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IS KAZIMIERZ AJDUKIEWICZ'S CRITIQUE OF IDEALISM CONCLUSIVE?

Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz was occupied with idealistic implications of epistemology for at least 15 years and he wrote 4 comprehensive self-contained papers on this subject, not to mention numerous items where the subject was also touched. This was a problem of great importance for him and – as he wrote – its analysis helped him during his period of radical conventionalism to leave the metaphysical crossroad and to take the way of realism. Moreover, it is recognized (e.g. in Prof. J. Woleński's book on Polish Analytical Philosophy) that these Ajdukiewicz's studies are good examples of so called method of paraphrases – a particular method of philosophical analysis invented by Ajdukiewicz himself. Even for those two reasons only the works mentioned deserve thorough investigation.

In the article written in 1937 and entitled *The Problem of Transcendental Idealism in a Semantic Formulation* Ajdukiewicz tried to use certain metalogical results to criticize the epistemological standpoint of the Baden faction of the neokantion school. He took into consideration views of Heinrich Rickert – one of the leaders of this school. Let us reconstruct briefly Ajdukiewicz's presentation of relevant neokantian statements together with the subsequent criticism[1].

Ajdukiewicz claimed that in Rickert's opinion reality is no more than a mere corelate of consciousness and it has ontologically derivative character. The particular feature of Rickert's standpoint is that according to him the consciousness mentioned above has supraindividual character. It is – in technical terms – „Bewüsstsein überhaupt". What is more, the consciousness seems to be reduced to one basic function only – namely the function of

[1] K. Ajdukiewicz, *Problemat transcendentalnego idealizmu w sformulowaniu semantycznym*, [in:] *Język i poznanie*, t. 1, Warszawa 1960, p. 264–278.

judgement. This function consists in the fact that the consciousness is the source of certain transcendental norms which are the criteria of truth for statements uttered by individuals. Putting the matter otherwise, according to Rickert existence consists in conformity of relevant existential statements with transcendental norms. One can see that Rickert chose a non-standard theory of truth, because for him veracity meant conformity with rules[2].

As a preparation of his criticism Ajdukiewicz presented the metalogical notion of language as a deductive system. Such system includes a decidable set of well formed formulas as well as a set of rules of immediate inference. An interpretation of all symbols of the language is according to Ajdukiewicz equivalent to the choice of its rules of immediate inference, so the natural language or the scientific language is a deductive system if its expressions have full meaning. Ajdukiewicz thought that at least the language of empirical sciences fulfills the above condition and that consequently it is a deductive system. On the other hand he referred to the fact that richer deductive systems (those containing arithmetics) are incomplete. If one is ready to accept the metalogical principle of excluded middle, one immediately arrives at conclusion that in the scientific language there are true statements that are not derivable. According to Ajdukiewicz the notion of transcendental rule could be interpreted in terms of the rules of immediate inference, so we reach the negation of the thesis of transcendental idealism because there are true statements which do not conform to the transcendental rules[3].

We must stress that Ajdukiewicz did not state categorically that his interpretation was an ultimate refutation of transcendental idealism in Rickert's version. He put some question marks on the end of his proposal but neverthless he seemed to be sure that the main part of his refutation is irrefragable. He mentioned two possible objections to this own construction. Firstly, one can replace some finitist notions with infinitist ones, and secondly, the acceptance of the metalogical law of excluded middle should be somehow justified. However, he described these doubts as subtle, which probably meant marginal and he did not discuss them at all. But it seems to me that these doubts are connected with the very crucial problem of this investigation, namely they are contribution to the question how the whole procedure is justified.

Let us allow ourselves certain extravagance and going through the looking glass quote famous verses:

And as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 271–273.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 273–276.

Is it possible to falsify this statement by saying that Jabberwock is the present reader of this text and „to burble" means to snore? If anybody claimed that, he would be immediately accused of committing petitio principii. The dispute about the truthfulness of the verses above would change into the dispute about the justification of the interpretation proposed.

