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Is the Logos of the Psychic Concealed in History? On the Work of Felix Krueger

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Psychology, which by its very name seems called as no other science to romp in the fullness of life, has nowadays become as sobre and lean as an ascetic...

Kierkegaard

This contribution aims to present those aspects of the genetic, holistic or structural psychology of Felix Krueger which deals explicitly with the significance of history and culture for psychology. Of greatest relevance to this subject is Krueger’s programmatical text Über Entwicklungspsychologie—ihre sachliche und geschichtliche Notwendigkeit (1915), the first in the series Arbeiten zur Entwicklungspsychologie, which he edited.¹ The following discussion concentrates on this book, which is representative neither of Krueger’s overall psychology nor of his later work or of German Psychology in general. This book originated within the context of the psycho-historical cultural research carried out by Karl Lamprecht (1856-1915) and of Wilhelm Wundt’s academically established ethno-psychology (Kulturpsychologie). Their concern was to combine history, sociology and psychology. What seems so familiar to us today from the “annales school” in France, the historical researching of mentalities, may legitimately be seen within the context of work done at the University of Leipzig at the turn of the century. Krueger’s article bears witness to the many controversies at the time which have remained the object of academic science up to the present day.²

Through the revival of interest in the discussion of the relationship of psychology to history, also brought about by the concern

*Translated from the German by John Burns.
for a re-orientation in both scientific disciplines, already-forgotten and scarcely-familiar names spring again to mind. One of these is Felix Krueger, who was born in Posen in 1874 and died in Basel in 1948. He began his university studies in Strassburg in 1893, a student of Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915) the philosopher and historian, with whom Krueger later came into critical conflict. In Berlin, he attended the philosophy and history lectures of Paulsen, Treitschke and Dilthey. Although he studied with Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) for a short period only, and probably with critical misgivings, it is this very thinker who stimulates him in his questioning and in his reflection on the relation of the individual to society.\(^3\) Krueger writes:

Dilthey was still caught up in semi-romantic notions of the self-sufficiency of the creative individual. His sense of reality did force him occasionally to take a look at ‘milieu,’ but this unclear concept of West European origin meant to him, as to his contemporaries, something with neither soul nor structure. He saw as the pinnacle of human development in its entirety the cultured, differentiated personality with its high-intensified ‘awareness of individuality,’ living life to the full and directed towards ‘conscious ends.’ Into this ideal flowed motifs from the Renaissance and the New Humanism, strongly combining with the 19th-century spirit of private capitalism and economic materialism which practically negated the evolved structures of the community.\(^4\)

With the thesis upon which \textit{Über Entwicklungspsychologie} is based—that man must for psychological research, too, be a social and historical being—Krueger opposed not only the philosophers and cultural historians, but also experimentally-and positivistically-oriented association psychology, and even the young science of sociology. For what reason? All these disciplines have proposed for psychology an object which for Krueger does not exist: the isolated, reduced static individual, abstracted from all life-processes. The development postulated for Western cultural history from \textit{we} to \textit{I}, and from an emotionally-determined to a de-emotionalized life\(^5\) remains the object of Krueger’s reflection, which he neither can nor will sacrifice to the strict laws of German-born experimental psychology.

On completion of his doctoral thesis (\textit{Der Begriff des absolut Wertvollen als Grundbegriff der Moralphilosophie}) Krueger joined the staff of the first German institute for experimental psychology, in Leipzig, headed by its founder, Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920). After his inaugural dissertation (1903), Krueger worked for two
years (1906-1908) as Ordinary Professor of Philosophy and Psychology in Buenos Aires. In 1910 he was appointed professor in Halle. For one year he taught at Columbia University in New York. During this period he wrote Über Entwicklungspsychologie, in which he attempted among other things to ‘save’ philosophy for psychology and thus escape the clutches of English association psychology and empiricizing Positivism, which he held to restrict the scope of scientific work entirely. In 1914 he was appointed to Wundt's chair of philosophy in Leipzig, where he was made University Vice-Chancellor in 1935. Soon after his appointment to the Vice-Chancellorship he relinquished his office. Krueger became Emeritus Professor in 1938.

In Krueger's writings the feeling of disappointment at the state of science in general and of psychology in particular is especially evident. At the beginning of this century, the object of science had become reduced to a mere assembling of facts which had no immanent meaning and no normative, i.e. generalizing force. Compartmentalization, particularization and the collecting of detailed but at the same time fragmentary insights producing no whole were characteristic of 'doing' a science distinguished neither by a common purpose nor a philosophy as a unifying principle.

