



## **Karl and Charlotte Buehler in Dresden: A Chapter in the History of German and International Psychology**

Karl Buehler held a position at the "Technische Hochschule" in Dresden from 1918 to 1922. This was, in fact, Karl Buehler's first full professorship, that in philosophy and pedagogy (in this, he was the follower of Fritz Schulze - from 1876 to 1908, and Theodor Elsenhaus - from 1908 to 1918). The scientific background of Karl Buehler was the Wuerzburger School of "Denkpsychologie", where he was one of the leading figures. He had started to work with Oswald Kuelpe in Wuerzburg and then had followed his teacher to Bonn and later to Munich. In Munich he met Charlotte Malachowski, who first studied psychology with Carl Stumpf in Berlin. On the recommendation of Stumpf she changed - in the fall 1915 - for Munich and joined Kuelpe's group. Only two weeks after their first meeting Karl made a proposal: they became married on the April 16th, 1916. When the Buehlers left for Dresden at the end of World War I Charlotte Buehler had just received her Ph.D. (The title of her first dissertation was "Über Gedankenentstehung: Experimentelle Untersuchungen zur Denkpsychologie"). During their time in Dresden she wrote her "Habilitationsschrift" titled "Entdeckung und Erfindung in Literatur und Kunst" under the supervision of Oskar Walzel. This was the first "Habilitation" of a woman in the history of German psychology. So, no doubt, Dresden marked a very important step in the Buehlers' careers.

There was no independent psychological institute in Dresden before Karl Buehler arrived. Buehler's assistant in Dresden was Helmut Bocksch and among his co-workers at the "Allgemeine Abteilung" of the TH Dresden one finds (since 1919) also privat-dozent Walter Blumenfeld. The first psychological institute - Institute of Psychotechnics - was founded by Blumenfeld at the TH Dresden on the 17th of

July, 1922, with the help and the formal participation of Karl Buehler. In Dresden, Karl Buehler's work concentrated on perception. In particular, he wrote "Die Erscheinungsweisen der Farben" (1922), a volume that was part of the "Handbuch der Psychologie". There he formulated his "Duplizitätsprinzip" which states that all constancy phenomena in perception are based on a two-fold empirical basis: "Dingprojektionen" und "Umstandskriterien". In the emphasis on the role of context this is certainly very much alike to the views of the Berlin school of Gestalt psychology. Kurt Koffka in particular elaborated on these ideas in the later invariance theory of constancy which can be found in his "Principles of Gestalt Psychology" (1935).

Buehler's work on perception and specifically the duplicity principle later became of utmost importance to his Viennese student and assistant Egon Brunswik. Brunswik's "Wahrnehmung und Gegenstandswelt" (1934) is heavily influenced by his teachers ideas. One can argue that Brunswik's lens model which he developed much later in the United States combined the duplicity principle with correlation statistics. Buehler's overall influence on Brunswik certainly marks one of the most important lines of descent.

By the end of 1922 the Buehlers left Dresden for Vienna where they founded one of the most flourishing psychological institutes in Europe [Gerhard Benetka "Psychologie in Wien: Sozial- und Theoriegeschichte des Wiener Psychologischen Instituts 1922-1938, Wien: WUV, 1995]. The Vienna Psychological Institute attracted many students and international guests (e.g., Edward C. Tolman). To elaborate a little bit on the importance of the Vienna Psychological Institute, here are a few more of its students during the time of the Buehlers: Lajos Kardos, Josef Krug, Alexander Willwoll, Paul Lazarsfeld, Maria Jahoda, Peter Hofstaetter, Else Frenkel (later Frenkel-Brunswik), Hildegard Hetzer, Lotte Schenk-Danziger, Elsa Koehler, Kaethe Wolf, Hedda Bolgar, Albert Wellek, James Bugenthal, Henry Wegrocki, and the philosopher Karl Popper (Popper wrote his doctoral dissertation with Buehler mainly being inspired by his psycholinguistic ideas). Helmut Bocksch also initially belonged to the group but he returned to Dresden after several years of work as Karl Buehler's research assistant.

