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William R. Woodward
Associate Professor
(University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA)

FROM THE SCIENCE OF LANGUAGE TO VÖLKERPSYCHOLOGIE: LOTZE,
STEINTHAL, LAZARUS, AND WUNDT

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Psychology as we know it is a professional discipline, comprising institutes, laboratories, journals, faculty, students, societies, and occupations. Little over a century ago, scarcely any of these existed. In their place were only competing conceptions of psychology: as a field of medicine, as a field of philosophy, and—in the case of the episode described here—as a program for a larger audience.

The topic Völkerpsychologie is intriguing precisely because it grew out of the hope to bring psychology to the educated layman, to the Bürgertum. As such, the professional aspects of psychology as we know it were largely irrelevant to this hope for cultural reform. What was important was that the public learn to understand its human potential in the future of humanity. In an era of industrialization, of rearmament, and of ideological controversies following the failed revolution of 1848, psychology held promise of bringing a realistic Enlightenment about the possibilities and limits of human civilization.

In the fifteen years between 1848 and 1863, the year in which the Heidelberg Docent Wilhelm Wundt first published his lectures on language and will, a movement to reconstruct the image of man on a historical foundation gathered momentum. Some seeds of the twentieth century schools of phenomenology, pragmatism, and scientific realism were planted in the cultural reform programs of the Mikrokosmus. Ideen zur Naturgeschichte und Geschichte der Menschheit (Versuch einer Anthropologie) by the Göttingen philosopher and physician Hermann Lotze (1817-1881), a book which reached a far wider circulation than Wundt’s Grundzüge der Völkerpsychologie as a result of its translation into four foreign languages and its six editions by 1923. First published in three volumes
from 1856 to 1864, the Mikrokosmus recounted the history of mankind in a novel way - by fields of knowledge including the body, the soul, life, man, mind, the microcosmic order, history, progress, and the unity of things. The purpose was to depict the historical epochs in the development of human social and scientific orders in a manner leading up to and legitimating the bourgeois political system of constitutional monarchy.

Also recognizing the public need for a continuing critical review of science and culture, two young German Jewish academicians founded the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* at Berlin 1860. Like Lotze's Mikrokosmus, the purpose was to educate and inform: unlike it, however, the intent was also to found a new discipline of Völkerpsychologie. The transition from educating the public to establishing a discipline was a major one, and yet the central intellectual issue was similar: how do we learn language and how does language convey the culture of a people?

In looking back to Wundt's Völkerpsychologie, which appeared in ten volumes between 1900 and 1920, it behooves us to reflect on its origins in the cultural reform movement of the 1860's. From the vantage point we can then consider the gains, and the losses, of the subsequent professionalization of psychology to which Wundt inadvertently contributed.

**Lotze's Program for Language and Culture**

Philology had attained tremendous prestige among the academic disciplines by the 1850's. Building on ever-increasing numbers of detailed studies of classical, oriental, and other languages, philologists had formulated rules of etymology, grammar, and syntax which enhanced or encroached upon, depending on one's perspective,
the neighboring disciplines of philosophy and natural science. Conversely, the founders of new disciplines drew on philosophy for legitimation of their systems and methods. A key transitional figure between the older systematic ideal and the newer critical one was Hermann Lotze again. His efforts were directed toward holding the disciplinary directions in an "encyclopedic" unity, which the next generation began to tear asunder.³

The second volume of the Mikrokosmus, for example, belongs historically at the onset of the disciplinary differentiation of Völkerpsychologie. The founders of this discipline focussed their attention on this volume, while the first volume had a greater reception in the biological and psychological sciences, and the third volume was influential in the historical and theological studies. We begin with the argument of the volume itself, and then show how it was reviewed and received by others.

