7 “Open systems” and anti-relativism

Anti-relativist strategies in psychological discourses around 1900

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Protagorean relativism and the general standpoint

Who wants to be a relativist? The term “relativism” seems to be a concept characteristic for the period around 1900—but it typically is not used as a concept for affirmative self-description (Köhnke 1997). Quite the same holds for “psychologism,” and many authors (Husserl is a prominent example) establish close connections between relativism and psychologism. Relativism is typically seen as posing a threat: it questions the very possibility to arrive at, justify, and consistently hold absolute values—logical, epistemological, ethical, aesthetic values—and thus potentially affects all fields of philosophy and the sciences. This can be captured in a radicalization of the “man is the measure of all things” phrase: for the relativist, *individual* man becomes the measure of all things, or, in a widely used rephrasing, each and every *standpoint* becomes equally acceptable because any clear method is lacking that might allow it to come to a decision among these standpoints.

A prominent statement of this generalized Protagoreanism is given by Hugo Münsterberg (1863–1916) in his ambitious book on *Eternal Values* from 1909. Münsterberg, active as a psychologist and philosopher and a key figure for establishing the discipline of psychology in the United States,[1] sees his own time as being dominated by a relativism in which all values come to depend “upon our special standpoint.” While we, as practicing scientists, as religious believers, as artists or social reformers, do believe that there are absolute values, “all these convictions and beliefs, these faiths and inspirations, must fade away, it seems, as soon as the philosopher begins to examine them”—and he summarizes this in a very concise characterization of relativism:

> Everything is relative; everything is good only for a certain purpose, for a certain time, for a certain social group, for a certain individual. … Philosophical skepticism and relativism are thus the last word, and their answer harmonizes with a thousand disorganizing tendencies of our time. (Münsterberg 1909a, 1–2)

Münsterberg makes clear from the outset that he intends to reject this relativism. In his own anti-relativist argumentation, he identifies two main opponents: a philosophy that recognizes a merely "pragmatic value" in goodness, beauty, progress, truth, peace, and religion, i.e., in everything that had been thought of being absolutely valuable; and a psychological approach that claims that what "we dream of eternal values should simply be explained psychologically like the fancies of a fairy-tale" (Münsterberg 1909a, 2).

His strategy in refuting relativism is highly interesting. He wants to promote an "idealism," a Kant- and Fichte-inspired account of the necessity of absolute values that interprets "reality in voluntaristic spirit" and acknowledges "the fundamental character of the purposive activity" (Münsterberg 1909b, 334)—another term that Münsterberg uses to denote the fundamental role of the will is "teleological." The idea is that a naturalistic reduction of mental processes becomes impossible as soon as the will is established as a fundamental fact. His theory

> will show that idealism is justified, nay, is demanded, by true science and true philosophy, that the believers are right and the pragmatists wrong, and that we may stand firmly with both the feet on the rock of facts, and may yet hold to the absolute values as eternally belonging to the structure of the world.
>
> (Münsterberg 1909a, 2)

While Münsterberg presents his position in strongly dualist terms, and while he criticizes psychology for reducing eternal values to fictitious ideas, he nevertheless asks us to stick close to "the rock of facts," and this includes giving a role to psychological research. For Münsterberg, being anti-relativist (and anti-psychologist) does not imply that he also takes a strictly anti-psychological attitude. The key step here consists in changing our conception of what Münsterberg calls the "structure of the world." As with many other value theorists, values are not seen as an added layer that is superimposed upon a body of neutral facts. Rather, values themselves become intrinsic properties of states in the world.

The very term "structure of the world" indicates that Münsterberg is aware that this changes our understanding of what "facts" or "world" might mean. Münsterberg's strategy can be described in terms of a broadening of our understanding of "facts" and of the "world" that leads to what we may call a *general standpoint* that is clearly distinguished from just accumulating a number of neutral facts. He does not opt for a response to relativism in terms of selecting one standpoint and preferring this standpoint above others. This would lead into serious difficulties of the kind that in more recent epistemology are discussed under the title of "no meta-justification": Singling out a particular standpoint would require justificatory arguments that can be accepted among the competing standpoints, and that is just what the coexistence of rival standpoints denies. Rather, he intends to arrive at a point at

which we are no longer forced to take a decision between rival options, but that still can be called a standpoint, for instance, in virtue of it being itself a fact.

