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From the History of the Underground University of Warsaw*

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VII

The underground philosophy studies in Warsaw were neither as numerous nor as well organized as Polish studies. Groups were not formed by an administration because such an administration did not exist; they formed "themselves." Through acquaintances, colleagues, and partially through professors, young people eager to study together found each other, went to the lecturers, and discussed the terms and dates of meetings with them. It may have been a less convenient and efficient way of functioning, but it had a certain advantage. Like everywhere where organization and administration cannot intervene, the valuable privacy of meetings and the direct, personal contact between the master and students were preserved.

The first lecture on *Elementy* [Elements][2] was given to us by Tadeusz Kotarbiński in Morysiński's family apartment on Smolna Street. In the corner of the room, there was a large, imposing armchair waiting for the professor. Soon we were about to realize how unsuitable it was for the person who would sit in it. He entered, a very slim, small, as if weary, grizzled elderly man. After a quick greeting, he approached the chair indicated by the hostess and perched on the edge.

* J. Pelc, *Z dziejów podziemnego Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego*, in: J. Pelc, *Wizerunki i wspomnienia. Materiały do dziejów semiotyki*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Warszawa 1994, pp. 39–51. The translated text is an excerpt from sections VII and VIII.

2 Pelc is referring to Kotarbiński's seminal textbook, which served as the basis for his lectures: T. Kotarbiński, *Elementy teorii poznania, logiki formalnej i metodologii nauk*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1961 [English translation: T. Kotarbiński, *Gnosiology: The Scientific Approach to the Theory of Knowledge*, Pergamon Press, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Oxford–Wrocław 1966] [translator's note].

Great modesty, simplicity, and directness emanated from his entire figure. The old-fashioned, moustached gentleman took out a large silver watch from the pocket of his dark clothing, perhaps a keepsake from his father. He looked around and not finding a table near the armchair, he placed the watch on the floor by his feet. Then he leaned forward, stretched his long, thin neck from under the loose collar – as was the fashion at that time – closed his eyes and, leaning even further towards his watch from time to time, he began to speak: "Today I will talk about what it means to 'express directly,' 'indirectly,' 'to articulate,' 'to articulate a thought.'" This is how, without unnecessary introductions, Tadeusz Kotarbiński's first lecture in the first semester of our secret university studies began, in the fall of 1942.

Right after the first sentences, we noticed how difficult it was to take notes during this lecture, even though the professor spoke slowly and thoughtfully. But in what he said there were no superfluous words that could be safely omitted. And at the same time, great concentration and effort were required to understand it, although at first everything seemed simple, clear and even obvious. In addition, the ordinary curiosity about the new face was also a hindrance. Above the notes, we glanced at a focused, serious, kind face, somewhat out of place today because of the long, old-fashioned moustache. We glance even more boldly because the professor's eyelids are constantly lowered, so his eyes are probably closed, and thanks to that, he can be observed freely, without hindrance.

Kotarbiński always lectures with lowered eyelids, as if he wants to isolate himself from external distractions and remain alone with the problem. One might think that he is not addressing his listeners, but his own thoughts, with which he engages in a focused conversation. So many times over the 17 years that have passed since that evening, I have seen him as a lecturer, presenter, and speaker. Always with completely lowered eyelids. But to this day, I don't know if his eyes are completely closed when he speaks, or just lowered. I never dared to ask him about it. Maybe now, when he learns about my doubts, he will reveal a bit of the mystery!

As a listener of Polish studies lectures, sometimes brilliant, sometimes charming with the merits of literary form, mostly verbose, usually not requiring much intellectual effort from the lecturer in formulating ideas or from the audience in understanding them, I was captivated by the uniqueness of what Kotarbiński said. It was not the dominion of memory, erudition, or mastery of words here,

but the adequacy of formulations and the mastery of thought. One witnessed the effort to come up with the proper thought and its most apt verbal counterpart. One was impressed by the economy of expression, devoid of harsh simplicity, cool, deliberate laconicism. The unknown beauty of precise thinking and speaking was revealed.

