Part II.—Reviews.

Principles of Gestalt Psychology. By K. KOFFKA. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1935. Pp. xi + 720. Price 25*s*. net.

This book is very well written, lucid and easy to read, like all Prof. Koffka's works, but it is prolix and discursive, and could, with great advantage, both to the book and the reader, have been confined to half its size, or even less. For the beginner the book is not elementary enough, and for the advanced student it is, in parts, too elementary.

There is no doubt that the "Gestaltist" School has produced a great amount of careful, important and valuable work, but nevertheless one is tempted to ask the "Gestaltist" what is this all about? For what you call "Gestalt" we have had all along concepts (though not all synonymous one with another), such as configuration, complex, combination, constellation, integration, organization and others, so that Gestalt does not bring anything, or brings very little, that is really new. Further, you contend against many things that were transitory in the development of experimental psychology and inveigh against others, although these explain observed facts better than Gestalt psychology is able to do.

There are fifteen chapters. The first is devoted to some metaphysical considerations; the second introduces the concept of fields, which seems certainly a very useful one, and it is stated that the issue between the behaviourists and the Gestaltists "with regard to animal psychology is not conscious behaviour versus purely physiological behaviour, but physiological behaviour of the *field* type versus physiological behaviour of the mechanical connection type". Also "the task of Gestalt psychology is the study of behaviour in its causal connection with the psychophysical field".

The next five chapters, 3 to 7, deal with the Environmental Field: Refutation of false solutions and formulation of the true one; visual organization and its laws; figure, ground and framework; the constancies; tri-dimensional space and motion. The question is asked, "Why do things look like they do?" The first answer given is—"Things look as they look because they are what they are". This is pronounced as wrong, because it does not explain anything. The answer accepted as true runs as follows: "Things look as they do because the proximal stimuli are what they are." By proximal stimulus is understood the stimulation of the retina. This point is discussed at great length and illustrated by a great number of optical observations. However, through all these lengthy discussions the author discloses a quite remarkable bias, brushing aside older and simpler theories which are perfectly adequate and forcing the observed facts into his own theory. There are ever so many examples, but one must here suffice. E. Götz trained chickens to peck at larger grains only. He then placed a large grain at a distance of 73 cm. from the chick's box and a small one at a distance of 15 cm. The chick pecked the distant larger one

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although it is calculated that the retinal image of the larger grain was but one-thirtieth of that of the smaller grain. Prof. Koffka comments upon this as follows: "Such results are utterly incompatible with a meaning theory. Chicks must be geniuses if they can discover in the first three months of their lives that something that looks smaller is really bigger. Since we do not believe that they are endowed with such miraculous gifts we must conclude that they select the bigger because it looks bigger, even when, within wide but definite limits, its retinal image is smaller" (p. 89). Of course, it looks bigger to the chick; but why? because the distance from an object serving as a local sign, the size has acquired a meaning. The theory of the Acquirement of Meaning is fully sufficient for the explanation of the observed fact, and probably Prof. Koffka is vaguely aware of it, or else he would hardly resort to an *argumentum ad hominem* by emphasizing the chicken's age, which, after all, is probably equivalent to more than three years for a child, and speak about "geniuses" and "miraculous gifts". To scoff at association, experience, acquirement of meaning or assimilation, and to misrepresent them by assailing them in their earlier and cruder forms is most unsatisfactory. Take the following: After having, to his own satisfaction, mangled the assimilation theory, Prof. Koffka writes: "The assimilation hypothesis thus becomes untenable. Its main aspect was the addition of two kinds of mental elements, sensations and images. Experience was not only a condition, but the source of special elements which were added to other elements supplied by the sense organs. How different the whole problem looks when we consider experience as an inner condition. Without experience the nervous system has a certain constitution; with experience it has a different one. Consequently we can no longer expect that the same forces, the same proximal stimuli will produce the same process in it. At one stroke we get rid of all the unverifiable parts of the assimilation hypothesis, the original sensations, the added imagery, and the process of fusion. At the same time we have freed ourselves from the last two difficulties, since we do not assume that a mosaic of proximal stimulation produces a mosaic of sensations. And finally we have the advantage that we can now define the problem of experience in perception in clear terms. Thus it does make a difference to call experience an inner condition of a process, and what is true of experience is true of our other factors" (pp. 104–5). For views and theories slaughtered by our author we should probably have to go back some fifty years and search for them among philosophical writers, whilst the views like, or similar to, those propounded here were held by many psychologists long before "Gestalt" was heard of.

