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THE IMAGINATION IN WUNDT'S TREATMENT OF
MYTH AND RELIGION.¹

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Two years ago,² the writer called attention to the importance of the task which Wundt has set himself in these later years of his scientific activity. It is the task of interpreting the development of the products and processes of human society in terms of the psychological standpoint which he has rendered definite and commanding through a lifetime of arduous labors. Those first results appeared in the two parts of the first volume of his *Völkerpsychologie*, and dealt with the highly complex and illusive processes of speech and their products, preserved for us in language. Apart from the decisive advance which the substitution of a modern psychology for the Herbartian, which has persisted in philology and education, brings with it, we pointed out the searching test to which this undertaking subjected the concepts and categories of the Wundtian psychology. In particular there arose in the consideration of the problems of language an opposition between the structural contents which were assumed to be given and the associative and especially the apperceptive processes by which these were organized into cognizable wholes.

The difficulty, however, did not reach such definite proportions in the treatment of language as those which it assumes in the last volume which Professor Wundt has recently published — the first half of the second volume of his *Völkerpsychologie* — which deals with Myth and Religion. One has, to be sure, in reading this volume the same sense of a mind moving easily and surely within a vast labyrinth of material, because it possesses a clue enabling it to pass comprehend-

¹ This number, dealing especially with social psychology, has been prepared under the editorial care of Professor J. H. Tufts.

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ingly wherever it will. Whatever conclusion the reader may come to touching the adequacy of his account from the point of view of psychological theory, he cannot for a moment question the control over this enormous field which a consistent psychological standpoint gives. It is not only that generalizations are possible which the anthropologist and sociologist have not succeeded in making, but that these generalizations order not only the material but also the innumerable theories which have dealt with it in the past.

Wundt's fundamental position is that the mental processes, which have given rise to myths and the constructive art that has embodied them, are quite identical with the immediate processes of sense-perception as they have existed among primitive peoples, as they exist among such peoples to-day, and as they exist in the most reflective communities. The difference lies in the fact that our reflection checks and criticises an apperception which otherwise would animate nature and its objects for us, as it has for all communities before reflective consciousness becomes dominant. The common defect therefore in all the theories which have been offered in explanation of rise of myths — the symbolistic, the rationalistic, the analogical, the importation, the illusion, and the suggestion theories — is that they have one and all assumed that myths existed in the minds of primitive peoples as explanations of various phenomena, such as life and death, the change of the seasons, growth and decay, etc., when in reality dream figures and ghosts, personified animals, plants and inorganic things, were the direct apperceptions of uncritical natures. And the specific task which Wundt undertakes is that of so analyzing impression, association, and apperception that we shall see only a difference in degree between our affective presentations of natural objects and the 'personifications' thereof by more primitive men. The phase of the perceptive process which affords the material for this interpretation, is the imaginative. Phantasy or imagination is at work in all our perceptions, filling in the outlines and incomplete presentations of the senses, enriching our associations especially with feeling-contents, and finally projecting us into the objects of our apperception, through the merging of objective data of the sense-process and the subjective reaction thereto in an indissoluble whole. This does not imply of course that imagination is a separate faculty or power. "This activity of the imagination is nothing which is added to the other conscious processes as a field of specific phenomena or as the expression of a separate power, but is simply an expression for the mental processes in general, when these are viewed from the point of view of the interaction of outer impressions with the