The development of the sciences towards mechanization, methodization and empiricization, with the exclusion of metaphysics and philosophy from which to derive the question as to the meaning of action and thought, should be borne in mind, for it provides Krueger with one of his most important target areas. Positivism with its reduced concern for knowledge implies an anthropology of man which defines him in measurable terms only. Krueger dealt extremely critically with the scientific methods of psychology and with man as the object of its knowledge.

* * *

There is a 'modesty' in science which is even more intolerable to me than presumption. The 'modest' conceal themselves behind the method and make divisions and delimitations for the Alpha and Omega of experience. It's often as if they were saying: "It doesn't matter what we find, but how we order what we haven't found."

Canetti
Krueger's writings in his middle years may be read as a protest against such divisions and delimitations as were adopted in psychological research and against the emptiness of positivism. Positivism knows man only as a bundle of ideas, impressions and imaginings; it knows the human ‘I’ only as passive subject. With his book Über Entwicklungspsychologie Krueger wishes to overcome the model of mechanically-functioning man and place him in the context of values, intentionality, ability to act, and meaning. If psychology is to have as the object of its knowledge a living, constantly changing and developing entity, how does its method then stand up? He discusses the basic methodological problem of psychology and defines its epistemological position within the natural sciences and the humanities. This critical treatment of the epistemological problem remains dominant in Krueger's work. He differentiates his concept of knowledge in a discussion of the research methods of exact measurement and experiment which predominate in psychology and for which knowledge and the exact definition of psychic phenomena are identical. Krueger rejects this concept of knowledge without, however, wishing to forgo the value and significance of such empirical methods for psychological research. Empirical and experimental research remain important for Krueger but must not, he considers, be the only source of knowledge.

The equating of the scientific with exact definition, with "concept" and "number" or "measurement," he considers false. Much is true, Krueger writes, which cannot be calculated. The value of an insight is not in its exactness but in its truth-content; it is not the method with which an insight is obtained which decides as to its dignity but its truth-value. Krueger would like to combine an empirical, psychological science with metaphysics, i.e. he is looking for a possibility to relate empirical science to reflection. "For the true is the whole, which dwells neither exclusively upon 'immediacy' nor leaps swiftly into the realm of 'reflection,' but which combines both functions equally." Krueger, who witnessed the development of correlation analysis—he was a friend of Spearman—explains:

With the aid of correlation calculus we recognize that highly complex psychic processes somehow relate to each other or to a common factor. The real determinants of these processes and even their internal compos-
ition are nevertheless far from being known to us. The numerical values determined may point the way to further analytical and explicative research but never replace it.\textsuperscript{10}

Here, too, one must refer to the omissions of academic psychologists. They neglect, in fact, almost entirely the social and historical determinacy of the entire psychic process.

Krueger's intent is to see man in psychological research as a social, historical and economical being. Krueger had to defend his point-of-view against psychologists, cultural historians and historians alike. In Krueger's opinion, the extremely influential cultural historians of the time, Windelband and Rickert, for example, thought of psychology as "an atomistic natural science, as developmentally-alien mechanics, devoid of the individual spiritual process."\textsuperscript{11} Psychology is thus deprived of the right to contribute anything at all to cultural history. Krueger laments that "for our logicians the concept of 'cultural science' consequently shrinks to that of purely historical knowledge."\textsuperscript{12} He criticizes cultural and historical sciences which have degenerated to chronology. It is wrong, writes Krueger, to separate the individual from the cultural-psychological and thus from history.\textsuperscript{13} It is true, he admits, that direct spiritual experience can itself only take place within individuals, but:

For the science of the mind, the whole difference lies between the "individual" and the "social" in the meaning used here, externally and temporarily. Direct spiritual experience takes place only within individuals. Yet psychology has to research even the most intimately personal, the most peculiarly individual and expressive in this, in its social determinedness.\textsuperscript{14}

Elsewhere he writes:

No one is alone. What the individual calls his personality is, in the strictest sense, a tissue of thoughts and sensations, the greatest part of which by far merely repeats what the society in the midst of which he lives possesses and administers as common spiritual property.\textsuperscript{15}

Psychology should also concern itself with:

The family, too, the club, the public, and thousands of other social structures, even fashion or the spiritual community of two people—the economy, science, war, or modern festivities [also] ... urgently require social-genetical, psychological research.\textsuperscript{16}
Although psychology has one of its origins in the history of German philosophy—holistic and structural psychology may in part be traced back to Dilthey, it has completely neglected the historical and social aspects of the human psyche, a concern which it could, however, also derive from the same philosophical tradition. Krueger writes:

Thus Herder and the leading romantics saw deeper than the academic psychologists of their day. For since that time the individual human sciences have agreed on the principle that all specific human life is not just genetically but historically, i.e. socio-genetically determined.\textsuperscript{17}

It is this socio-genetical perspective which Krueger wishes to introduce into psychological research as a method.

