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PROBLEMS AND THEORIES OF PHILOSOPHY

by
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Translators' Preface

Philosophy and logic in modern Poland

One of the most remarkable national contributions to learning of this century is the logic and philosophy produced in Poland, particularly during its two decades of genuine independence. Logic, in its modern, mathematical form, is less disadvantaged than philosophy if expressed in a little-known language, since the proportion of straightforward prose in it is comparatively small. Furthermore, logical works of the greatest importance are often quite short and so offer no great obstacle to translation. As a result the logicians of modern Poland, in particular the three great Polish masters of the discipline in recent times, Łukasiewicz, Lesniewski and Tarski, are well known to the philosophers and logicians of the rest of the world.*

The philosophy associated with this powerful and productive school of logic is less familiar. But Polish logic originated from philosophy in the first place in the sense that its founders, Łukasiewicz and Lesniewski, came to the subject from

* See *Polish Logic*, edited by Storrs McCall, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1967, which contains historical surveys by Kotarbinski and Jordan as well as seventeen logical papers.

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philosophy and were both pupils of the philosopher Twardowski, whose teaching was the starting-point of this entire movement of thought. Furthermore, the work of the two leading Polish philosophers of the twentieth century, Kotarbinski and Ajdukiewicz (the author of this book), stands in a close relation to formal logic in much the same way as logic and philosophy are connected in the writings of Frege, Russell, Carnap and Quine.

Twardowski himself was a pupil of the Austrian philosopher, Franz Brentano, along with Husserl and Meinong. His approach to philosophy was, like theirs, of a broadly phenomenological character in that it took the form of an exact scrutiny of the precise introspectible nature of mental and, in particular, intellectual processes. Brentano had assigned to philosophy the task of investigating, not the causes and effects, the regular physical and physiological accompaniments, of such processes, but the intrinsic structure of the processes themselves. Together with that of Husserl and Meinong, Twardowski's own work was concerned with the nature of thought, whose articulation into acts, contents and objects he carefully analysed.

It was not, however, either the rather narrowly mental subject-matter or the phenomenological procedure of Twardowski that underlay the great creative influence he had on logic and philosophy in Poland, although those aspects of his work were directly continued by the distinguished phenomenologist, Roman Ingarden. His influence flowed, first, from his personal, patriotic decision to carry on his professional career not, as he could easily have done, at the Austrian centre of the Habsburg empire but at its outer limits in Lwow (in the south-east of Poland and now incorporated in the Soviet Union), and, secondly, from the remarkable and irresistible example he gave (in this strictly Polish location) of absolute clarity and precision of thought. His marvellously lucid and rigorous style of thinking, in

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which all crucial terms are explicitly defined or explained and all inferences set out so that their logical structure is absolutely perspicuous was firmly imparted to his pupils, and it has remained a persisting feature of Polish logic and philosophy. Those pupils soon fell under the influence of Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica*. The main lines of Russell's logical work had been laid down before he became aware that they had been anticipated in the much more rigorous, but hitherto almost wholly neglected, writings of Frege. The Polish logicians, particularly Lesniewski, were conscious of Frege from the beginning, with beneficial consequences for the quality of their work.

In this way the leading philosophers of Poland came to adopt a position about the correct method of philosophy similar to that of the analytic philosophers of western Europe and the United States, which takes the prime business of philosophy to be the investigation of thought in the shape of an analysis of it in its linguistically explicit form, the analysis itself being carried on with the principles of definition and inference specified by formal logic. Like the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* they took philosophy to be 'the logical clarification of thoughts'. It is a style of philosophising that nowhere outside Poland, except perhaps in the writings of Carnap, so thoroughly achieves its ideal of austere impersonal diction, of freedom from any taint of the subjective, the literary and the emotional.

Like the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle the leading philosophers of modern Poland found in modern formal logic an instrument of analysis that would allow philosophy to become truly scientific. Kotarbinski, indeed, dissented from the anti-metaphysical insistence of the logical positivists. Like Quine more recently, he has always taken the view that ontology, the determination of the main kinds of entity that really exist, is a proper and central part of philosophical inquiry. Ajdukiewicz was closer to Carnap and

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the positivists, although, as this book shows, less hostile than all of them but Schlick to the idea that the logically renovated philosophy of the present day is continuous with the philosophical work of the past.

