Lazarus and Steinthal along more psychological lines. Nevertheless, according to Danziger (1983) and Eckardt (1988) the result did not get beyond the programmatic stage and never developed into an empirical psychology worth the name. An obstacle that Wundt was unable to overcome is the theoretical distance between super-individual history on the one hand, and intra-individual psychology on the other. It is difficult to draw reliable conclusions about the psychological processes that determine human interactions on the basis of historical analyses of the objectifications of these interactions. Apart from this foundational problem it must also be taken into account that actually,

Wundtian *Völkerpsychologie* did not investigate human interactions because language was only studied as expression (*Ausdruck*). As argued by Nerlich and Clarke (1998), the *Völkerpsychologie* was no more than an *Ausdruck* psychology and social interaction had no place in it. Danziger has reached a similar conclusion. “The psychologically relevant environment”, he notes (Danziger, 2001a, p. 89), “was *geistig*, i.e. mental or spiritual”. This was of course not the direction in which twentieth century social psychology was to develop. Nevertheless, in spite of “its gross limitations it did contain some hints of alternative directions of conceptual development which social psychology may have ignored to its cost” (Danziger, 1983, p. 311).

In the context of this paper, this statement may serve as another example of Wundt as a ‘still-active participant’.

CONCLUSION

In this essay I have attempted, firstly, to describe Wundt’s psychology as a coherent system and, secondly, to use this system as a point in case for the history of psychological thinking.

With regard to the first goal, I think I have demonstrated that the Wundtian key-concepts of immediate experience, voluntarism, apperception, psychic causality, and creative synthesis are interconnected, or rather, that they were all intended to do the same job in their respective domains, namely, to safeguard the primacy of mind. Hence, I agree with Danziger (1980d) that Wundt was really more of a philosopher than a psychologist. Perhaps it is better to avoid the noun ‘mind’ when speaking about his philosophy and use ‘mental activity’ instead. After all, in Wundt’s view, mind is emphatically not a constant entity but activity or process. Now you may wonder, which one of the key-concepts mentioned should be considered foundational for the coherence of his psychology? But I think that this question defies answering. When I was writing a thesis on eighteenth and nineteenth century German psycho-philosophy (Van Rappard, 1976), I noticed to my despair that the key-concepts dug up from the gothic print were so closely interconnected that it seemed that between them they formed a tight circle. You may go around it many times, wondering at what point you might break it. But eventually you come to realise that it does not really matter which link you try because by virtue of their intimate connection any one may provide an entrance to the whole. Creative synthesis may have been an important guide for Wundt when developing his psychological ideas (Blumenthal, 2001, p. 130), but it is not to be taken as the one foundational concept of the mature system. As I see it, it is immaterial which key-concept you take as the foundational one—any one will do. But underlying all of them, I contend, is the intuition of mind as activity or process. Phrased differently, Wundt’s key-concepts may all be considered specific

forms, geared to their respective domains, in which mind-as-activity/process may be seen to shine through.

The second goal of this essay concerns the relevance of history for the psychological discipline. As mentioned in the Introduction, this essay is intended as an instance of the history of psychological thinking as distinguished from the history of psychology. I maintain that scattered through Danziger's writings many observations can be found that can be assigned to the former category. To give just one example,

"The history of psychology does not involve the progressive development of a single discipline but rather the often simultaneous appearance of a number of different disciplines, each one of which defined its object of study in a different way. Such definitions predetermine the range of findings and interpretations that is possible for a discipline. A historical examination of alternative foundations therefore provides a way of transcending the narrow horizons that confine the more dogmatic adherents of any particular disciplinary matrix." (Danziger, 1983, p. 303; other examples can be found in, e.g., Danziger, 1979, p. 205; 1980a, p. 86; 1980d, p. 378; 1985, p. 133; 1994, pp. 471–472; 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, p. 46)

As I see it, in this quotation as well as in the other examples the historian of psychology is pictured as a participant in theoretical-psychological debates. In this essay, two conceivable opportunities for Wundt to take part in such debates have been pointed out, while Danziger (2001a, p. 73) mentions several other general items. Now, it is in this use of our classics, I contend, that the relevance of history for psychology may be seen in particular. I think that Danziger would agree even if he has reservations, wavering between the stances of the scientist-scholar and the professional historian. "Historical studies pursued by active practitioners of a discipline often suffer from a tendency to look for precursors of present day viewpoints or anticipations of current theoretical positions", he wrote (Danziger, 2001a, p. 92). He then reassured us that this is "quite understandable if one's primary engagement is with to-day's issues", adding however, "but it does not make for very good history".

I agree—and in the preceding pages I have tried, among other things, to explain why.

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