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WŁADYSŁAWAS TATARKIEWICZIUS VILNIUJE (1919–1921 M.). FILOSOFIJOS ISTORIJA – ETIKA – DARBO METODAI

Władysław Tatarkiewicz in Vilnius (1919–1921). History of Philosophy – Ethics – Methods of Work[1]

SUMMARY

The aim of the article is to examine the works of Władysław Tatarkiewicz which are associated with his assignment to Stefan Batory University (1919–1921), to link these works with the studies preceding and following them, and to draw conclusions on the significance of this period for his entire academic career. The article contains analysis of texts which shows that in Vilnius Tatarkiewicz deepened his previous ethical research and refined his methods. Even though he spent only two years in Vilnius, these years appear to have been an important period for his philosophical development.

SANTRAUKA

Šiame straipsnyje siekiama išnagrinėti Władysławo Tatarkiewicziaus darbus, parašytus jį paskyrus dirbti Stepono Batoro universitete (1919–1921), siejant juos su ankstesniais bei vėlesniais tyrimais, ir padaryti išvadas apie šio laikotarpio reikšmę visai jo akademinei karjerai. Straipsnyje pateikiama tekstų analizė, iš kurios matyti, kad Vilniuje Tatarkiewiczius toliau plėtojo savo ankstesnius etikos tyrimus ir tobulino jų metodus. Nors Vilniuje jis praleido tik dvejus metus, šie metai, atrodo, tapo svarbiu jo filosofinės raidos laikotarpiu.

INTRODUCTION

In 1919, when Vilnius University (VU) resumed its activities as Stefan Batory University (USB), Polish scholars began to arrive in Vilnius to revive academic

life at the university. The Faculty of Humanities, established at that time, had four philosophical departments chaired by scholars delegated from other Polish universities. Tatarkiewicz, aged 33, was among them (Pawlak: 13-17). When he came to Vilnius in 1919, most of his already published or completed works could be assigned to one of two fields: history of philosophy (doctoral dissertation on Aristotle's philosophical system and articles on the Marburg's interpretation of Plato, phenomenology, and Polish philosophy) or ethics (habilitation thesis on the good and analyses of the notion of happiness) (Krajewski 1992: 19, 27). In Vilnius, Tatarkiewicz focused on analyzing scholastic manuscripts from the USB Library and developing his ethical investigations. It was in subsequent decades that his the most significant works were published, namely: *History of Philosophy* (Tatarkiewicz: 1933) and *Analysis of Happiness* (Tatarkiewicz 1947)[2]. After World War II, Tatarkiewicz focused on issues of methodology and aesthetics to a greater extent than previously.

This article aims to examine his investigations during his stay in Vilnius (1919-1921) and link them with his other philo-

sophical studies related to this period both chronologically and problematically. It appears that the 'Vilnius period' of Tatarkiewicz's investigations is an important time for his philosophical development. Firstly, Tatarkiewicz developed his methods of work in the history of philosophy and gained practical experience in ordering research material. Secondly, he developed the ethical ideas contained in his habilitation dissertation devoted to the absoluteness of the good. These two fields of his studies are essential for understanding the overall development of his research, all the more so since history of philosophy and ethics are fields in which he left a significant legacy.

It should be emphasized that the direction of Tatarkiewicz's investigations during his work at the USB was, in a way, the result of his previous research, his teaching experience and his interest in the arts. Nevertheless, the specific conditions of work and his assignments at the USB, such as the organization of library collections, ethical seminars, and even the architecture of the city of Vilnius, were of no less importance. This article presents his investigations in two fields: the history of philosophy and ethics.

1. THE LIBRARY COLLECTION OF THE USB

In Vilnius, Tatarkiewicz became involved in organizing the collections of the USB Library, focusing his efforts mainly on scholastic manuscripts. The ordering of the library collections led him to write an article (Tatarkiewicz 1926: 1-42), in which he presents a range of information on the collections: the

number of items, their placement in the archive, their probable origin, date of production, structure, typology, as well as their authors, content, and the context of their conception. The main subject of his research was focused on philosophical courses (476 volumes) of logic, physics, metaphysics, and ethics. Tatarkie-

wicz assessed them as extremely valuable evidence of late scholasticism in Lithuania. He also took into account the broader historical context: the organization of scholastic teaching in Lithuania as well as its development from the beginning of the 17th century to the 1830s. Furthermore, the article includes a list of the professors who were the authors of the courses.