What made a great impression on everyone was that as the hands of the watch lying on the floor reached seven o'clock, the final word of the lecture was uttered – the very one that was meant to conclude the topic – everything having been covered exactly as planned and within the allotted time.

After the professor left, the room buzzed and swarmed as if not a few, but dozens of people had gathered for the lecture that had just ended. Comments were exchanged about what was said and about what he was like. An hour of great concentration and mental effort now demanded a reaction. The thing about Kotarbiński's lectures is that after they end, thoughts start racing. The accumulation of intellectual stimuli in a relatively short time later unleashes mental energy. There were also comments about him. The sonorous and resonant voice of Krysia Sznerrówna dominated over others, probably the only actress and singer today who has thorough philosophical studies under her belt, with exams passed and papers written with excellent results. It was said that Kotarbiński, before the secret university classes were established, taught Latin and Greek – to earn a living. It was also mentioned how, before the war, a letter arrived at the Philosophical Seminar at the University of Warsaw addressed from abroad to "Prof. Tatarbiński" – a completely untrue anecdote – and what confusion ensued because, as you can imagine: Tatarkiewicz and Kotarbiński! Young adepts of philosophy did not yet know that despite great differences in views, the collegial environment of philosophers is exceptionally harmonious and agreeable and that neither that fictional address, intended to unite "two in their suns opposed – gods," nor other real and serious events, could ignite discord or ill will.

October and November had passed. The first weeks of lectures were already behind us. Christmas was approaching. After the last pre-Christmas lecture, Professor Kotarbiński took out his calendar and said, "The next lecture falls on 1 January, New Year's Day, and the seminar on 6 January, Three Kings' Day. If you wish, I can come on both of those days."

There was a moment of silence. We were embarrassed. It is known that students all over the world prefer holidays to even the most interesting lecture. On

the other hand, how could it be appropriate to tell the professor that we would take a break when he had declared his readiness to come? Miss Morysińska, flustered, mumbled, "We would be obliged."

When Kotarbiński left, there were exchanges of reproach among the classmates and explanations from the well-bred hostess: "Well, you understand. I couldn't tell him not to come."

In a whisper, as if talking about a great scandal, one of them, very concerned, informed the others: "Did you know he's an atheist? He doesn't believe in God! He said so. In one of the classes. They asked him, and he said himself: 'I don't think there is such a thing as a personal God.'"

In reality, regardless of Kotarbiński's atheistic views, the genesis of this event was different. His great meticulousness was decisive here. We paid a fixed amount for education each month. The professor didn't want us to lose two lectures after paying, and refunding the money already paid seemed awkward to him for both parties. So he preferred to come and conduct the classes, although, according to tradition, to which he is sincerely and – as is usually the case with people of the older generation – more attached to than the young, he himself considers New Year's Day and Three Kings' Day to be holidays.

In addition to the *Elementy* lectures, in the first year, we had seminars on the philosophy of history and culture. They were held in different groups, in accordance with the loose structure of philosophical studies, which allowed for fairly free combinations of classes. In this second group, the ones who stood out clearly in intellectual terms and were already promising as real academics, which the future would fully confirm, were Klemens Szaniawski, my childhood friend and colleague from Batory junior high school, who studied mathematics alongside philosophy, and Jan Białostocki, who divided his time between philosophy and art history. After a period of internships as an ethicist as an assistant under Professor Ossowska, and then after several years of work in Professor Kotarbiński's department and in Professor Ajdukiewicz's institute, where he distinguished himself with abilities and diligence among his fellow logicians, Szaniawski is now preparing to take over the statistics department of sociology. Białostocki is gaining recognition as an associate professor of art history. Both names are known and appreciated outside of Poland as well.

