

Albert Bazala on the Philosophy and Psychology of Wilhelm Wundt*

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Summary

This paper explores the understanding of Wilhelm Wundt's (1832–1920) philosophy and psychology in the thought of Croatian philosopher Albert Bazala (1877–1947), who spent part of his postdoctoral training at Wundt's laboratory of experimental psychology in Leipzig. Following an "Introduction" that provides a brief overview of Bazala's biography, the central section of the article presents his interpretation of Wundt's philosophy and psychology. In the concluding remarks, it is argued that, in Wundt's view, philosophy unifies all other sciences, thereby fulfilling both the metaphysical and rational human drives to comprehend reality in its entirety. Bazala emphasizes Wundt's acknowledgement of psychology's significant role within the system of particular sciences, granting it a special position, given that the subject of knowledge is simultaneously its object.

Keywords: Albert Bazala, experimental psychology, Croatian philosophy, voluntarism, Wilhelm Wundt

Introduction

Albert Bazala (Brno, 1877–Zagreb, 1947) was a Croatian philosopher and public intellectual. Born in Moravia, he grew up and received his education

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in Croatia. He earned his doctorate at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, where he later served as professor and dean. He was also active in politics and, for a time, served as a member of the Croatian Parliament.

During his academic career, Bazala pursued further studies in Germany, spending time in Munich, Jena, and Leipzig. The latter city is especially relevant to the subject of this paper, as it was home to the first laboratory of experimental psychology, founded and led by Wilhelm Wundt (Neckerau, 1832–Grossboten, 1920). Bazala met Wundt personally and took part in the work conducted in his laboratory.¹

The turn of the 20th century was marked by the rise of positivism, influenced by thinkers such as Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer. Positivism advanced the idea that, following its theological and metaphysical stages, science must progress to a positive, empirical stage, one that presupposes a different metaphysical and semantic framework of reality. In this view, phenomena were no longer explained by reference to supernatural entities or abstract natural forces, but through the discovery of lawful, “mechanical” relations.²

At the same time, however, metaphysically oriented philosophies such as phenomenology emerged, while classical German idealism was gradually losing its predominance over the German-speaking world. Each of these philosophical trends introduced its own epistemological and axiological framework, that is, its own set of criteria for what should be regarded as true and valuable.

In the Introduction to the sixth book of the third volume of his *Povijest filozofije* [*History of Philosophy*], which addresses more contemporary philosophical systems of the time, Bazala himself notes:

„It is a difficult task to present, in even a roughly coherent overview, the vast multitude of thinkers of the 19th century who came after the great systems and were influenced by them. The reason for this lies in the fact that, from the beginning of the past century to the present day, cultural circumstances have become immensely complex, such that every individual and nation now stands, more than ever before, not only under the various influences of their immediate environment, but also under those coming from the most distant parts of the world.“³

¹ Cf. Franjo Zenko, “Albert Bazala”, in *Novija hrvatska filozofija* [*Modern Croatian Philosophy*], Franjo Zenko (ed.) (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1995), p. 198.

² Cf. Vladimir Filipović, “Pozitivizam” [“Positivism”], in *Filozofijski rječnik* [*Philosophical Dictionary*] (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice Hrvatske, 1984), p. 257.

³ Albert Bazala, *Povijest filozofije* [*History of Philosophy*], vol. 3 (Zagreb: Globus, 1988), p. 197.

Bazala notes that this was a time of numerous intellectual trends that led to social, normative, and paradigmatic changes. Education and scientific discoveries were becoming increasingly accessible and “global”, yet in each nation, they developed in distinct and unique ways.

The historical events and cultural atmosphere of the period also shaped Wundt’s thought, which Bazala, in the chapter titled “Obnovljenje idealizma” [“The Renewal of Idealism”] places alongside that of Hermann Lotze (1817–1881), Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–1887), Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906), and Rudolf Eucken (1846–1926).

