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Original Contributions - Originalbeiträge

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Gestalt Theory and Socioeconomic Analyses

1. Introduction

Although early representatives of Gestalt theory have already discussed social issues intensively, socioeconomic topics have remained somewhat underexposed in Gestalt-theoretical discourse for a long time. Stemberger (2011) has discussed some fundamental works by Wertheimer (1937, 1940), Lewin (1947, 1951), Metzger (1962), and Galli (1999), all of whom made important contributions to social, psychological, and socially relevant debates. This paper directs attention to some further contributions to socioeconomic applications of Gestalt theory, as they have found their way, at least in niches, into the theory of social evolution, economic theory, the theory of social policy, and political economy over the past decades (see also Kubon-Gilke 2021b).

The paper aims to provide an insight, but not a complete overview, of the importance of Gestalt theory for the analysis of a wide range of social issues. Economic questions and approaches are in the foreground, but the paper concerns cross-cutting social science issues. After some very general considerations on the importance of Gestalt theory, the paper focuses on different topics such as democracy, justice, and theories of economic organizations.

2. Fundamental Issues: Biological, Cultural, and Social Evolution

Evolution and competition are often referred to as twin ideas, as both are concerned with a similar explanation of emergence, order, and change on both an individual and a societal level. Accordingly, the principle of variation and selection has been applied to many scientific questions in a wide variety of disciplines.

One of the cornerstones of Darwin's theory concerns the uniqueness of individuals. Darwin believed that there was an unlimited amount of variation available to natural selection. The source of difference was of great concern to Darwin, but he did not find an explanation that could satisfy him. This is understandable from today's point of view, because Darwin could not have had sufficient knowledge of the genetic basis of heredity at his time. He placed the selection aspect of evolution in the foreground in his publications and treated variation as a black box. Variations are always present in great abundance

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in his theory, but the nature of variation—the contents of the black box—he was unable to specify precisely. He introduced the term random variation; and perhaps this choice of term is to blame for a persistent misunderstanding about the nature of evolutionary processes. Darwin (1963, p. 131) himself says he was somewhat careless about the concept of random variation. In his view, it is indeed a completely inappropriate term; indeed, he uses it only to admit his ignorance of the cause of any particular variation.

The notion of random variations is still widespread, but nevertheless, it proves to be too crude a concept not only for biological evolution. Variations are neither biologically nor psychologically, culturally, or socially arbitrary and random. Directed variations, which can be explained unconstrainedly in terms of Gestalt theory, have substantial explanatory value at all levels (Schlicht, 1997; Kubon-Gilke & Schlicht, 1998).

A good example of the difficulties with the notion of random variation is the distinction between inherited and learned behavior, which can be traced back to the variation. Human behavior is understood in this duality in various psychological approaches. However, this position overlooks the structuring and coupling effects that are induced by physical and chemical equilibrium and self-organization processes. These have an independent explanatory value for human cognitions, emotions, motives, and actions, which must also be taken into account for social phenomena, namely, genuinely as social self-organization processes based on directed variations as well as a consequence of individual behavioral dispositions. Asch (1987, 80 ff.) points out that the inheritance–learning dichotomy derived from random variation and selection is inappropriate for explaining many psychological phenomena and also produces errors in understanding social phenomena. One can speak of heredity only with regard to the organic medium in which the self-organization processes take place. The same point has already been systematically elaborated by Köhler (1971), and the importance of analogous self-organization processes can be seen in the formation of social rules and institutions. In a very similar way, Wertheimer (1940) in his "*Story of Three Days*" pointed out inconsistencies in adopting either a completely individualistic or a culturalist/radical constructivist position to explain social phenomena. Both inconsistencies and limitations are partly based on a concept of evolution that overlooks the self-organization processes of humans, the directed variations, and the resulting regularities in the biological and social fields.

In line with this view, in the meantime, the theory of evolutionary developmental biology (EvoDevo) superseded the old biological approach. Köhler (1971) has, as mentioned above, repeatedly pointed out what gross errors evolutionary models can contain, which, for example, in biological evolution, ignore the chemical–physical processes and equilibrium adjustments in the wake of gene variations.

This is exactly what is now being discussed in more recent times in "Evolutionary Developmental Biology" (EvoDevo, sometimes also referred to as the extended synthesis of evolutionary biology), in which, firstly, the so-called control genes (e.g., *Hox* genes) are identified, which are responsible for the regulation of basic body plans and which represent a kind of "switch" for the activation of coordinated developmental pathways.