The meetings took place in the old-town apartment of the Białostocki family on Brzozowa Street. Mr Jan's small room was filled with artworks and beautiful

books. Some of the woodcuts, drawings, and sculptures were made, quite well, by the host himself, impressive in the versatility of his talents and interests, as well as his achievements – astounding, considering he was not yet 20 years old at the time. The presentations and discussions in this circle were captivating. The seminar's topics were broad, but above all, the personality of Kotarbiński attracted people from various fields of study to this group, giving the gatherings a humanistic character in the broadest sense of the word. I believe that, as I do, the mentioned colleagues might also remember these meetings today, as well as Mrs Julia Hartwig, a poet, translator, and journalist, who, as a participant in the same group, often hosted us in her maiden room, in the annex at 75 Wspólna Street, in the immediate vicinity of the apartment where Krzysztof Baczyński, the poet of the days of occupation, spent his childhood, my playmate when we were a few years old, and later a classmate from Batory High School.

Professor Kotarbiński's seminar was held in a slightly different group during the second year of studies. The former group was joined by: Isia Cierniakówna, Tazbirówna (tragically deceased a few years ago), Marcin Czerwiński, then a student of secret sociology, now a well-known journalist, and a few others. The meeting place was often the large living room of the old-fashioned apartment of the Czerwiński family on Skorupki Street. The participants' interests – on one hand sociological-ethical, on the other aesthetic – influenced the topics of the meetings and the nature of the discussions, enlivened by the participation of the young host, whose somewhat unhealthy appearance, great subtlety, refined sensitivity, and over-intellectualization combined with the radicalism of his views, rebelliousness against his wealthy domestic environment, and the conservatism of his elderly father.

These discussions were not always academic. I remember one that erupted during a period of intense street executions, fresh from the slaughter of a large group of small children by the Germans. It revolved around ethical problems, initially theoretical. The question was what ethical ideal could take the place of the Gospel's moral directives in the worldview of a decent person, ultimately based on non-rational motivations, and therefore unacceptable to non-believers. The spark for the debate was a proposal by Kotarbiński, the advocate of the ethics of "reliable" guardianship.

The response came from current events, swollen with tragic conflicts. Soon, the problem was concretized in the form of a question, so characteristic of those

days: How should a German soldier act when ordered to shoot children, knowing that if he refuses to carry out this order, the execution will still take place, but the execution – and the moral problem – will fall on another person? It can be assumed that among the speakers, with that painful fervour that arises whenever we touch on very personal matters, there was someone, perhaps more than one, who fought with a weapon in hand as a participant in an underground LC (liquidation cell) and experienced the moral conflict associated with taking another person's life.

It was particularly remarkable that discussions on topics so distant from then-current events that they seemed unreal were approached with no less emotion and interest. Among such topics were, against the backdrop of the dangerous present, issues related to aesthetics and art theory.

Proof of the liveliness of those discussions is that I still remember the remarks made after Sznerrówna's excellent presentation on Bell's book on art, a book published when the war was raging across the world. Similar contradictions – the overly significant and painful relevance of some theoretical issues juxtaposed with the seemingly complete unreality of others – were common and ordinary in those times. The vitality of interest in the latter had something of Polish disregard for reality. This extended beyond the realm of theory as well. I myself participated in meetings organized by the programming cell of the underground Polish Radio, which ordered and compiled materials in the form of reports, short talks of five, ten, and fifteen minutes, and scripts for radio plays, intended to be aired from the first minutes of regained independence until the following two or three years. This was in 1943 and 1944. Fortunately, the authors were recruited from financially needy students, members of the military conspiracy circles, so the fees for the broadcasts could be treated as highly desirable scholarships with a clear conscience.

