

# VÖLKERPSYCHOLOGIE

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## *Völkerpsychologie* in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Germany:

**Lazarus, Steinthal, Wundt**

### **1. Introduction**

*Völkerpsychologie*, or ‘folk psychology’, reflected some of the main currents within German academia in the nineteenth century. Its foremost representatives – the philosopher Moritz Lazarus, the linguist Heymann Steinthal, and the psychologist Wilhelm Wundt – tried to build a new academic discipline that would synthesise the empirical knowledge about the history and development of mankind that had been accumulated during the nineteenth century. The idea of universal progress characteristic of ‘classical’, nineteenth-century liberal thinking underpinned the ‘project’ of *Völkerpsychologie* as much as a firm belief in the importance of the nation or the ‘people’. Judged by the ambitious aims of its founders, *Völkerpsychologie* was a failure. In contrast to other emerging disciplines (such as sociology, cultural anthropology or political science) it did not become an established subject at university level during the twentieth century. Still, it was part of a wide-ranging debate about the future of the humanities and their role within a changing disciplinary matrix. Moreover, the history of *Völkerpsychologie* is indicative of the mentality of liberal, nineteenth-century German scholars, their preferences, perspectives and idiosyncrasies; and despite its flaws and ultimate demise, it left a long legacy throughout the twentieth century.

### **2. Founders: Lazarus and Steinthal**

Lazarus and Steinthal’s *Völkerpsychologie* provided an amalgam of the philosophies Joseph Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841), Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) and Georg W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) and aimed at an alternative to both historicism and philosophical idealism. Their version of *Völkerpsychologie* kept much of the Romantic terminology of the early nineteenth century, most importantly the concept of the ‘folk spirit’ (*Volksgeist*), as well as an uncritical belief

in the *Volk* as the source of everything that was good, true, and beautiful. In contrast to earlier studies of ‘national character’, from Herodotus and Thucydides to Montesquieu, Hume and Mill, Lazarus and Steinthal’s aim was to build a discipline exclusively devoted to the study of the *Volksgeist*. They believed that this folk spirit was not only an important aspect of history and society, but its central pillar and driving force. A complete and adequate understanding of the ‘mind of the nation’ would explain the historical development of mankind in its entirety. With hindsight, *Völkerpsychologie* thus appears as a quintessentially modern discipline, despite the old-fashioned terminology they frequently employed. The core ideas of liberalism were fused in their concept of folk psychology: the belief in the primordial importance of the nation was combined with an admiration for the methodological rigour of the sciences. These notions were combined with the idea of universal progress, both material and moral, which was informed not only by philosophical study, but by their personal experience of Jewish emancipation. Both Lazarus and Steinthal strongly supported the Jewish reform movement, and at the same identified with Prussian-German nation and its culture.<sup>1</sup>

*Völkerpsychologie* would bridge the gap between the sciences (‘natural history’) and the humanities (‘history of mankind’) that had opened by mid-century.<sup>2</sup> Nature was strictly determined, Lazarus and Steinthal argued: it was ruled by the ‘blind necessity’ of mechanical processes and the cycles of organic life. History, in contrast, was defined by freedom and progress. The ‘essence of the spirit’ (*Wesen des Geistes*), however, was ambivalent: similar to nature, it developed with law-like necessity, but at the same time, the spirit produced ‘historically progressive, new and free creations’ which were impossible in the ‘realm of nature’. The spirit developed according to psychological laws and thus created progress: ‘The law-like permanent

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<sup>1</sup> On Lazarus and Steinthal see Ingrid Belke (ed.), *Moritz Lazarus und Heymann Steinthal: Die Begründer der Völkerpsychologie in ihren Briefen*, 3 vols. (Tübingen: Siebeck, 1971-1986); Mathias Berek, ‘Neglected German-Jewish Visions for a Pluralistic Society: Moritz Lazarus’, *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 60 (2015), pp. 45-59; Matti Bunzl, ‘*Völkerpsychologie* and German-Jewish Emancipation’, in H. Glenn Penny and Matti Bunzl (eds.), *Worldly Provincialism. German Anthropology in the Age of Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp. 47-85; Uffa Jensen, *Gebildete Doppelgänger: Bürgerliche Juden und Protestanten im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); Ivan Kalmar, ‘The *Völkerpsychologie* of Lazarus and Steinthal and the Modern Concept of Culture’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 48 (1987), pp. 671-690; Klaus Christian Köhnke, ‘Einleitung’, in Moritz Lazarus, *Grundzüge der Völkerpsychologie und Kulturwissenschaft* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2003), pp. ix-xlii; Céline Trautmann-Waller, *Aux origines d’une science allemande de la culture: Linguistique et psychologie des peuples chez Heymann Steinthal* (Paris: CNRS, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> M. Lazarus and H. Steinthal, ‘Einleitende Gedanken über Völkerpsychologie, als Einladung zu einer Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft’, *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, 1 (1860), p. 15. All translations by the author.

activity of the spirit equals development, and progress is so much part of the nature of spirit, that the spirit therefore is not part of nature anymore.’<sup>3</sup> This paradox called for a new discipline that would study the ‘folk spirit’ – the subject matter of the humanities – with the methods of the sciences. Worded rather awkwardly, Lazarus and Steinthal thus proposed establishing a ‘social science’, a generation before establishing ‘sociology’ became the concern of some of Germany’s most eminent scholars.

To position their new discipline, Lazarus and Steinthal rejected other disciplines that had already studied man as a social being as one-sided and limited. They were particularly critical of anthropology and ethnology: the former explained the characteristics of nations solely as the result of geological and climatic influences and ignored all psychological factors, while the latter treated man as an ‘animal’, a mere ‘product of nature’ and thus represented little more than a ‘chapter of zoology’. Such perspectives systematically ignored the mental development of mankind, Lazarus and Steinthal maintained.<sup>4</sup> *Völkerpsychologie*, in contrast, would merge the sciences (natural history) and the humanities (history of mankind).<sup>5</sup>

The main task of *Völkerpsychologie* was to describe and understand the development of the folk spirit, i.e. the progress of nations (or *Völker*), civilisation and humanity, and by doing so to contribute to this very progress. The aims and objectives of the new discipline were universal, all-encompassing and without limits. A discipline that studied man as a social being was overdue, Lazarus and Steinthal argued: ‘Man is by birth a member of a *Volk*, and is thus determined in his mental development in manifold ways. The individual cannot be completely comprehended without regard to the mental whole (*die geistige Gesamtheit*) in which it has been created and in which it lives.’<sup>6</sup> Man could only exist as part of a national community, and since the folk represented more than the sum of its parts, folk psychology was the necessary extension of individual psychology.<sup>7</sup>

For this purpose, folk psychology needed to clarify the relationship between the individual and the community. Lazarus and Steinthal described this relation as an interaction (*Wechselwirkung*), but an asymmetric one: each and every mental activity of an individual was

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-13.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Heymann Steinthal, *Grammatik, Logik, und Psychologie: Ihre Principien und ihr Verhältnis zu einander* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1855), p. 388.

