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## THE SOCIOLOGICAL DECONSTRUCTION OF PHILOSOPHICAL FACTS — THE CASE OF “PSYCHOLOGISM”

“If two people agree, one of them isn’t a philosopher.” (English proverb) [Philosophers] are only in agreement when it comes to funding new chairs in philosophy.” (Franz Hillebrand, 1913)

### **Introduction**

The allusions of my title notwithstanding, in this paper I shall neither try to interpret texts by Jacques Derrida nor attempt to defend or criticize strong or weak programs in the sociology of science. Since I have tried to say something on the latter issue in a forthcoming book on Foucault (Kusch 1991), I suppose I can, without too many twinges of conscience, follow Steven Shapin’s advice and “do” rather than “debate” social studies of science (Shapin, 1982: 157). Thus, after a few introductory remarks on metalevel relativism in philosophy and the idea of a sociology of philosophical knowledge, I shall turn to a rough sketch of a sociological-historical account of one controversy in philosophy, i.e.

the debate over psychologism in Germany around the turn of the century.

### **Towards a sociology of philosophical knowledge**

Ever since antiquity, philosophers have been aware both of the large degree of controversy in their field, and of the difficulty in overcoming their disagreements. Indeed, there hardly is any other discipline that can pride itself with an equal number of studies on why its members disagree so much. Yet, and unsurprisingly, different philosophers have drawn different conclusions from this observation. The reaction most interesting from my vantage point, is to take “the anarchy of philosophical systems” (Dilthey, 1911: 3) as a good reason for adopting some sort of metalevel relativism with respect to philosophy itself, and then to go on and search for the causes of why philosophers disagree so persistently. In more recent literature, this line of thought is adopted, for instance, in

books by Peter Unger (1984) and Nicholas Rescher (1985). Unger seeks to explain the philosophers' inability to reach consensus in terms of their varying background assumptions and different semantic intuitions concerning key philosophical concepts, while Rescher believes that philosophers fail to agree purely rationally because they have different cognitive value orientations.

Although this assumption might be wishful thinking, it seems inviting to assume that the existence of metalevel relativism in philosophy would lessen philosophers' resistance to relativistically minded historical-sociological studies of philosophy. Research carried out under this heading, I submit, does not search for the causes of philosophers' controversies on the level of semantic intuitions or value orientations of individual philosophers. Instead, it will approach philosophical disagreement from the perspective provided by recent social studies of science (e.g. Bloor, 1976; Collins, 1985; Latour 1987). Thus, the historical-sociological study of philosophy seeks to provide answers to questions like the following: (1) Which social factors are needed to explain that some disagreements among philosophers lead to aggressive controversies, while other disagreements are hardly attended to at all? And, what are the typical shapes of philosophical controversies? (2) Which interests fuel philosophical controversies? E.g. "professional vested interests" as philosophers' interests to (re)define object areas for the purpose of establishing their (exclusive) competence in dealing with them; or philosophers' interest in keeping laymen out of the philosophical field; or philosophers' interests in using conceptual tools drawn from the broader cultural or social context (in order to arouse wider attention for their work); or interests in the wider society (or other disciplines) to make philosophical arguments and results effectively applicable; or then philosophers' interests in drawing support from classes and institutions? And how do philosophers create, translate and transform existing interests, both in other disciplines, and in the wider society? (3) What are, more specifically,

the rhetorical devices used by philosophers to discredit the position of others and to gain recognition for their own? (4): Which social processes can be identified in the transformation of philosophical statements into philosophical facts? Which social processes can be identified that help to bring it about that a specific argument comes to be regarded as having established a specific thesis?

### Psychologism

Perhaps the easiest way to demonstrate that these sociological-historical questions are worth asking visàvis philosophy and its history is to show by way of an example, how, as Latour and Woolgar once put it, "a hard fact can be sociologically deconstructed" (1986: 107). Naturally, talk of "hard facts" in philosophy is to be taken with a grain of salt: statements in philosophy are hardly ever as stable and unquestioned as some statements in the natural sciences. Nevertheless, there certainly are statements in philosophy that fulfill the criteria of (i) being widely accepted, i.e. being incorporated into the standard textbooks, (ii) being such that they cannot be ignored or bypassed whenever one works in the respective field, and (iii) can be used without further argument to support new statements. Statements in philosophy that fulfill these criteria we might call "philosophical facts", but not much hinges on terminology here.

I submit that the statement that psychologism in logic and epistemology is a highly questionable doctrine and that Husserl and Frege are to be accredited for having shown this, constitutes a philosophical fact by these criteria. First, this statement is widely accepted and can be found in the standard histories of twentieth century philosophy (Passmore, 1968: 186; Schädelbach, 1984: 99). Second, authors who investigate the relation between logic and psychology invariably take their lead from Frege and Husserl (e.g. Notturmo, 1985; Macnamara, 1986; Notturmo (ed.), 1988). And, third, in linguistic and philosophical debates this statement can func-

tion as support for new arguments and statements. For instance Jerrold Katz seeks to show in his *Language and Other Abstract Objects* (1981) that Chomsky is a psychological linguist and therefore is mistaken by developing “linguistic analogues” for Frege’s and Husserl’s arguments (Katz, 1981: 160–179).