I don't remember the exact date. Suffice it to say that illness prevented Professor Kotarbiński from personally participating in the seminars. Like many people during the occupation, he suffered from avitaminosis, which led to serious purulent complications, culminating in surgery. Once, Professor Kotarbiński was replaced by Dr Janina Kamińska, later to become his wife, but shortly thereafter, she was arrested and taken to a camp. For several consecutive weeks, the seminars were led by the unofficial assistant of Professor Kotarbiński, Henryk Hiż, the son of a well-known old Warsaw journalist, who is now a mathematics professor at one of the universities in Western America. About the old Hiż, an unforgettable figure of old

Warsaw that begs for a monograph, it is said that he belonged to that generation of journalists for whom the workplace, but real work in the full sense of the word, was more often a café table or – more secluded and conducive to concentration – a restaurant table rather than the editorial desk. Allegedly, once, the wife of one of Hiż's editorial colleagues, friends and companions, who was less patient than Mrs Hiż, unable to find her husband neither in the editorial office nor in the printing press, sent the errand boy on an expedition to the Warsaw taverns. After some time, the messenger returned without the editor, but with a reassuring letter or certificate that Hiż, as a fellow reveller, scribbled on a piece of paper, apparently not wanting to lose his drinking buddy and work companion too early: "Mr X lives and drinks – the certificate read – and so does Hiż."

Young Hiż, Henryk, was different from his father. The charm of extraordinary intellect, which characterized both, manifested itself in a different way in the speeches of the young, already eminent mathematician and philosopher. Although only a few years older, he impressed us greatly, perhaps even more than the master himself. For the Kotarbińskian traits were condensed in him and accentuated consciously. When speaking, he, like the professor, would stretch his neck and tilt his head to emphasize important thoughts with a nod, and although he did not have such a long or thin neck at his disposal, it made an impression of a deliberate, purposeful gesture with great tradition behind it. The intonation of his speech echoed the characteristic tone of the professor's lectures through individual drops in his voice. He did not wear a tie, did not button his shirt at the neck, walked in sneakers, and could justify why he did so. He was not only a rationalist but also a rationalized person. He addressed Kotarbiński as "Tadeusz." This impressed us the most. Teaching *Elementy*, he proved to be a more radical adherent of the doctrine than its author. In what he said and how he said it, he tried to avoid apparent names, although these were not final formulations. It was evident that precision of formulations was not only a tool for him but also a goal, achieving which pleased and amused him. Great clarity of thought, great intellectual boldness, great liveliness of associations, along with knowledge, scholarly talent, and pedagogical talent.

It's no wonder that they quickly found a common language and became friends with Klemens Szaniawski. Besides their many similar traits of outstanding intellect and related interests, what must have brought them closer together was the fact that Klemens's father, Władysław Junosza-Szaniawski, a brilliant and

popular humorist – "Aramis" from "Kurier Warszawski" [The Warsaw Courier] – was a colleague and contemporary of the old Hiż.

Taking advantage of the opportunity to communicate with the professor's assistant, after each lecture, we bombarded Hiż with questions and requests for further explanation of the more difficult passages in *Elementy*. He explained in an extremely suggestive way. I remembered his remarks about the set in the distributive and collective senses and about antinomies, including the so-called barber's antinomy: the barber who shaves all men who do not shave themselves.

Soon we also became familiar with the Hiż family house on Kredytowa Street, opposite Hersy, where the lectures moved. Professor Kotarbiński, after his illness, did not leave his apartment, and several times we gathered at his place, on Brzozowa Street, in the office with a beautiful expansive view of the Vistula River and its opposite bank with a bluish line of forests on the horizon. Later, when he recovered, very disturbing news and warnings came that he was facing serious danger. His activity attracted not only the attention of the Germans. Also, native extreme right-wing conspiracy groups looked hostilely at such a serious and active ideological and political opponent, who attacked and was attacked even in the heated years before the war. There were real and justified fears, supported by analogous, fresh examples from the surroundings, that informing to the Gestapo or a fanatic assassin's bullet executing a "sentence" on "communists, Masons, and Jewish lackeys" might interrupt such a valuable and necessary existence. Therefore, the professor had to minimize his walks on the streets full of dangers. We considered the premises temporarily compromised: mine at 4 Jerusalem Avenue, and later at 9 Warecka Street, Czerwiński's on Skorupki Street, Jeziorański's at 4 Jasna Street, Morysińska's on Smolna Street. The friendly Hiż house, relatively not far from the Old Town on Kredytowa Street, seemed convenient, especially since the relations between the professor and the hosts facilitated organizing accommodation if necessary, and in the case of an investigation, explaining the visit with friendly considerations.