The "Law of Prägnanz" is considered of some importance, and is stated thus: "Psychological organization will always be as 'good' as the prevailing conditions allow. In this definition the term 'good' is undefined. It embraces such properties as regularity, symmetry, simplicity and others" (p. 110). This sounds somewhat like *une vérité de La Palisse*.

Whatever view one may take of the James-Lange theory, it is really unfair to present it in the following manner: "Traditional psychology was all too ready to explain what obviously appeared as A as B or C. Never was a psychologist prouder than when he could say: A is not really A, but something else. The best-known example is perhaps the James-Lange theory of emotion, according to which an emotion is not really an emotion, but a set of kinesthetic and organic sensations aroused by responses to the emotional situations" (pp. 178–9). A large part of Chapter 7 is concerned with visual movement. Probably because it serves his purpose Prof. Koffka always considers the

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retinal elements as if they were each a separate sense-organ, which, of course, is wrong, as the whole retina acts as one organ.

Chapters 8 and 9, entitled "Action", deal with reflexes, the ego, the executive, adjusted behaviour, attitudes, emotions and the will. Most of these subjects are treated in more or less orthodox fashion in Gestalt terminology. However, a few points have to be raised, as many of the Gestaltist's difficulties are of their own creation. One of the most question-begging arguments here is that about *Einfühlung*—empathy. When we talk about a " gloomy landscape " or a " proud poplar ", no one ever asserted that the landscape felt gloomy, or the poplar proud. We are here making use of a poetical licence, a figure of speech. Though ourselves quite cheerful, a landscape may produce in us an incipient mood of gloom which, if the influence of the landscape continued, would eventually dispel the cheerful mood and give rise to gloom. It is idle to distort the meaning of " projecting our feeling into the objects "; it is a way of speaking which everybody understands, and no one takes literally. Or take this : " There is no psychologist who has not taught that perception depends upon experience and memory; as we know . . . traditional psychology *defined* perception by the participation of memory and distinguished it thereby from sensation. But this theory is radically different from the one we are advancing here. On the one hand it sticks to the constancy hypothesis . . . for its explanation of sensations ; on the other it explains perception by the *addition* of new elements, images, to these sensations, in the assimilation hypothesis. . . . But in our theory the effect of experience is not that of adding new elements to old ones, but changing a prior organization " (p. 393). Whoever of modern psychologists taught that experience consisted of *adding* new elements to old ones ? Prof. Koffka sets up an Aunt Sally of his own imagination, and then with immoderate merriment begins to demolish it.

The next two chapters, 10 and 11, on Memory are perhaps the best in the book. They show a very good knowledge of current literature, and are not in the flaunting style of the previous ones. A trace theory is accepted and developed. If R. Semon's *akoluthic phase* were here considered, further, the after-effect of seen movement, i.e., experience of visual movement without change of position in space, the specious present, and the span of temporal apprehension, the exposition could have been made still more lucid and effective.

Chapters 12 and 13 deal with " Learning and other Memory Functions ". They are very good too, and discuss learning as an accomplishment and process ; learning and traces ; consolidation, availability, formation and after-effect of traces ; the acquisition of skill ; associationism and rote learning ; recognition ; thinking and problem solving, etc. In full agreement with the vast majority of psychologists, Prof. Koffka refuses to accept a vitalistic or spiritualistic dualism.

The fourteenth chapter, on " Society and Personality ", deals in a straightforward manner with social psychology except that it is adjusted to the Gestalt psychological theory and expressed in corresponding terminology. The fifteenth is a concluding chapter with a retrospect and calls for no comment.

On p. 384 there is a transposition of lines : Line 29 ought to be line 23.

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