

INTERNATIONAL BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY JOURNAL

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF SOMATIC PRAXIS

(Incorporating US Association for Body Psychotherapy Journal)

volume eleven ● number one ● spring 2012

An abstract painting in shades of grey, white, and black, depicting a figure in a dynamic, flowing pose, possibly dancing or in a state of intense movement. The brushwork is expressive and energetic.

EUROPEAN
ASSOCIATION FOR
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Organismic Self-Regulation in Kurt Goldstein's Holistic Approach

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Received 20 December 2011; accepted April 2012

Abstract

The author presents a brief intellectual biography of Kurt Goldstein which focuses on the concept of organismic self-regulation – the true *leitmotiv* of his entire theorization, beginning from the Frankfurt (1914–1930) and Berlin (1930–1933) periods, across the long period spent in the U.S. (he was one of the first victims of the Nazi persecutions), and up to his death in New York in September 1965. In particular, emphasis is given to the gradual shifting of his thinking from an unmistakably neurophysiological plane, which in *The Organism* leads to the formulation of the “basic biological law”: Equalization toward an “adequate” average level in an “adequate” time – a “law” that seemingly takes us back to Walter Cannon’s homeostatic regulation principle – to a more philosophical, existential, and ontological plane, which underlies the concept of *self-realization*.

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Keywords: equalization, organismic constants, *individual norm*, self-realization

International Body Psychotherapy Journal *The Art and Science of Somatic Praxis*

Volume 11, Number 1, 2012 pp 57–65. ISSN 2168-1279

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One of the “most important, most contradictory, and now most forgotten figures in the history of neurology and psychiatry” (Sacks, 1995, p. 7), Kurt Goldstein (1878–1965) and his work can be thought of as a large city buried under the ashes of time. “The destiny of a buried city”, Ellenberger writes, referring to Janet’s production with the same simile, “is uncertain: it can remain buried forever; it can remain hidden and be sacked by plunderers. But it can also be that it is one day dug up and brought back to life instead” (1970, chapter 6). Goldstein’s poor reception is to be related to the turbulent events that the Old World has experienced over the last century.

I like to define this author as one of the most captivating sons of Weimar’s culture (1919–1933). Anne Harrington, before me, named this intense and productive period of Goldstein’s life “Reason, Courage and the Making of a Weimar Hero” (1966, pp 154–159). Indeed, still today his voice is imbued with echoes of the ultra-millenary tradition that has matured “on the east side” of the Atlantic – a tradition which had its origin in the ancient Greek civilization and was to become an archetypical symbol of fragmentation and dismemberment (the Berlin wall was built in 1961, only four years before his death). Just like Weimar’s culture, in its melancholic wane, he echoes those issues and those debates which took place immediately

before the “catastrophe”. The Kantian heritage, gathered during his studies in Heidelberg and profoundly and repeatedly meditated on in the continual exchange of ideas with his cousin on his mother’s side, Cassirer, glows for the last time with an enchanting and crepuscular light.

By and large, Goldstein is famous for having placed a strong emphasis on the functioning of the organism as a whole. Behavior, he asserted, is never the mere summation of single reactions which can ultimately be traced back to reflexes, but it is the individual’s “performance” that, in relation to his *milieu*, always acts as an organized whole. By virtue of this priority importance assigned to the whole with respect to the parts, he is acknowledged as the father of the holistic approach in biology – a theoretic and methodological orientation which contrasts with the dominant paradigm, then as today, defined as atomistic.

More in particular, the years he spent studying medicine at the University of Breslau, where he specialized in neuroanatomy and neurophysiology, were those that occurred in the middle of what has been defined as “the golden age of the cerebral localizations” (1870-1918). It was in this period that, by means of ablation, electrical and mechanical stimulation experiments, the first mapping of the cortical lobes and circumvolutions was achieved, with the attribution of a specific sensory or motor function to each area. The brain, and presumably mental life, was thus becoming a highly complex machine which functioned according to the principles of linear causality.

