

UNEXPECTED CONTEXTS OF REASON AND BELIEF IN JANUSZ TREMPAŁA'S LECTURE

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Summary. Janusz Trempała (2023) identified fundamental problems for modern science, and therefore, in particular, also for psychology. Because they refer to the foundations of the rationality of science in the contemporary social context, thus going beyond the problems of psychology, the comment is also maintained in a broader discourse, referring to the European tradition of discussing fundamental issues. The comment focuses on three problems: (1) the problem of the need to justify rationality from the perspective of the heritage of European thought and the consequences of this necessity, (2) the problem of the status of (non)recognition of fact in a situation of rationality crisis and (3) the problem of pragmatic effectiveness as a rescue for weakened rationality.

Key words: science, reason, belief

Introduction

In his lecture, Janusz Trempała (2023) identified two problems related to the development of science and in particular psychology. The first is a decline in belief, in reason and science, which has many signs and social consequences, such as a kind of post-truth culture or – as Trempała calls it: “resistance to facts.” The second problem is the gaps and shortcomings in terms of the practical consequences of scientific research, and thus the usefulness of science. In the analysis of the first problem, Trempała focuses on the ontogenesis of thinking, and in the analysis of the second problem – on the epistemology of good theory. The hope shines between the lines of the text that a convincing argument for belief in science and reason would be the practical use of theory to improve human fate.

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Discussion on the main theses of the lecture

Exactly 900 years ago, Peter Abelard formulated a new method of finding the truth in his work *Sic et non* (1122/1969). There he compared contradictory statements (hence the titular statement *sic* – yes and *non* – no) of contemporary experts to demonstrate that contradictions are usually apparent because they concern only part of the truth. Following this path, since Trempała says *yes* in his speech – in the Abelardian spirit of searching for the truth – I will say possible: *no*, and what I mean here is more about looking at what *yes* hides, confronted with *no*, rather than a fully justified denial of the formulated *yes*.

My first *no* concerns what is already implied by the title itself. Of course, I understand the intellectual provocation of the title, but this provocation takes place on a certain playing field, defined by two pre-assumptions that are worth visualizing in the light of verbalization. The first of them concerns some supremacy of reason as an instance with the power of superior decision-making. The second one concerns the fact that, despite this supremacy, reason requires some justification and support. These theses seem to be contradictory and mutually exclusive. But in the Abelardian spirit, such contradictions do not necessarily mean that only one of them is true, because it also happens that – from a certain perspective – both become only partial truth. This is also the case here. The first thesis is objectively epistemological, while the second thesis is a thesis describing the psychology or sociology of beliefs and human behavior. This distinction between frames of reference is important because it determines methods of analysis and argumentation. The line of argument that seeks to justify reason in belief at the epistemological level is doomed to failure. In the European Christian tradition, the instance of reason was obvious as long as it was based on its unquestionable transcendent origin (man created in the image of God). In a sense, it was based on belief, but the belief which was obvious and unquestionable. The moment when belief in the transcendent foundations of reason ceased to be obvious and became questionable was also the fate of reason. One of the sources of modern science was Augustinian in spirit, although formulated by Anselm of Canterbury (1078/2007) *Fides quaerens intellectum* (i.e. belief seeking understanding), reflected this unquestionability of reason. Transforming this maxim into a kind of *Intellectus quaerens fidem* (i.e. reason requiring belief) is not very suitable as the foundation of empirical science (cf. Rojek, 2016). Reason in this approach is too busy with itself and validating itself to be concerned with anything else, especially the world beyond itself, the existence of which is no longer certain. Reason that needs belief in itself and looks for it is unfortunately on the road to despair because no justification will convince it. Reason, especially European reason, is after all a critical reason, as taught by Kant's philosophy (Kant, 1781/2001), growing out of the heart of the Enlightenment referred to by Trempała (2023) (cf. Adorno, Horkheimer, 1947/2010; Drozdowicz, 2019).

