



Andrzej Lewicki: a New Psychology and an Even Newer Paradigm

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There are two main reasons that the editors of the *Avant* magazine decided to present a fragment of a book by the psychologist Andrzej Lewicki (1910–1972) to contemporary English-speaking readers.

One reason is historic. This outstanding researcher—a representative of psychology at the Lvov-Warsaw School (see Rzepa, 1997)—not only made an important contribution to Polish psychology, including clinical psychology, but his work was also on a par with contemporary world trends, and was sometimes even ahead of them. It is worth presenting these facts more widely outside the circle of Polish language users, even though the professor's work was prematurely interrupted.

The second reason looks to the future; it is related to changes in the scientific paradigm of research on cognitive processes. Both the general theoretical framework of Lewicki's works and some of his discoveries and theses seem to be extremely close to the assumptions of so-called cognitive ecology, a contemporary perspective that is also rooted in the past, especially in early research in ecological psychology.

Let us go back to history for a moment. We know quite a lot about the life and work of Andrzej Władysław Tadeusz Lewicki. Born in Lwów, after graduating from local high school he simultaneously studied Polish studies and psychology at Lwów University. The university offered him a chance to listen to some of the greatest Polish lecturers and scholars, such as Kazimierz Twardowski, Roman Ingarden and Leon Chwistek. Lewicki was also an assistant lecturer at the Department of Psychology of LU under Mieczysław Kreutz, a post which also involved teaching duties, which hereafter always constituted a part of his work. In 1945 at the Catholic University of Lublin

he defended his doctoral thesis, which combined his interests in literature and psychology. He then became an adjunct professor (and later the Deputy Head of the Department of Psychology) at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, where he moved with his wife. Almost at the same time he was hired by the Outpatient Clinic of the Mental Hygiene Institute, where his interest in clinical psychology was awakened.

As pointed out by his daughter Maria Lewicka and Helena Sęk (2009)⁵, he faced there quite a difficult time in the field of Polish psychology. On the one hand, there was a need to improve the standard of Polish education and research, both of which had fallen behind the West due to the Second World War. On the other hand, there were ideological pressures and prohibitions, such as a ban on using diagnostic tests. In reaction to that, Lewicki developed other diagnostic techniques such as clinical observation, thus initiating basic research in clinical psychology (pp. 12–13).

In the early 1950s Lewicki obtained his *habilitacja* post-doctoral degree and started work at the University of Poznań in the Department of Psychology. In 1960 he was awarded the title of associate professor for his book *Procesy poznawcze i orientacja w otoczeniu* [*The Cognitive Processes and Orientation in the Environment*] (1960), a translated chapter of which is presented in this issue (Lewicki, 2016). Lewicki also became head of the Department of Clinical Psychology (the first such unit in Poland). In the following years he worked in Poznań and Toruń (at the university and as a consultant at the Voivodeship Mental Health Outpatient Clinic). During these years the professor's output was prolific. Besides his own research publications, he became the editor and co-author of the first Polish textbook on clinical psychology. He was also working on a textbook of penitentiary psychology which was interrupted by his untimely death.

Lewicki's research in the 1950s clearly evolved: the requirements of clinical psychology and the neurophysiological fundamentals of Ivan Pavlov's work began to play an important role. Lewicka and Sęk point out that this scholar was slightly ahead of the research conducted abroad (unheard of in Poland at the time): based on the ideas of Ach, Aveling and Hull, he adapted to his needs the technique of "artificial language" and proposed an original method of learning artificial concepts (2009, pp. 13–14). Lewicki carried out an in-depth analysis of and commented on the works of Pavlov, interpreting them in a way that differed from the approach common at that time (1955; 1960, pp. 59–90). He treated the domain of psychology as a science dealing

⁵ The editors and authors of the introduction to the anthology of Lewicki's work, entitled *Między humanistyką a przyrodoznawstwem. Od podstaw psychologii do eksperymentalnej psychologii klinicznej* [*Between humanities and natural science. From basics of psychology to experimental clinical psychology*] (2009), on which I largely base this part of my introduction.

with mechanisms governing human behavior, including topics from both life sciences and humanities (see Lewicka and Sęk, 2009, p. 22). He described behavior as “an action through which the organism regulates its relation with the environment” (Lewicki, 1969, p. 21).