Goldstein was born in 1878, and, towards the end of the century, when “we can affirm that the ‘revolutionary’ phase of the studies on the functioning of the nervous system ideally ends” (G. Cimino, 2002, pg. 58), he was studying at university under the protection of Edinger and Wernicke. The holistic theory that he was to elaborate over the following two or three decades deserves special interest for how it chronologically falls into the history of localization neurophysiology. Indeed, to use Kuhn’s terminology (1962), if the years in which he specialized went through the phase that we may call “of *normal science*”, during his later work at the *Institut zur Erforschung der Folgeerscheinungen von Hirnverletzungen* [Institute for Research on the After-Effects of Brain Injuries], which he founded in 1914 in Frankfurt, Goldstein had to deal with the consistent emergence of “abnormalities” and with the consequent proliferation of supplementary theories formulated for explaining them.

“For a while”, he recalled, “it seemed the ideal of a complete brain map was coming closer and closer to realization (Head calls this the era of the ‘diagram makers’). So strong was the suggestion that emanated from these brain maps that most investigators had not the slightest doubt that the research was on the right track. Until one or two decades ago, the tenor of the entire literature was, in general, one of extreme assurance. Of course, more and more cases became known in which the symptomatology could no longer be fitted into these schematic constructions and in which the anatomical facts by no means corresponded to the theoretical premises. However, these difficulties were overcome by special, usually ad hoc explanations, which were presented and received with a surprising lack of critical attitude” (Goldstein, 1939, pp. 203-204)¹.

His fundamental book, entitled *The Organism* (1939), is imbued with an inexorable *vis polemica* in this respect, to the point that it seems difficult to also make out a *pars construens* that can rearrange the “data” acquired through the research in neuroanatomy of that century. Yet Goldstein does not appear to renounce light-heartedly “any attempt to form a concept of the

¹ Heretofore all quotations from *The Organism* will be reported as (Goldstein, 1939), which is the first English version of *Der Aufbau des Organismus* (Goldstein, 1934), though the pages will be referred to the last, more recent publication (see in bibliography Goldstein, 1995).

differential significance of the various parts of the brain for different psychological functions. The differences of symptoms, when the lesions are localized in different places", he writes, "are much too convincing" (p. 204). It is therefore interesting to notice the provocative role played by his figure in relating to tradition and to contemporary neurology, always moving between continuity and distance, between conservation and revolution, or to the desperate search for an impossible synthesis between the two. For the history of neuroscience, all this can represent a subject to be expanded elsewhere.

Intuitively, I read into this "provocation" a re-emerging of that philosophical trend that has always accompanied the course of his scientific research (Goldstein, 1959, p. 5). In 1934, when he wrote the very first draft of *Der Aufbau des Organismus* in German, he was in exile in Amsterdam, fleeing as a Jew from Nazi Germany and awaiting a visa for the U.S. Novalis's words come to mind: "philosophy is after all nostalgia; it is the desire to feel at home anywhere" (Fragmente, 24). From It. trans., 1976, pg. 41). From this moment on, he was to return sentimentally to the bedside of his homeland – a Germany that was falling into the abyss of World War II – only through Kant, Heidegger, Goethe.

Marianne Simmel (1968) reports that Goldstein never felt completely rooted in the United States; he never again felt at home. Regardless of the fact that he had become an American citizen in 1940, "His comment on news of victories [of the Allies] was typically: 'Das haben die Amerikaner doch eben grossartig gemacht'". Not once", she adds, "did I hear him say 'we' in this connection. He always felt a stranger among friendly natives. He was grateful to the country where he and so many others had found asylum first, and then a new home – but it was still a home in exile" (p. 9).

