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A Remembrance of Professor Ajdukiewicz*

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Everyone who was once a student develops a very special attitude towards teachers. There is a relationship here that is unique and different from the many other relationships that we establish throughout our life journey. Even more unique is our memory of the professors who directed our higher studies. Many images remain in memory, sometimes small and seemingly insignificant but specific snapshots; various fragments of conversations, statements, parts of lectures come to mind – and through it all we can see the personality of the one who taught us, educated us, and through whose mediation a specific, unique and therefore priceless message of truth reached us.

An indelible memory dominated by elements of clarity, pedagogical mastery, and absolute honesty in scientific work remains with me from all of the didactic activities of Kazimierz Twardowski. Also, etched in my memory is the beautiful head of Mścisław Wartenberg, set on a frail and so small body that during the lecture it protruded only slightly above the lectern, and the lecture proceeded complete in its beauty, impeccable form, and fully imbued with love for philosophy and its problems. The same conviction of the greatness of philosophy and classical philosophical topics characterized already the first lectures of Roman Ingarden. His later seminar, where we read Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, I count among the finest I have had the opportunity to participate in. From the study of history, I vividly remember Łucja Charewicz's perfectly conducted paleographic exercises and Jan Ptaśnik's lectures and seminars full of wise erudition. I was deeply impressed by the famous lectures of Étienne Gilson at the Collège de France and his seminar at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. It was an unparalleled introduction to direct contact with the masters of medieval thought, just as the intimate meetings with Jacques and Raissa Maritain in their villa in Meudon near Paris were an

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excellent exercise in reading the text of Thomas Aquinas. In Poland, Dominican friar Jacek Woroniecki taught us responsibility for words and initiated us into the skill of rendering in Polish the thoughts of an author (in this case, St Thomas) writing in Latin, and in a precisely, technically developed language.

Everything fell into place in such a way that in this – so rich and diverse – set of factors shaping my mind and preparing me for scientific work, it was Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz who played a unique role. We touch upon a paradox that will allow for a better understanding of the deeper reasons for the undeniable fact that it was Professor Ajdukiewicz – seemingly having nothing to do with philosophical medieval studies – who supervised both my doctoral thesis and my habilitation process to completion at the University of Poznań in 1946. He was the one – among many mentors – who strongly influenced the way I gave [final shape] to the texts I was working on. He influenced me not so much through the views he held and proclaimed regarding radical conventionalism or specific logical, semantic, methodological, epistemological issues, or those from within other philosophical disciplines, but rather through his approach to the scientific questions he considered. From the very first moments of contact between us, when as a young student I signed up for his exercises and began attending his lectures, Prof. Ajdukiewicz impressed me in many ways. I was struck by his remarkable memory and insightful reasoning, not only the excellent, lively form of his lectures but above all what Tadeusz Kotarbiński once called "profoundism," which – in the negative aspect – was an uncompromising struggle against all manifestations of verbalism, and positively it was an attempt at the most accurate understanding of the proposition under consideration, both as read in the studied text and as upheld by the interlocutor in discussion.

There was certainly something of a mathematical-physical formation in this, which inclined Ajdukiewicz at a certain stage towards neopositivism and the guidelines proclaimed by the so-called Vienna Circle; there was a tendency here to eliminate all ambiguities and introduce unambiguous expressions everywhere. This tendency in textual research is dangerous if one does not keep in mind the ambiguities intended or allowed by the author being studied, but it is also beneficial, as it forces the historian of philosophy, or the philosopher reading philosophical texts, to make an uncompromising effort to express incomprehensible concepts and judgements through words and sentences belonging to a more understandable language.

Despite the tradition of philosophical inquiry originating from Brentano and maintained by Twardowski, which highly esteemed the philosophy of Aristotle and its scholastic continuation, especially in Thomas Aquinas, the atmosphere at the Lvov School was not conducive to the study of medieval philosophy. Medieval philosophy was often evaluated as confessionally oriented ideological thinking. I have often heard bitter and sharp remarks about the fact that "confessional" philosophy ceases to be philosophy – and it was often difficult for me to maintain myself in an environment that I highly valued, while remaining faithful to my scientific interests and worldview beliefs. And it was here, in this delicate and difficult point, that I found understanding and help from Professor Ajdukiewicz. He was a product of excellently educating Galician gymnasia, he went through the "old school of riding" there, and being an excellent mathematician and physicist, he also had a great understanding of humanities and a deep respect for Latin and Greek. He used to say that he did not know Latin well enough to read scholastic texts – but he read them with precisely that "degree of incomprehension" that guards against the illusions of facile understanding and the temptations of verbalism. I am also convinced that, as an expert in logic and as a "spiritual grandson" of Brentano, he was fascinated by classical scholasticism.