Bazala deals most thoroughly with Wundt’s philosophy in his text “Wilhelm Wundt,” included in the third volume of his *History of Philosophy*, which was originally published in 1912 and reissued in 1988 by the Zagreb-based publisher Globus. In this work, Bazala discusses Wundt’s biography, the historical context of his intellectual development, and his understanding of philosophy and psychology.⁴

Bazala also mentions Wundt in his article “Psihologički eksperiment u nauci i obuci” [“The Psychological Experiment in Science and Teaching”], published in *Nastavni vijestnik* [*Teaching Bulletin*] in 1906. In this article, Bazala presents Wundt’s experimental method as a valuable tool in school pedagogy—one that trains students in independent reasoning based on actual, observed facts.⁵

In *Nastavni vijestnik*, Bazala later published an article entitled “Wilhelm Wundt”. The article appeared eight years after the chapter from *History of Philosophy*, following Wundt’s death. In this piece, Bazala again addresses Wundt’s philosophy and psychology, but his interpretation is here marked by greater structure and maturity.⁶

In the first section of this paper, I will briefly present Bazala’s biography and the fundamental characteristics of his philosophy. The following two sections will address Wundt’s philosophy and psychology as interpreted by Bazala.

The aim of this article is to examine how Bazala understood Wundt’s philosophy and psychology, as well as their inherent interconnection. This paper does not attempt to assess the objectivity or validity of Bazala’s interpretation in light of later research in experimental psychology or Wundt’s thought.

⁴ Albert Bazala, “Wilhelm Wundt”, in *Povijest filozofije* [*History of Philosophy*], vol. 3 (Zagreb: Globus, 1988), pp. 251–257.

⁵ Albert Bazala, “Psihologički eksperiment u nauci i obuci” [“The Psychological Experiment in Science and Teaching”], *Nastavni vjesnik: Časopis za srednje škole* [*Teaching Bulletin: Journal for High Schools*], 14/9–10 (1906), pp. 654–661.

⁶ Albert Bazala, “Wilhelm Wundt”, *Nastavni vjesnik* 29/1–2 (1920), pp. 11–15.

1. *Albert Bazala*

Albert Bazala was a Croatian philosopher whose most productive intellectual work was accomplished in the early 20th century.

In 1900, he earned his doctorate in philosophy at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb, with a dissertation titled *The Psychological Science of Apperception*. It was defended under Franjo Marković (1845–1914), the first professor of philosophy at the reestablished University of Zagreb.⁷ After completing his habilitation at the same faculty, earning him the title of *privatdozent*, Bazala went to Germany for further academic training. He spent time in Munich, Jena, and Leipzig.⁸

It is also worth noting that Bazala authored a psychology textbook in which he defined psychology as a science, drawing on the ideas of German philosopher Johann Friedrich Herbart.⁹

However, his life's mission was not confined to scholarship; he was actively committed to inculcating philosophical thinking into society, that is, to directing the “will of the people” toward a more complete and meaningful improvement and goal:

“Philosophical enthusiasm thus permeates the entirety of life, compels the conceptual illumination of the paths and aims of human endeavor, and ultimately leads to the formulation of articulated views into a rounded, as harmonized as possible, image of being and human existence.”¹⁰

For this reason, philosophy, politics, and culture form an integral whole, with the concrete life of the people as their bearer.¹¹

Bazala's philosophical thought has been described as “voluntarist activism”. The will is the foundational principle of our thinking and acting, and one must consider its conditioned and shaped nature: “The will thus always strives

⁷ Cf. “Bazala, Albert”, in *Hrvatska enciklopedija* [*Croatian Encyclopedia*] (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 1999), p. 670.

⁸ Cf. Zenko, “Albert Bazala”, p. 198.

⁹ Cf. Ivana Skuhala Karasman, “Bazalino razumijevanje snova” [“Bazala's Understanding of Dreams”], *Radovi Zavoda za znanstveni rad Varaždin* [*Papers of the Institute for Scientific Research Work in Varaždin*], 23 (2012), pp. 401–402.