The situation is different when looking for the reasons why belief in reason is weakening in modern societies. It is worth considering this using the instruments of social sciences, psychology and perhaps even developmental psychology. But here I am reporting my second possible *no*. Well, Trempala (2023) identifies a phenomenon that he calls “resistance to facts.” It is supposed to consist in the fact that people – despite scientific knowledge, do not accept certain facts, succumb to pseudo-arguments and – as Trempala calls it, “deviations from rationality”. Of course, I see the problem that Trempala writes about, but I interpret it slightly differently. Well, nowadays it is not the resistance to facts that is the problem, but the nonresistance to pseudofacts, or in other words – it is not the disbelief in science that is the problem, but the belief in non-science (cf. Hood, 2005; Czech, 2015). Let us note that a kind of “resistance to facts” is what distinguishes science from other human activities. Yes, science must be resistant to (somehow understood) facts! The fact, experienced every day by several billion people around the world, that everyone sees the sun moving across the sky, is questioned by science – precisely resistant to such obvious facts – which says: that despite the obviousness of what we see, it is only an illusion. Copernicus, resistant to facts, questioned Ptolemy, not resistant to facts. In this sense, the greatness of Plato, if someone does not respect philosophy, let’s give the example of Darwin, and if someone has doubts that his thought is not sufficiently strict and precise, let’s throw Einstein’s card on the table – all this stems from the resistance to facts (Freud’s concept, of course, too, but since his work unnecessarily channels disputes based on misunderstandings, I do not use it as an example, but only mention it in brackets). Facts are understood here as obviousness, what is seen, what is understandable in itself, or as the subject of protocol sentences in the approach of philosophers from the Vienna Circle (cf. Koterski, 1998).

European rationality and science are – from the beginning and in essence – the search for a hidden structure manifested only in observable facts, which, however, turn out to be something different than they might seem. This is what it is all about – to give just two examples from the beginning and the end of history – the Platonic superiority of episteme over doxa (cf. Reale, 1996), as well as the superiority of measuring a – *nomen omen* – latent variable in factor analysis over the simple average of questionnaire items (cf. Borsboom, Mellenbergh, van Heerden, 2003). It is always about the same thing – sorting the wheat from the chaff, illusions from the truth, or in other words – controlling the measurement error.

As Popper (1935/2002) taught – finding one fact that questions a theory is more valuable than many facts confirming it because this one questioning fact allows us to decide and say that something is not true for sure, while a series of the latter closes us in a circle only possible truth, but unfortunately uncertain (cf. Ciecuch, 2008). This is why the maxim of the European scientist is Augustine’s *dubito ergo sum*, or *I doubt, therefore I am* (Augustine, 395/1953), later paraphrased by Descartes (1637/2019) to the more famous *cogito ergo sum*, or *I think, therefore I am*. But such a state of doubt is extremely demanding in terms of personality, one could even say

inhumane. It can still be endured when it concerns things unrelated to existence, but it ceases to be bearable when it concerns important things, such as life, death or other elements included – as psychologists say – in the area of the self. Human needs certainty wants to know – and this is the same root which European science and conspiracy theories grow from (cf. Czech, 2015), that Trempała (2023) cites as an example of irrationality. From an objective point of view, of course, it is reason gone astray, but from a psychological point of view – it is nothing else than... although on an unexpected field – the victory of rationality. Yes, it is un-Popperian and wrong, but – as I would like to emphasize – it grows out of the same longing.

