WILHELM WUNDT AND THE MAKING OF A SCIENTIFIC PSYCHOLOGY

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W. Wundt.

PREFACE

The creation of this book stems largely from the current centennial celebration of the founding in Leipzig of Wundt's psychological laboratory. Wundt is acknowledged by many as one of the principal founders of experimental psychology. His laboratory, his journal, and his students were all influential in the transmission of the new psychology from Germany to all parts of the world. Nevertheless, until recently, psychologists and historians of science hardly recognized the scope and breadth of Wundt's influence, not to mention his contributions.[1] It was first through E. B. Titchener, and then through Titchener's student, E. G. Boring, that psychology got to know the somewhat biased and distorted picture of this great German psychologist. The picture painted by Titchener and Boring was unquestionably the way they saw him, and the way they wished to use him as a part of the scientific psychological Zeitgeist of their time.

This volume of essays on Wundt from the perspective of our times would therefore provide a fresh and, hopefully, more accurate point of view for current as well as future scholarship, not only on German psychology, but on occidental psychology and the history of ideas. The diverging points of view of each of the contributors in this book provide a unique and important scholarly dimension that could not have been possible if written by a single author. At the present time there is no biography or book of scholarly essays available in English on Wilhelm Wundt; therefore, it is especially appropriate that we issue this book during the centennial year of the founding of Wundt's psychological

[1]D. A. Lieberman's paper in *The American Psychologist*, April 1979, is a good example of an attempt to develop a contemporary variation of introspectionism based in Wundt and Titchener.

laboratory. The cooperative approach in putting this book together for publication is particularly appropriate for this series, Publications for the Advancement of Theory and History in Psychology (PATH), for it is quite compatible with many of the basic objectives that PATH has set for its goals.

The book is comprised of four parts: (1) Wundt's personal history before Leipzig, (2) Wundt's influence after Leipzig, (3) Wundt and English translations, and (4) a critical appreciation of Wundt as reflected in the literature of the past.

Part I, written by Solomon Diamond, is a comprehensive and detailed contribution, consisting of one chapter, covering Wundt's early career between the years 1856–1873. The chapter presents an original contribution in the form of new information about Wundt's personality and how it related to his theory and research.

Part II contains four chapters, the first two by Kurt Danziger, the next by Arthur Blumenthal, and the last by Robert W. Rieber.

Danziger's paper on the two traditions of psychology shows that Wundt, contrary to the interpretations of Titchener and Boring, rejected the psychological tradition of mental and individual atomism, but, rather, prompted a psychology of "apperception." In his next chapter on the theory of behavior and volition, Danziger discusses Wundt's psychology of "voluntarism," which extended the concept of volition to cover both conative and affective processes. With this theory, Wundt additionally distinguished between a developmental process of psychological differentiation and a process defined as "automatization." Danziger indicates that Wundt's theories prompted opposition from those who adhered to the sensationalist doctrine of mental life.

Blumenthal's chapter dealing with Wundt and the theory of American psychology focuses on the distinction and clash between the American and German experimental traditions and applications. As Wundt's objects of investigations derived from German philosophical traditions concerning levels of consciousness, emotion and will, and priority of mind over matter, the American testing notions were exemplary of the Anglo-French Enlightenment tradition concerning mechanistic laws, utilitarianism, and priority of matter over mind. Although these academic communities maintained close relations under the stress of conflicting cultural viewpoints, nonetheless, this is a source of much misunderstanding and misinterpretation still unresolved today.

The fourth chapter, by Rieber, on the Americanization of Wundt defines the Americanization process and its influence on the groundwork

of psychology. A vivid example of the influence of this process is expressed in G. Stanley Hall's glowing tribute to and criticism of Wundt. The functionalist–structuralist debate is also reviewed. Wundt and his "disciples" are placed within this framework. Additionally, major factors fueling this debate are considered. A consideration of Wundt's criticism of Darwin's theories, particularly Darwin's theory of emotional expression, is commented upon. Wundt's criticism of Darwin, crediting Darwin for his observational powers and nothing more, coupled with the influence of biological and physiological accounts of both mind and body, lend further understanding to the criticism of Wundtian psychology. The wavering influence of Wundt on James Mark Baldwin is discussed.

Part III is composed of two chapters. Chapter 6 comprises excerpts from Wundt's *Principles of Physiological Psychology*. Solomon Diamond has provided both a translation and a commentary on this work. The translation of Wundt's *Outlines of Psychology* is the focus of Chapter 7.