Paul Lazarsfeld, who emigrated to the United States (as did the Buehlers and many of their students) later described the organisational structure of the Institute ("die Wiener Organisationsform") in very favorable terms: "In den Jahren vor und nach 1930 war das Wiener Psychologische Institut in Abteilungen gegliedert, die verschiedenen Assistenten unterstanden, von denen ich [Lazarsfeld] einer war. Wir vermittelten zwischen den Arbeiten der Studenten und den allgemeinen Direktiven des Vorstands. Einmal jede Woche kamen Kandidaten, Assistenten und Professoren in einem Kolloquium zusammen, um laufende Arbeiten zu ueberpruefen, wichtige Literatur von auswaerts zu besprechen oder ein neues Manuskript der Buehlers zu besprechen....Die ganze Konstruktion des Instituts erscheint mir im Rueckblick eine sehr wichtige organisatorische Schoepfung. Sie garantiert einerseits, dass der Geist der Leitung sich in allen Teilen auswirkt, und erlaubte gleichzeitig den Assistenten eine freie Entwicklung ihrer eigenen Interessen" [Lazarsfeld, P. (1959). Amerikanische Beobachtungen eines Buehler-Schuelers. Zeitschrift fuer exp. und angew. Psychol., 6, 69-76].

Among the "Abteilungen" were a unit for general psychology run by Egon Brunswik, a unit for social psychology in which among others Paul Lazarsfeld and Maria Jahoda took part, and a unit for developmental psychology headed by Charlotte Buehler. With time she increasingly assumed the role of an unofficial scientific leader of the institute. In this respect, her stipends and grants from the Rockefeller Foundation (since 1924) had immensely supported the institute's broad international contacts and projects.

The breadth of Karl and Charlotte Buehlers' interests can best be seen by a look at their major publications. Karl's studies in the psychology of thinking stood at the beginning of his career. However one might judge their worth today (after the "Cognitive Revolution"), they still constitute (to our knowledge) the earliest attempt at the study of complex thought in the psychological laboratory and should be seen against the background of Wundt's program for psychology and Wundt's dismissal of the study of higher mental processes with the experimental method.

Next, there are the Buehler's studies on perception and his notion of Gestalt psychology which he however understood as a competitor to the Berlin school's view of Gestalt (Wertheimer, Koehler, and especially Koffka). Initially, Buehler was opposed to the extension and, in fact, an over-generalization of the mainly perceptual phenomenology of Gestalt notion to thinking and reasoning. Without doubt, this was a continuation of the Wuerzburger tradition of cognitive research with its emphasis on the "Unanschaulichen" in thinking and, as we briefly mentioned earlier this research, in particular, had a strong influence on Egon Brunswik whose legacy, in turn, remains quite influential in contemporary psychology. The notion of an ecological approach to psychology can be readily traced back to Buehler. (We mean here the Brunswikean notion of ecological validity, not a Gibsonian one. This later is more indebted to Kurt Koffka who was one of Gibson's mentors - see e.g. Gibson's preface in "Ecological Approach to Visual Perception", 1979).

Another important early focus of Buehler's work and collaboration with Charlotte Buehler was developmental psychology. Buehler wrote the most read German textbook on the issue (at least until Piaget became available in the German speaking world) titled "Die geistige Entwicklung des Kindes" (1918). This textbook appeared in numerous editions and was translated into many languages (e.g. its Russian translation was preceded by a very favorable introduction written by Lev Vygotsky). In fact, Buehler had just finished the book when he came to Dresden (on a personal level it was inspired by their first child which was about two or three when they came to Dresden -- this is certainly in good tradition of developmental psychology!). Buehler's treatment of the mental development of the child shows a strong concern for the cognitive questions of representation and language. The study of language under a cognitive perspective eventually developed into one of Buehler's most important interests which culminated in his monumental "Sprachtheorie" (1934). In this respect Buehler is certainly one of the major forerunners of semiotics and contemporary cognitive linguistics (see, in particular, works of Fillmore and Lakoff).