<sup>7</sup> Lazarus and Steinthal, ‘Einleitende Gedanken’, pp. 27-28.

rooted in the spirit of the folk. The community regularly took precedence over the individual. Individual achievements could only be understood and explained as products of the folk spirit, even though they could only be expressed by individuals. Language was the prime example to illustrate this point: it was never ‘invented’ or ‘created’ by an individual, but as a means of communication presupposed the existence of a folk community. Equally, the customs, works of art and general culture of a nation were products of a ‘slow and incremental progressive development’, not creations of an individual.<sup>8</sup> A central concept of Lazarus’s folk psychology was *Verdichtung* (literally ‘condensation’ or ‘thickening’). It described the learning processes of nations over long periods of time, which allowed for the progressive development of culture and civilisation. *Verdichtung* occurred ‘when concepts and series of concepts, which have been discovered in earlier times by the most talented individuals and could only be grasped and understood by few, become slowly appropriated by whole classes of peoples and ultimately by the entirety of the people’.<sup>9</sup> Hence, the folk as a whole stood ‘on the shoulders of giants’: it profited from the discoveries of outstanding individuals whose ideas it used and took for granted, thus elevating its standard of culture and civilisation.<sup>10</sup>

For Heymann Steinthal in particular, studying language was the best way to understand the national mind, since language transmitted the ‘appropriations of the past in condensed form into the present’, as he explained with reference to Lazarus.<sup>11</sup> To Steinthal, linguistics itself was a form of applied *Völkerpsychologie*. Steinthal and Lazarus thus continued a long tradition of philosophical study of language, and agreed with their predecessors, from Herder to Humboldt to the brothers Grimm, that language was the foremost expression of the folk spirit. Accordingly, linguistics and philology aimed at explaining the ‘mind’ of nations by studying their literatures and

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 31; Moritz Lazarus, ‘Verdichtung des Denkens in der Geschichte’, *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, 2 (1862), p. 57; ‘Über das Verhältnis des Einzelnen zur Gesamtheit’, *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, 2 (1862), pp. 393-453.

<sup>9</sup> Lazarus, ‘Verdichtung’, p. 54; Georg von Graevenitz, “‘Verdichtung’: Das Kulturmodell der ‘Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft’”, in Aleida Assmann (ed.), *Positionen der Kulturanthropologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1994), pp. 148-171; Klaus Christian Köhnke, ‘Der Kulturbegriff von Moritz Lazarus – oder: die wissenschaftliche Aneignung des Alltäglichen’, in Andreas Hörschen and Lothar Schneider (eds), *Herbarts Kultursystem: Perspektiven der Transdisziplinarität im 19. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), pp. 39-67.

<sup>10</sup> Moritz Lazarus, ‘Über den Begriff und die Möglichkeit einer Völkerpsychologie’, *Deutsches Museum: Zeitschrift für Literatur, Kunst und öffentliches Leben*, 1 (1851), p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> Heymann Steinthal, *Philologie, Geschichte und Psychologie in ihren gegenseitigen Beziehungen: Ein Vortrag gehalten in der Versammlung der Philologen zu Meissen 1863* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1864), p. 45; see Lazarus, ‘Verdichtung’, p. 57.

the grammatical structures of their languages, and were thus the most important areas of research for *Völkerpsychologie*. Appropriately, *Sprachwissenschaft* was included in the title of Lazarus and Steinthal's journal.

Still, *Völkerpsychologie* needed to reach beyond linguistics. While Lazarus and Steinthal considered language the most important common trait of the folk, they argued that defining the folk by language alone was insufficient. There was no general agreement on what constituted a 'language' in the first place. Moreover, different nations used the same language, and some nations such as Switzerland used more than one language. Similarly, 'common descent' could not define a nation since all nations were ethnically mixed. As a solution, Lazarus and Steinthal introduced a voluntaristic definition of the nation: the folk was the product of the will of its members to form a folk, and hence the result of a conscious and deliberate decision. A *Volk* depended on the subjective view of its members of their equality and unity. Despite their subjective origins, nations were no imaginations, but realities, and could be found as facts throughout history. But the folk was a mental product of the individuals who belonged to it and was thus endlessly recreated. It was the 'first product of the folk spirit'. Lazarus and Steinthal thus introduced a notion of the 'folk' that came close to modern constructivist theories of nations and nationalism.

The debate about anti-Semitism between 1879 and 1881 changed the meaning of folk psychology for Lazarus as it increasingly became a way of describing the Jewish spirit and justifying it against anti-Semitic accusations. These formed the main reason for his decision to embark upon a major book project, a comprehensive study of the *Ethics of Judaism* that would occupy him for the rest of his life. Lazarus managed only to finish the first volume of this comprehensive study, which was published in 1898, with English and French translations following soon afterwards.<sup>12</sup> Reflecting his political-social consciousness as a liberal reformist German Jew, Lazarus tried to synthesise 'Kant and Judaism' and presented the *Ethics of Judaism* as embodying universal values. He wanted to show that the continuous Jewish tradition was the real origin of modern humanism.<sup>13</sup> With this claim he represented the dilemma and the inner contradictions of Reform Judaism, for he reserved a privileged position for the unique Jewish spirit,

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<sup>12</sup> Moritz Lazarus, *Die Ethik des Judenthums*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann, 1898).

