

Kazimierz Twardowski: Masters of Our Time*

Izydora Dąmbska

I belong to a dying generation of direct students of Kazimierz Twardowski who, to the best of our abilities and capabilities, strive to continue a certain style of philosophizing and a certain style of work adopted from him. However, regardless of this, it seems to me that Twardowski's influence – so strong during his lifetime – still somehow persists in Poland. Perhaps through his students' students, or perhaps through a spiritual model preserved in what he created. Furthermore, I think we need this influence. But to notice and understand it, one has to know what Twardowski aimed for when in 1895, as a 28-year-old professor, he took over the Chair of Philosophy in Lvov, until he died in the same city in 1938.

Therefore, in these dozen or so minutes that the organizers of today's meeting have given us, I would like to recall certain aspects of Twardowski's activity that seem essential. Twardowski set himself the task of creating a scientific style of philosophizing in Poland by practising, with the help of rigorous research methods, those branches of philosophy that belong to science. He aimed to clearly delineate boundaries, through the application of the postulate of clarity and justifiability of claims, where in philosophical investigations scientific work ends and the profession of faith begins. This postulate of practising philosophy scientifically had nothing to do with the materialism popular in the second half of the 19th century in some circles of philosophizing natural scientists, and it also differed in many respects from the anti-metaphysical assumptions of positivism. Twardowski believed that metaphysical views and systems satisfy the deep need of the human mind for a comprehensive, coherent view of the world and man's place in the world. However, they cannot claim to be science. With the development of specific sciences, certain concepts taken by these sciences from meta-

* I. Dąmbska, *Kazimierz Twardowski. Mistrzowie naszego czasu*, "Znak" 1969, Vol. 27, Nos. 7/8, pp. 885–888.

physics are indeed scientifically elaborated, and thanks to this, the metaphysical view of the world will gradually come closer to the postulated scientific view of the world. But it will only ever get closer to it because such a developmental process will never come to an end. This results from both the nature of scientific cognition and the nature of our minds.

Putting forward the postulate of the scientific practice of philosophy, Twardowski fought for the clarity and precision of philosophical statements and their proper justification. He wanted to prepare researchers for this type of work by organizing philosophical studies appropriately. According to Twardowski, the study of philosophy should be preceded by "preparatory work consisting in acquiring knowledge of scientific methods in the field of special sciences," encompassing both empirical and a priori methods of science. "And whoever says – writes Twardowski – that this way demands too much from a philosopher, let him remember that philosophy gives man so much that it has the right to demand a lot from him, almost too much."¹

What are these gifts of philosophy? According to Twardowski, practising philosophy is not just about solving certain theoretical problems. It is also a path of deepening and improving moral character, a path to internal independence and self-mastery. To be a philosopher is not only to realize certain intellectual values but also moral ones. Twardowski had in mind the ideal of an ancient sage, modelled on the figure of Socrates. And he had something of Socrates in himself: in his passion for teaching, in his postulates of linguistic precision, in his fight against relativism, and in the uncompromisingly absolutist conception of ethics.

In the first period of his activity in Lvov, that is, until the outbreak of World War I, Twardowski created the organizational framework for his work at the University. He organized the first philosophical seminar in Poland, equipped with a beautiful library (incidentally, he moved his own library to the university and made it available to students), founded a laboratory of experimental psychology, and took care of the Philosophical Circle Academic Reading Room. During this period, he educated four generations of students, among whom were future professors of philosophical sciences at universities in Poland, such as Jan Łukasiewicz, Tadeusz Czeżowski, Władysław Witwicki, Tadeusz Kotarbiński,

¹ K. Twardowski, *O przygotowaniu naukowym do filozofii* [On Scientific Preparation for Philosophy], in: K. Twardowski, *Rozprawy i artykuły filozoficzne*, Lwów 1927, pp. 194 f.

Stanisław Leśniewski, Zygmunt Łempicki, Stefan Błachowski, Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, Zygmunt Zawirski, to list just a few well-known names.

As philosophical life in Lvov developed, the need to expand his organizational framework grew. On the 100th anniversary of Kant's death, on 12 February 1904, the first Polish Philosophical Society began its activities, initiated by Twardowski and chaired by him until his death. In his inaugural speech, Twardowski expressed his philosophical attitude by saying: "The Polish Philosophical Society will not serve any philosophical position exclusively, as it wants to encompass all positions. It wants to be free from any one-sidedness, striving to be as comprehensive as possible. The only dogma of the Society will be the belief that dogmatism is the greatest enemy of all scientific work. We want all directions of work and philosophical views in our Society 'to aim toward one goal: to reveal the truth.' Towards this, the path is scientific criticism."² In 1911, Twardowski began to edit and publish "Ruch Filozoficzny" [Philosophical Movement], a journal informing about philosophical life in Poland and abroad. Both the Polish Philosophical Society and "Philosophical Movement," albeit to a limited extent, continue the tasks assigned to them by Twardowski to this day.

