

JAKOB FRIEDRICH FRIES (1773 - 1843): CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY AND POSITION IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Jakob Friedrich Fries (1773-1843) was one of the leading German philosophers of the 19th century. He developed a mental anthropology as propedeutics of a critical philosophy. With this he wanted to perfect Kant's philosophy and to protect it against the prospering speculative systems such as Hegel's and Schelling's. In the view of the historiography of philosophy, these aims have not been achieved. Stigmatized as representative of psychologism, Fries and his work fell into oblivion or were declared to be an aberration on the way of the progress of philosophical cognition.

The historiography of psychology uncritically adopted this philosophy-historical judgement. The general canon is: Because of his psychologism, Jakob Friedrich Fries did not render any good service to psychology. But a critical analysis of Fries' works and of the political, scientific and philosophical context of his time shows that this judgement had originally been passed for science-political reasons of self-legitimation and differentiation rather than for factual reasons. Especially the example of Jakob Friedrich Fries and of the evaluation of his works by psychology historians is an inducement to study the practice and function of the so called "deliberate forgetting" and in this way to consider central problems of the historiography of psychology.

RESUMEN

Jakob Friedrich Fries (1773-1843) fue uno de los principales filósofos alema-

nes del siglo XIX. Desarrolló una antropología mental como propedéutica de una filosofía crítica. Con esto pretendió perfeccionar la filosofía de Kant y protegerla de sistemas especulativos como los de Hegel y Schelling. En el panorama de la historiografía de la filosofía, este objetivo no se ha logrado. Calificado como representante del psicologismo, Fries y su trabajo cayeron en el olvido o fueron declarados una aberración para el progreso del pensamiento filosófico.

La historiografía de la psicología ha adoptado sin criterio este juicio histórico-filosófico. Esto es: que debido a su psicologismo, Jakob Friedrich Fries no prestó un buen servicio a la psicología. Pero un análisis crítico de los trabajos de Fries y del contexto político, científico y filosófico de su época, muestra que esta opinión fue en su origen dictada por razones político-científicas de autolegitimación y diferenciación más que por razones objetivas. Especialmente, el ejemplo de Jakob Friedrich Fries y de la evaluación de sus trabajos por historiadores de la psicología es un aliciente para estudiar la práctica y la función de lo que se ha llamado el "olvido deliberado", y en esta línea, considerar los problemas centrales de la historiografía de la psicología.

I.

The opinions about whether Jakob Friedrich Fries' "Mental Anthropology" has influenced the development of psychology or not, and if it had, in which way, differ considerably. The variety of conclusions in the field of history of psychology ranges from the view that Fries has enriched and inspired psychology, to the statement that he has not done psychology any particular service; or he is not mentioned at all. The latter is the most common case and probably the most effective strategy to make ideas, biographies and constellations of problems fall into oblivion. This strategy and practice may be called "deliberate forgetting". The reasons and functions of such an approach to the history of sciences and philosophy are multilayered. They include the whole complex of science-theoretical and political questions of historical research. Especially the example of Jakob Friedrich Fries and of the evaluation of his works by psychology historians is an inducement to study this practice and in this way to consider central problems of the historiography of psychology. One of these central problems - at least for the time before 1879 - is the uncritical adoption of philosophy-historical views into the historiography of psychology. We might say: The historiography of psychology in the period before 1879 lacks the necessary distance from the philosophy-historical judgement. Lastly the phenomenon of scientific emancipation is called into question. While psychology has achieved the status of an autonomous science, grown out of philosophy, this cannot be said about its historiography.

To explicate this thesis on the "Fries case", practice, function and passing-on of psychology-historiographical evaluations of his theories will be considered. At the beginning, as a consequence of "deliberate forgetting", we will have to give a short biographical and historical summary and to present Fries' conception of psychology.

II.

