

CARL STUMPF AND THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF PSYCHOLOGY AS A NEW SCIENCE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BERLIN

LOTHAR SPRUNG\*

HELGA SPRUNG

SIBYLLE KERNCHEN

Department of Psychology  
Humboldt University of Berlin

For an historian it is a most pleasant task to share with his colleagues information about ideas, lines of development, persons, and the influences they exerted; that - justifiably or not - had been forgotten for some time. Despite his considerable achievements, pertaining equally to experimental psychology, musicology and philosophy, Carl STUMPF (1848-1936) -at least in the history of psychology- is today one of the little known contemporaries of Wilhelm WUNDT (1832-1920), and Hermann von HELMHOLTZ (1821-1894); (see BROŽEK, PONGRATZ, 1980; BRINGMANN, TWENEY, 1980; SPRUNG, SPRUNG, 1981, 1983, 1983a; ECKARDT, SPRUNG, 1983). Yet, the mere number of his pupils who became famous is quite high. Thus he taught and supported the endeavors of almost everyone of the Gestalt-psychologists, who later on became internationally known. To name only a few: Max WERTHEIMER (1880-1943), Wolfgang KÖHLER (1887-1967), Kurt KOFFKA (1886-1941), and Kurt LEWIN (1890-1947). His achievements as regards the official recognition (wissenschaftspolitische Leistung) of psychology were and still are most impressive even today: the development of the Berlin Institute for Psychology as one of the world's biggest and most efficient institutes for psychology of that time; the

\*LOTHAR SPRUNG: Department of Psychology, Humboldt University of Berlin, Oranienburgerstr. 18, 1020 Berlin, G.D.R.

setting up of a centre for research on anthropoids on Teneriffe (Anthropoidenstation), or the building up of the archive of phonogrammes (Phonogrammarchiv) for use as a collection of musical-ethnological data. But despite all that, the name of Hermann EBBINGHAUS (1850-1909) is better remembered in connection with the foundation of the Berlin Institute for Psychology; the name of W. KÖHLER, with the research centre on Teneriffe; the name of Erich Moritz von HORNBOSTEL (1877-1935), in connection with the archive for phonogrammes. STUMPF's pupil Edmund HUSSERL (1859-1938) became better known among phenomenological philosophers.

In this paper we cannot and do not want to probe the question as to why STUMPF's part in this series of great achievements was overshadowed so much by that of his contemporaries and his pupils. What we want to do is to outline STUMPF's contributions made at the Berlin University, to give an account of his life, his work, and his influence - brief as it has to be within the framework of this paper.

Carl STUMPF was born on 21 April 1848 in Wiesentheid, a small place in Bavaria. He began up his studies in 1865 in Würzburg, where he was influenced mainly by the philosopher Franz BRENTANO (1838-1917), an influence which was to stay with him all his life. Thus he dedicated his last comprehensive work "Erkenntnislehre" (Philosophical Approach to Scientific Thinking) - posthumously published in 1939 - to his teacher F. BRENTANO on the occasion of his 100th birthday.

Following BRENTANO's recommendation, STUMPF changed over to Göttingen in 1867, where he completed his dissertation on a philosophical subject in 1868 under Rudolph Hermann LOTZE (1817-1881). Two years later, he completed his "Habilitation" academic qualification in the same field, and in 1873 he accepted appointment as BRENTANO's successor in Würzburg. In 1879 he went to Prague as (Full) Professor (ordentlicher Professor), accepted an appointment in Halle in 1884, and in Munich in 1889, from where he went to Berlin in 1893. Here he worked for 28 years, until he became professor emeritus in 1921. He died on 25 December 1936, at the age of 88.

What kind of an era does his life span?

Born in 1848, the year of a revolution in Germany that failed, he witnessed the "restauration" (Restaurationszeit), with its three German wars of unification (in 1864, 1866 and 1870/71).

In the most creative period of his life, he witnessed the rise and fall of the German Empire (1871-1918), at an advanced age the Weimar Republic (1919-1933), and finally, as an old man, the first phases of fascist dictatorship in Germany (1933-1945). At the beginning of his career as a scientist, there was the Proclamation of Papal the Infallibility (Unfehlbarkeitsdogma) by the First Council of the Vatican in 1870, with its noticeable effects, on the Catholic intellectual life, i.e., precisely the environment STUMPF came from and in which he lived at first in Würzburg - an effect, which deeply affected his teacher BRENTANO. It was during STUMPF's decisive academic years that he witnessed rapid development of science in Germany, especially that of the natural sciences which gained world-wide recognition - a process that took place mainly during the last three decades of the 19th century. Moreover, he witnessed the initial stages and the growth of the experimentally and mathematically based New Psychology which, with increasing speed, freed itself from the ties with the



"Mother-Sciences" (philosophy, physiology, physics, in order to establish itself step by step as an independent, institutionalized science (BROŽEK, PONGRATZ, 1980; BRINGMANN, TWENEY, 1980; SPRUNG, SPRUNG, 1983, 1983a). This emergence of psychology as an independent science, with special centres, for research and teaching, was to a considerable extent due to the impact of STUMPF's work during his "Berlin-Period"

How did STUMPF's appointment in Berlin, in 1893, which was to bear so much consequence for the development of psychology at the Berlin University, come about?