Plečkaitis, who was an indisputable expert on scholasticism in Lithuania, states that, over the years, Tatarkiewicz's article "has retained its value, especially for Polish scholars, for whom later Lithuanian publications on this subject are not always readily available for linguistic reasons"[3] (Plečkaitis 2002: 127). Indeed, more detailed studies have been developed over time, and for this reason Tatarkiewicz's article has lost its relevance for Lithuanian scholars. The same is true with regard to the catalogue of the collections prepared by Tatarkiewicz and his wife Teresa, which has been replaced by a more detailed catalogue by Michał Brensztejn (ibid). Nevertheless, Tatarkiewicz's work was not in vain, for he completed the task of the preliminary ordering of the archive collections of the USB Library, and this was, and has remained, a starting point for scholars in this field. What is of particular relevance here is the fact that Tatarkiwicz's article appears to have played a significant role in the development of his research methods.

The work on the archive collections can be recognized as an important step in shaping his methodology. The ordering of material content seems to be at the heart of his methodology during every phase of his philosophical development, and this can be observed both in the afterword to the *History of Philosophy* (Tatarkiewicz 1933: 295-299) and in the preface to its sixth edition (Tatarkiewicz 2014: 7-9), as well as in the paper *The History of Philosophy and The Art of Writing It* (Tatarkiewicz 1971a: 63-86; a text first presented in the fifties; Krajewski 1992: 30). In the *History of Philosophy*, ordering is one of the main purposes of the work. Tatarkiewicz was aware that one of the consequences of this attitude towards his task was the omission of certain philosophers or the emphasis of some at the expense of others. It is a book prepared as a book for non-experts, as the first step on the way to exploring the history of philosophy, thus Tatarkiewicz's attitude is fully justified from this perspective. It should be noted that this work successfully fulfilled its purpose, the issues being presented very clearly. Nevertheless, it is not a work on the methodology of the history of philosophy, unlike the last of the above-mentioned texts, which is devoted to this issue. There Tatarkiewicz emphasizes the significance of the interventionism of the historian of philosophy; for example, he distinguishes the various procedures which the researcher undertakes. Among these procedures, Tatarkiewicz mentions the ordering of facts.

His attitude to ordering was expressed very clearly at the end of his life in a short text answering the question: what is the philosophy which I do? In this text Tatarkiewicz compares his methodological attitude to the work of organizing papers on a desk, and in this way, he recognizes ordering as the essence of

his philosophy: "my philosophy is the ordering of concepts, nothing more. [...] I have the same attitude towards philosophy as towards my desk and the papers lying on it. I cannot be calm when they lie in a mess. [...] I want to put the papers in order not only for myself, but also for others, so as to allow them to find what they are looking for" (Tatarkiewicz 1977: 1334). His article on the USB Library collection corresponds perfectly to this postulate.

At the same time, it should be stressed that Tatarkiewicz had already started to develop his methods of research during his studies in Marburg and while writing his doctoral dissertation (Głombik 2005: 28-29) devoted to Aristotle's metaphysical system and its notions (Tatarkiewicz: 1910), which he wrote under the supervision of Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp (Tatarkiewicz 1978: 11). When he returned to Poland after graduation, he published, inter alia, an article on Marburg's interpretation of Plato (Tatarkiewicz 1911: 346-358) and a paper about philosophy at Warsaw University in which he took into account archive materials (Tatarkiewicz 1915: 197-207). Therefore, although the ordering and the research focused on the collection of the USB Library was not something entirely new in his biography, it was exceptional in that Tatarkiewicz had to start from scratch, he had to work on manuscripts which were "arranged but not ordered" (Tatarkiewicz 1926: 2). For this reason, this work should be recognized as important research practice that helped him "revive the spirit of the historian of philosophy" (Wiśniewski 1997: 89), and allowed him to gain valuable practical experience in ordering research material. This research work on scholastic manuscripts can therefore be recognized as a practical experience that complemented the competences he had acquired earlier in Marburg and Warsaw.