### Husserl as a closet psychologist

In the following sketch of a historical reconstruction of the debates out of which this fact emerged, I shall concentrate on Husserl, for the simple reason that Frege’s writings were, for a long time, almost completely ignored by German philosophers. (This fact too calls of course for a sociological explanation, but I shall not go into this question here.) For some comments on Husserl’s criticism of Frege’s antipsychologism, see Kusch (1989: 47–54).

The natural starting point of a historical reconstruction of the controversy over psychologism are the contemporary reactions to Husserl’s *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900). After all, this book was the key text in this debate. Interestingly enough, there was no agreement among German philosophers at the time as to whether Husserl’s arguments were decisive, or whether they even were new and original. Indeed, their originality was questioned repeatedly. Of the Neokantians, Paul Natorp wrote in a review of the *Prolegomena* that Husserl’s “pure logic” was nothing but an insufficient version of the Neokantian “Erkenntniskritik” (Natorp, 1901: 270). He also claimed that Husserl had taken over central arguments against psychologism from his (i.e. Natorp’s) earlier article “Über objektive und subjektive Begründung der Erkenntnis” (1887) (1901: 274). Privately, Natorp wrote that Husserl’s arguments had been for the Neokantians “eine abgetane Sache” (an obsolete topic) (Holzhey, 1986: 261), and later he publicly voiced the view that the Neokantians had “nothing to learn” from Husserl’s criticism (Natorp, 1912b: 198). In a similar vein, Hus-

serl’s book was also evaluated by Wilhelm Schuppe, Karl Heim, Melchior Palágyi and Wilhelm Wundt. Schuppe held that Husserl merely expressed views that he himself had already developed into a fullblown system (1901: 20). Heim saw Husserl’s work more as a summary of earlier arguments rather than a novel approach to the topic (1902: 1). Palágyi claimed that Husserl had done nothing else but reformulate ideas of Bernard Bolzano (1902: 9). And Wilhelm Wundt suggested that the decisive blow against psychologism had already been dealt in the 1880s, when the first edition of his *Logik* was published (1920: 264–273).

In addition to denying Husserl major claims to originality, it was also questioned whether he had really criticized views held by anyone. At least those of the authors that Husserl had seen as the German archpsychologists still alive, Erdmann, Lipps, Sigwart, and those whom he had criticized, directly or implicitly, of displaying psychological tendencies, e.g. Brentano, Meinong, Wundt, all publicly denied the charge at least with respect to their own position (Erdmann, 1907: 533; Lipps, 1905: 522; Sigwart, 1921: 25; Brentano, 1911/1959: 179–182; Meinong, 1904/1913: 501; Wundt, 1920; cf. Moog, 1920: 36–47).

Interestingly enough, in almost all books and articles written in reaction to Husserl’s *Logische Untersuchungen*, it was argued at length that Husserl, in his own criticism of psychologism, had proven to be a psychological logician himself. For instance, angered by Husserl’s remark that even the “transcendental psychology” of the Neokantians had to count as a psychological project, Natorp wrote that “[a]nyone who *wants* to find the psychological in Husserl, will find it everywhere”. Natorp suggested that Husserl’s usage of terms like “Evidenz” and “Einsicht” had a strong psychological ring, and concluded that since Husserl “has given one finger to this devil, he will have to give soon his whole hand” (1901: 280). Other critics, like Heim (1902), Michaltschew (1909), Moog (1920), Nelson (1908) and Wundt (1910), all raised this same charge of a hidden psychol-

ogism in Husserl. Michaltschew, for instance, attacked Natorp's criticism of Husserl as being far too mild. For Michaltschew, it was not a question of whether or not one *wanted* to find psychologism in Husserl: "I hold that, once we *know, what* psychologism really is, one will find it *without doubt* in Husserl." Michaltschew regarded Husserl's ideas as amounting to a "psychologistic theory of knowledge" as a "strange, interesting, but totally incoherent variation of the original psychologism" (1909: 57).

Typically, critics saw psychologism emerge in Husserl because Husserl had drawn the distinction between logic and psychology in terms of two kinds of laws: ideal logical laws, known to us in and through apodictic evidence ("apodiktische Evidenz"), and real laws of nature, known through induction. Like Natorp, many critics argued that *Evidenz* was itself a psychological notion and that it thus could not guarantee the "absolute universality" of logical laws (e.g. Heim, 1902: 15—17).

Moreover, Husserl's sharp distinction between ideal and real laws was also found insufficient on the grounds that his theory left unexplained how ideal laws as platonic entities could ever be known to us. Furthermore, his critics also regarded the distinction as far too strict, arguing that laws of nature too contained a priori or ideal elements (Natorp, 1901: 282; Michaltschew, 1909: 58; Heim, 1902: 2427; Maier, 1914: 325; Sigwart, 1921: 25).