<sup>13</sup> Pinchas E. Rosenblüth, 'Die geistigen und religiösen Strömungen in der deutschen Judenheit', in Werner E. Mosse and Arnold Paucker (eds.), *Juden im Wilhelminischen Deutschland, 1890-1914* (Tübingen: Siebeck, 1998), pp. 569-572; David Baumgardt, 'The Ethics of Lazarus and Steinthal', *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 2 (1957), pp. 205-217.

but at the same time conceived the Jewish spirit as universal and progressive.<sup>14</sup> Similar to non-Jewish liberals, he presented his own political-social and moral values as universal and generally valid. In addition, and not unlike his anti-Semitic opponents, he essentialised the Jewish spirit, although he did not associate it with negative, but positive connotations, since it embodied a general ideal of mankind.<sup>15</sup>

For his part, Steinthal responded to this dilemma of Reform Judaism in much the same way as Lazarus. Even though less exposed in public life than his colleague and brother-in-law Lazarus, he was involved in several Jewish organisations, published regularly in the *Zeitschrift des Judentums*, and responded to anti-Semitic accusations with the same vigour and conviction. To Steinthal, Judaism equalled moral-intellectual progress and was thus a vital part of the national spirit: ‘Judaism equals humanity; and since humanism can be reconciled with any nationality, if the nation really aspires to it, so Judaism can be reconciled with any nationality.’<sup>16</sup> Steinthal repeated an argument that represented the pride of German Jews in their achievements and enraged the anti-Semites: he claimed that their ‘double heritage’ had turned the German Jews into better Germans because they combined German culture and *Bildung* with Jewish ethics.

Both Lazarus and Steinthal saw no conflict between folk psychology and their interest in ethics; on the contrary, they presented them as closely related, even complementary fields of study. After all, ‘morals’ and ‘customs’ of the folk and their historical development had always been understood as one of the products of the folk spirit. Lazarus presented folk psychology as a discipline created on the ‘basis of Judaism’ whose ideas ‘originated from the deepest sources of Judaism’. His studies on folk psychology had reconfirmed his identification with the Jewish faith and its ethical principles.<sup>17</sup> With hindsight, he saw his childhood experiences in the trilingual town of Filehne in the province of Posen as a reason for his life-long interest in *Völkerpsychologie*.<sup>18</sup> Appropriately, Lazarus’s last public speech, delivered in Vienna in 1897 to much acclaim, was

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<sup>14</sup> Rosenblüth, ‘Die geistigen und religiösen Strömungen’, p. 573.

<sup>15</sup> Jensen, *Gebildete Doppelgänger*, p. 88. Hermann Cohen was among the outspoken critics of Lazarus’s *Ethik des Judentums*; his discussion of this book destroyed their relationship beyond repair. See Hermann Cohen, ‘Das Problem der jüdischen Sittenlehre: Eine Kritik von Lazarus’ Ethik des Judentums [1899]’, in *Jüdische Schriften*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Schwetschke, 1924), vol. 3, pp. 1-35.

<sup>16</sup> Heymann Steinthal, ‘Judentum und Patriotismus [1892]’, in *Über Juden und Judentum: Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Berlin: Poppelauer, 1906), p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> Lazarus to the faculty of the Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, 7 May 1895, in Belke (ed.), *Moritz Lazarus*, vol. 1, p. 205.

<sup>18</sup> Moritz Lazarus, *Aus meiner Jugend: Autobiographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann, 1913), p. 32; see Köhnke, ‘Einleitung’, p. xxiii.

dedicated to a ‘folk-psychological study of Judaism’, thus combining the topics that had dominated his academic work and his activities as a public intellectual.<sup>19</sup> To Steinthal, too, ethics and *Völkerpsychologie* were intricately connected. Ethics did not start with the individual, he argued, but with the national community. The ‘spirit’ of the individual was rooted in the community, which was therefore the starting point both of folk psychology and of any kind of ethics.<sup>20</sup> In 1885, Steinthal published a comprehensive study entitled *General Ethics* which underscored this point.<sup>21</sup> In this study, Steinthal defined the ‘objective spirit’ in a way that was dangerously close to the ‘metaphysical speculations’ that folk psychology had intended to overcome. To Steinthal, the objective spirit represented the ‘sum and the system of objects of all subjective spirits that have ever lived’. The objective spirit was the ‘realm of the intelligible’, of ‘ideas and truth, beauty and the good’, it was the ‘empirically highest concept, the definition of all conceivable perfection, the perfect object’.<sup>22</sup>

Even though Lazarus and Steinthal’s folk psychology can be described as a proto-social science, or as a precursor of modern social psychology,<sup>23</sup> their terminology and horizon resembled early- to mid-nineteenth-century philosophy and reflected debates in the humanities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Their attempt to orientate folk psychology towards the sciences worked only on the level of analogy and was largely mediated by the psychology of Herbart. Neither Lazarus nor Steinthal developed an awareness of the methodological problems of a ‘social science’, and designed *Völkerpsychologie* as a text-based, hermeneutical discipline that differed little from the established humanities. In particular Lazarus lacked the knowledge and understanding to introduce new ‘scientific’ methodologies to the humanities. Instead, he believed that discovering historical ‘laws of development’ would assure the scientific status of folk psychology. A related structural problem of folk psychology was the Eurocentric, even Germano-centric bias of their approach. Echoing Hegel, for Lazarus and Steinthal ‘history’ started with the ancient Greeks and was limited to European nations. Only European nations contributed to culture and civilisation, and hence only they were of interest to folk psychology. Lazarus and Steinthal

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<sup>19</sup> Belke (ed.), *Moritz Lazarus*, vol. 1, p. 227.

<sup>20</sup> Heymann Steinthal, ‘Herrn Prof. Dr. M. Lazarus zu seinem fünfundzwanzigjährigem Doktorjubiläum am 30. November 1874’, in *Über Juden und Judentum*, p. 239.

<sup>21</sup> Heymann Steinthal, *Allgemeine Ethik* (Berlin: Reimer, 1885).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 424.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Gustav Jahoda, *A History of Social Psychology from the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment to the End of the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 121-137.

were not capable, or willing, to include non-European nations or even prehistoric, ‘primitive’ people into their studies, despite Steinthal being an expert of African and Asian languages. Their folk psychology thus differed from later approaches to cultural and social anthropology whose cultural relativism opened perspectives that were unattainable for the philosophers Lazarus and Steinthal.<sup>24</sup>

Judged by the high expectations of Lazarus and Steinthal, the reception of folk psychology by the academic community must have been disappointing. From its inception, their *Völkerpsychologie* received mixed reviews. Even sympathetic readers missed an adequate definition of the crucial term *Volksgeist* and doubted that the ‘mind’ or ‘spirit’ could be exclusively understood as the product of ‘society’.<sup>25</sup> The Kantian philosopher Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906), author of the *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, argued that the legitimacy of folk psychology depended on the existence of a ‘general spirit’ (*Gesamtgeist*) or folk spirit, which had not been proven. He also doubted that the general spirit would always take precedence over the individual spirit, as Lazarus and Steinthal had claimed.<sup>26</sup>

