

Philosophy in High School*

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Due to the construction of the new Polish high school system, numerous academic projects and ideas for various types of high schools have recently appeared. In many aspects divergent, those projects and ideas almost without exception agree in underestimating the significance of propaedeutics of philosophy as a subject taught in these schools. This subject is granted two or three hours per week in the last grade of high school, prescribing the teacher to present in such a limited time frame elements of psychology and the main concepts of logic. Sometimes logic is taught separately, one hour per week in the penultimate grade, and psychology two hours in the final grade.

Whoever grants propaedeutics such a scarce amount of time does not know or forgets that teaching logic can be efficient only when combined with activities and exercises, and that teaching psychology properly without using experiments is impossible. And, strangely, this is not known or not remembered by one of the most famous projects for the new high school, which rightly pays much attention to exercises and practical classes in school and constantly emphasizes that school learning without such didactic resources misses the point not only didactically but also pedagogically, killing all interest, undermining thoroughness, developing superficiality and shallowness.

And yet propaedeutics of philosophy deserves to be taught in every way thoroughly. It is one of the most significant subjects in the high school curriculum. And its significance lies in the following moments:

- I. Contact of the youth with propaedeutics of philosophy has a similar meaning in their cognitive development as the emergence of philosophy had in human history for the cognitive development of the whole of humanity: it is a moment of the emergence of scientific self-awareness, it

* K. Twardowski, *Filozofia w szkole średniej*, "Ruch Filozoficzny" 1919–1920, Vol. 5, pp. 1–6.

is a moment of turning from the sensual world, that had attracted the investigative thought until then, towards one's spirit and how it works and creates. Obviously, this turn is prepared beforehand, but it becomes fully conscious and systematic here.

- II. This way propaedeutics of philosophy makes the youth aware of some theoretically and practically significant issues and teaches them how to capture those issues. A student in high school has already encountered those issues in lower grades and within other subjects – for example, the problem of the relationship between thought and speech while learning languages, the problems of the existence of the external world during physics, the issues of the influence of various motivations on human behaviour while reading and analysing literature and studying history – but this had happened accidentally. Now they realize how to formulate such and comparable issues and what is intended to solve them methodically.
- III. Thanks to the issues that converge in teaching propaedeutics, until then spread across various subjects and only accidentally discussed, as well as thanks to the fact that propaedeutics of philosophy teaches a student about the forms within which any scientific study develops and the laws that guide any human psychological activity, properly conducted teaching of this subject can concentrate, in the minds of students who are just about to finish high school, all the previously taught school knowledge, embracing all that they had learned and found out, from the point of view of categories and logical criteria and in the illumination of the human psyche, this definitive source for all the humanities and natural sciences, as well as any works of literature, and any human actions recorded in history.
- IV. Presenting to the youth a philosophical stance on all products and issues of the human spirit, propaedeutics of philosophy accustoms them to the critical way of thinking, protecting them from narrow dogmatism and destructive scepticism. A matter not only significant for scientific activity but also for practical life, as only thanks to criticism can one protect themselves from too much self-assurance and from disregarding the opinions of others, and at the same time keep the proper measure between exuberant emotionality and infertile dryness.

- V. Criticism goes hand in hand with exactness in reasoning. Indeed, many people reason exactly, although they have never learned logic and have not found out from psychology about the causes and reasons for errors and mistakes in thinking. But those who had learned logic or psychology, will, *ceteris paribus*, possess more sensitivity to errors and mistakes.¹ And is the fact that people can speak their native language a serious argument against the need to teach the grammar of that language? Therefore, propaedeutics of philosophy is not unnecessary when talking about developing exactness in reasoning. Indeed, it is one of the most efficient means for that. And exactness in reasoning is not only necessary for a philosopher or a scientist. Practical life cannot also do without the spirit of exactness, about which Hume speaks as follows: "... in every art or profession, even those which most concern life or action, that a spirit of accuracy, however acquired, carries all of them nearer their perfection, and renders them more subservient to the interests of society ... the genius of philosophy ... must gradually diffuse itself throughout the whole society, and bestow a similar correctness on every art and calling. The politician will acquire greater foresight and subtilty, in the subdividing and balancing of power; the lawyer more method and finer principles in his reasonings; and the general more regularity in his discipline, and more caution in his plans and operations. The stability of modern governments above the ancient, and the accuracy of modern philosophy, have improved, and probably will still improve, by similar gradations."²
- VI. Finally, considering that high school is a general education school, one must not forget that propaedeutics of philosophy acquaints the student with a whole range of concepts, the knowledge of which is essential for a generally educated person. For only a systematic, though elementary,

