

Gestalt

Kevin Mulligan

The distinctive claim of the Gestalt psychologists (of Prague, Graz, Berlin, Leipzig, and Vienna) is that we are typically aware of wholes which have “Gestalt qualities”, such as being a melody, and that these qualities could not be properties of mere sums, for example of sums of tones. A common, stronger claim is that the wholes we are aware of are themselves “Gestalten”, the parts of which are inseparable from each other and from the wholes they belong to. The Gestalt psychologists took themselves to be opposing associationistic and atomistic assumptions in psychology. The notion of a Gestalt is applied primarily in their accounts of perception and to a much lesser extent in their accounts of feelings (*Gefühle*), aesthetic and non-aesthetic, of their objects, of our awareness of the feelings of others, of our attributions of emotions, of our grasp of value and of the relations between affective phenomena and perception.

A feeling is itself a complex whole, an episode consisting of at least four parts: (a) an affective aspect – being pleased, admiration – which is distinct from any sort of affective sensation (*Gefühlsempfindung*) such as a localised pain (Stumpf 1928) and depends on its (b) basis or presupposition, a perception, judgement, phantasy etc. The basis consists of two parts, (c) a mode or quality – a seeing, a judging, visual imagining - and (d) a content – for example, a presentation of Sam or of an imaginary woman or the propositional content that it is raining. The affective aspect of an emotion depends one-sidedly on its basis: displeasure based on the belief that it is raining may disappear while the belief survives. Meinong and Witasek (1904) argue that the affective aspect of a feeling may depend directly or predominantly either on the mode or on the content of its presupposition. In the first case, the feeling is an act-feeling, in the second, a content-feeling. Aesthetic feelings are content-feelings, indeed aesthetic pleasure in a melody may be pleasure based on hearing the melody or on remembering the melody. But consider someone who wants to know whether it is raining and succeeds. His pleasure in his discovery is an act-feeling. But displeasure based on the belief that it is raining is a content-feeling; it depends directly on the content of the emotion’s basis – that it is raining - and indirectly on the mode or quality of the basis – belief. Where a content is complex the affective aspect of a feeling may directly depend on or “colour” part of a content rather than the whole content: there is a pleasure based on listening to a melody

which is pleasure in the way the melody is played and which may coexist with dislike of the melody itself.

Feeling may be based on “serious” acts and states, judgements, beliefs, perceptions etc. but also on visual imaginings or on suppositions, that is, on phantasy seeings and phantasy judgements. Are there phantasy feelings ? The affirmative answer to this question, given by Meinong and then by Husserl, has it that in a phantasy feeling (what is now often called a “make-believe emotion”) the affective aspect itself is a phantasy act or state. Witasek disagrees. The state that feels like fear when one watches the monster on the screen really is fear but fear based on visual make-believe and perception of the screen. Phantasy feelings have a serious affective aspect and a make-believe presupposition.

The most ambitious account of feelings as Gestalten is that explored by Robert Musil (1995) or rather by Ulrich, the hero of Musil’s *The Man without Qualities*. Ulrich rejects the view that feelings are merely one-sidedly dependent on ideas, thought or perceptions in favour of an interdependence between feelings and thoughts or perceptions, and between these, stimuli and the subject’s situation and history. He describes the forms of the different ways in which affective phenomena can develop (their *Ausgestaltung*) and locates these on a continuum between two extremes: feelings which culminate in action (processes) and feelings for which the best term seems to be “moods” (states). Musil’s analysis is in some respects an application of the framework developed by Kurt Lewin (1925) in his account of intentions, the will and behaviour (an account Lewin applies in passing to affective phenomena and which is developed further by Dembo (1931)). Musil’s narrator notes that the concept of love is a family resemblance concept: the different types of love are related to each other merely by overlapping, partial similarities.

Karl Bühler (1927; Duncker 1941) gives a pioneering account of pleasure in activity (*Funktionsfreude*) and of its relation to the products of activity and uses this account to criticise Freud’s psychology.

Husserl and then Max Scheler (1973) argue that values and goods require (*fordern*) or demand certain affective reactions: danger demands fear and fear in the face of danger forms a whole in which the fear “fits” its object. The idea is developed by Wolfgang Köhler (1935) and by Lewin, who claims that practical objects may display demand, prohibition or permission characters (*Aufforderungscharaktere*), what has come to be called “valence”, as when the use-value of tools requires or allows certain practical and affective attitudes.

Felix Krueger argued that feelings are more or less deeply rooted in a person. Scheler (1973) attempts to unpack the metaphor of depth in terms of the extent

to which feelings are more or less indirectly subject to the will: sensory pleasure is more easily controlled than feelings of exhaustion or health, the latter are easier to influence than admiration. But felicity and despair (Musil's states), love and hate are more difficult to manipulate than any of these.

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