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## A POSTHUMOUS TRIBUTE TO TADEUSZ KOTARBIŃSKI

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Let us look at two words – *dog* and *flight*. Both are nouns, and both can serve as subjects of a sentence. School grammar books teach us that the subject of a sentence is the word that shows what the sentence is about. If so, the sentence *A dog began to bark* is about a dog, and the word *dog* has its counterpart in reality, namely some dog. Let us look at the sentence *The flight took two hours*. It is about a flight. Applying a similar reasoning as in the first case, we arrive at the conclusion that the word *flight* has its counterpart in reality that is some flight.

Be careful, warns Kotarbiński, creator of the philosophical doctrine known as reism; it is at this point that we have made an error known as hypostasising. It occurs each time when, on the basis of the presence of some noun in the language or, more generally, a nominal phrase referring to some abstract entity, we infer that an object of which this noun or nominal phrase is supposedly the name exists in reality. In fact, however, the word *flight* is only seemingly a name; in other words, it is an imitation of a name, an apparent name, and in Kotarbiński's terminology – an onomatoid.

That onomatoids make up a semantic category distinct from names is the first observation of semantic reism. Onomatoids are names of abstracts, whereas genuine names are names of concrete objects. Hence, from the point of view of semantic reism, all names of properties, such as *roundness*, relations, such as *brotherhood*, states of affairs, such as the phrase *geographical location*, events, such as the word *journey*, phenomena, like *fluorescence*,

or processes, like *ageing*, are not names but onomatoids. Such words as *feature*, *relation*, *state of affairs*, *event*, *phenomenon*, or *process* are also onomatoids, as well as the words *meaning*, *sense*, *connotation*, *intension*, *range*, *denotation*, *extension*, *semantic function*, and many, many other semiotic terms.

According to a semantic reist, genuine names include words like *round* as the name of all concrete round objects, *brother* as the name of such-and-such men, *cleaned* as the name of all things that have been cleaned, *ageing* as the name of all such-and-such things, persons, or animals. Yet a reist observes that the same word, *ageing*, used in reference to an issue, problem, fashion, trend of ideas, cultural current, political programme, or system of government ceases to be the name of a concrete object, becoming the name of some abstract entity instead, and thus moves from the semantic category of names to the semantic category of onomatoids.

At this point, the question arises whether every genuine name refers to some object in the physical sense. What should a semantic reist do with such words as *genie*, *Muse*, or *chimera*? They do not refer to any abstract; on the other hand, however, they are not names of any concrete object existing in the world. This dilemma is solved by Kotarbiński by assuming these words, as well as other expressions of this kind, to be genuine but empty names, not onomatoids. In his opinion, this categorization is motivated by the following arguments.

Firstly, most English-speaking people who would hear or utter the word *genie* would imagine more or less the same thing: a small humanoid creature of such-and-such appearance. The case is quite different with the word *absorption*, for example. It is either understood only conceptually, without imagining anything at the same time, or this understanding is accompanied by some accidental derivative images, different for every person, or even different each time for the same person. One person may imagine a filter filled with coal granules, while another – the word *śpiewak* [*singer*], in which the *a* was absorbed from the root and shifted to the suffix *-ak*.

The word *faun*, although having no referent, is a genuine name because speakers uttering it think of a certain person, or rather a character; it is only that their intention falls upon a place in empirical reality which is empty. The case would be similar if a person not familiar with Warsaw ZOO said (in good faith): *the gorilla in Warsaw ZOO in 1980*. The phrase is a name, not an onomatoid referring to an abstract entity; only it is an empty name, because there were no gorillas in Warsaw ZOO in 1980.