¹ In the compilation of Twardowski's philosophical texts published by his students in 1927, when he was still alive, this sentence was changed to: "But those who had never learned logic or psychology, will, *ceteris paribus*, possess less sensitivity to errors and mistakes." K. Twardowski, *Filozofia w szkole średniej*, in: *Rozprawy i artykuły filozoficzne*, Księgarnia "Książnica-Atlas", Lwów 1927, p. 179 [translator's note].

² D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2007, p. 6. This book was translated by Twardowski and Jan Łukasiewicz in 1905; in the present article, Twardowski cited its 2nd ed.: D. Hume, *Badania dotyczące rozumu ludzkiego*, trans. J.Ł. Łukasiewicz, K. Twardowski, Polskie Towarzystwo Filozoficzne, Lwów 1919 [translator's note].

learning of logic and psychology can explain precisely what is meant by definition or proof, contradiction and opposition, deduction and induction, hypothesis and theory, images and concept, memory and attention, association, instinct, passion, impulse, will, etc., etc.

Given all these moments, which clearly emphasize the significance of propaedeutics of philosophy as a subject taught in high schools, it seems strange that in projects and ideas concerning the new organization of learning in the Polish high school, this importance is seldom appreciated. Instead, one can often encounter the opinion that teaching propaedeutics of philosophy does not produce any results, and that time devoted to this subject is wasted.

Unfortunately, this is indeed the case. But this is not the fault of the subject. Several other factors are to blame here. Firstly, there are not enough qualified teachers of this subject; as a result, propaedeutics is taught in high school by teachers who do not have the appropriate professional background. It is conducted by Polish-language teachers and historians, physicists and mathematicians, natural sciences teachers, and classical philologists. Generally, it is taught by anyone who wants to and can be convinced by the headmaster to do it, but rarely by someone who has an understanding of it. Such a situation would not be tolerated in any other school subject. In propaedeutics of philosophy, it is acceptable – why, we will see below. Secondly, there are no appropriate textbooks – which I have broadly commented on in *O potrzebach polskiej filozofii* [On the Needs of Polish Philosophy].³ Thirdly – even if only qualified teachers taught it and excellent textbooks existed, the teaching of propaedeutics of philosophy could not prosper precisely because there are not enough hours dedicated to it. What can the best teacher using the best textbook teach if, in our sanctified by so many free days of school laziness he disposes of one hour per week for logic in the seventh grade and two hours per week for psychology in the eighth grade, where systematic learning ends – and at the latest – with the date of the written part of the graduation exam, that is, in May?

Therefore, one cannot be surprised by the complaints about the unproductiveness of teaching propaedeutics of philosophy in high school. But neither can the current situation be left unchanged. And it can be changed. But for this, apart from energy, goodwill is also necessary.

³ K. Twardowski, *O potrzebach polskiej filozofii*, “Nauka Polska. Jej Potrzeby, Organizacja i Rozwój” 1918, Vol. 1, pp. 453–486 [translator’s note].

Well, in many cases, this goodwill is missing, especially in those who do not understand the significance of propaedeutics of philosophy as a school subject. Usually, the only experience they possess is their own, gained during their school years when they were taught in a dull, dry, rote way by a teacher asking them to memorize passages “from here – to there” from a problematic textbook. The teacher had neither a PhD in philosophy nor a teacher’s certificate, but was still in the process of preparing for such an exam, not in philosophy but, for example, in history or chemistry. In light of such memories, they serve – in good faith – a sentence of condemnation on propaedeutics of philosophy. However, if they had really learned and knew the conditions for the proper justification of judgements, they would see that they lack a rational basis for their claims. And this lack of understanding of the significance of the propaedeutics of philosophy education, which high school should provide, often connects with a disregard for philosophical education in general and philosophy itself. This symptom is frequent among representatives of the natural scientists in the broadest sense of the word. The considerable development of the natural sciences led some representatives of these sciences to look down on all other sciences – except for mathematics – and, at most, they accept only this philosophy which they – usually in a dilettante way – create themselves.

