

HUGO MÜNSTERBERG: IN MEMORIAM

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The science of psychology has again suffered a grievous loss. On Dec. 17, 1916, in his fifty-third year, Hugo Munsterberg was overtaken by death while lecturing. Thus even to his last breath he was unceasingly active, as unceasing work was a dominant quality of his character. Not the quiet work of the scientist's cell, but a far reaching public activity, the organization of the realms of politics and *Kultur*, the transference of scientific knowledge and methods to the demands of practical life—these, especially in recent years, had become the chief occupation of his life. But at the same time he was an investigator of penetrating sharpness, with a power of presentation marked by genius, and he was also a philosopher who had struggled most earnestly with the great problem of the theory of the universe (*Weltanschauung*). That he did not nevertheless always reach a full unification and harmony of its manifold features, that often enough indeed two souls fought within him, forms the tragedy of this personality.

This appears even in the fact that he was a man with two Fatherlands. He lived in Germany, where he was born in Danzig on June 1, 1863, through his apprenticeship years and also began there his mastership years. He studied in Leipsic, chiefly with Wundt, and in Heidelberg with Windelband; he obtained the doctorate in philosophy and in medicine; he was docent and professor extraordinary at Freiburg. In 1892 he took the authorized leave of absence for a few years in order to establish a psychological laboratory at Harvard University (Boston), the chief institution of higher learning in America, and there he remained till the end of his life, almost a quarter of a century. He was often in Germany, but always as a vacation traveler, or as in 1910-1911, as exchange professor at the University of Berlin. A permanent opening for work in the Fatherland, such as he himself silently longed for, did not come.

For many years Münsterberg considered it his special problem to strengthen the relations between his first and his second homelands. His books on America and the Americans, the founding of the American Institute in Berlin, his proposal to shape the Hamburg institution of higher learning as an embodiment of American University ideals, his share in the psychical organizing of German-Americans, as well as many other things, testify to this. He did not always find sympathy in these attempts either here or there. But at the beginning of the world war, his attitude became completely unambiguous and unconditional. He realized that he was a German, and regardless of consequences he began at once a spiritual war against the traditional English sentiment at Harvard. What this meant to him is shown in the following portion of a letter sent to me in February, 1916: "Day and night I work both before and behind the scenes, almost entirely in the interests of the political struggle, and fortunately thus I can

accomplish much. Of course almost all of my old relations are severed, especially here in Boston. Most of my friends here no longer recognize me; I have been thrown out of clubs and put out of academies. All their rage has concentrated upon me. But we hold out." The hope which he expressed in the same letter, "I hope I can soon see your institute, for it is our plan to take the first Hamburg steamer that crosses," will now never be fulfilled.

Scientifically also there were two souls in Münsterberg, which never were completely harmonized. As a psychologist, especially in the first period of his investigating, he was most sharply oriented for natural science. Psychology has to do with the contents of consciousness as objects of factual consideration, with their analysis into simple elements bound together by causal laws, and with their resolution into the accompanying physiological phenomena. When man is "psychologically" explained he ceases to be a personality. There are then no inner purposes and attitudes, no significant totality or vital value, but only psychical elements, which are related to one another and to the physical according to regular laws. But on the other hand, Münsterberg is very far from denying the correctness of that other point of view; he even thinks it the truer and higher, only lying outside of all psychology. Philosophically he professed himself an idealist, in which his inner relation to the Baden group, Windelband, Ricker, J. Cohn, appears, but with an especial inclination to Fichte. His *Weltanschauung* was constructed upon a theory of value which is completely independent of the causal considerations of natural science. In it there is no longer question of cause and effect but only of end and norm. Here man is not the object of analytical knowledge but the subject of a unified attitude. Here life is not a mechanical natural process but a significant relating of purposes.

