

# REVIEWS OF AJDUKIEWICZ'S AND KOTARBIŃSKI'S PUBLICATIONS

Leopold BLAUSTEIN

*Translated from Polish by Filip Gołaszewski*

*Abstract and keywords prepared by Filip Gołaszewski*

*Bibliography edited by Filip Gołaszewski*

---

## *Abstract*

Blaustein reviews two publications by representatives of the Lvov–Warsaw School: Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz's *On the Meaning of Expressions* (1931) and Tadeusz Kotarbiński's *Gnosiology: The Scientific Approach to the Theory of Knowledge* (1929). The examination of Ajdukiewicz's publication focuses on semantic theory developed through motivational relations between sentences, language directives, and inferential substitutivity relations. Blaustein's analysis addresses the distinction between verbal

and intuitive derivation, disposition toward a language, and definition of synonymy through inferential substitutivity. With respect to Kotarbiński's publication, Blaustein analyzes the integration of the reist ontology with epistemological realism across semantic theory, epistemology, formal logic, and scientific methodology. The reviews examine both the theoretical contributions and the methodological approaches of both philosophers. They also identify specific limitations in metaphysical assumptions and applicability beyond formal logical systems.

*Keywords:* Ajdukiewicz, Kotarbiński, expression, meaning, motivation relations, reism.

---

### **Oceni publikacij Ajdukiewicza in Kotarbińskiego**

#### *Povzetek*

272 Blaustein ocenjuje publikaciji spod peresa dveh predstavnikov lvovsko-varšavske šole: *O pomenu izrazov* (1931) Kazimierza Ajdukiewicza in *Gnoseologija: Znanstveni pristop k teoriji vednosti* (1929) Tadeusza Kotarbińskiego. Prikaz Ajdukiewiczzevega dela se osredotoča na semantično teorijo, ki jo pisec razvija s pomočjo razgrnitve motivacijskih odnosov med stavki, jezikovnih smernic in predpostavljenih substitucijskih odnosov. Blausteinova analiza zadeva razlikovanje med verbalno in intuitivno izpeljavo, disponiranost glede jezika in definicijo sinonimije na podlagi predpostavljene substitutivnosti. Pri obravnavi dela Kotarbińskiego Blaustein analizira integracijo reistične ontologije z epistemološkim realizmom na področjih semantične teorije, epistemologije, formalne logike in znanstvene metodologije. Oceni se dotikata tako teoretskih prispevkov kot metodoloških pristopov obeh avtorjev. Obenem identificirata določene omejitve glede metafizičnih domnev in glede uporabnosti onkraj formalnih logičnih sistemov.

*Ključne besede:* Ajdukiewicz, Kotarbiński, izraz, pomen, motivacijski odnosi, reizem.

---

[| 455]<sup>1</sup> **Ajdukiewicz, Kazimierz**, *O znaczeniu wyrażeń* [*On the Meaning of Expressions*]. Offprint from the Memorial Book of the Polish Philosophical Society in Lvov, Lvov 1931, 47 pp.

Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz wrote a significant treatise on defining the meaning of expressions, a problem that poses considerable difficulties for grammarians and philosophers who work within semantics.<sup>2</sup> This book can contribute, especially in its critical part, to the elimination of certain outdated and erroneous views. Such views persist, for example, in numerous grammar textbooks. Moreover, Ajdukiewicz's treatise in an original manner paves the way to replacing these erroneous views with accurate and precisely formulated ones. After distinguishing various ways of using the word "meaning," Ajdukiewicz limits his considerations to "meaning" in the narrower sense. He correctly draws attention to the necessity of relativizing the meaning of expressions to language. Ajdukiewicz also remarks on the ambiguity of expressions in quotation marks and on the threefold sense of the expression: "to speak Polish." These remarks can contribute significantly to removing a series of inaccuracies usually committed in semantic research. What follows is a critique of the associationist theory of meaning. Ajdukiewicz formulates associationist theory much more favorably than this is usually done. Associationist theory has long been abandoned by philosophers, but is sometimes maintained by linguists. Nevertheless, Ajdukiewicz convincingly demonstrates that this theory cannot be maintained even in such a modified form. With respect to the question of