This argument was most concisely stated by the author in a letter to his publisher describing these three parts of the nine part work: "(4) physical anthropology, man, (5) mental anthropology, mind; (6) pragmatic external history of man in a short sketch of the chief moments of general culture."⁴

Part 4, "Man", led up from inorganic to organic nature, and from there to the five human races classified by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in 1779; the continuing authority of the Göttingen School of comparative anatomy, signaled by the many editions of Blumenbach's Handbuch der Naturgeschichte, accounts for Lotze's reliance on Blumenbach.⁵ Actually such a "natural historical review of the animal series" was only preliminary for Lotze to "inner nature" in the sense of Johann Gottfried Herder's history of humanity.⁶ His goal, like Herder's, was what we might call a cultural anthropology.⁷ This required a reinterpretation of the
human organs as "means of action" and as "symbols full of
meaning."8 Knowledge and action, in other words, have an eman-
cipatory function.

In Part 5 on "Mind" we come to the heart of Lotze's advance
from philosophical idealism toward scientific naturalism. Drawing
on his medical knowledge of the voice apparatus, he noted that
the vowels and consonants are based in part on organic conditions
of the reflexes. Furthermore, "language begins with the meaning
attached to these sounds," and sounds eventually take on the
characteristics of parts of speech.9 Lotze thereby dropped the
logical elements of Aristotle's logic such as concept, judgment
and syllogism as points of departure for language analyses and
opted instead for the "natural form" in which we express the meta-
physical notions of thing, property, and flux by the substantive,
adjective, and verb.10 This physiological and metaphysical founda-
tion distinguished his position from the naturalistic approaches
to language of the physiologists, such as Heinrich Czolbe, and
philologists, such as August Böckh. It was closest to the philo-
sophers of language, Adolf Trendelenburg and Otto Friedrich Gruppe,
although intellectually independent of them also.11 For Lotze
went beyond the merely philological study of language to demon-
strate its symbolic function.

He argued in Part 6 on "The Microcosmic Order" that the
products of the adjustment of "inner life" to "external life"
are truth and custom: the one culminates in religion and the
other in the state.12 The resulting moving equilibria of cultural
development combined the Herbartian "means of self-preservation"
with the Hegelian "principle of progress."13 This message was ulti-
mately a political one, to legitimate the ideal state: "A great political community is thus, to a large extent, everywhere a work of Nature, or rather not of mere Nature, but of a Moral Order which is independent of the individual, and the commands of which occur to men when they are living together in a life of social communion."\textsuperscript{14} This program is quite the opposite of a value-free sociology; its very legitimacy stands upon the pluralistic values of the community. This conception of the primacy of the social organism appealed, albeit in different ways, to the founders of Völkerpsychologie, who recommended "to younger coworkers ... especially the works of Lotze, as the greatest thinker of our time," not so much for his overall program, but for what he could offer their own interest in establishing "a third discipline between natural science and history."\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Steinthal uses Lotze to critique Lazarus}

The project for a Völkerpsychologie doubtless originated in the Jewish upbringing of the two friends, Heymann Steinthal (1823-1899) and Moritz Lazarus (1824-1903) who came to know one another through the Hegelian philologist Karl Heyse during their studies in Berlin. Coming from small towns in Posen and Anhalt, as one biographer suggests, they experienced at close hand the cultural differences of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish communities, who were unified under a national German language and Volksgeist.\textsuperscript{16} Both men combined a Talmudic education with broad study of culture on a Herbartian, as well as Hegelian, philosophical foundation. Steinthal returned to Berlin as Privatdocent in 1856, after four years in Paris, becoming ausserordentlicher Professor in 1862; meanwhile, Lazarus became ordentlicher Professor in Berne
and, during 1860-1865, Dean and rector, before returning to teach at the Military Academy in Berlin. Although hindered by anti-Semitism in Berlin, Lazarus became the organizer and publicizer of the new discipline and Steinthal its leading scholar.