Other reviewers were even more critical. The philosopher Adolf Lasson (1832-1917), a colleague of Lazarus and Steinthal at the University of Berlin, could not hide his sarcasm when he reviewed the first issues of their journal. Lazarus and Steinthal had failed to give a precise definition of the folk, the main object of their new psychology, Lasson complained. Folk psychology had neither a distinct object of study nor a method; therefore it did not meet the requirements of a scientific discipline. Unsurprisingly to Lasson, the first issues of the new journal included a hotchpotch of unrelated articles and lacked coherence. What Lazarus and Steinthal had in mind, he continued, was old hat and existed already under the label ‘cultural history’: the fashionable term *Völkerpsychologie* merely pretended innovation. Lasson represented a major line of criticism of folk psychology: he did not object to studying the peculiarities of nations as expressed by their

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<sup>24</sup> For a folk psychologist, and expert on East Asian languages, Steinthal was surprisingly ignorant of Chinese history and culture: ‘Was zunächst den Inhalt der Literatur betrifft, so ist dieser für die allgemeine Geschichte von geringem Interesse. Was gehen uns die Chinesen an? Und sie sind zu wenig mit den geschichtlichen Völkern in Berührung gekommen, als daß wir von ihnen viel anderes lernen als chinesische Geschichte’. Steinthal to Lazarus, 11 December 1855, in Belke (ed.), *Lazarus*, vol. 1, p. 288. See Bunzl, ‘*Völkerpsychologie* and German-Jewish Emancipation’, p. 79.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Ludwig Tobler, ‘Zeitschrift for Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft’, *Neue Jahrbücher für Philologie und Pädagogik*, 83 (1861), pp. 257-280.

<sup>26</sup> Eduard von Hartmann, ‘Das Wesen des Gesamtgeistes (Eine kritische Betrachtung des Grundbegriffes der Völkerpsychologie) [1869]’, in *Gesammelte Studien und Aufsätze gemeinverständlichen Inhalts* (Berlin: Duncker, 1876), pp. 504-519.



‘spirit’, but could not accept the overambitious, even arrogant way in which Lazarus and Steinthal had presented their new ‘discipline’.<sup>27</sup>

Despite such fundamental and sometimes devastating criticism, Lazarus and Steinthal’s *Völkerpsychologie* found its readers and even followers, for instance the philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918) who taught from 1890 as *Privatdozent* and adjunct professor at the University of Berlin and had been a student of Lazarus and Steinthal.<sup>28</sup> They helped him start his academic career when they agreed to publish his first academic article in the *ZfVS* – an essay on ‘Psychological and Ethnological Studies on Music’, which was inspired by Steinthal’s study on the ‘Origin of Language’.<sup>29</sup> In his more mature works, Simmel appropriated central concepts of Lazarus and Steinthal’s folk psychology: the famous lecture on ‘The Metropolis and Mental life’, which summarised ideas from his magnum opus *The Philosophy of Money*, characterised modern culture by the ‘preponderance’ of the ‘objective spirit’ over the ‘subjective spirit’.<sup>30</sup> However, Simmel did not share the optimism towards progress that was so prominent in his teacher Lazarus. While Lazarus had held an unreservedly positive view of the ‘objective spirit’ as the force that enabled and represented cultural progress, Simmel stressed the conflict between the objective and the subjective spirit, i.e. between society and the individual. According to Simmel, the individual in modern society – the ‘subjective spirit’ – was overwhelmed by the rapid development of the objective spirit. To Simmel, the ‘progress’ of human culture represented by the objective spirit was an ambivalent force at best since it had caused the alienation of the individual. In Simmel’s view, then, the development of modern culture was a not a ‘success story’, as a whole generation of liberal intellectuals and academics had been convinced, but a highly ambivalent process with almost tragic outcomes.<sup>31</sup>

Even despite these differences in tone and perspective, Simmel’s sociological and philosophical works owed a lot to Lazarus and Steinthal’s folk psychology. His major works were

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<sup>27</sup> [Adolf] Lasson, ‘Review of “Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft”’, *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 27 (1860), pp. 209-216. On Lasson see Jensen, *Gebildete Doppelgänger*, pp. 292-294, 300-304.

<sup>28</sup> Wolf Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 239-244.

<sup>29</sup> Georg Simmel, ‘Psychological and Ethnological Studies on Music’ [1882], in *The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays*, trans. by K.P. Etkorn (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968), pp. 98-140. On Simmel’s biography see Klaus Christian Köhnke, *Der junge Simmel in Theoriebeziehungen und sozialen Bewegungen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996), pp. 30, 51-62.

<sup>30</sup> Georg Simmel, ‘Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben’ [1903], in *Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe*, 24 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989-2015), vol. 7, pp. 116-131.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

based on a number of central concepts he had found in their writings, such as the ‘objective spirit’ or ‘interaction’, which he reworked and reformulated into a critical theory of modern society that stressed conflict and crisis over progress and harmony. Simmel thus took a peculiar mixture of ingredients from folk psychology, which were stripped of their optimism and belief in science, and replaced by a scepticism towards the achievements of modern society characteristic of the *fin-de-siècle*. Thus altered and reinterpreted, concepts from Lazarus and Steinthal’s folk psychology have found entrance into the core writings of one of the ‘founding fathers’ of modern sociology.<sup>32</sup>

Lazarus and Steinthal’s harsh view of anthropology and ethnography did not prevent the reception of *Völkerpsychologie* by the German-born cultural anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942), a former student of the ethnologist Adolf Bastian at the University of Berlin, who valued Steinthal’s linguistic studies in particular. Boas defined ‘cultural anthropology’ as an holistic discipline whose subject matter was ‘partly a branch of biology, partly a branch of the mental science’.<sup>33</sup> In a famous essay on the history of anthropology, he referred to ‘folk psychology’ as the major influence for linguistic-anthropological studies and specifically mentioned Steinthal’s contributions.<sup>34</sup> In its comprehensive outlook, Boas’s anthropology overlapped with folk psychology since it studied all manifestations of the *Volksgeist* – language, myths, religion and art – alongside the physical and geographical conditions of human life. Boas thus rejected simplistic theories of scientific racism while acknowledging the biological dimension of anthropology.<sup>35</sup> Despite Boas’s appreciation for Steinthal’s work, there were fundamental differences between his concept of cultural anthropology and *Völkerpsychologie*: Boas abandoned the idea of a hierarchy of civilisations with its Eurocentric bias and replaced it with a pronounced relativistic view; no ‘culture’ was deemed more worthy than any other, and all cultures merited to be studied for their own sake. Boas’s cultural anthropology was based on empirical fieldwork: as a true synthesis of the disciplines that studied ‘man’, he practised a combination of physical anthropology, ethnology,