Jakob Friedrich Fries was born in 1773. At the Moravian Academy in Herrnhut he got a sound scientific and philosophical education. In 1792 Fries began his studies of jurisprudence and philosophy in Leipzig. At the same time as Hegel he taught as a private lecturer for some years in Jena. The two became deadly rivals in philosophical as well as in private respect¹. Their philosophical rivalry was based on a different handling of Immanuel Kant's works. Both wanted to perfect his philosophy. But their views of the direction in which this perfection had to go varied considerably. Fries made the development of the critical part his business. Hegel's system, however, like Fichte's before and later Schelling's, tended increasingly to the speculative direction. In Fries' eyes these philosophical systems might distort Kant's intentions.

The most important and decisive break in Fries' career followed his appearance at the Wartburg Festival in 1817. Fries had given a speech in which he declared himself in favour of the unity of Germany and against Prussian-Austrian predominance. Because of this speech he was declared public enemy of Prussia. The consequence was that at the Prussian governments's instigation Fries was suspended from his lectureship of philosophy. It seems to be proven that Hegel, who had just taken over Fichte's chair in Berlin, had been playing a part in this decision.² While Hegel's philosophy was beginning its triumphant march, Fries was prohibited from giving public lectures on philosophy. When 20 years later Fries was permitted to teach again, the Hegelian historiography of philosophy had already declared his philosophical system to be a historical arabesque.³

These developments have been of prime importance for the adoption and effectiveness of Friesian thinking up to the present. After the following short outline of Fries' conception of psychology we will come back to this topic.

III.

For two reasons Fries had deliberately avoided the term "psychology" in his conception of it:

- 1) to evade the metaphysical assumptions of the old rational psychology,
- 2) to express his dissatisfaction with contemporary empirical psychology.⁴

Therefore he went back to the term "anthropology", the "theory of man as systematical science".

According to Fries the subject matter of psychology or "Mental Anthropology" is the human mind and/or the preconditions of human cognitive capacity. The subject is understood as empirical. According to Fries the task of psychology is to investigate the "history of reason as it develops in the child to the adult and

¹ see Leary, 1982, p. 223

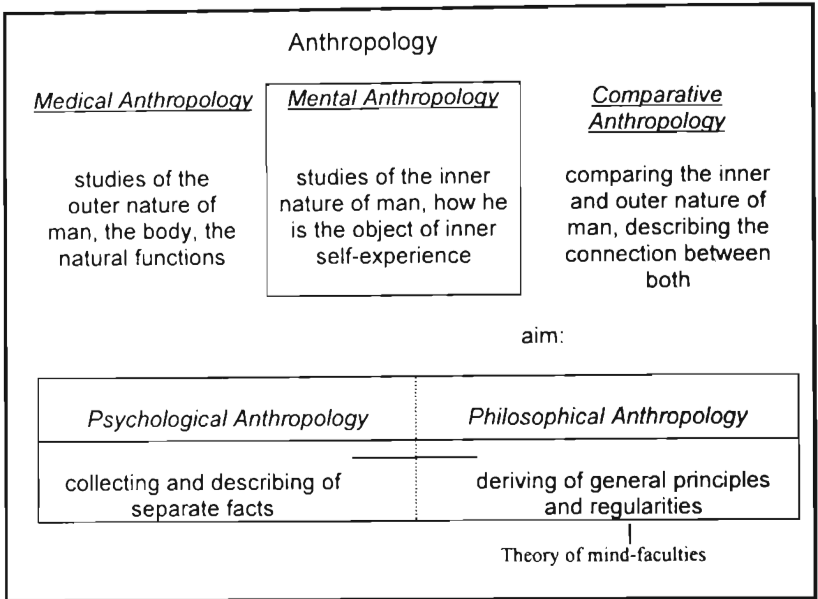
² see Henke, 1937, pp. 154-157; d'Hondt, 1973; also Leary, 1982

³ see Kraft, 1980

⁴ Fries, 1837/39, Vol.1, p. 35f.

to the old man, as it appears when being awake and asleep, as it differs in man and woman, in constitution, people and race, or as it is injured or destroyed in physical and mental diseases"⁵. But Fries did not want to stop at this point. Starting from this empirical source he wanted in the next step to formulate a theory of reason "as it shows itself in the self-observation of healthy specimens"⁶. This part of "Mental Anthropology" is designated by Fries as "Philosophical Anthropology".