Even when writers conceded that Husserl had been, by and large, successful in his criticism of some versions of psychologism, they suggested that Husserl had not stayed clear of another, equally dangerous standpoint, i.e. formalism or logicism ("Logizismus"). This line was taken by Palágyi's book *Der Streit der Psychologen und Formalisten in der modernen Logik* (1902), as well as in Wundt's booksize article "Psychologismus und Logizismus" (1910).

For Palágyi, logic and theory of knowledge were endangered not only by the psychologism of physiologist intruders into philosophy, but equally by formalistic tendencies in

modern mathematics (1902: 12). In Husserl's work, Palágyi welcomed the attempt to free philosophy from physiology but detected a mathematical imperialism: "As one can see, mathematics is no less selfish than any of the other special sciences; mathematics too wishes to suck up logic completely. Logic is supposed to resolve totally into mathematics, and for this end it is supposed to renounce psychology" (1902: 5). What Palágyi was most eager to show was that the platonism of mathematics could not work in the case of logic; and that thus logic was not as remote from psychology as Husserl had tried to claim (1902: 1828).

More hostile than Palágyi was Wilhelm Wundt, who went so far as to say that the interest in Husserl's arguments against psychologism was more an indication of the low standards in contemporary philosophy rather than an indication of praiseworthy qualities in Husserl's book (1910: 614). Strangely enough, the same text also contained words of praise for Husserl's arguments. See Wundt, 1910: 603. Wundt saw Husserl as a "logicist": "Psychologism wants to turn logic into psychology, logicism wants to turn psychology into logic" (1910: 516). However, Wundt regarded psychologism and logicism as standpoints that easily shade over into one another. Modern "scholastics" like Brentano and Husserl, Wundt alleged, ignored the advances of modern psychology and conceptualized the mind with the help of logical notions. Yet precisely for this reason, their attempts to separate logic from psychology were doomed to fail from the start. All they could do was combine syllogistic subsumptions of concepts with Hegelian dialectical moves (1910: 580), replace the study of the mind with the analysis of words (1910: 603), and, in and through their reliance upon an undefined and unqualified notion of evidence, fall back into a "nativistic psychologism" (1910: 623).

### Varieties of psychologism

Upon first sight it might seem strange that a

philosopher like Husserl continuously attacked psychologism or psychologistic tendencies in the thought of his contemporaries, only to be, in turn, accused of psychologism himself. Yet in being both a critic and an accused, Husserl's situation was not unique in the German philosophical community between the late 1890s and the first world war. Indeed, it is hard to find any philosopher during this period who did not share Husserl's fate. Cohen, Natorp, Windelband, Rickert, Lipps, Nelson, Schuppe, Wundt, Rehmke, to mention only a few figures, all turned the charge of psychologism against others, only to turn out to be psychologistic thinkers by their colleagues' criteria (Cohen, 1914; Natorp, 1901; Windelband, 1909; Rickert, 1904; Lipps, 1905; Nelson, 1908; Schuppe, 1901; Wundt, 1910; for Rehmke, see Moog, 1920: 7374). Thus it seems very strange to read in Herbert Schnädelbach's much praised *Philosophy in Germany 1831—1933* that psychologism was the "standard opinion of philosophers from the middle of the last century up well into our own: Gottlob Frege and Edmund Husserl were fairly isolated in their campaign against it" (Schnädelbach, 1984: 99).

Be this as it may, before going into the social causes for this strange phenomenon of a whole philosophical community constantly on the lookout for psychologism, it is worth while attending briefly to the fact that during the period under investigation, the criteria for attributing a psychologistic stand to another philosopher were extremely flexible.

The term "psychologism" had been introduced into the terminology of German philosophy as late as 1866, when Johann Eduard Erdmann coined the term in order to characterize the philosophy of Friedrich Eduard Beneke (1798/1854). For Beneke, psychology had to take its lead from the natural sciences, and it was to become the basis of philosophy (Erdmann, 1964: 671). While subsequent authors agreed on the fact that psychologism meant a grounding of all of philosophy in psychology, they sharply disagreed as to what constitutes such a ground-

