

Principles
of
Topological
Psychology

Kurt Lewin

新闻学与传播学经典丛书·英文原版系列

Principles of Topological
Psychology
拓扑心理学原理

Kurt Lewin 著
〔美〕库尔特·勒温

中国传媒大学出版社

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“新闻学与传播学经典丛书·英文原版系列”，选取了在新闻学与传播学历史上具有里程碑意义的大师经典名作。如传播学“四大奠基人”哈罗德·拉斯韦尔、保罗·拉扎斯菲尔德等及加布里埃尔·塔尔德、罗伯特·帕克、哈罗德·英尼斯、马歇尔·麦克卢汉、库尔特·卢因、卡尔·霍夫兰等这些学界耳熟能详的名家佳作。这些是传播学与新闻学的奠基之作，也是现代新闻学与传播学发展的基础。许多名作都多次再版，影响深远，历久不衰，成为新闻学与传播学的经典。此套丛书采用英文原版出版，使读者读到原汁原味的著作。

随着中国高等教育教学改革的推进，广大师生已不满足于仅仅阅读国外图书的翻译版，他们迫切希望能读到原汁原味的原版图书，希望能采用国外英文原版图书进行教学，从而保证所讲授的知识体系的完整性、系统性、科学性和文字描绘的准确性。此套丛书的出版便是满足了这种需求。亦可使学生在专业技术方面尽快掌握本学科相应的外语词汇和了解先进国家的学术发展的方向。

本系列丛书在原汁原味地引进英文原版图书的同时，将目录译为中文，作为对原版的一种导读，供读者阅读时参考。本系列丛书有些因为出版年代比较久远，也囿于当时印刷水平的限制，有些地方可能与现在的标准不太一致，在不影响读者阅读的前提下，我们未对其进行处理，以保证英文原版图书的原汁原味，

从事经典著作的出版，需要出版人付出不懈的努力，好在有全国新闻院系的专家教授们的大力扶持，为我们提供了备选书目并对英文目录进行了翻译，因此使我们得以在学术出版的道路上走得更远。我们自知本系列丛书也许会有很多缺陷，我们也将虚心接受读者提出的批评和建议。

To
THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY
Jerusalem

PREFACE

DR. WOLFGANG KÖHLER

Swarthmore College

Swarthmore, Pa.

DEAR KÖHLER:

This book is the result of a very slow growth.

I remember the moment when—more than ten years ago—it occurred to me that the figures on the blackboard which were to illustrate some problems for a group in psychology might after all be not merely illustrations but representations of real concepts. Much interested in the theory of science, I had already in 1912 as a student defended the thesis (against a then fully accepted philosophical dictum) that psychology, dealing with manifolds of coexisting facts, would be finally forced to use not only the concept of time but that of space too. Knowing something of the general theory of point sets, I felt vaguely that the young mathematical discipline “topology” might be of some help in making psychology a real science. I began studying topology and making use of its concepts, which soon appeared to me particularly fitted to the specific problems of psychology.

However, this undertaking expanded rapidly, forcing me to consider wider and wider fields of psychology and to face more and more involved problems. That is the reason why this book has seen quite a number of unfinished and unpublished editions, and why it does not yet contain the “vector psychology.” The main difficulty has not been the mastering of the mathematical problems as such, at least insofar as the topological problems are concerned. After several attempts to employ the more complicated concepts of topology, I found it both sufficient and more fruitful to refer to the most simple topological concepts only. Vector psychology will, of course, require a more elaborate mathematical setup and will—in all probability—even make it necessary to enter a somewhat undeveloped field of mathematics. But the main difficulty was the dealing with problems which lie, so to say, *between* psychology and mathematics.

We know, since the theory of relativity at least, that empirical sciences are to some degree free in defining dynamical concepts or even in assuming laws, and that only a system as a whole which includes concepts, coordinating definitions, *and* laws can be said to be either true or false, to be adequate or inadequate to empirical facts. This "freedom," however, is a somewhat doubtful gift. The manifold of possibilities implies uncertainty, and such uncertainty can become rather painful in a science as young as psychology, where nearly all concepts are open and unsettled. As psychology approaches the state of a logically sound science, definitions cease to be an arbitrary matter. They become far-reaching decisions which presuppose the mastering of the conceptual problems but which have to be guided entirely by the objective facts.