¹⁰ Albert Bazala, *Filozofijska težnja u duhovnim životu: Od pada apsolutizma ovamo* [*Philosophical Striving in Spiritual Life: Since the Decline of Absolutism*] (Zagreb: p. o. Obzor, 1936), p. 4.

¹¹ Cf. Ljerka Schiffler, “Filozofijsko nastojanje Alberta Bazale” [“Albert Bazala's Philosophical Work”], *Prilozi za istraživanje hrvatske filozofske baštine* [*Contributions to the Research of Croatian Philosophical Heritage*], 14/1–2 (27–28) (1988), p. 106.

toward some purpose, some act; unlike reason which, as we have seen before, reduces everything to the static.”¹² Taking the will into account is therefore essential for understanding the current condition of both the individual and society, as well as for orienting future action.

2. *Bazala's Reflections on Wundt's Thought*

A significant feature of nineteenth-century developments in the humanities was the division between psychology and philosophy. This separation arose from a pronounced decline of interest in metaphysics and, particularly in Germany, as a reaction against the overwhelming dominance of speculative thought. Psychology sought to establish itself as a strictly empirical science. At first, however, it struggled to maintain recognition within the broader framework of the natural sciences and was often treated as a specialized branch of physiology or general biology. Consequently, thinkers engaged with psychological themes increasingly abandoned the traditionally philosophical, deductive method and turned instead toward experimental research.¹³

Although Wilhelm Wundt is regarded as the founder of experimental psychology, Bazala observed that philosophy and psychology, while distinct and deserving recognition as independent scientific disciplines, nevertheless continue to permeate one another. Moreover, when conceived as an experimental science, psychology occupies a particular position within the natural sciences. For this reason, his approach allows philosophy and psychology to be seen—and ought to be seen—as separate yet complementary fields of inquiry.

2.1. *Bazala on Wundt as a Philosopher*

Wundt's philosophical thought is situated on an axis grounded in the experimental method, yet it ultimately aims to fulfill a metaphysical aspiration—the human need for a comprehensive understanding of reality.

Philosophy is rooted in experience and must establish firm connections with the particular sciences, but the metaphysical aspiration it expresses goes beyond them. In other words, philosophy is a general science that synthesizes

¹² Ivan Restović, “Umjereni iracionalizam Alberta Bazale” [“Albert Bazala's Moderate Irrationalism”], *Prilozi za istraživanje hrvatske filozofske baštine* 48/1(95) (2022), p. 200.

¹³ Cf. Luka Boršić, Ivana Skuhala Karasman, “Odvajanje psihologije od filozofije na primjeru Gjuro Arnolda,” [“The Separation of Psychology from Philosophy in the Example of Gjuro Arnold”] in *Filozofijsko djelo Gjuro Arnolda* [*The Philosophical Work of Gjuro Arnold*], Berislav Podrug (ed.) (Sisak: Ogranak Matice hrvatske u Sisku, 2024), pp. 77–78.

the insights of the particular empirical sciences into an irrefutable system (*neporiječni sustav*).¹⁴ This is not a purely speculative system, but a unified worldview that enables a holistic grasp of reality.¹⁵ The primary function of philosophy, therefore is to integrate the general knowledge of the particular sciences into a systematic whole. Although this system arises from the particular sciences, it simultaneously transcends and logically organizes them.¹⁶

Bazala's understanding of Wundt's philosophy can be summarized in four main points:

1. it provides a general worldview—a kind of “metaphysical foundation”;
2. it responds to the demands of reason as well as to the needs of the heart;
3. it is scientific in character, meaning it finds its origin in the particular sciences;
4. it reflects all other cultural aspirations, while simultaneously exerting an influence upon them.¹⁷

From this, one can conclude that Wundt's philosophy concerns concrete, lived reality, that is, both the objective and subjective experience of reality. Such an understanding of philosophy undoubtedly influenced Bazala himself, who conceives it as a discipline that enables the integration of the entirety of life experience and its embodiment in culture and the ultimate orientation of human action:

