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ANTI-IRRATIONALISM, ITS VALUE AND PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Abstract

The article examines the concept of anti-irrationalism coined by the members of the Lvov-Warsaw School. The term “anti-irrationalism” comes from Ajdukiewicz, who used it to define the specificity of the School as a whole. For Ajdukiewicz, anti-irrationalism, which values cognition with intersubjective qualities, is contrasted with irrationalism. The article discusses Twardowski’s tripartite division of beliefs into rational, “irrational,” and “non-rational.” Against this background, the article explores Dąmbska’s view on irrationalism, which is divided by her into several sub-categories. Finally, the author considers the question of anti-irrationalism as a metaphilosophical standpoint in the context of the question of a worldview.

Keywords: anti-irrationalism, rational beliefs, metaphilosophy, Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, Izydora Dąmbska

“Because philosophy — is nothing else than human reason set, in an absolute limitless way, with all the power we can afford, on explaining the world.”

J. M. Bocheński, *Wege zum philosophischen Denken*

“Rationality gives us greater knowledge and greater control over our own actions and emotions and over the world.”

R. Nozick, *The Nature of Rationality*

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1. INTRODUCTION: ANTI-IRRATIONALISM IN THE LVOV-WARSAW SCHOOL

The hallmark of Kazimierz Twardowski's school of philosophy, known since the 1930s as the Lvov-Warsaw School (hereafter LWS), was the methodology shared by its adherents and their similar understanding of philosophy and its tasks. Thus, it can be said that what is essential and valuable for this philosophical school covers the realm of methodology and metaphilosophy.¹ A synthetic characteristic of the LWS was, I believe, very well expressed by Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz in an article published in 1934 in *Przegląd Filozoficzny* and soon afterwards in *Erkenntnis* (see Ajdukiewicz 1934, 1935). This article attributed to the LWS, as a philosophical school, such features as: anti-irrationalism, postulate of conceptual clarity, assimilation of the apparatus of contemporary logic (see Ajdukiewicz 1934: 399). All these features of the LWS are its characteristic values and have contributed to the reputation it has gained in the philosophical world. At the same time, as highly valued properties of the school, they are worthy of a contemporary discussion that allows for critical analysis. A philosophical achievement, even the most valuable one, is only alive when we debate it. In the following comments, by necessity general, I will concentrate on the feature of the LWS that Ajdukiewicz called anti-irrationalism.

The term itself was introduced by Ajdukiewicz in the above-mentioned article where he presented a synthetic characteristic of the school. According to Ajdukiewicz, the features of this school, as I have already mentioned, are as follows: 1) anti-irrationalism, 2) adoption of the postulate of conceptual clarity and linguistic strictness, 3) assimilation of the apparatus of modern formal logic (Ajdukiewicz 1934: 399). Anti-irrationalism (equivalent to rationalism) is a position that puts high value on scientific cognition. Such cognition, as Ajdukiewicz pointed out in his later work *Zagadnienia i kierunki filozofii* [Problems and Theories of Philosophy] (1949/2004), should meet two conditions: intersubjective communicability and intersubjective verifiability (see Ajdukiewicz 1973). Ajdukiewicz's position is often justifiably presented as typical for the features of rationalism (anti-irrationalism) in the school created by Twardowski. Anti-irrationalism (rationalism), valuing cognition with intersubjective qualities (communicability, controllability) is opposed in this approach to the irrationalist position.

¹ This is how Twardowski saw it: "The essential characteristic of this school lies in the formal and methodological field — namely, it consists in striving for the greatest possible precision and accuracy in thought and expression of thought, as well as the most exhaustive justification of what one proclaims, as well as the correctness of the argument" (Twardowski 1992: 30).

The term anti-irrationalism was used for the first time by Ajdukiewicz, but comments on this topic can be found in Twardowski himself. An important contribution to the debate on this issue was also made by Izydora Dąmbska (1938, 2016). In these synthetic insights, focused on the value of anti-irrationalism, I intend to present these positions using the works of the three philosophers mentioned above. I will also try to formulate (explicate) elements common to them and make a methodological characterization. Anti-irrationalism is one of the valuable tenets of the LWS, worth defending, but also discussing, even today.

2. TWARDOWSKI AND DĄMBSKA ON IRRATIONALISM

Twardowski's understanding of philosophy and its methods was close to the models that demand rationality from philosophical reflection (see Kleszcz 2013: 21-63). However, the notion of "rationality" appears in a broader sense only in Twardowski's well-known speech at the 25th anniversary of the Polish Philosophical Society in Lviv (1929). Twardowski used three terms in this speech: rationality, irrationality, and non-rationality (*racjonalność*, *irracjonalność*, *nieracjonalność*, see Twardowski 1965: 380-381; 1999). Thus, we do not have here a simple dual (binary) division of beliefs into rational and those lacking rationality.