For balancing this example let us put forward another one. When Plato stated that a man is a featherless biped, Diogenes showed him a plucked chicken, crying: „This is Plato's man!" It was a conclusive falsification of Plato's definition and as we know, stubborn Plato made his definition more sophisticated claiming that a man is a featherless biped with flat nails.

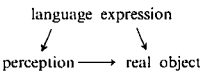
These examples show that one can expect conclusive falsification when one's interpretation fits the meanings of the statements under consideration. Generally speaking, an interpretation is valuable if it creates simpler problems than it resolves. Of course there are a lot of philosophical notions that are vague or even completely deprived of any distinguishable meaning. Some people even think that the very essence of philosophy consists in using such notions, as the definition taken from some American dictionary shows: „Metaphysics: highly abstract speculation, not easy to understand". Obscure philosophical theories cannot be falsified by any single interpretation. It seems to me that conclusiveness can be reached only by some kind of metacriticism pointing out that notions under consideration are vague but this would be by no means the refutation of the relevant theory.

The result of Ajdukiewicz's investigation concerning the problem of transcendental idealism boils down to the statement that if certain universal language of science could be constructed and if it had the features of a deductive system and its theses had finitist character and if transcendental norms could be treated as rules of immediate inference of this system then providing that metalogical rule of excluded middle was accepted, the main theorem of transcendental idealism would collapse. One can see how far these considerations are from being conclusive and I am convinced that attempts of justifications of the above premisses would only provoke further questions. In particular it is dubious whether one can justify the interpretation of transcendental norms as rules of immediate inference. Suspicion arises because the rules of inference must concern transformations of certain stated symbols and as such they always have only limited extent. Transcendental norms on the other hand are universal norms of thinking and thus cannot be boiled down to any definite (even if infinite) variety of symbols. The process of thinking always uses certain symbols but nevertheless it will always transcend every particular symbolism. Another objection against Ajdukiewicz's attempt is temporary and changeable character of meaning in the natural language. Neither the set of well formed formules is closed nor meanings are attached to words for ever. As the natural language evolves so must the rules of its

inference do. And one cannot doubt that transcendental norms do not change in time.

Twelve years after the critique of transcendental idealism Ajdukiewicz returned to idealistic views once again and focused on its subjective version. In the paper entitled *Epistemology and semiotics* he took into consideration bishop Berkeley's views. (It can be of historical interest that in those times and circumstances positive evaluation of the work of any bishop, and Berkeley in particular, was a deed of great intelectual and civil courage, precisely as today criticism of any bishop is)[4].

Ajdukiewicz investigates three-argument relation: language-perceptions-reality. Relations of referring between them are as following:



Ajdukiewicz puts stress on equivocation connected with double reference of language expressions. It arises when one uses the same word as a name of a sense data and as a name of real thing. He claims that this equivocation is responsible for basic misunderstanding hidden in subjectivistic thesis „esse = = percipi". In his opinion Berkeley is right when he stresses oviousness of this thesis, but only so far as imaginations, thoughts, impressions and so on are concerned. All of them ecxist only in someone's mind and they constitute separate realm called „the second world" by Karl Popper later on. But Berkeley does not stop here and goes farther, stating – in Ajdukiewicz's opinion – that the existence of the world (Popper's „first world") has the same derivative and dependent character[5]. Such standpoint is obviously false because in that case not only pink elephants but real ones as well would find a shelter in my mind. If one is not aware of the equivocation shown above, one can feel that „esse = percipi" is obvious but nevertheless somehow paradoxical. „Esse = percipi" is self-evident but only as far as it refers to perceptions. The „realistic" part of this thesis remains unproved.