Steinthal was an early admirer of Lotze, judged by his own admission and the extent of his borrowing from Lotze's ideas. By 1855 he had discovered in the physiology of Johannes Müller and Lotze the clue to go beyond Wilhelm von Humboldt's theory of language as "inner form." Language originates with the interjections which express feelings in a reflexive manner. Speech itself involves auditory sensations and muscular movements which are associated in series to produce sounds. But it is the feelings expressed by such a set of sounds that constitute meaning, and hence communication, even prior to their articulation in parts of speech. Steinthal's theory of onomatopoeia was not based on the direct imitation of sounds but on sound reflexes and their associated meanings, for example, "miow" for cat, "Donner" for thunder, or "ah" for wonder.

When Lazarus' book Das Leben der Seele appeared in 1856, Steinthal devoted a critical review to the theoretical foundations of his friend's book along with the books of the Herbartians Wilhelm Fridolin Volkmann and Moritz Wilhelm Drobisch. The essay review, in which he drew heavily on Lotze's Logik of 1843, was published in the Zeitschrift für Philosophie. Steinthal employed Lotze's distinction between meaning and intensity, namely that the meaning of ideas has a strength which is entirely independent of their intensity in consciousness. This provided the second major insight of Steinthal's theory of
natural language: that "understanding is the kernel of speaking."\textsuperscript{21} This went against the assumption of Lazarus and the Herbartians that ideas are compounds of simpler elements. It also assumed that mind is active, not passively mechanical. Steinthal concluded that Herbart's assumption of a fusion seems to me even more certainly to disappear before Lotze's remarks about the essentially discriminating consciousness. May psychologists therefore devote special attention to this foundation of all psychological research.\textsuperscript{22}

**Steinthal critiques Lotze's Theory of Language**

By 1860, however, Steinthal had begun to distance himself in regard to the relation of grammar and logic, "which I do differently from Lotze."\textsuperscript{23} In the second volume of the Mikrokosmus in 1858, Lotze had stated that a beast of burden associates the sight of the load with the feeling of painful pressure, whereas a human would go further and explain it by cause and effect. Steinthal insisted first that the human ascription of an objective cause to a subjective feeling be called apperception. Secondly, and more importantly, Steinthal was not satisfied when Lotze called this a logical justification. The actual grammatical forms are more varied, he claimed, than the logical ones. For example, the same logical form and thought content might be expressed by three different sentences: "the growing of coffee is in Africa," "Africa is the homeland of coffee," or simply "coffee grows in Africa."\textsuperscript{24} In fact, Steinthal proposed in this highly acclaimed book *Charakteristik der hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues* a functional classification of languages into isolating, agglutinating, and inflecting types, which
Wundt borrowed without acknowledgement three years later.\textsuperscript{25}

Under the encouragement of Lazarus, Steinthal was moving toward a greater appreciation of history. Their co-authored introduction to the \textit{Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft} claimed ambivalently that their new discipline drew upon both the experimental and the observational methods; it was a "physiology of the historical life of mankind."\textsuperscript{26} Actually there was no use of the experimental method, unless the theoretical use of the reflex concept and the mental mechanisms by which language roots became words were so-called. Steinthal's method, which Lazarus generalized and popularized, was comparative linguistics. Invoking their former teachers, August Böckh, Jakob Grimm, and Wilhelm von Humboldt, they endorsed the hermeneutic study of "cultural minds" (\textit{Volksgeister}) through language, mythology, art, religion, custom, and the occupations of mankind.\textsuperscript{27} There was a tension here between what they said and did. In 1863 Steinthal took issue with the Darwinism of August Schleicher's \textit{Die deutsche Sprache} and the logicism of Max Müller's \textit{Lectures on the Science of Language}; in both cases, the authors allegedly treated language outside the context of the mental life of cultural groups.\textsuperscript{28} Yet this is precisely what Steinthal did, insofar as he based his major work, \textit{Abriss der Sprachwissenschaft} in 1871, upon a Herbartian "mental mechanics."\textsuperscript{29}

The reason for Steinthal's confusion, it may be said in retrospect, was both methodological and theoretical. Admiring the experimental methods in the natural sciences, he sought to underpin his linguistics with a reflex physiology and a mental mechanics. But as Wundt observed in 1882,

this is a prejudice of linguists:

Steinthal too is of the opinion that there is a psychology independent of objective facts.\textsuperscript{30}
Steinthal's real contribution to psychology, continued Wundt, was not in his mental mechanics but in his booklet on Mande-Negro language. Only by returning to the facts of language through hermeneutic methods, and by abandoning psychological theory, could we hope for a better psychology as well as a science of language.

