THE TOPICAL ISSUE

PREFACE BY THE EDITORS-IN-CHIEF TO THE TOPICAL ISSUE

Psychological research into human development requires the mutual relationship of cooperation to be laid down between the theory of development and the empirical exploration of the transformation of the human mind and personality in an individual’s life course. This calls for the revision of the links between theory and experience that today dominate modern psychology in general, not just developmental psychology.

A key factor in this will be the difference between empiricism and empirical research in psychology. Empiricism is the theory of knowledge, which also provides – among others – conclusions as to how scientific research should be conducted. Studies in psychology are under the influence of this epistemological theory. This influence is by no means to the advantage of psychological knowledge and should indeed be shrugged off in order to rebuild the significance of theory itself and its synergies with empirical research. A new theory of knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is needed for this. This is the premise of Adam Niemczyński.

The following four articles, the authors of which have all noted a crisis in interest in theory prevalent in human development studies, refer to this postulate. They are not, however, willing to reject empiricist epistemology but rather conjecture its supplementation or expansion. Dorota Czyżowska points to the philosophical and anthropological discourse that is necessary in developmental research, whereas Maria Czerwińska-Jasiewicz sees a chance for developmental psychology to counter the predilection for quantitative analyses with qualitative research. Janusz Trempała advocates for the future of developmental psychology to be within empiricism and signals the methodological problems which should, in his opinion, be urgently resolved to secure advances in research. Jan Cieciuch is steadfast in staying with empiricism and perceives theory as a synthesis of the outcomes of empirical research, also set to bring added value.

These four articles encapsulate specific reactions to attempts of drawing away from empiricism and arose as succinct comments on the matter. The issues discussed by them undoubtedly require extrapolation in a continued discussion. What is important is a diversity of directions in which the arguments supporting the development of a good theory of human development run, even though they may only be an incipient line of reasoning, they are probably still representative to wider circles of psychologists. Thus, this collection stands a chance of drawing readers into the discussion on the relationship between theory and empirical evidence. This may reinvigorate the efforts for formulating the main problems of psychology in developmental research much better than they have been so far and also provide some proposals on how to tackle them. These problems still remain to be adequately
identified and resolved. The editorial board of the European Journal of Developmental Psychology (Koops, Kessel, 2017) recently dedicated a special edition to this very issue. A different proposal for theory and research in this field was advanced by Niemczyński (2017) in his article, which – by kind permission of the Polish Psychological Bulletin, will be reprinted here along with its Polish version, presented for the first time in this collection. This article constitutes an appendix to the core collection of seven articles and has been added at the end of this issue for readers wishing to delve deeper into this proposal of how practicing scientific psychology of the development of the human mind and personality is possible without empiricist theory and in line with the cognitive methodologies of empirical studies that are adequate to its purposes. Earlier research on the development of personality after adolescence are also a part of this proposal (Niemczyński, 2007, 2009).

Developmental psychology, similarly to psychology as a whole, is under the influence of this very theory of knowledge, which mainly has its roots in British empiricism. Under the rule of this philosophical doctrine, the role of theory is completely subordinate to sensory experience. There is no room for the independent input of the knowing subject’s own cognitive operations in the cognition of real-world objects. Just as the mind – under this doctrine – is subject to the senses, so too the theory of the mind is replaced therein by the discipline of the methodology of empirical research on the human mind and cognitive development. Liberation from the monopoly of this methodology paves the way to building genuine knowledge on cognitive development. This is what Niemczyński is trying to demonstrate.

It is also worth highlighting – for the sake of preventing misunderstandings – that a critical approach to empiricist psychological research methodology and the postulate of emancipation from under its dominance should not be confused with its rejection. A critical approach is, in this respect, crucial to reveal the boundaries within which this psychology unquestionably possesses scientific value and undeniable merits for social practice in many fields. The ferocity of the criticism is not intended to depreciate its merits but merely to demonstrate, as clearly and unequivocally as possible, the reasons for not being swayed by the demands of empiricism to have exclusive rights over what has and what does not have cognitive value in psychology. In the meantime, empiricist procedures in reality only affect the surface of phenomena, satisfying themselves with the information required to exercise control over their course.

