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Review

E. B. Holt revival

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Eric P. Charles (Ed.), *A New Look at New Realism: The Psychology and Philosophy of E. B. Holt*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011. 330 pp. ISBN 9781412842426 (hbk).

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This is the third volume in the series *History of Psychological Ideas* from Transaction Publishers. Jaan Valsiner contributed the Foreword. Cornelis de Waal, a Peirce scholar and editor of a collection of New Realist writings, wrote the Preface. Eric Charles edited the volume and wrote the extensive Introduction.

For most readers of this review, the first questions will be, "Who was E. B. Holt?" and "Why should we be interested in him?" The short answer is that Holt was one of the most able students of William James and Hugo Münsterberg. He remained at Harvard after his Ph.D. in what was arguably the best Philosophy Department in the world (Kuklick, 1977). As a psychologist, Holt conducted research inspired by Münsterberg and developed a motor theory of vision. He insisted on the importance of behavior and was known as one of the early behaviorists, albeit a sophisticated one, as opposed to John B. Watson. As a philosopher, he was at the forefront of the New Realism that is highlighted in this book. Holt was present at the famous Clark University meetings of 1909 when Freud was introduced to U.S. academic psychology. In *The Freudian Wish and its Place in Ethics* (1915; humorously referred to as the "Holtian Wish" by James Gibson in his letter at the end of the Charles volume), Holt presented some of his ideas as behavior-oriented interpretations of Freud—well before Dollard and Miller (1950). His book, *The Concept of Consciousness* (Holt, 1914), presents his argument for consciousness being "out there," and his *Animal Drive and the Learning Processes* (Holt, 1931) nicely anticipates modern developmental systems theory while staking its claim as rooted in William James' Radical Empiricism. Holt was the teacher of Edward C. Tolman and James Gibson, and a major influence on Floyd Allport's approach to social psychology. Because Holt's sophisticated behaviorism was both molar and purposive, and these are notable properties of Tolman's system, it can be argued that Holt was an important precursor of modern cognitive psychology—to the extent that Tolman is credited with making that subdiscipline possible. These tidbits should be enough to pique the interest of many and to explain why Eric Charles has compiled this volume on Holt.

In 1910, six philosophers, led by Holt, published their first declaration about their intentions to develop ideas along realist lines. They recognized that there were many differences among members of the group but argued that future collaboration would lead to

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a more coherent point of view and a common understanding of key problems. Nevertheless, the differences were strong enough that both the 1910 paper and subsequent 1912 book consisted of entirely separate statements from each person. The collection under review is similar to these original efforts, with a range of authors who are nevertheless willing to be loosely organized as discussants of realism (and, of course, Holt).

There are three main parts to the book: "The Specific Response and the Problem of Illusory Experience" (consisting of chapters by Michell, Tonneau, Charles, and Shapiro & Hamburger); "Holt's Legacy and Holt as Legacy" (chapters by Taylor, Natsoulas, Shaw, and Heft); and "Beyond Representation" (consisting of an Eric Charles interview with Nicholas Thompson and a chapter by Alan Costall).

Joel Michell's interest in Holt and realism comes through Australian philosophical psychology. One of the most eminent Australian philosophers was John Anderson, who was inspired by the 1916–1918 Gifford Lectures of Samuel Alexander in Glasgow. Alexander, of the University of Manchester, admired the New Realists enough that Holt was offered a position (which he declined) at Manchester. The bulk of Michell's chapter describes Anderson's elaborations of Holt's view of consciousness as a "specific response" relation, listing categories of what responses might be specific to. François Tonneau has seized on Holt and the New Realism as essential support for behavior analysts. Ironically, the functionalism developed by William James, and caricatured by John B. Watson, led to the behaviorism that promoted the study of learning but not perception. B. F. Skinner once told me that what he wanted to know from Gibson, when they talked, was what he could do about a stye in his eye—ophthalmology not epistemology. Tonneau argues the case for a theory of direct memory. In the New Realism collection of 1912, Holt's audacious contribution was his realist theory of illusions. Eric Charles' chapter offers a sympathetic examination of Holt's arguments for how to treat illusions within realism. That is followed by Arthur Shapiro and Kai Hamburger's largely empirical summary of their fascinating research on illusions.

Consciousness is pursued most vigorously, and critically, by Natsoulas, who uses his chapter to explain his differences with Holt—specifically, that he cannot accept Holt's rejection of consciousness as "internal." "Holt was known among the graduate students at Harvard as 'the man whose consciousness was at the end of a stick,' one who said consciousness was that cross-section of the objective world to which the biological organism was reacting" (Costello, 1948, p. 232). Taylor argues against Holt from his standpoint as a scholar and acolyte of James. He argues that Holt was not a proper successor to James because of his emphasis on the importance of logic and his rejection of pragmatism. Shaw has been a careful student of the New Realism and Holt for many years. He has used the occasion of his chapter in this volume to present the fruits of that labor. He not only contextualizes the work of Gibson in Holt and the New Realism, but also contextualizes the New Realism in earlier developments in philosophical psychology, primarily citing Locke, Bain, Mach, and Meinong, and then he shows how James Gibson's insights about invariants can solve puzzles that seemed to block Holt's program. Prior to the Charles volume, the only thorough account of Holt for psychologists was a chapter in Heft (2001). Heft uses his chapter to re-examine his understanding of Holt's important concept of "the recession of the stimulus." Holt emphasized that

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behavior had to be understood as a "specific response" and the essence of that was *what* the response was specific to. As an animal grew and learned, the objects to which its behaviors were specific became less and less immediate. Heft, in 2001, had interpreted this "recession" as more or less cognate with a move from "proximal" to "distal." This is what he recants here, arguing that the movement is more encompassing, like toward an expanded "situation" such as that studied by Roger Barker.

The connection to Tolman, mentioned earlier, is most explicit in the interview with Nicholas Thompson, who explains that, after his full career in animal behavior, he only began to realize his connections to Holt very late. In the final chapter, Alan Costall pays homage to Holt by criticizing James Gibson for not making a frontal assault on rampant representationalism in cognitive psychology when his Holtian background placed him in a perfect position to do so.

All told, this is a curious collection. Charles cast a wide net when recruiting authors and knows full well how heterogeneous they are. But his goal was to stimulate more serious studies of Holt, and it is fitting to show how wide ranging such future studies could be. Most of the chapters can be read on their own, as they seem directed at very different audiences. None can substitute for reading Holt himself, which might be the best testimony to his worth.

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