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Twardowski on Presentations and Truth

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This paper is concerned with Twardowski's role as a teacher and a founder of the Lvov-Warsaw School of logic and philosophy as well as with his main contributions to philosophy: the distinction between the content and object of presentations and his defense of objective truth, which initiated a debate on the eternity of truth in the School. It would perhaps be no exaggeration to say that the emergence of the Lvov-Warsaw School was the result of the premeditated efforts of one philosopher, namely Kazimierz Twardowski. Therefore, I will first present Twardowski's role as a teacher and founder of the School and then move on to his theoretical achievements.

1. Twardowski as a Teacher and Founder of the Lvov-Warsaw School

Kazimierz Twardowski (Figure 1) was born to Polish parents in 1866 in Vienna. He studied philosophy, history, mathematics, physics and physiology at the University of Vienna and was a student of Franz Brentano and Robert Zimmermann.[1–3] In Vienna he obtained both his PhD (in 1891) and Habilitation (in 1894). In 1895 Twardowski was appointed Reader in Philosophy and in 1898 a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Lvov, which was at that time one of the two universities in which Polish was the language of instruction. He saw his coming to Lvov as something of a mission to reform Polish philosophy by introducing rigor and clarity to it. This was especially important as clarity of thought was by no means a priority in Polish philosophy at the time – the most influential trend was Messianism, a peculiar mixture of Hegelian themes, Catholicism and national myths.[4]

Twardowski intended to teach his students philosophical methods that were close to the methods of science, where the goals were clarity, disciplined discussion, detailed and systematic analysis, rigorous argumentation and considerations of specific problems. Twardowski encouraged cooperation with scientists from other disciplines and emphasized collaboration. He was a devoted but strict teacher, teaching philosophy to students of various disciplines and able to attract not only philosophers but mathematicians, psychologists, lawyers, historians of literature and others to his classes.[5] Members of his seminar had the keys to the library and he made his private collection of books available to them. Twardowski's attention and clarity

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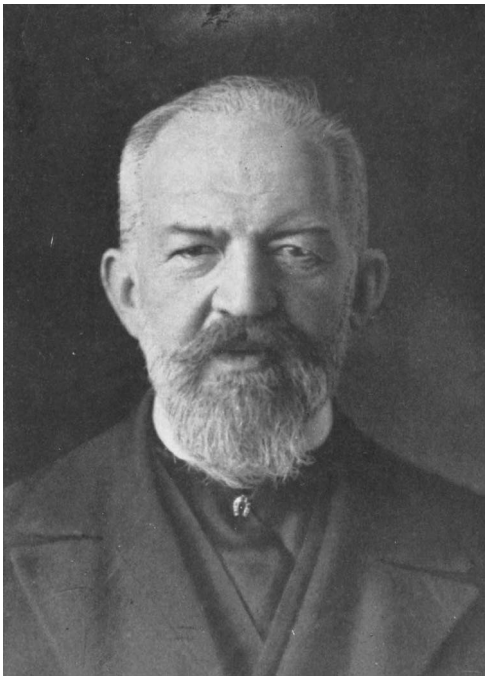


Figure 1. Kazimierz Twardowski

made him a very popular teacher and at some point, when the number of students reached 2000, his lectures had to be moved to the Great Concert Hall of the Lvov Musical Society. His lectures started at 8 am sharp, his seminars were held on Saturday afternoon.[1–3,6] He taught discipline and rigor both in one's writing and practical life.[1,4,7]

Twardowski organized philosophical life in Poland and was president of numerous societies. In 1904 he founded the Polish Philosophical Society, in 1907 he established the first laboratory of experimental psychology in Poland. In 1911 he created the journal *Ruch Filozoficzny*, still in operation today. He was a Dean twice and Rector three times before retiring from the University in 1930.[1,4,6]

Amongst his most famous students one should note Jan Łukasiewicz (1878–1956), Stanisław Leśniewski (1886–1939), Tadeusz Kotarbiński (1886–1981), Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz (1890–1963), Stefan Banach (1892–1945), Tadeusz Czeżowski (1889–1981), Roman Ingarden (1893–1970), Izydora Dąmbska (1904–1983) and Maria Lutman-Kokoszyńska (1905–1981). Łukasiewicz is best known for his invention of many-valued logics. In 1915 he became a Professor at Warsaw University, marking the point at which the Lvov School became the Lvov–Warsaw School. In 1919 Łukasiewicz was joined in Warsaw by Leśniewski and Kotarbiński. All three taught Alfred Tarski (1901–1983), who was to become the most famous Polish logician and analytic philosopher. Other pupils of Twardowski were appointed to the chairs of logic and philosophy, for example Zawirski in Poznań and Czeżowski in Vilnius.[5]

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After the war, Tarski worked in Berkeley, where he founded the famous Berkeley school of mathematics and logic. His students include Andrzej Mostowski (University of Warsaw), Julia Robinson (University of California, Berkeley), Solomon Feferman (Stanford University), Richard Montague (University of California, Los Angeles), Jerome Keisler (University of Wisconsin, Madison) and Dana Scott (Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh).