Steinthal's review of the Mikrokosmus in 1866 reflects this confusion. "I admit that Lotze's advice that the mind observes itself supplements the psychological foundations of Herbart in a most important way, essentially changing the foundations." Nevertheless, he alleged that Lotze's psychology was dualistic because it posited a mind observing "a mere series of associated sounds and contents." He proposed to overcome this dualism in the following way: take the sentence "the shrubs bloom." It can be apperceived first as "shrub," then as "bloom," next as "shrubs blooming," and finally as "blooming of shrubs." The example was fine, and the phenomenological method clear; but he undermined his methodological sophistication by slipping back to the theory that this fourfold apperception "belongs nevertheless to the mental mechanism."

The same critique was transposed into the cultural plane when Steinthal claimed that Lotze had not carried the developmental laws far enough. He accused him of advocating a dualism of concrete individuals who embody the education of mankind and of abstract humanity which preserves and conveys these cultural advances from generation to generation. Missing was the middle level term of the Volksgeist, or "cultural mind," analogous to apperception in the individual mind. Lotze's portrayal lacks these social units, he claimed: "Our psychology proceeds by con-
trast from humanity and seeks to conceive the individual as it appears in this whole."\textsuperscript{34} Steinthal illustrated his point with the historical change of the proletariat and of women, which Lotze had downplayed, e.g., "Is the woman of the hunting Indian and the caliph and the Christian yet one and the same?"\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{Lazarus draws upon Lotze's Cultural Program}

The irony of Steinthal's critique of Lotze is that it re-
lected a shortcoming of his own work; he dealt only programma-
tically with "cultural mind", focussing instead on the classi-
fication of languages and their theoretical basis in mental development. Lazarus, by comparison, was much more attuned to popular culture. Although he experienced no formative influence from Lotze, as had Steinthal, he quoted Lotze in support of his own views in the areas of education, humor, and personality.

The agreement of Lotze and Lazarus went beyond the concern for self-development to the altruism required "to fulfill one's place in the world through service for the general good."\textsuperscript{36}

Lazarus liked to pose contradictions and resolve them; in this case, the contradiction between the individuality of education and the universality of science was resolved by the altruistic service of the individual to the community. Humor posed another contradiction between reality and phantasy; quoting Lotze's critique of Romantic phantasy, he urged that humor occurs when "the striving which fails in its goal is understood in the world order and therefore cannot fail to achieve straightway another goal which stands in contradiction to its own."\textsuperscript{37} A frequent theme in Lazarus, finally, was personality in the sense of an aesthetic unity, realized through combining sensory stimulation
with artistic imagination to achieve "unity of character."³⁸

In one important respect, both Lazarus and Steinthal fell short of Lotze's cultural program. Neither was truly historical; there is no treatment of historical epochs of culture in their work comparable with the Mikrokosmus. For this aspect of Lotze's legacy, one must turn to his successor at Berlin in 1883, Wilhelm Dilthey.³⁹ For Lotze had in fact displayed historical reason in the folk culture of the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Christians, Renaissance, and modern ages. He did so under the bourgeois chapter headings of truth and science, work and happiness, manners and morals, beauty and art, the religious life, and political life and society. If anything, this program was too orderly and harmonious to suit the taste of the fin de siècle generation of Dilthey and Nietzsche. Yet Lotze's cultural program did find its way to the book shelf of the educated citizen, providing a standard of Biedermeier stability in a time of rapid progress.

Wundt fulfills the Program of Lazarus and Steinthal

If Lotze's program gradually faded by 1900, Wundt's was stillborn in that year. Wundt's Völkerpsychologie failed to achieve a popular audience, in part because of its ponderous length and wooden style. Nevertheless, it is of historical interest as a transition from Lazarus and Steinthal to George Herbert Mead, and as a foil for the disciplinary development of psychology.