ing. For Husserl, from around 1910 and onwards, anyone who forgot to carry out the transcendental reduction remained on the level of psychologistic naïveté. In a like manner, the Neokantians thought that all philosophy that is not transcendental in their sense, is psychologistic (e.g. Cohen, 1914: 597). Other authors provided a wide variety of other criteria that I can only list here. For them, psychologism could be: any *Erkenntnistheorie* which takes its starting point from Kant (Wundt, 1914: 315); any use of the notions of *Evidenz* or consciousness in logic and epistemology; speaking of logic as a normative discipline or *Kunstlehre*; distinguishing between subject and object of knowledge, regardless of whether this subject is empirical or transcendental; any "ethicism" (*Ethizismus*), i.e. the tendency to employ ethical notions like "value" or "ought" in the theory of knowledge; every form of naive realism; all talk of knowledge as corresponding to reality; any attempt to separate different sciences either in terms of their objects or in terms of their methods; every definition of culture that made reference to human beings; or speaking of the natural sciences as a product of human culture. Indeed, even the attempt to dissolve psychology as a philosophical discipline was psychologistic, or more precisely "inverse psychologism". I have confined myself here to a collection of criteria as they surface in Moog 1920. Additionally, there were also many separate criteria for psychologism in ethics and aesthetics, which I shall not enumerate here (Meinong, 1912; Cohn, 1904). Given these lists it becomes understandable that it was close to impossible for a philosopher between 1900 and the First World War to avoid being charged with psychologism.

### Experimental psychology

In order to understand why philosophers between the late 1890s and the 1910s were so strongly inclined to unmask their colleagues as advocates of psychologism, we have to turn to the central "antidiscipline" of

philosophy in this period, i.e. experimental psychology. For the notion of "antidiscipline", see Wilson (1977) and Lepenies (1978). Experimental psychology was the antidiscipline of philosophy not merely in the sense that it was thought of as potentially threatening to absorb key areas of philosophical study. What was worse, experimental psychology was presenting itself as part and parcel of philosophy, and, consequently, as entitled to chairs in philosophy departments.

Psychology had of course traditionally been one of the central fields of philosophical study. But this field had acquired a new form when Wilhelm Wundt was appointed professor of philosophy at Leipzig in 1875. Wundt held a degree in medicine, and had been a student of the physiologist Johannes Müller. Müller and his brothers in arms, like von Helmholtz and Virchow had demonstrated how academic politics could be successfully played in Germany: since the 1850s they had aggressively campaigned for new professorial chairs, mostly in the medical faculties, and then "peopled" these chairs with their own students. The result was that by the 1870s, every German university had a chair in physiology (Ash, 1980a: 260).

It has been suggested that Wundt's turning towards philosophy was due in part to the fact that by the 1870s, the expansion of physiology had reached a first limit (Ash, 1980a: 260). Be this as it may, with Wundt's move into the philosophy department, experimental psychology was established within philosophy itself. Wundt had successfully learnt from his teachers the art of academic politics. One indication of this is that he gave the journal, that was supposed to present the results of experimental research done in his Psychological Institute (founded in 1879), the title "*Philosophische Studien*". As Wundt later admitted himself, this title was meant to be a "*Kampftite*" (title as a call to battle), that is, the title was intended to show "that this new psychology had the claim to be a subdiscipline of philosophy". The title was also meant as a signal that experimental psychology had nothing to do with materialism and that experimental psychology could

not be equated with physiology (Wundt, 1920: 313). Wundt also did his best to secure his position as an academic teacher and a "*Doktorvater*": his lectures were attended by huge audiences and no less than 186 dissertations were produced in Leipzig under his supervision (Ash, 1980a: 264).

Even though Wundt was only moderately successful in placing his own students on philosophical chairs, his work soon started to interest trained philosophers to follow his example, to set up laboratories, and concentrate on experimental psychological research. Such men included Herrmann Ebbinghaus, Oswald Külpe, Ernst Meumann, Georg Elias Müller, and Carl Stumpf. Judged by the number of philosophical chairs occupied by experimental psychologists, the new field expanded rapidly. Of the 39 full professorships in philosophy in 1892, experimental psychologists held 3, while of the 44 full professorships in 1914 they already held 10. Their share thus increased from 7.7% to an impressive 22.7% within the short period of 22 years (Ash, 1980b: 398).

In part this stunning success was due to the fact that Wundt and his colleagues presented themselves as having finally introduced scientific rigor into philosophy, as having finally brought philosophy onto the sure route of a science. For instance, when applying for more funds for his Berlin institute, Stumpf wrote to the ministry of education that the progress in philosophy in recent times was "due primarily to the ... strictly scientific spirit of modern psychology" (quoted from Ash, 1980a: 272). Karl Marbe did one better by claiming that traditional philosophical armchair psychology differed from experimental psychology as the work of the Presocratic philosophers differed from the results and methods of modern natural sciences (Husserl, 1911/1987: 40). Marbe also proposed that psychology be established as an auxiliary discipline to the natural, as well as the historical sciences, and he predicted that "the time will come when one will look upon the study of psychology as being of equal importance to the philosopher as today one regards mathematics for the physi-

cist, or physics for the chemist, or classical philology for the historian of ancient times" (1912: 69). Wundt himself, who was referred to by his followers as "a modern Aristotle or Leibniz" (Külpe, 1911: 105; Messer, 1913: 148) argued that his experimental psychology, as well as his *Völkerpsychologie* was something like the inevitable outcome of the history of philosophy, and that it was to mediate in border disputes between philosophy and other disciplines (Wundt, 1904/1914: 231). While stressing that psychology had become an independent science, Wundt also made clear that because of the crucial importance of psychology for the *Geisteswissenschaften* it could not be separated institutionally from philosophy (Wundt, 1913). Wundt attacked his philosophical critics, as we saw above in his criticism of Husserl, by labelling them scholastics or Neo-Hegelians, thus cleverly exploiting, both anticatholic, as well as antimetaphysical sentiments, in the German Academia.

