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Benedict, or, About Teachers*

Andrzej Nowicki

Characters:
KAZIMIERZ, age 72
WŁADYSŁAW, age 60
FRYDERYK, age 19

Warsaw, Psychological Institute, February 1938.

For many months, Witwicki had come to lectures dressed in a grey suit. So I was surprised to see him in black. His face lacked the usual smile; instead, it bore an expression of sorrow. This was in mid-February, a few days after the death of Kazimierz Twardowski.

Upon stepping up to the lectern, Witwicki announced that he would interrupt the regular course of the general psychology lecture for one day due to exceptional circumstances, which compelled him to dedicate the entire hour to presenting the figure of Twardowski, as "on 12 February 1938, his body ceased to live." From the further course of the lecture, it became clear that "he himself," meaning Twardowski, continued to live on in his students. The lecture was so evocative that one could feel his presence in the room and perceive the "lights he had kindled."

However, it turned out that the 45-minute lecture was not sufficient to say everything about Twardowski that Witwicki himself considered most important. Thus, at the end of the lecture, he self-critically assessed its content and pointed out the numerous gaps.

After the lecture, I approached Witwicki and mentioned that I had many questions regarding the lecture, but, of course, I was aware that it was not the best day

* A. Nowicki, *Benedykt albo o nauczycielach*, in: A. Nowicki, *Uczeń Twardowskiego. Władysław Witwicki*, Wydawnictwo "Śląsk", Katowice 1983.

for a lengthy conversation and clarification of doubts, but I would be extremely grateful if he would be willing to discuss Twardowski with me at another time.

A few days passed. Witwicki resumed attending lectures in his old suit, and one day he invited me to his office for a conversation.

WŁADYSŁAW:

I'm glad that the lecture on Twardowski piqued your interest. Do you still remember the questions you wanted to ask me regarding that lecture?

FRYDERYK:

I have four questions. The first one concerns the "Lucifers." Professor, you said something along the lines of Twardowski's teacher being the ex-Dominican Brentano, who was in close intellectual contact with Thomas Aquinas, who, in turn, was connected to Aristotle, and through Aristotle, to Plato and Socrates. Through Brentano, Twardowski also became part of this long chain of "Luciferian" minds, who considered their life's mission to be awakening others from slumber, "lighting the lights," and separating science from poetry and waking dreams. In this context, Descartes was also mentioned.

Regarding this, the following question arises in my mind: Is this the gallery of your philosophical ancestors, Professor? I repeat: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Brentano, and Twardowski – are these the seven teachers you carry within you, just as Socrates once carried his daimonion within himself?

Second question: If so, how did Thomas Aquinas end up among them? I find it difficult to believe that this medieval theologian could also "separate science from waking dreams."

Third question: This list is missing many important links. If I were asked about your philosophical ancestors, Professor, I certainly wouldn't omit Callicles, Hippias, and Lucian, and, among modern thinkers, Voltaire and Nietzsche.

Fourth question: Or perhaps I've confused two entirely different things: Twardowski's philosophical genealogy with your genealogy, Professor? Perhaps you carry entirely different teachers within you than he did? Maybe Twardowski was just one of your many teachers, with others balancing out his influence?

WŁADYSŁAW:

Those are interesting questions. I'll try to answer them briefly.

Regarding the first question: I consider myself a student of Twardowski, and this means that his predecessors are also my philosophical predecessors, and – in some sense – I do carry them within me – meaning, I remember them and try to follow their guidance.

The second question exhibits some unwarranted prejudice against Thomas, or maybe just a lack of familiarity with his philosophy. I encourage you to read Twardowski's series of lectures on medieval philosophy, as well as to look through Aquinas's *Summa theologica*. Do you know, sir, that Thomas posed several thousand questions in his works? This man knew how to ask questions and clearly formulate thoughts – both his own and those of others. When he considered a problem, he thoroughly presented different perspectives and weighed the arguments for and against.

In answer to the third question, I readily admit that I have omitted many important links. However, I'd like to know what leads you, sir, to believe that my philosophical ancestors include sophists, Lucian, Voltaire, and Nietzsche.