Ajdukiewicz's life

Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz was born in December 1890 in Tarnopol, in Galicia. His parents moved, first to Cracow, where he attended the high school, and then to Lwow, where he attended the university, studying philosophy as his main subject under Twardowski and also working in mathematics and physics. His knowledge of logic began with his attendance at the lectures of Lukasiewicz. In 1912 he obtained his doctorate with a dissertation on Kant's theory of the *a priori* nature of space and left Lwow for further study at Göttingen, where Hilbert, the great mathematician and formalistic philosopher of mathematics, was teaching, as also was Husserl.

In the 1914–1918 war he served in the army on the Austro-Italian front, was decorated for bravery for rescuing some comrades from a ruined fort and was finally demobilised in 1920 with the rank of captain. Soon after he became professor of philosophy at the university of Warsaw and married the daughter of his teacher Twardowski. In 1928 he returned to Lwow as professor and remained there during the war, for some of the time teaching physics in a technical school. After the expulsion of the Germans from Poland in 1944 and the reconstitution of the Polish state under Russian auspices he was appointed professor of logic and the philosophy of science at the university of Poznan, where he remained until 1952, serving as rector of the university during his last four years there.

From 1954 until his death in 1963 he lived in Warsaw. Until his retirement at the age of seventy in 1960 he was

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head of the institutes of logic at both the university of Warsaw and the Polish Academy of Science. He remained until his death the chief editor of *Studia Logica*, the periodical in which logical and logico-philosophical works by Polish thinkers were published in more generally accessible languages: English, French, German and Russian.

Between 1948 and 1954 the communist regime in Poland, having successfully eliminated all effective political opposition, extended its attention to embrace the less immediately dangerous aspects of culture which it found unacceptable as residues of bourgeois liberalism. The logically oriented philosophy of the inter-war period came under heavy attack. It should be said that this attack was primarily intellectual. The exponents of bourgeois philosophy, with their anti-dialectical hostility to contradictions, were vehemently criticised but, although in many cases forbidden to teach, or to publish anything but translations of classic philosophical works, they were not in general deprived of academic employment or subjected to the full ferocity of 'administrative pressure'. That fate was largely reserved for dissident Marxists.

Ajdukiewicz was singled out for specially intense polemical treatment at the hands of Adam Schaff, the member of the central committee of the ruling party with particular responsibility for ensuring the dominance of the orthodox faith in the intellectual and cultural field. In 1952 Schaff published a long essay in which Ajdukiewicz's philosophy was indicted for 'idealism' in virtue of its alleged ascription of an autonomous, and therefore spiritual, existence to language in its picking out of language as the primary object of philosophical investigation. Ajdukiewicz was allowed to publish a reply of comparable length the following year, that of Stalin's death. From 1955 onwards he was able to resume the publication of his philosophical opinions in a non-defensive way.

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[More information](#)*Ajdukiewicz's works*

Ajdukiewicz published eight books and a great number of articles, more than fifty of which are brought together in the two volumes of *Język i Poznanie (Language and Cognition)*, vol. I, 1960, vol. II, 1965. Some of these articles are to appear in English translation in a volume to be published by D. Reidel and Co. Ajdukiewicz's books are: *On the Methodology of the Deductive Sciences*, 1921 (his thesis for promotion to the rank of dozent); *The Main Trends of Philosophy*, an anthology of extracts from the works of its classical representatives, 1923; *The Main Principles of Scientific Method and Formal Logic*, 1928; *The Logical Foundations of Teaching*, 1934; *Propaedeutic to Philosophy* (for colleges of general education), 1938; the present work, 1949; *Outline of Logic*, 1953 (translated into German as *Abriss der Logik*, 1958); and, posthumously, *Pragmatic Logic*, 1965.

Ajdukiewicz's philosophy

Ajdukiewicz's first original works of importance in philosophy appeared in the 1930s and fell within the field of logic or theory of meaning. He brought to the problems of this field an understanding of the nature of deductive systems obtained from earlier work in the domain of metalogic. From the beginning he was quite clear in his mind as to the distinction between sense and reference. This had been classically articulated by Frege but had been to some extent obscured in English-speaking philosophy by the influence of Russell's theory of names, with its thesis that a true, 'logically proper' name is meaningless if it stands for nothing.

At the time Ajdukiewicz was writing, the prevailing assumption among analytic philosophers in western Europe was that meaning is essentially syntactical in character, which is to say, very approximately, that all questions about mean-

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ing can be answered by assertions about the properties of expressions or the relations of expressions to one another and need involve no statements about the relations between expressions and extralinguistic reality. The most elaborately developed version of this doctrine is Carnap's *Logical Syntax of Language*. One source of this conviction was, no doubt, Wittgenstein's view that statements about the relationship between language and the world are senseless, endeavouring to say what can only be 'shown', a view that did not prevent him from making many statements of this avowedly unacceptable kind in his *Tractatus*. Another source could have been disquiet about the concept of truth, engendered by the paradoxes to which its use seemed to give rise. Philosophers of the Vienna Circle were led by this to accepting a form of the coherence theory of truth, which saw it as a matter of the relations of sentences to one another and not to extralinguistic reality.

