

WUNDT AND DILTHEY ON VERSTEHEN —TWO VARIETIES OF 'GENTLE-METH' (1)

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'GENTLE-METH'

From various angles a bifurcation has been observed in the history of psychology: On the one hand there is of course, the empiricist-positivistic line of development, and on the other hand there is a 'second force' so to speak, which is to a large extent characterized by its opposition to the former tradition. In this respect SPIEGELBERG (1972) has used the term countermovement, 'a countermovement to the wave of abstract science initiated by GALILEO'. And a countermovement this second force is indeed: elsewhere I have observed that most psychological schools that emerged in the German-speaking world around the turn of the century may be called, *anti-elementistic* (SANDERS a.o. 1976, 239). In their *Human Action and its Psychological Investigation* (1977), GAULD and SHOTTER saw a dichotomy between mechanistic and hermeneutical psychology, and several authors (BLUMENTHAL, 1980a; DANZIGER, 1980) in the WUNDT-centennial publications have drawn the attention to the divergent Lockian and Leibnizian traditions in psychology. GERGEN (1982) distinguishes between Exogenic and Endogenic theories of knowledge. And most readers are familiar with the *Natur-* vs. *Geisteswissenschaft* discussion at the end of the nineteenth century as well as with LEWIN's distinction between the Galilean and Aristotelian traditions.

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It should be clear that I do not imply that these dichotomies and the many similar ones that can be found in the literature (see GERGEN, 1982) are completely congruous and overlap one another perfectly, but it seems that there is at least some reason to distinguish two major traditions in psychology. Of these two 'forces' one seems to have predominated, at least in the Anglo-Saxon world, whereas the second, which is typical of Continental-European thought, may in many respects be characterized by its opposition to the former. If we call the first tradition *Methodological Positivism*, the second one could be called *Genuine Positivism*.

The concept of Methodological Positivism has been derived from KOCH's observation that,

"Sciences won their way to independence, and ultimately institutional status, by achieving enough knowledge to become sciences. But at the time of its inception psychology was unique in the extent to which its institutionalization preceded its content and its *methods preceded its problems*" (KOCH, 1959, 783; emphasis added).

This quotation makes clear that in Methodological Positivism certain fundamental ideas on method were framed before the object was conceived properly. In other words, the research object had to be adjusted to the requirements of the research methodology. There is of course nothing special about this; without at least some measure of 'adjustment' (i.e. reduction) of object to method, science simply would not be possible at all. The Genuine Positivists, however, object to the extent to which this reduction is carried out: in Methodological Positivistic psychology, they argue, the object is reduced so much that it is twisted and mutilated beyond recognition. Although the Methodological vs. the Genuine Positivist cleavage is not restricted to our century but may well go back to the Romantic Era, one of the prime examples of Methodological Positivism can be found in John WATSON's conviction that psychology would not be able to use observation and experiment until it had conceived of a research object that is publicly observable and that, consequently, consciousness should be abandoned and replaced by 'behavior'. In other words, when the object is methodologically embarrassing, drop it and study something else instead - a strategy that is undoubtedly attractive for its simplicity, but also, alas, a little inadequate in the long run.

As noted before, Genuine Positivists object to this research strategy. They turn against what might be called the 'methodological *Idola*' (BACON), it being the perfect prejudice to block our full experience.

If positivism means nothing but founding all sciences without any prejudices whatsoever upon the "positive", i.e. upon what is to be grasped at first hand, HUSSERL wrote in a quotation in SPIEGELBERG (1971) from which the concept of genuine positivism was derived, '*then it is we who are the genuine positivists*' (emphasis added).

