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Kazimierz Twardowski*

Władysław Witwicki

On 12 February 1938, his body ceased to live. He began his work in Poland in 1895. He was born in 1866. Thus, he was not yet 30 years old when he was already teaching philosophical sciences at the University of Lvov. At that time, there were no philosophical seminaries in Poland, that is, scientific schools educating future authors of works in the fields of logic, psychology, ethics, aesthetics, theory of knowledge, metaphysics, and the history of philosophy. There was no scientific society bringing together people working in these fields, and there was no periodical dedicated to the publication of scholarly works in these fields. There were also no original Polish textbooks providing secondary school students with preliminary training in this area, aligned with the state of science at that time.

Philosophical needs existed. A few individuals, genuinely interested in these types of issues, referred to German, French, and English works. Taine and Nietzsche were read; in positivist circles, Spencer, Mill, and Comte were known. Kant was virtually inaccessible due to his dry prose with rococo syntax, and Spinoza was generally closed off with countless references and Latin. Descartes was walled off by medieval terminology, and only a very sparse and vague understanding of medieval philosophy was disseminated. Translations of Buchner and Darwin circulated, for which boys were expelled from secondary schools; Polish literature teachers mentioned Hegel in connection with Krasiński and discussed the Śniadecki brothers in relationship to Mickiewicz's *Romantyczność* [Romanticism]; funny terms from Trentowski were quoted but never entered common usage; Father Pawlicki was regarded as a physiologist, Father Morawski as a biologist, and the boundaries between science, poetry, and preaching were not clear. There was even talk of the "science" of Towiański and Wroński, of Swedenborg and Słowacki, who also wrote *Wykład nauki* [Exposition of Science].

* W. Witwicki, *Kazimierz Twardowski*, "Wiadomości Literackie" 1938, Vol. 15, No. 18 (757), p. 1.

People read more than they do today; they did not play bridge, there were no sports columns in newspapers, and intelligent conversations were not rare among the intelligentsia of the time. Sometimes, they even enjoyed reading together. There was no radio and no cinemas. People had time for meaningful conversations. Secular viewpoints, the discussion of which might have been considered inappropriate, were not imposed by anyone. From abroad, from the Czech Republic, Tyrol, France, and Germany, echoes of struggles for independence in scientific research and freedom of thought reached Poland. Nowhere were books being burned in public squares yet.

A young person typically formed their view of the world and life through reading poets and novels. One might stick with the family of Połaniecki and *Wieczory nad Lemanem* [Evenings on Lake Geneva] by Father Załęski,[1] while another would turn to Anatole France and Gabriele D'Annunzio. Soon, some would be mesmerized by Przybyszewski, others by Żeromski, and still others by Brzozowski – yet all of them lacked a clear and precise method of thinking. It seemed to many people that there were as many truths as there were poets, that there were old truths and new, conflicting ones – class truths, national truths, religious and worldly truths, and it seemed that all of these could be contradictory to one another. It seemed that what is true today and here, might not be true elsewhere and at another time. It was not very difficult "to subscribe" to a general viewpoint, to lean towards it, sympathize with it, or to pretend to hold it; it was harder to truly possess and profess it, especially if one was not naturally narrow-minded and dogmatic. It was difficult to firmly stand on the mists.

Systematic engagement with philosophical issues was deterred by both the obscurity of these issues and the incomprehensibility of positions, often expressed in foreign, difficult, and unsettled terms. Philosophy lectures at universities did not attract large audiences, and lessons in philosophical propaedeutics in secondary schools, if not devoted to other subjects, were dull. However, the genuine humour of Count Wojciech Dzieduszycki's lectures, who as a professor at the University of Lvov devoted his free time to philosophical talks in a quiet café and at the hotel where he resided, breathed fresh air into the field.

[1] [Translator's note] This is probably a mistake on Witwicki's part. The author of *Wieczory nad Lemanem* is Father Marian Ignacy Morawski, but Witwicki attributes this work to Father Załęski and probably had Stanisław Załęski in mind, who was working in Lvov at the turn of the 20th century. The fact that both Morawski and Załęski were well-known Jesuits could have led to this confusion.