Part IV consists of Chapters 8, 9, and 10. James's review of Wundt's *Grundzuge*, Feldman's paper on "Wundt's Psychology," and Haeberlin's paper on "The Theoretical Foundations of Wundt's Folk-Psychology" constitute the critical appreciation of Wundt as reflected in the literature of the past.

The following list of Wundt's works translated into English will be of interest to those who wish to read further:

Einführung in die Psychologie [*An introduction to psychology*] (R. Pinter, trans.). London, 1912.

Elemente der Völkerpsychologie [*Elements of folk psychology*] (E. L. Schaub, trans.). London, 1916.

Ethik [*Ethics: An Investigation of the facts and laws of the moral life*] (E. B. Titchener, M. F. Washburn, and J. H. Gulliver, trans.). London, 1897.

Grundriss der Psychologie [*Outlines of Psychology*] (C. H. Judd, trans.). Leipzig, 1897.

Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie [*Principles of physiological psychology*] (E. B. Titchener, trans.). London, 1904.

Vorlesungen über die Menschen- und Tierseele [*Lectures on human and animal psychology*] (J. E. Creighton and E. B. Titchener, trans.). London, 1894.

Über den wahraften Kreig. Rede 1914 [*Concerning true war*] (G. E. Hadow, trans.). Oxford: Oxford Pamphlets, 1915.

It is our hope that this volume will set the stage for a better understanding of Wundt's contribution to psychology.

R. W. Rieber

January, 1980

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I

PERSONAL HISTORY BEFORE LEIPZIG

1

Solomon Diamond

WUNDT BEFORE LEIPZIG*

It is possible to sum up the first 40 years of Wundt's life, in the style of an introductory textbook of psychology, by saying that he was the son of a country parson, that he studied medicine at Heidelberg and subsequently served for several years as assistant to Helmholtz at that university, and that he was by profession a physiologist until, in his 40th or 41st year, he set about writing what Boring (1950) called "the most important book in the history of modern psychology" (p. 322). All this would be accurate, but also completely uninformative. The Wilhelm Wundt who is regularly depicted in much fuller yet still fragmentary accounts is a myth based on the misconceptions of some of his students, both embellished and softened by the complementary processes of "sharpening" and "leveling" that are familiar to all psychologists as phenomena of recall and rumor and that are unavoidable in that form of information transfer that we call history. In the case of Wundt, the resulting distortions have passed acceptable limits. Until we put his career in proper perspective, our view of the process by which psychology became an experimental science will be seriously defective.

This chapter has a limited scope. It deals with the first half of Wundt's life, including the period that Titchener (1921b) aptly called "seventeen years of depression" (p. 171n)—years during which he worked as a physiologist with only modest success, before the appearance of the *Physiological Psychology* suddenly made him the most prominent figure in

*This paper is an expanded version of an invited address to Division 26 of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada, August 29, 1978. In its present form, it has profited from critical readings by Karl Danziger and William R. Woodward—and would doubtless have profited more if the author were more flexible in his views.

an emerging science. This chapter is motivated by a conviction that it is not possible to understand the part that Wundt played in the development of psychology as an independent science without a serious study of his early career. If Wundt was half so great a force in the history of modern psychology as he is commonly thought to have been, a full-length portrait of him is long overdue. This chapter is a beginning.

Why this task remains to be done sixty years after his death is itself something of an enigma. Before he died in 1920 at the age of 88, Wundt had been honored worldwide for more than four decades as the world's leading psychologist. At that time, it would have seemed safe to assume that his life and work would before long engage more than one enthusiastic biographer. In fact, the closest approach to a full account is that by Petersen (1925), which is explicitly directed primarily to elucidating Wundt's position as a philosopher rather than as a psychologist. One searches the literature in vain for any comprehensive treatment that is written with historical perspective. The imposing presence that overawed his students seems still to inhibit the work of even his most recent chroniclers. Furthermore, some recent articles (Eschler, 1962; Kossakowski, 1966) make such arbitrary selections of facts and quotations as to introduce new distortions.

