

Annette Mülberger, Thomas Sturm (Guest Editors). Psychology, A Science in Crisis? A Century of Reflections and Debates. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences Special Section II.* 2012; 43 (2): 425-521. ISSN: 1369-8486.

The widespread use of Kuhnian concepts to depict developments in psychological science has long been in need of scholarly attention and critique. There are reasons to question whether psychology has reached a level of normal science, whether «paradigms» are meaningfully descriptive of differing assumptions and research foci, whether the incorporation of cognitive phenomena into learning models satisfies criteria for «revolution». Although not their principal aim or contribution, Mülberger and Sturm deftly supply an important aspect of the needed critique through analysis of declarations of disciplinary crisis in psychology from the late 19th century to the 1970s. The special issue of *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science: Psychology, A Science in Crisis? A Century of Reflections and Debates* offers a deftly selected set of excellent essays, each one devoted to an instance of explicit assertion that the discipline had reached a point of crisis and was in need of overhaul. Unlike the clichéd «cognitive revolution», the cases covered foreground crisis as an «actor's category», one with meaning to psychological scientists themselves rather than a framing strategy for the historian or science analyst. Indeed, the editors acknowledge that Kuhn himself saw explicit declarations of crisis on the part of scientists to be rare. The special issue, in both the editors' introduction and the diverse set of papers demonstrates that «crisis talk» on the part of psychologists at least, is not an uncommon or extraordinary event, a demonstration made across eighty years, with representation from German, French, Russian, and American psychologists. At the same time, the editors do not assume that crisis declared constitutes a crisis in fact: each case is merely an instance of «crisis talk». However, each case is informative of the significance of such talk to disciplinary challenges and developments; each is worthy of analysis and greater understanding of its interplay with historical disciplinary and nondisciplinary dynamics.

Each paper includes reflection on the nature of the crisis heralded, the features of the discipline asserted to be untenable, the assumptions held in doubt, the problems alleged to require a radical overturning of frameworks, units of analysis, methods, and disciplinary aims. Chapters also detail the forms of critique, the degree of agreement with the acknowledgment across the discipline,

social and cultural considerations, the outcomes of the declaration, its impact on disciplinary values and practices. At least as interesting as the declarations of crisis are the responses to declarations on the part of contemporaries.

The discipline would seem to be in continual crisis judging from the papers as a set. Moreover, they illustrate collectively that «psychology has no one single persistent problem, perhaps not even a clearly definable set of such problems» (Sturm and Mülberger, p. 430). There is not one complaint repeatedly raised in different voices but really vastly *different* problems indicated and different solutions proposed: The earliest declaration is traced to Rudolf Willy, and analyzed by Mülberger to focus on psychology-philosophy relations, with blame for the crisis levied on Wundt for what Willy regarded as toxic metaphysical spillage. Willy expressed additional alarm over the «branching» of psychology into too many disparate directions, obscuring the essential subject matter and telos of the fledgling science. The lack of disciplinary unity is a common crisis theme, and is notably a central feature of Bühler's more influential critique as Sturm presents it. Yet it is by no means a general feature of crisis talk even of that century. John Carson's discussion highlights 19th century French openness to variety in focus and methods, a tolerant if not celebratory attitude toward pluralism. By contrast, the conviction that psychology must rise above the mere accounting of psychic facts to an explanation of their meaning and significance is a theme common to declarations of crisis as diverse as those of Hans Driesch, Gestalt psychology, and Husserl, as explicated in the contributions by Allesch, Hatfield, and Feest, respectively. Moreover, the social utility of psychology, its potential applicability to the solving of human problems (or more accurately, the lack or failure of its applicability) is the focus of the crisis proclaimed by Hofstätter, Vygotsky, and 1970's American social psychology, as analyzed in interesting chapters by Gundlach, Hyman, and Faye. The introduction further points to different dimensions of crisis talk that accompany differences in the content of the acknowledged crisis. Crisis is viewed as a constructive force by some, destructive by others, a permanent trait of the discipline or a temporary state of affairs. The crisis is singular in some declarations, a web of interrelated malfunctions for others.

This leads to my only point of critique for the extremely worthy project of the special issue. Every paper is a model of careful, subtle, and informative historical scholarship. The introduction is clear and compelling, making perfectly evident the scholarly value of attention to declarations of crisis in psychology, convincingly arguing the challenge it poses to certain of Kuhn's assumptions. Let me be clear, then, in acknowledging the special issue to be a *tour de force*, a major contribution to both psychology and history of science. It is superb. In

keeping with its scholarly integrity it is the editors' intent to let the papers speak for themselves, to keep framing analysis and general conclusions to a minimum, affording analysis and reanalysis on the part of any whose interest in crisis is piqued. Thus the editors seek to «pave the way for taking crisis declarations more into account when studying the development of the field» (Sturm and Mülberger, p. 431). Yet because of the nature of the focus on crisis, the gravity and lingering import of the questions these papers provoke, some preliminary analysis across the exemplars offered, a glimpse at the editors' views on points of similarity and key differences, or the enduring implications of these crisis declarations for the discipline would provide some welcome signposts as well as pavement. Mülberger's study of Willy concludes with a statement that could easily be applied to the excellent discussions of crisis that appear in the special issue as a set: «It is the authors that declare a crisis who keep the black box of science open, compelling others by their reflection and criticism to reconsider fundamental issues» (p. 443). The authors who analyze declarations of crisis perform a similar function. ■

Lisa M. Osbeck
University of West Georgia