After the break caused by World War I, Twardowski resumed his philosophical activities at all the mentioned institutions and many others that were established thanks to Poland regaining independence. However, he always had the greatest concern for the university, defending its autonomy as a necessary guarantee of the independence of science. One of Twardowski's last publications, *O dostojęństwie Uniwersytetu* [On the Dignity of the University], a lecture delivered during the solemn ceremony of receiving an honorary doctorate from the University of Poznań in 1933, contains thoughts that, in light of the grim fate of science in the totalist states of the 20th century, are particularly meaningful. Speaking about the conditions for fulfilling the proper tasks of the university, which he considered to be "discovering ever new truths and scientific probabilities, as well as improving and spreading the methods that allow for their discovery," Twardowski said these significant words: "The possibility of fulfilling the tasks proper to the university is conditioned by its absolute spiritual independence... And even if the results of the university's scientific work were unpleasant to those to whom it owes its existence, this cannot be seen as the right to impose

² *Otwarcie Polskiego Towarzystwa Filozoficznego we Lwowie* [Opening of the Polish Philosophical Society in Lvov], "Przegląd Filozoficzny" 1904, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 241.

any restrictions on it. Because scientific research can develop and bear fruit only when it is neither constrained nor threatened by anything.”³ In the same publication, Twardowski once again summarized his view on philosophy and its tasks. “By making truth itself the subject of its research,” he said, “illuminating the paths leading to it, creating a theory of scientific knowledge, philosophy becomes the ally and guide of all those who, in any field of human inquiry, strive for truth. It arouses in us a criticism that protects us from blindly submitting to authorities, from comfortably settling for the intellectual habits we like, and from too much trust in our human, so greatly limited reason; it tells us to demand clarity and precision wherever scientific argumentation is concerned, and to combat all kinds of intellectual foggyiness...; it teaches us to scrutinize numerous concepts of specialized sciences, which do not delve deeper into them, and allows us to realize equally numerous assumptions that guide us in the reflections and actions of everyday life in its everyday practice.”

What was Kazimierz Twardowski’s educational influence on his students? What personal traits and what kind of behaviour made him create what was probably the first philosophical school in Poland? A school not in the sense of a group of advocates of a certain philosophical system (like phenomenologists or neo-Kantians), but in the sense of a community respecting certain methodological postulates and possessing a common scientific language. This question has been asked many times, but no answer seems exhaustive. There has been talk of his iron consistency with which he required students to perform their duties, of his gift for presenting philosophical issues clearly and precisely, of his excellent work organization, and of his ability to introduce students to systematic, persistent work focused solely on truth. There has been talk of how he influenced others with his own example. It’s all true. But something essential and difficult to name escapes from these descriptions, like everything that goes beyond the framework of a rational approach. The matter of love. Twardowski, in his actions, which were rationally thought-out and constantly guided and controlled by rational reflection, served the goals that he passionately loved. The love of two ideals: objective truth and moral goodness, went hand in hand with his love for the youth. “I tried to instil in your souls what is the best part of my own soul: sincere love

³ K. Twardowski, *O dostojęństwie Uniwersytetu* [On the Dignity of the University], in: *Lwowskie wykłady akademickie*, Vol. 1: *Wykłady o idei Uniwersytetu*, eds. R. Kuliniak, D. Leszczyna, M. Pandura, Ł. Ratajczak, Wydawnictwo Marek Derewiecki, Kraków 2018.

for work, ardent love of truth and earnest striving for justice.”⁴ He uttered these words in a speech thanking his students for the commemorative medal with the inscription “Discipulorum amor et pietas” given to him when he bid farewell to the university. A great heart, filled with passionate affection, from the fullness of which we all drew, made Twardowski a hunter of human souls of Socratic proportions. It was this heart that created an unbreakable bond connecting students with the master and students with each other, a bond of friendship. And perhaps, apart from other traits that I have tried to highlight, this is also a reason to call Twardowski the “master of our times.”

⁴ K. Twardowski, *Podziękowanie [...] w sali posiedzeń Seminarium Filozoficznego Uniwersytetu Jana Kazimierza na uroczystości wręczenia [...] medalu pamiątkowego wybitego staraniem byłych [...] uczniów* [Acknowledgement [...] in the meeting room of the Philosophical Seminary of Jan Kazimierz University at the ceremony of the presentation of [...] a commemorative medal minted through the efforts of former [...] students], in: *Myśl, mowa i czyn*, Vol. 2, eds. A. Brożek, J. Jadacki, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, Warszawa 2014.