### The "pure" philosophers' reactions

The "pure" philosophers' reactions to the experimentalists' threat were diverse. As mentioned earlier, at least some of them exploited the new possibility by going into the novelfield themselves. The majority however, with the two main Neokantian schools leading the pack, choose a different strategy. Their battle plan had already been formulated in outline by Wundt's onetime colleague in Leipzig, and his successor in Zürich, Wilhelm Windelband in 1876. In his inaugural lecture in Zurich, Windelband congratulated experimental psychology on its successes but added that it had no place in philosophy and that psychologists should not fill philosophical chairs (Harré *et al.*, 1985: 386).

Subsequently, many German "pure" philosophers competed with one another on who would provide the most convincing arguments for keeping the experimentalists out of the philosophy departments. This task was complicated not only because Wundt and his

colleagues did more than just experimental psychology, and wrote widely on purely philosophical issues as well, but also because philosophers were unwilling to throw out the baby with the bath water, i.e. unwilling to give up their rights to competence in psychology as a philosophical discipline. The period from 1890 to 1920 thus saw the emergence of a number of projects for a pure, nonexperimental philosophical psychology (e.g. Dilthey, 1894; Husserl, 1900/01; Husserl, 1913; Lipps, 1905; Meinong, 1913; Natorp, 1912a; Rickert, 1909; for more literature, see Külpe, 1921: 88).

While the nature of these various projects differed widely, they had at least two common elements. On the one hand, they tried to show that experimental psychology was a natural science like physiology, indeed that it was nothing but physiology. On the other hand, each author tried to set his own project apart from that of others, by stressing the special antipsychologistic qualities of his enterprise, thus suggesting implicitly that the views of his colleagues provided an insufficient justification for a clear separation between pure philosophy and nonphilosophical psychology. Put differently, their widely differing criteria for what psychologism consisted of, were not due to their simply having different semantic intuitions about the word "psychologism" as one might suspect on the basis of Unger's suggestions nor were they due to different sets of cognitive values as Rescher would have it. Instead, their idiosyncratic usage of the label stems from their respective attempts to translate the "pure" philosophical community's interest in defending "pure" philosophy, into an acceptance of their respective project. Little surprise therefore, that as mentioned earlier, each and everyone could easily be an accuser and an accused.

In their attacks upon experimental psychology, the pure philosophers not only equated experimental psychology with psychologism, but they also sought to enroll and translate interests and anxieties in the wider society. This can be seen most clearly in the fact that they never forgot to point out

that psychologism was a naturalistic doctrine. And from naturalism, it was but a short step to materialism, social democracy, total relativism, skepticism, in short: chaos. Indeed, despite all the criticism levelled against Husserl's refutation of psychologism in his *Logische Untersuchungen*, his equation of psychologism with total skeptical relativism was challenged only once (Mischaltschew, 1909). Moreover, in his article "Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft" (1911), Husserl dealt with both experimental psychology and psychologism under the heading "Naturalistic philosophy", and went on to write: "What characterizes all forms of extreme or consistent naturalism ..., is the *naturalization of consciousness* on the one hand, ...; and the *naturalization of ideas* and thus all absolute ideals and norms on the other hand" (1911/1987: 9). Husserl also treated psychologism together with historical relativism as the two main dangers to the project of a strict, rational philosophy (1911/1987).

Windelband, in his *Die Philosophie im deutschen Geistesleben des XIX. Jahrhunderts* (1909), discussed psychologism in the fourth chapter of his book, entitled "IV. Positivismus, Historismus, Psychologismus". All of these three views were described as arising from "Irrationalismus, Materialismus, Pessimismus". Windelband also deplored the pre-occupation with experimental psychology as an expression of the shallow *Zeitgeist*, a *Zeitgeist* that expressed itself typically in giving more value to making money than to striving for *Bildung* and high ideals (1909: 93).

Even more explicit was Georg Simmel who wrote in a widely circulating public journal that interest in psychology at the expense of pure philosophy would result in the youth's turning "to other sources which promise to fulfill their deepest needs: to mysticism or to that which they call 'life', to social democracy or literature, a falsely understood Nietzsche or a skeptically colored materialism. Let us not delude ourselves: ... the substitution of chairs of experimental psychology for chairs in philosophy proper puts the seal

upon this tendency and gives it increasing support" (quoted from Ash, 1980b: 415).