Second, this line of theory has uncovered—and continues to uncover—major developmental constraints that can be physical, morphological, and phylogenetic in nature and that induce specific channeling effects. They *de facto* define a kind of range of possible variations.

In addition, phenomena of epigenetic inheritance are discussed. It is interesting to note the reference to "internal environments", which include the chemical conditions of organisms, which Köhler also emphasized. In general, developmental biology is often concerned with self-organization processes in which threshold effects analogous to *gestalt switches* can occur, that is, which entail a nonlinear, erratic adaptation of the entire living system. And pattern formation is also discussed in a manner similar to old Gestalt theory ideas, by means of which, for example, well-ordered and reproducible spatial patterns of differentiated cells emerge – as in the zebra or the tiger (Kubon-Gilke et al., 2018, 377 ff.).

Based on these considerations, supplemented by more recent findings of the self-organization theory, Kriz (2015) has decisively elaborated the evolutionary perspective of personal and social development in the connection between body, mind, and expression that is inherent in Gestalt theory. In it, he shows "[...] that a '*person*' can only and always already be seen in the interplay and interaction of body and social co-world in a context of evolutionary, bio-psycho-social and sociogenetic-cultural developmental dynamics" (Kriz, 2015, p. 319 [translation]). In this context, the phenomenal field of the human being is understood as the decisive controlling instance for human motives, emotions, and behavior. The evolutionary development of the human body, especially of the brain, can serve as a basis for explaining many individual psychological phenomena as well as for many ensuing sociotheoretical and sociopolitical questions. Both Asch's (1987) fundamental and comprehensive reflections on social psychological phenomena and Kriz's analyses (2011) are important elements for this. Kriz, for example, writes about how people acquire a *common* understanding of situations and processes. On the evolutionary theoretical foundations he formulates, the argument is extended by pointing out that communication and coevolutionary processes based on Gestalt laws ultimately produce unified concise categories and images, which—on the one hand—facilitate social life and communication, but can also produce devaluations, discriminations, and all forms of othering. Wertheimer (1937) and, subsequently, Asch (1987) already addressed this in detail when they

argued that some categorizations entail restrictive barriers to interpretation that virtually force people to identify "blindly" with certain groups and to devalue other people and groups. The task is to support contexts that prevent precisely these restrictive interpretations. Kriz (2011) describes the coordination of meanings according to the principles of the perceptual organization of the brain and the coevolutionary development of humans not as *synchronization* – because that only expresses a temporal aspect – but by using the term *synlogization*. He thus replaces *chronos* (time) with *logos* (meaning).

If one takes the evolutionary perspective and the contributions of Gestalt theory as a basis, avoiding categorizations per se cannot be the goal. This is not possible in the current evolutionary state of human beings. Instead, it can only be a matter of breaking down those category systems that result in discriminatory phenomena or self-aggrandizement. This also has to do in particular with the formation of social norms that arise according to identical regularities, such as simplicity, clarity, symmetry, and so on, that follow the laws of perception and that contain strong frame-of-reference effects. Therefore, it is important to understand how the norms of interaction change depending on the overall social, institutional structure.

3. Categorization, Narrative, and Behavior

These are fundamental considerations to keep in mind when supporting democratic, diversity-acknowledging categories. Notions of categorization, sense-making, and shared understandings of different facts accompany many recent approaches discussed, for example, in economics but are rarely directly attributed to Gestalt theory. In his book "*Narrative Economics*", for example, Shiller (2019) describes firstly how narratives, stories, and concepts satisfy the Gestalt laws, secondly how they can spread almost epidemically in the sense of shared ideas, and thirdly how they decisively influence economic and social processes, including political decisions. Although Schiller did not refer explicitly to Gestalt theory, much of this is reminiscent of Wertheimer's and Asch's considerations, as well as Bartlett's (1932) schema theory.

Analogously, North and Denzau (1984) have pointed out the importance of *mental models* for personal and social decisions. In a more recent publication, Piketty (2020) describes, without fundamental reference to theory, that all historical inequality regimes worldwide were supported by (concise) narratives that offered a justification for inequality (cf., also Kubon-Gilke, 2020) and entailed a certain individual commitment to the rules (which can be interpreted as a requiredness toward the valid system of rules). The worldwide debate on nudging (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008) can also be assigned to this class of models. Nudging is about politically generating frames of reference based on the principle

of prägnanz, which induces people to make "good" decisions for themselves, for example, in the area of old-age provision, nutrition, or insurance against major risks.