This is why, after Kazimierz Twardowski retired and I was "inherited" from him by Ajdukiewicz, and after writing two works (on Hume and Locke) under Twardowski, when it came to discussing the topic of my doctoral dissertation with Ajdukiewicz, he fully took into account my medieval interests and proposed a topic that referred, as a matter of fact, to one of the central concepts of Brentano's philosophy. It is known that Franz Brentano, in his *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, derives the concept of intention, which is essential in his philosophy and later in phenomenology, from the scholastic tradition. Ajdukiewicz suggested to me that I should research this medieval genesis of "intentio," and the working title of the dissertation was then established as *Pojęcie intencji w wiekach średnich* [The Concept of Intention in the Middle Ages].

The professor held the self-sustained awareness that he was neither a historian nor a historian of philosophy, and therefore, he immediately emphasized that he would read my work "as an intelligent man," and in the historical field, he wanted me to follow the best medievalists. For this purpose, he first directed me to consult with Father Konstanty Michalski, from whom I received many valuable insights (and I presented a study of his scholarly work as a seminar paper

under Prof. Ptaśnik), and then – when the work was already advanced – with Étienne Gilson, and later also with Father Jan Salamucha. Gilson acknowledged the importance of the chosen topic but advised focusing solely on Duns Scotus, hence the dissertation – written in Paris and Lvov – ultimately received the title *Pojęcie intencji w filozofii Jana Dunsa Szkota* [The Concept of Intention in the Philosophy of John Duns Scotus].

The period before the defence of my doctoral thesis was a very difficult time for me – but also extremely valuable in terms of my contacts with the Professor. I gave the text of the dissertation to Ajdukiewicz in parts and discussions took place over these parts. I do not know if I have ever had such a thorough and inquisitive interlocutor about my own scholarly writing as I did during the editing of my doctoral thesis and later my habilitation thesis. Our conversations were often long and tiring. The professor would not relent until I had clarified his doubts thoroughly. What irritated him the most was when I claimed that a certain matter was clear and understandable when, for him, it was anything but, and when it turned out that my interpretation was too hasty, too superficial, and what I thought was already understandable was only understandable verbally, not substantively. I learned many things during these conversations; I often defended myself fiercely and did not want to get trapped by proposed solutions in the spirit of "dichotomous divisions," when I was convinced that a third option had to be adopted. Many times, I had to concede, admitting that my interpretation was too superficial and not inquisitive enough. All in all, I had to increasingly accept the truth of the Professor's saying that one of the most important "steps to Parnassus" is to be able to admit "I don't understand" when trying to grasp the views of the author I was studying. After several such discussions about the completed work, I still didn't know what the "verdict" would be, because the individual stages of the meetings never ended with any decisive statement. I will never forget what a great experience it was for me when the phone rang one evening and when I heard the Professor's voice announcing that he had finally accepted my work.

Two years after my doctorate, following a period of peregrination, I returned to Lvov again, and for several years, I was the Professor's assistant. Ajdukiewicz's decision to appoint me as his assistant was fully conscious and deliberate: he knew well that I was not deepening my studies in the direction of his interests, but continuing my medieval research. The fact that I became his assistant does not seem to me to be just a coincidence. Ajdukiewicz was a man deeply concerned

with the problems of "great philosophy," although he himself was a representative of philosophical minimalism; he was also someone who did not dismiss with disdain or contempt fundamental worldview questions. For several years, under the fatherly and truly caring wing of the Professor, there lasted – despite the malicious currents of extreme nationalism rearing its head at that time – a truly beautiful symbiosis he had with his two assistants: the Jew Zygmunt Schmierer, a rising star of logic, who was later murdered by the Nazis – and with me, a medievalist and a Christian. The three of us shared a true, deep friendship. As was customary, every day we would walk the Professor home after morning classes, passing through the entire centre of Lvov and engaging in the most interesting conversations we played a role similar to those three debaters from Peter Abelard's famous treatise *Dialogus inter Philosophum, Judaeum et Christianum*.

My contacts with the Professor continued to deepen. The experiences discussed together regarding the work on Duns Scotus clearly showed that it was impossible to thoroughly understand Scotus's theory without knowing well the views of his predecessors. At that time it seemed to us that the one whose knowledge was necessary for understanding Scotism [was] […] Thomas Aquinas. However, it soon turned out that one cannot know Thomas well without a good understanding of Aristotle, whom Thomas comments on. Our conversations together led to the specific conclusion that in order to write a valuable work on Scotus's philosophy one day, one must devote oneself to thorough studies of Aristotle. It was the Professor who again provided me with the proper research topic. Once, during his philosophical lectures or exercises, Ajdukiewicz touched upon the problem of the soul – and he told us how he disturbed the student nuns when he showed to what extent believers and the educated do not know what they believe in and use the term "soul" without realizing what this word is supposed to mean and can mean. So he strongly encouraged me to delve into what Aristotle, Thomas, Scotus, and others thought on this matter. This encouragement became the starting point for my studies on this issue in Aristotle (I wrote then an article titled *Nauka o duszy w Metafizyce Arystotelesa* [The Science of the Soul in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*]) and for my habilitation thesis on *commensuratio animae ad hoc corpus* (the adaptation of the soul to this body) in Thomas Aquinas.