Secondly, an empty name cannot be the grammatical subject of a true

singular or universal (general) sentence referring to persons or objects, because its appearance as a subject will result in the sentence being false. However, it has the following feature:

Let the word 'chimera' serve as an example. It is defined in ancient mythology as a lion's head with a goat's body and serpent's tail. No such monster has ever existed, and hence it is an empty term. But if its denoting elements (that is, 'lion's head', 'goat's body', 'serpent's tail') are replaced by other denoting terms, 'head', 'thorax', 'trunk', we obtain the whole 'head with thorax and trunk', which is a term and denotes any (mature) insect. A similar operation cannot be performed on those terms which are not empty concrete terms, although they also do not denote persons or things. They are such words as 'smoothness', 'relationship', 'tune', 'shift', and, generally, what are called names of properties, relations, contents, events, etc. (Kotarbiński 1979a: 44)

The third argument in favour of classifying words like *chimera* as names, not onomatoids, is as follows. By saying *This is a pine* and supplementing this utterance with a pointing gesture, we construct a meaningful sentence: true if the object pointed to is indeed a pine, false if it is not. In this utterance, as well as in ones of a type similar to *Warsaw is a city*, the word "is" appears, according to Kotarbiński, in its fundamental role, that is, as a sentence-creating functor which takes genuine names as its arguments. The word "is" is used in the same manner in sentences containing empty names, for instance *Polihymnia is a Muse* or *This is a donkey's horn*

The reason for this is obvious. If someone, pointing to a ram's horn, said *This is a donkey's horn*, she/he would say a falsehood, but nevertheless a perfectly well-formed sentence. If, however, someone pointed to the same thing, or to anything that can be pointed to with a gesture, and declared *This is a relationship*, she/he would utter a nonsensical sentence. (Kotarbiński 1955a: chap. 2)

Nonsense is here understood as a string of words which is disconnected with regard to semantics, because one syntactic position is occupied by a word belonging to a different semantic category than the one designed for this particular syntactic position. In this case, the copula "is" – in the

schema *This is A*, when this is uttered with the same intention as if a given object was being pointed to – appears in its already-mentioned fundamental role; hence on both its sides it requires the presence of genuine names, either denoting, like *table*, or empty, like *Hermes* or *nymph*. If a word other than a genuine name appears there, it will cause "is" to stop connecting the words adjacent to it into a syntactically coherent whole. Instead of a sentence, we will obtain a sequence of unconnected words, not creating a well-formed whole. It is evident that not only the semantic, but also the syntactic aspect is being taken under consideration. Hence Kotarbiński's reism can be described not only as a semantic, but also as a semiotic reism. Correspondingly, *Or is although* and *Theft is a crime* will be understood as nonsensical sentences. The latter will be considered a nonsensical set of words if the speaker used the copula "is" in its fundamental role, that is, made a statement about theft, understanding "is" in the same way as normally, like in a sentence *Snow is white*, which declares that snow is one of many white things. Our intuitions usually rebel at such a view of the issue. We are fine with the idea that the sentence *Or is although* is nonsensical. But *Theft is a crime* is not a nonsensical but rather a true sentence. This reaction is provoked by two circumstances.

The first is the fact that while *Or is although* goes against the rules of grammar, *Theft is a crime* does not. Hence we are willing to accept only the first sentence as nonsensical.

Secondly, our non-acceptance of the sentence *Theft is a crime* as nonsensical stems from the fact that in this sentence the deep structure, for instance *Someone who steals is a criminal*, is visible from underneath the surface structure. And in this sentence there are no onomatoids, while the copula "is" appears in its fundamental sense: after all, both *someone who steals* and *a criminal* are names with non-empty denotation. Thus, it is possible to perceive the sentence *Theft is a crime* as non-nonsensical, but only on condition that it is viewed as an abbreviation standing for a sentence that is free of onomatoids; an abbreviation in which the word "is" appears in a different role than the fundamental one.

In Kotarbiński's semiotic reism, therefore, there is a differentiation between genuine names and onomatoids; the former are divided into denoting names (singular and general) and empty names. Both empty and denoting names – including proper and general names – are considered suitable both as the subject and as the predicate of a sentence. Nominal phrases, called descriptions in logic, such as *the highest mountain in Europe*, *whoever studies English* or *a man weighing 350 kg*, can also fulfil both these functions.

