

KURT GOLDSTEIN, 1878-1965

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Kurt Goldstein died in New York City on September 19, 1965, after a short illness, at the age of 86. All concerned with the study, development, and education of human beings have reason to look back on the life and work of this unusual explorer of brain and mind, and of living beings, most of all, man. As one of the founders of the holistic approach in neuropsychiatry and especially of organismic psychotherapy (1963a),¹ this great man stood alone for many years against conservative academic indifference and resistance to his new and revolutionary concepts no matter how well these were bolstered by his proofs and practice. In the following, the author who had the good fortune to know Goldstein for over 30 years and was his student, will endeavor to point up some essential features of this man and his work.

VITA

Kurt Goldstein was born in Kattowitz, Upper Silesia (now in Poland, then an easternmost outpost of the old German empire) on November 6, 1878, into a well-to-do family of merchants. Among his cousins were the philosopher, Ernst Cassirer, and others who became publishers and representatives of the world of letters and art. Following his education at the gymnasium, he was uncertain whether to study philosophy or natural science. When deciding on the latter, he felt that he would use it only as a basis for becoming a physician. "Medicine alone appeared suited to my inclination—to deal with human beings" (20, p. 5). He completed his studies at the University of Breslau, now Wroclaw, in 1903. His doctoral dissertation was on a strictly neuroanatomical subject, and this was followed by some eight publications on similar themes. But the years 1907 to 1915 saw him already as assistant professor (*Privatdozent*) in psychiatry at the University of Königsberg, East Prussia. He was deeply dissatisfied with the nothing-but-custodial treatment here at the psychiatric hospital, but used this dismal facility, probably no worse than most at that time, for penetrating observations on alcoholic psychoses, (23, No. 47), and hallucinations and their experimental production (23, No. 49).

¹In parentheses, numerals from 1 to 28 pertain to the list of references at the end of this paper; dates, usually followed by a letter, pertain to the Kurt Goldstein Bibliography Supplement which follows the present paper.

In 1918 he was appointed full professor of neurology at the University of Frankfurt am Main and also director of the Neurological Institute where he had come in 1916 to be the assistant of Ludwig Edinger. In 1917 he organized a hospital, later called the Institute for Research into the After-Effects of Brain Injuries (20, p. 6). Here a large number of patients were treated and studied intensively and over a long time in order, as Goldstein always emphasized, to make at least some livable adjustment feasible. He later stated that this clinical and research undertaking was made possible by the close and eager cooperation of younger neurologists and psychiatrists, among them Walter Riese (26) and Frieda Reichmann (25), and psychologists, especially Adhemar Gelb (8).

In the years 1917 to 1929 this dedicated and intensive work yielded entirely novel conceptual aspects of such conditions as aphasia, apraxia, agnosia, tonus disturbances and general behavioral changes after brain injury (see 23). At the same time, in keeping with Goldstein's strong desire to help, he published material on the roles of the nurse, the physician, and the social worker in the care of the brain-injured (23, Nos. 92-95) and about special "training schools" for the patients (23, Nos. 84, 97).

In 1927 he helped to organize the International Society for Psychotherapy (7) and then also, with the psychiatrists Robert Sommer, Wladimir Eliasberg and others, to found the *Allgemeine Aertzliche Zeitschrift für Psychotherapie*.

In 1929 he was appointed professor of neurology at the University of Berlin, and director of the neurological section of the Berlin-Moabit City Hospital, which section was built according to his plans to provide facilities for both patients and research. In the spring of 1933, under the Hitler government, Goldstein was one of the first professors to be arrested. Released, he went to Holland where he spent over a year as guest professor at the University of Amsterdam, and wrote *Der Aufbau des Organismus* which appeared in English in 1939 (1963a).

Arriving in New York in 1935 with his wife, a neuropsychiatrist, the late Eva Rothmann, he was issued a New York State license to practice medicine. But his work consisted mainly of research and teaching at the New York State Psychiatric Institute and Hospital and as clinical professor of psychiatry at Columbia University. He was soon put in charge of a newly organized laboratory for neurophysiology at Montefiore Hospital. In 1938 he was appointed to read

the William James Lectures on Philosophy and Psychology at Harvard University, which were published as *Human Nature in the Light of Psychopathology* (1963b). From 1940 to 1945 he was clinical professor of neurology at Tufts Medical School; at the same time, he was active on the staff of the Boston Dispensary's clinic for nervous diseases.

Returning to New York City, he engaged now, more than before, in the private practice of neuropsychiatry and psychotherapy. He also became visiting professor of psychopathology at the College of the City of New York and at the New School for Social Research, and later guest professor at Brandeis University, commuting weekly to Waltham.