Thus the outcome is a two-world theory which leaves unsatisfied the yearning of man for a final unity, and yet only where unity is, is there a true *Weltanschauung*. To me Münsterberg seems here to be the typical representative of a period of transition. The insight had awakened that a psychology which is only an analysis of consciousness does not do justice to the value of personality, but the determination was still lacking to reform psychology from the ground up so that it could also do justice to the theory of personality. What must come is a personalistic psychology.¹

The sharp separation of the psychological investigation of facts and the ethical theory of ends also found in Münsterberg a formulation important pedagogically, which one must agree with in its fundamental ideas in spite of other differences of opinion. Münsterberg fought with zeal a false "psychologism" in the teacher. Wherever a man has actual dealings with other men, and so especially in teaching, he must evaluate unitary subjects, he must strengthen personalities in process of development, but not explain the contents of their consciousness. He who forgets this runs the danger of neglecting the ethical problem. The teacher who has to do only with psychology in all his educating, easily considers his pupils as mere samples of interesting psychical phenomena; he also feels himself easily lured off to deducing the purpose of education from the psychological conditions, while these furnish only the means by which ends sanctioned on far other grounds can be attained. This warning of Münsterberg against overmuch preoccupation with psychology aroused in its time much surprise and contradiction among teachers. One can only

¹ Perhaps I may mention here that just this sharp formulation of the split in Münsterberg was the determining factor for me to transfer the views of personalism to psychology also.

completely evaluate it from the background of the American situation. In fact, there seems to have been for some time a very one sided cult with psychological experiments as the chief object of the teacher's training; perhaps a protest against it was not entirely unjustified.

But naturally Munsterberg's positive work in the field of psychology is far more important. In the first period of his theoretical investigation we must mention especially the theory of the will (in which he reduces the will to an aggregate of sensations and muscular tensions) as well as the *Aktionstheorie* connected with it, which also ramifies into the realm of pedagogical-psychological interests. According to this the elementary, primitive form of the psychical life is not the sensation or idea, that is, a passive given, but the immediate unity of impression and expression, of sensation and muscular movement. The entire modern basal principle of self activity, the work principle, etc., is related to this idea expressed by Munsterberg more than two decades ago. That originally he tended to overvalue the purely muscular factor we must refer to the newness of the thought.

But more and more his interest in psychological theory was replaced by one in applied psychology, and here his universalistic spirit, participating in the manifold ramifications of *Kultur*, stands revealed. During the years when we in Germany had only cautiously and tentatively begun to shape methods for the new problems of application, Munsterberg had penetrated into the fullness of human life, had laid down a general program, and in four books of his own had given a wide outlook into the possibility of making psychology effective in the administration of justice, the healing of the sick, education and industrial life. It is true that often he showed more boldness and power to image future possibilities than he did cautious technical knowledge, but much greater than this is the service which he did of attracting publicity (even non-psychological) to this perfectly new method of controlling *Kultur*, and of drawing the great guiding lines for future work. Most of all is his work path-breaking on the Psychology of Industrial Life. In this he describes the American Taylor system of scientific management, on its psychological side, and presents his now notable experiments on the vocational selection of street-car conductors and telephone operators. Here he gave the impetus to the attempts which are now also introduced into Germany, to make vocational choices from a psychological point of view.

In his last great work, *Psychotechnik*, Münsterberg gives a unified presentation of the various possibilities of applied psychology. Perhaps the educator will not find overmuch that is new in the section on education, for the study of children was somewhat aside from Munsterberg's interests. Of far more service will be the section on industrial life, especially the general part, which gives an attractive presentation of the significance of psychotechnics in general and of its two chief ends, psychological prediction and psychological control.

In Munsterberg psychology loses one of its most important leaders and most stimulating thinkers, whose thoughts will fructify both theory and practice long after his premature death.

Munsterberg's chief scientific German works are the following (all published by J. A. Barth, Leipzig): *Beiträge zur Exper. Psychologie*, 1889; *Grundzüge der Psychologie*, I, 1900; *Philosophie der Werte*, 1908; *Psychologie und Wirtschaftsleben*, 1912; *Grundzüge der Psychotechnik*, 1914. In addition he published a number of works in English. The works from his laboratory appear in the *Harvard Psychological Studies*.