Against this backdrop, the young Kazimierz Twardowski appeared at the Department of Philosophy in Lvov. He began giving lectures, conducting exercises, and leading discussions in youth scientific circles. Immediately, an incredible rumour began circulating in the city that in these lectures and exercises, everything that was heard and discussed could be understood. There was no fluff or insider jargon. Every term was explained, and it was always clear what was being discussed, even when it involved difficult and unpopular issues. This attracted increasingly larger crowds to his lectures. Some attended out of curiosity, wondering whether it was even possible to understand philosophical issues without being a specialist and whether one could speak clearly about these matters while being a specialist. Both turned out to be possible because it was true. For the first time in Poland, philosophical issues began to interest such large crowds – not in churches. Eventually, even the largest lecture halls became insufficient. A separate building had to be constructed to accommodate the audience.

The popularity of Twardowski's lectures was rather strange because he did not use flowery or dazzling language. These were not prose poems; he did not sprinkle his speeches with metaphors, did not engage in rhetoric, did not make dramatic pauses or modulations, did not insert smiling apostrophes in parentheses, did not pretend to understand what an intelligent listener might also struggle to understand, did not play with ambiguities, and did not fill the room with a roar like those who usually captivate crowds. He spoke clearly and straightforwardly, was accountable for every word, and explained every new or unclear term and phrase before moving on. When asked why he spoke so unusually clearly, he replied that otherwise, he himself would not understand what he was saying. He did not try to influence his listeners with his personal views or impose anything; he merely described, analysed, and proved. He did not hypnotize anyone but woke many up. He always allowed his words to be scrutinized and welcomed opponents in discussions. It was not that he wanted an easy triumph but rather to search for truth from both sides. In his speeches and writings, philosophy was not a form of fine literature, nor was it free creation in the mists, but science. This was his goal. And it was new to us.

He came from the school of Brentano, whose lectures he had attended in Vienna. He focused mostly on issues at the intersection of psychology and theory of knowledge, the relationship between thought and speech, ethical and epistemological issues, and the history of philosophy. He lectured on psychology,

logic, ethics, theory of knowledge, aesthetic issues, and the history of philosophy – from ancient India to contemporary times. His teacher, Brentano, a former Dominican, was in close intellectual contact with Thomas Aquinas, who in turn was connected to Aristotle, and thus to Plato and Socrates. Through Brentano, Twardowski joined the long chain of minds that, over the past 2,000 years, have separated science from poetry, clarified truth from confusion and ambiguity, from daydreams, irresponsible metaphors, apparent mysteries, and clichés. This task is incomparably more challenging than waking a human being from sleep, but it is also about transitioning human thought from a state of sleep to a state of wakefulness.

His early scholarly works were published in German, which had an impact on philosophical thought beyond Poland's borders. The concept of ideas and perception in Descartes was the subject of his doctoral thesis. Later, he published a work in German on the content and object of presentations. Shortly after arriving in Lvov, he wrote a paper titled *Wyobrażenia i pojęcia* [Images and Concepts], which he then published in German. These are descriptions, analyses, and psychological and epistemological distinctions, as well as certain definitions of scientific terms, which proved to be useful and productive. It is not the place to discuss them here.

In the early years of his time in Lvov, his work titled *O tak zwanych prawdach względnych* [On So-Called Relative Truths] was published. It is a refutation of relativism in the theory of knowledge. Twardowski rightly argues that there are no relative truths at all. There are only poorly formulated expressions that sometimes appear true and sometimes erroneous. If they are formulated precisely and clearly, they turn out to be absolute truths or absolute falsehoods, not "relative truths." Clearly, this provides guidance for anyone engaged in science and for anyone who desires to be close to the truth in any field – indeed, the absolute truth, as there is no other – by formulating clearly and precisely what seems to be a disputable truth. Unambiguity of words, clearly defined terms, and formal correctness of logical steps are essential and irreplaceable beacons on the path to understanding the truth in every domain. Without them, there is no philosophy – only, at best, poetry, and at worst, graphomania. This already is the attitude of Socrates and the position of Plato.