Simplicity of the problem stated above renders the presentation of the preparatory metalogical part of this paper unnecessary. Nevertheless, Ajdukiewicz devotes a lot of time to these matters, mentioning esp. Tarski's paper on the definition of truth and he claimed that metalogical distinctions between language and metalanguage throw cerain light on the problem. Let us consider Ajdukiewicz's idea of extending the notion of metalanguage to a language possessing names for objects from „the second world" (so called

[4] K. Ajdukiewicz, *Epistemologia i semiotyka*, [in:] *Język i poznanie*, t. 2, Warszawa 1965, p. 107–117.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 109–111.

introspective language). This idea was induced by certain similarity in semantical relations in a genuine metalanguage and an „introspective language". Relations of referring are as follows:

metalanguage → language → reality
language → perceptions → reality

But similarities seems to end at this point. Perceptions are by no means language expressions. I cannot use my perceptions as a means of communication with another people what is a basic feature of any language. Thus whatsoever we arrive at with help of this analogy, must remain dubious and unjustified.

Putting this marginal matter aside let us return to Ajdukiewicz's claim that the equivocation is hidden in the argumentation of Berkeley. First of all it seems highly improbable that such simple logical error could remain undiscovered in the foundations of the system. Secondly, it can be clearly seen in Berkeley's text that he accepts „intentional" existence of perceptions and other states of mind and rejects the claim that apart from the knowing subject and the content of his mind there exists something else. (Obvious inconsistency in admitting the existence of God and other subjects can be easily explained as an self-censorship quite understandable in those times)[6]. However, Ajdukiewicz's argumentation implies that such a statement would be unacceptable. According to him, a subjective idealist cannot afford the statement about „real nonexistence" of certain things simply because he has not the notion of „real existence" at his disposal. If the only assertions that can be stated in the language of subjective idealist are: „A exists-in-mind" and „A does not exist-in-mind" then it is obvious that we are unable to say that A does not exist in reality. Probably that is the way of Ajdukiewicz's argumentation when he writes that subjective idealist has only pure metalanguage at his disposal (i.e. the language deprived of names for external objects). But such argumentation is easy to refute when one remembers that a subjective idealist speaks not only about his own perceptions but about knowing subject as well. If he can tell that a subject exists independently, he can also say that other things do not exist in this sense.

Let us allow ourselves to make a general remark. Berkeley's standpoint rejecting the independent existence of the objects of experience has undoubtedly metaphysical and not semiotical origin. Therefore all attempts of its criticism from the semiotic standpoint are ill-constructed. If someone believes or does not believe in existence of goblins and dwarfs, you cannot force him to

[6] G. Berkeley, *Traktat o zasadach poznania*, przel. J. Sosnowska, § 89, Warszawa 1956, p. 97 98.

change his opinions by referring to the language he uses, unless you demonstrate his inconsistency (and even then some people remain resistent). A decisive argument must be based on some intuition or experience. One can remind here attempts of another outstanding Polish contemporary philosopher Roman Ingarden who attacked the transcendental idealism of Husserl. The result of his efforts inspired by resistance to regarding the world as a correlate of consciousness was his *Controversy Over the Existence of the World* full of conceptual distinctions, tending to discover in the very essence of analysed notions some factor supporting our everyday's belief in the reality of the world. The evidence that Ingarden sought in vain is that the author himself left his work unended without achieving his goal.

Even if Ajdukiewicz was right in pointing out some inconsistencies of Berkeley's language and if moreover subjective idealism could not be stated in a consistent way, a follower of this school would be able to say with Wittgenstein that the language was only a ladder which can be thrown out after reaching the upper floor (i.e. after clear recognition of the issue in question). Even if Berkeley's standpoint is served in epistemological sauce, its essence has got a metaphysical core inaccessible to epistemological assaults. Similarly, belief in the independent existence of the objects of external experience cannot be refuted by epistemological investigations contained in Berkeley's *Treatise*. Ajdukiewicz's question put forward in the beginning of the paper discussed, namely: „Are there any metaphysical consequences of epistemological investigations?" can be answered as folows: such consequences (if at all) could be given only by experience or intuition and epistemological investigation can be relevant only to the limited extent.