Wundt's originality was in shifting Steinthal's emphasis from the reflex movement associated with sound and feeling to the meaning of sentences. In 1863, Wundt had already critically
reported the view of Lotze and Steinthal, which was earlier hinted at by Wilhelm von Humboldt, that language begins with reflexive movements, some of which are onomatopoetic. By 1885, Wundt placed more emphasis on gestures and mimic movements containing symbolic meaning. This was an important step toward a social behaviorism, in which reciprocal postural adjustments constitute the beginning of sign communication, which becomes the theoretical basis of language. Using the concept of meaning after 1900, Wundt was able to provide a genetic account of the origin of myth and custom through sentence construction (Satzfügung) and the transformation of meaning (Bedeutungswandel) in language communities. Wundt thus bridged the individual and social aspects of language use by relating the process of language acquisition to the process of language evolution.

It can be seen in retrospect that the transition from the reflex to the gesture to the significant symbol was a gradual one. Lotze's emphasis on the meaning of the parts of speech, independent of reflex physiology and logic, was an important step toward a naturalistic theory of language development. His theory of culture as "moving equilibria" of human religious and political orders helped to legitimate the shift to a new psychological subject matter, the community or folk. Steinthal took up one aspect, the linguistic community, and Lazarus the other, the social community. Steinthal's success was limited by his excessive confidence in a mentalistic psychology, as Wundt pointed out, while Lazarus lacked a unity of conception according to even his own biographer, so that by 1890 he had relinquished the disciplinary ambitions (of his Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie).
Unfortunately Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* arrived too late to offer a foundation for method and theory in social psychology. By 1910, the Bühlers, Otto Selz, and Oswald Külpe had placed cognitive processes on an experimental foundation. Wundt's resort to the transformation of meanings, myths, and customs in historical communities seemed less rigorous, despite the fact it emphasized precisely the aspect of social experience which the new cognitive psychology lacked. Instead of a division of labor between the study of the lower and the higher mental processes, there occurred a disciplinary differentiation of psychology from anthropology, and of both from philology, history, and sociology. The gain in detailed results was purchased at the price of a loss of discussion at the metatheoretical level of *Völkerpsychologie*. 
Footnotes


4 Lotze to Hirzel, 7 February 1858.


6 Lotze, Microcosmus, I, 525 (II, 132; II, 136), inner nature; I, 467 (II, 70; II, 71), natural historical review (not "biological review," as in the English translation).


9 Lotze, Microcosmus, I, 614 (II, 225; II, 234), language begins.

10 Lotze, Microcosmus, I, 622 (II, 233; II, 243), natural form.


12 Lotze, Microcosmus, II, 101 (II, 428; II, 446), inner life (the title of Part 5, ch. 5); II, 76 (II, 403; II, 420), external life (the title of Part 5, ch. 4).


21. Steinthal, 1858, 209 (1880, 83), understanding.

22. Ibid., 1858, 206 (1880, 80), assumption.


25. Ibid., p. 312.


27. Ibid., 1860, 38-62; 1880, 344-68.

28. Heymann Steinthal, Philologie, Geschichte und Psychologie in ihren gegenseitigen Beziehungen (Berlin: Ferd. Dümmler, 1864), pp. 23-24. This interpretation of Steinthal's methods as hermeneutic, notwithstanding his explanatory theory, receives circumstantial corroboration from the fact that he quotes the historian who pioneered hermeneutic methods, Gustaf Droysen, in his preface to the effect that "the task of defining the essence and laws of history" was "the next significant turn" in the sciences. It was Dilthey, as I intend to show elsewhere, who resolved this tension, and after him the Baden School of NeoKantians, though not necessarily for the better.
Cf. the two volumes of his major textbook, the one an explanatory theory, the other a hermeneutic description, with no bridge between them: Heymann Steinthal, Abriss der Sprachwissenschaft, 2 vols. (Berlin: Ferd. Dümmler, 1871), vol. 1. Einleitung in die Psychologie und Sprachwissenschaft, vol. 2. Charakteristik der hauptsächlichsten Typen des Sprachbaues.