This strategy is closely related to other forms of generalization in philosophy that are prominent in the period around 1900:[2] Husserlian phenomenology can be described in similar terms, as can a hermeneutic approach that denies the independent existence of individual standpoints. What is particularly interesting about Münsterberg's version is that he wants to steer a *middle course* that allows him to maintain absolute values *and* to incorporate results from psychology at the same time.[3] This chapter looks more closely into the role of psychology and of philosophical conceptualizations of psychological theories within debates concerning relativism around 1900. Its key strategy is to show how the turn toward higher forms of generality is prominently present in psychological and psychology-related discourses in this period and how this could support hopes for a non-reductionist way of including the results and practices of the special sciences into larger foundational projects.

Toward a general theory of values: "Bring values home"

The status of values becomes itself the topic of a novel subfield in philosophy.[4] Discussions in the philosophy of values are typically characterized by strong dualisms, in particular the dualism between the claim that values can be, and need to be, *absolute*, as opposed to the *relativist* attitudes that became associated with a psychological or naturalistic analysis of values. This dualism finds its clearest expression, at least in the English-speaking world, in the discussion between Münsterberg, who argues for the necessity to arrive at absolute or "eternal" values, and Wilbur Marshall Urban (1873–1952), who argues, against Münsterberg, for the importance of a psychological analysis in the theory of values.[5]

Münsterberg stages this debate explicitly in dualist terms and shows that the dualisms in the philosophy of values can be related to a number of other conflicts in the philosophy of his time: the positivist vs. the idealist, the relativist vs. the absolutist, a psychological vs. an epistemological stance, the analysis and explanation of facts vs. a teleological system (1909b, 329). Münsterberg himself argues for a revival of the standards of Kantian critical philosophy in order to counteract the relativism of his days: "We simply must once more force on our present-day relativism the fundamental categories of critical philosophy: we must go back to Kant and from Kant to Fichte"—or, with the Neo-Kantian outcry: "Back to Kant!" (1909b, 337–388)[6]

Even though Münsterberg includes a "psychological" approach in his list of dualisms, he nevertheless emphasizes that his anti-relativist attitude can be seen as a continuation of psychological approaches. He has three arguments to this effect. Firstly, the idealist in Münsterberg's sense can "accept … and appreciate … the psycho-sociological studies of the relativist" (1909b, 329), as long as they are not presented as the ultimate principle in a study of values.

The relativist, on the other hand, cannot include the absolutist stance into her theories because she cannot accept absolute values. Secondly, the prevalent atomism in psychology—the analysis of mental phenomena into their ultimate elements, forming the methodological foundation of associationist psychology—can pave the way toward an idealist understanding of these phenomena: "Consistent psychological atomism of the will and radical teleological philosophy of the will belong most intimately together" (1909b, 332). The idea seems to be that the importance of the will and the irreducibility of mental phenomena to these elements can only be understood if we first boil down the mental phenomena to their ultimate elements. The third argument points out that eternal values need to be represented in consciousness in order to become efficacious as principles that govern our activities.[7] The changing ontology of (mental) states that has already been adumbrated in section 1 can summarize these arguments: we need to accept that the "givenness of the objects and their existence involves valuation" (1909b, 333). This can lead to a refinement of the anti-naturalist stance with respect to psychology. Münsterberg criticizes the atomism that he, just as many of his contemporaries, detects in the more empiricist, reduction-supporting strands of psychology as being one-sided; associationist psychology in its elementarist approach neglects the complexity of states that his teleological argument required, and that he thought to be able to discover via psychological experience: "The standpoint of the naturalist is an artificial one; it involves certain abstractions" that distort the complex states under consideration (1909a, 13).

The exchange between Münsterberg and Urban starts off in dichotomically dualist terms. This makes it the more surprising that there is an unexpected and important harmony with respect to the role they ascribe to psychology. Urban's goal is stated, explicitly, in terms of unification and of a scientific attitude; he strongly opposes what he calls "misologistic" tendencies (i.e., anti-intellectualist or irrationalist tendencies in psychology/philosophy; Urban 1909, VIII) as well as the Kantian distinction between the empirical and the *a priori* and aims at pursuing and further developing science to its fullest extent. In the relevant passages, he refers to, among others, Alexius Meinong (1853–1920) and Christian von Ehrenfels (1859–1932) as authors who pursue a related agenda in unifying the empirical and the *a priori* in the theory of values:

> The desideratum, therefore, seems to be to find a method which shall unite in some more fruitful way the descriptive and the normative points of view, a method which shall know how to interpret the norms of the so-called "intelligible" will in terms of the laws of the "empirical" will.
> (Urban 1909, 6)

One way to achieve this unification is precisely by emphasizing the ubiquity of psychology, in a psychologistically sounding phrase that at first sight lends support to Münsterberg's charging Urban's value theory as being

psychological: "Strictly speaking there is no problem, scientific or unscientific, which does not have its psychological side. Not only the questions, but also the objects in connection with which these questions arise, belong in the first place to the psychical life" (Urban 1909, 9). We can now see why this need not be incompatible with Münsterberg's account: if complex states can be (psychologically) given to us, the psychological character of these states can indeed support a unification of the descriptive and the normative.