Perhaps Ajdukiewicz was not satisfied with his results because three years after the reviewed paper he published anoter one entitled *On the notion of existence*. This one was inspired by Leśniewski's ontology in turn. The author tried to show that the standpoint of transcendental idealism cannot be presented consistently. Ajdukiewicz introduced two different notions of existence: intentional existence and real existence. With their help he proclaimed the following idealistic thesis: „Trees exist intentionally but do not exist in reality". We remember that the truth of this proposition boils down to its conformity with the transcendental norms. These norms were interpreted as rules of immediate inferece in turn. The fact that trees exist intentionally (the only possibility for an idealist) is equivalent to the fact that the statement about the existence of trees fulfills the transcendental norms. But such statement is an empirical statement which means that it uses standard notions of existence – the real existence. In this way – according to Ajdukiewicz – we can see the inconsistence of an idealistic language. For on one hand an idealist rejected the statement that trees really exist (accepting only that they exist

intentionally) and on the other hand the consequence of this step lead him to affirm that nevertheless trees really exist[7].

This paradox seems to be apparent only too. The statement that trees exist intentionally only is an epistemological statement of course, because sciences do not use the notion of the intentional existence at all. According to transcendental idealists the truth of this statement depends on its conformity with certain transcendental norms. These norms must deal with this particular type of statement and not with empirical statements, therefore there is no need of assuming that these norms will force us to admit that trees exist in reality. Speaking otherwise: if we bear in mind the universal character of transcendental norms, that they are applicable to all kinds of declarative sentences, we must realize that because epistemological statements are distinct from statements of empirical sciences, relevant transcendental norms should be different also. Although the norm for the empirical statement „Trees exist" could tell us to admit that trees exist in reality, there is no need of assuming that in case of an epistemological statement „Trees exist intentionally only" because this statement has got another criteria of truthfulness.

Finally, I must repeat once again that no one of Ajdukiewicz's arguments seems to be conclusive. If one remembers the importance of the above problems for the philosopher, the outcome seems to be rather depressing. Nor the method of paraphrases has manifested its merits if I am right to claim that majority of arguments could be presented without a reference to the logical results. In my opinion these results could act as a possible inspiration of certain epistemological hypotheses rather than as strict schemes which epistemological statements match.

Perhaps it is significant that while in his first paper Ajdukiewicz claimed that philosophical problems under consideration could be resolved easily with help of formal logic in the second one he seemed to be more modest with respect to that claim although he still cheered himself with certain epithets addressed to idealists and finally in the third one epithets as well as the impression of self-confidence disappeared at all. Is it possible that after long arguments with idealism Ajdukiewicz became to appreciate the opposite part of this controversy?

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[7] K. Ajdukiewicz, *W sprawie pojęcia istnienia*, [in:] *Język*..., p. 143-155.

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ZAGADNIENIE KONKLUZYWNOŚCI KRYTYKI IDEALIZMU PRZEPROWADZONEJ PRZEZ KAZIMIERZA AJDUKIEWICZA

Ajdukiewicz podejmował kilkakrotnie próbę analizy i krytyki metafizycznego idealizmu zarówno w jego wersji obiektywnej, jak subiektywnej. Angażował do tego celu pewne pojęcia i wyniki współczesnej metalogiki, co stanowiło przykład zastosowania właściwej mu metody analizy filozoficznej, zwanej metodą parafraz. Analiza Ajdukiewiczowskiej argumentacji ukazuje jej dalece niekonkluzywny charakter, jak również zdaje się wykazywać, że metoda parafraz nie znajduje tu swego efektywnego zastosowania. Konkluzją przedstawionych rozważań jest hipoteza, iż fundamentalne przekonania metafizyczne nie poddają się krytyce o charakterze semiotycznym.