Genuine Positivists have always tended, and in a number of cases still do, to inverse the Methodological Positivistic way of thinking by putting object prior to method. In some cases the former is stressed to such an extent that it is difficult to detect even the traces of a scientific method, as in parts of contemporary Humanistic Psychology. In other cases a less extreme attitude is adopted, as in European Phenomenology, Critical

Psychology, and Soviet Psychology, but even then there is a clear tendency to develop a method that 'fits' the object, a method that is 'object-adequate'. Therefore, I can't agree with KOCH (1959) who wrote in his *Epiogue* to the third volume of *Psychology - a study of science*,

For the first time in its history, psychology seems ready to assess its goals and instrumentalities with primary reference to its own indigenous problems. It seems ready to think contextually, freely and creatively about its own refractory subject matter, and to work its way free from a dependence on simplistic theories of correct scientific conduct.

For the first time? Nonsense!. For over a century, Genuine Positivism has characteristically attempted to create an object-adequate, 'indigenous psychology'.

Generally speaking, in these attempts a methodological restraint can be found, a gentleness toward the object that is being studied, a shying away from the harsh and mutilating reduction of the object. A 'methodology of non-violence' is seen, along with a reverence for the given. The Genuine Positivist search for a 'gentle method' (hereafter: *GentleMeth*) rejects the reconstruction of the object in terms of hypothetical concepts, it refuses reduction (Phenomenology and Hermeneutics), schematization and abstraction (Dialectics) and experimental manipulation and truncation of the object (American Humanistic Psychology). Instead, *GentleMeth* advocates the 'emancipation' of the object, sometimes at the price of an all too 'soft' psychology. *GentleMeth* manifest itself in particular in holism, in anti-reductionism, and in an emphasis on subject and object being related and interdependent.

Elsewhere (RAPPARD, 1978, 1979) I have argued that in the protest made by many European thinkers against the tide of Methodological Positivism, two varieties can be distinguished. The first one lies in an effort to *Correct* the biases and limitations of the Methodological Positivist concept of science, while the second variety forms a *Reaction* to it, which is expressed in efforts to offer an alternative. By correction I mean that approach of science that envisions a more inclusive way of acquiring knowledge. It is an attempt at *Ergänzung*, at widening the concept of science as is seen in the nineteenth century in HERBART, LOTZE, WUNDT a.o. In our century a good example is found in the work of VYGOTSKY.

By reaction I mean the isolation and absolutization of those aspects of the acquisition of knowledge that were neglected by the *Naturwissenschaft*. In lieu of a widening, among Reactive thinkers conceptions are found that take the line of an alternative kind of science on a new basis. The work of FORTLAGE is a good illustration from the middle of last century, while we can set the Correctivist WUNDT and the Reactivist DILTHEY against each other, and against VYGOTSKY the oversimplified effort of KORNILOV to develop a dialectical psychology.

The reader might object that the classification as Correctivist or Reactivist depends on one's personal view of science and its rationality, nowadays so much disputed by philosophers of science, so that the use of these concepts would be rather limited. But then I would say that this is not correct: one's personal view of science is not important when it comes to determining whether a certain Genuine Positivist psychologist should be called Correctivist or Reactivist because these terms solely refer

to the attitude of that psychologist in regard to the Methodological Positivist tradition -the view of the judge on this tradition being irrelevant.

This however, does not alter the fact that it is questionable whether the varieties of GentleMeth mentioned are still relevant at a time when the problem 'what is science' is so much in dispute -even if I am quite certain that some Humanistic Psychologists fully deserve the label Reactivist.

So although it is doubtful whether the concepts of Correction and Reaction are still of great importance to the psychology of the second half of the twentieth century, they are in my opinion applicable to the situation around the turn of the century, when Genuine Positivist psychologists may have felt threatened with more right and reason by a monolithic *Naturwissenschaft*.

In this paper I want to demonstrate therefore Correction and Reaction in the view of WUNDT and DILTHEY, respectively of the method of *Verstehen*.

WUNDT

Since the spate of literature that was loosed by the WUNDT-centennial, it has become clear that the classical picture of the father of experimental psychology was distorted (see BLUMENTHAL, 1980b). There is no mistaking anymore that WUNDT's psychology is rooted in the rationalistic tradition, as will be shown in some typical problems.