We get into a rather surprising situation. The two opponents in a debate that was presented in dualist terms share profound convictions. It did not go unnoticed that the dualist opposition between Urban and Münsterberg did not seem to be adequate to their greater ambitions. A particularly salient case is presented in a 1917 paper on the "Theory of Values" by Columbia philosopher Herbert Schneider (1892–1984) in the *Journal of Philosophy Psychology and Scientific Methods*, of which Schneider was the editor from 1924–1961—the precursor of today's *Journal of Philosophy*. Schneider, too, argues for a more positive attitude toward psychology in the theory of values, that would take away the "odium of the 'merely' and the 'nothing but'" that "psychology and empiricism have to bear" (1917, 144). His main argument consists in reconstructing values as *complex* three-place predicates that combine a valuable object, an organism or activity to which it is valuable, and an end or purpose for which it is valuable (1917, 146). Neglecting one (or more) of these factors by way of abstraction is as inadequate as the reaction on the side of "absolute idealists and realists" who cry, " 'relativism and subjectivism!' " (Schneider 1917, 147). Leaving the reference of values to specific ends out of consideration, making them "irrelative," would only render these impoverished values, in a pragmaticist argumentation, "irrelevant." Only if we respect the complexity of value predicates can we study them in their natural habitat:

> The present need is that psychology study values at home, in their natural and specific situations. They can not rightly be studied as abstractions; they must be studied in their functional relationships, and this involves a study of all three factors of the value situation in their proper and specific relations.
>
> (Schneider 1917, 148)

As a consequence, Schneider arrives at what looks like a relativist position; values, according to his three-dimensional analysis, are indeed relative in the sense that they are "not an absolute unchanging piece of reality, but a characteristic of nature by means of which organic activity is made possible and carried to its perfection" (1917, 154). However, this does not imply that a theory of absolute values needs to be or can be opposed to his understanding of values as specific and concrete—values only function in acts of valuation and cannot be studied independently of these complex processes. There simply is no theory of values in the abstract; emphasizing the complexity of

evaluative states does not so much relativize values but rather gets us closer to understanding their nature.

The idea that psychology may be used for arriving at a philosophically sensible, but nevertheless non-naturalist theory of values was shared more broadly. One prominent example: one of the key authors both for value theory and for innovations in psychology, Christian von Ehrenfels, in his 1893 treatise on *Werttheorie und Ethik* (*Value Theory and Ethics*) contrasts the trend toward the naturalistic "objectivation" of values with a "psychological" analysis. While the naturalist overstresses the role of the intellect, the psychologist can appreciate the psychological capacity "that alone is capable of creating values" (von Ehrenfels 1893, 87), namely the "emotional dispositions" that are at work in all questions concerning values. It is precisely the dimension of feelings, as studied by psychology, combined with an integrative, non-abstractive account of the human mind, that again is—as all the authors presented so far stress—not only not at odds with, but even deeply engrained in, the spirit of psychology, that is required for a non-naturalist theory of values.

Relationalist anti-relativism in psychology

Where does psychology deal explicitly with relativism? One line of argument has already been presented in reference to the broadly shared anti-atomistic attitude, with its anti-empiricist and anti-naturalist implications. Another line can be found in the most quantitative sub-field of psychology, namely in psychophysics. The key achievement of a mathematized psychophysics, the Weber-Fechner-law, is standardly introduced in the psychology textbooks of the period in terms of the *relativity* of sensations.[8] One example: Theodor Ziehen (1862–1950), clinical psychologist, philosopher, author of widely read handbooks, presents Wilhelm Wundt as considering the Weber-Fechner-law as just a special case of the "general law of the relativity of our mental processes in general" (Ziehen 1924, 65), namely the principle that there is no absolute but only a relative measure for their intensity.[9] It is in this way that *Wundt* treats Weber's law in his own *Physiologische Psychologie* (1893, 393). Weber's law, according to Wundt, does not refer to sensations themselves but to apperception as the operation of relating sensations to one another; it is a law not for states but for *relations* and for relative measurements. Ziehen generalizes these ideas into a philosophical position that he calls *Relationismus,* which is based upon the idea that "the things studied in natural science are, in their essence, nothing but relations" (1927, 23).

