The purpose of this text is both to summarize the contents of Panellists' debate and to present the author's personal point of view in the discussion. The author discusses Niemczyński’s concept of the autonomy of individual development in the aspect of the growth of the self-determining mind and cognition, as it is outlined in the volume. She points both to the advantages of this concept and to the questions that arise in connection with it. She also refers to selected topics discussed during the debate and to the particular viewpoints expressed by the Panellists, taking especially into consideration the negative effects that empiricism and positivism have on the area of psychology, the lack of important theoretical syntheses, and a great flood of detailed empirical data in developmental psychology.

The task of providing an overview of an 80-page multifaceted text/discussion is not at all easy, even precarious. Particularly that it’s Initiator not only provides a comprehensive introduction thereto but also elaborately responds to the voices of the Discussants, taking up many different threads in both cases. Thus, having abandoned ineffective attempts to provide a synthesis of this material, I have elected a less schematic and more casual and friendly option of a sixth, somewhat summarising voice, in the discussion. It doesn't merely collect the entirety of the voices so far but is a reflection in itself on certain fragments of the Panellists’ debate, perhaps provoking further discussion. I do, of course, develop the thoughts to the extent that I have fathomed the difficult issues raised in the debate. It is also worth mentioning that this discussion de facto began much earlier than during the Warsaw Conference, also by means of correspondence, which I will attempt to draw from hereunder.

AROUND ADAM NIEMCZYŃSKI’S CONCEPT OF THE AUTONOMY OF HUMAN MIND AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

I would like to point out that in this volume we not only have a discussion on the role of theory in human development research but also on the considerably outlined concept by Adam Niemczyński of the autonomy of individual development in the mind and cognition aspect. Thus, I take the statements of the Professor as an important voice of the Author of this concept. It is also from this that I will begin.

A broadly historically-underpinned criticism of empiricism and positivism can, thus,
be found in Niemczyński’s statements, remaining in direct relation to his theoretical proposal. The Author argues that it requires a different theory of cognizance to the “too narrow” empiricism that gave rise to or consolidated reductionism in psychology, which fails to differentiate between the nature of perception and the nature of the mind, and excludes intuition (in the sense of the inner perception of Macnamara, 1999) as a path to truth and ideal objects (e.g., like the experience of freedom, justice, objectively existing values, and transcendentalia, etc.). A whole array of issues relating to the human person, like, for instance, noninstrumental experiences and strivings, the need for self-actualisation, the sense-giving role of values, transcendental needs, etc., have no place in the positivist research paradigm.

The prominent Polish theorist of personalism, Maria Straś-Romanowska, wrote about these issues almost two decades ago (2000a and b), also recalling that a scepticism towards the state and style of psychological research arose in the 1970s. In the 1990s, there was already talk of a deep crisis in psychology, which was manifest in:

- A multitude of research results with relatively low predictive power and limited heuristic value;
- The monothematicity of the research, their sterility; lack of real world references;
- The shallowness and banality of research topics in relation to genuine human problems;
- Stereotypicality; the replication of old patterns and research questions;
- The triumph of form over substance; excessive procedures and techniques being applied to research problems;
- Generality and theoretical reductionism (Straś-Romanowska, 1992 & 2000a).

Has anything changed in psychology since then?

The Professor’s predications, however, centre on something slightly different: “The point is not to let oneself become encased by this limitation [empiricism], leaving important issues beyond the reach of scientific psychological research”. Concurring with this statement, I am at the same time considering what important issues we have left aside and whether or not this constitutes a problem for present-day psychologists or have they rather gone beyond them already? I agree that the frame of the prevailing research paradigm needs to be expanded and a broader understanding of the empirical sources of knowledge and their appreciation is required. I am asking, however, are researchers consciously opting for the qualitative, narrative, phenomenological paradigm reaching to the subjective world of the meanings of man, dealing with human experience, not already striving to this end? The current position that their works hold in this regard in relation to mainstream academic psychology speaks for itself (see also Opoczyńska, 1999; Krzyżewski, 2003; Ludy, 2008). Such a path is possible, however, because a researcher is a free person. Surely, they are free to choose a specific anthropology and actually do so even when they are not consciously considering it. They have a set worldview that always affects what they do in research, even if they think that this is not visible. The only problem is that they are obliged to meet today’s requirements of researchers in psychology, and the message is clear – they have to be wary that what they are doing is scientific because, after all, psychology is “hard empiricism”. Without it, there is no chance of getting into journals with high publication credit points. And this, paradoxically, becomes an end in itself.