During these last 20 years in New York he vigorously pursued his long-time quest for developing his holistic-organismic position, also widening its application to psychotherapy (1959e) and to education (1959d).

During these years also, Goldstein was frequently invited to participate in congresses of learned societies and institutions—medical, psychiatric, psychological, psychotherapeutic, rehabilitational, sociological, and philosophical. Goldstein's papers appeared in journals of all "schools"—except the orthodox Freudian. Among the many publications honoring Goldstein on his 75th and 80th birthdays were those of the Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis (Karen Horney group) (2), the Association for the Advancement of Psychotherapy (3, 4), the International Congress of Psychotherapy (1), and the American Society of Adlerian Psychology (22). The last includes a large portrait of Goldstein.

Two years before his death, Goldstein had the satisfaction of seeing two of his books appear in paperback editions, *The Organism* (1963a) and *Human Nature in the Light of Psychopathology* (1963b). His *Language and Language Disturbances* (12) became virtually a classic among neuropsychiatrists, psychologists, linguists, speech therapist, etc., had three printings during his lifetime and a 4th soon after his death.

PERSONALITY

Before recalling the milestones in his work progress, I should like to single out two qualities of Goldstein which seem important: compassion and courage. Goldstein himself considered his work, his organismic theory, an outgrowth, almost a by-product, of his continued effort to understand suffering individuals in order to help them

(24, p. 15). Up to the few weeks of his last illness, he never ceased to strive for self-realization—in his research, writing and teaching—and always in the same spirit. One might call this spirit the great quality of *compassion*.

To complete the description of Goldstein's motivation one has to add another quality, a prerequisite for "living out" or executing such compassion in practice—*courage*. Those who knew him recognized this; and he himself, when looking back on his life as well as contemplating generally the qualities requisite for self-realization—and, particularly, to the "common enterprise" of the psychotherapist and patient—pronounced "risk taking" and courage as unavoidable. "Courage in its final analysis is nothing but an affirmative answer to the shocks of existence which must be borne for the actualization of one's own nature" (1963 a). He stated again and again that striving for self-realization demands of us taking the risk of insecurity; that only when confronted by *some insecurity* are we able to "realize ourselves" which, according to him, means to "exist."

It is, I believe, most characteristic of Goldstein, from his youth on, that he would stand up for what, through thinking and pains-taking investigations, he had found to be true, even when he knew, through increasing experience, what "risks" this would involve.

This was evidenced when as assistant professor in Koenigsberg, at the age of 34, he not only gave a public address on racial hygiene (at that time in Germany equated with genetic, social, and mental hygiene, without any racist overtones) but also wrote a monograph on the subject which was issued by a prominent scientific publisher (9). In it he expressed hope, in 1913, for a United Nations organization (*Vereinigung der Voelker*) which would eliminate national armies, while he conceded that this may remain a utopia for a long time (9, pp. 95-96). Among other demands highly unpopular at that time in Germany, he advocated full emancipation of women, birth control, etc. But more than that: Goldstein openly opposed the reality of the so-called Yellow Peril proclaimed by the Kaiser. Goldstein proclaimed: "The goal that we are striving for is the final goal of all evolution—the happiness of mankind" (9, p. 96).

Another example of his undaunted risk-taking was the extended public discussions with one of his teachers, Ottfried Foerster, a defender of the then predominant view of brain localization of the so-called special functions (7). Goldstein also opposed most of the leading neurologists in Germany at that time with his theories and treatment of brain-injured patients.

Yet it was not opposition for its own sake which moved Goldstein. On the contrary he later stated: "My aversion to any personal controversy goes so far that I have expressed it by omitting, as much as possible, the names of those against whose work I was compelled to raise objection" (1963a, p. 505). His objections were necessitated by his responsible compassion and by his search for knowledge to make this compassion a working reality.

It was characteristic of Goldstein that almost at the age of 75, while revisiting Frankfurt, he examined a number of his former patients who still remained there, and published these follow-up findings (16).

CONTRIBUTIONS

In the following an overview of Goldstein's most important contributions is given. The total of his life's work is reflected in some 250 publications.

Holistic-Organismic Theory

Early in his thinking Goldstein found himself clearly having to reject certain elementaristic concepts which were quite generally held at the time. To begin with, he could not accept the view which saw reflexes as constituting the normal framework of the nervous system. Stated positively, Goldstein claimed, adducing a wealth of proofs, that the "same" reflex is most inconstant, varying with the total condition of an organism, and that thus reflexes must be reduced at best, to indicators of certain abnormal states in an organism.

Similarly, he attacked the custom of overvaluing one prominent symptom, or symptoms, while neglecting the remainder of the total picture.