The criticism of a behavioural approach to research and the practice of psychology also serves to attempt to determine the boundaries that this psychology cannot cross if it does not want to go astray and roam the wilderness of irrationalism. Not only should every scientist strive to gain an awareness of the possibilities offered by the scientific method mastered and applied by them but also or – perhaps – above all, to be conscious of its limitations. Skinner (1950), a consistent behaviourist, was fully aware of these limitations and argued how inconsistent they are with one another. On the one hand, there was his scientific analysis of the behaviour of organisms and, on the other, theories, which are to allegedly explain – with the aid of that, which cannot be observed – what can be seen when studying behaviour, namely, using objects whose nature is one of a mental construct, psychoneurological or formal logic, none of which can be observed using the senses. In this context, it is also worth recommending the texts of the leading authors of behaviourism juxtaposed with the writings on classical consciousness psychology published in a book co-edited by Siuta and Krzyżewski (2000). Skinner’s science on the behaviour of
organisms in their natural living conditions, which rules such theories out, is consistently being practiced in the natural science model. However, this does not, by any means, mean that the psychology of the human mind and its development can only be practiced in such a natural science model. Nor does it imply that it should be practiced within such a model.

Why should the science on the behaviour of organisms in their natural living conditions rule out the psychology of the mind and its development? Neither Watson (1913/2000) nor any other behaviourists after him claimed that it should exclude the other. The helplessness experienced in dealing with the problems of the validity of introspection and not being able to find their conclusive solution led to Watson’s declaration of drawing away from introspection and, instead, applying the natural science model in psychological research to win immediate recognition. The promising attempts of Brentano (1874/1999) and Wundt (1897) to approach the issue of validity of introspective judgments were not been taken up by their contemporaries. The manifesto of the new science was fused with the stream of strivings of comparative and genetic psychology, taking experimental psychology with it, promising sound knowledge since grounded – just like physics and biology – in facts available to the sensory observation of every person concerned and, thanks to this, subject to intersubjective correction. At the start, behavioural psychology found itself – with the subject of its cognition – in a similar position to that, which was reached by Hume, being left with pure experience, divest of the subject and object of this experience. Human behaviour, as the behaviour of an organism in its living environment, dispossessed of the subject and object and essentially reduced to a sequence of events, becomes problematic. It is no coincidence that attempts are being made to “salvage” the subject of behaviour in this psychology (Krzyżewski, 1989).

Skinner (1971/1988) demonstrated that such ideals as human dignity and freedom can be reduced to a contingency of reinforcements of operant behaviour, and provided definitions that would explain the essence of these values in the terms of the science of the behaviour of organisms. However, all this is, is an indication that the ways in which people routinely treat these values are being set and possibly undergo transformation in every socio-cultural environment where people live, along with the relevant change in their environment. And this is what a behaviourist must content themselves with in the scientific cognizance of society and culture and their significance to the life and development of individual people. It is also worth mentioning on the sidelines that Skinner missed the fact that his fierce and compelling criticism of the hypocrisy with which people approach the ideals of freedom and dignity do not remain subjectless in the world of scientific control of behaviour.