Apart from that, semiotic reism promotes a certain programme. Its recommendation is to eliminate onomatoids from ultimate statements, especially important ones; to substitute phrases containing onomatoids with their paraphrases, intra-linguistic translations, that are free of onomatoids; as well as to be ready to do so at any time. This is not because of a generalised opposition to formulating abstract or metaphorical expressions. On the contrary, the former are useful, because at times they make it possible to neatly and succinctly formulate a thought that would otherwise be verbose and overly detailed; the latter are also useful, because they enliven a lecture, making it vivid and graphic, more convincing and easier to memorize. Yet they are useful only if they serve as substitutes: if it is possible to give their expanded alternative version that can be understood literally, and if that version only contains genuine names. According to a semiotic reist, an essential impossibility of providing such a translation indicates that the sentence in question is nonsensical. As to the justification for the above theses and programme, Kotarbiński himself admitted that it was:

naively intuitive and based on common induction. It can often be observed that when we want to explain to a person the proper sense of a statement containing noun(s) which are not names of things, we ultimately arrive at a formulation which no longer included such nouns. (Kotarbiński 1966b: 434)

Elsewhere, Kotarbiński asked rhetorically:

Should we wish to explain to a child what the word "similarity" means, should we not show him in turn several pairs of objects which look alike, and say: "Look, here are two sparrows: this one is grey and that one is grey, this one is hopping and that one is hopping, this one has a short beak and that one has a short beak. These two birds are similar one to the other. And here are two windows: both are rectangular and both have rectangular panes, separated by thin pieces of wood. These two things are similar one to the other. Do you understand now what similarity is?"? Or suppose that in the class we encounter in the text the word 'recovery', which the pupils do not understand. We shall tell them: "Whenever a person has been ill, and later was better, and now is still better, we speak of recovery." (Kotarbiński 1979a: 44)

Kotarbiński states that:

This leads to the supposition that it is always so. [...] This in turn results in the surmise that it is so probably because every object of cognition is a thing. [...] One step more and we conclude that every object is knowable in principle, that it is a possible subject matter of cognition, and that there are no other objects – which yields ontological concretism. (Kotarbiński 1966b: 434–435)

In the last twenty-five years of his life, Kotarbiński thought that this ontological concretism, that is, ontological reism, serves to reinforce the above-quoted justification for the theses and programme of semiotic reism. Earlier, he had regarded the ontological thesis as the main one, writing, in the same study, that "originally, concretists were fond of stating, above all, that every object is a body, and lately [1958] they are fond of stating that all onomatoids vanish in ultimate formulations" (Kotarbiński 1966b: 434). Hence, according to Kotarbiński, ontological reism is the view that only things exist – inanimate or animate, so this includes humans, animals, plants – but always corporeal, physical, tangible things. Corporeal and tangible: it is, therefore, somatist reism as well, also known as pan-somatism or, as it has already been mentioned, concretism. Concretism has the nature of materialist monism, because it assumes that no other entities but bodies can be ascertained by experience. This also means that it is impossible to encounter universals anywhere; therefore, they do not exist. This view is a version of ontological nominalism.

In epistemology, a reist takes a position which Kotarbiński called radical realism: she/he rejects the assumption that there exist immanent images, which are supposed to arise in a person every time this person perceives, recalls, or imagines something. That something appears "in our mind's eye" is just a metaphorical manner of speaking; in reality, there is nothing inside us, there exists no intentional or ideal object which would be 'similar' to that which is the transcendent, i.e. external, object of our perception or recollection. The only thing that exists is that which is being perceived or recollected. When we fantasise, what we imagine does not exist as a single object; its elements (brought together by our imagination to create something that in reality does not exist anywhere) do exist, but they are scattered: either as parts of various things or animals or as discrete tangible things.