We sat at Hiż's dining room around a long table. Joining our group was a man about 20 years older than us, an experienced educator and psychologist, Mr Konstanty Lech (later the director of the Department of Education), whom Professor Kotarbiński knew from the pre-war period, recalling him as a distinguished Polish activist, in Parana, I believe, and now invited him to seminar sessions on praxeological topics. Lech's imposing figure, a man of athletic build, towered

over the surroundings; from the very first moment, he showed great activity in the discussion, and together with the host of the apartment, Henryk Hiż, they formed a duo of mature thinkers, possessing their own capital of thoughts and experiences, creative and ready for debate, often very inventive, always full of intellectual passion.

We, second-year philosophy students, were just taking our first steps in theoretical considerations and discussions, and the superiority of our older colleagues greatly intimidated us. I think this could have led to the paralysis of discussion and a freezing of the atmosphere if it weren't for the fact that the seminars were led by Professor Kotarbiński, an educator who, like no other, knows how to be a teacher to weaker students. He could accept any contribution to the discussion from someone inexperienced, young, or shy in such a way that the speaker would forget about their own stage fright, and the listeners would abandon the attitude of high judgement of the colleague's mistakes and focus on what was being said. It was not always successful. Not always wise. Sometimes, for the first few seconds after one's or a colleague's speech, the thought crossed our minds: "There was no need to rush with that." Sometimes, there were some critical smiles on the faces of peers. But it only lasted for a moment because Professor Kotarbiński, in such moments, without delay, rushed to the rescue. In a brief summary of the student's speech, he extracted something that turned out to be very accurate, important, or original. He always practised nurturing criticism: friendly, uplifting – a remarkable pedagogical technique. Lech, a good teacher and educator, and Hiż, a known student and assistant to the professor, excellently seconded him in this regard. Thanks to this, the atmosphere of these gatherings was excellent and conducive to diligent intellectual effort, the development of emerging interests, passions, and abilities.

The fate that allowed me to apprentice with Kotarbiński under conditions different from those of a regular, crowded university seminar, I consider exceptionally fortunate for me. The frequent, direct, semi-private contact with the professor, the social bond, personal, stronger in the apartment than in the lecture hall, the camaraderie of conspiracy, and those times that brought people together almost as dangers on the front lines bring comrades-in-arms closer together – all of this allows my generation of Kotarbiński's students to be considered privileged in a particular way. I believe that my colleagues, participants in his seminars and lecture listeners, feel and remember it similarly. Among them are many who have drifted

away from philosophy; there are those who practise it in ways that deviate from the principles of reism, the professor's doctrine. Yet, about each of them – I mean not only my peers but also those who studied years before me and after me – one can say: they are Kotarbiński's students; although each of them had other teachers, they are also his students. But always in a different sense of the word.

The seminar of Tadeusz Kotarbiński is a school that not only teaches but also educates. It educates not by instilling principles but by demonstrating a living example of intellectual behaviour, practising philosophy, and resolving worldview issues. This demonstration is natural and spontaneous because the living example is how the professor himself thinks and speaks. Therefore, those afternoons and evenings – spent at gatherings under the direction of Tadeusz Kotarbiński, on Jerusalem Avenue, Warecka, Jasna, Wspólna, Brzozowa, Dobra, and Kredytowa streets, in the restless years of 1942, 1943 and 1944 – I consider important and pivotal in my life. They determined my further intellectual path because, at that time, my mental attitude was shaped, I simply learned to think. Before that, as perhaps to many students of Polish studies, writing and speaking came too easily and smoothly to me. Modelling words was not always modelling thoughts. Since then, I have learned to have difficulties in formulating what I want to convey to others. Words began to resist me. Similarly, I believe other participants of these seminars experienced it when, under the influence of the professor, they began to demand from their own statements that instead of being a shield for unclear and indistinct thoughts, they would inform others skillfully and faithfully about what was thought concisely and precisely. Responsibility for our own words and respect for those of others – this is what we learned at those seminars.