traces of former experiences, and under the peculiar condition that the results, arising from this interaction, arouse feelings and emotions, which the perceiving subject projects into the objects, while they are still experienced as subjective excitations. This process accompanies in a certain degree all contents of consciousness, since there are none in which direct and reproductive elements do not coöperate in stronger or weaker affective reactions. The activity of the imagination, therefore, is simply an enhancing of these normal functions, taking place under favorable circumstances. In the same fashion we may add that the mythological imagination is no mental power, formerly present and now lost, but it is in its whole nature identical with imagination in general."¹ In this sense Wundt analyzes the imagination as it appears in spatial perception, in temporal perception, in the contents of its images, in childhood, and finally in art. It is in the æsthetic consciousness that it finds its most characteristic expression, and our introspective presentation of it he identifies with the 'feeling-in' (Einfühlen) which has become so common a term in modern psychological æsthetics. "The 'feeling-in' is supposed to make comprehensible on the one side the effect of the impression on the affective consciousness (Gemüt) of the observer, and on the other the immediate relation of the subjective excitation of the feelings to the object. 'Feeling-in,' in this sense, in the nature of the case is no process that is confined to æsthetic objects, but forms a necessary coefficient of every possible presentation, whether this is a so-called perception or an image of the fancy. In its psychological nature this 'feeling-in' is the part of the assimilation-process involved in the formation of every presentation, which lies upon the affective side. It is in so far a double-sided assimilation of the feelings, as the motives to association that are bound up with the objective impression are inseparably merged with those subjective motives which spring from the immediate reaction of the impression upon the body itself, its volitional activities, and the associated feelings."² The importance of this identification for Wundt's theory is evident when we read in the chapter dealing with Mythological Apperception: "Thus the mythological personification is only a heightened degree of all those processes, which one has termed 'feeling-in' in the analysis of æsthetic effects. The æsthetic feeling-in is nothing else than a reduced form of mythological personification, and this itself is the æsthetic feeling in its highest degree, where the whole personality, in its momentary state of consciousness together with the

¹ *Völkerpsy.*, 2. Bd., 1. Abt., p. 579; cf. Chap. I.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 42.

after effects of former experiences that enter into it, passes over into the object. As æsthetic feeling-in and mythological personification are different only in degree and not in essence, so they are both, finally, only modifications of a more general function, without which the object, which both the æsthetic as well as the myth-building phantasy imply, would not exist for our consciousness, *i. e.*, apperception."¹ This animating (belebende) apperceptive process looked at from the point of view of the heightened activity of the imagination Wundt considers his first principle in the psychological explanation of the social phenomena which are included under the rubric of Myth and Religion. The second principle he denominates 'the feeling-enhancing power of illusion.' We shall presumably hear more of this second principle in the second part of this volume where the phenomena of religion, it is to be supposed, will be dealt with more particularly. Only so much needs to be emphasized in reference to this second principle, that, in the structures of imagination, it is the subjective rather than the objective factors which give determining affective moments to the impression, so that it is with the increase of this factor of the imagination that the increase of the emotional effect of the impression goes hand in hand.² It is perhaps hardly necessary to call attention to the fact that these factors are the feelings, in the sense in which Wundt has finally defined them in the last editions of his *Grundrisse*, and the *Physiologische Psychologie*; that is, contents of consciousness which have not only the attributes of pleasantness and unpleasantness, but also those of excitement and depression, and of strain and relaxation. These contents cover, therefore, what other psychologists have ascribed to our kinæsthetic sensations. I wish to call especial attention to this value which feeling has for the author, because of its important result in the psychological interpretation of myths and religions. For these feeling-contents are not confined to the field of this second principle, but play perhaps as important a part in the interpretation of the animating apperception. Wundt points out that the content of our images is only in a small degree what comes through the objective sense-processes. It is possible for a nonvisualizer to have vivid imagery that has to do with objects which are sensed by the eye and the hand. Where he does not depend upon the visual and tactual contents, according to the author, their place is taken by the feelings. The result of this use of the term is that what may be presented in terms of the kinæsthetic sensations has for Wundt the peculiarly subjective character that goes

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 579, 580.

² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

with the affective phases of consciousness. It has not only this; it has practically the static value which these phases possess, which is in crying contradiction with the kinæsthetic contents which they are called upon to represent.

In insisting upon this latter point I have reference not so much to the presentation which Wundt makes of the feelings in his works on individual psychology as to the results which appear in his treatment of the constructions of the imagination, especially in dealing with the art of children and primitive peoples.