2. THE INAUGURAL LECTURE

For many years, the only publication presenting Tatarkiewicz's quasi-ethical investigation in Vilnius was a single-page text in the journal "Hypogryf" (Tatarkiewicz 1920: 9) in which he raises the issue of purposeful action. Although the text *Order of Goods. A Study in Pascal* (Tatarkiewicz 1921: 295-318) was published in 1921, there are two reasons why this text should not be regarded as the result of Tatarkiewicz's ethical considerations in Vilnius. Firstly, this text was probably written before Tatarkiewicz's arrival in Vilnius (Wiśniewski 1997: 89). Secondly, this work is in fact an analysis of Pascal's considerations contained in *Thoughts*, and therefore it is an examination of the history of ethics rather than ethics itself. For this reason, the available sources of Tatarkiewicz's ethical considerations in Vilnius were extremely meager until 1999, when Jacek Juliusz Jadacki found the manuscript of Tatarkiewicz's inaugural lecture on morality and action from 1919[4]. This lecture had only been mentioned by Wiśniewski in an article in which he examined Tatarkiewicz's 'Vilnius period' (Wiśniewski 1997: 87). Nev-

ertheless, Wiśniewski did not present the content because the lecture had not been published. It seems that this lecture casts new light on the 'Vilnius period'.

A) Historical Introduction

The lecture is divided into two parts. In the first, Tatarkiewicz deals with the history of philosophy, and above all with the history of philosophy at VU, while in the second, he reflects upon an ethical issue, the issue of moral action. In the first part, he recognizes that some issues of philosophy are too difficult to examine and substantiate scientifically. Tatarkiewicz states that scientists and philologists made progress during the years when VU was suspended, but this was not the case for philosophers, for their situation is different since they examine issues that frequently cannot be examined scientifically by "regularly gathering facts and developing theories" (Tatarkiewicz 2001: 159). Tatarkiewicz recognizes that philosophical research, to a much greater extent than scientific research, is related to personal issues, because "when arguments come to an end they are replaced by the needs and temperament of the one who argues" (ibid). For this reason, it is often the various needs and personalities of philosophers that determine philosophical solutions.

As a result of his inquiry into this issue, Tatarkiewicz came to the following conclusion: "In these conditions, the history of philosophy cannot proceed in a relatively smooth and peaceful way like the history of other sciences. Does philosophy, then, stand still without developing? No, philosophy changes more

frequently than any of the sciences. So, is philosophy moving forward? Again, no, because philosophy returns over and over again to the same place where it has already been and from which it left. Philosophy returns to this place more confident and more mature, but it returns to the same place. Therefore, philosophy does not stand still, but it does not move forward; it moves in an oscillating movement, moves like a wave, which reaches over and over again to this shore or to another" (ibid, p. 159). These two shores represent philosophical depth and certainty. The depth is characterized by a broader perspective, while certainty has a narrower perspective.

Tatarkiewicz attempted to describe philosophy at VU from these perspectives. He states that Vilnius scholars tended to represent one or the other of these two directions of philosophical research. He recognizes that the Śniadecki brothers represented the pursuit of philosophical certainty, while Józef Gołuchowski that of philosophical depth. He then went on to claim that the revived USB was closer to the philosophy of the Śniadeckis. However, their pursuits of certainty were not identical to each other, there was also "internal waving" (ibid, p. 160). The attitude of Jan was more empirical, focused on experience and facts, while Jędrzej was more rational, focused on the notion of necessity. In Tatarkiewicz's opinion, the USB was closer to the latter: "If judgment can be made, consciously risking subjectivity, then I will say: the prevailing trend is that which wants certainty to be a necessity. And although our trend is very dif-

ferent from this approach with regard to how to strive for this certainty and what the results of these investigations are, nevertheless, we come back to a Vilnius University that is closest to Jędrzej Śniadecki" (ibid., 161).

The first part of the lecture is related to the second, where Tatarkiewicz takes up ethical issue, with his considerations on the nature of the historical development of philosophy in the background: "we have learned from what happened after Śniadecki in the history of philosophy, when people believed in the omnipotence of reason. We are not trying to encompass all the issues of philosophy in our trend. [...] We prefer to isolate some fields of philosophy from the whole philosophy in order to satisfy our desire for certainty there, although to a lesser extent. One of such fields is ethics" (ibid). Tatarkiewicz recognizes that certainty based on facts is the domain of the history of ethics, or descriptive ethics, while certainty based on rationality is the domain of ethics per se: "The ethicist will have to answer other questions: what it means that something is good, and whether what history pointed out as good or was considered good really is good and in what sense. And the ethicist will have to seek the greatest certainty that can be achieved by answering these questions. And this certainty cannot be extracted from the facts" (ibid). Moreover, in taking up the fundamental question of ethics, Tatarkiewicz decided that the certainty that he was striving for was not the certainty achieved by omitting or replacing some issues. The answer contained in the sec-

ond part of the lecture includes both theoretical and practical aspects of the above-mentioned ethical problem.