Gestalt-theoretical considerations also help to understand and specify the criticism of nudging, since this policy is subject to the accusation of manipulation, as Asch (1987) impressively points out analogously in his chapter on propaganda.

Neither the works of North and Denzau (1984), Piketty (2020), Thaler and Sunstein (2008), or Shiller (2019), nor behavioral economics, make direct reference to Gestalt theory, but—at the most—refer to more recent psychological concepts, which in turn do not refer to the Gestalt-theoretical heritage (Toomela, 2010). Some of these "new" theoretical approaches appear somewhat too schematic because the phenomena of general prägnanz are not in focus and the complexity of Gestalt-theoretical thought is often reduced to a few psychological effects.

Some approaches that draw explicitly on Gestalt theory avoid this narrowing down and are mentioned below. First, however, a few remarks are made on important, more-comprehensive contributions that have found their way into social sciences research regarding categorization, narratives, and the related behavioral effects.

The most influential concept in the social sciences inspired by Gestalt theory is the notion of "focal points", propounded by Schelling (1980). His work became particularly important for game theory, for example, on the question of the coordination of human behavior in the case of multiple equilibria. Prägnanz aspects play a special role in this context. In addition to general questions of coordination, this theory is particularly important for discrimination theory (cf., e.g., Basu, 2017).

Specific issues of the Gestalt theory are used particularly often in the social sciences, such as the importance of reciprocity in human relationships and its power to influence behavior. Another example is Heider's (1958) attribution theory, which illustrates how we categorize our own behavior and also the behavior of others. Depending on the underlying category, this has considerable consequences for emotions and behavior. An example of this is the shift from intrinsic motivation to extrinsic motivation when the focus of work is too much on reward. In this context, Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance is complementarily relevant. In it, perceptions, feelings, and behaviors are shown to change when, for example, one's behavior is at odds with the underlying dominant category. It further shows the plasticity of human attitudes. A change in frame of reference can entail systematic changes in behavior. Many institutional economic explanations are implicitly or explicitly based on attribution processes according to Gestalt-theoretical regularities (Kubon-Gilke, 1997; Schlicht, 2004, 2008).

Learning is a particularly important category in the social sciences. The behaviorist view, which has dominated for a long time, has various weaknesses, which is why Schlicht (1998, 100 ff.), for example, refers to Gestalt-theoretical approaches. Following Piaget (1967), learning in his approach is associated with the possibility of Gestalt switches from a prägnanz perspective. According to this, new elements are first attempted to be assigned to existing rules and categories. Piaget calls this *assimilation*. If the elements fit more and more badly to a category or a rule, then there will be a change of perception and a new rule will be formed, which obeys the law of prägnanz. Piaget calls this *accommodation*. Kohlberg's (1983) ideas of moral development can also be assigned to this line of reasoning.

4. Justice

In his contribution, Schlicht (1984, 2001) contrasts an emotive conception of justice (exemplified by Adam Smith's (1759) theory of moral sentiments) with a cognitive one, which he traces back to Max Wertheimer (1937). In concrete terms, he states that justice is understood as acting in accordance with the rules that apply in society. If these rules are violated, we speak of injustice. In the formation of rules, he again refers to cognitive regularities of perception and the emotive force via cognitive dissonance and requiredness when these rules are not complied with. His view does not imply a deterministic position on the formation of certain norms of justice, because he refers to the necessity of the general prägnanz of the entire social rule structure, emphasizes frame-of-reference effects, and addresses abrupt changes in the rules in the sense of Gestalt switch when cognitive dissonance is too strong.

5. Institutions: Norms, Customs, Usages, and Corporate Structures

After various preparatory works on other specific questions and on fundamental questions of social analyses (e.g., Schlicht, 1978, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1993, 1997), the special consideration of social norms of justice was later extended by Schlicht (1998, 1999, 2000) to a general explanation of social norms, customs, and practices based on Gestalt theory. The set of norms of a society that emerges in this way and changes according to the principle of prägnanz is then in turn decisive for the functioning of various organizational modes of an economy. Markets, for example, depend on a certain moral foundation so that transaction costs do not become prohibitively high, and markets remain functional.