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<sup>32</sup> David Frisby, *Simmel and Since: Essays on Georg Simmel’s Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 28-29; Hans-Jürgen Dahme and Othein Rammstedt, ‘Einleitung’, in Georg Simmel, *Schriften zur Soziologie: Eine Auswahl* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), pp. 7-34. Efraim Podoksik, ‘Society as the Mode of Redemption: The Individual in Georg Simmel’s Early Sociological Writings’, *Intellectual History Review*, 25 (2015), pp. 413-431. On ‘cultural pessimism’ of the German fin-de-siècle see the classic case study by Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

<sup>33</sup> Franz Boas, ‘The History of Anthropology’, *Science* 20 (1904), p. 513.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 518.

<sup>35</sup> Bunzl, ‘*Völkerpsychologie* and German-Jewish Emancipation’, pp. 82-85.

linguistics and psychology that appropriated perspectives and aspects of folk psychology, but went far beyond the scope of Lazarus and Steinthal's works.<sup>36</sup>

### 3. Wundt: Between Experimental Science and the Humanities

Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920), from 1875 Professor of Philosophy at the University of Leipzig and one of the founders of modern, scientific psychology, is the scholar most closely associated with the concept of *Völkerpsychologie*. An attentive reader of Lazarus and Steinthal, he continued their 'project' and devoted the last twenty years of his long career to writing ten massive volumes of a general and comprehensive folk psychology.<sup>37</sup> *Völkerpsychologie* formed an integral part of his concept of psychology, which consisted of two separate, but complementary, branches. According to Wundt, all psychological knowledge was based on individual psychology, which dealt with simple processes of the mind that could be studied with experimental methods. Wundt had borrowed these methods from physiology and introduced them to psychological research. This scientific approach to psychology, practised in his soon-to-be famous psychological laboratory, established Wundt's fame and reputation and secured him his place in the annals of the discipline as the founder of scientific psychology.<sup>38</sup> Experimental, physiological methods were, however, of limited use for psychologists, Wundt argued. They could only be applied to the study of the most basic functions of the mind, such as reactions, perceptions and sensations. The more complex,

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<sup>36</sup> See George W. Stocking Jr., 'Franz Boas and the Culture Concept in Historical Perspective', in *Race, Culture and Evolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 195-233; Alexa Geisthövel, *Intelligenz und Rasse: Franz Boas' psychologischer Antirassismus zwischen Amerika und Deutschland, 1920-1942* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013); Hans-Walther Schmuhl (ed.), *Kulturrelativismus und Antirassismus: Der Anthropologe Franz Boas (1858-1942)* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie: Eine Untersuchung der Entwicklungsgesetze von Sprache, Mythos und Sitte*, 10 vols (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1900-1920); see Christa M. Schneider, *Wilhelm Wundts Völkerpsychologie: Entstehung und Entwicklung eines in Vergessenheit geratenen, wissenschaftshistorisch relevanten Fachgebietes* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1990); Georg Eckardt, 'Einleitung in die historischen Texte', in *Völkerpsychologie: Versuch einer Neuentdeckung* (Weinheim: Beltz, 1997), pp. 78-112.

<sup>38</sup> See Wilhelm Wundt, *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1873). This introductory text was Wundt's most successful and influential work; it was translated into several languages and remained in print until long after his death. Wundt's role as founder of scientific psychology was canonised by E. B. Titchener (1867-1927), a former English student of Wundt who became professor of psychology at Cornell University, and by Titchener's student Edward G. Boring (1886-1968), author of the influential study *A History of Experimental Psychology* [1929], second edition (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1950). See, for example, Baldwin R. Hergenhahn, *An Introduction to the History of Psychology*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2009), pp. 265-271; C. James Goodwin, *A History of Modern Psychology*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Wiley, 2015), pp. 88-99.

higher products of the mind asked for a different approach, namely *Völkerpsychologie*, since they could not be re-created in the environment of a laboratory.<sup>39</sup>

Wundt was a critical reader of Lazarus and Steinthal's programme for a future *Völkerpsychologie*. While he agreed that psychology had to go beyond the study of the individual, he rejected one of their principal aims, i.e. to transfer 'scientific' methods to the study of history in order to discover the 'laws of development' of the 'folk spirit'. Lazarus and Steinthal only had a vague idea of what constituted a 'scientific method', and had spent little time in explaining how such methods could be 'applied' to the study of the human mind. The trained scientist Wundt, in contrast, had convinced himself of the limited use of scientific, experimental methods for folk psychology, and insisted on the strict separation between experimental-scientific methods for individual psychology, and qualitative-hermeneutic ones for folk psychology. While restricted to observation, the latter were no less accurate or objective than experimental methods, Wundt explained. After all, a number of scientific disciplines such as geology or botany did not proceed differently. Wundt agreed with Lazarus and Steinthal that the task of *Völkerpsychologie* was to study those mental processes which formed the basis of the general development of human communities as evidenced by their mental products (*Erzeugnisse*). But their neat distinction between descriptive and analytical disciplines was too simple, Wundt argued. It was already outdated and not even supported by scientists anymore.<sup>40</sup>

Only the systematic study of the community, i.e. the *Volk*, as an object sui generis could explain the higher and more complex 'products' of the human mind such as language, myths and morality. In accordance with Lazarus and Steinthal, Wundt insisted that the 'folk' or nation was by far the most important community formed by human beings. Other groups such as families, clans, or regional, local and professional associations only ever existed within a nation and depended on it, hence the name *Völkerpsychologie* was appropriate. Wundt thus dismissed alternative labels that had been suggested as more suitable and accurate for the new discipline. 'Group psychology' implied a focus on other, less important human communities than the nation and was therefore misleading.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, he preferred *Völkerpsychologie* over 'social psychology' or 'sociology':

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<sup>39</sup> Kurt Danziger, *Constructing the Subject: Historical Origins of Psychological Research* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1990).

