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TRUTH-THEORIES IN THE LVOV-WARSAW SCHOOL

1. Introduction

Philosophical reflection on the concept of truth was among the favorite topics in the Lvov-Warsaw School (LWS hereafter; I will also use the denomination “Polish analytic philosophy”). It culminated in Tarski’s famous semantic theory of truth (see Tarski 1933), one of the most important contributions to analytic philosophy and perhaps the most important Polish contribution to world-philosophy. However, Tarski had his predecessors in Poland. On the other hand, Polish (or more specifically, undertaken in LWS) contributions to aletheiology (let me use this word in referring to the philosophy of truth) cannot be reduced to preceding or being associated with Tarski’s conception. Let me mention, for example, many-valued logic and its relation to the problem of truth.

In general, LWS defended the Aristotelian tradition in aletheiology. In fact, the consensus theory of truth developed by Poznański and Wundheiler (see Poznański, Wundheiler 1934) was the only notably exception. In fact, the popular label “the classical definition of truth” was invented in Poland in the 1920s and occurred in Kotarbiński 1926, pp. 120/121 for

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1 The article is a result of the project The Significance of the Lvov-Warsaw School in European Culture, supported by the Foundation for Polish Science. I use some material previously published in Woleński 1989, Woleński, Simons 1989 and Murawski, Woleński 2008.

2 Bibliographical references to writings by Polish philosophers mention the year of publications. Translations into English are added in particular bibliographical items at the end of the paper.

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the first time. This paper reviews aletheiology in LWS. I start with Kazimierz Twardowski, the father of the school. Then, a section on the Kotarbiński-Leśniewski debate follows. It also contains later views of both philosophers. Łukasiewicz’s views are reported in the next section. Tarski’s theory and its philosophical significance is briefly presented in section 5. Finally, I give a general summary of aletheiology in LWS. This scheme is only a skeleton. Several contributions by other members of LWS, like Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, Tadeusz Czeżowski, Maria Kokoszyńska or Zygmunt Zawirski are mentioned and commented on. In principle, my considerations cover the period of 1900–1939, but some later contributions of particular authors are taken into account as well.

2. Twardowski

Kazimierz Twardowski strongly influenced the subsequent aletheiology of LWS as well as many other philosophical views developed in Polish analytic philosophy. In 1900, he published an influential paper on relative truths. Twardowski’s problem was to answer the question of whether truth is absolute or relative. Something (a bearer of truth) is absolutely true provided that it is true everywhere, at all times and under all conditions, in particular, in all places. On the other hand, a truth-bearer \( A \) is relatively true, if it is true in some circumstances (at some time, at some place or under specific circumstances) and it implies that this bearer is not absolutely true. For instance, the relativists say (Twardowski’s examples) that the utterance “This flower has a pleasant smell,” “It is raining,” “Cold baths are healthy” or “It is morally wrong to conceal the truth.” Twardowski argues that these examples are mistakenly considered to express relative truths. In order to show that, he distinguished sentences (powiedzenia in Polish) and propositions (sądzy in Polish). According to Twardowski, sentences have no single or fixed meanings. Thus, the meaning of a given sentence can be associated with several propositions and a correlation in question can and usually does depend on various specific circumstances.

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3 In fact, Kotarbiński used the expression “the classical answer [to the problem of truth].” See also Kotarbiński 1929, p. 126, where the label “the classical understanding of truth” occurs.
4 “Briefly” because this theory deserves an extensive elaboration. I am working on a monograph on this topic (see Woleński (in preparation)).
5 Influential in Poland, in spite of the fact that this paper appeared in German in 1904.
6 Twardowski’s terminology was slightly different. In German, He used the word Urteil, which is translated as “judgment.” However, he understood judgments as non-psychological entities. Hence, the term “proposition” is legitimate in the context of his examples.