On 18 June 1893, both (Full) Professors (Ordinarien) of Philosophy in Berlin, Eduard ZELLER (1814-1908) and Wilhelm DILTHEY (1833-1911) addressed a request to the philosophical faculty that a third chair to be provided. The intention was twofold: to relieve the two aged professors, on the one hand and, on the other hand, to establish a section "...for psychology, especially for experimental psychology, as well as for a philosophy based on natural sciences..." (HIRSCHFELD, 1893) (1) DILTHEY wrote in a special memorandum (Denkschrift), dated 13 July 1893 on the appointment to this chair: "We need someone, who, familiar with the natural sciences and with mathematics, is able to represent subjects which depend on them. Moreover, he is to be capable of demonstrating a way of thinking, which students derive from the study and the knowledge of mathematics, natural sciences and medicine" (DILTHEY, 1893). This description of the task to be fulfilled was wholly suitable for someone like STUMPF, in view of his development up to this point.

As regards the persons to be chosen, the minutes of the commission meeting read as follows: "Two persons are to be mainly considered as candidates for this field: *Wundt* in Leipzig, and *Stumpf* in Munich. *Wundt* is said to be more than 60 years of age, and is also said to have ceased experimenting during the last years. It would, be desirable to obtain a younger person for organizing these studies at our university STUMPF, who is said to be 45 years of age, would be a suitable member of the university staff, as he has already carried out comprehensive studies on various subjects" (HIRSCHFELD, 1893). After H.v. HELMHOLTZ, too, had expressed his appreciation of STUMPF's "Tonpsychologie" (Psychology of Tones, volume 1, 1883, volume 2, 1890) at the decisive "Commission Meeting", on 1 July 1893, dealing with the appointment to this third chair, STUMPF's call to Berlin was an accomplished fact and, as far as the occupation of this post was concerned the chances for H. EBBINGHAUS, Associate Professor (außerordentlicher Professor) for many years in Berlin, were thus practically reduced to nil (KLIX, 1979; SPRUNG, JAHNKE, SPRUNG, BRINGMANN, 1984).

This is summed up in the above mentioned memorandum as follows: "So we recommend, Your Excellency, Stumpf for the Chair in Philosophy. Among contemporary philosophers it is only he -a genuine psychologist- who is comparable to the great psychologists of recent years, to Fechner and Lotze here, to Bain and James abroad. At the same time, being a competent teacher and handling experiments with great care, he is the right person to be in charge of studies of psychology, in a manner adequate to the significance of our university, as well as to create a centre of major influence for experimental research of students and young scholars, the foundation for which have already been laid thanks to the work

of Mr. Ebbinghaus. In accordance with his experience, he will know how to avoid the dangers inherent in new experimental institutes. He will beware of infringements in the field of physiology. He will avoid what he had so vigorously fought against, the waste of students time on ineffective experiments. And the impact of his personality reflecting his sound knowledge, will make itself felt in the teaching of all the main areas of philosophy" (DILTHEY, 1893).

After he had accepted the offer, Carl STUMPF was appointed (Full) Professor of Philosophy in Berlin on 18 December 1893, in accordance with the proposal of the faculty. He was committed "...to represent this science in harmony with the other specialists (Fachprofessoren) in lectures and exercises..." as well as "...to be the head of the department (Seminar) to be founded for experimental psychology" (BOSSE, 1893).

During the 28 years of his work in Berlin, STUMPF made out of the Berlin Institute one of the world's biggest and most efficient psychological centres of research and teaching. Thus Berlin increasingly became a competitor to Leipzig, where WUNDT worked until 1917, a competitor which had to be taken seriously.

Carl STUMPF was an extremely versatile person. He studied problems of auditory perception, tone psychology (Tonpsychologie) as well as problems of space perception (Raumvorstellungen; STUMPF, 1873) and emotions (Gefühlsempfindungen; STUMPF, 1928).