Kotarbiński, with his usual modesty, considered his views in the area of ontology and epistemology to be a conjecture, derived inductively from experience. He expounded them, among others, in his celebrated handbook

*Gnosiology: The Scientific Approach to the Theory of Knowledge* (Kotarbiński 1929/1961, 1966), which was used by more than one generation of Polish humanists. One does not have to accept ontological reism or radical realism in order to accept the programme of semiotic reism. It is possible to realize this programme without engaging in ontological and epistemological considerations, treating it as valuable advice of an experienced educator, a past master in the art of teaching, a luminary of Twardowski's school – the famous Lvov-Warsaw school. Kotarbiński's disciples: Maria Ossowska, Stanisław Ossowski, Mieczysław Wallis, Janina Kotarbińska, Alfred Tarski, and others, as well as the disciples of his disciples, had the opportunity to find out that the programme was indeed beneficent, although not all of them were ontological reists or radical realists.

Much confusing babble – for instance upon the topic of meaning – would have been avoided if this therapeutic procedure, advised by the great healer of the humanities had been applied: to use no onomatoids when speaking of important things, and to steer clear of hypostases.

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Semiotic reism is a grammar of language; or we might even say: a school grammar of language, but handled by a teacher of philosophy and logic, with an eye not just on one particular ethnic language, but rather on any language, considered as a means of conveying clear and distinct ideas. The grammar of language, in turn, was regarded by Kotarbiński as a chapter in the grammar of action, while speech was considered a kind of action:

*Czy wolno spytać o coś? – Pytaj! – Chciałbym wiedzieć,  
Co gorsze: głupstwo zrobić, czy głupstwo powiedzieć?  
– Złudny przemycaś kontrast w zapytaniu gładkiem:  
Wszak drugie jest pierwszego szczególnym przypadkiem.*

*May I ask you something? – Ask away! – Tell me | Which is worse: to do a stupid thing or to say one? | – You smuggle in a deceptive contrast in a smooth question: | After all, the latter is a special case of the former.*

A *sui generis* grammar of action is provided by the science of "methods of doing anything in any way," that is, a general theory of action, dubbed praxiology by Alfred Espinas in 1890. The same label was used, probably

independently, by Eugeniusz Słucki in the 1920s, and then by Kotarbiński, with whom it has been associated ever since, not only in Poland but also worldwide. Espinas came up with the idea of praxiology, Słucki located it between economy and the general theory of things in the classification of sciences. Alexander A. Bogdanov outlined it, fifty years ago, as a general theory of organization, and Kotarbiński wrote the first monograph on praxiology, *Traktat o dobrej robocie* (1955), translated into English under the title *Praxiology* (1965; literally, *A Treatise on Good Job*). So far [1983], there have been seven editions of the Polish version [another one was published in 2000]; it has been translated into English, Czech, Japanese, German, Russian, Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian, and Romanian.

Praxiology is concerned with any intentional activities and considers them with regard to their effectiveness, efficiency, usefulness, practicality, and creativity. It observes and scrutinizes deeds and actions carried out in various fields of reality, behaviours of different actors, agents and authors—not only humans but also animals, e.g. beavers constructing lodges, bees and ants building nests, or birds preparing for migration. It collects observations and experiences of managers, military, legal, and diplomatic strategists and tacticians, experienced practitioners and theoreticians, blue- and white-collar workers, chess- and card-players. It converts these contributions into generalizations. In analysing concepts connected with acts and their merits, it strives to free itself from emotional judgements and set aside features characteristic of particular disciplines. The point is that the results should apply to any 'good job' (*dobra robota*), regardless of the peculiarities of a given type of work.

Thanks to such an approach, praxiology is more than "a science of efficient action," "a general action theory," "a general technology of actions," "the logic of action," "general methodology" – though all these descriptions were used by the author of *Praxiology*: not only does it offer a theoretical basis for disciplines such as management, but it also gives theoretical grounds for reflections and, above all, postulates within social philosophy and social policy.