This situation is in striking contrast to the intensive treatment that has been given to the life of William James (e.g., H. James, 1920; MacLeod, 1969; Perry, 1935), who in much the same period passed through the same progression from physiologist to psychologist to philosopher, and whose name was often linked with that of Wundt during their lifetimes. For example, in 1896, at a time when enthusiasm for the "new psychology" was running high on both sides of the Atlantic, a leading German newspaper reporting on the Third International Congress of Psychology at Munich commented that "the psychological pope of the Old World, Wundt, and the psychological pope of the New World, James, were both distinguished by their absence" (Perry, 1935, Vol. 2, p. 145). There was more than a little truth in this hint of schism in the new faith, but the relative importance of the two leaders in the eyes of their knowledgeable contemporaries was probably correctly reflected in the fact that Villa's *Contemporary Psychology* (1903) cited Wundt on 95 pages and James on 37.

The scope of this chapter is indicated by its title. Wundt went to Leipzig in 1876, at the age of 44. He was to die at 88. Our intent is to establish a foundation that will permit a meaningful discussion of his work during the second half of his life, but that task is left to future

papers, not necessarily by this writer. Readers who are unhappy with some of the interpretations offered will, it is hoped, be stimulated to seek others consistent with the facts, and not simply to asseverate the myth.

A Question of Lifestyle

It is often said of Wundt that he led the quiet, withdrawn life of a scholar and a scientist, in which intellectual pursuits were always dominant. If this were true, it would be oddly out of keeping with his own insistence that his psychology is fundamentally "voluntaristic" rather than intellectual in its orientation and emphasis. He said of himself that his strongest motivations were political and that this was especially true at the high points of his life (1920, p. iv). This statement led Titchener (1920) to comment that "whatever else Wundt learned in the course of his long life he had not learned fully to know himself" (p. 75). It is nevertheless unwise to dismiss Wundt's self-characterization lightly, although we need not limit our conception of political motivation to his definition of it as "concern for the welfare of state and society." We should keep in mind also Spranger's concept of the "political style of life" (usually translated as *political type*) as applicable not only to those involved in "politics" in the narrow sense but also to those who seek to dominate some special field, even if this is done with the intention of benefiting others. Specifically, said Spranger (1925/1928), the term applies to "whoever strives to dominate through knowledge" and by assuming the role of authority (p. 233). That sentence could have been written with Wundt in mind! Both varieties of political interest coexisted in Wundt's complex personality.

Wundt's autobiography is invaluable for our purpose, and on every rereading of it one discovers fresh, illuminating sidelights. However, it is not always accurate in detail, and it shows from time to time the sort of defensiveness that must be expected in even the best-intentioned work of that genre. Specific reference to it will not be made in reporting facts about which there can be no question. Similarly, we shall not clutter the text with references to the many standard biographic sources that have been useful. They are listed separately at the end of the chapter, with an indication of the articles used in each. Throughout, we shall use the unqualified name Wundt only to refer to Wilhelm Wundt, always designating others who bear the same surname by their relationship to him.

Early Childhood and Family

Wundt was born August 16, 1832, at Neckarau, a suburb of Mannheim, which was already an important commercial center, situated as it was at the upper limit of the then navigable Rhine. Neckarau is scarcely two kilometers from the heart of Mannheim and from its great ducal palace, the largest in Germany, with a facade that stretches 600 meters along gardens sloping to the Rhine. Within Wundt's infancy, construction had begun on the harbor facilities that made Mannheim the second greatest inland port of all Europe. In short, Wundt was not born in the rural environment we associate with the term *country pastor*. However, he was only about four years old when his parents moved to Heidelsheim, which he described as "a small town or rather a large village." It was situated about one league (a brisk hour's walk) from the sizable provincial town of Bruchsal, where he later experienced the most traumatic year of his life, his first year of formal schooling away from home. The transfer from Neckarau to Heidelsheim is just the first of a number of facts that show that Wundt's father, despite some fine qualities, was a rather ineffectual person, a circumstance that was not without effect on his son. It was in Heidelsheim that Wundt spent most of his childhood, virtually without peer companionship, though fortunate in attracting the kindly interest of sympathetic adults who also helped to shape his character and interests. (Heidelsheim is not in the vicinity of Heidelberg, where Wundt either studied, taught, or summered for long periods of his life. The similarity in names means only that the common blueberry was plentiful in both regions.)