Psychology, monstrously expanding contributory quantitative research and increasingly sophisticated statistical (mathematical) analyses, has allowed itself to be reduced to a social discipline with its questions about human behaviour in the social environment and is suspended (or torn) between being a humanistic
and a natural science. Somebody’s choices, also worldview ones, lie behind this, starting from the oldest, made in a secularised, positivist world of 19th century science, setting the path for development and the present form of psychology. It is supposed to be dealing with an averaged, surface layer of the psychosocial functioning of the human being in the world.

Today, psychology students are no longer asking where this science came from but are finding out, however, that this is how it should be practiced. The choices have already been made. What can be changed? They take psychology as they are taught, with its faith in the psychosocial paradigm and hard statistical methods as the most scientific. Sometimes even – I myself have come across this – it is the tools that become for students or PhD students the basis for formulating research problems, devoid of any in-depth reflection on the varied theoretical foundations of the planned instruments, hence, also on the specific anthropology that underpins them. After all, we too probably do not even consider the way in which we practice science or its positivist biases.

That is why the initiative to take up a discussion demanding more insightful, epistemological reflection on the issues mentioned above, is very important. This is because psychologists are more interested in how they are to conduct their research than the subject of study itself – which Dorota Czyżowska also points out. How aptly this has been put by Janusz Trempała in his statement that the Professor “sparked thought, which is the source of cognition”, and Dorota Czyżowska: “The initiative […] of committing to reflect on and around the theories of individual development and their significance in empirical research is invaluable. Considering what and how we are dealing with and where we are drawing our convictions that we are doing this well, is of utmost importance”.

The Professor sees the need and possibility (?) for change in psychology. He indicates a certain way out, although merely subtly delineating its barely visible contours. He takes advantage of the post-panel discussion plane for an exchange of thought in order present his own views on the nature of individual development, particularly of the mind. We are very grateful to the Professor for this substantively rich voice of a thinker and savant with probably many years of thought behind him. “How long have you been creating this image?”, They asked a certain prominent painter. “Ten minutes and my whole life”.

The Professor’s statements are read like a gripping book, written with erudition, in beautiful Polish, although not always easy to understand. It is multithreaded, requiring a broader understanding of psychological thought in the historical perspective, which the Author himself has. It incites reflection not only on the condition of theoretical research in developmental psychology in view of the position held by empiricism, but also on fundamental issues, which include learning the truth about the way the human mind functions. This kind of literature is scarce and hard to come by in Polish developmental psychology. It also includes the text published in the Polish Psychological Bulletin (Niemczyński, 2017) about the autonomy of the human mind and personality development. Perhaps it would be worth putting these texts together to create a whole? It is certainly a book we’re anticipating.

Coming back again to the Professor’s theoretical proposal and, with it, to the mistakes of empiricism and positivism, we can see that the concept of autonomous personality development from adolescence to late adulthood developed by him for many years (see Niemczyński, 1980, 1994, 2007), appeared here in its most recent, extended version as the concept
of self-sustainable perception and the self-determined human mind. Its initial version has now been directed to a more basic level, to the mind and cognition processes. The Author demonstrates that already on these levels we are dealing with autonomous mechanisms that cannot be reduced to biology, physiology, or acts of perception described here as self-sustainable. It is these autonomous acts of the mind, which decide on the nature of the individual mental and personality development of a person. Since, being self-determined, they completely transcend the biology and physiology of the brain, the development of the mind and personality is based – according to Niemczyński – on processes and mechanisms of an absolutely different quality (different kind) than are characteristic of the human organism. This differentiation (or theory based on this distinction) is defined here as psycho-physical dualism. On the path of demonstrating the veracity of his reasoning, the Professor uses the clarification of the constitutive characteristic of the human mind – originally indicated by Brentano (1874/1999) and developed a hundred years later by Macnamara (1999) – namely, any reference of the subject in the act of the mind to the subject of cognition.