Not the least of these problems lay in the difference between outer and inner perception, which KANT probably borrowed from TETENS. The concepts of outer and inner perception referred, respectively, to sensory perception and the direct, non-sensorily mediated experience of one's own mental states and activities. The difference between the two was of great importance in KANT's philosophy, which saw the inner experience as the object of psychology, and went on to state that on the strength of this it could never become a real, that is, a mathematical science. During the first half of the nineteenth century, psychology was characterized to substantial extent by efforts to reject this Kantian thought in one way or another. Of great importance was the rapid development of German physiology; soon the thought began to take root that, in the foreseeable future, psychology could be replaced by this science. Around the middle of last century it looked as if FECHNER has opened up a possibility to study the mind under experimental conditions -something that KANT had rejected in principle. In the wake of this development the scientific approach to the mind by way of the inner perception deteriorated to a method that could only provoke laughter from everyone who wished to consider himself a serious scientist.

With the above a brief outline has been given of the background of the dilemma in which WUNDT found himself. Having started as a physiologist, WUNDT could not be expected to be very sympathetic the method of inner perception. On the other hand, an incorporation of psychology by physiology could even less meet with his approval. In other words, WUNDT faced the problem of how the typically mental, that in his opinion consisted of the dynamic stream of consciousness -which was totally neglected by both the psychology of content and physiology -, could be approached in a scientific way, which in his opinion meant, experimentally.

As we know, the foundation of WUNDT's attempt to develop a relevant and at the same time scientific psychology, is to be found in his concept of 'immediate experience'. This concept was meant to define the basic difference between psychology and natural science in such a way that it would not be traced back to the *object* of study, e.g. inner versus outer perception, but to the *perspective* from which reality is being approached. In contrast to psychology, the natural sciences 'abstract from the subject' (WUNDT, 1896, 11).

With regard to this, one should know that by 'subject' WUNDT meant the 'dynamic structure of the processes of consciousness'. In addition to this, the expression 'abstraction from the subject' meant the isolation of separate moments in the stream of consciousness from the total structure. Representations, that themselves are a part of processes of consciousness, were lifted out of the total structure by the natural scientific approach and as a result of this, were frozen to petrified and apparently independently existing mental contents. With a view to this 'abstraction from the subject', the natural science way of acquiring knowledge had to be called 'mediate' and also, because it required the use of hypothetical concepts, 'abstract' and 'conceptual' (*begrifflich*). On the other hand there was the psychological 'immediate' experience, also called 'phenomenal' (*anschaulich*).

The philosopher W. WINDELBAND (1957, 569) has pointed to the fact that in the course of the nineteenth century efforts were made from various sides to do away with a number of limitations of the traditional logic of concepts. Amongst other topics the criticism was directed towards the one-sided emphasis of this logic on the relationship of the general to the particular. WUNDT also lodged objections to the assumption that some characteristic or other could be more 'general' or 'comprehensive' than the concept of which it forms part. The concept 'yellow' for example does not necessarily include all concepts of yellow coloured objects - it is not more general than 'gold' and so the latter cannot be subsumed to 'yellow'. Instead, according to WUNDT, only concepts of one and the same kind, e.g. gold and metal, could be compared with regard to their generality. The possibility of such a comparison, the so-called 'comparative method', forms the essence of WUNDT's methodological views. In the field of *Völkerpsychologie* comparison is of similar importance as the use of the experiment in individual psychology.