For instance, by invoking results achieved in praxiology, Kotarbiński pointed out that it is a mistake to count teacher's work among services and, accordingly, make it pay less than a turner's work. A turner transforms an unformed piece of metal into a formed one, while a teacher transforms an incompetent person into a competent one. But a person is the most important element of the system of production. After all, the degree of importance is determined not by the agent's distance from the physical contact with the material



but rather by how difficult it is to find a replacement. One conclusion is that theoretical sciences, including humanities, are no less important than practical disciplines, in particular the technical ones. The former are an indispensable prerequisite for the latter.

It is the hallmark of Kotarbiński's attitude and mind-set that he imbued his praxiology with social and civil reflections, that he enriched it with moral elements. In that way, it gained a broader scope and a greater capacity to influence society than it would have done by adopting a purely technical or technocratic approach. It proved valuable in humanist terms and – in accordance with Kotarbiński's intention – became a part of broadly-understood ethics, which encompasses:

three principal fields of problems: How to act in order to act effectively? How to act in order, as far as possible, to avoid unpleasantness for oneself and for others, and on the contrary, to make life as pleasant as possible? How to act in order to be in agreement with one's conscience? (Kotarbiński 1966c: 511–512)

Answers to these questions depend on one another: you do not act effectively if the work is a constant ordeal for you; on the other hand, wrestling with one's conscience does not make life pleasant. Thus, recommendations in the field of pragmatics, ethics in the narrower sense, social philosophy, and philosophical anthropology criss-cross and partly overlap. In fact, in most cases it is hard to tell whether a given praxiological rule has been derived from cool calculation or, as Kotarbiński would put it, from 'postulates of conscience' or 'obvious necessities of heart' (*oczywistości serca*). He thought that one should always follow the latter, since any activity which ceases to obey 'heart's necessities' spills over into violence:

*Gdy zaś pięść z mózgiem same pozostały w parze,  
Oto skutek: mózg rządzi – tak, jak mu pięść każe.*

*And when the fist and the brain were left alone,  
Here's the result: the brain rules – governed by the fist.*

He would oppose violence not only for personal reasons – expressed at one point in the words: "I've always taken the bit between my teeth and will take the bit between my teeth as before" – not only for moral and civil reasons, as a defender of human dignity and freedom of conscience: but also because he bore in mind that:

*Rozum w pełni rozkwita pod strażą wolności,  
Wolność rozkwita w pełni pod strażą rozumu.*

*Reason flourishes under the charge of freedom,  
Freedom thrives under the charge of reason.*

Thus freedom is not only a lofty ideal that must be pursued according to a higher moral imperative, but also something tangible and advantageous, recommended by reason, which estimates profits and losses. And this situation keeps repeating itself: spiritual and material values blend together:

[...] *imponderabilia zlekceważył, zatem  
Źle zważył, źle obliczył, przegrał, poniósł stratę.*

*he neglected the imponderables, and so  
he weighed it wrongly, miscalculated, lost.*

A frequent paradox indeed: we are often forced to weigh something which is by nature devoid of any weight. But we know it will tip the scales.

These imponderables, endowed with a tangible material value, include trust. Trust is recommendable not only for moral reasons, for the sake of human dignity, but also for practical ones – utility. After all, redundant control makes for a double loss: it costs, takes time and money, and, in addition, it reduces profits, because it suppresses the initiative of the controlled, discourages them from efficient work, encourages indifference, since "who doesn't act at all, won't make a mistake." One should, therefore, avoid superfluous commands and prohibitions, respect individuality, dissimilarity, independence:

*Choć więc – jeśli się zatną – możesz ponieść stratę,  
Ceń sobie koła, mistrzu, za to, że zębate.*

*Thus although you will suffer losses once they jam,  
Value the cogwheels, master, for their teeth.*

Clearly, two forces complemented and reinforced each other in Kotarbiński: a sympathy for material, practical needs and an attachment to moral, spiritual values. Kotarbiński-praxiologist, on account of his specialization, was an advocate of efficient organization of teamwork; yet Kotarbiński-philosopher was aware of a lurking danger: "in the bonds of organization, the truth will go to the devil" – and called for respecting the rights of the individual.

