

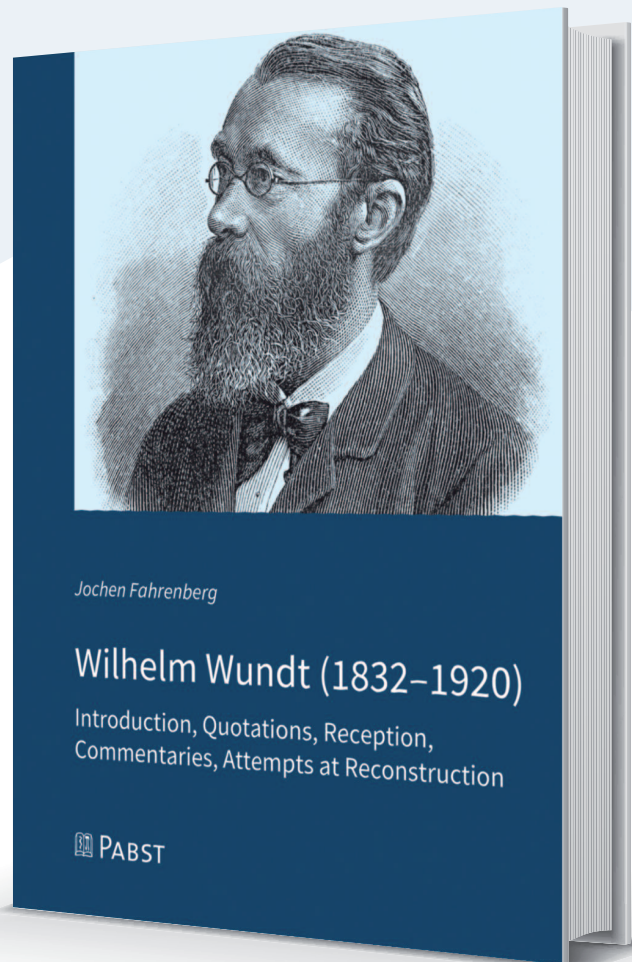
*Jochen Fahrenberg*

# Wilhelm Wundt (1832 – 1920)

Introduction, Quotations,  
Reception, Commentaries,  
Attempts at Reconstruction

Wundt's conception of psychology emerged during many decades of research and teaching, which led him from neurophysiology to psychology and philosophy. He thus established a unique, interdisciplinary, and comprehensive theoretical horizon not attained by any psychologist after him: Sensory psychology, neuropsychology, psychophysiology, animal psychology, general psychology, cultural psychology, ethics, epistemology, methodology, and philosophy. To elaborate a developmental theory of mind, which, for instance, seeks access to the genesis of thinking via the development of language, can be considered a central guiding idea in Wundt's entire work. General psychology and cultural psychology ("Völkerpsychologie") share a common basis in Wundt's theory of apperception. In a generalized sense, apperception is an integrative process in which sensory impressions, feelings, and volitional activity are not just processed, but integrated and creatively synthesized. This process is dynamically influenced by the individual's active aspiration, i.e. primarily by motives and not by cognitive control systems.

Wundt also developed the first genuine theory of science and methodology with respect to empirical psychology. His conception includes a multimethod approach, i.e. a competence for experimentation, as well as qualitative comparison and interpretation (hermeneutics). – When one-sided views become temporarily attractive in the mainstream of psychology – be it cognitivism or neurophysiological reductionism, computer-based modelling, psychoanalysis, phenomenological orientation, the narrative turn or the socio-critical new psychology – it is worth recalling the theoretical horizon of



the founder of psychology as a discipline. Wundt encouraged psychologists to conceive of a coordinated strategy, referring to the distinct categories and principles valid for mental science and for natural science in order to assess the human being as a psycho-physical unit. Here, he argued during the founding phase of psychology with a high degree of meta-scientific reflection, which can still provide an impetus for current research.

Wundt's conception has remained attractive because of its integrative foundation and comprehensiveness of his conception, particularly since controversies persist about the aims and methods of psychology and about shifting currents within prevalent theoretical orientations, as well as actual splits into subdivisions and highly specialized professional associations. Such developments demand continuous discourse about the controversies in theoretical psychology. This includes the critical philosophical reflection of one's own presuppositions, and the ability and willingness to reverse perspectives systematically, especially in psychology, academic studies, research, and professional practice. ■

**Foreword**

**1 Introduction and Overview**

- 1.1 In Remembrance of Wilhelm Wundt
- 1.2 Objectives
- 1.3 Approaches to Wundt's Work
- 1.4 Previous publications by the author about Wilhelm Wundt and Theoretical psychology

**2 Wilhelm Wundt: A Short Biography**

- 2.1 Curriculum Vitae
- 2.2 Research and Teaching
- 2.3 Wundt's Political and Religious Attitudes
- 2.4 Emil Kraepelin's View of Wundt
- 2.5 Wundt's Bequest
- 2.6 Leitmotif
- 2.7 Annex – Biographical Data

**3 Wundt's Complete Work**

- 3.1 Overview
- 3.2 Sensory Physiology and Sensory Psychology
- 3.3 Neuropsychology and Psychophysiology
- 3.4 Animal Psychology
- 3.5 General Psychology
- 3.6 Cultural Psychology ("Völkerpsychologie")
- 3.7 Ethics
- 3.8 Epistemology and Methodology
- 3.9 Philosophy (Metaphysics)

**4 Reception**

- 4.1 Strategies for Reception Research
- 4.2 Reception analyses
- 4.3 Wundt's work in Selected German Textbooks from 1890 to approximately 1935
- 4.4 The role of Wundt's PhD Students and Co-workers
- 4.5 Festschrift, Appreciations, and Obituaries
- 4.6 Scientific Controversies and Philosophical Positions

- 4.7 Current German Reception of Wundt's Psychology
- 4.8 Anglo-American Reception of Wundt's Work
- 4.9 Hypotheses Regarding the Minor Impact of Wundt's Work
- 4.10 Summarizing Theses on the Historiography of Wundt
- 4.11 Tasks for Research

**5 Attempts at reconstruction**

- 5.1 Strategies of Reconstruction and Previous Attempts at Reconstruction
- 5.2 Recent Approaches to Reconstruction of Wundt's Concepts
- 5.3 Defining Psychology
- 5.4 Wundt's Postulates, Principles, and Methods
- 5.5 Wundt's Theory of Apperception

**6 Wilhelm Wundt's Current Relevance**

**7 References**

*Further publications by Jochen Fahrenberg:*

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