During the years of exile in the U.S., the purely "experimental" tone in *The Organism* that characterizes the rigorous close observation of the "data", withdraws to the background and leaves room for psychotherapy practice and a "phenomenological" reflection on behaviour, on life-experience, and on the concrete experiences of human beings, whose ultimate goal can be identified in the tendency towards self-realization. Goldstein's reflection, moreover, reconfirms that basic concept, postulated in *The Organism*, of isomorphism between biological knowledge and biological existence, retraces the contrast between his own "biological" point of view and the physicalist view of the world, and eventually presents a theory of knowledge that is articulated around the dialectic pair, *The Holistic Approach and the Analytic Method in Science* (1940, pp. 1-33)³.

The levels of Goldstein's theory are multiple: from methodology – the true generative moment of the entire argumentation – to theoretics, and from here to epistemology and further on to actually speaking of ontology; all this without ever renouncing situating his theory within the framework of reference of *biological science* (1939, pp. 313, 409). Obviously, in the meantime, the scope of biology as a science expands to the point of resembling a "paradigm", of a *Weltanschauung* - a vision of the world. Goldstein's epistemological problem was never to be dealt with in a systematic manner (Goldstein, 1951). Perhaps it should have been dealt with in his last work, *From anatomy to philosophy: Late and early writings in the holistic approach*, but this project was never accomplished (Harrington, 1996, pp. 171-172, 261 note 146). The author often mentions Rubin's famous image, which may appear as a white vase on a black background or as two black profiles on a bright background (Goldstein, 1939, pg. 125; 1940, pp. 19-21).

² So the Americans have ultimately, magnificently made it.

³ An important achievement during the U.S. period consists in the construction of the famous *Goldstein-Scheerer Tests of Abstract and Concrete Thinking* (Goldstein e Scheerer, 1941, 1945).

He uses the image quite freely; he first of all applies it to the “figure” of excitement within the nervous system, simultaneously to any “performance”, but he later extends its application to the aforementioned various levels.

In the disapproval of localization, for example, such an unconventional use of the figure-background leads to conclusions that are as enigmatic as the perceptive effect of the image we are discussing: we do not know whether to believe that it is a vase or two profiles. “Our view”, he writes, “does not deny, by any means, the special significance of specific structure... Indeed, the organism consists of qualitatively different structures... But the specificity itself arises within the functional pattern of the whole to which each part, by functioning, contributes a very specific qualitative tonality” (1939, pg. 216). Here is a small work of art: the art of giving with one hand and taking with the other. In other words, granted that our science must move forward and that it can only do so in an atomistic way, let us thus move forward; however, everything that can be discovered operating this way is fictitious, unnatural, and unreal. It is only by contextualizing the various phenomena within the global process of the organism that we may correctly evaluate the relative contribution which each cortical structure supplies to the performance in progress.

From a theoretical stand point, the alternation of analytical-holistic knowledge works, minute by minute, according to the same formal organization principle figure-background. The reader eventually feels that Goldstein captured a dualistic vision, at least as regards theory, with each of the two complementary terms always present as *background* also in the other, holistic or analytical, cognitive process, which at a given time emerges as *figure*.

Among the authors Goldstein mentions in *The Organism* (pg. 281) there is Walter Cannon (1871-1945), physiologist from Harvard, who formulated during the 20's the concept of “emergency reaction” of the organism or *sympathetic arousal* - a preparation for an attack or an escape (fight or flight response), and who in 1932 published *The Wisdom of the Body* (New York, W. W. Norton), in which he presented the “homeostasis” concept, namely, the tendency towards the *self-regulation* of the organism (maintenance of steady blood pressure, body temperature, blood-glycaemia levels, etc.). Postulating the principle of “Equalization toward an ‘adequate’ average level in an ‘adequate’ time: a basic biological law” (1939, pp. 104-105), Goldstein's theory presents in this regard significant analogies with the aforementioned homeostatic conception of organic functioning.

The tendency towards *preferred behavior*⁴, towards a suitable regulation of the *organismic constants* (which for Goldstein too are the respective average levels in the various physiological indexes: muscle tone, blood pressure, pH, and glucose concentration in the blood stream, etc.) and, through this, towards *Self-realization*, is what distinguishes the functioning of living creatures from physical processes of inorganic matter.