The reason we can think of Twardowski's students as members of one school is not a set of ideas that they all adhere to but a common and distinctive methodological attitude that they inherited from Twardowski and which he himself inherited from Brentano.[1,4,7–9]

2. Twardowski's Distinction between Content and Object of Presentations

After his appointment in Lvov, Twardowski put most of his time and effort into establishing a tradition of scientific philosophy in Poland and published little.[1,7] Talking about his achievements I will thus concentrate mostly on his habilitation thesis 'Zur Lehre vom Inhalt und Gegenstand der Vorstellungen' (1894) and in particular his distinction between the content and object of presentation.

This work was conducted in the Brentanian tradition. An important thesis of Brentano identifies the distinction between mental and non-mental phenomena with the intentionality of mental phenomena: every mental phenomenon has an object towards which it is directed (Ref. 10, p. I). Thus in every mental act we can distinguish the act itself and its object. For Brentano, the object is the so-called intentional object, immanent to the mental act – its content.

But Twardowski argued that every presentation has both a content and an object and that Brentano's immanent object should be identified not with the object but with the content of the mental act. As a result we do not have just the act and content of a presentation, but the act, content and object, the object being external to the presentation and ontologically independent.

This distinction has its predecessors – Twardowski mentions Höfler,[11] Bolzano,[12] Zimmerman[13] and Kerry[14] – but no Brentanian accepted the distinction before Twardowski's lucid argumentation. The work influenced Husserl's and Meinong's theories of intentionality. It was reviewed in *Mind* by Stout,[15] and through this review influenced both Moore and Russell.[16,17]

Twardowski argued that the reason why content and object are often identified comes from an ambiguity in the phrase 'presented object'. To clarify his point he appealed to the distinction between modifying and determining adjectives, and offered an analogy between the act of presenting an object and the act of painting a landscape. Determining adjectives simply attribute properties to objects (as in 'good friend'), while modifying adjectives change the original meaning of the noun (a false friend is no longer a friend).

When an artist paints a landscape, he thereby paints a painting. The 'painted landscape' is the painting in this case, and the adjective 'painted' is used here in a modifying sense, because the landscape is not really a landscape, but a painting.

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But by 'painted landscape' we can mean a piece of land that happened to be depicted in a painting. Here we use the adjective 'painted' in a determining sense – the landscape is still a landscape when it is depicted by an artist.

The same happens with the adjective 'presented' in 'presented object'. Imagine Twardowski looking at a pipe. The pipe is a material object in front of him. He thinks about the pipe, forms a presentation of the pipe in his head. The pipe in his head is the immanent object of his presentation, its content. But Twardowski is not thinking about the immanent object, he is thinking about the pipe in front of him. When he considers smoking the object, he does not mean the mental object, he wants the real feel of the wood in his mouth and real nicotine in his lungs. As he put it, 'presented 100 talers does not constitute wealth' (Ref. 18, ch. 2). Yet both objects are presented. The pipe in the head is presented in the modifying sense of 'presented', as it is not really a pipe but a mental object, presented in the presentation, the content of the presentation. The pipe external to Twardowski is a presented pipe in the determining sense, it happens to be presented by Twardowski through his presentation. It is the object of the presentation.

Apart from explaining why the confusion of content and object of presentation takes place according to him, Twardowski offers arguments for the distinction. He points out that we can have two contents for one object when the same object is presented to two persons or to even one person in two different ways. Imagine it is really Brentano's pipe, given to Twardowski as a token of friendship. Brentano might have forgotten he had given it to Twardowski and wonders where the pipe is. He does not remember it very well, the colors he remembers are a bit different but, first of all, the presentation in Brentano's head is a different mental object to the one in Twardowski's head. Still, in both cases the object of the presentation is the same.

Additionally, the content and the object of a presentation are different objects, because they have different properties. For example, the pipe on the table is black and brown, it is wooden. It existed – we can imagine – before Twardowski existed and is now smoked by somebody else even though Twardowski is no more. The pipe in Twardowski's head is a mental object, existing only as long as Twardowski's presentation exists.

