

of "closure". There is an inherent tendency toward "from" in all our perceptions. This tendency is so strong that whenever there is any incompleteness or confusion in the external object, we strive to complete it and we are dissatisfied until this can be done. There is an inherent tendency in us to perceive a complete figure, by disregarding the gaps. This is called "closure." Closure is a special case of the law of "Pragnanz" or principle of equilibrium. According to this law, every experience tends to complete itself and be "as good as possible."

For the organisation of the perceptual field, the *Gestalt* school have mentioned some *conditions* which are stated briefly :

(a) Things which are *alike* tend to form a whole and are perceived as a whole, e.g., men in uniform—fall into squads.

(b) *Proximity* is another condition. Things which are close to one another in space or time tend to be grouped together as a unit.

(c) *Continuity* is a condition of organisation. A continuous line forces itself into a figure. If some dots are so arranged that they may form a vertical and a horizontal line, we perceive them as a vertical and the other as horizontal line. Here the perceptual field is organised into two lines though the dots are not really connected.

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perceive is only a chaos of atomic sensations.) We group some of these discrete sensations together by experience and thus see them as forming a whole. William James characterised the perception of an infant as a "booming, buzzing confusion". By this he meant that in the perceptual field of the infant nothing takes any definite form.

This view was, however, criticised by Stout. But (it was subjected to severe criticism by a group of German psychologists known as the *Gestalt* school. The fundamental tenet of the Gestalt school is that awareness of pattern or the tendency to organise the sense field is *innate*. Even a totally unfamiliar object will appear to an infant as a form or figure, i.e., as a *Gestalt* (a German word which is very difficult to render, in English. It has been translated as "form", "pattern" or "configuration"). According to the *Gestalt* school, *the perceptual field is an organised whole is not a mere aggregate of parts*)

We perceive an object as a *Gestalt*, a whole, a pattern or unit. With the growth of age, man reacts to the relations of things rather than to the things taken separately. Classical psychologists attempted to reduce psychology to a kind of "mental chemistry". They assumed that any complex mental entity could be known by reducing it to its component elements. *Gestalt* school opposed this atomistic approach. It will be ridiculous to analyse a tune into its separate notes. We may do so, but it will destroy the internal structure on which the nature of the tune as a whole depends.

(According to the *Gestalt* psychologists, the very nature of the perceptual process is to form a *figure* in a *ground*. All perception is done against a background. Whenever we perceive something we perceive it as a *figure against a ground*. The perception of an infant is not "booming, buzzing confusion." When the infant sees its mother, it may not perceive the mother as it would perceive her some years later. But even at this early stage, the figure of the mother stands out in bold relief as a single harmonious figure against the background, viz., room)

Another principle stressed by the *Gestalt* psychologists is that

sensation is partly interpreted, because I have recognised a human form saluting me. This cannot be called a pure sensation. We may, therefore, say with Ward that a pure sensation is a psychological myth.

### **Short account of the Gestalt theory of Perception**

The Gestalt school of psychology has contributed a great deal to the study of perception. Perception organises the sense-field. But much controversy has raged over the question whether this tendency to organise the sense-field is innate or learned by experience. The Associationists are of the opinion that what we