The experimental process, as we earlier realized, is all the more restricted in psychology the more the objects of the enquiry have historical character, the more they are essentially determined by cultural development. This again applies most to the more central functions of the mind, to the more complex, more essential structures of the mental life.\textsuperscript{18}

It is heretical, in Krueger’s words, to restrict scientific psychology in principle to the dissecting of isolated and culturally indifferent individual entities.\textsuperscript{19} Krueger criticizes especially philosophers, cultural historians and psychologists who wish to regard scientific psychology in this way, as a pure natural science following the same logical patterns as physical mechanics. This is far too restrictive:

Scientific psychology . . . [was] to restrict itself to the mechanics of the psychic. That means more exactly: to laws of necessity in processes within what is thought of as the non-developing individual.\textsuperscript{20}

Although Krueger only half-heartedly accepts Freud’s psychoanalytical method, as it fails to include exact experiment and is, to his mind, not free “from theoretical bias with regard to sexual-erotic connections and their dialectical re-interpretation,”\textsuperscript{21} he sees aspects of psychoanalysis which meet his demands for scientific psychology. Psychoanalysis does not proceed from a non-developing individual; moreover it recognizes the significance for the human psyche of feelings of every kind which, in Krueger’s opinion, determine behaviour and thought, and it is open to the genetical-comparative method, i.e., the Freud school includes ethnological knowledge in its work and
results. Psychoanalysis endeavours through phenomenology and conceptual analysis to reconstruct as completely as possible the genetic history of every mental illness and thus to bring to light emotional experiences both as components and as determinants of the process.

Krueger’s treatment of the relations of psychology and history in his own time sheds light on the conflict which has continued up to the present: the reason why one expects nothing of psychology is not that it could contribute nothing on account of its reduced knowledge of a historical object of research, but that one tries to keep psychology at a distance and has an interest in restricting it to a natural science or a science of the individual having no share in philosophy, cultural history, the humanities and history.

This criticism of compartmentalization within the individual disciplines is also leveled by Krueger at the generally historically- and philosophically-oriented sociologists Georg Simmel and Max Weber, whom he holds in esteem for their method but both of whom he understands as willing to see psychology reduced to the individual. Even today one argument against cooperation between psychology and history is its limited object: the individual. Precisely because Krueger wishes to research the individual in his social, economic and historical embeddedness and having-become-ness, he demands interdisciplinary work. His reproach of experimental psychology is that in its describing and explaining of the psychic process... it abstracts from none of the socio-genetic determining complexes as completely as from the economic, whereas in reality adult cultural man, the main research object of psychology, is influenced at every turn in his psycho-physical behaviour by economic factors.

Krueger, however, reflects upon man in his value-determined feeling and willing, in his meaning-organizing thinking, in his creative imagination. The great significance of the poets for psychology is for Krueger, as also for Freud, undisputed: In any case one wishes the researcher a small dose at least of the moral-psychological gift of discovery of a Gottfried Keller or Wilhelm Raabe and of such higher humour as is closely related to the tragedian’s skill and as he can find in the seemingly smallest detail things of great significance and the seeds of unlimited development. At this point the task of the psychologist becomes identical, more intimately so than most experts think, with that of the artist...
For Krueger, man as a historical entity is not infinitely changeable but lives in the tension between history and self-consistency. This supposition governs the different goals which Krueger sets for history and psychology. An important distinction must be made between developmental history and developmental theory. The concept of historical knowing covers only insights of a certain type in developmental science, namely those referring to a unique phenomenon, referring more exactly to specific places and times; these are developmental-historical insights. Developmental theory on the other hand always transcends (thus defined) historical knowing. It is always a science of laws.

The problem which most needs clarifying . . .: the problem of a more-than-historical scientific knowing of spiritual [mental] development.  