Theoretical psychology in its present state must try to develop a system of concepts which shows all the characteristics of a Gestalt, in which any part depends upon every other part. As we do not yet have the knowledge of facts which really suffices to determine this system of concepts and as, on the other hand, this knowledge of "facts" cannot be acquired without developing this system of concepts, there seems to be only one way open: to proceed slowly by tentative steps, to make decisions rather reluctantly, to keep in view always the whole field of psychology, and to stay in closest contact with the actual work of psychological research.

Such an undertaking, if any, needs the cooperation of a group. I have always found myself rather unable to think productively as a single person. I hope that this handicap may, in this case, turn out to be of some advantage, for it has made this book the result of the work of a group. Those who are acquainted with you know that you are not interested in "psychological schools," and one of the main incentives of this book is to help develop a psychological language generally understandable and independent of schools. (By the way, I have tried my best to destroy the myth that Gestaltists do not attack each other.) Yet collectives have had and will, I think, always have their place in scientific work. The group which was called the Psychological Institute of Berlin has been, I think, such a collective of friends, working together for many years, interested in all fields of psychology, and concerned as much with experiments as with theories. Whether it was valuable, history will show; but at least it was happy and lively.

May this book prove to be somewhat worthy of the spirit of this collective and of the leading influence you have had on each of its steps. For the friends scattered throughout the world this feeling of cooperation seems to continue and the circle steadily to widen. I would enjoy nothing more than to have contributed to this broad cooperation.

I dedicate this book to a young scientific center at the meeting of the East and the West where I hope new productive collectives will arise.

KURT LEWIN.

IOWA CITY, IOWA,
May, 1936.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dr. Fritz Heider and Grace Heider have not only undertaken the laborious work of translating this book, but have improved its form and contributed much to its content. I am deeply indebted to the productive help and criticism of Dr. Tamara Dembo. She, Dr. Roger Barker, and Dr. Herbert Wright have spent much time in improving the text. Dr. W. W. Flexner was good enough to read the part dealing with the topological concepts and to give valuable suggestions. I gained much by discussing several points with Dr. Herbert Feigl, Dr. W. A. Hurwitz, Dr. E. H. Kennard, and Dr. E. C. Tolman.

Harcourt, Brace & Company has kindly permitted the use of a selection from Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *North to the Orient*. Figure 6 is taken from Charlotte Bühler, *Zwei Grundtypen von Lebensprozessen*; Fig. 7 from Kurt Koffka, *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*.

KURT LEWIN.

IOWA CITY, IOWA,
May, 1936.

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PART ONE

THE TASK OF PSYCHOLOGY AND THE
FOUNDATIONS OF TOPOLOGICAL
AND VECTOR PSYCHOLOGY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE PRESENT STATE OF PSYCHOLOGY

In its present state of development psychology must be thought of as a young science. There is only one field in which it is relatively well established and in which it has advanced steadily: this is the psychology of sensation and perception. The scientific character of this field is fully recognized. Its findings are based almost entirely on experimental evidence, and even when its theories are in conflict one feels that as far as method is concerned it stands on relatively firm ground. The situation is different with the psychology of will, of needs, and of personality despite the fact that these fields have always attracted popular interest. As recently as fifteen years ago it was assumed that they, by their very nature, were not amenable to scientific methods. The little experimental work that had been done seemed too artificial and abstract to give an insight into the real processes. It was generally accepted that experimental investigations of these elusive and highly complicated processes were intrinsically impossible, at least in so far as human beings are concerned. Thus in Europe these problems were treated in a half-literary, half-philosophical way, and in America the tendency was to study individual differences by means of tests.

The only approach to deeper problems was the brilliant work of Freud. However, the attempt of the psychoanalysts to base general laws entirely on case studies and therapeutical work seemed methodologically unsound to most scientists.

This skeptical atmosphere and the undoubtedly great technical and conceptual difficulties have blocked the development of an experimental psychology of will and needs. On the