Perhaps most importantly, he rejected the concept of localization centers in the brain, especially in the cortex, thought of as "harboring" certain specialized functions. While admitting, indeed, that destruction of certain circumscribed brain areas impairs certain functions in particular, Goldstein insisted that such pathological condition does *not prove* that the healthy cortex and the central nervous system in general are entirely particularized (like, e. g. parts in a machine). Rather, the smooth functioning of all and each of these parts (which the natural sciences have isolated into "parts" so as to contemplate them in logical "order") is supported, or as Goldstein usually stated it, "guaranteed" by the *whole*.

The concept of preferred behavior is another of the foundations of

Goldstein's holistic-organismic approach. It pertained initially to the position of limbs in any organism but particularly in man, then to the entire body, and was finally widened to general modes of behavior (1963a, pp. 34^o ff).

Goldstein soon applied the widened concept of holistic functioning to many fields. For example, in eugenics he opposed "the atomistic interpretation of hereditary processes, the attempt to explain the origin of an individual through the sum of separate hereditary factors" (1963a, p. 457). "The reality of intellect, of self-determination, which even in its most primitive form represents essential characteristics of man, dooms to failure any breeding experiment of the usual type" (1963a, p. 461).

Likewise Goldstein considered the influence of hormones and of drugs in regard to the whole of the organism (1963a, p. 76). From the same viewpoint he also made a strong, and at first unpopular, stand of cautioning, and soon of warning, against lobotomy and other forms of psychosurgery (11, 13, 14, 1945).

Goldstein probably considered his highest goal to be the development of a holistic-organismic biology, linked with a similarly oriented anthropology. Such biology, based mainly on the study of living organisms and geared toward their preservation, would not have to neglect entirely the results of the earlier and still reigning analytical-partitive laboratory-based biology (considered as a branch of the "natural sciences"), but would, in his view, be far superior to the latter (1963a, pp. 497-500). Perhaps the briefest expression of this attitude may be found in two quotations by Goldstein from Claude Bernard: "Physiologists and physicians must . . . always consider organisms as a whole and in detail, at one and the same time . . ." (5, p. 91). "Life results from the contact of the organism with its environment" (5, p. 75). "When I read this," Goldstein says, "I felt at home" (6).

*"Only One Drive: Self-Actualization"*²

Goldstein rejected a multiplicity of drives, as in Freud's system (10). Instead, Goldstein asserted that in man or in any organism there could be only one drive, namely, self-actualization. "Normal behavior corresponds to a continual change of tension of such a kind that over and over again that state of tension is reached which enables and

²The terms "self-actualization" and "self-realization" are both used as translations for the original *Selbstverwirklichung* in the English version of *The Organism*. Later Goldstein tended to prefer "self-realization."

impels the organism to actualize itself in further activities, according to its nature" (1963a, p. 197).

Goldstein rejects the pleasure-pain principle. From the organismic viewpoint, he contrasts *joy* with *pleasure*. The latter may be, he says, "a necessary state of respite. But it is a phenomenon of 'standstill'; *it is akin to death*" (15, pp. 48-49; 19, p. 180).

The organism realizes itself in adequacy. For this most important concept Goldstein's own example of learning to bicycle may be illuminating.

In the acquisition of any performance, like bicycling, for example, we execute inappropriate movements . . . [which] have only an indirect connection with the . . . achieved performance. . . . Nevertheless, they are necessary because, by continuous modification of the movements, the correct performance will be reached. However, the correct movements appear suddenly *when a state of adequacy between the procedure of the organism and the environmental conditions is attained*. . . . This adequacy is experienced by us. . . . We continue trying to bring about this procedure until it becomes the unique performance which we set going when we want to ride a bicycle (1963a, p. 402).

Importantly, Goldstein later refined this cardinal concept, self-realization, when he stated: "To avoid misunderstanding, I shall use the term *realization of the particular nature*, instead of self-realization, when we are not dealing with adult human beings" (19, pp. 179-180).

Anxiety is conceived by Goldstein as a condition arising from an undue constriction of self-realization (1963a, pp. 291-307; 18; 23, No. 127). It is the feeling of inability to tolerate "life unworth living." One aspect of Goldstein's concept of anxiety is what he termed "catastrophic reaction" which he first observed in brain-injured patients (1963a, p. 37).

Abstract and Concrete Attitudes

The abstract attitude is needed for and is adequate to activities such as categorizing thinking, choosing, the envisaging of the "possible" in contrast to the "concretely given." Abstract and concrete attitudes do coexist in the individual, being applied according to the situation or task (21; 12, p. 25). It is abstract behavior which can be diminished nearly to the point of absence. Goldstein observed this first and foremost in a large number of brain-injured adults. He found it later also in certain conditions of underdevelopment in infants and children, though not in all cases of retardation (28). In 1964, the year before his death, he expressed great satisfaction in having these views largely confirmed by Bernard Rimland (27).