Table 1 shows how he subdivided anthropology:



Following his teacher Tetens, Fries's theory of reason is still a theory of mind-faculties. According to Fries there are three fundamental categories of mental faculties hierarcically structured and thought as activities. In his terminology these are: knowledge (Erkenntnis), inner disposition (Gemüth/Herz) and activity

⁵ "... die Geschichte der Vernunft, wie sie sich im Kinde zum Erwachsenen, zum Greise entwickelt, wie sie mit Wachen und Schlafen erscheint, wie sie nach Mann und Weib, nach Konstitution, Volk und Race sich nüancirt, oder wie sie in körperlichen und Geisteskrankheiten verletzt und zerstört wird" (Fries, 1837/39, Vol.1, p. 37)

⁶ "... wie sie in gesunden Exemplaren überhaupt der inneren Beobachtung eines jeden vor Augen liegt" (Fries, 1837/39, Vol.1, p.37)

(Thatkraft)⁷.

Fries does not consider these three faculties as independent and isolated from each other. Rather they are "always together stimulated in each real life activity"⁸

As a heuristic principle, Fries adds a three-stage development system to the faculties of mind. He states that we must "relate the difference in capacities to the difference in the stages of development of our mental capacities, and we will only obtain a correct arrangement of findings if we consider human life as a task of the power of self-control and self-formation"⁹

The stages of development of mental capacities are according to Fries:

1. Sensual stimulus
2. Lower mental processes directed by habit and association
3. Higher mental processes directed by the power of self-control of the mind.

The highest stage of mental development i.e. the higher mental processes, enables the "inner self-formation of man". This self-formation or self-control, resp., is no individual end in itself, but its end is the trinity of truth, beauty, and justice (of the good, resp.) that is determined by "the public life of the peoples".

It becomes clear that Fries' theory, though still influenced by the psychology of faculties, goes beyond this tradition. On the one hand, with the faculty of "activity" (or "decision-making") the moment of acting takes a central place in psychic happening, on the other hand, this theory considers the faculties as a system of equilibrium. This system is the more vulnerable, the more isolated the particular stages of mental development are and the less developed the higher mental processes (power of self-control) are. On the basis of these ideas Fries developed a differentiation of symptoms from psychical to psychopathological ones which goes far beyond the state of development of psychology and psychiatry at that time.¹⁰

IV.

How important is Fries' conception of psychology with regard to scientific emancipation?

To answer this question we have first to take Kant into consideration. Kant's statement that psychology may at best be a historical physiography of the soul but never an exact science, i.e. psychological experimental theory, is well known. But it is also well-known that this statement in later years challenged many philosophers and psychologists to furnish proof to the contrary.

Fries was one of the first to accept this challenge. He took the view that in Kant's philosophy psychological and metaphysical elements were mingled. He

⁷ The third faculty "activity" means activity in a narrower sense, because all three faculties are activities.

⁸ Fries, 1837/39, Vol.1, pp. 42f.

⁹ Fries, 1837/39, Vol.1, p. 48

¹⁰ see Meyerhof, 1910; Kronfeld, 1920; Wyrsh, 1976; Akbar, 1984

tried to solve the problem by placing his mental anthropology as propaedeutics in front of the now "pure" transcendental philosophy. Fries was also of the opinion that the rational principles of the material world did not apply to the mental world. It was true that both worlds influenced each other, but this influence was not causal but only inductive.

This "disentanglement" or this clear definition and limitation of psychology and philosophy on the one hand and natural science on the other hand might have served the development of psychology if Fries' approach had been followed. But the history of psychology and the history of philosophy took a different course.

It is well-known that Fries was not the only philosopher of his time who thought that psychology could possibly become a science of its own. Two of the best-known theories with similar intentions were Johann Friedrich Herbart's "Mathematical" and Friedrich Eduard Beneke's "Genetic Psychology". A short comparison between Beneke's and Fries' approach leads us to the so-called problem of psychologism which plays an important part in the adoption of Fries' theories.