It is worth adding that in the first part of the lecture, Tatarkiewicz also considers such issues as the distinction between the history of philosophy and philosophy. He also observes that the philosophical investigations of his time were characterized by a multitude of research directions, emphasizing that this multiplicity occurred simultaneously, not period after period. He compares this situation to nineteenth-century European architecture, when different architectural styles were used simultaneously. He described this as "slight waving to all shores" (ibid., p. 160).

B) Ethical Considerations

The second part of the lecture, as mentioned, contains ethical considerations referring to the issue of certainty, and focusing on the meaning of action and its consequences from a moral perspective. Tatarkiewicz does not focus on descriptive ethics, but attempts to answer the question: what does it mean that something is good? He states that an ethician – unlike a historian of ethics or meta-ethician – should find the most certain and practical answer to this question (ibid, p. 162). For this purpose, he takes into consideration two common ways of evaluating moral action: the first does not include the consequences of actions, the second is determined by the consequences. Good attributes of action, for example truthfulness, are crucial for the first perspective, morality being determined by the attribute and indepen-

dent of the circumstances, whereas for the second evaluation, this is not sufficient, as from this perspective good consequences are essential. Tatarkiewicz states that morality "depends not only on the attributes of the action itself but also on the attributes of what is achieved by the action" (ibid, p. 163). He refers to individual cases to justify his approach. For example, he indicates that even if a lie is wrong, it can sometimes save human life, and for this reason, lying can be the right action from a moral perspective. Tatarkiewicz emphasizes that "what can be achieved by various actions in particular circumstances must be considered and then an action that leads to good must be chosen" (ibid).

Tatarkiewicz also presented other methods of moral evaluation in a slightly different way, within the perspective of an intuitive and teleological theory of action. He states that "only the person who wants to do good does the moral action" (ibid, p. 165), in other words, the person who has good will. According to this, those who want to do good must also care about the consequences, because the effects of an action are the purpose of the action. Tatarkiewicz indicates that moral action is not just a gesture, that the consequences of actions can be predicted at least to some extent, and for this reason, the effects must be included in their moral evaluation. The good, as a value, as an attribute, is undoubtedly crucial for Tatarkiewicz's ethical thought. Even if he accepts evil deeds for a good purpose, this does not mean that he ignores the significance of the attributes of an action, he merely wants to indicate that the ac-

tion and consequences must be compared and if the implication of the action conflicts with the attribute of the action, then the implication should prevail. Any action is right or wrong in itself, regardless of the effects, and this is necessary for the moral character of actions but not sufficient. Therefore, Tatarkiewicz came to the conclusion that a teleological understanding of moral action is right.

What is relevant here is that even if this understanding is focused on the consequences of action, it is not limited to them. Tatarkiewicz emphasizes that it is not just utilitarianism, in which morality depends only on the benefits, because both good will and the attributes of actions are important criteria. It is not relativism either, because the good is an absolute attribute of an action, a point of reference. Indeed, Tatarkiewicz states that "the end justifies the means" (ibid, p. 167), but not always. Therefore, he decides to indicate certain conditions for acting: morally questionable means should be used only in exceptional circumstances, with an awareness of the cost of achieving the good, and most importantly only to achieve the good. This apology for the teleological approach is much more complex, but what is most relevant here is the conclusion of the lecture referring to the main subject of both the above-mentioned perspectives of moral action. Tatarkiewicz indicates that the first leads to the postulate "let's try to be good", and the second, "let's try to do good" (ibid, p. 168). Therefore, the content of the inaugural lecture confirms, as Wiśniewski pointed out in his article, that Tatarkiewicz was trying to develop

the research from his habilitation dissertation in the direction of its practical application (Wiśniewski 1997: 88).

