

# A note on the presence of Wilhelm Wundt in Spanish psychology<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract: The aim of this paper is to trace the relationship between Wilhelm Wundt and Spanish psychology. Attention has been paid to works and authors previous to the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Two main schools, one in Madrid and the other in Barcelona have been examined, and differences in Wundt's image have been found between that provided by psychologists at the end of the century and at the first decades of our century. Most significant contributions were found in high school textbooks, such as those by F. Giner, M. Navarro, F. Herrero-Bahillo and E. Luis-André, and in a historical work of J. V. Viqueira. Wundtian impact seems to have been significant although it did not have any practical and institutional effects. Such a peculiar situation may perhaps be due to the primary interest in applied issues that dominated Spanish psychology in the first half of our century.*

*Zusammenfassung: Mit diesem Beitrag soll die Beziehung zwischen Wilhem Wundt und der Spanischen Psychologie dargelegt werden. Das besondere Augenmerk gilt den Arbeiten und Autoren vor dem Spanischen Bürgerkrieg (1936-1939). Zwei wichtige Schulen, die von Madrid und Barcelona, werden untersucht; hierbei werden Unterschiede in deren Wundt-Bild festgestellt, ebenso Unterschiede bei den Psychologen, die vor der Jahrhundertwende und denen, die im ersten Jahrzehnt unseres Jahrhunderts arbeiteten. Die wichtigsten Unterschiede sind in Lehrbüchern, wie z.B. von F. Giner, M. Navarro, F. Herrero-Bahillo und E. Luis-André, sowie in den historischen Arbeiten von J. V. Viqueira zu finden. Der Einfluß Wundts war bedeutsam, obwohl er keine praktischen oder institutionellen Wirkungen hatte. Dieser eigenartige Sachverhalt ist vielleicht darauf zurückzuführen, daß das Hauptinteresse der spanischen Psychologie in der ersten Hälfte unseres Jahrhunderts im Bereich angewandt-psychologischer Fragen lag.*

In its historical development, modern scientific psychology is associated to the efforts of Wilhelm Wundt, whose ideas have influenced, both in a positive and a negative way, most of the national traditions along which the new science evolved.

Here we will present in outline the network relating Wundt and Spanish psychology. To such a purpose, it will be useful to differentiate those contacts of a literary nature from those of a more scientific character involving personal

knowledge and interaction. While the former seem to have taken place in the last decades of the past century, the latter have occurred short before the World War I. These two moments seem to have had a different meaning in the development of psychology in Spain, as we will show in what follows.

Interested as we are in psychological problems, all Spanish references to Wundtian philosophy will be put aside, as well as those coming from philosophers or other sources that cannot be considered as psychological in any sense. Although they probably constitute the largest part of the influences exerted by the German professor on Spanish culture, and must be viewed as extremely important -as might be the case of Ortega-y-Gasset's attitude toward Wundtian ideas-, we will ignore them here and now (see Carpintero, 1981). Let us only note that, while several Wundtian philosophical works (*Introduction to Philosophy, Ethics, Introduction to Metaphysics*) were translated into Spanish at the beginning of our century, only three psychological works received as much attention: *Outlines of Psychology, Elements of folk psychology*, and his short book on *Hypnotism and suggestion*. Let us now consider Wundt's impact on Spanish psychology.

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Spain has been more a receptive than a creative country in psychology. It remained out of the channels through which modern science developed in Western countries, and in the past century it began to move forward in the right direction, trying to incorporate new ideas and techniques. Since the Reformation, the country had been kept apart from modern ideas on religious grounds. Notwithstanding, in the second half of the Nineteenth century, the new spirit of modernity began to permeate social elites, as new ideas, modern science and techniques, religious freedom, democratization accompanied the emergence of a growing middle class.

The advent of the new psychology took place along two main lines, one centered in Madrid, the other in Barcelona, the two largest cities at the moment. (A Neoscholastic line could also be added. Some religious groups and institutions were involved in the cultural "aggiornamento" initiated under Pope Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* encyclical letter (1879), but their contribution will be omitted here because of its scarce originality).

In Madrid, well into the 1860's, some groups tried to promote a deep change in society by creating a modern mentality. This goal was to be achieved through a scientifically oriented education based on psychological grounds. They were inspired in the philosophy of the German idealist philosopher and freethinker Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-1832), whose thought was deeply

influential on Spanish „intelligentsia“. Krause' system tried to combine nature and spirit, science and metaphysics; it placed the science of the spirit at the basis of all philosophical construction (Ureña). No branch of philosophy was thus to be developed without a previous psychology.

Spanish “krausists” gathered around the Free Institute of Education (“Institución Libre de Enseñanza”), a private educational center created to promote freedom in science and education (1876). It was headed by Francisco Giner de los Ríos (1839-1915), a professor of Law at the University of Madrid, that became one of the most influential personalities in contemporary Spain (Carr, 1966).