Just as he imbued his ideas about efficient action with attention to, and concern for, moral goods, so he formulated his ethical reflection – but never

commands and prohibitions – bearing in mind practical possibilities and necessities of life. On an everyday basis, not just once in a blue moon, he recommended, half-jokingly: "1. Be fond of doing something. 2. Love somebody. 3. Don't be a scoundrel. 4. Live seriously." When he recommended virtues, he would lay down the requirement – seemingly not very demanding, but how difficult to satisfy – "that virtues should not contradict virtues." What he meant here were everyday virtues rather than the highest ideals, since he kept in mind that "what is best may not be good" and remarked that "the virtue of perfection will also benefit from moderation." If he gave advice, it concerned not so much as what to pursue as what to avoid, what to refrain from; and he would justify this by pointing out that a given type of behaviour leads to results that are unwanted in some respect, usually a practical one, e.g.: "Eschew five misdemeanours: tone, face, sarcasm, irony, taunt. Coexistence without refraining from them is a true agony." So he would rather discourage than encourage, since he believed that in ethics: "you know what to do, when you know what not to do."

He said of himself that he follows the Quaker rule: to ascribe honesty and noble motivations to others. He would go to greater lengths in this than most people would: down to the border of naivety in dispute, down to the risk of a loss. It seems that he came to know the taste of disappointment, unavoidable in the way he had chosen: with a melancholic smile, he would say that his patron, St. Jude Thaddaeus, was 'the worst saint', the advocate of desperate cases. In a discussion or a polemic, he never indulged in sarcasm or irony, which he regard as ungentlemanly. Thus the only weapon at his disposal were valid arguments. He wielded it with absolute and unconditional loyalty. Obeying the rules of a chivalry duel often made him defenceless against unscrupulous opponents. Fortunately, he was able to disarm even them with his winsome, friendly, kindly, hearty manner.

A trustworthy or reliable guardian (*spolegliwy opiekun*) – this was the archetype of Kotarbiński's ethics, the role model for a teacher and a tutor. The guardian's duty is to protect her/his near and dear – children, family, subordinates – from danger, against misfortune. He wrote that "neglecting such a defence would be a shameful deed." There is, however, no obligation to love each neighbour. Neither is the guardian obliged to ensure that her/his charge attains the highest pleasure, joy, satisfaction, wealth, happiness. These are – he would say – only additions stemming from moral generosity.

People who knew Kotarbiński had the opportunity to appreciate the scope of his own generosity, the number of people whom – according to his own

'heart's obviousness' – he regarded as his charges, whom – in keeping with the 'postulates of conscience' – he felt obliged to provide with his reliable protection. So, for years, he paid people who helped him with everyday activities – personal secretaries, drivers, janitors, messengers – a regular monthly salary, although they were being paid by the institutions which had hired them. He believed that on account of their tasks and the continual contact with him they entered the circle of the folk, whom he should have protected against poverty. It was a kind of moral 'stratagem' or 'ruse' on his part. After all, he had deliberately envisioned a rather modest ethical programme: only care for a handful of loved ones under your protection. And only be concerned with their defence, because it is the only realistic goal. Yet such a project would not satisfy his heart. Following the voice of feeling, he had adopted an interpretation that allowed him to care for a fairly substantial group and to include 'achieving satisfaction' under the heading of defence against dangers. In this way, the rationalist idea of task minimalization was safeguarded, and yet the practice fulfilled the needs of a heart sensitive to human misery. It was a triumph of noble-mindedness and kind-heartedness – both secular and evangelical.

The project of the ethics of a trustworthy guardian – minimalist, or rather anti-maximalist, defensive, as opposed to acquisitive; the doctrine of reism and radical realism – rationalist, or rather anti-irrational; his philosophy of action, philosophical anthropology, and social philosophy underlying Kotarbiński's praxiology – all this stems from a view that he called practical realism.