The presented collection does not bear any systematic reference to the Vienna Circle early twentieth-century philosophers’ version of empiricism. The position taken by them is known under several names, probably most commonly as logical empiricism, and this is the name that is given to its continuation in the US after many of the prominent members of this research group emigrating there from Europe in the nineteen-thirties. We should certainly do with an analysis of the logical empiricism approach to the theory of scientific knowledge here. It was meant to replace the endless epistemological disputes with an irrefutable settlement, as Schlick (1930) promised on a tide of enthusiasm in this philosophical movement, which begun to ebb with the deepening divide between its participants from the mid nineteen-thirties.
Although logical empiricism ultimately broke up into specific arguing versions in the nineteen-fifties and lost its appeal over the next decades (Sady, 2000), it did, however, contribute to maintaining and reinforcing among philosophers the science of the rational postulate to use experience in striving for knowledge. The widespread distrust in the cognitive value of assertions before they are subject to proper intersubjective control is good proof of this (Ajdukiewicz, 1934). Although empiricism is the philosophy of science, it is hardly its only current. The critical role of logic in scientific knowledge is commonly recognised but it is not understood or practiced in the same way. The so-called Lvov-Warsaw School of Logic and Philosophy, to which the already mentioned Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz belongs, also had its own interpretations. It is characterised by great diversity (cf. Woleński, 1985, 1989, 1997) and, in its first generation, comprises the followers of Kazimierz Twardowski – Polish psychologist and philosopher, who was mentored by Franz Brentano at the University of Vienna. In fact, there were many different interactions between it and the Vienna Circle (Szaniawski, 1989). Its links to analytical philosophy should also be pointed out (Hempoliński, 1987).

Formal rigour in contemporary psychology is to be provided by statistics, which has almost become the only formal logic of empiricism for psychologists. Taking up of the idea of the so-called operational definitions of terms from the philosophising on the practice of science physicist Percy Williams Bridgman (1927), referring to the elementary atom and subatomic particle physics objects that cannot be directly observed with the senses, tremendously reinforced its dominance. It is worth reminding that measurement is a metaphor in the psychology of the mind and personality. Operational definitions of physical (natural science) quantities and their measurement using specially constructed equipment and devices is the practice of testing physical (natural science) theories.

Brentano’s ideas became attractive for another student of his, Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, who gave up mathematics for the theory of knowledge. A reference to Husserl’s work is indispensible for any future psychological investigations into logical aspects of mind. Husserl began meticulously “cleansing” his logical studies of psychology in the work Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy (1913/1967). His objective was to establish phenomenology as a science that not only is autonomous and independent of all mathematical and natural sciences or even social sciences and humanities but, most of all, as a science that moves away from the old means of practicing philosophy. What was most important to him was to “(...) awaken the understanding that reliable philosophy, the idea behind which is to bring about the concept of absolute knowledge, is rooted in pure phenomenology, and in such a serious sense that systematic and strict reasoning and the building of the first of all philosophies is a condition of all metaphysics and all other philosophy that cannot be circumvented – «which will be able to appear as a science»” (own translation) (Husserl, 1913/1967, p. 11).

The end of Husserl’s above phrase in quotation marks is characteristic of the strivings of philosophers since the nineteen-twenties to practice philosophy as a science because science has become a synonym of valuable knowledge with an assurance of certainty that rejects all uncertainty. Therefore, pure phenomenology is to provide the guidelines for reaching incontestable judgments about reality that can be experienced during the course of a philosophical study. Husserl conducted his later research on the genealogy of logic in this very spirit and that was the name he gave them.
in the sub-heading of his work *Experience and Judgment. Investigations into a Genealogy of Logic* (1939/2013). Psychological studies on the origins of the logical aspects of the mind are urgently needed, possibly drawing on the results of Husserl. However, it would be difficult to develop this postulate here. It may suffice, for the time being, to signal the importance and significance of such a future endeavour. Husserl’s genealogy of logic – rooted, in its beginnings, in pre-predicative experience and moving towards the construct of predicative thinking – brings to mind Piaget’s origins of logic in children and adolescents and other concepts in the studies of psychologists on cognitive development in the human life cycle. Such a perspective on future research coincides with the suggestions that also stem from phenomenological investigations and analyses in the field of ethical and aesthetic values.