Although Giner was not a psychologist, he paid much attention to Wundtian ideas. He searched to clarify the psychophysical nature of the human being which Law necessarily deals with. He also saw Psychology as a basis for an education firmly established on scientific grounds. He published an influential work, *Lecciones sumarias de psicología* (“Summary Lessons in Psychology”) in 1874; it was reissued, with slight changes in 1877. This is a short textbook based upon the lectures given by the author at a School for Nurses from 1870 on. In its pages, Giner acknowledged his interest to combine the “newest psychophysics” of Wundt, Fechner, Lotze, Helmholtz and Spencer with the anthropological views of Krause and his followers (Giner, 1877); in so doing, metaphysical speculation was combined with positivistic ideas, and emphasis was put on the physiological dimensions of psychological processes, in order to clarify the life of human embodied spirit (Lafuente, 1980).

„Man is ,a spirit with a body‘. Because the spirit is organized in accordance with the body, both factores intermingle and result in a ,psychophysical cycle‘ of interaction between them, in which reciprocally body and spirit appear as dynamic realities... He points out two functions between both factors: first, the soul receives physiological states and modifications and reacts to them with a certain ,echo and resonance‘ (sensation), regulated by laws such as Weber-Fechner's, adapted in each receptor to a single type of stimulus and later making possible perceptive structuration processes. The spirit, on the other hand, acts upon the body in the form of expressive and other movements, one of which is language. To separate both functions does not exclude, according to Giner, their cooperation, since even the sensation, implies muscular actions of an attentional type, and movements generate new sensorial messages.“ (Carpintero, 1982).

As it may be seen, in this view the metaphysics of Krause's idealism and the empirical approaches of the new psychophysics coalesce in a personal synthesis.

In some reflections upon, Giner also considered society as an organism with a collective mind, and here very often referred to Wundtian contributions to Folk psychology.

Close to Giner was the first Spanish professor of experimental psychology at the University of Madrid, Luis Simarro (1851-1921). A psychiatrist trained in the French tradition of Charcot and Magnan, he got his chair at the Faculty of Sciences in 1902. In his courses he used a Spanish translation of Wundt's *Outlines of psychology* as a textbook. He was also founder of the first Spanish laboratory devoted to psychopedagogical research (1894), where he carried out some empirical studies on the mental fatigue of schoolchildren. In his work, he was interested in combining both the associationistic point of view and the physiological approach. A man so sparing in written production as he was prolific in students of the outmost importance for the history of Spanish psychology, he is currently considered as the „founding father“ of experimental psychology in Spain.

By the same years, in Barcelona a small group centered around a biologically oriented researcher, Ramón Turró, began to work on psychological matters.

Turró (1854-1926), strongly influenced by Claude Bernard, maintained the need of an experimental approach to the physiological study of behavior, and the radical unity of all human dimensions. He used to say that “the man who thinks and the man who eats are one and the same”. Accordingly, hunger was conceived as the basis of all knowledge. In his view, there is a ,trophic‘ sensibility for food, ,trophic‘ reflex actions that fulfill needs, and a whole learning process for the relation of object signs to the effects on the organism. Digestive reflexes are then considered as the first link connecting man with the world around. On such grounds he built a metaphysical theory of knowledge. In his works he showed a changing attitude towards Wundtian ideas. While at an early period he clearly approved the experimental approach carried out by Wundt, some years later he found introspection wholly unreliable, and he blamed Wundt for not having proposed a clearcut methodology for the scientific study of psychological processes (Saiz, 1990). These are his words:

“Wilhelm Wundt proclaimed the need of approaching psychological processes in an experimental way, but he did not explain how and in which way such an experimentation should be carried out; as a matter of fact, everyone understood this in his own way, and experimental work was carried out in an arbitrary fashion. After thirty five years of so-called experimental work, no definite law has been obtained nor any accepted mechanisms have been found to explain a universally acknowledged class of phenomena; moreover, there is not a theoretical body that may be considered as a common scientific property by all scientists” (Turró, 1918, 1992).

Facing such a situation, Turró stressed the need for an “objective methodology”, and paved the way for a physiological approach to the organism as a whole that was to prevail in the Barcelona school in the early decades of our century (Saiz, 1990).

Up to this point, the influence of Wundt seems to have been of a very general nature, mainly stemming from the experimental character of his approach to the study of mind. References to his Folk psychology may also be found, although they are neither frequent nor significant.

The situation changed for the better with the advent of a new generation of high school teachers, who were trained under Giner and Simarro in Madrid, and under Turró in Barcelona. They furthered the new tradition in psychology.