Lewicki’s main aim was to study human cognitive processes, understood as an element of man’s adaptation to his social environment (Lewicka and Sęk, 2009, pp. 14–15). It appears that the importance of this task can be demonstrated not only by Lewicki’s achievements but also by the contemporary panorama of studies and problems within cognitive sciences, with significant input from psychology. In the 1990s there were already clearly perceivable attempts to, on one hand, break away from the internalistic approach to cognitive processes (cognitive “intracranialism”) and, on the other hand, to study the environmental (including socio-cultural) situating of these processes. These tendencies can be connected from the perspective of so-called cognitive ecology.

One can distinguish two separate trends of cognitive ecology. The first is a combination of mainstream cognitive sciences (mainly neuroscience) with evolutionary ecology (see Dukas and Ratcliffe, 2009). The second clearly takes into account the socio-cultural nature of human cognition. For its theoretician Edwin Hutchins (2010), cognitive ecology includes the sciences that study cognitive phenomena in their context, understood as a multi-level physical, biological, social and cultural eco-niche. He indicates three historical approaches important for cognitive ecology: Lev Vygotsky and others’ cultural-historical activity theory, Gregory Bateson’s ecology of mind, and James Gibson’s ecological psychology. In the context of Lewicki’s work, it is worth paying particular attention to this last approach. As Hutchins notes, from the perspective of Gibsonian psychology, psychological processes ought to be understood in terms of the dynamic coupling between the animal (agent) and its environment. For this purpose, Gibson (1966, 1979) introduces a category of affordance that is somewhat controversial to this day. Affordances are relational action possibilities provided for acting animals by objects in their environment; they are what a given environment “offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill” (Gibson 1979, p. 127).

It is interesting how Lewicki (1960) coped with similar challenges which are defined today in the context of cognitive ecology. The researcher treated the cognitive processes of animals or humans as a mechanism that controls their behavior. “Understanding” is replaced here by the term “orientation in the environment”. This orientation consists of the orientation in value and the orientation in action that are possible thanks to indications of value

and indication pointing to action that are present in the environment. Generally speaking, an “external situation, or its component that constantly accompanies the performance of a movement and that is reinforced with it, constitutes the indication pointing to the action that must be performed in order to obtain this value”. (Lewicki, 1960, p. 177 / Lewicki, 2016, p. 65) The reader can become familiar with the exact analysis of these mechanisms in the translation presented in this issue (Lewicki, 2016). One can wonder whether Lewicki did not sketch out here an alternative to Gibson's approach to agent-environment coupling—a clearer account which would satisfy critics of Gibson's theory of affordance.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning an issue that is absent in the translation we are publishing: I mean here the socio-cultural dimension of the human environment. Lewicki emphasizes that we should consider a man in a relationship not in some abstract space, but in his own environment, here and now. At the same time, the specifics of the socio-cultural environment of people are determined not only by the fact that they have to deal mainly with artifacts, but also—especially—with demands placed on the individual by a given society. However, regardless of the specificity of the cultural needs of a human being, they can still be considered in terms of adaptation to the environment (Lewicki, 1960, pp. 186-194).

A cursory and biased (especially against Pavlov as inspiration) overview of Lewicki's ideas may lead to an accusation of a certain reductionism. However, careful reading of his precise, critical reasoning, which was strongly aware of the limitations of the research at the time and the need for its development, should in my opinion lead to the reception of his works as being harmoniously embedded between humanities and natural science, in accordance with the author's own research ideals.

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