It is obvious that this program is related to other philosophical and psychological programs that, in many respects strongly influenced by *Gestalt* theory, introduce novel types of objects that are claimed to be more general than traditional object categories would us have it, and that thus go beyond traditional sub-divisions of the field of philosophy. Alexius Meinong is a key protagonist in these debates, with two strong claims that become intimately

related in his texts: The claim that he succeeded in initiating an innovatively general theory of values (Meinong, 1911, 132), and the claim—characteristic for his *Gegenstandstheorie*—that we need to adopt more general object categories. His brief text on *Für die Psychologie und gegen den Psychologismus in der allgemeinen Werttheorie* from 1911 highlights these claims. Meinong, too, intends to reject the charge of psychologism but nevertheless wants to continue making use of psychology. Psychology even remains of key importance because our attitude with respect to values cannot be understood as a purely intellectual endeavor; rather, our emotional life, the *Gemütsleben*, plays a key role here, and consequently psychology should not remain restricted to analyzing human mental life as a logical process.

The innovative character of his theory is mirrored in Meinong's terminology that one can hardly see other than as coining consciously unwieldy neologisms. Examples are terms referring to the role of feeling in cognitive processes: *Urteilsgefühle* and *Wissensgefühle,* feelings of judgment and feelings of knowing (1911, 136),[10] *Vorstellungsgefühle, Urteilsinhaltsgefühle*, feelings of representations and of the content of judgments. Other terms seem to be closer to existentialist sentiments but still refer to feelings that are involved in judgments about objects: The feelings of *Daseinsleid* and *Daseinsfreude*, the grief or pleasure related to the existence of an object (1911, 136). What these terms already suggest, with their combination of subjectively accessible emotion terms and epistemological concepts, underlies Meinong's argument in favor of psychology and at the same time against a psychologism: psychology itself needs to concede, according to Meinong, that "pre-theoretical" accounts of values need to be included in any psychological theory of valuation. Meinong makes the strong ontological implications of these ideas explicit by requiring that any analysis of value judgments has sufficient ontological "latitude" (1911, 139): feelings need not be initiated by actual encounters with objects, but also potential objects, or objects that I only potentially might own, can be valuable for me. What we need is a combination of a theory of super-personal, absolute values with the empirically well-supported personal and relative character of values that psychology has tended to neglect (1911, 141). Meinong refers to a large number of allied authors, operating between philosophy and psychology, and all building forth upon an idea that he ascribes to Wilhelm Windelband,[11] namely, the idea that "the close relationship between intellectual and emotional experiences has been unduly neglected by the, otherwise quite adequate, psychological tradition" (1911, 141).

A key topic among these authors concerns the program of unification in psychology and includes the integration of cognitive/logic-related and emotional states. A characteristic example of this strategy can be found in a 1905 paper on the cognitive value of aesthetic judgments by Edith Landmann-Kalischer (1877–1951), one of the authors on Meinong's list. Landmann-Kalischer, best known for her involvement with the George circle, departs from the "view, generally shared in science" that values, in particular aesthetic

values, are "subjectively determined everywhere" and that value judgments are not aimed at cognition (1905, 264). But she sees it as timely, urgent, and possible to remove the odium of subjectivity from aesthetic valuations, and intends to upgrade feelings by understanding them in analogy with sense perception, i.e., with the paradigm of objectivity-related judgments. In the concluding passages of her paper, she strongly emphasizes that this indeed means a strong revision of earlier attitudes in philosophy:

> While in earlier times [the times of Locke] the subjectivity of sense impressions was demonstrated by showing that they do not differ from feelings, we, today, have to establish the objectivity of the properties in things grasped via feeling by placing them in one line with sensory qualities.
>
> (1905, 328)

Feelings, thus, should be understood in such a way that they can claim objective status. This inverts our epistemological expectations regarding subjectivity and objectivity, and regarding the distribution of these epistemic characteristics among feelings and sense perceptions in that feelings, and subjectively determined values, are viewed as candidates for objectivity: While it is, according to Landmann-Kalischer, undeniable that values have subjective conditions (1905, 267), it remains possible that, while "acknowledging fully this being subjectively conditioned" of values, values still can be valid in a non-subjective, in a subjectivity-transcending way—and that in this sense value judgments are analogous to judgments about sensory qualities and are geared toward cognition (1905, 267–268).