Previously admiring the beauty and artistry of written or spoken words, we began to see a new ideal: clarity of speech. This was a consciously set direction. Moving forward, we were to develop that style of thinking (yes, simply thinking, not philosophizing) appropriate to Tadeusz Kotarbiński's school.

VIII

During the years of occupation, Warsaw, in addition to other higher education institutions, like the Lipiński School and the Zaorski School, had as many as two underground universities: the University of Warsaw and the University of Western Lands. Professor Władysław Tatarkiewicz lectured at both, always at-

tracting such a large audience that it is surprising how the professor and his students emerged unscathed from these meetings, which can hardly be properly described as clandestine. The history of philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, lectures for philosophers, and so-called "service" lectures for humanists of other specialties – this was the rich and industrious programme of the tireless lecturer. Private apartments, the boarding house of the grey-haired as a pigeon Father Kurzyna on Nowogrodzka Street, the halls of the Boduen house for dropouts, an authentic school on Świętokrzyska Street, and finally, the women's monastery in Kraków on St John Street, already after the Uprising, towards the end of the occupation, successively provided shelter for the professor and his students.

I attended the first lecture at the University of Western Lands, in Father Boduen's department. In those walls, a group of noisy youth and university lectures were – even under occupation conditions – quite a remarkable phenomenon. Then Professor Tatarkiewicz directed me to the clandestine lectures of the University of Warsaw. For philosophers, he taught ethics and the history of philosophy from 1942 to 1944, and for Polish studies students, at the aforementioned Tynelski School, in the academic year 1943/44, he taught aesthetics. Classes were held at my place at 9 Warecka Street, at Jeziorański's at 4 Jasna Street, at Miller's on Dobra Street, at the Zieliński's on Kopernik Street, at Neumann's villa on Malczewski or Lenartowicz Street, at Pniewski's villa on Prezydencka Street, and at the villa on Langiewicz Street, on the even side of the street.

These study groups were larger than others. While normally consisting of six, seven, at most ten people, these counted a dozen or more, sometimes up to twenty. They brought together people from various specialties. Alongside philosophers, there were art historians, philologists, historians, and even medical professionals, like Zofia Greulich and Ludwik Barcz, who, alongside medicine, studied philosophy, only to return to their medical profession years later. Among the students, there were also those who attended as auditors, solely out of interest and pleasure, with no intention of taking these classes or exams. Tatarkiewicz's lectures always enjoyed great popularity. Their topics, approach, and attractive literary form, not to mention the charming and immensely popular persona of the well-known and eminent professor, attracted people with various interests and career and life plans. However, this diverse audience was characterized at first glance by certain external features: generally well-dressed youth, mostly from affluent intelligentsia, perhaps landowners, partly gilded, somewhat snobbish, sometimes presumably treating their participation in such activities as a matter of good taste – on

a par with Sunday attendance at the elite chapel "Przytulisko" on Wilcza Street, and later at the morning music session at Wojtowicz's café on Nowy Świat Street.

But let's not generalize. There were also those whose genuine and already crystallized interest brought them, and who were easily recognizable as future academic workers. Undoubtedly, among them, Klemens Szaniawski stood out due to his extraordinary abilities. The rumour of his excellent exam in the history of philosophy, prepared in record time, spread widely and reached other study groups despite the barriers of the underground. Miller stood out for the breadth and boldness of his views, tall, slender, with a powerfully arched forehead and bright, cheerful eyes. His ground-floor apartment on Dobra Street was the site of many long and heated discussions. He is currently living in Switzerland and working in academia.