“According to the differentiated forms of conscious activity, it is a factor of integration, which directs the individual forms back to the totality of life from which they have emerged and in which, even if they have developed independently, they ultimately find their destination. In this relationship, the philosophical function places them into mutual balance, seeking the most fulfilling position for the feeling of life in the full and complex expression of the spirit, in the harmonious composition of the meaning of theoretical striving, imaginative production, emotional dispositions, and practical attitudes; in the unity of the ideals of truth, beauty, and goodness, in which the meaning and value of human endeavor is reflected, and also human happiness and his sanctification.”¹⁸

One of the main functions of philosophy, both for Bazala and for Wundt, is the unification of knowledge garnered from the particular sciences, which philosophy organizes into a coherent, comprehensive whole. Wundt extends

¹⁴ In Bazala's philosophy, the term irrefutable (*neporječno*) is used to denote something that cannot be denied because it is logically consistent. Cf.: Bazala, *Povijest filozofije*, vol. III, p. 368.

¹⁵ Cf. Bazala, “Wilhelm Wundt”, 1988, p. 252.

¹⁶ Cf. Bazala, “Wilhelm Wundt”, 1920, pp. 12–13.

¹⁷ Cf. Bazala, “Wilhelm Wundt”, 1988, p. 252.

¹⁸ Bazala, *Filozofska težnja u duhovnom životu Hrvatske: Od pada apsolutizma ovamo*, p. 4.

this philosophical function to psychology as well, which Bazala considers of great importance for understanding Wundt's philosophical system.¹⁹ Although this is when psychology began its separation from philosophy—and although Wundt is regarded as the first psychologist and the founder of experimental psychology—it is important to keep in mind that he still perceived psychology as intimately tied to philosophy, as Bazala himself points out.

2.2. Bazala on Wundt as a Psychologist

Through his psychological approach, Wundt had a profound impact on science in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, in Central Europe, and beyond. This is attested by Bazala's statement in *Nastavni vjesnik*:

“A lively movement developed around experimental psychology, especially in the 1870s, when Wundt established his initially private psychological laboratory and began conducting experiments with a few of his students and assistants. As interest in psychological experimentation continued to grow, there arose a need for a journal in which the results of that work could be collected and presented to the world (thus *Philosophische Studien* came into being). The university administration eventually took over the institute, and thus Leipzig became home to the first ‘institute for experimental psychology.’ Soon, psychological institutes modeled after Wundt's began to spread across the world, and today, outside the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, there is hardly a major university without a psychological laboratory; in Austria, only Graz has one.”²⁰

It is therefore not surprising that Bazala was interested in Wundt and experimental psychology. Bazala thus points out that, through experimental observation, psychology gained a concrete foundation for its knowledge and reasoning. As a result, its insights were no longer constructed from the speculative concept of the soul, to which mental states had to conform, but instead relied on a method rooted in experience, that is, in observation, albeit of a different kind than in, for example, physics.²¹ Such an approach established a new epistemological framework that permeated the further development of psychology as a scientific discipline distinct from philosophy. According to Wundt, it became “the science of inner experience.”²²

The emphasis is placed on experience, but one based on introspection, that is, observation of the self, as a legitimate experimental method. The purpose

¹⁹ Cf. Bazala, “Wilhelm Wundt”, 1988, p. 253.

²⁰ Bazala, “Psihološki eksperiment u nauci i obuci”, p. 733.

²¹ Cf. Bazala, p. 655.