Landmann-Kalischer has two strategies to offer in support of this view. In both cases, she introduces object types of a higher level of generality with the intention that these higher levels of generality objectify what is subjectively conditioned: *Gestalt* qualities on the one hand (e.g., 1905, 279),[12] relational structures on the other are introduced to this purpose (1905, e.g., 274). Landmann-Kalischer's paper itself attracts a wider audience and is embedded into contexts in which precisely these operations of generalization occupy center stage.[13]

We see a number of larger issues at work here. If feelings, as the traditional paradigm for subjective mental states, can be objectified (and if, as a consequence, aesthetic judgments acquire cognitive status), this means at the very least that an emotional component in one's theory is not sufficient for an indictment as being relativist. Put more generally: the strategy seems to be one of redrawing typical boundary lines in the field of philosophy (here that between objectivity and subjectivity) in order not to directly refute the relativist but to fruitfully accommodate precisely the key tenets of the relativist into a yet broader picture that allows a return to traditional philosophical values such as scientificity. The resulting picture is one that needs to, on the one hand, incorporate the openness and indeterminacy characteristic of the

relativist and, on the other hand, has to introduce high-level concepts that can govern the totality of open and indeterminate ideas in a way that can be seen as scientific. Typically, *Gestalt* properties and relational structures are deemed ideal candidates for filling in this agenda.

In all cases, this picture has strongly anti-dualist implications. The simple dualism between subjective and objective states does not work: “I am of the opinion that we should become suspicious with respect to such purely subjective elements of consciousness” (Landmann-Kalischer 1905, 273); “subjectivity and objectivity do not reside in particular phenomena in/of consciousness (it is not the case, for instance, that any feeling is subjective while any mathematical thought is objective),” but rather derive from the “constellation, the law-governed dependencies in which we encounter a phenomenon” (1905, 276). The stable relational linking of an object to our mental states is viewed as being a property of this very object, thereby extending the notion of properties so as to include also relational properties (1905, 274). *Gestalt* properties that are declared by Landmann-Kalischer to be directly perceivable, despite their being conceptually complex (1905, 279), again provide the best examples. With respect to value judgments, this relationalist account of values implies that values cannot be reconstructed in a (reductively) naturalist fashion.[14]

One of the most striking features of both Meinong’s and Landmann-Kalischer’s accounts, as well as of the other relationalist accounts, is that what seems to be the most individualist and subjective, namely emotions and feelings, becomes incorporated into an argument that is directed at new levels of generality, and at maintaining high standards of scientificity and at keeping in contact with the special sciences throughout.[15] At this point, it becomes possible to return to debates in the philosophy of value and to ask how the ideal of strictly scientific openness becomes operationalized in these debates.

Relativism, pragmatism, phenomenalism, correlativism, realism …: Integrative accounts in innovative forms of philosophy

We thus arrive at a highly distinctive trend that pervades philosophical and psychological discourse around 1900: an agenda of aiming at large-scale integrations that reach beyond the traditionally established demarcation lines in philosophical discourse can be found in (at least at first sight) highly diverse contexts. In a number of cases, these integrative accounts lead to newly labeled forms of philosophy. Some of these accounts, in their reaction against relativism, will be sampled in this section.

Examples for the prominence of strongly relationalist programs can be multiplied easily. Ernst Cassirer’s favoring of functional concepts above substance concepts is a prominent example, as is Max Frischeisen-Köhler’s (1878–1923) discussion of the problem of reality.[16] Maximilian Beck (1887–1950), who obtained his Ph.D. in Munich with Munich phenomenologist Alexander Pfänder before emigrating to the United States, even creates an entirely new

label, *Korrelativismus* (Beck 1928), for a relationalist philosophy that intends to overcome the disjunctions between subjectivism and objectivism, idealism and realism, and to support a concrete form of interaction between man and the world of objects. (There are Heideggerian undertones here, and Beck also refers to Spengler.)