Fries followed the works of Beneke, who was 25 years younger, with great attention and esteem. He called him his "friendly opponent". He put great emphasis on the fact that both were in opposition to German idealism, that both insisted on a psychology of inner experience and that empiricism formed the starting point of their research¹¹. But Beneke also thought highly of Fries as "the only sober-minded philosopher" in the 'bacchanalian frenzy' of the romantic-idealistic dancers" who "stood before him as a shining star"¹². Nevertheless, Beneke's psychology differs considerably from Fries'. But the only difference of interest in the context of this paper is their opinion about the position psychology should take in relation to philosophy and natural sciences.

It is known that Beneke wanted to make psychology the "centre ... of the whole philosophy", "the sun from which the remaining philosophical sciences receive their light". Moreover: this "sun of psychology should and could enlighten the natural sciences even in their most important respects." For "only in this way true unity and order, only in this way universality may be gained for philosophy"¹³. What Beneke here puts into words is plain psychologism. Nevertheless (or perhaps because of that?) Beneke's contribution to psychology is with good reason highly appreciated.

Not so Fries. For him the clear separation of psychology and philosophy was the first prerequisite for correct findings in both fields. If he considered his mental anthropology as propaedeutics of philosophy this does certainly not mean that he tried to solve philosophical problems by psychological means. He merely wanted to point out that philosophical cognition requires well-founded psychological knowledge. But in his view it was completely absurd that psychology should be of fundamental importance for the natural sciences. A relationship between nature

¹³ Beneke, 1832, p. 89

¹¹ Freis, 1839, p. III

¹² see König, Geldsetzer, 1982, p. 83*

and mind could only be established by means of the principle of "belief" and "presentiment", i.e. metaphysically and in no case empirically.

V.

If Fries is dealt with in any studies of the history of philosophy and psychology he is mainly mentioned together with Beneke under the heading of "psychologism". Whereas this label fits Beneke it has become clear that it does by no means fit Fries. If this term should be associated with Fries' system at all, one might according to Sachs-Hombach (1997) speak of a "moderate attributive psychologism of his theory of cognition". To make it short: generally, the stigmatization of Fries as a representative of psychologism is incorrect.

The question arises how this false estimation could have come about. One reason certainly is that the phenomenon of psychologism in the field of philosophy has only recently been studied in greater detail.¹⁴ But the science-political function of the stigmatization seems to be even more important. It is necessary to deal again with the contemporary context of the recognition and utilization of Fries' system. There were at least three conditions that impeded the positive reception of his views:

1. The particular way in which Fries referred to Kant
2. Fries' strong objection to the prospering German idealism
3. The predominance of Hegelian philosophy and philosophy-historiography at the time when Fries was prohibited from teaching.

The scientific and political conditions were highly unfavourable for Fries' philosophy and psychology during his lifetime. The real deathblow was later dealt to him by the Hegelian Kuno Fischer who said: "What is a priori cannot be recognized a posteriori"¹⁵. With this interpretation Fischer "reduced the whole of Fries' philosophy to the supposed attempt to psychologize the results of Kant's work..." and declared "this attempt to have failed"¹⁶. With that Fries was stigmatized as representative of psychologism and, as König/Geldsetzer (1982, p. 53*) put it, in this way two aims were achieved: Fries could now be bestowed his unquestioned position in the history of philosophy but at the same time his contribution to the progress of cognition could be denied.

From that time on Fries' approach became the focus of the fierce fight of the neo-Kantians against psychologism, the aim of which was nothing less than "to save the dignity of their philosophical approach as a philosophical one at all"¹⁷. So much about the function of Fries' stigmatization for philosophy.

The philosophical debate on psychologism and Fries' stigmatization has, of course, not remained without consequences for the psychology developing in the

¹⁴ see Marquard, 1985; Kusch, 1995

¹⁵ Fischer, 1862, p. 87

¹⁶ Kraft, 1980, p. 9

¹⁷ König, Geldsetzer, 1982, 53*

lap of philosophy and for later philosophy-historical judgements. It is true that now and then the view was expressed that Fries should be accorded an important position in the history of ideas and emancipation of psychology. For instance, in 1855 Reinhold emphasised that Fries had advanced this discipline "in an enriching and inspiring way"¹⁸ Windelband stated in 1904 that Fries' works held an "independent position in the field of empirical psychology"¹⁹ In 1921 Höffding called his works "forerunners of contemporary psychology"²⁰. But these few voices were not able to rise above the general canon which read as follows: Jakob Friedrich Fries as the principal representative of psychologism took the wrong way and did not render any good service to both philosophy and psychology.