In the meantime, the empiricist attempt at implementing the postulation of the rational use of experience raises reasonable doubts. Intersubjective control fails to sufficiently protect against irrationalism if it is not performed on the basis of the cognitive relationship between the knowing subject and the object of cognition. Aristotle himself pointed to this relationship and Brentano (1974/1999) recalled its significance and stated that “referring to something as an object” is what distinguishes the acts of the mind from all other phenomena. Admittedly, logical empiricism rightly focused on analysing concepts and language to identify the cognitive values of statements, that is, subject predicate sentences in the logical sense, whose structure corresponds to the state of things in the world and carry the properties of the objects of cognition in their meanings. Logical empiricism also failed to benefit from Brentano’s (1974/1999) indication of the need to elaborate the referential nature of all acts of the mind, particularly of cognitive acts. Twardowski (1965) and his students took up these logical and semantic analyses, founding the mentioned Lvov-Warsaw School, and ended up going in many different directions, later recognised as scientific achievements in the field of logic, epistemology and psychology.

According to logical empiricism, knowledge is growing in the sciences thanks to the rigour of methodology, as the irrational influences of pre-scientific or non-scientific preconceptions are rooted out. Thus, an analysis of language is imperative in order to clearly and explicitly identify the cognitive content of a statement because people use words to fulfil different goals and science should be cleansed of content that fulfils different functions. Hence, the emphasis on the clear definition of scientific terms.

One could go on mentioning more issues that require attention when attempting a systematic elaboration on the relationship between theory and empirical research in the scientific psychology. However, this is not what this collection of articles aims to achieve. Its goal is to revive the somewhat stifled interest in theory in psychology, particularly to pique curiosity in the relationships between theory and empirical research and to open up to the allure of psychological thought, restoring it to its former glory while boldly crossing the frontiers of established research practices, liberated from the routine of the current methodological doctrine. Thought discovers new fields to be cognised and provides the hypotheses to cover them, while experiment and observation suggest what should be left aside and what should better be rejected. Not every thought is capable of this. It has to be shaped and nurtured. This is what the overriding objective of academic training and education of psychological thought should be – releasing a mind capable of overcoming barriers and crossing the thresholds of cognizance, explaining the world better than any schemata to date.

Logic and philosophy in particular are natural partners for collaboration in the fields
of psychological studies on the mind and personality. Statistics cannot replace logic in constructing conceptual models for urgently needed psychological theories of mind and development. Indiscriminate acceptance of the epistemological doctrine of empiricism will make one blind to the real problems of the theory of knowledge, which are so critical to establishing creative collaboration between psychologists, logicians and philosophers. It is high time to once and for all do away with the illusion planted decades before Boring of the need to keep psychology away from philosophy for fear of acquiring a propensity for idle, useless speculation. In the time of the birth of psychology, both psychology and philosophy, which it has its roots in, were flourishing, and philosophy was already becoming an intensely scientific philosophy and the philosophy of science at the same time.

Here in Poland, the Poznan School of the Philosophy of the Sciences, particularly oriented towards the field of research and investigations in social sciences, focused on the methodology of these sciences. Jerzy Brzeziński, who came from this school, recently redefined his position (Brzeziński, 2012) in contrast to the studies that he dismissed. One kind of them reduce the subject of psychology to the brain and the other kind he rejects are the studies of human mind and personality with qualitative methodology.

Brzeziński examines qualitative versus quantitative research from an empiricist position, although he only selects certain programme statements of positivism in his science programme of excluding humanists from the “hard” psychological science (cf. Kołakowski, 1966). This is certainly not the place and there is no need to respond contestingly to this exclusion here. The matter should be left for another time. The writers of these words – which is also evident in the summary of Wanda Zagórska – are siding with the specificity of human psychology and, in this sense, they belong to the humanist orientation even if they do not move around in exactly one and the same stream of a multitude of theoretical ideas of philosophical and cultural anthropology, epistemology, and axiology. This orientation surely has a plethora of streams that are rooted not only in Dilthey, who as the only one has been pointed to by Brzeziński. They have been alive for quite some time in the social and humanist sciences.

There is no creative, disciplined, critical thinking where there is an absence of discourse, dispute, and a multiplicity of perspectives on and around the subject of cognition. If the presented collection contributes to inspiring discussion and work on the epistemological aspects of psychological research then it will fulfil the hopes that have been placed in it.

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REFERENCES