Ajdukiewicz rejected this point of view in his theory of meaning. In conformity to his thorough commitment to Frege's distinction between sense and reference, he thought of meanings, not as any sort of objects, but as a property of expressions determined by the existence of rules governing their employment. He distinguished three kinds of rules: (i) axiomatic rules, laying it down that certain sentences should always be accepted, for example 'every A is A '; (ii) deductive rules, laying it down that if one sentence is accepted, another sentence must also be accepted, for example, if 'if p then q ' is accepted so also must be 'if not- q then not- p '; and (iii) empirical rules, laying down that certain sentences must be accepted in the face of certain specified data of experience, for example 'it hurts' when one is in pain. The non-syntactical aspect of meaning, of course, is covered by the third, empirical, type of rule. Only the first two types of rule are found in formal deductive systems. The main lines of this theory were published in 1934, a year after Tarski had

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published in Polish his famous essay on the concept of truth which, as it were, logically legitimated semantic assertions about the relations between words and the world. In due course Carnap was converted to this point of view.

Two further fields of investigation should be briefly mentioned. On the basis of some ideas of Lesniewski's, Ajdukiewicz developed a theory of semantic categories to make possible the formulation of rules specifying which combinations of expressions are admissible as well-formed sentences. This is a simple enough task as regards an artificial, formal language of limited and specified vocabulary. It is an altogether more difficult problem as regards natural languages. To English-speaking philosophers the problem for natural languages seemed to allow for no more definite and explicit a solution than Ryle's very informal and unsystematic doctrine of categories. More recently, however, the type of procedure Ajdukiewicz inaugurated has been carried further in the kind of analysis of syntactical structure practised by Chomsky and his associates.

Ajdukiewicz went on to derive from his account of the meaning of expressions as being defined by rules which, it seemed, allowed for considerable freedom of choice, the conclusion that there could be languages which differed, not just in the comparatively trivial sense of having different vocabularies, each associated with a single common pattern of rules, but in being radically untranslatable into each other. Here he anticipated the conclusions about the indeterminacy of translation which are fundamental to Quine's work in the philosophy of language, although he arrived at them from a very different direction. He went on to infer that the epistemologist, since inevitably confined to the conceptual apparatus of the language in which his reasonings are expressed, cannot set himself up as an impartial critic of or arbiter between different conceptual apparatuses.

On his return to philosophy after 1945 Ajdukiewicz was

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led to abandon the kind of conventionalism or linguistic relativism that has just been outlined, but he entertained the possibility of another doctrine familiar from the writings of Quine which takes the logical aspects of language, in Ajdukiewicz the sentences determined as acceptable by its axiomatic and deductive rules, to be as much accessible to the arbitrament of experience as are sentences of a straightforwardly empirical character. Like Quine he maintained that empirical testing bears not on single assertions, but on whole bodies of assertions, among which the propositions of logic may be included. Among other subjects treated by him in this phase of his career are definition, hypothetical statements, analyticity and, in a rare departure from strict philosophical abstraction, the freedom of science.

Fuller accounts of Ajdukiewicz's original contributions to philosophy can be found in chapter 5 of H. Skolimowski's *Polish Analytical Philosophy* and in the article about him by Z. A. Jordan in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Paul Edwards.

This book

The present volume, which was first published in 1949 at the time when the official repression of the logically oriented philosophy of Poland was just getting under way, was, it appears, one for which Ajdukiewicz had a particular affection. He may well have felt that in it he had succeeded in conveying a great deal of information about historically influential philosophical arguments without any departure from the well-established standards of clarity and rigour characteristic of the school of philosophers to which he belonged.

As a first introduction to philosophy it can withstand comparison with a much better-known work with the same aims and of much the same size: Bertrand Russell's *Problems of Philosophy*. Ajdukiewicz's book is much more neutral and

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impersonal than Russell's, it is altogether drier and less entertaining, it contains no significant new additions to philosophical thought. On the other hand it covers more ground and does so in a more conclusive and authoritative way. Ajdukiewicz, with the characteristic logical self-consciousness of the Polish philosophers, always has a clear idea of what he has established and what he has not. There are no suggestive or tentative loose ends in this book.

