

## review

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### Source Information

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**Book Reviewed:** *Wilhelm Wundt: Die Konzeption der Völkerpsychologie*. Berthold Oelze. Münster & New York: Waxmann, 1991. ISBN 3-89325-030-1

Wilhelm Wundt is chiefly known to modern psychologists as the man who founded the first laboratory for experimental psychology. His nonexperimental *Völkerpsychologie* was neglected in both Germany and the United States. This situation has begun to change. I recently reviewed a book from 1990 on Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* (Brock, 1992). Now another book on the subject has appeared. Unfortunately, both of these works are in German and are not likely to gain a wide readership in the United States.

As the title indicates, *Wilhelm Wundt: Die Konzeption der Völkerpsychologie* is mainly concerned with the theoretical foundations of the subject. The author has chosen 14 "key texts," which were published between 1862 and 1916. These texts are summarized and discussed in chronological order. Finally, there is a brief attempt to place Wundt's work in its social and historical context.

One of the strengths of the book is its concentration on Wundt's early writings on *Völkerpsychologie*. Some two thirds of the book is devoted to work that was published before 1900 (when the first volume of *Völkerpsychologie* appeared). Wundt's earliest publications outlined the need for a nonexperimental *Völkerpsychologie* to supplement the findings of experimental psychology and contain a great deal of discussion of this subject. The author also examines Wundt's neglected philosophical works, such as *Logik* (1883) and *Ethik* (1886). The latter is, in many ways, essential to an understanding of his *Völkerpsychologie*.

One of the weaknesses of the book is its failure to examine Wundt's 10-volume *Völkerpsychologie* (1900–1920). The only part of the work that is mentioned is the preface and introduction to the first volume. There may be some justification for this omission in that the book is mainly concerned with Wundt's conception of *Völkerpsychologie*. Unfortunately, the relationship between conception and realization is very complex. Wundt wrote in his autobiography that outlining a research program and actually carrying it out are two different things. He greatly modified his conception of *Völkerpsychologie* while he was writing the 10-volume work. To see these changes, one has to look at his major work on the subject.

Wundt was a prolific writer, though the extent of his productivity has been greatly exaggerated. Boring's figure of 53,000 pages was arrived at by counting the various editions of Wundt's works as separate items. Hall's figure of 16,000 pages is probably more accurate. Whichever way one looks at it, Wundt published a great deal. Anyone who chooses to outline his views must come to terms with this problem.

This brings us to the question of why the author chose these 14 so-called key texts, some of which are only a few pages long. It seems that he was mainly concerned with choosing work that is short and concise. This may explain the decision to concentrate on Wundt's programmatic statements rather than the *Völkerpsychologie* itself. The author has examined only a small proportion of Wundt's writings on *Völkerpsychologie*. Any comments that are made about the work should be seen in this light.

### References:

Review of the book *Wilhelm Wundt's Völkerpsychologie*. *Contemporary Psychology*, v. 37, p. 380, 1992, Brock A.