The conclusion of the habilitation dissertation is: "the good is absolute, and rules of acting are relative" (Tatarkiewicz 1971b: 289). This thought was developed in Tatarkiewicz's inaugural lecture. Both the lecture and the last chapter of the habilitation thesis entitled *The Theory of Relative Rules* are devoted to the same issue. The considerations are largely similar; Tatarkiewicz starts with the same issues, but he takes different perspectives. In the dissertation, Tatarkiewicz follows the perspective of previous chapters, focusing on the issue of objectivity and subjectivity, absoluteness and relativity, but throughout the chapter he does not use the phrase "teleology" or "teleological", which becomes the main subject of considerations in the lecture. Nevertheless, it seems that the same thoughts are expressed as those in the dissertation with its use of the notion of "rightness". In the dissertation, Tatarkiewicz recognizes a good deed as an act that brings the most good, and he associates rightness with a particular situation. Thus rightness is related to the situation as the morality of the deed, in the lecture, is related to the circumstances. It seems, therefore, that Tatarkiewicz formulates the same thoughts in both works, only from a different perspective. In both works the following issues are repeated: acting as a means to an end, the results of an action as an attribute of a deed, a moral act as an act with good results, or doing evil for the sake of good. At the same time, it seems that the

considerations contained in the lecture were developed from a more practical perspective; for example, the conditions for doing evil to achieve good were not given in the dissertation.

Rightness is also explicitly mentioned in the article *The Four Types of Ethical Judgments* (Tatarkiewicz 1930: 291-295), namely judgments about value, rightness, intention, and merit. According to the content of the article, rightness should be defined by value, judgments of which refer to the absolute order, whereas the other three refer to relative order, with rightness standing on the border. For this reason, the evaluation of actions requires the inclusion of a broader context which makes the rules of action relative and dependent on circumstances and possible consequences.

The lecture is also related to Tatarkiewicz's ethical considerations contained in his treatise *Analysis of Happiness*. There are some significant parallels between his considerations on the moral action and his theory of happiness. For example, his definition of happiness is teleological in character. Tatarkiewicz defines happiness from two perspectives: idealistic and realistic. According to the first, happiness is "satisfaction, but only complete and lasting within the context of a whole life" (Tatarkiewicz 1947: 23). At the same time, Tatarkiewicz emphasizes that such a state is impossible to achieve and for this reason he formulates the second, realistic, definition: "happy is the one who is approaching this maximum, this ideal [state]" (ibid, 24). Although circumstances are of great importance in his theory of happiness, their significance is less than in his teleologi-

cal theory of moral action because, according to Tatarkiewicz, happiness as a state of mind is determined by attitude toward circumstances rather than by the circumstances themselves. Relativity in the theory of happiness proposed by Tatarkiewicz is the main subject, but not the only one. It seems that the treatise is a description of the network of dependencies between person and reality, which aims to explain the phenomenon of happiness and thus help in efforts to achieve it. Happiness, according to Tatarkeiwicz, depends primarily on the person, mind and satisfaction, but also on the way of life, character, attitude towards time, other people, and the general view of reality. Therefore both rela-

tivistic and teleological attitudes can be observed in the treatise.

The inaugural lecture thus appears to be the first step in the direction of Tatarkiewicz's investigations on the strictly practical aspects of ethics, and provides significant evidence of his ethical approach in the 'Vilnius period' as an expression of his teleological attitude. It can be concluded that at that time some of the most important thoughts of his ethical theory, which had been sown earlier in the habilitation dissertation and were to grew mature later in the treatise, were already present in his considerations. The ideas presented in the inaugural lecture can therefore be recognized as the germination of his ethical thought.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Tatarkiewicz's 'Vilnius period' and his work at the USB marked an important step in his academic path. It was an important time not only from the historiographic point of view but also in terms of his philosophical development, for he improved his methods of work in the archives and developed his methodology, contributed to the historiography

of philosophy and developed ethical ideas which can be considered as a halfway house between his habilitation dissertation and his treatise, a progression from the absoluteness of good to the relativity of happiness. As the above outline has demonstrated, although his stay in Vilnius was very short, it was significant for his life and writings.

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Endnotes

[1] Language editing by Una Maclean-Hańćkowiak.

[2] All titles of books have been translated by the author or given in the form of existing translations.

[3] All the quotations are translated into English by the author.

[4] Unfortunately, Jadacki did not provide its exact location in Vilnius.