One other characteristic Wundtian category should be referred to before a final estimate of his interpretation of these social phenomena is presented. I refer to apperception. In discussing impression, association, and apperception, the author says: "These concepts indicate at bottom only one and the same process, that is viewed each time from another side: as impressions, when we attend especially to those associations which subsist between the elements which have just entered consciousness; as associations in the narrower sense, when we consider the relations of these elements with the multiform former experiences of the same conscious individual; and finally as apperception, when we emphasize the comprehension of all these factors in a resulting conscious function. As little as there is ever an impression which does not contain numerous associations, so little is there any association-process which does not order itself under a result that includes all the associations of objective and subjective elements, of which the immediate state of consciousness consists."¹ And finally: "That power of these associations includes as well, and as essential factors, those associations which build themselves up between the feeling and volitional impulses and the objective contents of consciousness. The resulting effects of these blendings and assimilations of both elements is apperception, which is for this reason the most unitary function of consciousness, comprehending all other mental processes."² Here we have apperception — the organizing function of consciousness — stated in terms of association, not association interpreted in terms of apperception. The actual use of this conception results in the explanation of all conscious activities in terms of elements already there with their associations determined by the structure arising out of past experience, plus the immediate experience. Of course the value — the meaning — of this immediate experience must come in terms of the associations already worked into the warp and woof of consciousness. In other

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 589.

² *Ibid.*, p. 588.

words, the only direction which consciousness finds lies in the associations already present. There is no hint that among an indefinite number of such associations there may be selection, determined by the activity which is going on. And yet this is just what introspection reveals to us, an organized group of associations arising in response to the demands of the particular situation within which we find ourselves. In this treatise Wundt regards apperception as a simple necessity that lies upon all our associations of appearing in unitary wholes, not as the directing and controlling action of consciousness selecting these associations. The actual apperceptions are explained in terms of existing associations and not vice versa.

Now it is evident that these two concepts, that of feeling and that of apperception, go hand in hand. The sense of active direction which introspection reveals attaches itself to kinæsthetic experience, and in proportion as we substitute structural contents of feeling for these kinæsthetic contents in that proportion do we rob consciousness of explicit direction.

Returning now to the problems which Wundt has undertaken to solve, we find him accounting for every product of the mythological imagination as a work of art that finds its *raison d'être* and its attraction for the social group in the feeling contents, and the æsthetic response thereto (Einfühlen). He follows out in a remarkably clear analysis the development of ideal art through the stages of momentary, memory, decorative and imitative art. In every case he affirms that the constructive act arises in response to an outer stimulus, and the value of this stimulus lies in the feeling content which it possesses. One seeks an object that will be a more admirable carrier for this feeling content. In incidental art it is but a passing impulse, which may come under the impulse to communicate and so this art tends to pass into the class of language expression. Memory may be influenced, in part, by the thought of the lasting character of the presentation, but this is not the immediate ground of its construction. Decorative art arises through the associations of the form of the utilitarian object or its markings with animals and men. In personal decoration at first the terrifying effects of tattooing and markings may be present, but Wundt presents it as a production which simply calls forth a feeling, as if there were a natural passage from the feeling to that which produces it, apart from the valuable effect that this might have in battle. In every case the psychological account of the appearance of the product is found in the relation of the feeling content to the artistic construction of the object. It is only secondarily that it may be selected to perform certain functions

with the social group. Finally, out of the control which the primitive artist has obtained over the material and technique arises the possibility of the free expression of those objects in nature which are the carriers of his affective reactions, and from this, through the emphasis upon the characteristics which call forth feelings, he advances to the construction of works of art which are the embodiment of his ideas and serve to set free those affective contents which are seeking expression. We find a similar analysis in the psychological development of the so-called musical arts, dance and music, leading on to the song, the epic, and the drama. Finally, in the discussion of the mythological imagination we meet the generalization of his interpretation which has been already given at the beginning of this paper.

It would be difficult to convince one who approached without psychological presuppositions the history of primitive art and mythology, that the functions which the early products of a constructive imagination fulfilled in the social life of the group did not determine the psychological growth of the products themselves, that the function which the æsthetic image had in the social consciousness was not active until the product arose in response to the simple demand for a carrier of the feelings, that the selection which must have been responsible for their preservation had nothing to do with the inner activities by which they were produced; and yet this seems to me the logical result of Wundt's analysis. In a word, for him, the æsthetic image, whether existing simply in the mind or embodied in an outer form, has no function beyond that of responding to and heightening the affective experience. If such a statement seems an adequate psychological interpretation of the ideal artist and his creations it certainly breaks down when applied to primitive art.