Kubon-Gilke (1997) has, in addition to general questions about the institutions of a society, devoted herself, among other things, to the concrete task of considering what this means for institutional competition in the field of corporate structures (legal forms, distribution of property rights, remuneration systems, hierarchies, etc.). Schlicht and Kubon-Gilke point out, among other things,

that there is no arbitrary number of concise interpretations of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship can be understood as a mode of competition within an organization, as a hierarchy with command and obedience, or as a cooperative built on trust with mutual rights and obligations. Depending on the interpretation and category, different motives and behaviors are supported. It is somewhat debatable whether the cooperative form must also be perceived as democratic at the same time or rather two different interpretations are given. In any case, a company that tends to be interpreted as a trust-based cooperative with mutual duties and rights can tilt toward the competitive interpretation if management increasingly uses monetary incentives to increase productivity. If this destroys intrinsic motivation, it can lead to the exact opposite, that is, lower motivation despite increased incentives. Lewin (1951) already formulated it in a similar way when he compared an autocratic, democratic, and *laissez-faire* atmosphere by emphasizing the superiority of the democratic group situation in terms of positive effects on the motivation and ability of group members to think independently and solve problems productively and creatively.

Bowles (2016) also takes up this phenomenon and argues that it is precisely the renunciation of fierce competition that can prevent crowding-out effects in motivation. In terms of economic policy, however, this also means that the supposed perfection of markets with the greatest possible flexibility need not necessarily be socially beneficial, "[a] constitution for knaves may *produce* knaves" (Bowles, 2016, 26%, pos. 1112 ff.). Equivalently, the purely incentive-focused design of enterprises does not necessarily have to be conducive to corporate success. Conversely, companies can be successful if they are better able than others to promote high productivity by supporting cooperation-promoting norms and intrinsic motivation. Bowles does not go into Gestalt theory but nevertheless emphasizes, in line with it and extending Lewin's concept, that crowding out through incentives is not inevitable, but that the interpretation of these incentives in terms of general prägnanz is decisive. This can, but does not necessarily have to, even lead to crowding-in, that is, to a strengthening of motivation, only in cooperative environments.

Incentives or other corporate measures are interpreted in a specific way by individuals. Depending on the measure and the frame of reference, a certain intention of the regulating authority is supposed. This intention can be interpreted as trusting and supportive or as distrust. This in turn determines whether motivational effects are more destructive or supportive (Bowles, 2016, 28%, pos. 1218 ff.).

A particular problem in this context can arise from digitalization, especially blockchain technology (Kubon-Gilke, Emanuel, Gilke, Kirchhoff-Kestel & Vilain, 2019). Without blockchain, many contracts, for example, between

manufacturers of end products and their suppliers, are incomplete because it is not possible to have contractual clauses for every future eventuality and, moreover, contract fulfillment often cannot be verified in court. This favors, if one follows the common institutional analysis, long-term relationships, trust-building, and necessary state support for this. If one takes into account these effects of the crowding-out of increasing market orientation on attitudes, preferences, and behavior, more letting the market work can even increase transaction costs and decrease the efficiency of market coordination. If use of blockchain, which makes all actions between contracting parties verifiable, means that more markets have complete contracts and are not dependent on state support or trust relationships, then this can have significant negative spillover effects on the remaining or newly created markets with still-incomplete contracts. Because then, it is difficult to build trust relationships between otherwise-selfish actors (knaves).

In the worst case, even the understanding of the state can change if state activities are no longer attributed to such supporting tasks, and the state in general is hardly attributed any competence in shaping and solving problems (Sturn, 2017). The erosion of trust and the dwindling state activity can ultimately become detrimental to both market coordination and the understanding of democracy. These somewhat-pessimistic statements can be derived directly from Gestalt-theoretical considerations (Kubon-Gilke et al., 2019; Kubon-Gilke & Laurinkari, 2021).

6. Public vs. Private or State vs. Market

A very current debate on the relationship between the public and the private, or the market and the state sphere, which directly follows on from this, can benefit from early works of Gestalt theory, especially Wertheimer's (1937) essay on democracy. Wertheimer explicitly pointed out that democracy must not be understood as the sum of technical voting procedures or individual elements of democracy and that democracy must always be understood in the context of the social system of rules and norms, because the individual elements of democracy can acquire different meanings depending on the frame of reference. It is important to him that the concrete meaning and effect of individual rights and institutions depend on the character of the overall structure of which they are part.