FRYDERYK:

In your commentary on *Gorgias*, Professor, you clearly side with Callicles, asserting that Socrates fails to counter him with rational arguments and must resort to religious beliefs to support his own position. From the commentary on *Hippias*, one could infer that you admire the fact that this sophist never encountered anyone who surpassed him in any respect. He was not only interested in everything but also capable of doing everything himself. That seems to be your ideal, Professor.

Next. What struck me the most while studying your *Psychologja* [Psychology][2] textbook – and what also stands out when listening to your lectures – is detachment from the phenomena you analyse. For you, nothing is taboo. You don't acknowledge any sanctities or altars. In every statement you make, one senses irony, even scoff. This is precisely the attitude of Lucian and Voltaire.

Finally, regarding the philosophical sources of your theory of cratism, Professor – which is the foundation on which the entire edifice of your *Psychology* is built – there's no doubt that these should be sought in Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, and you yourself point to it.

[2] W. Witwicki, *Psychologja dla użytku słuchaczów wyższych zakładów naukowych*, 2 vols., Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich, Lwów 1925–1927 [translator's note].

As for Thomas Aquinas, I'm still not entirely convinced. It's not quite true that Thomas thoroughly presents different viewpoints, treating the arguments "for" and "against" equally objective. Only from a distance it looks so pretty that Thomas, after presenting a certain position, looks for what argues against it and always finds some "sed contra." In reality, however, the very structure of each chapter in his *Summa* predetermines the assessment of the positions considered. What is placed under the heading "videtur quod," even before it is presented, is stigmatized as something that "only appears" true, and thus will be refuted in further discussion. Meanwhile, what is found under "sed contra" is not just another, equally valid position but is preemptively granted the authority to interrupt the discussion with its verdict.

WŁADYSŁAW:

I must firmly protest against the imputation that I have the attitude of Lucian, an infidel and a scoffer, who wants to demolish altars. The detachment you're referring to is the most ordinary and normal thing in the scientific work of any chemist, botanist, or geologist. If a biologist describes the behaviour of monkeys during a lecture, one shouldn't accuse them of mocking monkeys. As a psychologist, I describe the behaviour of various people, and it's not my fault if someone silly finds it funny. I have never mocked – neither in my textbook, nor in my lectures, nor in *Wiara oświeconych* [Faith of the Enlightened] – people of faith, nor any sanctities. My task was to describe, and if you, sir, found that description amusing, then the laughter is yours alone, not mine.

But never mind that. Let's move on to the fourth question. Your guess is correct. Twardowski was not my only teacher.

FRYDERYK:

Professor, will you allow me to start taking notes? I'd like to jot down the names of your teachers and get more acquainted with their lives and works.

WŁADYSŁAW:

Go ahead. Take notes if you like, sir. So, in gymnasium, I was taught history and geography by an outstanding historian, a corresponding member of the Academy of Learning, Professor Ludwik Kubala; natural history by Ludomir Sykutowski; religion and Latin by Dr Jan Slósarz, a theologian and priest; Greek by Stanisław Romański; and mathematics and physics by Łucjan Czechowicz. I had the worst grades in mathematics, barely good enough in Greek, and the best in

natural sciences, drawing, religion, Latin, Polish, history, and later in logic and psychology. I generally learned easily and willingly; engaging subjects I studied out of curiosity, and boring ones out of a sense of duty, though never anything, I think, out of ambition.

I only happened to be an honour student once in gymnasium, in third grade. In all other years, my math grade was a hindrance – only satisfactory, despite my best efforts. I always had a lot of private lessons – I had to earn a living, so I could devote little time to my own studies.

At the University of Lvov, I initially studied the natural sciences. I had seven teachers there: the botanist Teofil Ciesielski; the geologist Emil Dunikowski; the anthropologist Benedykt Dybowski; the zoologist Józef Nusbaum; the chemist Bronisław Radziszewski; the paleontologist Józef Siemiradzki; and also Rudolf Zuber, the discoverer of medicinal springs. On 4 December 1900, I passed the state exam to become a teacher of natural history as my main subject, and mathematics and physics as subsidiary subjects. After that, I taught these subjects in Lvov high schools for several years.