Ibid., p. 128.

Ibid., p. 128.

Ibid., p. 223.


Lazarus, Das Leben der Seele, 2nd ed., 1876, I, 18, citing Lotze, Mikrokosmus, 1858, II, 399.


This point is documented in my work-in-progress on Hermann Lotze. Meanwhile, the respect of the Dilthey School for Lotze is most readily documented in the introduction to Lotze's *Logik* by Georg Misch: Hermann Lotze, *Logik* (Frankfurt: Meiner, 1912), pp. ix-cxxii.


L. Stein, "Lazarus", p. 130. The journal was changed to the *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*. 
Chapter VI. GERMAN QUOTATIONS

4) die körperliche Anthropologie, Titel: der Mensch, 5) die geistige Anthropologie: der Geist; 6) die pragmatische äussere Geschichte der Menschheit in einem kurzen Abriss der Hauptmomente der allgemeinen Cultur; ...

6) naturgeschichtlichen Uebersicht der Thierreihe

8) Mittel zum Handeln bedeutsamen Symbolen für alle

9) Die Sprache entsteht erst mit der Bedeutung, die an diese Laute geknüpft wird

10) die naturgemässe Form

12) das innere Leben des äusseren Lebens

13) Selbsterhaltungsmittel Princip des Fortschrittes


15) besonders die Arbeit Lotzes, des grössten Denkers unserer Zeit.

15) eine dritte Wissenschaft zwischen die Naturwissenschaft und Geschichte.

21) Verstehen der Keim des Sprechens ist

22) Annahme der Verschmelzung scheint mir noch sicherer vor Lotze's Bemerkungen über das wesentlich unterscheidende Bewusstsein schwinden zu müssen. Möchten also die Psychologen besondere Aufmerksamkeit dieser Grundlage aller psychologischen Forschung widmen.

23) was ich in anderer Weise thue als Lotze

24) Des Kaffees Wachsen ist in Afrika Afrika ist die Heimath des Kaffee Der Kaffee wächst in Afrika

25) den ganzen sprachlichen Organismus

26) die Physiologie des geschichtlichen Lebens der Menschheit?
28 Philologie ist Geschichte
Die Aufgabe, das Wesen und die Gesetze der Geschichte zu bestimmen ... die nächste bedeutende Wendung

30 Auch Steinthal ist der Meinung, es gebe eine von objectiven That-
sachen unabhängige Psychologie

31 Ich gestehe Lotze zu, dass er mit dem Hinweis auf diese Fähigkeit
der Seele, sich selbst zu beobachten, Herbart's psychologische Grund-
lagen in höchst bedeutsamer Weise ergänzt, ja dass diese Ergänzung
ejene Grundlagen wesentlich umgestaltet.

32 bloss eine Reihe associirter Laute und Inhalte

33 Die Sträucher grünen
Strauch
grünen
gerhört sie doch zum psychischen Mechanismus

34 Unsere Psychologie geht im Gegenteil von der Menschheit aus und
sucht den Einzelnen so zu erfassen, wie er in diesem Ganzen er-
scheint.

35 durch all diesen Sturm und Drang wandeln kaum berührt von seinen
wechselnden Beleuchtungen die Frauen

35 Ist die Frau des jagenden Indianers und des Kalifen und des
Christen noch ein und dasselbe?

36 durch den Dienst für das allgemeine Gute seine Stelle in der
Welt zu füllen

37 die Bestrebungen, die ihr Ziel verfehlt, von dem allgemeinen Zu-
sammenhang der Dinge ergriffen wird und deshalb gar nicht verfeh-
len kann, auf geradem Wege ein anderes Ziel zu erreichen, das mit dem
ihren in Widerspruch steht.

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