In the area of the relationship between the public and the private, there have recently been significant changes to the whole, which Sturn (2020) describes. First of all, he names the genuine tasks of the state and the market from an economic point of view, as well as the interfaces and frictions of both levels. In addition, he points to specific problems when these boundaries are crossed or interpenetrated. Typical state failure can occur when genuinely collective tasks are not fulfilled sufficiently well due to inappropriate decision-making and enforcement

mechanisms. But state failure can also occur when the state takes decisions that do not require a collective decision. Sturn (2020) calls the second case a shadow economy by the state. Market failure can also occur genuinely because rules of the game, regulatory conditions, and possible institutional rules do not lead to a completely efficient outcome. However, market failure can also occur when market coordination extends to areas that can only be decided and implemented collectively. The latter is what Sturn calls shadow politics by the market-based economy.

He speaks of the fact that in the course of diverse privatizations in recent decades, a (semi-)private provision of the core public goods could undermine the irreducible public good of a higher order (liberal order based on a sovereign state). As a transformed political and democratic narrative, this has far-reaching consequences. Namely, this can either nourish a "reductionist scepticism of the state" (Sturn, 2020, slide 9) or support an image of politics and democracy that is predominantly concerned with the assertion of particular group interests without regard for other (devalued) groups. However, if an understanding of democracy is established that devalues politically solvable tasks or is reduced to fighting and ruthlessly pursuing one's own interests, and the state is perceived only as an agency for market interests or as a vehicle for securing small-group profits, then the individual elements of democratic decision-making take on different meanings, which significantly affects the state's ability to solve problems.

Rüstow (2005, 51 ff.), a sociologist, historian, and economist who was a friend of Wertheimer and who is considered one of the fathers of the social market economy, speaks critically in a somewhat different context with similar arguments of the fact that established democracies can also change in the direction of pseudointegrative structures by mutating into a kind of vulgar democracy. This happens above all when, in the wake of social changes, internal cohesion and acceptance of democratic rules is only achieved through sharp demarcation from a supposed "outside". The "outside" can refer to other societies, but also to minorities within a community, which are superimposed on the majority in the political and economic spheres, through sharp differences in internal and external morality among members of the majority group or through the formal exclusion of participation opportunities for minorities where no rationing of participation rights would actually be necessary, but discrimination nevertheless takes place.

This can also become a problem of democratically constituted organizations if, firstly, the inner commitment to cooperative behavior is only strengthened by a supposed struggle with a hostile market environment and, secondly, the "inner outsiders", that is, the minorities and their interests, are rigorously suppressed by majority decision-making in what is only a supposedly democratic process. Then, in the worst case, the persons of the minority are implicitly or explicitly denied essential rights of freedom.

Wertheimer (1940) saw strong demands on the individual. For him, a democratic basic attitude is a necessary prerequisite for stable democracies. However, these attitudes are influenced by the changed meanings in the course of the altered competence of the public and private spheres, which leads to the question of what safeguards are possible, for example, through constitutions, to make these shifts in meaning more difficult. These questions would have to be taken into account in political economy, which so far has essentially only been concerned with possibilities of how a socially desired result can be realized through suitable electoral procedures. This is precisely the piecemeal understanding that Wertheimer already criticized.

7. Theory of Social Policy

Kubon-Gilke et al. (2018) have attempted to develop a new theory of social policy based on all the described foundations for understanding the individual and society, self-organization processes, and the preliminary work on democratic theory. Central to this is the endogenous consideration of value, attitudes, preferences, and motives on the basis of the Gestalt laws. This comprehensive view is intended to prevent the use of too narrow assumptions about the rationality of human decisions with supposedly fixed preferences or a complete arbitrariness of culturally bound attitudes and thus, in the worst case, to slide into ideological positions. In their book "*Gestalten der Sozialpolitik*", an epistemologically and scientifically underpinned interdisciplinary approach is developed based on critical rationalism and Gestalt theory as a whole. Three core themes are addressed:

(1) The fundamentals of individual behavior and the question of selecting appropriate behavioral assumptions for social policy theory in general, as well as for modeling various individual social policy issues, and for reform processes.
(2) Functioning of economic and social self-organization processes based on individual behavioral dispositions as well as genuine interrelationships of spontaneous order.
(3) The importance of normative positions on justice and freedom and their consequences for welfare state programs.

In addition to general questions on the theory of social policy, this is still to be applied to the specific fields of social policy. Concrete social policy measures are assessed against the new theoretical framework. An important question deals with the transition from an alimentary to a preventive social policy. Here, the levels of the individual and society intertwine in a special way. Thus, in this question, individual-related insights from Gestalt theory, for example, on the relationship

between body and mind, as well as pedagogical concepts based on them, become significant for sociopolitical questions on preventive policy (Kubon-Gilke 2021a).