In the light of these chains of associations, it becomes understandable, that Franz Brentano, one of the many who were accused of being a champion of psychologism, began a defense with the following words: "Some have accused my theory of knowledge of psychologism; this is a neologism that makes many pious philosophers now cross themselves, pretty much like many orthodox Catholics when hearing the word 'modernism', as if these sounds contained the devil in person" (1911/1959: 179).

### Husserl's breakthrough

Up to this point we have seen that roughly between 1900 and 1914 there could be no widespread agreement on any proposal on how to explain the relation between philosophy and psychology, on any suggestion of what psychologism amounts to, or on any list of who was to be regarded as a psychological thinker. We have also seen how the academic-political struggle shaped philosophical knowledge itself, i.e. how the projects for a pure philosophical psychology were actually tactical moves in a battle over professorial chairs. What remains to be provided, however briefly, are answers to the questions why Husserl's *Prolegomena* came to occupy a central place in this debate, and why the debate faded down after the war, leaving for the textbooks little else but the earlier, much contested, statement that Husserl had refuted psychologism.

As concerns the first question, we must remember that Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* made him a major figure on the German philosophical scene almost overnight. Given the fact that the book was criticized so much, this might seem rather surprising. Indeed, one might even wonder why any of the leading figures, like Natorp and Wundt, bothered to write long reviews and criticisms at all, or why younger *Privatdozenten* like Heim and Palágyi as early as 1902 published whole books attacking Husserl's arguments.



In part the answer to this question has already been given above, in so far as I have mentioned, that by the late 1890s there already existed a strong interest among philosophers in the border dispute between experimental psychology and philosophy proper. To this however, we must now add that Husserl's *Prolegomena* was very much a rhetorical masterpiece: the textual argumentative strategy of the book was such that it simply forced others to react. First of all, Husserl's book differed from other, earlier, antipsychologistic writings in being much more detailed in its criticism and in singling out its opponents by name. Husserl had chosen his victims well: Sigwart's *Logik* was generally regarded as the outstanding logical treatise of the time, Mach and Avenarius had been opposed by both Wundtians and Neokantians, Wundt was of course the psychologistic thinker, and Mill's views were contested by Dilthey as well as Windelband and Rickert. For background, see Schnädelbach (1985), and Köhnke (1986). Husserl's attacks were often aggressive and insulting; e.g. Husserl mentions Sigwart's ideas as "indicative of the low standards of purely logical insights in our time" (1900: 68–69). Moreover, Husserl constructed something like an *Idealtyp* of what a fullfledged reliance on psychology allegedly would lead to. Earlier the word "psychologism" had been used somewhat vaguely, but Husserl argued at length for a firm link between psychologism, naturalism and skeptical relativism. Thus Husserl provided everyone, even his own critics, with an elaborate category that could be developed further, modified and enriched. And, needless to say, once the link between psychologism and relativism had become convincing, anyone accused of being a psychologist obviously had to defend himself.

Husserl also employed a clever strategy of presenting himself and of choosing his allies. By presenting himself as a converted earlier proponent of psychologism, he visibly and clearly separated himself from his academic teachers like Brentano and Stumpf, who were anything but hostile towards experimental psychology. Wilhelm

Wundt noted this fact and spoke of Husserl's book as a "captatio benevolentiae" (1910: 601). As concerns allies, Husserl expressed sympathies with the Neokantians, and quoted approvingly Kant, Lotze, Windelband and Natorp (1900: 84, 156, 213–227). Yet here too his approval was mixed with challenge and provocation, since Husserl suggested that not even the Neokantians were immune to the psychologistic disease (1900: 93, 123).

In sum, for a good part, Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* could become the focus of attention in the border dispute between psychology and "pure" philosophy not only because it provided pure philosophers with a powerful argumentative weapon, both against each other and against experimental psychology, but also because no-one accused of psychologism could afford to ignore the accusation. Others could try, and indeed tried, to turn the charge against Husserl himself, but whatever the style and direction of the various reactions, in subsequent generations of publications, Husserl's text could not be left uncited.

### Why the debate quieted down after 1914

This brings us, finally, to the question of how and why the controversy over psychologism in general, and over Husserl's arguments in particular, ended. As far as I have been able to determine, there is little reason to assume that the debate ended by being rationally resolved. Neither did philosophers change their mind over Husserl's arguments, nor did they come to agree on one set of criteria for the attributing of psychologism. Instead, after the First World War, philosophers lost interest, not only in the problem of how to distinguish between philosophy, philosophical psychology and experimental psychology, but also in the search for psychologistic tendencies in their colleagues' writings. The fate of two books, both published in 1920 is telling in this respect. Theodor Ziehen's *Lehrbuch der Logik auf positivistischer Grundlage* could have been regarded as psychologistic by

anyone's criteria, but it was largely ignored. Willy Moog's *Logik, Psychologie und Psychologismus* provided not only an excellent summary of earlier arguments pro and contra Husserl, but also claimed to have caught yet more philosophers redhanded. Again, and unfortunately from Moog's point of view, there was no outcry. He was ten years late in his attack on psychologism, could not gain credit from his peers and could do no better than subsequently become a historian of ideas.