And in case of brain injury or severe damage to the body, the organism reacts globally; it reorganizes the average levels of the constants with extraordinary plasticity, and does its best to restore its performance and behavior. Through practically automatic modalities which were completely unknown to the subjects themselves, the behavior of Goldstein's patients carried on according to a mysterious holistic principle of organic self-regulation. During his work alongside the psychologist of the Gestalt, Adhémar Gelb, at the *Institut* in Frankfurt, on the rehabilitation of the brain-injured soldiers who returned from the war front, he realized that *the symptoms are not the direct consequence of the brain damage, but are the responses of the whole*.

⁴ In order to interpret correctly the meaning of this “preferential” characteristic, shown by the behavior of an organism, see Goldstein, 1939, pp. 265 ff.; and 1940, where the author writes: “this term [preferred behavior] does not imply any conscious awareness or choice of a special way of performing” (p. 174).

organism to the change that took place after the damage itself. “Recovery is a newly achieved state of ordered functioning, that is, responsiveness, hinging on a specifically formed relationship between preserved and impaired performances... in the direction of a new *individual norm*, of new constancy and adequacy” (pg. 334).

However, at least to some extent, the “constants” are unpredictable, if it is true that in the laboratory they “are reached at the expense of performances very essential for the organism. The constant determined in this manner is certainly not the one that corresponds to the natural conditions” (pg. 281). But, how can we then distinguish what is “essential” and “natural” from what is not? The criterion appears about twenty pages further on (pg. 305): “The constants themselves”, Goldstein asserts, “are still somewhat equivocal because they are also obtained by an isolating procedure⁵. After all, the method of determining constants depends on a formal criterion: the ordered condition in other parts of the organism, whenever a genuine preferred behaviour occurs in one field”⁶. And yet, this ordered condition is to be exposed to the experience of “catastrophe”, which is, in disease, “shock and danger for existence” (pg. 328), but also a normal phase of healthy life, a dynamic principle and an inherent element of the evolution process (pp. 392-393).

Although the idea of organismic self-regulation remains central in all the literature of the following period, the reflection on the constants and on preferred behaviour soon arrives at a dead end. In Human Nature, Goldstein goes as far as envisioning a possible factorial analysis to identify the constants and to formalize their correlations. But every case is unrepeatable, he keeps telling himself; and indeed his approach always privileged the study of the single case (cfr. ibid., pp. 41-42). As a matter of fact, in everyday life the “real” constants set in only in accordance with the individual norm, which in turn is determined by the condition of the whole organism in its coming to terms with the world. Thus, once again, every typology is rejected, and any definite pronunciation on the structure of personality (1940, Chapter 7) is postponed to an indefinite time.

His holistic concept of self-realization must have seemed to him sufficiently general to discourage any attempt to elevate and hypostatize a particular constellation of personality factors, be they the drives and the psychic structures of psychoanalysis, the various motivation principles of other theories, or the functional specificity of cortical areas or lobes. It is certainly a sufficiently general concept, but also, I wish to add, far too generic. As early as in *The Organism*, constants appear everywhere: physiological, behavioral, affective, constants regarding the sensory and motor threshold, intellectual characteristics, constants as expression of the essential nature of the species and of the individual organism under consideration, time constants in the temporal and rhythmic course of processes and so on (Goldstein, 1939, pp. 282-283).

Moreover, the term “equalization” brings to mind the processes of energetic nature. As the history of psychoanalytical ideas has shown, however, the energy metaphor has always proven to be, in psychology, of little use for explaining the meaning of human behavior (Klein, 1976). It

⁵Goldstein uses various synonyms to designate the “analytic” or “atomistic” method or procedure in scientific research. To be found among these are the terms “anatomizing” or “dissecting”, or also “isolating” (1939, pp. 69, 398, note 27).