8. Transformations

Particularly in the field of social policy, but also in topics regarding sustainability or demands for democratization of economic life, the question arises not only as to which measures and structural changes would be suitable for this, but also as to which paths would bring one closer to the goals. Transformation theory still relies heavily on science-based, rational recommendations for measures in policy advice, but only in exceptional cases, it refers to social narratives and how they can be influenced, as well as to the question of which people and groups can be influenced in what way in order to be able to initiate processes of change. It is one of the future tasks of social and political analyses inspired by Gestalt theory to query earlier works by Lewin (e.g., Lewin, 1947) to see what conclusions can be drawn from his work on social change processes for today's pressing problems, which often transcend national decision-making boundaries, and at what point further considerations should be made.

9. Concluding Remarks

This article has highlighted some essential strands of discussion that currently draw on Gestalt-theoretical considerations for questions of social theory and policy, without merely repeating older findings, but rather developing them further or transferring them to concrete questions of the relationship between market and state, to sociopolitical and institutional questions, as well as to the question of processes of social change. Especially the indicated interdependencies, for example, between an understanding of democracy within a large community and within an organization via striving for general prägnanz and the importance of narratives for collective action deserve further, more in-depth analyses. All this points to the special importance of an interdisciplinary society such as the Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications (GTA) (i) to provide a voice for all the scattered Gestalt theory-inspired approaches from social psychology, sociology, economics, and so on and (ii) to enable joint efforts to understand the indicated questions. A vacuum that still needs to be filled concerns the concept of power for understanding social structures and dynamics. Lewin's understanding of power (cf., Stemberger, 2017) can be a good starting point.

It could help to overcome the conceptual nirvana of economics, which in the main only connects alternative options with power potential. And it could correct the partially widespread understanding in sociology to conceive—in the end—every relationship as a power relation. Depending on the analytical question, useful

model assumptions could be derived from the general understanding of power developed in Gestalt theory.

If one wonders why Gestalt-theoretical thinking has not penetrated much more strongly into social–scientific thinking, one could argue that the Gestalt laws and their far-reaching consequences only provide a necessary condition for explaining social phenomena, but that the openness of the results is still considerable, since, as is well known, different, albeit always concise, systems of rules and institutions can form. Such a view fails to recognize that, although one does not get a deterministic explanation, with knowledge of the entire existing rule system, it is possible to estimate which attributions, moral rules, or institutions in general form and how this systematically influences behavior. The reason why Gestalt theory has not become even more firmly established as a basis of the social sciences is more to do with science policy. After the suppression of its development during the time of National Socialism in Germany with the emigration of important representatives and with the emergence of a behaviorist mainstream in psychology after World War II, Gestalt theory only got a niche place in modern psychology, Many recent research works point in the direction of older findings, but the precursors are hardly acknowledged, maybe not even known. The more that work on the significance of narratives and mental models, on habitual behavior, and on so-called psychological "anomalies" comes to the fore in contributions to the social sciences, the more one can hope to refer again more to the fundamental work of the pioneers without limiting oneself to their findings, but building on them. In this way, one can also avoid the problem of addressing Gestalt-theoretical findings only as single psychological effects. Gestalt theory is different from the set of various behavioral effects. The explanatory power results mainly from the shown interdependencies between cognitions, emotions, and behavior in the course of striving for general prägnanz.

Summary

The analysis of social and economic phenomena has a long Gestalt-theoretical tradition but is currently seen rather as a niche subject. In this article, recent important approaches are presented that explicitly or implicitly refer to Gestalt-theoretical considerations. The particular relevance of narratives is pointed out. In addition, further analytical challenges are discussed.

Keywords: evolution, democracy, institutions, norms, transformation.

Zusammenfassung

Die Analyse gesellschaftlicher und ökonomischer Phänomene hat zwar eine lange gestalttheoretische Tradition, wird aber dennoch aktuell eher als Nischengegenstand gesehen. In diesem Beitrag werden auf der Grundlage der Überlegungen gestalttheoretischer Klassiker wichtige neuere Ansätze vorgestellt, die explizit oder auch implizit auf gestalttheoretische Überlegungen rekurrieren. Dabei wird die besondere Bedeutung

von Narrativen beschrieben. Zudem werden darauf aufbauende weitergehende Analyseaufgaben herausgearbeitet.
Schlüsselbegriffe: soziale Evolution, Demokratie, Institutionen, Normen, Transformation.

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