It is remarkable that representatives of philosophy and the humanities, even classical philology, unreservedly recognize the significance of the natural sciences and education in this field, while the opposite is seldom the case. Is it not proof that one-sided scientific education easily leads to the closing of the mind and narrow-mindedness? Anyway, it is not surprising that in projects and ideas concerning high school education offered by representatives of the natural sciences, propaedeutics of philosophy does not occupy the position it rightly deserves.

This lack of goodwill concerning propaedeutics of philosophy, stemming from a lack of understanding, does not exclude the hope for change. With time, argumentation, persuasion, and, in exceptionally favourable conditions, also experience may prove that the negative opinions about the significance of this subject in school teaching and the value of this science itself are not duly justified. Therefore, anyone who, because of a lack of understanding of its significance, does not grant propaedeutics of philosophy its due place in high school may eventually be converted. Worse, much worse, is the case with those who do not grant propaedeutics of philosophy its due place in high school because they understand its significance. Here, we encounter not only a lack of goodwill but explic-

itly bad will towards propaedeutics of philosophy. This is characteristic of any type of obscurantism, which is unwelcoming of any criticism and, consequently, fights – openly or covertly – anything that prepares youth for independent and exact logical thinking. Therefore, it also undermines propaedeutics of philosophy, sometimes using interesting methods. Being unable to eliminate it from the school curriculum, it was at least managed that, for example, the National School Council in the former Austrian partition did not announce at all – except Dr E. Płazak's short period of vice-presidency – competitions for teachers of that subject. This way, the school governance itself implied that high school does not need qualified teachers at all, which obviously did not encourage young people to gain teaching qualifications for this subject. Indeed, it must have convinced them that candidates to teach this subject have fewer prospects of getting a position in school than qualified candidates for any other subjects. Due to such an artificially created lack of qualified teachers of propaedeutics of philosophy, its teaching was "out of necessity" handed over to unqualified people. This is mainly because an unqualified teacher of propaedeutics is a less dangerous opponent of obscurantism than a qualified one. They are less interested in the fight against obscurantism than qualified teachers and, above all, less prepared for this fight.

Therefore, there is a severe risk that nowadays, in the moment of building a new high school system, obscurantism, which keeps the teaching of propaedeutics of philosophy at such an unbelievably low level by the means mentioned above, will use, among others, precisely the argument of propaedeutics' low level and its inefficiency, to try to get rid of this subject from high school. Those attacks will be supported by means which cannot be blamed for bad will in this case, but they fail to understand the significance of the matter and, consequently, lack goodwill towards propaedeutics of philosophy. And once removed from school, propaedeutics of philosophy will not be easily restored.

The first step to eliminate propaedeutics was when the number of hours dedicated to it was reduced from four hours per week to – taking both final high school grades together – three hours per week. In some projects and ideas for new plans, these three hours are further reduced to two. So the danger is great. And as I have tried to demonstrate here, it is not about some indifferent or of-little-importance matter. Propaedeutics of philosophy, which should develop sensitivity and conscientiousness in using logic while accustoming to independent reflection on one's own mental life, is therefore of immense significance not only in

didactic terms but also in upbringing and, thus, social terms. Being a systematic consolidation and deepening of all the factors that teach high school students to think independently and critically, it provides the generations to which the future belongs with one of the most potent weapons to fight against obscurantism and one of the most powerful levers of mental progress. Therefore, the scope of propaedeutics of philosophy in high school should not be narrowed but broadened; three hours per week should be dedicated to it in the two final grades so that there is time for exercises and discussions, so that the teaching of psychology can use experiments, and so that students have the opportunity to become accustomed to this, in many aspects, totally new school subject.

Only when the teaching of propaedeutics of philosophy is treated seriously, when it is taught by teachers imbued with a philosophical spirit, with adequate professional education, and when those teachers have enough time to breathe at least part of that spirit into their students, will the teaching of propaedeutics of philosophy be able to fulfil its immeasurably important task and contribute to educating a large legion of truly enlightened citizens!

Translated by Ewelina Grądzka

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