Twardowski held very high standards for the scientific character of work, both for others and, above all, for himself. Formal standards. It cannot be ruled out that this is why, in later years, he taught more and created less. He would never

have published anything that was not properly formulated and methodically carried out from start to finish. It was not fitting for him to approach unknown truths blindly, in darkness, in the mist of premonitions and vague words, since he was himself a beacon, a proponent, and a teacher of clarity and correctness of thought at any cost. It was as if he had lost the courage to err. He respected this in poets, as long as they did not pretend to be philosophers. There was a poet in Lvov who did not pretend to be a philosopher and did not engage in science, and who did not have much to live on: Jan Kasprowicz. Under Twardowski's influence, he embarked on doctoral and habilitation work and became a professor of literature. He would never have become an assistant professor of philosophy in Lvov; when it came to literature – Twardowski's conscience was clear. In Kasprowicz, he had a friend whom he esteemed – and did not impose his own spiritual stance on him.

Moreover, Twardowski was by no means a dry pedant who constantly focused on formal correctness in everything and always. He had a remarkable sensitivity to the emotional value and weight of words and phrases and needed music in his life as much as salt. He played the piano and composed songs. Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner were probably as close to him as Brentano, Thomas Aquinas, or Plato. He was both a philosopher and a musician but at different times. Not everyone can do that.

Twardowski took his teaching vocation as deeply as possible. He immersed himself in it. He started from the basics. If teaching, then teach from the very beginning. He thus taught in secondary schools for a time to closely understand the mindset of the growing youth and wrote a textbook on logic and didactics for secondary schools and teacher training colleges. Today, this textbook is out of print, but it was accessible and understandable to anyone who knew Polish. It was a book from which not only mathematicians and specialists in logic could benefit, but also natural scientists, lawyers, and humanists. Twardowski often quoted with laughter a definition of philosophy he found in one of the German humorous journals: "Philosophy is the systematic confusion of terminology, intentionally invented for that purpose." He did not want that. He was the first in Poland to teach about algebraic logic but always wrote in plain Polish, the everyday language we speak. Only more precisely. He greatly respected algebra – in others.

Wishing to apply the method of clear analysis to ethical issues, he wrote a treatise on whether every person acts selfishly. Contrary to the prevailing view,

he argued that not everyone acts this way, as not everyone pursues their future personal pleasure as their goal – some people, at times, undoubtedly aim for the pleasure of others rather than their own. This is undoubtedly the case when it comes to conscious goals – Twardowski did not address subconscious or unconscious goals.

Two years before the Great War, he published a work on the borderline of grammar and general theory of objects titled *O czynnościach i wytworach* [Actions and Products]. It contained certain definitions and distinctions significant for the vocabulary of psychology and beyond.

He published a series of lectures on medieval philosophy, considering that this period was neither sufficiently known nor properly appreciated in Poland, even though it was not as unproductive as it was thought to be. Anyone who wanted to understand modern philosophy had to first grapple with the issues of medieval philosophy – hence this foundational work by Twardowski.

He wrote a number of shorter papers, articles, speeches, and reviews, which were published together in the *Collected Works*. In the final years of his life, he published a work titled *O dostojeństwie Uniwersytetu* [On the Dignity of the University]. It has become clear in recent years how important it is to remember this work.

In an effort to make classical philosophy accessible to students, he collaborated on some translations, edited and revised others, and encouraged and urged others to write new ones. He approached this task with the same diligence he applied to everything he undertook.

In addition to his lectures and exercises at the university, which he never missed, he was the permanent head of the Philosophy Circle of the Lvov University Students. Every Friday, young people from all university faculties gathered there to present both newer and older papers, discuss, and bring their own works and ideas. There, the professor gained direct contact with the youth and often found his future students. He guided young natural scientists, lawyers, and medical students – not only humanists in the strictest sense – along philosophical paths. He guided and accompanied them – not only in the lecture hall but also in everyday friendly interactions.

He established the first philosophy seminar in Poland. The best works produced and discussed there were published through his efforts at the Warsaw "Przegląd Filozoficzny" [Philosophical Review], which he co-edited for many years with the late Weryho.

He established the first experimental psychology laboratory in Poland and directed it until the last years of his career at the university.

He founded and led the first philosophical society in Lvov so that the scholars he had nurtured would not lose intellectual contact with each other and could publish philosophical works in Polish and foreign languages. The society now bears his name.