Is that enough? Or is there something else you'd like to know?

FRYDERYK:

I'll explain what I mean. Unlike Freud and Adler, who believe that the foundations of personality are formed in early childhood, somewhere by the age of five, I suppose that a much more significant period for the process of personality formation is the later years, between the ages of fourteen and twenty-two – the final years of high school and the university years. If during this period one has not just one teacher, but many, and among these teachers are some outstanding individuals, differing in interests, views, temperament, and lifestyle, it creates a field of tension in the student's inner world – beneficial for intellectual development.

The diversity of teachers causes a splitting of personality, that is, a certain kind of disintegration, which is a beneficial phenomenon because it enables the achievement of a higher level of integration, encompassing a greater number of developed components.

In this context, I'd like to ask a question: Which of the mentioned teachers was the strongest individual? Whose influence could be compared to the impact of Twardowski's personality? And if there was such a teacher, I'd like to hear more about him.

WŁADYSŁAW:

Such a teacher was Benedykt Tadeusz Nałęcz Dybowski, a participant in the January Uprising, a prisoner of the Tsar, an exile, a researcher of Siberia, a geographer, topographer, climatographer, limnologist, geologist, paleontologist, botanist, zoologist, anthropologist, ethnographer, linguist, physician, social activist, philanthropist, freethinker, moralist – a man who worked creatively for over 80 years and lived almost an entire century.

Initially, I thought he was born on the same day as I was, namely 30 April, but these were dates from two different calendars. His calendar differed from mine by 12 days, so according to my calendar, his true birth date was 12 May 1833. The age difference between us was 45 years.

There was something fascinating about his views. He was a passionate defender of Darwin's theory, a champion of free thought, a critic of superstitions, and a pioneer of secular ethics.

FRYDERYK:

Did being caught between the conflicting influences of philosopher Twardowski and natural scientist Dybowski create any internal conflicts, a sense of division or inner turmoil?

WŁADYSŁAW:

And why should it?

FRYDERYK:

I recall your commentaries on *The Apology of Socrates*. It was written there that "Socrates discouraged young people from studying the natural sciences […] and directed their minds towards psychological, ethical, and social issues." It's well known that after studying the natural sciences, you turned to psychology and ethics – this is evidenced by the titles of the works: first, *Analiza psychologiczna ambicji* [Psychological Analysis of Ambition], then *Analiza psychologiczna objawów woli* [Psychological Analysis of Manifestations of Will], followed by *Analiza psychologiczna pragnień jako podstawa etyki* [A Psychological Analysis of Desires as the Basis for Ethics] and *Z psychologii stosunków osobistych* [On the Psychology of Personal Relationships], and finally *W sprawie przedmiotu i podziału psychologii* [On the Subject Matter and Division of Psychology] – but there are no works on birds or fish.

WŁADYSŁAW:

Twardowski believed that scientific philosophy is, above all, a theory of science. He held the natural sciences in high regard, and certainly cannot be accused of trying to dissuade anyone from studying the natural sciences.

FRYDERYK:

And what about Dybowski?

WŁADYSŁAW:

He considered philosophy a relic of a lower stage of humanity's intellectual development, something that hinders the progress of science. That's why he would hurl unflattering insults at philosophers – he called Kant a mammoth, Spinoza a forger, and Paulsen a dyed-in-the-wool fox.

When he found out that I was working on Plato's texts, translating his dialogues from Greek into Polish and writing extensive commentaries, he didn't hesitate to let me know what he thought of Plato.

I remember that back then he called Plato an ichthyosaur and a complete fool. I then defended the Greek philosopher, and as a result, we ended up falling out.

FRYDERYK:

So, did having such different teachers have a splitting effect on you?

WŁADYSŁAW:

That's not the right word. I have never stopped appreciating Dybowski's vast knowledge, his genuine scientific achievements, or his moral courage. I remained a proponent of Darwinism. I continued to engage with the natural sciences. I gave lectures on botany and zoology, including topics like what happens in leaves during autumn and the habits of beavers. At the same time, I kept working on Plato and had no intention of stopping just because a 70-year-old professor preferred illiterate Kamchadals to educated Athenians.