

ASH, M.G. (1995): Gestalt psychology in German culture, 1890 - 1967. Holism and the quest for objectivity. New York: Cambridge University Press.

HARRINGTON, A. (1996): Reenchanted Science. Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

ASH and HARRINGTON are American historians who have each published a book describing the rise of the holistic movement in German speaking universities during the first half of the 20th century. Both authors situated the life and thoughts of a scientist in his context - *his* context, because women are noticeably absent in scientific life in that period. That context included the individual's family background, teachers, university setting in which competition for money, prestige and positions took place, journals and their editors, and the political and cultural developments. It is that context that influenced the questions each scientist raised, the language he wrote in, the metaphors he used to explain his ideas and so on. Both authors, therefore, approached history from a holistic point of view.

ASH's book expounds the gestalt theory as proposed by Max WERTHEIMER (1880 - 1943), Kurt KOFFKA (1886 - 1941), Wolfgang KÖHLER (1887 - 1967) and their students. ASH stressed that the formation of psychology took place within the philosophical faculties of German universities. Because these faculties had limited resources and professorial chairs, tensions and conflicts arose between adherents of the new discipline - experimental psychology - and traditionally inclined philosophers. ASH did not restrict himself to these sociological analyses, but also analyzed publications of WERTHEIMER and his friends for influences of contemporary scholars. He mentions then many names, for instance, Henri BERGSON, Wilhelm DILTHEY, Edmund HUSSERL, William JAMES and James C. MAXWELL. However, that makes these passages, in my eyes, difficult to follow.

ASH mentioned the principal teacher of the three gestalt psychologists, Carl STUMPF (1848 - 1936) several times and acknowledged STUMPF's influence on his students. Although he stressed the importance of the experimental method of the gestaltists, ASH did not recount how STUMPF adapted the experimental method to the specific needs of psychologists and that the gestaltists only took over and applied STUMPF's method. Yet my major criticism is reserved for ASH's discussion of the period after World War II when behaviourism was the dominating school in psychology. ASH only mentioned behaviourism in passing, while a contextual account of the gestalt theory during these years should inform the reader how the gestalt scholars reacted to behaviourism and to the threat of being banned to the fringe of psychology.

HARRINGTON's book illustrates the rise of holistic thought - of which the gestalt movement forms part - through four biographies, namely of the physiologist Jakob von UEXKÜLL (1864 -1944), the neuroanatomist and neurologist Constantin von MONAKOW (1853 - 1930), the psychologist Max WERTHEIMER, and the neurologist Kurt GOLDSTEIN (1878 - 1965). The book also sketches the lives of a few other holistic scholars. HARRINGTON's book is well written and when she discusses brain research or other technical matters, her treatments are always understandable for nonspecialists. I enjoyed reading her biographies; they are stories of

how human beings within their time and context and while carving a career for themselves, searched for beauty and meaning. It is the human element that we share with the early holistic thinkers and that bridges the gap between them and us and that makes her book so interesting.

When discussing WERTHEIMER, HARRINGTON presents one of WERTHEIMER's teachers, Christian VON EHRENFELS (1859 - 1932) in a non-traditional way. At the beginning of his career, EHRENFELS wrote one article, his (1890) *Ueber 'Gestaltqualitäten'* that placed him squarely in the history of psychology, since it is with this article that the gestalt movement started. Historians of psychology, however, have never discussed EHRENFELS' other and later works, and this seems wrong from a contextual point of view. When WERTHEIMER became a student of EHRENFELS, EHRENFELS taught in Prague and had already moved on from his earlier work. Later thoughts were expressed in the lectures that WERTHEIMER attended, and it seems, therefore, indispensable to devote attention to that later work when discussing WERTHEIMER's intellectual roots. I found it, therefore, appropriate that HARRINGTON did not linger long on EHRENFELS' famous gestalt article, but devoted more space to his (1916) *Kosmogonie*.

ASH and HARRINGTON also addressed the Nazi era and both treatments make it clear that the struggles and failures of the earlier generation of holistic thinkers contain important lessons to us. KOFFKA had already emigrated to the USA in the 20's and WERTHEIMER and KÖHLER decided to follow him at the beginning of the Nazi era. Other scholars, however, like Kurt GOTTSCHALDT and Wolfgang METZGER stayed in Germany. Both ASH and HARRINGTON make it abundantly clear that accepting gestalt theory or embracing holistic thought forms no guarantee at all for democratic thinking. Supporters of holistic views collaborated in lesser or more degree and some even to an unacceptable measure with the Nazi regime, despite WERTHEIMER's contribution to the gestalt movement and KÖHLER's personal example of protest against Nazi regulations. These two books each tell in their own way the story of holistic thinking, but their description of the role of intellectuals during World War II makes them of importance to a wider group of students.

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