Texts by William James (1842–1910) and Oswald Külpe (1862–1915) can illustrate how the notion of relativism and the problem of abstraction migrate between philosophy and experimental psychology. William James devotes an entire chapter in *The Meaning of Truth* to a discussion of "Abstractionism and 'Relativismus'," clearly referring to a German-language discourse and including an intense discussion with Münsterberg's account of "eternal values" (James 1909). He inverts Münsterberg's criticism that pragmatism is an unjustified form of abstraction and strongly rejects what he labels as "vicious abstractionism," and he also sees this vicious attitude at work when authors such as Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936) or Münsterberg charge pragmatism for being relativist (James 1909, 263).[17] While conceiving of a concrete situation abstractively by singling out some salient feature is a useful strategy, things go wrong when "we proceed to use our concept privatively; reducing the originally rich phenomenon to the naked suggestions of that name abstractly taken, treating it as a case of 'nothing but' that concept" (1909, 249): "Abstraction, functioning in this way, becomes a means of arrest far more than a means of advance in thought. It mutilates things." This analysis of the dangers of an abstractionist account serve James to characterize pragmatism in terms of adding "concreteness" to our way of analyzing concepts (1909, 262–263). The concept of abstraction plays a double role in his argument. James reacts against Rickert's and Münsterberg's criticism that pragmatism is unable to conceive of the abstract notion of truth, and turns the table by charging his critics with themselves operating on a level of abstraction that makes it impossible "to give any account of what the words may mean" (1909, 266) or that abstracts the relevant notions—such as "truth"—"from the universe of life" (1909, 268). The discourse on relativism in Germany, according to James, suffers from precisely such an over-abstraction (1909, 270–271).

The notion of abstraction, and the critical rejection of abstraction as leading away from concrete reality, find their way into experimental practice in psychology and in philosophical theorizing that is strongly influenced by psychological experiment. Oswald Külpe, a Wundt-pupil, later emancipating himself from Wundt and becoming the central figure of the "Würzburg school of experimental thought psychology,"[18] is the most visible protagonist for mutually incorporating psychology into philosophy, and vice versa, in a way that can be analyzed in terms of an integrative account of abstraction. At this point, we can start looking into psychological practice. In his main work in philosophy, *Die Realisierung*, Külpe emphasizes that abstraction does not imply that we move away from the realm of things; abstraction is not an *Entdinglichung*, a de-reification, and it does not imply a loss of individuality, an *Entindividualisierung* (1912, 132–133). Concrete and abstract objects are

not fundamentally different (1912, 137); concrete objects, as a limit concept in cognition, also have abstract characteristics.

Evidence for these claims can be found, Külpe claims, in psychological experiments, where Külpe explicitly endorses introspection as a method in experimentation. The evidence is, in fact, multiple: In his experiments, Külpe regularly encounters states that are, according to traditional criteria, abstract, devoid of imagistic content, but that can nevertheless be experienced as distinctive and complex inner states. Another line of argument derives from Külpe's experiments on "subjectivation" and "objectivation," that is, his study of those factors that determine whether we take a particular mental representation as being subjective or objective. Again, his experiments show that an experience's being deemed subjective or objective is not due to an inherent feature of a representation but depends upon other factors (such as the particular task that is studied in an experiment) (Külpe 1912).[19] Külpe thus studies, in psychological experiment *and* philosophical theory, what James asked for in his plea for concreteness. What is most remarkable about his research is his confidence in indeed being able to apply the experimental method, in continuity with the experimental practice of the special sciences (this claim, of course, would require closer scrutiny), in order to gain deeper insight into philosophical concepts and theories. As in virtually all authors presented so far, it is the anti-elementarist, anti-associationist, anti-imagistic (in the sense of: against a notion of ideas that understands them as copies of sense impressions) results of his experimental research that allow him to confidently claim that his brand of psychology does not fall prey to charges of relativism or psychologism.

Summary: "Open systems" in scientific philosophy and psychology

Reacting against the challenge of relativism means taking a position in a situation where there are too many options available; too many standpoints without a basis for choosing among them. What has been presented in a caleidoscopic overview in this chapter points at a rather surprising, but also widely adopted, strategy. Both Münsterberg and, even more explicitly, Rickert phrase this strategy in terms of opening up the rigorous notion of "system." Münsterberg asks whether the philosopher cannot and should not "find in his own system fullest room for the free unfolding of the relativistic knowledge" (1909b, 329), and Rickert poses the question: "Couldn't we find our strength in consciously renouncing closure?" In discussing the "system of values," Rickert finds a compact phrase for the openness that is required for incorporating a broad range of positions or attitudes, and for accounting for the development and progress of science: he argues for "*open* systems" (1913, 297). His motivation for maintaining a place for systems in philosophy derives from a strongly anti-systematic trend that he perceives in the philosophy and in the broader culture of his time, and that he relates to the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche's thinking. Rickert concedes that the very term "open

systems" is, on the surface, contradictory (1913, 297). His reaction toward this contradiction consists in specifying more precisely what open systems need to do: he requires openness for the more specific purpose to account for the *Unabgeschlossenheit,* the non-closedness of history, and the factors that are used in systematizing history can "reach beyond history without conflicting with it" (1913, 297). Openness, refraining from aiming at achieving closure, can be viewed as "strength" (1913, 298): this, then, requires novel concepts for systematicity that are sufficiently open so as to include (in Rickert's case: historical) change; "order" is Rickert's example for such a concept that, in itself, does not impose any kind of rigorously structured hierarchy.[20] More specifically, Rickert argues for a co-existence between connected systems of values that transcend historicity, and the concretely determined events in history (1913, 300), in what can be read as a rather direct rendering of the idea of a hermeneutic circle.