²² Cf. Bazala, “Wilhelm Wundt”, 1988, p. 253.

of experiment was to make self-observation scientific, which was achieved through controlled conditions and measurement.²³

Within the branching system of particular sciences from which Wundt's scientific philosophy emerges, psychology occupies a central position. It stands at the intersection between the natural sciences and the sciences of the mind (or spirit). The results of its inquiry encompass both the object (physicality, nature) and the subject (spiritual or psychological nature), and are derived from the "facts of consciousness," which Wundt breaks down into two components: *content* and *experience*. Content refers to the reflection of the object in consciousness, while experiences are the very acts of consciousness. The task of psychology is to present experiences in a causal relationship, through the analysis of the facts of consciousness.²⁴

It is also important to emphasize that observation and experimental observation are not synonymous. Observation alone is insufficient, since psychological phenomena change rapidly. Experimental observation therefore gives us the opportunity to observe psychological phenomena from beginning to end, measuring their intensity, duration, scope, and strength. Furthermore, psychological experiments do not primarily seek physiological causes, although such causes may still be helpful.²⁵

Bazala notes that Wundt, in order to illustrate the relationship between mental and physical phenomena, that is, to interpret the connection between mind and body in humans, employed the theory of psychophysical parallelism. This theory points to the fact that certain states we observe on the physical level correspond to specific elements in psychological perception. However, this parallelism should not be understood metaphysically, that is, as two sides of a single origin, nor should it be seen as absolute, in the sense that the entirety of human experience could be interpreted equally from both psychological and natural-scientific perspectives. The theory rests on the assumption that there is only one experience, but which can be approached from two viewpoints: that of the object, and of the subject. The first viewpoint belongs to the domain of the natural sciences, while the second belongs to psychology. There exists a correlation between the two, which is significant but not absolute. Thus, Bazala emphasizes that this parallelism should be regarded as a working theory, not as something of absolute validity.²⁶

²³ Cf. Bazala, p. 254.

²⁴ Cf. Bazala, "Wilhelm Wundt", 1920, p. 13.

²⁵ Cf. Bazala, "Psihologički eksperiment u nauci i obuci", p. 658.

²⁶ Cf. Bazala, "Wilhelm Wundt", 1988, pp. 253–254.

However, Bazala was aware of the problems that could arise from using this method and offered a critical perspective on psychological experimentation as a means of turning psychology into a science. The main issue lies in the fact that the psychological phenomena of the subject are reflected in relation to their own experiences and beliefs. Thus, it is particularly important to bear in mind that observations and conclusions about others inevitably involve analogical judgment.

This underscores Bazala's awareness of the complexity of the human psyche:

“It is indeed difficult to observe mental phenomena within oneself due to their rapid nature, and on the other hand, the levels of individuality are such that mere observation does not allow us to determine what, in the phenomena we observe within ourselves, is universally human and what is uniquely our own. The shortcomings and difficulties of self-observation, that is, introspection, are so great that even observation cannot overcome them. Not only is this process indirect, but self-observation becomes the very key to interpreting phenomena; consequently, all the errors and limitations of introspection are also introduced into the observation of others. Since we do not see the mental phenomena of others directly, but only their physiological or physical correlates, we project onto them experiences known from our own inner life. In others, we see ourselves; in ourselves, we see others. As a result, every observation of others is necessarily an analogical judgment, based on perceived physiological processes or movements in the other person and on our own self-observation. For this reason, only a deep understanding of one's own mental life can lead to a valid understanding of others: no one can truly know people unless they truly know themselves.”²⁷

The second problem that Bazala refers to above can be understood as the issue arising from the fact that mental, or psychic, life is a process rather than a collection of objects that can be observed statically. For this reason, Wundt introduces the concept of voluntaristic psychology, which rests on the will as the primary driver of mental processes. The soul merely integrates events.²⁸ It does not possess its own substantiality but is rather an act that exists only within the concrete unfolding of consciousness.²⁹

Ultimately, Bazala returns to Wundt as a philosopher. His notion of perpetual becoming extends to all of reality. Nature is also encompassed by the idea of constant activity, which then gives rise to what we perceive as substances. Thus, nature does not consist of actual substances: they are merely an illusion,

²⁷ Bazala, “Psihologički eksperiment u nauci i obuci”, p. 656.

²⁸ Cf. Bazala, “Wilhelm Wundt”, 1988, pp. 254–255.