I believe the thesis on the self-determined nature of the acts of the human mind to be true and its adoption in the theory of individual development I deem to have important consequences for science. Acts of the mind understood in this way I perceive to remain in close relationship with the acts of the human free will, which poses a serious problem for psychology (see also Trzópek, 2003; Sotwin, 2010), and without which – remaining undisputed in medicine – we wouldn’t be able to move our own hand or leg.

However, I am asking – similarly to Janusz Trempała and Jan Cieciuch – what dualism in psychology are we talking about here? Trempała explores that it is perhaps a dualism in the meaning of the “existence side by side of separate, related or opposing by nature phenomena, tendencies, principles”? Cieciuch takes the view that the Professor is thinking of a “shift from biological monism to dualism” and has doubts as to the added value of such a transition. I do not see us as succumbing on a daily basis to biological monism in developmental psychology. I rather believe that we notoriously resist it or generally have no issues whatsoever with its existence.

So far, I have come across the concept of monism in psychology in relation to human spirituality which has been redefined by psychology. For monists in this field, there is no separate spiritual layer that is distinct from the psychological layer. Dualism, on the other hand, relates acknowledging the existence of both these layers and their differentiation (see also Frankl, 1984; Straś-Romanowska, 1992; Zagórska, 2011a and b, 2012). This leads to the acknowledgement that a human being is a spiritual-psychophysical unity, and not just a psychophysical unity or whole. If I understand correctly, the Professor points to a certain kind of dualism that distinguishes the sensory from the mental, and the self-determining mind is for him the basis of the principle of the autonomy of individual development. It’s worth asking if that is all? Perhaps it’s a manifestation of something else, the free will, for example, or the spiritual sphere in the human being? Surely, it’s these very questions that contest empiricism and positivism, or neopositivism, in psychology.

In the context of demonstrating the trueness of the thesis on the self-determining mind, the Professor pinpoints empiricism as a flawed theory of scientific cognition, confused in terms of the nature of the cognition. He claims that we are tainted and restricted by it. It puts into question the value of empiricism as an experience concept and the related positivism as a scientific worldview and the philosophy of
scientific cognition. It stands in opposition to
the core theses of empiricism and positivism,
which he deems to be erring and preventing
learning the truth about the human mind and
its development in the individual human life
cycle. At the same time, restoring the balance
in psychology between theory and empiricism
– for which the remaining Panellists clearly see
the need, Niemczyński links this to the neces-
sity of moving away from empiricism (and not
– attention! – from empirical research or an
empirical approach), extending it, and going
beyond it.

I consider the reflection on the errors of
empiricism and positivism as very valuable
because it seems that contemporary psychol-
ogists and aspiring psychologists have little to
no knowledge of these flaws, and debates on
this issue in psychological circles are practical-
ly non-existent. I believe this to be connected
with, although not exclusively, the specificity of
the modern world, where historical reflections
on science are engaging very few, and the pres-
ent moment requires research psychologists
to stay afloat in the rapid empirical research
currents.

Niemczyński claims that empiricism has
donated research on development and
that the need exists to move away from it as
an inadequate concept and interpretation of
experience, since it fails to take intuition into
account. According to him, this departure is
not tantamount to embracing other than ex-
periential sources of psychological cognition.
He justifies this in detail in his “Responses to
the voices from the panel...” I consider the
Professor's statements to be convincing – they
certainly are not an invitation to abandon
empiricism, as Cieciuch understood them to
be. They advocate the appreciation of intu-
ition. Maria Czerwińska-Jasiewicz and Dorota
Czyżowska agree with this position. Cieciuch,
however, does not see empiricism and pos-
itivism as relating directly to the status quo
in the manner of practicing psychology. He
reduces the problem to the pre-eminence of
empirical contributions over the construing of
theoretical models, where such findings would
constitute the “building blocks, verifier or fal-
sifier”. Trempała, whose predication I read with
great interest, fails to see the need for psychol-
ogy to be treated for the effects of the impact
of the empiricist-positivistic worldview. I can
even see a certain kind of sentiment in this
voice for empiricism and positivism, which is
probably connected with the school in which
Professor Trempała grew up. I myself do not,
however, identify with it. Moreover, I have the
impression that Niemczyński and Trempała
have a somewhat different understanding of
this worldview.