Practical realists follow common sense, so that, first of all, they only consider actions that they are able to carry out. In other words, they cut their cloak according to their cloth, contrary to the Romantic catchphrase *Mierz siły na zamiary!* – "adjust your strength to the aim" (Adam Mickiewicz, "Pieśń Filaretów," "The Song of Philaretos"). Next they select the action which seems to be of the greatest importance in a given context. And an action is more important if it nullifies or prevents greater evil. The evils in turn comprise, above all, cataclysms: extermination, illness, pain, poverty. Thus the practical realist's actions are guided by necessities, "conditions that must be met lest you face a disaster." For this reason, they would give precedence to research seeking to prevent cataclysms, at the expense of disciplines which fulfil other needs. Accordingly, science would have priority over fine arts; and they would value the latter mainly because it fights, drives away, and prevents ugliness, and only secondarily for creating beauty, giving delight and satisfaction.

Practical realism is the attitude of a mature person, a paternal approach, the attitude of an experienced guardian, who is aware that living conditions "on this planet – infinitely beautiful and, so far, infinitely atrocious" force them to abandon many dreams and desires and undertake primarily defensive activities – due to the responsibility for others resting on their shoulders. Presumably, this sense of responsibility determined several resignations in Kotarbiński's life – he gave up, for instance, an artistic career to which he was drawn by interests, talents, and family tradition.

At this point, it is difficult to resist the impression that his warm and cordial personality, his imagination and sensitivity, both poetic and pictorial, his fondness for beauty and art, his need to be of help to others and express his friendship, his dedication to the highest ideals – would perhaps chime with a philosophy different from the one which he created and served.

He must have renounced other philosophy, more attractive in various respects, precisely under the influence of practical realism – the approach which he had adopted in his youth and recommended for the sake of higher and more urgent humanitarian, social, civil, patriotic duties:

*Miał śledzić słońce obroty [. . . ] użyć źrenic  
do mikrokontemplacji przyziemnych gąsienic*

*Instead of following solar rotations, [. . . ] to use pupils  
for microcontemplation of down-to-earth caterpillars.*

*[. . . ] nieosiągalnych poniechać zamierzeń,  
sięgnąć po to, co można mieć. Nie sięgać szerzej.*

*to abandon unattainable goals,  
to reach for what one can have. Not to strive for more.*

Instead of climbing the peaks of wisdom, we should "get rid of foolishness," "spurn misleading stories, be clear-headed," "let go of unreliable phantasy," reject "the illusion of soothing dreams," and, finally, "train [other citizens] in everyday virtues." That was the code laid down by Kazimierz Twardowski's school, dictated to him by the historical situation of his fatherland, by the misery and destitution of a nation.

Truth, and only truth, should not be limited, according to Kotarbiński, by the minimalist constraints adopted by him voluntarily; honesty is an absolutely valid requirement. Breaking this rule is an appalling deed; who has committed it, condemns himself to moral death:

*To już nie on, choć niby wygląda jak dawniej.  
Ale przypatrz się oczom, a dostrzeżesz zmianę.  
Oczy trupa też obco łypią z twarzy znanej.*

*It's no longer him, though he looks like before.  
But look him in the eye, and you'll notice the change.  
A corpse's eyes also glow strangely from a familiar face.*

A philosopher whose mission is to teach and educate; who combines a cool intellect and a warm heart, who welds thought and action into one harmonious way of life; who grounds knowledge in practical reason, propagates it, undermining false beliefs, and uses it as a means of attaining virtue; which in turn he associates with utility; who is bold enough to defend the freedom of conscience and human dignity: such a figure brings Socrates to mind. And this is precisely the name once chosen by Karol Irzykowski, who dubbed Kotarbiński 'Warsaw's Socrates'.