Why then was the controversy over psychologism and the relation between psychology and philosophy abandoned? In answer to this question, I propose the following, in part overlapping, suggestions.

A first reason why it was no longer equally popular among philosophers in the 1920s to accuse each other of psychologism or psychologistic tendencies, might simply have been that the accusation had worn itself out. Already by the early 1910's the accusation had made so many rounds, that each and everyone had been accused of psychologism several times. As an argumentative weapon, this accusation at least, had lost much of its earlier force.

A second reason is that already before the war, that is, in 1913, the "pure" philosophers had taken the unprecedented step of organizing themselves against the experimental psychologists. When in 1912 the experimental psychologist Erich Jaensch was chosen by the Philosophical faculty of Marburg as the successor of Cohen, the latter's colleague Paul Natorp protested in the leading daily newspaper *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Early on in the following year, Eucken, Husserl, Natorp, Rickert, Riehl and Windelband organized a petition to all German universities and ministries of education, demanding that no more chairs in philosophy should go to experimental psychologists. The petition was signed by 106 philosophers in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and was widely debated in the German media. Husserl even suggested to Natorp that the philosophers form their own trade union (Holzhey, 1986: 398). Wundt's colleague and defender in

Leipzig, the historian Karl Lamprecht publicly called the philosophers' initiative "power politics" and other experimental psychologists, including Wundt himself, answered angrily. Without going into the details of the exchanges (see Ash, 1980b), I suspect in any case that the joint venture of the "pure" philosophers made them eventually less inclined to attack each other for their alleged psychologistic tendencies.

Third, even though the philosophers' petition did not lead to a separation of experimental psychology and philosophy "proper", the tide had already started to turn against the experimentalists by 1912. During the fifth congress of the Society for Experimental Psychology in Berlin, psychologists had tried hard to convince the politicians present of the need for further chairs in psychology. Yet by this time, the politicians themselves had become somewhat disenchanted with experimental psychology, since it had not produced the kind of knowledge that it had been hoped to provide. For instance, during the conference, the mayor of Berlin stated straightforwardly that new chairs in psychology would only come after the psychologists provided concretely applicable results, foremost in the courtroom (Ash, 1980a: 278). Indeed, after the war, the pure philosophers managed to regain several chairs that had earlier been held by experimentalists, whereas the latter were soon provided with six new chairs in applied psychology in institutes of technology and commercial academies (Ash, 1980a: 282).

A fourth reason might have been the first world war. Obviously during the period of the war, academic politics and polemics had to be set aside, or at least in the background, since now it was more important to defend and justify the German war aims, and argue for the superiority of the German idealistic spirit over French materialism and English skepticism. Again, psychologism, the German philosopher's favorite invective had some role to play. In blaming psychologism on the English and the French, experimentalists and "pure" philosophers could be found side by side. Wundt, in his *Die Natio-*

*nen und ihre Philosophie. Ein Kapitel zum Weltkrieg*, first published in 1915, spoke of psychologism only in the context of his discussion of the spirit of English philosophy, a spirit that was also characterized as utilitarian egoism and striving for domination (Wundt, 1918: 51, 139, 141). Wundt was followed by Paul Natorp, who in his book *Die Seele des Deutschen* (1918) linked psychologism closely to the anti-idealistic spirit of the British and the French (Natorp, 1918: 23, 27).

Fifth, and finally, in the early 1920s, academic "pure" philosophy was confronted with a generation that had gone through the experiences of a long and bloody war, and a generation that could not be kept interested in philosophy of the dry Husserlian, Natorpian or Rickertian style. This fact was dramatically brought home to everyone by the enormous success of Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes*, a book that was notorious in its disdain for academic philosophy. Needless to say, Spengler was quickly accused of being a psychologistic thinker (Messer, 1924), but this label hardly hampered Spengler's success. Academic philosophers like Max Scheler and Martin Heidegger, the new stars of the twenties, provided a better answer to Scheler's challenge. Even though the doctoral dissertations of both had been criticisms of psychologism (Scheler, 1901/1971; Heidegger, 1913/1978), and even though in his *Habilitationsschrift* of 1916 Heidegger had attempted to show that already Duns Scotus had been on the guard against psychologism (Heidegger, 1916/1978), both Heidegger and Scheler were quick to abandon this wornout topic and turn to more "existentialist" issues in the late tens and in the twenties. While the vigorous debates over psychologism in general, and the debates over Husserl's arguments of the *Logische Untersuchungen*, in particular, were quickly forgotten, within the phenomenological-existentialist camp Husserl's writings soon acquired the status of classical texts. The arguments of his antipodes of the turn of the century were no longer remembered, either because these

antipodes had no direct students who carried on their work, or because their work was soon dealt with only by historians of psychology, who even when they report on the border dispute between philosophy and psychology, do not attend to the repercussions of this dispute within pure philosophy itself. A history of psychology which carries "psychologism" in its index, is yet to be found or written.