There are two main lines for further analyzing this strategy of thinking in terms of "open systems." On the one hand, one can further contextualize this strategy by relating it to broader trends that we can detect in a number of debates around 1900: in various fields, we find a move toward increasingly higher levels of *generality* that are counterbalanced by a critique of abstraction. One of the most characteristic achievements that are to be gained by stepping up to these higher levels is that what previously appeared to be different concepts and ideas become *harmonized* once this higher level is reached. Since this move can be detected in areas that are paradigms of scientificity[21] as well as in broader philosophical and world-view movements, this strategy sheds a novel light on the role of relativism. If divergent ideas can coexist, by becoming abstractions or specifications within a more general framework that is thoroughly scientific, relativism need no longer be seen as a stance that departs from, or requires, a loosening of our standards; rather the opposite becomes possible: as a consequence, apparently divergent or opposed notions such as subjectivity and objectivity, abstraction and concreteness, generality and experience can become integrated in these debates. Within a framework of "open systems," relativism ceases to be a threat—rather, it becomes a foundational ingredient in science-inspired and science-directed thinking. Why this openness got lost, some way between the period discussed here and more recent philosophical attitudes, thus becomes a pressing, but by no means clearly resolved, problem.

This has important implications for our understanding of what it means to be scientific, and more particular of the status of holist movements in the period around 1900. Anne Harrington has analyzed "holist" movements in psychology and science as deeply ambivalent events, torn between a drive toward re-enchanting our world-views and the scientific ambitions of the protagonists (Harrington, 1996). Where this chapter takes issue with Harrington's approach is that Harrington rather strongly emphasizes "irrational" elements in "holist" ideas (e.g., Harrington 1996, 27, on Külpe)—rather, it seems to be important for the protagonists in this debate that they

present their ideas as being scientific, even as scientific in a particularly rigorous sense.[22]

More systematically, it is tempting to relate these "open systems" (and related notions) to a discussion of relativism in terms of two-level accounts. Martin Kusch (2017) expresses sympathy with epistemic relativism, and in order to do so, "the relativist must formulate his position in a way that involves two perspectives" (2017, 4692), namely a first-order perspective that "we happen to have because of contingent historical circumstances," the epistemic system that we happen to have adopted. Combined with that, we need a second perspective that is based in a reflection "on the contingency of one's epistemic practices and standards" (2017, 4693). In this picture, a "relativist second-order perspective" can be held together with being committed to a particular first-order perspective because "the second-order perspective does not have epistemic principles that directly compete with those of the first-order perspective" (2017, 4694).

The anti-relativist strategies presented in this chapter can indeed be seen as analyzing the problem of relativism and the adequate response in terms of two different perspectives, where one perspective guarantees the kind of openness and individuality that was thought of as leading to relativism while the other integrates these many standpoints into an ordered whole. In the cases of Rickert and Münsterberg, we have the open horizon of historical change that still can be ordered within open systems, and the infinity of personalized value attributions that presuppose a framework of absolute values. Compared to the arguments in Kusch's article, however, the perspectives are inverted. For Kusch, it is the reflective stance of the second-order perspective that allows for a rational form of relativism, while both Münsterberg and Rickert (and many others, as indicated in this chapter) argue for higher-level principles that point *beyond* relativism.[23]

In the anti-relativist strategies that have been presented here, it is on the higher level that the real commitment is asked for. We find various ways of justifying this commitment: In many cases, it is particular argument forms that are used on this higher level (Münsterberg, for example, makes ample use of transcendental arguments in his theory of absolute values); but just as important is the integrative or unificatory function of this higher level. More argument is needed in order to elaborate precisely how this higher level is thought to cooperate with the lower levels. This gets further complicated by the strong continuities among the levels. Take the example of feelings, which are typical candidates for generalizing moves that are intended to employ the characteristics of feelings (such as their concreteness, their phenomenological richness, there directness) also on the higher level. Another phrase that may capture this difficulty is: what the anti-relativist authors typically search for, are novel forms of systematization and, via a systematic ordering, also of justification that, nevertheless, keep close contact with traditional notions and arguments. Feelings, again, provide an illustrative example. It is remarkable to see the extent to which these theories dare to move beyond established

boundaries between philosophical theories, between philosophy and the special sciences, and between novel and traditional philosophical concepts. Looked upon in this way, the anti-relativist arguments as presented here, and the role of psychology in these arguments, can also serve as a basis for further refining the status of philosophical projects such as Husserlian phenomenology and (Diltheyan and others') hermeneutics.