Fact has always been a problematic issue in European thought. But nowadays, something new has appeared in addition to the traditional problem, which multiplies the existing problem. Using the categories proposed by Walter Benjamin (1968) – who, by the way, analyzed Baudelaire's poetry – I would see the essence of the contemporary problem with facts in the replacement of *Erfahrung* with *Erlebnis*. Unfortunately, these German expressions do not have Polish equivalents that would reflect the essence of the matter, but generally speaking – *Erfahrung* is an experience (and the fact is always experienced – we are in the field of psychology), which can – however – somehow be shared with another person. Even if not in the sense of Ajdukiewicz's intersubjectivity (Ajdukiewicz, 1965), then in the sense of a somehow shared community of experiences, understanding and shared obviousness, perhaps not always possible to precisely verbalize in precise categories, but still preverbally obvious – also somehow intersubjectively. *Erlebnis* – it's something completely different; it is an experience, an impression – always and only mine. Not only is it not, but in an ontological sense, it cannot be shared with anyone else. In various "talent show" competitions, jurors and experts use the "goose bumps" argument as an argument for determining the quality of a given performance and the truth of their words. They stick their arm out to the camera, showing a somatic reaction known as "goosebumps", which is proof of emotion, and this is supposed to prove quality. This is the essence of *Erlebnis* – an impression – mine, mine alone, and at the same time an unquestionable fact. The sticking hair behind the elbow is supposed to be irrefutable proof of the truth.

This understanding of fact (I repeat – new and multiplying European problems with fact) combined with rational longing are the causes of the problems identified by Trempała. Therefore, it is not "resistance to facts" (this is the virtue of a scientist), but the apotheosis of fact (unfortunately understood in the spirit of *Erlebnis*), combined with – well – the Hegelian need to live in a rationally explained world.

My third *no* does concern the proposal of the pragmatic effectiveness of a theory as a criterion of its goodness, which would also bring theory closer to the world of practice. Incidentally, the proposed replacement of classically understood truth with pragmatics seems to me to be much more threatening to European rationality, reason and science than the disbelief of current Europeans in their power. If we give up the criterion of classical truth, then every implementation, and here

consent – science should be implemented – moves to the sphere of politics and post-truth, where rhetoric and force, and not the power of argument, determine implementations, which then always become a necessity of an insufficiently justified experiment. Good and effective implementations can only be of products (models, theories) that were created not to change the world, but to understand it, to get to the way things are, i.e. search that grows from the root of the classically understood truth (cf. Ciecuch, 2021).

Apart from the above dialectical nuances, I agree with Trempała (2023) in almost everything else. There is no doubt that we have a social problem with science and reason and an internal psychological problem with theory. The above Abelardian considerations were intended to help us better understand the essence of these problems and – perhaps as a result of this understanding – act.

Post scriptum

My above comment on Janusz Trempała's lecture was one of many possible comments that could be made. In particular – I could formulate it in a different language (e.g. consistently psychological). However, I chose the form I did because I decided that one of the problems that Trempała touched on is our imprisonment in language and cognitive patterns – not so much our own, but shared with our environment, and the European reason with its *cogito*, as well as *dubito*, requires to seek an Abelardian meta-perspective.

Translated by Katarzyna Jenek

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NIEOCZEKIWANE KONTEKSTY ROZUMU I WIARY
PROF. JANUSZA TREMPAŁY

Streszczenie. Janusz Trempała (2023) zidentyfikował problemy fundamentalne dla współczesnej nauki, a w związku z tym, w szczególności, też dla psychologii. Ponieważ dotyczą one podstaw racjonalności nauki we współczesnym kontekście społecznym, wykraczając tym samym poza psychologiczny dyskurs, komentarz również utrzymany został w dyskursie granicznym, odwołując się do europejskiej tradycji dyskusji zarówno w treści, jak i formie. Komentarz skupia się na trzech problemach: (1) problem konieczności uzasadniania racjonalności z perspektywy dziedzictwa myśli europejskiej i konsekwencje tej konieczności, (2) problem statusu (nie)uznawania faktu w sytuacji kryzysu racjonalności oraz (3) problem pragmatycznej skuteczności jako ratunku dla nadwątlonej racjonalności.

Słowa kluczowe: nauka, rozum, wiara

Receipt Date: 21st August 2023

Receipt Date after correction: 15th September 2023

Print Acceptance Date: 30th September 2023