This achievement, the development of the concept of abstract and

concrete behavior, with its many consequences, appears to be the culmination of Goldstein's work. It is, possibly, not only one of the most fruitful but also one of the most original products of his thought.³ The longer Goldstein, his associates, and then other researchers, applied this concept, the more useful it proved itself, not only in brain-injured persons, but also, with modifications, when applied to psychotics (especially schizophrenics) in diagnosis and therapeutic efforts. The Goldstein-Gelb (sorting) tests and the series of the Goldstein-Scheerer tests represent probably the best-known use in practice of this concept (21). Goldstein also made some far-reaching suggestions regarding abstract and concrete attitudes in anthropological findings among primitive tribes. Significantly, he points out: "These phenomena may play a greater role in primitive life, but they are not essentially different from what we observe in the 'thinking' man and the 'non-thinking' man in civilized societies" (1960c, pp. 115 ff.).

Man's Essentially Social Nature

Although Goldstein began his studies on the quasi-isolated brain-injured individual, he came to express the view of man as essentially social, and seems to have carried his view progressively further. Developing his thinking from about 1906 on, Goldstein came to a succinct formulation of the social purpose of language. "Language is a means of the individual to come to terms with the outer world and to realize himself" (12, p. 23). "It is the special purpose of language to facilitate man's coming to terms with his fellows" (12, p. 95). In *The Organism* he wrote:

It is quite possible that the social attitude, the character of concrete group membership, belongs essentially to man. If this is true, then that attitude belongs to the individual norm of humans, and health will be maintained only when this essential trait, among the others, finds realization. . . . If, however, such an attitude did not belong to the norm, then the claim for social behavior would be totally inadequate, and would, therefore, be incompatible with ordered behavior, and so also with health (1963a, p. 445).

It will be seen that Goldstein was not out to 'proclaim' the essential social attitude of man, but rather to prove it, by logic and by his psychopathological observations.

We see this same approach in a much later statement, written "to stress first a possible misunderstanding of my concept of self-realization":

³The British neurologist, Henry Head, at approximately the same time, had described a concept similar to Goldstein's abstract attitude as "symbolic expression," but did not elaborate on it further (1963a, p. 30).

It could seem as if self-realization is an egotistic trend . . . In my opinion self-realization is possible only if self-realization of the 'other one' is guaranteed at the same time. My 'existence' is bound to the 'existence' of the other. A neglect of this relationship is a frequent cause of sickness. Only if understanding in this respect is reached in therapy, will it be successful. The relationship to 'the other' does not concern only the other individual but also the relationship to society and culture. A discussion . . . would reveal the great impediment to therapy originating from the uncertainty and inconsistency of our civilization and the lack of value systems which the individual could accept wholeheartedly. . . . A closer discussion of the relationship of the success in therapy to the social situation in which it occurs would show that therapy appears to be more than a means of helping the individual to overcome personal conflicts. . . . Psychotherapy should be performed at least with the hope for a better organization of society, i.e., one which better fits human nature. Today psychotherapy is very often doomed to remain patchwork . . . ; it will be successful only when we believe that conditions can, in principle, be changed for the better (17, pp. 115-116).

Goldstein's ever stronger assertion of man's inherent social nature is expressed even more poignantly in 1959, as follows:

No individual can . . . achieve a valid realization of himself unless he has helped so that others can do it also . . . The life of man always presents difficulties which seem to be insurmountable, but in spite of this, man tries to handle them not simply in terms of his own self-realization but also in such a way as to allow the self-realization of others. We do this not simply out of goodness to the others but out of the experience of mutual connectedness which belongs to human nature. This is why . . . the main requirement for individuality is the ability to love (1959d, pp. 12-13).

CONCLUSION

Limited as this endeavor must be, subject to the "imperfection" of man, which Goldstein never tired of stressing, it was made in the hope of being more than a "praising evensong." It was also meant to present his image and the high points of his work, in order to encourage readers to increase their acquaintance with it. It was in his work that Goldstein "realized himself," according to his goal which was to alleviate man's suffering, individual suffering as well as that encountered in "living with others."

Goldstein's concern was definitely no less with the whole of mankind. In 1949 he clearly showed his long-held apprehension that the non-humanistic attitude of physics and natural science could lead mankind to self-annihilation (1949, pp. 111-112). As a young scholar in 1913, enthusiastic and still with sober evaluation, he anticipated some kind of United Nations; in later years he stressed that we must persist in firm progress toward "guaranteeing the existence" of the whole of mankind.

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