<sup>40</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, 'Ziele und Wege der Völkerpsychologie', in *Probleme der Völkerpsychologie* (Leipzig: Wiegandt, 1911), p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie: Grundlinien einer psychologischen Entwicklungsgeschichte der Menschheit* (Leipzig: Alfred Kröner, 1912), pp. 4-5.

these disciplines were too focused on contemporary society, he argued, lacked psychological insight and ignored the developmental, historical character of civilisation.<sup>42</sup> Even more so than Lazarus and Steinthal, Wundt had to defend folk psychology against, other disciplines, in particular well-established humanities such as history, linguistics, mythology and philosophy. Wundt was at pains to convince his colleagues that he would be able to provide more than a synthesis of research conducted by specialists in their fields. Still, Wundt insisted that folk psychology was clearly distinct from these disciplines since it studied ‘all those “mental products” [*geistige Erzeugnisse*] which emanate from the community of human life and thus cannot be explained by the characteristics of an individual consciousness since they presuppose the interaction of many individuals’. While ‘all appearances which the humanities study’ were indeed ‘products of the folk community,’ philosophers, historians and literary critics typically focused on exceptional individuals, events and ideas.<sup>43</sup> Scholars in the increasingly popular and independent social sciences saw Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie* as competition and were not convinced of the need to establish such a synthetic discipline that lacked a unique method and object of study. One of the main rivals of Wundt’s folk psychology was social anthropology (*Völkerkunde, Ethnologie*), and like many of his peers from Durkheim to Freud, Wundt depended on the empirical knowledge provided by ethnologists and social anthropologists, but he insisted that folk psychology and social anthropology were different approaches that needed to be kept separate. *Völkerkunde* studied the genesis, characteristics and diffusion of ‘peoples’ over the globe, but neglected psychological aspects of these processes. It constituted, he insisted, a different discipline with a different set of research questions and interests. Like history and philosophy for Lazarus and Steinthal, social anthropology provided Wundt with the raw data necessary to discover and formulate the ‘laws of development’ of peoples, but it lacked the tools to reach the level of insight his folk psychology would offer.

Even though the first volume of his *Völkerpsychologie* was published only in 1900, and the final tome of the monumental study shortly before his death in 1920, Wundt had held an interest in and published on the topic early in his career. Already in 1862, he offered lecture courses on psychology designed for medical students; these were published under the title *Lectures on the Human and the Animal Soul* in 1863.<sup>44</sup> This sweeping survey included, following an overview of

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<sup>42</sup> Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie*, vol. 1, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Wundt, *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie*, pp. 1-3.

<sup>44</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, *Vorlesungen über die Menschen- und Thierseele*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Voß, 1863).

the study of individual psychology, Wundt's first attempt at folk psychology, even though he mentioned the term only in passing.<sup>45</sup> At the time, Wundt was still convinced that experimental methods could be applied to all psychological phenomena, and was mainly interested in individual psychology. The *Lectures*, however, included reflections on the very themes and topics which would later form the core of his *Völkerpsychologie*: language, myths, religion, customs and habits.

Similar to Lazarus and Steinthal, Wundt's interest in folk psychology was related to his interest in ethics and moral philosophy. Wundt, however, published his monograph on the 'study of the facts and laws of moral life' well before his *Völkerpsychologie*, where Lazarus and Steinthal had moved on to the study of ethics after they had published on *Völkerpsychologie*. Wundt agreed with Lazarus and Steinthal that any study of ethics had to be built on folk-psychological knowledge of communal life. He described folk psychology as the *Vorhalle*, the 'portico' of ethics.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, Wundt's *Ethics* included a number of topics that would feature later in his folk psychology, namely the study of customs, habits, and the development of morality.

Wundt agreed with Lazarus and Steinthal that folk psychology depended on an understanding of the relation between the individual and the community, and adopted Lazarus's term 'interaction' (*Wechselwirkung*) to describe this relationship.<sup>47</sup> Importantly, and in contrast to the dreaded 'individualists' like Jeremy Bentham, Wundt subscribed to the idea that the 'whole', i.e. the nation, constituted more than the sum of its parts and thus constituted a distinct object of study. To describe the relationship between the individual and the community Wundt introduced the term 'creative synthesis' (*schöpferische Synthese*). The folk, as a compound entity, was a product of the creative synthesis of interacting individuals and represented a new entity with its own quality and characteristics. Analogous to the human organism and the human mind, which also represented more than the sum of its parts, Wundt conceptualised the folk as a complex entity that could not be reduced to its constituent parts, but needed to be analysed as a whole. In addition, the concept of a creative synthesis accounted for progress in history. Wundt used it not only to define the interaction between individual and 'folk', but also to account for the transformation of primitive forms of civilisation to higher stages of development.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 449-451.

<sup>46</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, *Ethik: Eine Untersuchung der Tatsachen und Gesetze des sittlichen Lebens* (Stuttgart: Enke, 1886), p. iii.

<sup>47</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, 'Über das Verhältnis des Einzelnen zur Gemeinschaft', *Deutsche Rundschau*, 18 (1891), pp. 190-206.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

While Wundt's owed much to Lazarus and Steinthal, he was keen to stress the differences between their and his approach to folk psychology. He was not happy with their term 'folk spirit', and instead preferred to speak of a 'folk soul' (*Volksseele*), which proved to be even more controversial and repeatedly caused misunderstandings of his approach. Wundt insisted on the descriptive, non-metaphysical character of the term 'soul'. Its religious origins and the notion of a substance of the soul had to be overcome, he argued. 'Soul' was a purely technical term that described the mental state of an individual and comprised a person's perceptions, feelings, and volitions. Accordingly, to Wundt the term 'folk soul' simply referred to the collective perceptions, emotions and volitions of whole nations or 'peoples'. It described empirical, mental facts which formed the focus of any folk psychology, i.e. the 'mental products' of a folk community. Those critics who had claimed that folk psychology was an impossible discipline since a 'folk soul' did not exist, Wundt argued, were themselves guilty of a hidden form of metaphysics, since they still believed in the material existence of the soul and did not understand its psychological character.<sup>49</sup> In addition, the concept 'soul' as used in modern psychology referred to the physiological foundations of psychological processes and was therefore more appropriate than 'mind' or 'spirit' (*Geist*) which excluded or neglected these.<sup>50</sup> For Wundt, then, the term 'folk soul' had the same status as contemporary concepts such as 'national identity' or 'mentality': It had no material substance, but was a 'mental fact' that could be and indeed needed to be studied in a scientific way.<sup>51</sup>