On the one hand, Ajdukiewicz repeated with a smile that I was more of a student of the Church Fathers than of him, but on the other hand, he clearly encouraged me to study medieval philosophy – and in fact, he was most interested in

the issues that lie at the intersection of philosophy and faith. Sometimes he teased me kindly, but more often he was pleased with my interests and was intrigued that while delving into philosophy, I remained a believer. Once, when I visited the Ajdukiewicz family at their home, I found one of the distinguished Polish logicians there. The professor introduced me and said, "This is my assistant, who wants to reconcile rationalism with faith." I was left alone for a moment with that logician, who wanted to talk to what he considered a "strange creature." I expected severe blows aimed at the very core of Christianity – and I was astonished when my interlocutor said, "How can you be a Christian and still think rationally, since a believing Christian is obliged to acknowledge the infallibility of Holy Scripture, in which, after all, the hare is mentioned as a ruminant animal!" (Leviticus, 11:5). If the professor and I sometimes touched on these borderline matters, the level of the subject matter was fundamentally different and incomparably deeper. Even if he had an aversion to confessional institutionalism, he treated the person of Christ with the utmost respect, and he probably had no doubts about the existence of the Absolute. Moreover, he was undergoing some deep, indiscernible transformations. Once, when Mr Ajdukiewicz and Mrs Ajdukiewicz visited us during the nightmarish wartime period, he signed our "guest book" with the strange adjective "transformed"; I never asked him what it meant.

I won't even mention the habilitation itself, for which I owe so much to him, or our sporadic meetings in recent years. In this final period of his life, the voice of Professor Ajdukiewicz could be heard many times, supported by his long and multifaceted life experience. He spoke on matters of fundamental importance for the development of science, and his words carried the weight of true wisdom. I think primarily of his article published in 1957, entitled *O wolności nauki* [On the Freedom of Scholarly Research[2]]. Here is what we read there, among other things:

> The policy of supporting scholarly research, which would make the degree of material support for various directions of its research and for various issues dependent on whether these issues can justify their practical significance,

[2] The Polish word "nauka" encompasses all disciplines of scholarly research, including physics, biology, history, linguistics, literature studies, etc. It could also be translated as "science," in the older sense of the term, where one might refer to "the science of music" or "the science of painting." However, because this older meaning is now rather rare, I have chosen to translate "nauka" as "scholarly research" [translator's note].

> would be clearly harmful to the development of scholarly research. It can be stated that the development of theoretical scholarly research, the connection of which with practice is invisible, often contributes more to the further development of scholarly research than progress in research with practical significance.

When I recall the image of Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz in my memory, there is a strange combination of a certain severity and even horror with a powerful note of kindness and effusive, truly Lvovian cordiality. We were certainly afraid of the Professor, we, his students, of his merciless, sharp critical approach to all matters that concerned honesty in the field of truth. But at the same time, he was a man full of unique charm and possessing the ability to approach another human being in a very human way. He was the antithesis of a scholar who sees nothing beyond academia and scholarly work. Moreover, he had a woman of extraordinary value as his life companion. Mrs Maria Ajdukiewicz, the daughter of Kazimierz Twardowski, is not only a seasoned classical philologist but also someone who melts away all the seeds of crustiness, apathy, and alienation with a warm heart. In the first years of my marriage, we often felt a kind and cordial interest in our affairs from the Ajdukiewicz family.

The non-academic interactions and conversations with the Professor were always full of cheerfulness and charm. I wish everyone had a superior like Ajdukiewicz was to his assistants. In addition to all this, he was a great storyteller. He could excellently recall old times. He was an inexhaustible source of stories from the time of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, his artillery service in the Austrian army on the Italian front, and from the whole world of eastern Galicia province during the reign of Francis Joseph I. But he was also able to fully experience the present moment. He was not ashamed of his weakness, which was to make long hours of work more enjoyable with chocolates. He was happy to live in a city as beautiful as Lvov. He liked the atmosphere of the countryside, the mountains, trips, music, gatherings with friends, the atmosphere of warm cheerful conversation, even hunting, and then evenings by the fireplace. Yet he was by no means a sybarite or egoist. He had a very acute sense of social injustices and highly – even very highly – valued the practice of genuine human kindness and sacrificial love. For me, Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz will always remain an example of a man with a great heart and a true philosopher-humanist.