This allows us to classify human beliefs, in this proposal by Twardowski, within three groups:

- A) RATIONAL BELIEFS (rationality = scientific thinking), such that the methods of obtaining justification for them are drawn from the realm of science.
- B) "IRRATIONAL" BELIEFS (*SĄDY IRRACJONALNE*), which differ from rational beliefs in terms of the source from which they are derived (intellectual viewing, intuition, etc.).
- C) "NON-RATIONAL" BELIEFS (*SĄDY NIERACJONALNE*), the contents of which are inconsistent with the content of the data provided by science.

Twardowski states at the same time that in the set of human beliefs the majority are those that, according to the above terminology, must be classified as irrational. While not being rational, they do not have to be in contradiction with the beliefs included in the sphere of rationality. Such, according to Twardowski, are beliefs relating to the worldview. When the term "worldview"

appears in the context of Twardowski's thought, we should remember that Twardowski distinguishes between scientific philosophy and the philosophical (metaphysical) view on the world and life. However, these methodological assumptions typical for scientific philosophy and adopted by Twardowski, can be used only in the sphere of inquiry, where we use the tools and methods of science. We cannot refer to them when we want to provide answers to some ultimate questions. According to Twardowski, the validity of a particular view in the sphere of worldview cannot be demonstrated by means of scientific argumentation. This requires separation of the sphere of scientific philosophy and the sphere of worldview, the separation of which became a feature characteristic of the LWS.²

Views from the worldview sphere that are not scientific cannot be rational in this conception. But — as Twardowski emphasizes — they do not have to be non-rational (*nieracjonalne*) and thus contradictory to the theses of science. What is revealed at this point is the value of departing from binarity in the domain of belief. The reflection of Dąmbska, presented mainly in her work *Irracjonalizm a poznanie naukowe* [Irrationalism and Scientific Cognition], becomes important in the context of the issue of irrationalism. Dąmbska analyzed the term “irrationalism,” distinguishing several of its basic meanings: logical irrationalism, epistemological irrationalism, metaphysical irrationalism, psychological irrationalism (Dąmbska 1938: 85-110). She formulated features of rational cognition that would become typical for the position of those LWS members who would speak on this issue. On this view, rational cognition is characterized by expressibility, communicability, and intersubjective controllability (Dąmbska 1938: 101). Dąmbska assumed that the anti-irrationalist stance (the opposite of irrationalism) was connected with the recognition of the fact that irrationalism had no right to exist in science (Dąmbska 1938: 185 and ff.). However, the proponent of such a view does not necessarily have to claim that issues that cannot be solved in a scientific (rational) way should be left unanswered. The moderate version of the anti-irrationalist position seems, according to Dąmbska, more justified. According to her, it is only postulated that the answers to questions that cannot be solved in a scientific way should be treated as subjective beliefs, and not as theses of a scientific character. The desire to remove foreign elements from science is therefore not equal to a struggle for complete scientifying of all spheres of life and culture. As Dąmbska put it:

² Twardowski, in recommending this separation, is far from neglecting the worldview domain (see Twardowski 1965: 381).

By cleansing science of irrational elements, we free it from apparent and unsolvable problems that create not its richness but an unbearable burden. This does not diminish its achievements, but only removes that which, in its essence, has never been its natural component. Undoubtedly, in this way the illusion that science can solve non-empirical problems is shattered . . . (Dąbska 1938: 84-85)

In the concluding part of the article, Dąbska stated: “the postulate of rationalism does not need to be connected with some kind of scientific dogmatism” (Dąbska 1938: 212). This kind of approach can be called moderate rationalism (or moderate anti-irrationalism) and seems valuable and desirable also in the context of contemporary discussions.

3. RATIONAL AND IRRATIONAL BELIEF

Let us now attempt an explication of these positions, correcting the terminology somewhat. Thus, we shall identify:

A) RATIONAL BELIEFS — that is, beliefs that are arrived at by methods known from the so-called specific sciences. In Ajdukiewicz’s terminology, they would be intersubjectively communicable and controllable.

B) OTHER-THAN-RATIONAL BELIEFS, or para-rational beliefs (referred to as irrational beliefs in Twardowski’s works), are those that do not have to be in conflict with type A beliefs but differ from rational beliefs due to methods used to arrive at them.

C) NON-RATIONAL (IRRATIONAL³) BELIEFS, which are characterized by being inconsistent with type A beliefs in terms of content.