He enriched musicology through a great number of empirical and theoretical studies (e.g. STUMPF, 1921). In 1898 he established the journal "Beiträge zur Akustik und Musikwissenschaft" (Contributions to Acoustics and Musicology), for which he wrote numerous articles. He worked on problems pertaining to ethics (e.g. STUMPF, 1909), biographies (e.g. STUMPF, 1928a), aesthetics, metaphysics, the theory of evolution, and child psychology, as well as on questions concerning problems of methodology, the theory of science, theory of probability, and methods of research (STUMPF, 1907, 1907a, 1910, 1938; see also SPRUNG, SPRUNG, 1984).

In addition, he was an effective organizer in the field of science, as well as a good diplomat. He not only built a technically well-equipped institute (STUMPF, 1910a), but as Chancellor of Berlin University (1907-1908), as a member of various academies, and organizations, he contributed importantly to developing and establishing psychology as a science. Also to be remembered are his manifold activities as university lecturer, the range of which may be seen from the list of lectures given at the Berlin University. According to the evidence he gave himself, lecturing was not what he preferred. STUMPF wrote in his biography in 1924: "I cannot say, that I was an enthusiastic lecturer; moreover, this responsibility often seemed to me a rather irksome interference in my research - which seemed to me to be my main object... But I do, of course, appreciate the great advantages of having to combine teaching with research, especially due to the necessity for always having to keep the whole subjectmatter in view" (STUMPF, 1924, p. 229-230).



Last but not least, his commitment to younger investigators should be mentioned, the work of whom he promoted and supported indirectly or directly (e.g. W. KÖHLER) to such an extent that Berlin became a highly stimulating place for the development of psychology, the first two decades of this century (ASH, 1982). For us there cannot be any doubt that the often glorified "atmosphere" of the Berlin Institute in the twenties was due to STUMPF (MEILI, 1972; METZGER, 1970, 1972).

Birthdays are rightfully used as occasions for remembering and expressing gratitude. We wish to express our gratitude to Josef BROŽEK for his life-long endeavors in promoting the history of psychology, for encouraging the efforts of "younger" scientists in this field, and above all, for creating "mental links" between those who are searching for truth, and are dedicating their work to the promotion of understanding between the peoples throughout the world - in this our 20th century, so full of bloodshed.

Homage had to be paid to Carl STUMPF, one of the great men, who stood at the beginning of the development of psychology as an independent science at Berlin University, at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, the memory of whom was unjustly overshadowed by that of more famous contemporaries and followers.

## SUMMARY

Homage was paid to the life, the studies, and the impact of Carl STUMPF (1848-1936), whose work culminated in the institutionalization (de jure) of psychology at the Berlin University.

A further aim of this brief description was to characterize Carl STUMPF's personality, and to convey information about the conditions prevailing at the University of the capital of the "Deutsches Reich."

By pointing to the diversity of his scientific and administrative achievements, attention is directed to one of the "pioneers" of New Psychology, the memory of whom was unjustly neglected.