His conception of the scope of epistemology and metaphysics is not one that will appear at all surprising to those brought up in the modern philosophical tradition of the English-speaking world. There is more awareness of the work of Husserl and the phenomenological movement than such a book by a British or American writer would be likely to reveal. This is expressed in particular in the use of some of those ideas to provide more persuasive support than Kant gave to his thesis that the propositions of mathematics, although *a priori*, are nevertheless synthetic. In general there is a certain almost military austerity about the conscientiousness and punctilio with which Ajdukiewicz sets out his reasonings, as compared with the measure of genial perfunctoriness to be found in Russell's popular philosophical expositions. The claims of beauty take a distinctly second place to those of truth.

The publication of this book will not make Ajdukiewicz's own positive contributions to philosophy available to readers of philosophy in the English-speaking world, in the way that the publication of an English version of Kotarbinski's *Gnosiology* made accessible his systematic body of philosophical opinions. For that we must wait for the publication in English of a selection of his essays. But it does provide an excellent example of the typical Polish style of philosophical reasoning, applied to the task of introductory philosophical exposition, in which its clarity and rigour can be as valuable as in the domain of more advanced and original work.

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Further reading

- Z. A. Jordan *The Development of Mathematical Logic and of Logical Positivism in Poland between the two wars* (O.U.P., London, 1945)
- Z. A. Jordan *Philosophy and Ideology* (D. Reidel, Dordrecht, Holland, 1963)
- H. Skolimowski *Polish Analytical Philosophy* (Routledge, London, 1967)

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Preface

In this short book the reader will find a review of the most important problems which are traditionally included in the theory of knowledge and metaphysics. The reader will also find a review of the solutions to these problems which are most frequently found in the history of philosophy and, in consequence, a review of philosophical tendencies and trends in the theory of knowledge and metaphysics. Alongside bare presentations of theses characteristic of various trends, that is to say alongside philosophical positions, we have in most cases sketched the course of thought which led to these positions and we have in some cases sketched the polemics which representatives of opposing schools have conducted.

When I started writing I did not intend to write an entire book. The origin of this book is as follows; twenty-five years ago I published a book of philosophical readings under the title *Main Trends of Philosophy* which I introduced with a preface containing a review of problems and trends of philosophy which were then illustrated by texts from various authors. Recently, preparing a new edition of the above mentioned readings, I came to the conclusion that the preface should be written anew. Consequently I started to write this preface again. The new version grew to such a size that it

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could not be contained in the same volume as the readings. The thought occurred to me of publishing the preface as a separate book. This is the origin of the volume which the reader now has in his hands.

The origin of this book explains its character. First of all it is not a textbook for advanced students in which the author writes with the greatest precision he is capable of, ignoring the requirements of easy intelligibility. On the contrary, writing this book I have avoided too far-reaching analyses and I have not attempted to achieve the sort of complete conceptual clarity which could be achieved only at the expense of intelligibility. Consequently there are some statements whose sense may not be sufficiently precise for those whose demands in this respect are very high but that will not disturb the average reader. I mention this in order to avoid the misunderstanding that I regard the formulations contained in this book as final and incapable of being rendered more precise.

However, this little book is not ideal as a first introduction to philosophy. For that purpose it is too concisely written and not all means possible for a suggestive presentation of problems and their solutions are employed here. The most suitable introduction to philosophical problems is always monographs elaborating particular problems in detail. I think, however, that this book, in conjunction with *Philosophical Readings*, which is shortly to appear, will be able to serve as such a 'first introduction'.

This book will serve best at an intermediate level. It will be able to serve as a textbook or repetitorium for those who have already acquired some philosophical knowledge before reading it. It will enable these readers to find more or less tangible formulations of trends and problems of philosophy. Perhaps it will also give some readers a chance to arrive at their own opinions about various philosophical issues.

I hope that in spite of all the shortcomings I have mentioned

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Problems and Theories will fill a serious gap in our philosophical literature. For that literature contains hardly any books which cover the whole of theory of knowledge and metaphysics systematically. This role was once filled by 'introductions to philosophy' written by German authors at the turn of the century and now entirely out of print. These 'introductions' left too much to be desired in respect of their analysis of the meaning of philosophers' assertions. This work, in spite of compromises resulting from its level of presentation and the limits of its size, attempts to explain the meaning of terms used by philosophers in putting forward their doctrines. On this account I trust that the reader will find it useful.

July 1948

K.A.