Let us consider the practical side of the real-
isation of the Professor’s postulations. Will he
find allies for the work of treating psychology
for its misconceptions relating to the nature of
cognition? How does he intend to carry out
this treatment? What would need to be done
in practice to rid psychology of these errors?
How should it be approached? I do not know
the answers to these questions and the Profes-
sor does not furnish them either. I do think,
however, that this treatment is taking place, on
an individual level, in subsequent generations
of researchers, in their hearts and minds, to
the extent that they remain free in their con-
victions and refrain from thoughtlessly taking
up established views and patterns functioning
in science.

As far as I understand it, Professor Niem-
czyński’s concept contributes to the creation of
a new and sound theory of individual devel-
opment, the need for which has already been
raised by Czyżowska, Trempała and Cieciuch.
I do not know, however, how this theory would
translate in practice into empirical research;
what kind would they have to be? Trempała
believes that a “good” theory, which devel-
opmental psychology is in need of, has to be

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useful both in research and in social practice. Cieciuch is even more precise in this respect. As a prominent empiricist in Poland and worldwide, he proposes three conditions that a good theory should satisfy, which should be construed as a synthesis of theoretical thinking and empirical research. It is worthwhile recalling them here.

The first speaks of the need for new theoretical approaches to take into account contemporary empirical findings. Theory should be built “on” and “above” them, not “alongside” them. It should take them into consideration and, perhaps, give them new meaning. The second indicates that theory should be a “signpost for empiricists”, setting out new research paths. The point is not just that it should be empirically verifiable. The third condition states that a new theory should propose an interpretative, heuristic added value in relation to existing ones. It is to be a “better theory” and not just “yet another theory”; it is to give a “better” explanation of phenomena, and reinterpret elements of well-founded knowledge provided by empiricists.

I do not feel competent to assess the extent to which the concept outlined by Adam Niemczyński will evolve towards a “good theory” thus understood. I do see, however, that Adam Niemczyński and Jan Cieciuch represent two different worlds in their way of thinking about theory (including development theory) and its role in relation to empirical research (including research on development). These worlds show the direction in which scientific psychology is evolving. In the first world, what counts is creative thought, intuition, reflection preceding empiricism, good conceptualisation of development (e.g., personality development), giving serious consideration to the developmental processes that we are dealing with, what theory of development seems to best explain it, and what empirical data are suitable for testing the claims of this very theory. In the second world, the focus is on empirical data stemming from “hard” tools and their as-accurate-as-possible mathematical processing. Of course, there also is theoretical consideration, theoretical models, but they are full of individual, detached-from-reality, conceptual constructs held. The subject of research recedes into the background when faced with questions about tools. Cieciuch states: “Good scientific psychological research is when sound methodology is used to thoroughly screen empiricism so as to achieve a theoretical added value. Bad psychological research is such where theorising is not grounded in methodology and precise empirical findings, as well as such where empirical reports – even the most accurate – bring no theoretical added value.

Which of these two approaches actually brings psychology closer to the truth, and extends and deepens our knowledge of the human being? The future will show if psychology will prove successful without cogitators (although they will, anyhow, soon become extinct) and whether construing general theories or meta-theories is merely a temptation. Adam Niemczyński reminds us that “theory in scientific cognition is not a synthesis of scientific experiment reports” and that “experiential knowledge is not an extract (an abstractive product) from experience data”.

Theorists and theoretical thought are not valued in contemporary psychology. Frankly, there aren’t many outstanding theorists and illustrious empiricists among us. This is hardly surprising. Works that contribute any fresh insights to theories explaining individual development are few and far between. What we are dealing with here is exactly this kind of exception, which in itself is worthy of respect and appreciation. Let us make the most of what more brilliant thinkers than us are saying while we still have the time.
Let me remind the Reader that the starting point for the discussion on the role of theory in the developmental research proposed by the Professor was the decline of interest in theories noticed over the last decades in Poland and globally, particularly in individual development theories. In the situation we have found ourselves in, there is a lack of large-scale (and even medium-scale) theoretical syntheses in modern developmental psychology compared with an overproduction of detailed empirical reports. Developmental psychologists have, for many years, been functioning in such a reality. Everyone on the panel agreed with this diagnosis.