Since Professor Tatarkiewicz did not conduct seminars during this period, only lectures – which suited him better as a type of class – we got to know each other personally in our group of colleagues through conversations after the lectures, as during them our role by nature had to be passive. Usually, for these conversations – interesting in a group of cultured, intelligent youth with various interests – we would arrive much earlier, long before the lecture started, and often leave an hour or more after it ended. The hospitable host often served "tea," or more precisely, so-called herbatorum or a brew made from synthetic "Tonga" cubes (herbs plus carrots) or caramel essence. Depending on the wealth of the household, there would be saccharin or sugar, sometimes oatmeal cookies or even potato pound cake. Alcohol – never.

The atmosphere of these post-lecture social gatherings, which soon became a tradition, was pleasant, and the conversations led by people with diverse interests – future writers, journalists, actors, visual artists, philosophers, sociologists, Polish philologists – were a valuable complement to the lecture, which – as always with Tatarkiewicz – was characterized by a broad historical perspective, richness of associations, allusions, and quotes from the best literature, good taste, high culture, and beautiful literary form. The atmosphere of the pre- and post-lecture social gatherings "infected" the lectures themselves, and the whole thing took on the character of scholarly and cultural events, very attractive, which, in addition to usefulness, provided satisfaction and social enjoyment.

Sometimes, however, the atmosphere was disrupted by incidents in occupied Warsaw. For example, Szaniawski told me – although I wasn't a member of that group – that during a class at Miss Pniewska's on Prezydencka Street, an armed

attack took place in the neighbouring villa. Shots were heard just a few steps away. Rapid closing of windows and gates in nearby houses. Everyone froze in fear. They waited from minute to minute, expecting the Gestapo to burst in and shoot, or at best, to apprehend the entire group of young people, gathered in the immediate vicinity of the action, and take them away in "bud" vans. I don't know by what stroke of luck the professor and the students survived that ordeal and were able to leave the dreadful location after some time.

Often, chance and minutes decided people's lives. I remember how half an hour before one of Professor Tatarkiewicz's lectures, the screech of gendarme car brakes echoed in front of my house at 9 Warecka Street. Armed soldiers in helmets poured out of the cars, filled the gate and courtyard, and quickly spread out through all the annexes and staircases, swiftly taking control of the six-story tenement building. The Gestapo directed their main action towards Professor Zaorski's apartment, whose son and nephew were denounced as possessing weapons and pamphlets. However, because the affair was considered serious, the Germans decided to search the entire building, and three-person patrols went from apartment to apartment, conducting searches. When there was a loud knocking on our door, I didn't know if several young people rushing to my place for the group meeting had already been detained at the gate or on the stairs. Fortunately, it turned out that no one had entered yet. The patrol conducted a fairly detailed search, paying particular attention to the kitchen cupboard, where every bag of groats or peas was touched, every tin can opened and overturned. They only stopped in the room at the bookshelves, picking up every pamphlet. The patrol leader, a young gendarme with a helmet and a ready-to-fire "schmeiser" machine gun, attached himself to the large Latin dictionary by Kruczkiewicz, bought the day before and still unopened. He stood with it for about ten minutes, leafing through it carefully. I was sure that among the book's pages, he was looking for secret pamphlets. Imagine my surprise when, as he placed the volume back on the shelf, he pointed with his hand to two other Latin dictionaries standing nearby – the old Koncewicz and the Langenscheidt edition of Mengo-Kopia – and said that although he wasn't familiar with that particular dictionary, he thought it was probably much better than Koncewicz's and no worse than Langenscheidt's *Fonolexicon*. This philological digression from my armed interlocutor made me even more embarrassed for that humanist with a "sprayer" in hand. That day, Professor Tatarkiewicz's lecture did not take place.