Although only one university chair of psychology had been established in our country (in 1902, see above), a course on “psychology, logic and ethics” was included as a compulsory subject matter in high school studies. This provided new possibilities for broadening the attention paid to psychological issues.

We may find several textbooks written for such courses, in which Wundtian psychology was taken as the main basis for their conceptual planning. Among them, those written by F. Herrero-Bahillo, Martín Navarro and Eloy Luis-André, should not be forgotten. All three authors profitted from a stay at the University of Leipzig, thanks to the grants obtained from the new *Junta para Ampliación de Estudios e Investigaciones Científicas*. This was a national agency created in 1907 in order to promote research and postgraduate training in foreign centers. It was placed under the heading of S. Ramón-y-Cajal and had an enormous influence in cultural and scientific fields in the first half of the century.

Navarro (1871-1950) wrote a short but interesting “Handbook of experimental psychology” (*Manual de psicología experimental*) (1914) in which, in spite of its elementary level, an effort was made to provide teachers and students with a collection of well established experiments in the fields of sensation, perception, imagery, memory, feeling, will and intelligence. It has been noted that all the six references to Wundt were made to the first edition of his *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie*, that was taken as an authoritative theoretical groundwork. References were related to local-sign theory and the aesthetics of colour sensations. It has also been suggested that the impact of the Wundtian model, focusing upon the general laws of human mind, was counteracted by Navarro’s interest in Binet’s research in individual differences (Tous, 1984).

Herrero-Bahillo’s textbook „Notions of modern psychology“ (*Nociones de psicología moderna*, 1911) was conceived and written along the guidelines of Wundtian *Outlines of psychology*. It was centered on the study of the facts of consciousness, its elements, connections, development and laws. It also included

such common topics as sensation and feeling, as the twofold elementary bases of psychological processes. Wundtian works and articles, some of them published in *Philosophischen Studien*, were also referred to in footnotes.

Last but not least, Luis-André (1876-1936) studied in Leipzig under Wundt, and worked under his direction on the analysis of the melody of different languages and dialects (1910). He also did some work on the Spanish and German mentalities, and wrote a textbook not without originality but strongly inspired in Wundtian ideas.

According to his views, Wundtian synthesis combined Kant's criticism, Leibnizian idealism and Spencer's positivism; on such grounds Wundt was to be considered as the „German Aristotle of today“. He also founded some psychological laboratories in the various high schools where he taught (Orense, Toledo, and Madrid).

This line of thought clearly influenced other textbooks published at the time. In a study comparing such textbooks with those published in the 1940s, after the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), a striking result was found. While Wundt was the most cited author in the years before the war, his name practically disappear in the afterwar period, being replaced by Saint Thomas Aquinas, whose ideas were more in accordance to the new educational politics established by Franco's very conservative regime (Carpintero, 1981).

Turning now from textbooks to other works, a remarkable and broad review of Wundtian psychological system was offered by another high-school teacher, Juan V. Viqueira, (1886-1924), whose book „Contemporary psychology“ (*La psicología contemporánea*, 1930) is undoubtedly one of the most significant Spanish contributions to the history of psychology.

Viqueira, a student of Simarro and Giner, received postdoctoral training in Germany under Wundt, G.E. Müller, Stumpf, Cassirer and Husserl. In addition he also studied under Bergson in Paris. He also did research on position effect in nonsense syllable learning in Göttingen under Müller. After coming back to Spain, however, he was unable to obtain the facilities for psychological experimentation he had been claiming for, and as a result he turned to more philosophical questions.

A detailed picture of Wundt's system is presented in his above mentioned book. It includes a detailed account of both the physiological and socioethnological branches of the Wundtian approach. Among other features, Viqueira noted that this system, “is the most extended and influential direction in psychology nowadays... it has widened the field of psychological research as far as possible... including every method... and bringing with them the possibility of developing (theory) in a plurality of directions” (Viqueira, 1930). Such an account of

Wundtian theory underlines those traits stressed by Kuhn when defining paradigms many decades later.

Notwithstanding, he did not wholly accept the Wundtian approach, and maintained the need to provide psychology with a philosophical foundation, adding the genetic point of view to the structural and descriptive one. While strongly influenced by James, Bergson and Dilthey, he acknowledged Wundt as the true founder of the new science of mind.

In the following years, German influences were to combine with other coming from French and Swiss traditions, mainly oriented toward the construction of an educational psychology. Gestalt and phenomenology, German psychotechnology and comprehensive approaches began to prevail in Spanish psychological arena.

It seems that Wundtian impact on Spanish psychology has been significant but limited to a theoretical level and with scarce practical effects on research and institutional grounds. The needed support from universities was missing until the second half of our century, and for decades, scientific psychology was largely replaced by its applications. The analysis of Wundtian impact may help to clarify the idiosyncratic evolution of psychology in Spain.

## Footnotes

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