

Max Wertheimer and Gestalt Theory

By D. Brett King, Michael Wertheimer

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The ideas of Max Wertheimer (1880-1943), a founder of Gestalt theory, are discussed in almost all general books on the history of psychology and in most introductory textbooks on psychology. This intellectual biography of Wertheimer is the first book-length treatment of a scholar whose ideas are recognized as of central importance to fields as varied as social psychology, cognitive neuroscience, problem solving, art, and visual neuroscience.

King and Wertheimer trace the origins of Gestalt thought, demonstrating its continuing importance in fifteen chapters and several supplements to these chapters. They begin by reviewing Wertheimer's ancestry, family, childhood in central Europe, and his formal education. They elaborate on his activities during the period in which he developed the ideas that were later to become central to Gestalt psychology, documenting the formal emergence of this school of thought and tracing its development during World War I. The maturation of the Gestalt school at the University of Berlin during 1922-1929 is discussed in detail.

Wertheimer's everyday life in America during his last decade is well documented, based in part on his son's recollections. The early reception of Gestalt theory in the United States is examined, with extensive references to articles in professional journals and periodicals. Wertheimer's relationships and interaction with three prominent psychologists of the time, Edwin Boring, Clark Hull, and Alexander Luria, are discussed based on previously unpublished correspondence. The final chapters discuss Wertheimer's essays on democracy, freedom, ethics, and truth, and detail personal challenges Wertheimer faced during his last years. His major work, published after his death, is *Productive Thinking*. Its reception is examined, and a concluding chapter considers recent responses to Max Wertheimer and Gestalt theory.

This intellectual biography will be of interest to psychologists and readers interested in science, modern European history, and the Holocaust.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Michael Wertheimer is Max Wertheimer's son, and he and King (both psychology, Univ. of Colorado, Boulder) offer an exhaustively researched description of Gestalt theory based on archival sources drawn from places Max Wertheimer worked in Europe and the US, from family diaries and documents, and from interviews with colleagues, family members, and friends. Developed as a protest against atomistic analysis of experience (experience seen as simply the sum of its components), Gestalt theory argued that the whole can only be defined by the interactions and interdependencies of the parts. Initial support for this view came from experiments in perception, such as apparent movement, and from developments in social psychology, problem solving, cognitive neuroscience, and visual neuroscience. Max Wertheimer was the founder of this approach to psychology. The authors provide detailed cultural and intellectual history, adding rich context for examining Wertheimer's views of democracy, freedom, ethics, and truth. Indispensable for understanding the history of Gestalt theory and its impact on the discipline of psychology, this book will undoubtedly become a classic. Summing Up: Essential. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty and professionals; general readers.”

—D. Sydiaha, *Choice*

"*Max Wertheimer and Gestalt Theory* will take its place among the important classics in the literature of Gestalt psychology. This tightly written scholarly essay provides a copiously researched portrait of the founder of Gestalt psychology based on a rich and extensive collection of information from archival sources including family documents and diaries, materials collected from all the places where Max Wertheimer lived and worked in Europe and America, and from interviews with family members, colleagues, and friends of Max Wertheimer. Michael Wertheimer's memories of his father also, of course, find their way into the narrative. King and Wertheimer carefully integrate cultural and intellectual history into the major story line and thus provide the reader with a rich sense of context. ..."

—Wayne Viney, Professor and University Distinguished Teaching Scholar, Colorado State University

"*Max Wertheimer and Gestalt Theory*... integrates earlier theoretical and historical scholarship with groundbreaking new material. This extremely well-written work describes the intellectual growth of Max Wertheimer and the development of Gestalt Theory from hints in Wertheimer's childhood through stirrings early in his education to the emergence of Gestalt Psychology as worldview and a formal system of psychological inquiry.... The book will be interesting for casual readers, immensely useful for teachers of psychology, and critical for historians of science."

—William Douglas Woody, University of Northern Colorado

"*Max Wertheimer and Gestalt Theory* is a terrific, breathtaking book presenting astonishing facts on Max Wertheimer (1880-1943) and his genius work and life. The authors challenge former ill-conceived messages about the assumed 'dusty' European perspectives of Gestalt theory in psychology. This book should be read by history of psychology students, perhaps beginning with the advanced undergraduates of psychology, say honors class level."

—Viktor Sarris, Max Wertheimer Chair of Psychology, J.W. Goethe University, Frankfurt a.M., Germany

"King and Wertheimer have given us the definitive account of the life and times of one of the twentieth-century's most important intellects. Max Wertheimer's Weltanschauung is revealed to us with intriguing detail that could only be known through family, and placed in the broader context of the most harrowing period of German history and the roots of a movement in psychology that is now, at last, taking hold in neuroscience. *Max Wertheimer and Gestalt Theory* is indispensable to understanding the history of the Gestalt movement, a movement that is destined to become more even influential in the future."

—John S. Werner, Jules and Doris Stein Professor, University of California, Davis Section of Neurobiology, Physiology and Behavior

"The need for a biography of Wertheimer has now been filled by Max's son Michael (born in 1927), whose narrative is gratifyingly original thanks to his acccess to 'insider information.'"

—David J. Murray, Isis: An International Review Devoted to the History of Science and Its Cultural Influences

About the Author

D. Brett King is senior instructor of psychology, Department of Psychology, University of Colorado at Boulder.

Michael Wertheimer is Professor Emeritus of Psychology, University of Colorado at Boulder.

Users Review

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David Dugas:

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A lot of people always spent all their free time to vacation as well as go to the outside with them family members or their friend. Do you realize? Many a lot of people spent these people free time just watching TV, or maybe playing video games all day long. If you need to try to find a new activity that's look different you can read a new book. It is really fun for you personally. If you enjoy the book which you read you can spent all day long to reading a reserve. The book Max Wertheimer and Gestalt Theory it is extremely good to read. There are a lot of people that recommended this book. These folks were enjoying reading this book. In case you did not have enough space to deliver this book you can buy the e-book. You can m0ore effortlessly to

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Max Wertheimer and Gestalt Theory can be one of your starter books that are good idea. Most of us recommend that straight away because this guide has good vocabulary that may increase your knowledge in terminology, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort to set every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing Max Wertheimer and Gestalt Theory nevertheless doesn't forget the main position, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource information that maybe you can be among it. This great information may drawn you into new stage of crucial imagining.

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