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Nezahat Arkun on “logical behaviourism” (1938). An early contribution to scientific psychology in Turkey.

Contributed Paper | After Kant | 12:00 Noon - 12:30 PM (Europe/Vienna) / 01:00 PM - 01:30 PM (Local Time)

My paper examines a little-known contribution to discussions on behaviourism within the framework of logical empiricism in the 1930s. It presents and comments an early work by Hans Reichenbach's student at Istanbul University, Nezahat Nazmi [Tanç], better known under her marital name Nezahat Arkun, and situates it in the context of the development of scientific philosophy in interwar Turkey, including Reichenbach's efforts to establish and develop scientific psychology at Istanbul University. Nezahat Nazmi's graduation thesis on "logistic behaviourism according to Carnap and Reichenbach" (Mantıkî Behaviorism'in Carnap ve Reichenbach'a Göre Tefsiri) was completed in 1938 and published in the unique issue of the journal of the Istanbul University Department of Philosophy, Felsefe Seminarı Dergisi (1939). This thesis documents the reception of behaviourism in the movement of logical empiricism, combined with Reichenbach's interest in Gestalt psychology. This constellation is visible in the sources used in the thesis, which discusses the works of Egon Brunswik, who established in Ankara the very first psychological laboratory in Turkey in the early 1930s, and of Edward C. Tolman, who studied with Kurt Koffka in Giessen and developed according to Reichenbach a "very convincing form of behaviorism" (Experience and Prediction, 1938: 163) .
Another aspect taken into consideration in this paper is the development of scientific psychology at Istanbul University, where Reichenbach was able to establish two additional chairs for exiled professors before leaving for the University of California in 1938. Ernst von Aster, who was in his early career in München and in Giessen interested in experimental psychology and psychoanalysis, was thus appointed in 1936 to the Chair of History of Philosophy and the psychologist Wilhelm Peters was appointed in 1937 to a new Chair of Experimental Psychology. This chair and the related institute were initially meant to be directed by a Gestalt psychologist such as Wolfgang Köhler or Adhémar Gelb. Peter's assistant and translator, Mümtaz Turhan, had studied in Germany between 1928 and 1935 and written his doctorate thesis under the direction of Max Wertheimer. As for Nezahat Arkun, she wrote her doctoral thesis on "Statistical Study on Suicide in Istanbul" (1948), under the supervision of Wilhelm Peters. She became in 1968 professor of psychology at the Istanbul University Department of Psychology and mainly pursued studies in social psychology, using statistical methods.

Presenters



Pascale Roure
Yildiz Technical University