Before the comparative method can be applied, however, observation is necessary. It is clear that observation is not possible without a certain amount of constancy of the material to be observed but of course, constancy failed completely in the individual stream of consciousness. The importance of the psycho-physical experiment is to be found in the creation of the constancy required for observation. The experiment has only a minor place in WUNDT's psychology. It is no more than an aid for the observation of the stream of consciousness, which was to be manipulated under controlled conditions during a short period of time. In the field of *Völkerpsychologie* it is not possible to interfere in the collective stream of consciousness. But on the other hand, this would not be necessary at all because its concrete manifestations, notably language, myths and morals, already possess the required constancy. The super-individual stream of consciousness, which manifests itself in the historical development of the 'objective

mind' (DILTHEY), can be observed in an indirect way. *Völkerpsychologie* therefore studies the processes that underly the development of social relations and '*geistige Erzeugnisse von allgemeingültigem Werte*' (WUNDT, 1900, 6).

It was found above that WUNDT saw the dynamic structure of all processes as an essential characteristic of consciousness. The immediate experience does justice to this *lebendige Zusammenhang* (DILTHEY), whereas the mediate experience is marked by the consideration of isolated parts of it, which consequently take the character of static elements. It should be clear, that immediate and mediate experience are not fundamentally different. In reality there is only one, indivisible experience, which can be approached from two, mutually irreducible perspectives.

In connection with the theme of 'psychical causality' we run across the same train of thought. The constancy (*Beharrlichkeit*) of the processes detached from the total structure of consciousness, is found back in the way in which WUNDT describes the physical causality. In the case of physical causality, relatively constant conditions are assumed to be the cause, whereas in the case of psychical causality there are the immediate facts of consciousness.

(-) psychische Objecte als beharrende Träger von Ereignissen gibt es nicht (-) In der Veränderlichkeit jener Zustandbedingungen, die in die psychische Causalität eingehen, liegt endlich der augenfälligste äussere Unterschied derselben von der physische Causalität, die Unmöglichkeit nämlich, jemals ein Causalverhältnis dieser Art in der Form von Causalgleichungen darzustellen, wesentlich begründet. Es ist eben der Charakter der reinen Aktualität des Geschehens, der hier die Aufstellung solcher Gleichungen ausschliesst (-) Auf psychischem Gebiet ist die Causale Beziehung selbst in der inneren Wahrnehmung gegeben, und sie ist darum zugleich gebunden an jenen Zusammenhang des Bewusstseins, der jeden einzelnen Inhalt desselben direct oder indirect mit allen andern in Verbindung bringt (WUNDT, 1894, 108).

Psychical causality is thus seen to be characterized by the mutual interconnection of all processes of consciousness and by the fact that the abstract concept of the linear cause-and-effect chain makes room for the *immediate* reality of the intertwining of all processes.

It is, again, in the immediacy of the mental phenomena that the reason is found for WUNDT's distinction between explanation and understanding.

Als die Hauptaufgabe der Wissenschaften, deren Objecte geistige Vorgänge und geistige Erzeugnisse sind, betrachten wir es, dass sie uns diese Objecte *verstehen* lehren (-) Die Natur wollen wir *erklären* (-) Die Erscheinungen aber, die uns entweder unmittelbar als geistige Vorgänge gegeben sind, oder die wir nach bestimmten objectiven Merkmalen auf solche beziehen, wollen wir nicht bloss erklären sondern auch *verstehen* (-) das heisst wir wollen wissen, *wie sie wirklich sind oder gewesen sind*. Eines solchen Verstehens können wir uns -mindestens so lange wir auf dem Boden der empirischen Forschung bleiben -- innerhalb der Naturwissenschaft nicht anheischig machen (-) Sollte uns das letztere möglich werden, so müssten wir uns in die Naturobjecte selbst hineinversetzen können, ähnlich wie wir uns in einen andern Menschen, den wir nach bestimmten

psychischen Motiven handeln sehen, versetzt denken, um die Vorstellungen und Triebe, die ihn bewegen, innerlich nach zu erleben. Es ist daher klar, dass dieser fundamentale Unterschied der Zwecke der Naturerklärung von denen (des Verstehens) in dem Unterschied der unmittelbaren Auffassung unserer psychischen Erlebnisse von der Naturerfahrung seinen Grund hat (WUNDT, 1893, III, 81-83).