⁶Another one of Goldstein’s peculiar concepts is the “field of performance” (1939, p. 34). His point of view may be considered ecological, because it tends to substitute the term “function” with “performance”, the latter having to do with the actualization of the essential nature of an organism according to and in relation to its environment or milieu: “The performances of the organism correspond to these constants. It would be better not to speak here of functions. The term ‘function’ may be better reserved for the formal structure of the activity, while ‘performance’ means the concrete action in which the organism actualizes itself. Goethe spoke in this connection of ‘Dasein in Tätigkeit’ (‘Being in actuality’)” (ibid., p. 282).

can, indeed, be traced back to the universe of the discursive procedure of physics rather than to the experiences of patients. The latter have always to do with the concrete behavior, performances and feelings, and with the abstract attitude that frames all that in symbolic systems. In *The Organism*, for each specific organism in every given situation, the concept of equalization toward an adequate average level in an adequate time is matched with a constellation of concepts: “the tendency toward the preferred situation corresponds to the equalization process” (pg. 281), to the maintenance of the average levels of the constants, to the execution of an “ordered” behavior, to the adequacy of “coming to terms” with the world⁷; it furthermore corresponds to a performance which is “the best” to actualize all potentialities, the essential nature, of an organism; and, eventually, it is associated with feelings of well-being and safety.

Equalization, for each given organism, is always determined by the total situation which includes the individual’s performance and its environment. From a phenomenological viewpoint the unit of investigation is the “performance” (or “performance field”), namely “a *coming to terms* of the organism with environmental stimuli” (pg. 42, my italics). In defining performance as a “coming to terms”, it is obvious that the organism as a whole is always called into question.

The nervous system is a network that never rests and always functions as a whole, un apparatus well-differentiated from an anatomical point of view but extremely dynamic and flexible in functional and adaptive terms. Within this system, “the total excitation pattern is not confined to a definite anatomical structure but represents a definite excitation Gestalt that can utilize, for its course, any available structure [...] The performance is based not on the activity of certain mechanisms but on certain potentialities of the organism that realize themselves by utilization of all sorts of substitute means when the ‘normal’ means are out of order” (pg. 187).

Goldstein’s theory suggests a neurophysiology of performances, understood as holistic processes whose common denominator consists in the goal of the individual “coming to terms” with the world and so attaining Self-realization. The author shows, through examples of laboratory experiments, *the relative independence of the performances from the functioning of a specific locality to which “normally” they are related*. Thus, for example, in the *sequelae of amputation* after awakening from anesthesia, the operated animals learned immediately to bring on the “right” movements and so to accomplish the performance which the situation required (pp. 188-190).

The original German term *Selbstverwirklichung* has been translated into the English self-realization. We must, however, bear in mind that this term “means nothing but *the realization of all capacities of the organism in a harmonious way so that the ‘existence’ of the organism is guaranteed*. Indeed, the term fits the human organism fully only after the development of the ‘self’. When we use it in relation to the infant who has not yet a ‘self’ or to animals, where we cannot speak of a self at all, we do it because the essential meaning of the term is related to the unitary character of what we call a living being, which in the human being manifests itself in the experience of ‘the self’. To avoid misunderstanding I shall use the phrase realization of the particular nature, instead of self-realization, when we are not dealing with adult human beings” (Goldstein, 1957, pp. 179-180).

⁷ In his controversy with Benussi, Koffka spoke of “the concept of ‘biologically adequate’ stimulation, which he had probably encountered in the writings of Frankfurt neurologist Ludwig Edinger” (Ash, 1998, p. 143). The meaning of “stimulus” was thus redefined on the basis of the functional relationship between the latter and the organism. In Goldstein, the biological framework of reference expands, and what is ultimately meant by “adequacy” is a condition of “reality”. The world is “real” only if the subject is in an “adequate” relationship with it, only to the extent that both the stimulus and the reaction “correspond to the nature of the organism” (1939, pp. 310-312).

⁸ Cfr. *The Organism*, pp. 61-62: development of a so-called pseudo-fovea in patients with injuries to the calcarine cortex and with functional impairment of one half of the retina.