²⁹ Cf. Bazala, “Wilhelm Wundt”, 1920, p. 14.

but of numerous units of will. Through their unification, these units form matter, or physical substances that are devoid of consciousness. A higher level is represented by plants, which lack central consciousness, and animals, which possess it. However, self-consciousness emerges only in humans. Individual wills as smaller, distinct unities make up the general will, which gives rise to law, language, customs, and the state. Therefore, Bazala notes that Wundt's sociology is referred to as *Völkerpsychologie*, or the psychology of peoples.³⁰

Conclusion

Wundt highlighted the distinctiveness of psychology within the context of the modern understanding of science, as well as its close connection to philosophy, from which it originally emerged. Psychological research is grounded in the experimental method, which on the one hand points to a real, empirical foundation for psychological inquiry, and on the other, to the specific nature of its approach to human beings and reality. In other words, psychology after Wundt is no longer based on speculative notions, such as the concept of the soul, but rather on concrete, real data, that is, on experimental observation. It is now grounded in actual phenomena perceived in the subject as their bearer. For this reason, it is essential to distinguish psychological experiments from, for example, physical experiments. While the latter deal exclusively with matter, that is, with the object, the psychological experiment has the subject as its "object" of investigation.

The observation and investigation of psychological phenomena presupposes not only a knowledgeable scientist, but also a subject or subjects of research that are capable of distinguishing and carefully observing the psychological phenomenon within themselves.

Furthermore, it also requires specific measurements and a controlled environment. For this reason, laboratories for experimental psychology were essential to conducting such research, the most notable being Wundt's laboratory in Leipzig. Bazala spent time there as well and grew to regard the psychological experiment as a valuable contribution to the study of mental phenomena.

For Bazala, the value of the psychological experiment also lies in its didactic role, as a meaningful approach or tool that enables students to independently perceive a psychological phenomenon and draw their own conclusions about it. However, there are challenges that arise in this kind of observation. Psychological phenomena change very rapidly, and even when we manage to

³⁰ Cf. Bazala, "Wilhelm Wundt", 1988, pp. 255–256.

observe them, it is difficult to draw conclusions, as the process of observation and inference is almost always indirect. Observers of a psychological phenomenon tends to interpret it analogously, based on their own experience, attitudes, and belief system.

Although it no longer arises from a speculative, philosophical concept of the soul, experimental psychology does not eliminate philosophy. According to Wundt, philosophy is fundamentally scientific in nature, grounded in the general findings of individual sciences, but it is also a general discipline and a worldview, an outlook on life through which human metaphysical longing for a comprehensive understanding of reality is expressed. Therefore, in both Wundt and Bazala, philosophy points to concrete reality, and also reflects cultural and normative aspirations from which it is built, while simultaneously influencing them.

Albert Bazala o filozofiji i psihologiji Wilhelma Wundta

Sažetak

U članku se obrađuje shvaćanje filozofije i psihologije Wilhelma Wundta (1832. – 1920.) u misli hrvatskog filozofa Alberta Bazale (1877. – 1947.), koji je dio svojeg docentskog usavršavanja proveo u njegovom laboratoriju eksperimentalne psihologije u Leipzigu. Nakon »Uvoda« u kojem navodim njegov kratki životopis, u središnjem poglavlju donosim Bazalinu interpretaciju Wundtove filozofije i psihologije. Na kraju članka zaključujem da u Wundtovo misli filozofija objedinjuje sve ostale znanosti i time zadovoljava čovjekovu metafizičku, ali i racionalnu težnju za spoznajnim obuhvaćanjem stvarnosti kao cjeline. Bazala naglašava da Wundt upućuje na veliku važnost psihologije u kontekstu pojedinačnih znanosti, gdje ona zauzima posebno mjesto jer je subjekt koji ujedno spoznaje i njezin objekt.

Ključne riječi: Albert Bazala, eksperimentalna psihologija, hrvatska filozofija, voluntarizam, Wilhelm Wundt