Worldview beliefs would essentially belong to type B beliefs, for even if they are derived from the scientific data, they take it beyond the realm of applicability that is standard for science. Despite the indicated differences between scientific beliefs (and thus philosophical beliefs in the sense of scientific philosophy) and worldview beliefs, there is an area where they merge. The sciences draw their ideas and conceptual apparatus from the realm of metaphysics, and metaphysical systems (worldviews) receive them back, as it were, but already endowed with a scientific base. Consequently, a worldview (in the sense of a set of beliefs) may be subject to scientifying, or in other words, to rationalization. Of course, this process is infinite and therefore no worldview can become fully scientific (rational).

³ Irrational in the standard sense, as opposed to Twardowski’s “irrational.”

Now, limiting ourselves to these metaphysical (worldview) issues, it is worth asking: what requirements should be set for worldview (para-rational or other-than-rational) beliefs to prevent them from becoming non-rational (i.e., irrational in the standard sense)? Let us recall that, as already indicated, those would include worldview beliefs, especially beliefs concerning: a) the existence of God, b) the immortality of the soul, c) the existence of free will. Twardowski points to three such requirements that these other-than-rational (in his terminology, “irrational”) beliefs must have to avoid non-rationality (irrationality in the standard sense): 1) absence of internal contradictions, 2) intelligibility at the linguistic level, and 3) absence of incompatibility with the theses of science.

4. ANTI-IRRATIONALISM AND A METAPHILOSOPHICAL STANDPOINT

Let us now consider the program of anti-irrationalism in the context of metaphilosophical presuppositions of the LWS, and the possible difficulties they raise. Three issues will be analyzed: first, the problem of the scientific character of philosophy; second, the relation between philosophy and worldview; third, the virtues of the anti-irrationalist program in philosophy.

A. The question of whether philosophy is a science can be regarded as one of the most important questions of metaphilosophy. The attempt to answer this question entails the need to analyze the concept of science, the characteristics of the sciences called specific sciences, the relations between them, and finally, the methodological analysis of philosophy itself. At this point, let me just make some general comments. What the specific sciences and philosophy undoubtedly have in common is the concern about the precision of language, the use of logical apparatus, and the justification of statements. But is this justification the same in both cases? It seems that, when we are talking about justification in philosophy, we often mean using tools of the argumentative type that differentiates philosophy from the specific sciences. At the same time, philosophy does not have a strictly defined problem area. As a result, we can try to make a distinction, assuming that philosophy, as far as its status is concerned, differs from all specific sciences. This is because each of these sciences has a separate field of research interests. Meanwhile, philosophy would like to encompass with its scope everything that exists; as a result, the scope of research interests distinguishes philosophy from the specific sciences. With such an approach one could say that philosophy is a science, but in a broadened sense of the term “science.” This is what Władysław Tatarkiewicz,

who is close to the LWS, does when he states that philosophy can be defined as science only if science is understood very broadly. In such a broad understanding, science is “a methodical, technically perfected acquisition of knowledge” (Tatarkiewicz 1971: 47). With this understanding, the rationality of philosophy, philosophical anti-irrationalism, would have to be somewhat different from the rationality (anti-irrationalism) of the specific sciences.

B. The issue of the relationship between philosophy and worldview within the LWS was resolved by the standard assumption that they were separate since philosophy was a science. Analyzing this issue, let us assume that:

- a) worldview provides us with a synthetic picture of reality,
- b) worldview contains both descriptive and valuating theses,
- c) worldview is meant to provide (in its intention) answers to various questions of existential nature.

Worldview understood this way differs from science because it does not have such strong justifications as we find in science. Moreover, it is reasonable to distinguish between philosophy and worldview. However, worldview cannot be a set of theses accepted without any rationale, it cannot be a set of declarations devoid of any argumentation that could be invoked in its favor. The status of such an argumentation indicates at the same time that it can always be subject to dispute.

C. Anti-irrationalism as a philosophical program appeals to scientific cognition and appreciates the value of science. This seems to be a program worthy of recommendation. However, it does not have to be scientism, and it certainly does not have to be radical scientism, as Dąmbska’s analysis indicated. The value of an anti-irrationalist program would lie in the fact that it protects us from vagueness and proclamation of views without justification. It allows us to give our beliefs appropriate cognitive value. However, there are also other reasons, because as Ajdukiewicz said:

The rationalist’s voice is a healthy social reflex, an act of society’s self-defense against the danger of being controlled by uncontrollable agents, among whom may be both a saint, preaching revelation, and a lunatic, preaching the creations of his sick mind . . . (Ajdukiewicz 2004: 52)

Both cognitive and social reasons speak in favor of adopting this program of anti-irrationalism as highly valuable. The defense of reason is necessary, because its role in philosophy, as pointed out by Bocheński and Nozick quoted in the motto, is difficult to overestimate. At the same time, this does not mean that the LWS’s program, which values rationalism and reason, must be associated with scientism in its dogmatic sense. The program of anti-

irrationalism is attractive to philosophers who value reason, but its implementation and concretization can be subject to debate.

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