The last type of argument has been used by Twardowski in support of another of his ideas. As I mentioned, he attributed the distinction between content and object to Bolzano. But Bolzano claimed that not every presentation has an object, that some just have content. In contrast, Twardowski argues that every presentation has an object, that there are no objectless presentations.

Even if we imagine that Twardowski has overcome his craving for the pipe, that he has stopped thinking about the pipe and is now thinking about the son of a childless mother, we must see that his presentation has an object and not just content. Twardowski understands the content of his presentation and knows that its object not only does not exist, but it could not exist. It is a contradictory object. Twardowski attributes nonexistence to this object. But obviously the content of his presentation does exist, so it is something else that does not exist when Twardowski is performing the act of presentation of the son of a childless mother. His presentation has an object,

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although it is a non-existent one. Such contradictory objects do not exist in the ordinary sense yet they possess properties and are arguments of relations. This means that they have some form of existence.

Twardowski's arguments sound convincing as long as they involve objects of presentation that are real objects, such as pipes or tables. Once we leave the sphere of real objects, it is not clear, however, what he means by an object. If we want to claim that there are objects that are the objects of presentations whose content is inconsistent, we are – by using the phrase 'there are' – ascribing some form of existence to those objects. In 'Zur Lehre vom Inhalt und Gegenstand der Vorstellungen' Twardowski, apart from his theory of presentations, develops a comprehensive theory of objects (his theory formed the basis for Meinong's theory of objects[19] and influenced Husserl's ontology of wholes and parts;[20] see Refs 3, 7 and 21). Yet Twardowski does not explain what kind of being other than existence he attributes to contradictory objects and at some point he simply equates 'objecthood' with 'the property of being presented' (Ref. 1, §7, p. 37). Thus, his thesis does not necessarily have to be viewed as inconsistent with Bolzano's thesis that there are objectless presentations.

The ontology of non-existent and even contradictory objects was later taken up by Alexius Meinong.[21] Not everybody was prepared to accept the ascription of any form of existence to contradictory objects and Russell even accused Meinong's views of inconsistency on this account.[22] Meinong hoped to avoid Russell's charge by recourse to the distinction between complete and incomplete objects and his principle of the independence of existence from bearing properties.[19,23] Objects are by their very nature indifferent to existence, they just possess properties. For Meinong, as for Twardowski, an object is anything towards which a mental act can be directed. Incomplete objects are undetermined with respect to some properties. Thus, they infringe the principle of the excluded middle for predicate negation (and contradictory objects infringe the law of contradiction for predicate negation), but, according to Meinong, should obey the classical laws of propositional logic. As Russell charged Meinong's theory with infringing the law of contradiction, his objection involved only propositional negation. Recent work shows, however, that avoiding the charge of inconsistency might in fact require abandoning classical logic.[24–27]

3. Twardowski's Defense of Absolute Truth

I will now move on to Twardowski's work on truth and his paper from 1900, 'On the so-called relative truths'.[28] The work is important, because it initiated a debate about truth in Poland and it can be argued that this debate led to the important achievements in logic in the Lvov-Warsaw School (compare Refs 29 and 30).

Twardowski defended the notion of absolute, eternal truth. He surveyed putative examples of relative truths. Relativists would claim that something might be true for us but not for them or that something was true in the Middle Ages but is not true anymore. Twardowski argued that the relativity of truth is illusory: it disappears if

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one pays close attention to the (often covert) quantifiers or if one replaces indexical expressions by non-indexical terms referring to the same objects. He claimed that one can always de-indexicalize indexical utterances without compromising their content. This claim was later commonly accepted in the Lvov-Warsaw School and is still dominant in Polish philosophy.[31] As a result, a judgment that is true is always true, no matter when and where uttered.

The topic was taken up by other members of the School. In 'The problem of the existence of the future', Kotarbiński[32] argued that sentences about the future are neither true nor false now, but they acquire truth values over the course of time. Once they become true they will always be true, but not before that time. If the truth or falsity of sentences about the future were already settled, there would be no room for our free activity.

Leśniewski criticized Kotarbiński's arguments in his paper 'Is All Truth Only True Eternally or Is It Also True without a Beginning'[33] but Łukasiewicz supported Kotarbiński in claiming that eternity of truth entails determinism in 'On determinism'[34] and expressed similar ideas in his earlier book 'On the principle of contradiction in Aristotle'.[35] In the 1920s and 1930s, the debate moved from philosophy to logic. Łukasiewicz invented systems of many-valued logics and Tarski started publishing on truth in formalized languages. Even though Tarski's results are negative with respect to defining truth in natural languages, his achievements formed the basis for later work on truth and meaning in ordinary languages by others.[36–39]

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