The exact relation between explanation and understanding in WUNDT's conception of science is a complicated and, to this author, rather opaque subject of research. However, there is little doubt that WUNDT did not see *Verstehen* against *Erklären* as mutually exclusive approaches of the mental sciences. And a *Geisteswissenschaftler* he was! He argued that his time was the era of the mental sciences, the natural sciences were still on the old track (WUNDT, 1893, III, 8). The future of psychology was seen at a tangent point with history and sociology. *Völkerpsychologie* is the most important part of his psychological system, compared with which the experimental method would eventually be put into the background (WUNDT, 1900, vii).

DILTHEY

DILTHEY's reactive position especially comes to the fore in the concept of lived experience (*Erleben*), that has been of fundamental importance in his thinking. Presumably it originates from GOETHE. It can be found for the first time in the letters of HEGEL (SAUERLAND, 1972).

In two respects lived experience or *Erleben* differs from the concept of immediate experience of WUNDT.

First of all, it is strongly oriented to the inner perception,

Jede äussere Wahrnehmung beruht auf der Unterscheidung des wahrnehmenden Subjektes von seinem Gegenstande. Dagegen ist die innere Wahrnehmung zunächst nichts anderes als eben das innere Bewusstsein eines Zustandes oder Vorganges. Ein Zustand ist für mich da, indem er bewusst ist. Wenn ich mich traurig fühle, so ist dies Gefühl von Traurigkeit nicht mein Objekt, sondern indem dieser Zustand mir bewusst ist, ist er für mich da, für mich, als welchem er eben bewusst ist. Ich werde seiner inne (DILTHEY, 1894, 197).

In this quotation DILTHEY's view becomes clear, that the inner perception may not be considered an 'inner' counterpart of the outer.

This difference between the 'experience' of the natural sciences and of psychology indicates that DILTHEY may not, like WUNDT, be seen as a *widener* of natural science, but that he wanted to set an *alternative* against it.

This brings us to the second point of difference between lived experience and WUNDT's immediate experience. While WUNDT wanted to preserve the 'rational core' of science. DILTHEY saw in this the very adversary. In unmistakable terms he rejected it.

In den Adern des erkennenden Subjekts, das Locke, Hume und Kant konstruierten, rinnt nicht wirkliches Blut, sondern der verdünnte Saft von Vernunft als blosser Denktätigkeit (-) Diese Maschine hätte nicht für einen Tag die Fähigkeit, sich in der Welt zu erhalten (DILTHEY, 1883, 124).

An irrationalist, or better: *anti-rationalist* tendency manifests itself clearly. Qua philosophy of life it exhibits some conformity with NIETZSCHE. For DILTHEY the basic fact was to be found in the 'real, lived life' (*Leben*) of which lived experience or *Erleben* formed the smallest unit. It is important to realize that when writing this, DILTHEY did not have in mind an epistemological view but an essential characteristic of human existence,

Der Wert des Lebens wird (-) vor allem gefühlt in der Betätigung der Kraft; seine höchsten Momente liegen ihm in der Leidenschaft, welche die Ganzheit der Person bewegt; so hat er das stärkste Bewusstsein seines Selbst im Spiel mit der Gefahr und mit dem Leben (DILTHEY, 1932, 42).

The unformed, undirected and uninhibited impulse was glorified; 'Nicht Form', sondern Kraft; nicht begrenzende Anschauung, sondern Wille' (DILTHEY, 1900, 321).

Closely connected with this anti-rationalism is the characterization of the stream of life as an 'historical proces'. In this DILTHEY's 'alternativism' culminates. Just like the concept of lived experience, *Geschichtlichkeit* or historicity originates from the Romantic Era. HEGEL has probably created it (von RENTHE FINK, 1964). Since the eighties of last century *Geschichtlichkeit* was frequently mentioned, often in one breath with *Historismus*.