"Even as developmental psychology of culture" psychology "is not history," for psychology, even working historically, has in the final account to pursue one aim: it must search for constant determining and finally for law-governed relations of the psychic in order to make statements of general validity. With this claim Krueger finds himself in agreement with a philosophical tradition for which the discovery of the 'absolute' is the highest goal. The historical dimension of the psychic is subordinated to the discovery of its susceptibility to laws, and history fades into forgetfulness of that which historically precedes the law-constituting a priori. The 'rules of the soul' (Chladen) and human reason "are regarded as unchangeable and trans-historical and thus as the unproblematical tertium comparationis between the historical text to be understood and the immediate process of understanding." Historical research and historical psychology would thus have here different interests and goals of knowledge. The present demand of some historians "that dealing with history involves an autonomous discipline defined by its own procedures, by a specific object of enquiry, and finally by problems which are characteristic of it," would meet with Krueger's complete agreement, as it would not affect his idea of a historical psychology. Yet it cannot be emphasized strongly enough that Krueger did not succeed in building on and exploiting the potential for an independent historical psychology which was hinted at in Über Entwicklungspsychologie. The individual, living in a historical and social context, is later completely dissolved by Krueger and disappears in the all-embracing 'völkische Gemeinschaft' the building of which he expected, as did many others and Heidegger.
among them, from the National Socialists. The absolute identity of man and race, citizen and state, individual and society, which transcends the contradiction between them, ends historically and thus really in industrially-organized mass-destruction. When the people’s mind becomes one (Hegel), the variety and plurality of the totality, and thus of life, is sacrificed to the totalitarianism of particularity. Thus Adorno can write in Drei Studien zu Hegel that the totality is the untrue.

How can and should we, then, assess Krueger’s approach within the context of an appraisal of the history of historical psychology? Krueger is not free from the spirit of his time and is influenced by the idea of the cultural decay of the Western World. The concept of mechanically-functioning man is for Krueger just one indicator. But this justified criticism leads in Krueger’s case not to an Enlightenment-inspired critical (and thus emancipatory) concept of socio-historical man but makes him fall prey to the ideal of an ‘organically’ functioning community which he supposed once to have existed. It is this aspect, too, which leads to an affinity between Krueger, holistic psychology, and National Socialism. The idea of the ‘völkische Gemeinschaft’ is set against the theory of decadence and revolution. Historical psychology in itself is not yet a scientifically critical and emancipatory concept. This is in Krueger’s case evident and must be borne in mind as a warning. Yet, simultaneously, we must warn against coming to quick conclusions by placing the historical psychology which Krueger was demanding in unbroken continuity with the holistic psychology of a later time, with its close proximity to National Socialism.

Krueger’s text, which we have presented here, is a critical development of Wundt’s and Lamprecht’s ideas. They were taken up by none of his pupils. Neither Wundt’s ethnopsychology nor Lamprecht’s historico-psychological stimulus for cultural history fell on fertile soil in Germany. It was French and American scientists who adopted these approaches. In The Civilizing Process, however, Norbert Elias realized independently of these current developments much of what Krueger called for.

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Notes

1. Felix Krueger is well-known as ‘the mind of genetic holistic psychology’ (*Kopf der genetischen Ganzheitspsychologie*) (Albert Wellek). The ideas presented here in shortened form have seldom been taken up. It must be remembered that they represent only part of Krueger’s work. Apart from *Zur Entwicklungspsychologie* Krueger wrote two further essays of strongly historico-cultural character. In the series *Arbeiten zur Entwicklungspsychologie*, Bruno Gutmann’s book “Das Recht der Dschagga” appeared to which Krueger wrote an epilogue, the long essay “Entwicklungspsychologie des Rechts” (1926). His essay “Die Arbeit des Menschen als philosophisches Problem” appeared in 1929/30 in *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie*, in which reference is made to a final section which was probably never published. Further introductions to Krueger’s work are to be found in:

   Kogan, H., *Umriss der Entwicklungspsychologie, ihre Hauptvertreter und ihr Wesen.* (Diss.) Danzig, 1934.


3. See Jüttemann, G. (Ed.) *Die Geschichtlichkeit des Seelischen.* Weinheim, 1986. Lucien Febvre wrote in 1941: “Many people go away complaining insistently that on the well-trodden paths of history there is nothing more to discover. Were they to descend instead to the darker regions in which


24. Krueger, F., pp. 15 and 137.


32. Evand, R. J., Literaturbericht, p. 591.


34. See Weintraub und Burke (note 2).