In Heidelsheim, on the afternoon of the final day of his first year's schooling, he watched from his doorstep as a crowd of peasants erected a "freedom tree" in the public square. Then he saw the burgomaster's house set ablaze by the demonstrators and later—while the local bailiff paced up and down inside the Wundt cottage—he saw them dispersed by a squadron of dragoons. To this childhood experience Wundt immediately added pictures of scenes witnessed in the greater revolution, to which this incident was a minor prelude. Early in 1849, the Republic of Baden was established, and in June of that year, Wundt, not yet 17, from a high vantage point near Heidelberg, watched the distant flashes of cannon that signaled the suppression of that republic by a Prussian army. After the reaction of the 1850s came the liberalism of the 1860s, during

which Wundt was active in the Workers' Educational League and served for a time as a member of the Baden diet.

These, except for two early memories that relate to his father, are the events with which Wilhelm Wundt chose to open his autobiography because they were "more vivid in [his] memory than many others." It would be unwise, therefore, as we have said, to dismiss all these experiences as not pertinent to an understanding of his career. If Spranger's definition of the political lifestyle is valid, the priority that Wundt gave to these events (some of which are described in greater detail later) should alert us to the likelihood that coming to terms with power, whether in exercising it or in resisting it, was to be a critical issue in much of his future conduct. Perhaps this was even the root of his later insistence that "will" is the most primitive, most fundamental psychic process.

Wundt (1920, p. 58) tells us that his father, Maximillian (1787–1846), had not become a minister by his free choice but because his older brother had been "untrue" to the study of theology, thus leaving to Maximillian the onus of carrying on the family's long-standing pastoral tradition. Those who worked in that tradition were often simultaneously active in academic life. However, Heidelberg's theological faculty was primarily Catholic in its orientation, and severe limits were placed on advancement for Protestant theologians. From standard biographical sources (including an article by Wundt's daughter [E. Wundt, 1928]), we learn that his paternal grandfather had been a professor, apparently of Baden's history and geography, at the University of Heidelberg, while acting also as pastor of a church at Wieblingen, a small town in the vicinity. The great-grandfather and two great-uncles had also been on the university faculty, one as a greatly honored professor of rhetoric who received attractive offers from other institutions. A son of the latter was for a time on the medical faculty (Stübler, 1926). All these persons were deceased before Wundt's birth, but they left numerous issues, including a cousin named Justus (Bringmann, oral communication, September 2, 1979), who was the "university architect Wundt" who directed the construction of a maternity ward in 1828 and of the university hospital in 1843 (Stübler, 1926).

Wundt mentioned no paternal relative other than the grandfather he never knew and the unnamed uncle who had been "untrue" to theology; his daughter ignored the latter. It would seem, therefore, that the "country pastor" had virtually lost contact with the better-placed members of

his family, perhaps because Wundt's father clearly was not an achiever—a fact reflected, as we have already noted, in his transfer from Neckarau to more rural Heidelsheim.

Wundt described him as a jovial and generous person, but generous to a fault: he too readily yielded to parishioners who pleaded hardship in meeting their obligations for support of the church, and hence of the pastor's family, and he displayed embarrassment when his wife tried to stretch their inadequate income by energetic bargaining with tradespeople—a normal practice of the times. In the end, relatives (doubtless on the maternal side) brought about an understanding that Wundt's mother would take charge of the family finances, something that could hardly have taken place unless they had been called on to give some financial assistance. Wundt described his father also as a loving parent who called him by endearing names and from whom he might expect consoling caresses whenever his mother, who took the more active part in his early education, administered some painful reproof.

Wundt opened his autobiography with two "earliest memories," both of which concern his father. The first was of a traumatic tumble down a flight of cellar stairs, and its recall was always accompanied by a vague feeling that this had happened while he was attempting to follow his father into the cellar. In the other, Wundt was roused from a classroom reverie by a blow on the ear and looked up to see his father glowering over him. The office of school inspector was an appurtenance to the position of pastor, and on this day, his father had stepped out of his usual role of passive observer to become a not-altogether-loving parent. How shall we interpret these memories? Wundt only said that they show how the persistence of even very early memories depends on contextual reinforcement. If we look for some more dynamic process as being responsible for their selection from the fullness of a child's experience, we are struck by the ambivalence that turns a loving father, in each instance, into a source of pain. Clinically, we know that a boy's identification with such a father can lead to distrust of himself.

Wundt's relatives on the maternal side played a much greater part in his life than the Wundts. His mother's grandfather had owned property and managed church lands in the Palatinate, but after his death and the unsettling Napoleonic wars her father, Zacharias Arnold (1767–1840), sold his property and moved to Heidelberg, on the more safely German side of the Rhine. During Wundt's boyhood, Grandfather Arnold divided his time between his piano and a roomful of plants in a home that was run