DILTHEY's use of it is explicitly directed against the a-historical way of thinking of Methodological Positivism. Moreover, the concept of historicity in DILTHEY has clear conservative characteristics. Particularly the overpowering position of logic was denounced in his emphasis on the essential historical nature of man and society, just as the conception that the scientific quality of knowledge is closely bound with the extent to which it is formulated mathematically. The latter view was closely connected with the so-called epistemological point of view: the attempt to reach back behind the fundamental conditions of our knowledge in order to get at a metaphysical reconstruction of reality. DILTHEY however, being a Genuine Positivist, believed that 'hinter das Leben das Erkennen nicht zurückgehen kann' (DILTHEY, 1911, 184). Therefore, against the thought of reconstruction he argued that every pretention of an absolute starting-point for the acquisition of knowledge had to be given up in favour of an effort 'das Leben aus sich selbst zu verstehen'.

The concepts of *Leben* and *Geschichte*, which occupy such a prominent place in this alternative approach, were practically considered synonyms by DILTHEY.

Leben (-) ist seinem Stoffe nach eins mit der Geschichte (-) Geschichte ist nur das Leben, aufgefasst unter dem Gesichtspunkt des Ganzen der Menschheit, das einen Zusammenhang bildet (DILTHEY, 1910, 256).

The term 'structure' (Zusammenhang) referred to the fundamental community of man as a result of his collective participation in history. 'Life' refers to the historical background, which differs in the various cultural eras and peoples and with which they are thoroughly imbued. Therefore, the objectivations of this historical community, the so-called 'objective mind', should not be seen as more or less fossilized 'means of knowledge'. On the contrary, in them the historical reality forms itself and becomes manifest. Man experiences life as meaningful, he gives expression to this experience of meaning and this expression is open to understanding (*Verstehen*). DILTHEY's point

of departure lay in the essential unity of lived experience, objectivation and understanding. Lived experience is a pre-conscious way of knowing in which subject and object are not yet differentiated. Life that knows itself in the immediate *Innewerden* is obscure and unexplicated, non-recurring and restricted. But the lived experience is not condemned to remain confined in itself, on the contrary, it has a deeply anchored tendency to express itself and to take form. 'Jedes Innen sucht Ausdruck in einem Aussen und (schafft) so immer Symbole' (DILTHEY, 1931, 15). In the multitude of objectivations, the inner nature will try to clarify and unfold itself.

According to DILTHEY 'self-explication of life' takes place if life knows how to express itself, in order to recognize itself in its own products and so to come to a deepened consciousness of itself. 'Nur was der Geist geschaffen hat, versteht er' (DILTHEY, 1910, 148).

It is true that understanding presupposes lived experience as a starting-point, but it cannot stop there. The subjective limitations of lived experience are overcome, if understanding enables it to push through to the collective life and only then comes to full *Lebenserfahrung*. 'Es ist der Vorgang des Verstehens, durch den das Leben über sich selbst in seinen Tiefen aufgeklärt wird' (DILTHEY, 1910, 87).

This definitely tells a different story than WUNDT had to tell. EISLER (1910, III, 413) distinguishes two varieties of *Verstehen*. First, *Verstehen* in a wider sense, that is, the historical understanding of a process, such as found in WUNDT's attempt at correction by widening the concept of science. Furthermore, there is *Verstehen* in a narrower sense, which according to EISLER refers to the method that reactionists like DILTHEY set as an alternative approach against the explanatory method of the natural sciences.

NOTES

- (1) Part of this paper is a revised version of a paper originally appearing in the *Netherlands Journal for Psychology*, 1978.

SUMMARY

In this paper two psychological mainstreams are distinguished, Methodological and Genuine Positivism. In contradistinction to the former, Genuine Positivism is characterized by GentleMeth, that is, the search for an object-adequate or gentle methodology. In the history of psychology, two varieties of GentleMeth can be found (1) attempts at Correction of, and (2) Reaction against natural science. These varieties are illustrated by the views of, respectively, WUNDT and DILTHEY on the method of Verstehen.

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