## Conclusion

Needless to say, the above sketch of a sociological-historical account of the controversy over psychologism in Germany around the turn of the century leaves numerous important issues untouched and many questions unanswered. Some authors in science studies have demanded that scientific controversies be studied with more than fifty variables in mind (Brante & Elzinga, 1990: 36); here I have dealt at most with three or four. I am presently in the very early stages of writing a book on the central controversies in German philosophy between the 1880's and the 1920's, and perhaps within a decade or two I can replace the superficial sketch presented here with a more finegrained picture.

Yet, even the rudimentary bird's-eye-view of the debate given above, might suggest to some, not only that sociological-historical studies of philosophy can throw new light on central episodes in the history of philosophy, but also that such studies provide new insights for philosophers like Unger and Rescher, that is, for philosophers that are interested in philosophical disagreements as a philosophical topic.

Moreover, the above sketch also invites the formulation of a number of hypotheses concerning the shape and structure of philosophical controversies. Being derived from a case study of only one controversy, these hypotheses might easily and soon turn out to be wrong, but bold and falsifiable hypotheses are better than none. Some might also regard these hypotheses as trivial, but then

in a virginal area like the sociology of philosophical knowledge this can hardly be avoided.

(1) Philosophical controversies are decidedly more fuzzy than controversies in the natural sciences. Often it is only by hindsight that we can identify the members of the groups and camps that disagreed. This is because, compared with natural scientists, philosophers are much less inclined to cooperate with one another, even if the other holds a similar view with respect to the contested issue. Usually, even individuals who are on the same side of the divide, as we see it today, can be found accusing one another of providing insufficient arguments against the common opponent and thus attacking one another of being closet advocates of the joint enemy's position. Or, to put this observation into the now popular warfare idiom: philosophers' wars are wars of all against all, rather than clashes of two armies.

(2) Like controversies in the natural sciences, the emergence of philosophical controversies often are cases of boundary work (cf. Brante & Elzinga, 1990: 41). Controversies in philosophy are often triggered when parts of, or the whole of, the philosophical community feel endangered by the success and appeal of one or several antidisciplines. In such cases, philosophers then start to search for hidden tendencies in each others work, tendencies that allegedly provide an insufficient defense against usurpation. To study German philosophy of the late 19th and early 20th century is especially telling in this respect, not in the least because the Germans have a special way of doing things with words. After all, we owe to the Germans such marvels of philosophical terminology as psychologism, sociologism, biologism, and historicism. And this list could easily be continued for some time. Typically, the criteria for attributing any of these "isms" are highly idiosyncratic, thus ensuring that the charge can make numerous rounds.

(3) The focal point of philosophical controversies can be, and perhaps, typically are, a very small number of books and articles.

To become such a focal point, a text must be bold in its accusations, preferably short, and highly rhetorical. The sharper the tone, and the more straightforwardly the book provides its readers with a catchphrase to which it can subsequently be reduced, the better. (E.g. Husserl's equation of psychologism with skeptical relativism.)

(4) In philosophical controversies, charges of relativism, irrationalism, total skepticism and the like occupy a much more central role than in other sciences. In part, this is due to the fact that philosophical controversies are followed both by a wider audience of scholars in other fields and by the public at large. Strengthening one's position in the eyes of these wider audiences, by linking one's opponents' views to unreason and moral defect, is a temptation that philosophers are too weak to resist.

(5) Philosophical controversies are to use terminology now standard in the study of scientific controversies (Engelhardt & Caplan, 1987; Brante & Elzinga, 1990: 41—42) "abandoned" rather than "resolved". They do not end because one side succeeds in persuading its opponents by means of what all sides accept as facts and arguments. Rather philosophical disputes are put to rest because one or both sides lose interest and turn to new disagreements or return to old ones.

Obviously, if any of our "pure" philosophers of the turn of the century were still around to read this paper, they would undoubtedly want to know whether inquiries such as the one outlined above can ever prove that only power and chance prevails in philosophy, whether such studies can prove that some sort of metalevel relativism with respect to philosophy is true, or whether we can learn anything from them for systematic questions, such as whether or not psychologism is a tenable doctrine. I take it that the answers to all of these questions is negative. Case studies can merely weaken our intuitions or philosophical views on relativism or absolutism but usually they cannot replace more general, philosophical arguments.

Yet, if the "pure" philosopher then were to go on to say that sociologically minded studies of the history of philosophy indirectly endanger the true philosophical spirit of rational inquiry, and that such historical studies are no longer philosophy proper, one should remind him that the debate over whether or not the history of philosophy has any right within philosophy proper is just one more of those great controversies in 19th and 20th century German philosophy, a controversy that is not only interconnected with the debate over psychologism, but also a controversy that still awaits its sociological-historical deconstruction.

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