A special topic is Buehler's meta-theoretical ideas which he elaborated in his monograph "Die Krise der Psychologie", certainly a classic in the history of German-speaking and international psychology. This can hardly be an accident that at the end of the 20s two other extraordinary scholars - Kurt Lewin (1927) and Lev Vygotsky (1929) - wrote their-own versions of texts on the crisis of psychology, mostly with rather different prospects on the overcoming of the crisis (see on this e.g. Bischof, 1976, and Velichkovsky, 1988).

Our knowledge of Charlotte Buehler's work is somewhat wanting, so only a little bit will follow. Charlotte Buehler started out with an interest in the study of thinking. She had studied (as we already noted) with Carl Stumpf in Berlin and eventually studied with Oswald Kuelpe in Munich until his untimely death on the Christmas of 1915. Her work laid ground of the life-span concept in developmental psychology. Her book "Das Seelenleben des Jugendlichen" published during the Dresden period (1922) already anticipated this approach, which was explicitly formulated in later books - "Kindheit und Jugend" (1932, Karl Buehler gewidmet) und "Der menschlichen Lebenslauf als psychologisches Problem" (1933). Methodologically her studies of children's and adolescents' diaries are especially notable, also because

they influenced the Vienna school of logical positivism. After the Buehlers' emigration to the United States she became one of the driving forces in the founding of "Humanistic Psychology", particularly when she had received a professorship (in psychiatry) from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles (1943).

In 1938, after the Nazis took over in Austria, the Buehlers were forced out of the country. Karl Buehler was even imprisoned for a short while by the Nazis for "political and ideological reasons". Mitchell Ash (1987) has worked out the details of this story showing that it is not clear whether the Nazis were regarding Buehler as a suspicious person for his affiliation with the Social-Democrats and the pedagogical reform movement in Vienna or for his later connections with the conservative Dollfuss-Schussnigg Regime. Certainly the Buehlers do not appear as politically straight-lined, but connections to the Nazis? There is no indication (Ash, M. G., 1987): Psychology and politics in interwar Vienna: The Vienna Psychological Institute, 1922-1942. In M. G. Ash & W. R. Woodward (Eds.). Psychology in twentieth-century thought and society. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Any attribution of anti-Semitic sentiments is absolutely untenable, not only was Charlotte Buehler of Jewish descent but also quite a few of their students at the Institute.

At one point one of us heard an opinion suggesting that Buehler's ideas, especially his eclectic and biologically inspired outline of an action theory (as presented in "Die Krise der Psychologie", 1927) was fitting well with, if not helping along, the Nazis' fascist ideology. This is again an utterly unconvincing style of argument to us. We don't know whether this is anywhere in print, in any case, we guess, we have to leave this to everybody's own judgment. (we are however aware of the fact that one or the other of their many students later engaged in questionable research practices.)

As a final point that stress the wide recognition that the Buehlers received: Karl Buehler had not only been a visiting professor at some of the most famous American Universities (Johns-Hopkins, Stanford, and Harvard) but had also a job offer at Harvard University in 1930, Charlotte Buehler had an offer at the same time at Radcliff-College in Cambridge. They refused, they simply liked Vienna and the Old World too much. When in 1938 they were forced by the political development out of Austria they met with a very different situation in the United States, because the most positions were already taken by other German and Austrian emigrants. Since the general orientation of work at the many new institutes of psychology of the Dresden University of Technology is very much connected with the solution of applied psychological problems we all might appreciate the following quote of Karl Buehler, a quote from a speech he gave in 1923 to introduce the research program of his Institute to Viennese school teachers (many of whom were eager participants in the pedagogical reform movement in the days of "Red Vienna"): "Der Erkenntnis muessen die Probleme aus dem Leben erwachsen und fuer die Erziehungsarbeit gilt im gleichen Masse wie fuer die moderne Medizin und die moderne Industrie der Grundsatz: Es gibt nichts, was praktischer ist als eine gute Theorie."

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