## NOTES

- (1) All quotations from German sources were translated into English by the authors of this paper.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ASH, M.G.: *The Emergence of Gestalt Theory: Experimental Psychology in Germany 1890-1920*. A thesis presented to the Department of History, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1982. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 1982, 43.
- BOSSE, M.: *Schreiben an die Philosophische Fakultät der Berliner Universität vom 18.12.1893*. Universitätsarchiv der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Dekanat der Philosophischen Fakultät, Akte Nr. 1462, Blatt 129.
- BRINGMANN, W.G.; TWENEY, R.D. (Eds.): *Wundt - Studies*. Toronto. Hogrefe, 1980.
- BROŽEK, J., PONGRATZ, L.J. (Eds.): *Historiography of Modern Psychology*. Toronto. Hogrefe, 1980.
- DILTHEY, W.: *Denkschrift der Philosophischen Fakultät betreffend die Besetzung einer dritten ordentlichen Professur für Philosophie vom 13. Juli 1893*. Universitätsarchiv der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Akte Nr. 1462, Blatt 105-118.
- ECKARDT, G.; SPRUNG, L. (Eds.): *Advances in Historiography of Psychology*. Berlin. Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1983.
- HIRSCHFELD, O.: *Protocoll der Commissionssitzung betreffs Besetzung der dritten Professur für Philosophie: Sonabend d. 1. Juli 1893, 11 1/4 Uhr*. Universitätsarchiv der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Akte Nr. 1462, Blatt 100-103.
- KERNCHEN, S.: *Carl Stumpf - Beiträge zu seinem Leben, Werk und Wirken*. Berlin, Diplomarbeit an der Sektion Psychologie der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 1982 (unveröffentlicht).
- KLIX, F.: "Hermann Ebbinghaus - Ursprünge und Anfang psychologischer Forschungen an der Berliner Universität". In ECKARDT, G. (Hrsg.): *Zur Geschichte der Psychologie*. Berlin. Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1979, 84-109.
- KLIX, F.; KOSSAKOWSKI, A.; MÄDER, W. (Hrsg.): *Psychologie in der DDR*. Berlin. Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1980.
- MEILI, R.: "Richard Meili". In PONGRATZ, L.J.; TRAXEL, W.; WEHNER, E.G. (Hrsg.): *Psychologie in Selbstdarstellungen*. Bern-Stuttgart-Wien. Huber, 1972, 159-191.
- METZGER, W.: "Verlorenes Paradies". *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, 1970, 29, 16-25.
- METZGER, W.: "Wolfgang Metzger". In PONGRATZ, L.J.; TRAXEL, W.; WEHNER, E.G. (Hrsg.): *Psychologie in Selbstdarstellungen*. Bern-Stuttgart-Wien. Huber, 1972, 192-230.
- SPRUNG, L.; SPRUNG, H.: "Wilhelm Maximilian Wundt - Ancestor or Model?". *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, 1981, 189, 237-246.
- SPRUNG, L.; SPRUNG, H.: "Problem und Methode in der Psychologie - disziplinäre und interdisziplinäre Aspekte einer Entwicklungsgeschichte". In PARTHEY, H.; SCHREIBER, K. (Hrsg.): *Interdisziplinarität in der Forschung*. Berlin. Akademie Verlag, 1983.
- SPRUNG, L.; SPRUNG, H.: "Gustav Theodor Fechner y el surgimiento de la psicología experimental". *Revista Latinoamericana de Psicología*, 1983a, 15, 349-368.

- SPRUNG, L.; SPRUNG, H.: *Grundlagen der Methodologie und Methodik der Psychologie - Eine Einführung in die Forschungs- und Diagnosemethodik für empirisch arbeitende Humanwissenschaftler*. Berlin, Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1984.
- SPRUNG, L.; SPRUNG, H.: "Rudolph Hermann Lotze als Psychologe - Ein (Berliner) Rückblick aus experimentalpsychologischer Sicht im Jahre 1981". In WESSEL, K.F. (Hrsg.): *Philosophie und Naturwissenschaft in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*. Berlin, 1985 (im Druck).
- SPRUNG, L.; JAHNKE, U.; SPRUNG, H.; BRINGMANN, W.G.: "Early History of Scientific Psychology at the University of Berlin (1850-1894)". *Storia e Critica della Psicologia*, 1984 (in press).
- STUMPF, C.: *Über den psychologischen Ursprung der Raumvorstellung*. Leipzig. Hirzel, 1873.
- STUMPF, C.: *Tonpsychologie*. Leipzig. Hirzel, Band 1, 1883. Band 2, 1890.
- STUMPF, C.: "Erscheinungen und psychische Funktionen". *Abhandlungen der Königl. Preuss. Akademie der Wissenschaften vom Jahre, 1906*. Berlin. Verlag der Königl. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1907.
- STUMPF, C.: "Zur Einteilung der Wissenschaften". *Abhandlungen der Königl. Preuss. Akademie der Wissenschaften vom Jahre, 1906*. Berlin. Verlag der Königl. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1907a.
- STUMPF, C.: *Vom ethischen Skeptizismus*. Leipzig. Barth, 1909.
- STUMPF, C.: *Philosophische Reden und Vorträge*. Leipzig. Barth, 1910.
- STUMPF, C.: "Das Psychologische Institut". In LENZ, M. (Hrsg.): *Geschichte der Königlichen Friedrich-Wilhelm-Universität zu Berlin. Band 3, Wissenschaftliche Anstalten*. Halle/S., Verlag des Waisenhauses, 1910a, 202-207.
- STUMPF, C.: *Die Anfänge der Musik*. Leipzig. Barth, 1911.
- STUMPF, C.: "Carl Stumpf". In SCHMIDT, R. (Hrsg.): *Die Philosophie der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*. Leipzig. Meiner, Band 5, 1924, 205-265.
- STUMPF, C.: *Gefühl und Gefühlsempfindung*. Leipzig. Barth, 1928.
- STUMPF, C.: *William James. Nach seinen Briefen. Leben - Charakter - Lehre*. Berlin. Part, 1928a.
- STUMPF, C.: "Studien zur Wahrscheinlichkeitsrechnung". *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Jahrgang 1938*. Berlin. Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1938.
- STUMPF, C.: *Erkenntnislehre*. Leipzig. Barth, Band 1, 1939, Band 2, 1940.