KAZIMIERZ TWARDOWSKI ON PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

Kazimierz Twardowski is considered one of progenitors of analytical philosophy. Among typical features of such a philosophy, we find – as it is commonly known – a tendency for detailed analysis of small (particular) problems and, in connection with that, disinclination to philosophical systems, tracking of every uncleanness, unmasking superstitions, attachment to precision of language (as a tool of cognition) and, finally, making use of results and methods of natural and formal sciences in philosophical deliberations. This text is devoted to the last of these features in Kazimierz Twardowski’s thought.

1. Twardowski’s Interests

Twardowski’s interests in natural science arose together with his philosophical interests. He was concerned with both types of disciplines already as a teenager pupil of the Viennese Theresianum. It is very instructive to reconstruct the circumstances of the origins of his interests, since these circumstances had an important influence on the issues of Twardowski’s research. Twardowski’s first confrontation with philosophy was connected with revisions in his worldview. In the third class of Theresianum, he read a book, famous at that time, of Ludwig Büchner – Kraft und Stoff. Twardowski’s meeting with the worldview so dramatically different from the one instilled in him by his upbringing, made a strong impression on him.

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2 Some elements of Twardowski’s philosophy of science analyzed here were discussed i.a. in: Dąmbska (1939), Kokoszyńska (1977), Woleński (1989) and Jadacki (2003).
This book also revealed Twardowski’s inclinations towards strict analysis and solid argumentation. In his intellectual “Autobiography,” he wrote:

This initial acquaintance with a world-view that was not just different from the Catholic, but indeed inimical to it, made [...] a great impression on me. But this impression quickly faded when on a closer reading I realized that Büchner’s expositions were riddled with logical errors. I immediately started a notebook into which I entered Büchner’s logically flawed arguments, and – since, of course, I was not at the time familiar with the rules of logic – exposed their defectiveness by replacing the mode of demonstration employed by Büchner with a suitably different, concrete example, which blatantly exposed the inadequacy of the former (1926, p. 18).

The conviction that the argumentation of materialists is insufficient was maintained by Twardowski throughout his life.

One of the sources of Twardowski’s interest in natural sciences was a woman – Helena Gostkowska, who was an object of Twardowski’s feelings when he was a student of Theresianum. Helena was a daughter of baron Roman Gostkowski (1837–1912), a physicist and engineer, who lived for some time in Vienna, then became a professor of Lvov Technical University. He was the author of many studies concerning physics and engineering, and one of the first publications concerning space travel.3 From Twardowski’s Diaries we know that baron Gostkowski was favorably disposed towards him – but it seems that he saw in Twardowski rather a future scientist than a future son-in-law. It was Gostkowski who suggested to him some publications on natural sciences. Twardowski’s interests in mathematics and natural sciences were renewed a few years later, when he participated in lectures on physics and mathematics within the frame of his philosophical studies.

Physiology, medicine and psychology became objects of Twardowski’s interest under the influence of his friend (and later also his brother-in-law, i.e. his sister Zofia’s husband) – Józef Krypiakiewicz, a medicine student, and later a physician. Krypiakiewicz suggested to Twardowski to read, i.a., the works of Charles Darwin and Diaries of Julian Ochorowicz. Both of these scientists made a significant impression on the future philosopher.

In his “Autobiography,” Twardowski thus recalled university lectures in the domain of physics and mathematics:

Since as a young man intent on philosophy I felt the need to acquire a comprehensive scientific background, if I may put it that way, that is to say, to gain familiarity with the principles and methods of the major types of sciences, in addition to philosophy,

3 Gostkowski’s second daughter, Zofia Anna, was one of the first woman-politicians (she was a member of the Polish Parliament). She was married to Jędrzej Edward Moraczewski, an engineer and the prime minister of the Polish government.