Originally, Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* had a neat and clear tripartite structure that he had borrowed from Lazarus and Steinthal. Folk psychology studied the 'products' of the folk soul, i.e. those emanations of the human mind that were constitutive parts of any folk and had not been created by an individual. The prime example for this kind of 'mental product' was language; hence the starting point of folk psychology was the study of the origins, structure and development of language. The second major part focused on 'myths', which included fairy tales, epics, and all forms of religious thought. The third part, 'customs', was the most difficult to define and delimit, since it included everything from table manners, mores, attitudes to gender and sexuality, to complex systems of law, economics, politics and the state. Unsurprisingly, Wundt experienced major difficulties with his original three-fold structure of folk psychology, which proved to be too

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<sup>49</sup> Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie*, vol. 1, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Wundt, 'Ziele und Wege', p. 13.

static and limiting, and was forced to widen and expand its scope into a truly universal anthropology of mankind.<sup>52</sup>

The clearest and most concise summary of Wundt's concept of *Völkerpsychologie* can be found in the introduction to a concise single volume on folk psychology, first published in 1912.<sup>53</sup> In contrast to the multi-volume version of *Völkerpsychologie*, which analysed the appearances of the 'folk soul' independently and diachronically, the single-volume digest provided a chronologically organised history of mankind (or civilisation). Wundt argued that such a comprehensive summary was the real aim of his *Völkerpsychologie*. 'Development' was the main organising principle of his approach: similar to the development of individuals from childhood to adolescence and adulthood, 'peoples' developed in clearly defined stages, he argued. The first stage in this *Völkerentwicklung* was the primitive age, which formed the 'lowest level of culture'.<sup>54</sup> It was followed by the totemistic age, defined as a state of mind where, in contrast to modern times, the 'animal ruled over the human being'. The next step was the age of 'heroes and gods', when the rule of individuals and the military (*kriegerische*) organisation of the 'tribal community' emerged. This age also witnessed the creation of the state as the political organisation of 'peoples', as well as national religions: epic tales now replaced the myths and fairy tales of earlier times. The fourth stage of the development of mankind was characterised by the predominance of the national state and national religions, which still dominated the present time. The future development of civilisation, however, would overcome national divisions and lead to 'humanity', a truly universal world-civilisation. In its concise form, Wundt's folk psychology presented a universal history that studied the regular, progressive changes of mankind from primitive to higher, more civilised stages. Like many of his peers and contemporaries, Wundt used 'development' as the 'redemptive word' that allowed him to make sense of the dissolution of traditional society that characterised the nineteenth century.<sup>55</sup>

Ultimately, Wundt's folk psychology aimed at a strictly teleological philosophy of history which presented the development of mankind as a one-dimensional path to 'humanity'. Similar to

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<sup>52</sup> Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie*, vols. 6-10.

<sup>53</sup> Wundt, *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie*, pp. 1-11. This book was the only one to be translated into English as *Elements of Folk Psychology* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1916), hence most British and American commentators' knowledge of Wundt's folk psychology was restricted to this volume.

<sup>54</sup> Wundt, *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>55</sup> See Wolfgang Eßbach, 'Vernunft, Entwicklung, Leben: Schlüsselbegriffe der Moderne', in *Die Gesellschaft der Dinge, Menschen, Götter* (Wiesbaden: VS, 2011), pp. 131-140; with reference to Hellmuth Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch: Einleitung in die philosophische Anthropologie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1928).



Lazarus and Steinthal, he thus represented the optimistic idea of progress that had underpinned traditional liberalism, but had increasingly come under attack by critics and pessimists since the 1890s. He also firmly believed in the ‘unity of mankind’, characteristic of Enlightenment thinking, and focused on those traits that were common to all nations while he neglected the differences between them. The main aim of Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie* was not very different from Lazarus and Steinthal’s approach. Folk psychology would provide a synthesis of the results of specialised research in the humanities. It would replace neither history nor cultural history as empirical disciplines, but the speculative philosophy of history as represented by Hegel.

More so than Lazarus and Steinthal, Wundt stressed the dependence of folk psychology on individual psychology. Throughout his life, he stuck to three fundamental points on the relationship between experimental psychology and folk psychology:

First, that experimental psychology could never be more than a part of the science of psychology as a whole; second, that it needed to be supplemented by a branch of psychological studies that was devoted to the investigation of human mental processes in their social aspects; and third, that this latter type of study was able to make use of information that was no less objective than the data of experimental psychology.<sup>56</sup>

However, Wundt found it difficult to convince his critics of the unity of psychology and was at pains to demonstrate the causal relationship between individual, experimental psychology and folk psychology. Despite his criticism of authors who wanted to restrict psychology to the study of individuals, or those who used simple analogies between individuals and the community, his folk psychology was based on such an analogy. Wundt had borrowed the three-partite structure of his folk psychology from Lazarus and Steinthal; it also mirrored his notion of the individual mind. In Wundt’s description, the ‘folk soul’ was represented by language, myth (and religion), and customs, in the same way as the individual ‘soul’ consisted of imagination, emotions and the will.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Wundt’s approach to history was characterised by a deep-seated belief in historicist ideas that treated nations as a ‘collective singular’ and compared them to individuals. Folk psychology as the ‘developmental history of mankind’ took its underlying motives from the *Bildungsroman* and presented the history of civilisation as a continuous learning process that moved towards ‘humanity’.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Danziger, *Constructing the Subject*, p. 37.

<sup>57</sup> Carlo Sganzini, *Die Fortschritte der Völkerpsychologie von Lazarus bis Wundt* (Bern: Francke, 1913), 120-121.

<sup>58</sup> Wundt, *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie*, p. 7.

Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* could be practised from the comfort of an armchair and did not reflect the methodological standards of contemporary social or cultural anthropology. As a work of synthesis, it was derivative and depended on the findings of other scholars. Given the all-encompassing nature of folk psychology, Wundt could not even stay abreast even of the state of research in relevant fields and often relied on works that had become outdated. As one of the last polymaths, he did not fit into an academic landscape that increasingly prized specialisation over encyclopaedic knowledge. He still insisted that his *Völkerpsychologie* was an original contribution to science and represented 'research'; a notion that did not convince even his most sympathetic readers. Eventually, Wundt made too many enemies and could convince hardly anyone of the wisdom of his approach. While the majority of modern psychologists, intrigued by the perspective of turning psychology into a proper science by employing experimental methods, were disappointed by Wundt's traditional approach to *Völkerpsychologie*, and while the representatives of the established humanities treated Wundt as a dilettante who presented well-known specialised knowledge as 'research', the champions of alternative social sciences saw him as a dangerous competitor to their own efforts.