Therefore, the meaning of this “*self*”, which, based on what has been stated, would lead us to think of the “*self*” of the academic psychology, is actually traceable to the concept of “nature” according to Goldstein – a concept which is not very scientific, mystifying and can ultimately be defined as “romantic”. For example, readers may be left with a doubt as to whether the person who is writing is a scientist or a mystic when in *The Organism* they read: “... the organism is a Being enduring in time, or if we may say so, in eternal time; for it does not commence with procreation, certainly not with birth, and does not end with death [...] ‘birth’ and ‘death’ are merely certain landmarks like others, for example, like puberty and menopause. Their real *nature* is yet to be determined” (1939, pg. 387, my italics).

All living things share the same destiny: their potentialities are driven to actualize themselves. The tendency towards self-realization shall be considered the only true *basic drive* (fundamental ambition or motivation) not only in human beings but also in all living organisms. In the wake of criticism expressed towards the psychological doctrine, however, Goldstein hardly ever mentions this in the usual psychological terms, but rather in biological, philosophico-existential, and even ontological terms. So, ultimately, his Holistic Biology almost magically seems to us transformed into Philosophy of Existence. Ash (1998, p. 281) too notices this expansion of perspective: “Though he spoke of a ‘mean point’ to which excitations or behaviour strive to return, not mere survival, and certainly not only the ordered equilibrium of a visual field⁸, but the integrity of a biological individual was at stake”.

Humanistic psychology, the third force of American psychology, between psychoanalysis and behaviourism, will draw abundantly from Goldstein’s theoretic repertoire: from self-realization to communion, from sphere of immediacy to that idea of “awareness” upon which I would like to dwell. Goldstein identifies the primary nature of the mental dimension in the experience of “awareness”. As often happens in his writings, a phenomenon which is usually characterized in psychological terms is demoted to the biological category. In *The Organism* he had already focused on the subject of the contrast between *life and mind* [Leben und Geist] (pp. 353-363), and had concluded that the problem of the mind should officially be part of the

⁸A biological conception of the mind is today supported by Gerald Edelman, which Oliver Sacks, in his 1995 *Foreword to The Organism*, considers Goldstein’s true heir. The application of the Darwinian “population thinking” (Edelman, 2004, chapter 4) to the immune system earned Edelman a Nobel Prize in 1972. Since then, the author has focused on the further extension of this line of thought and has elaborated what he himself has defined as the *Theory of the Neural Group Selection* (TNGS), better known as *Neural Darwinism*.

“The global theory that Goldstein and Lashley and the Gestaltists sought”, comments Sacks, “may now have emerged in Edelman’s theory of neural Darwinism and his concept of the brain as a sort of society, in which every part is dynamically connected, “in converse”, by a process of re-entrant signaling, with every other” (Sacks, 1995, pp. 13-14). The analogies between the two theories are many and I would like to list just a few. To begin with, like Goldstein, Edelman (1992, chapter 2) claims that the mind should be reintegrated in nature. Secondly, we can see the broadened vision of biology and the corresponding attempt to elevate this sector of knowledge to a major scientific subject and to the main element of comparison for the system of unified knowledge. In this direction, Edelman foresees a progressive integration between biology and psychology to eventually arrive at the foundation of a subject field, which he refers to as sciences of recognition (evolutionism, immunology, neuroscience). Lastly, it is worth mentioning that both authors share a monistic approach to the mind-body issue, and claim that such an approach may be successful only if it is based on biological knowledge.