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Tadeusz Kotarbiński was born on 31 March 1886 in Warsaw. His father, Miłosz Kotarbiński, a painter and a composer, was the director of the School of Fine Arts in Warsaw; his mother, Ewa, née Koskowska, was a pianist; his paternal uncle, Józef, was an actor and a playwright, director of Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Cracow. Young Kotarbiński studied philosophy at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lvov in the years 1907–1912, under the supervision of Kazimierz Twardowski, and obtained his Doctor of Philosophy degree for the dissertation *Utylitaryzm w etyce Milla i Spencera* (*Utilitarianism in the Ethics of Mill and Spencer*). He chose classics minor and had the opportunity to use this skill in Warsaw, as a teacher of Greek and Latin in the private Mikołaj Rej High School. In the years 1919–1929, he was an associate professor at the University of Warsaw, and a full professor in the years 1929–1961: until 1951 at the Philosophy Department and then at the Logic Department. During World War II he gave lectures at the underground University of Warsaw as part of the system of secret education (the so-called *tajne komplety*, clandestine classes), and after the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, until January 1945, he lectured in Radom. Once the war was over, he co-organized the University of Łódź, becoming its rector (1945–1949) and then a professor up to 1951. He attended the I Congress of Polish Science but remained silent throughout.

In the years 1927–1955 he chaired the Warsaw Philosophical Society, in 1948–1977 he was the President, and after 1977 the Honorary President,

of the Polish Philosophical Society. Since 1929 he was a member of the Learned Society of Warsaw, up to its dissolution in 1951. In 1946–1951 – a corresponding member and subsequently a regular member of the Polish Academy of Learning (PAU) in Cracow up until its dissolution. Since 1951 he was an ordinary member of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) and in the years 1957–1962 – its President.

He was also a founder member of the Polish Semiotic Society (PTS). While he enjoyed good health, he participated in its meetings, and often took part in the discussions.

In 1957–1960 he was the Vice-President, from 1960 to 1963 – the President, and then Honorary President of Institut International de Philosophie. He received honorary doctorates from a number of universities both in Poland and abroad (the universities of Bratislava, Brussels, Florence, the Jagiellonian University, the universities in Łódź, Oxford, and Sofia, and the Medical University in Łódź). Six foreign academies admitted him as their member. Several hundred works by Tadeusz Kotarbiński include, besides *Gnosiology* (1929/1961, 1966a) and *Praxiology* (1955b, 1965), the following books, not translated into English: *Kurs logiki dla prawników (A Course of Logic for Lawyers)* (1955a), *Wybór pism (Selected Writings)* in two volumes (1957–1958), *Wykłady z dziejów logiki (Lectures on the History of Logic)* (1957/1985), *Sprawność i błąd (Efficiency and Error)* (1960), *Medytacje o życiu godziwym (Meditations on Decent Life)* (1966d), *Hasło dobrej roboty (Good Job)* (1968), *Studia z zakresu filozofii, etyki i nauk społecznych (Studies in Philosophy, Ethics, and Social Sciences)* (1970a), *Szkice z historii filozofii i logiki (Sketches in History of Philosophy and Logic)* (1979b). He also published volumes of verse: *Wesołe smutki (Merry Sorrows)* (1967 – third extended edition), *Rytmy i rymy (Rhythms and Rhymes)* (1970b). This is the source of the poetic fragments quoted above, and of the two final verses of one of the poems:

*Bez zmiany czegokolwiek wszystko się zmieniło  
I wszystko jest, jak było – z wyjątkiem wszystkiego.*

*Without any change, everything has changed,  
And everything's as usual – except for everything.*

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The Polish Semiotic Society paid the last tribute to Tadeusz Kotarbiński in the following obituary:

Tadeusz Kotarbiński, born 31 March 1886 in Warsaw, died 3 October 1981 in Anin near Warsaw. Founder member of the Polish Semiotic Society. For seventy years, he taught and demonstrated, by his own example, how to express independent thought in clear and precise words and have the courage to bear witness to the truth.

Polish Semiotic Society.

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