Despite such structural and methodological problems, even Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* found readers and followers and left its marks in the development of the humanities and social sciences. Wundt's colleague and friend at the University of Leipzig, the controversial historian Karl Lamprecht, appropriated the pillars of Wundt's approach, reformulated them and presented them as the centre of his cultural history – which in turn inspired the young Aby Warburg, for instance.<sup>59</sup> In France, it was Emile Durkheim who adopted perspectives from Wundt's folk psychology and integrated them in his programme for sociology as the fundamental social science.<sup>60</sup> Franz Boas's 'counterpart' Bronislaw Malinowski as the 'founding father' of British social anthropology similarly owed much to his knowledge of Wundtian *Völkerpsychologie*. Before his legendary research trips to the Pacific during the First World War, and before he established himself in British academia, he had studied for three semesters with Wilhelm Wundt in Leipzig. It was Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie*, not the experimental psychology practised in the

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<sup>59</sup> Roger Chickering, *Karl Lamprecht: A German Academic Life (1856-1915)* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993); Luise Schorn-Schütte, *Karl Lamprecht: Kulturgeschichte zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984); Karl Lamprecht, *Moderne Geschichtswissenschaft: Fünf Vorträge* (Freiburg: Heyfelder, 1905); Ernst H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1986).

<sup>60</sup> Egbert Klautke, 'The French Reception of *Völkerpsychologie* and the Origins of the Social Sciences', *Modern Intellectual History*, 10 (2013), pp. 293-316.

Leipzig laboratory, that inspired Malinowski and, together with his reading of James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, contributed to his conversion from the sciences and the philosophy of science to anthropology. Best known for his efforts in introducing empirical field-work to the study on anthropology, at first sight Malinowski's social anthropology seems like the antidote to Wundt's speculative armchair-anthropology. The evolutionary foundation of Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* was anathema for Malinowski, who positioned himself and his 'functionalist' approach precisely against evolutionism and diffusionism. However, Malinowski agreed with Wundt that anthropology essentially constituted a branch of psychology, and much of his 'social' anthropology could easily be named psychological anthropology. He thus continued a Wundtian orientation into the mainstream of twentieth century social anthropology.<sup>61</sup>

#### **4. The Legacy of *Völkerpsychologie***

At first sight it seems that the efforts by Lazarus, Steinthal and Wundt to introduce *Völkerpsychologie* as an independent discipline ended in complete failure. In particular after the experiences of the Nazi dictatorship and the end of the Second World War it was all too easy to dismiss folk psychology, which had never been established at university level, as a mere 'approach'. As a consequence, folk psychology was left out of the process of expansion of the social sciences in the 1950s and 1960s. While other disciplines became fully institutionalised, with their own university departments, dedicated chairs, degree programmes, academic journals and associations, *Völkerpsychologie* was dismissed and slowly forgotten. The experience of the Nazi regime damaged the already fragile reputation of folk psychology. Academics and intellectuals increasingly viewed it as part of the legacy of the Third Reich, understood it as a form of national stereotyping, or even associated it with the racist ideology of the Nazis, thus not worthy of the status of an academic discipline.

This judgement did not reflect the intentions of the nineteenth century founders of *Völkerpsychologie* or the nature of their research: neither Lazarus and Steinthal's, nor Wundt's, folk psychology had been a forerunner of scientific racism. Quite to the contrary, *Völkerpsychologie* had provided authors who were opposed to racist theories of the nation with a

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<sup>61</sup> Michael N. Forster, *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 204-206; Michael W. Young, *Malinowski: Odyssey of an Anthropologist, 1884-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 137-141;

welcome alternative. Lazarus and Steinthal had dismissed not only biological-racial definitions of the nation, but any ‘objective’ definition of the folk as insufficient. Even more so than Lazarus and Steinthal themselves, some of their followers, for instance Alfred Fouillée in France or W.I. Thomas in America, had referred to folk psychology in this way and employed it in their struggle against scientific racism.<sup>62</sup> Instead, they argued that the very existence of the ‘folk’ depended on the will of its members to form a community and introduced a ‘voluntaristic’ view of the nation which resembled – maybe even inspired – Ernest Renan’s famous definition (the nation as a ‘daily plebiscite’). As such, it resonates with modern theories of nationalism that stress the ‘constructed’ and ‘imagined’ character of national communities. A product of the Jewish background of Lazarus and Steinthal, their ‘voluntaristic’ definition of the nation thus assured an important, but hidden legacy of folk psychology.

As a powerful professor at one of Imperial Germany’s leading universities, Wilhelm Wundt was much better placed to establish *Völkerpsychologie* as an academic discipline than the Jewish scholars Lazarus and Steinthal, who always operated on the margins of the academic establishment. However, his peculiar understanding of the discipline of psychology prevented him from doing so. Hence, for his role in the development of modern psychology, Wundt has been aptly described as the ‘sorcerer’s apprentice’.<sup>63</sup> He contributed greatly to the introduction of experimental methods and was thus instrumental in emancipating psychology as a ‘scientific’ discipline. While providing the paradigm for psychology as a science, however, Wundt remained opposed to the attempts of separating psychology from philosophy and critical of his many students who tried to achieve exactly this separation. To Wundt, psychology had to remain an integral part of philosophy, conceived in a broad way. With his folk psychology Wundt remained loyal to the epistemological traditions of the humanities as they had developed throughout the nineteenth century and thus confused and disappointed the majority of his students, who in turn largely ignored the philosophical part of his *œuvre*. To them, *Völkerpsychologie* appeared like an unwelcome return to the kind of metaphysical speculation they were desperate to abandon. Folk psychology was an integral part of wide-spanning debates within the humanities at the turn of the century. These debates inaugurated the social sciences and folk psychology contributed to their eventual

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<sup>62</sup> Alfred Fouillée, *Psychologie du peuple Français* (Paris: Alcan, 1898); W.I. Thomas, ‘The Scope and Method of Folk-Psychology’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 1 (1896), pp. 434-445; see Adrian Brock, ‘Was Wundt a “Nazi”?’’, *Theory and Psychology*, 2 (1992), pp. 205-223.

<sup>63</sup> Danziger, *Constructing the Subject*, p. 34.

establishment, albeit in an indirect, mediated way. Unsurprisingly, important and canonised scholars such as Georg Simmel, Emile Durkheim and Franz Boas, who adopted central aspects of folk psychology, avoided the peculiar language employed by its founders.