The debate on the "problem of psychologism" seems to have been much more important for philosophy than for psychology, although it might be assumed that just the "psychologistic" empirical investigations offered welcome material for the not yet emancipated psychology. But this was not the case. On the contrary, the generation of founders tried to protect psychology even from the appearance of psychologism²¹, perhaps with a view to resisting the pressure of legitimation against philosophy. Whether Fries' works could really be labelled as "psychologism" and if so, whether they were of no value for psychology at all was hardly ever discussed. Fries' efforts "to set the image of interlaced capacities, laws and stages of development against the mechanical cutting-up of the soul"²² were rarely appreciated. In general, psychological research and the historiography of science that legalized it went hand in hand in their objection to Fries' psychology.

The decisive arguments for the psychology-historical evaluation of Fries were provided by Max Dessoir in his "History of modern German psychology" (1894/1911) with the keywords "criticism, emotional philosophy, psychologism". Referring to Fries he wrote that "criticism simply impeded... the further development of experience-oriented psychology"²³. Furthermore, he wrongfully called Fries "in fact" the philosopher of the "period of sensibility"²⁴. And, thirdly, in accordance with Windelband (1904) he subsumed Fries and Beneke under the heading "psychologism".

This image of Fries drawn by Dessoir corresponds completely with the usual philosophy-historical evaluation. On the one hand this is an expression of Dessoir's philosophical self-image. On the other hand it may also be interpreted as science-political signal: psychology, though by now institutionalized but not completely emancipated from philosophy, disassociates from unpopular philosophical approaches. To classify Fries as psychologistic was in keeping with the "mainstream" and from a historical point of view legitimized contemporary psychology as a

¹⁸ Reinhold, 1855, p. 229

¹⁹ Windelband, 1904, p. 397

²⁰ Höffding, 1921, p. 249

²¹ see Rath, 1990

²² Dessoir, 1911, p. 180

²³ Dessoir, 1894, p. 408

²⁴ Dessoir, 1894, 9. 348

philosophically correct science. The fact that Fries had indeed found little acception was carelessly considered as proof of an unsuccessful approach which had to be rejected for reasons of contents. But it remained unnoticed that perhaps in the first line political and philosophy-internal repression had minimised Fries' publicity and chances of influence.

Dessoir's judgement was maintained by the later historiography of psychology. For instance, Hehlmann wrote in 1967 that "Fries was only one example from a long row of authors who followed the path of psychologism but have not rendered any particular service to exact psychology"²⁵. It is no longer mentioned that Fries had "advanced psychology in an enriching and inspiring way", or that he even was "the founder of modern psychologies"²⁶. In the comprehensive "History of the problems of psychology" published by Pongratz in 1984 no reference at all is made to Fries.

Up to the present time a judgement has been maintained that originally had been passed for science-political reasons of self-legitimation and differentiation rather than for factual reasons. When older philosophers are nowadays studied from the psychology-historical point of view, it should be possible to rise above any stigmatizing philosophy-historical evaluations of their psychological achievements or to inquire after the function of these evaluations. Suitable starting points are the "Fries case" as well as the reevaluation of popular philosophy and experience-oriented psychology which has here and there already been undertaken in the fields of philosophy²⁷ and psychology²⁸.

These attempts are necessary steps in the emancipation of the history of psychology from that of philosophy as far as the period before 1879 is concerned. They are only the first hesitating steps towards new reconstructions and deconstructions which require or at least inspire the psychology historians to reflect on the fundamentals and implied contents of their own activities.

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²⁵ Hehlmann, 1967, pp. 127f.

²⁶ Lehmann, 1931, p. 119

²⁷ Zimmerli, 1979

²⁸ Schönplflug, 1994; Eckardt, 1998

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