At this point, I would like to add that the decline in interest in theories is accompanied by a decrease in knowledge of developmental theories, also in the sense of their deeper understanding or of comparative abilities in this respect. Another thing that is difficult to find in modern times is the "development of theories of development".

Admittedly, it can hardly be said that the imbalance between theory and empiricism is considered to be a serious problem in psychological circles. In these spheres, we tread the fixed paths of the scientific practice of psychology which are being set out with increasing precision, mainly by American standards, to which we not only can but have to adjust to so as not to disengage from the world of science. The very nature of these requirements shapes and reinforces our thinking about the priorities in science, and the value of empirical research relative to the theoretical reflection that precedes them and concerns them. A contemporary developmental psychologist simply knows that not only do they have to carry out research on their scientific path but they have to do it in a manner that will ensure that they will ultimately get into high-ranking, English-language journals. They are also aware that it would be even harder for them to get there should they decide to publish a theoretical paper. All of this is happening in the context of earning publication points that will determine the “be or not to be” of a psychologist at a higher education institution. Scientific discussions at universities in private conversations are being replaced by interchanges on the optimisation of point-gaining and research-funding strategies. Is anyone discussing the shape and meaning of what we are doing? Are we still asking what we are inheriting in this respect?

It is in these realities of everyday academic work that the Professor wanted to create a stir in Polish developmental psychologist circles by putting the following question to them: “Why are we carrying out our research in developmental psychology in the very way that we are doing it, while hoping to understand individual psychological development?” He has prompted us to undertake an epistemological reflection and turn our attention to the role of theory in empirical research on human development. He outlined the objectives of such a discussion as:

• Acquiring greater self-awareness in research on development, and
• Demonstrating that the tendency to underestimate theory in psychological research on individual development is flawed.

He pinpointed the source of this flaw, which is the “empiricist myth stating that scientific statements and conclusions about their cognitive value come from experience”.

Have these goals been achieved?

In the case of the Panellists, they certainly have; as for the Readers of this publication – let’s hope that they have also been reached. After all, it aims to encourage a currently rare reflection on the manner in which we practice science. I believe that most modern psychologists would find it difficult to explain precisely why they are practicing psychology in this and
There Can Be No Sound Empiricism Without Serious Thought on the Human Being...

not in any other way. Not much thought is going into the historic sources of current approaches. We are grateful to Adam Niemczyński that he is leaving it here, with us, enabling us – particularly the youngest generation of psychology researchers and students – to gain greater insight into it.

It also seems that despite the visible differences between positions on specific issues, the Participants in the Discussion agree that one has to rely on theory – and a good theory at that – when conducting research on individual development. Through their statements, they show that the development of such a theory is worthwhile and that it plays an important role in empirical research. It also demonstrates that a theorising that ignores empirical input is a contribution to science that is mired in mediocrity. Theory has to stay close to empiricism.

One may ask about the issues agreed on by all. In many instances, the differences in opinions are too wide. Thus, drawing to a close, I will recall the comforting thought of Popper: “Even if parties fail to reach any agreement, they still leave the discussion wiser than before” (1998, p. 185, own translation). This will, hopefully, be the case this time too.

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NIE MA DOBREJ EMPIRII BEZ DOBREGO NAMYSŁU NAD CZŁOWIEKIEM.
GŁOS SZÓSTY, NIE TYLKO PODSUMOWUJĄCY

STRESZCZENIE

Tekst jest realizacją zamysłu podsumowania zawartości debaty Panelistów, a zarazem zabrania w niej osobistego głosu. Autorka ustosunkowuje się do, zarysowanej w tomie, Niemczyńskiego koncepcji autonomii rozwoju indywidualnego człowieka w aspekcie rozwoju samostanowiącego umysłu i poznania. Wskazuje na walory tej koncepcji i rozącące się w związku z nią pytania. Prezentuje również swój stosunek do wybranych wątków podniesionych w debacie oraz stanowisk wyrażonych przez Panelistów, odnosząc się w szczególności do negatywnych skutków empiryzmu i pozytywizmu w obszarze psychologii oraz braku ważnych syntez teoretycznych i zalewu szczegółowych danych empirycznych w psychologii rozwoju człowieka.