He established and edited the scientific journal "Ruch Filozoficzny" [Philosophical Movement] in Lvov, which served as a detailed record of everything related to philosophy that had taken place and was happening in contemporary Poland, both in print and in public oral discussions. The journal functioned both as a protocol and oversight body, with an extensive review section that was neither aimed at mutual admiration among specialists nor at undermining competitors, but rather at a substantive, objective, and impersonal analysis of the works discussed. It didn't matter whether the work was written by a close relative or a personal enemy. Most of those who currently teach philosophical subjects at Polish universities are Twardowski's students. This holds true for universities in Lvov, Warsaw, Poznań, and Vilnius.

Many of his students are now prepared to teach propaedeutics of philosophy in secondary schools. Some of them actually teach it, despite the fact that current times are not particularly conducive to philosophical thinking.

Twardowski was not only a born scholar and teacher but also an unmatched organizer. As one of the founders and long-time patron of a girls' high school, he was concerned not only with the general direction and spirit of the studies at the institution but also knew about every detail in its life and did not overlook any, even if that detail did not align with the general approach. The same applied to his management of Lvov University, where he served as rector for three years. Then, for the first time since time immemorial, the queues of listeners in front of the ticket offices during registration disappeared. The same was true in the case of the Society of Teachers of Higher Schools, of which he was chairman for several years and which he elevated like no one before him. He organized philosophical conferences and was their driving spirit.

Always active and never tired, always helpful to everyone, he consistently met all deadlines, promises, and obligations, and demanded the same from others. He taught this. And he was so unusual in public life that, while holding managerial positions, he adhered to the rules and regulations just as he demanded

from his subordinates. He wanted, in a somewhat old-fashioned way, for both the managers and those being managed to be governed by principles, norms, laws, and rational regulations, rather than by the arbitrariness of some and the fear of others, mixed with falsehood, hypocrisy, and forced flattery. He could not tolerate the sight of a policeman talking to a streetcar driver under a sign prohibiting conversations with the driver. He even knew how to politely point out to the city mayor the impropriety of his behaviour if the mayor publicly smoked cigarettes in a room where a no-smoking sign was posted on the wall. He had the right to do so as a citizen and had enough civil courage. He involved himself in life.

He did not involve himself in politics or run for legislative bodies – the natural governance over souls was enough for him and provided an open field for public activity. During his time as a rector, he managed to save Lvov University from utraquisition by the Austrian government. That was his political act. It was clear that he would not have delivered programmatic speeches to voters – he was responsible for every word and phrase.

No political party could say of him: "He is one of us." But every enlightened Pole must say this about him. Besides the enlightened Poles, everyone who serves the truth and seeks it with open eyes, regardless of the language they speak or write, and who collects taxes from them, must say this about him.

Twardowski will be remembered in the history of Polish intellectual life not as a minister of enlightenment, but as a creator and organizer of enlightenment in his field over the last 40 years, as one of the links connecting Polish thought with the thought of contemporary humanity, both past and future.

Both in his lifetime and today, Twardowski, both himself and through his students, spoke, speaks, and will speak to anyone in Poland who wishes to publish something about the human spirit, its creations, the world, and life, and who claims a scientific character for what they write. Twardowski would ask everyone: What exactly do you want to say? Can you summarize it in honest, simple words? Explain what you mean by each vague and contentious term you use, and if you do not understand it, do not pretend that you do. And consider what you want to do: to teach, to awaken, and to enlighten, or to lull, entertain, and move? Are you seeking truth or seeking yourself? Do you truly believe in what you write, or are you just pretending? And what arguments do you have to support your position? Put your arguments on the table. We will weigh them in silence, in the clear light of reason and conscience. An argument is not a shout, not a smile, not a tear, not

pathos, and not a pose, but a visible, clear truth. One for all adults. There is also a place for those things. But not in science.

A similar spiritual stance once dawned on Słowacki when he noted on a piece of paper in his diary a quatrain:

> By the monastery, my duck,
> Sanctity, adoration, self-importance.
> By the little cross, on the little table,
> Facts. Two acts.

Only, unlike Słowacki, this factual stance in Twardowski had neither tuberculosis nor penance for the sin of pride in the background but was a manifestation of his health, diligence, and courage. He could look truth in the eye – that was a sign of spiritual health. He considered it his duty to serve and enhance its brilliance; he swore an oath to this when he received his doctorate. He was also able to speak and write the truth where necessary; he had the courage.

This is how he gave himself to others and this is how he will remain in the memory of all who came into contact with him during his life. A scholar, a teacher, an organizer, a human being – as everyone should be if only they can.