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Notes

1. Münsterberg bridges the gaps between European and American philosophy and psychology on a number of levels: a pupil of Wilhelm Wundt, he was invited to the U.S. by William James and later institutionalized academic exchange between the U.S. and Germany. One of his most visible tasks was the organization of the 1904 "Congress of Arts and Sciences" in St. Louis, for which he projected a comprehensive system of the sciences (on this topic, see Ziche 2008).
2. On the prominence of the notion of generality in science-related discourses around 1900, see Hagner and Laubichler (2006).
3. In a next step, it clearly would be relevant to compare the authors and ideas presented here in more detail to the philosophico-psychological projects of, in particular, Husserl and Dilthey.
4. For a contemporary overview, see Messer (1926).
5. Urban, a professor at Dartmouth and Yale, was strongly influenced by ideas form Ernst Cassirer, who also succeeded him at Yale.
6. As is frequently done in the texts discussed here, Münsterberg also sees a dualist opposition between a systematic spirit in philosophy on the one hand, and the "impressionistic philosophizing" current in his time on the other (1909b, 335).
7. See, e.g., Münsterberg (1909a, 48). This passage is significant: Münsterberg starts from the broadly Kantian conviction that all our mental states remain dependent upon the conditions of consciousness; in a second step, he reads this transcendental standpoint as implying that even the world of absolute values does not exist "eternally separated from our consciousness."
8. Meinong discusses Weber's law extensively in a number of contexts; see, e.g., Meinong (1896); Meinong (1888).
9. On the Weber-Fechner-law, see also Ziehen (1913, 467), again in terms of the "general relativity of psychical processes."
10. On the notion of "*Gefühlsgewißheit*" and on "*Wahrheitsgefühle*," see Albrecht (2015); Ziche (2015).
11. On Windelband and relativism, see Kinzel (2017).
12. The most comprehensive discussion of *Gestalt* psychology still is Ash (1995).
13. Landmann-Kalischer's texts are referred to frequently in a number of the texts discussed here, e.g., in Urban's text that is discussed in section 3; see also Urban (1907). On Landmann-Kalischer, see, e.g., Reicher (2016).

14 Landmann-Kalischer's list of authors who recognize the "*Sonderstellung des Wertes*," the "special position of value," include, among others, Simmel, Meinong, Jonas Cohn, and in particular Ehrenfels (Landmann-Kalischer 1905, 264–265).

15 In this chapter, "science" is always used in the broad sense, thus including the natural sciences, the humanities, and the social sciences under this term.

16 Frischeisen-Köhler, philosopher and educationist at Halle, strongly influenced by Dilthey, carries on with the relationalist programme, and he generalizes this program yet further in the sense that we not only need to focus upon relations everywhere but also must turn toward the "universal relational connection," *dem universellen Beziehungszusammenhang* (Frischeisen-Köhler 1912, 12–13). His references include authors from classical hermeneutics and German idealism: Goethe, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Jacobi, Bergson, Dilthey (Frischeisen-Köhler 1912, 48–50).

17 For a discussion of pragmatism as a form of "generalization," see Perry (1907).

18 On the "Würzburg school," see Kusch (1999) and Ziche (1999).

19 The same kind of argument is, again, also pursued in Külpe's experiments concerning "abstraction" (Külpe, 1904).

20 On theories of order around 1900, see Ziche (2016).

21 Mathematics is the most prominent example; see Ziche (2008, ch. 6).

22 In the light of the prominence of integrative analyses of value systems, and of the important role of feelings in evaluative, yet scientific contexts, Daston and Galison's (2007) account of objectivity in terms of disinterestedness and depersonalization also needs to be critically questioned.

23 Rickert, in his 1913 paper on the system of values, makes clear that being a system, in his view, requires a "principle," and more specifically a principle of completeness that goes beyond the mere juxtaposition of (historically determined) facts or ideas (Rickert 1913, 298).

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