However, in the place of the organism, seen as a whole, Edelman places the concept of “evolutionary morphology” or “dynamic morphology” as main axis of all his theorization. In order to simplify as much as possible, we may say that, for him, evolutionary morphology alone determines in the human species, by *natural selection* (interorganismic) and *somatic selection* (intraorganismic: initial, experiential and by “re-entry” connections between neuronic group maps), the progressive epigenetic appearance of value-category associations, of perceptive categorizations, of a *primary consciousness* and, thanks to the development of language, of a *higher-order consciousness*. There is no room for any Cartesian dualism. The hypothesis of the *res cogitans* is unacceptable for the author. The dynamic morphology is the Mind. Everything else is mere speculation.

field of biology. Based on how he was re-elaborating and expanding the epistemic range of his subject, the apparent dualism would have been recomposed in a unitary manner on the area of biological knowledge⁹.

In his famous article *The Smiling of the Infant*, the author questions himself on the inner experiences of the fetus and hypothesizes that even at such an early stage, experience of psychological nature is present. “The observation of the first smiling”, he writes, “has taught us that even very early ordered behaviour seems to be accompanied by a psychic experience, the experience of well-being which accompanies the condition of ‘adequacy’. We believe that it may not be too far-fetched to attribute even to the *embryonic life* some *psychic experiences*, something akin to the feeling of well-being in ‘order’ and of anxiety in ‘disorder’. I feel justified in doing this particularly since it renders unnecessary the assumption of conscious experiences in the proper sense of the word, which we certainly cannot assume to exist in the embryo” (1957, pg. 182).

We thus see that, in this manner, conscience is bypassed to re-found psychism as a whole on the terrain of “awareness” of the “inner states, moods, feelings etc., which do not originate in a definite stage of development and are not related to a definite activity of the organism. They are characteristic properties of all organismic life, psychic phenomena belonging to the various ways of the coming-to-terms of the organism with the various demands it is exposed to. In the ordered, adequate form of organismic life, this [coming to terms] is accompanied by the feeling of well-being; in the disordered, by anxiety, whether it occurs in the mature organism or in the fetus” (*ibid.*, pp. 182-183). It is clear that the author here refers to an organismic “awareness”, to a subjective feeling of being, of being present and reactive before the stimulating universe.

His collaborator and disciple, Fritz Pearls (1893-1970) – founder of the Gestalt Therapy – spoke of “awareness” as one of the inherent properties of life which is present even in a cellular protoplasmic stage (Pearls, 1970, chapter 3). And, if all that is vital, claims an ontology and an epistemology that cannot be reduced to the paradigm of physics, then this awareness must contemplate the experience of death as well. In discussing the finality shown by living organisms, Goldstein declares to accept the designation “definite end”, meaning “actualization of one’s own essence” (Goldstein, 1939, pg. 324). The word “end”, which is used to summarize the *innere Zweckmässigkeit* [internal aim] of the third Kantian *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, means both purpose (intention, desired result) and extinction (cessation, death). From the agglutination of these two semantic areas emerges the existentialist character of Goldstein’s approach in thematizing, in the area of biology, the connection between individual freedom and mortal destiny. The only thing left to support the man is a sort of “faith” – an attitude of absolute devotion to life, which allows all human beings to transform the traumatic impact of reality “into admiration for nature and veneration for its benignity” (pg. 393).

BIOGRAPHY

Luigi Corsi (philosopher, psychologist) lives and works in Tuscany, Italy. He is a researcher and collaborator at the Universities of Pisa and Florence. He is the Italian translator and editor of *The Organism*, to which he wrote a preliminary *Note*. He’s the author of *Riflessioni sui fondamenti epistemologici e storico-filosofici delle concezioni organismiche di Malcolm Brown*, in Pini M. (ed) “Psicoterapia corporeo-organismicica. Teoria e pratica clinica”, Franco Angeli, Milano, Italy, 2001; and of *The Concept of Health, Disease and Therapy in the Holistic-Organismic Approach of Kurt Goldstein* (poster presented at the 23rd Annual Conference of the European Health Psychology Society, Pisa, Italy, September 23rd-26th, 2009).

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INTERNATIONAL BODY PSYCHOTHERAPY JOURNAL

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF SOMATIC PRAXIS

(Incorporating US Association for Body Psychotherapy Journal)

volume eleven ● number one ● spring 2012

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