273

---

1 [This translation indicates original pagination directly in the text in square brackets; all page numbers refer to: Blaustein, Leopold 1930. "[Review of] Ajdukiewicz Kazimierz, *O znaczeniu wyrażeń*" and "[Review of] Kotarbiński, Tadeusz, *Elementy teorii poznania logiki formalnej i metodologii nauk*." *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 5 (4-5): 455–458.]

2 [See Ajdukiewicz 1931 [1978]].

the psychological mechanisms underlying the use of certain phrases as verbal expressions, Ajdukiewicz aligns with [Edmund] Husserl's position. According to Husserl's view, the meaning of a given expression (as a type) in a certain language is the type, under which the intention attached to meaning content must fall. The correlation between the type and linguistic intention ensures that the phrase functions as an expression within a specific language, rather than being ambiguous across multiple languages. Interestingly, Ajdukiewicz is inclined to accept the existence of universals. Universals are conceived as objects of a different order than objects whose existence is recognized only by [Tadeusz] Kotarbiński's reism. Ajdukiewicz also subjects [John Stuart] Mill's theory of connotation to analysis and critique. However, Ajdukiewicz believes that Mill's theory provides the correct methodological approach for determining meaning.

274 Ajdukiewicz's definition of meaning is based on motivational relations between sentences, and between intuitive representations and sentences. This approach also employs the concept of disposition to use a language; Ajdukiewicz defines this disposition in terms of specific motivational relations. Ajdukiewicz limits further considerations to languages with established and unambiguous vocabulary, syntax, and motivational relations. This allows him to introduce the concept of language rules. These rules express the motivational relations for each sentence. Disposition toward a certain language consists of readiness to proceed according to the rules established by that language. Ajdukiewicz further distinguishes verbal derivation from intuitive derivation. If we accept certain sentences on the basis of accepting other sentences, then we deal with verbal derivation. In every other case, we deal with intuitive derivation. Using language rules, Ajdukiewicz defines synonymy as inferential substitutivity. Applying the schema for definition by abstraction, he obtains a definition of the meaning of a given expression *E* in language *L*. This is the property of expression *E*, which is common to all expressions synonymous with expression *E* in language *L*, and only to those. Finally, Ajdukiewicz gives an interpretation of the so-called "intentional nature of acts" and "matter of the acts." [1 456] These interpretations are supposed to reduce the readiness to react to certain representations with belief in a certain sentence about the object of representation. However, Ajdukiewicz does not clarify whether this

---

readiness remains at the mental disposition level or whether it actually becomes a conscious experience. One may accept Ajdukiewicz's account, noting that it lacks clarity with respect to individual properties of the representational intention.

Ajdukiewicz's logical argumentation and technical definitions employ rigorous formal distinctions and systematic terminology. This methodological rigor makes the treatise difficult to read, but Ajdukiewicz's book remains comprehensible. The arguments addressing objections to the proposed definition of synonymy are particularly difficult to follow. The definition of meaning that emerges from Ajdukiewicz's abstractive method provides little insight into the actual nature of meaning. This limitation persists unless one considers Ajdukiewicz's constructive proposals developed through his critique of associationist theory. Ajdukiewicz's results are all the more interesting, as they open promising epistemological perspectives. It is more difficult, however, to judge what their significance will be for the semantics of ethnic languages. This is because ethnic languages are based on an artificial language model that is not exclusively deductive, but has an unambiguously established vocabulary, syntactic rules, and directives. However, ethnic languages resemble to a lesser or greater degree a logically ideal language. Every rigorous science strives toward the creation of such a language. Therefore, one can assume that knowledge of the ideal language structure is beneficial for understanding ethnic languages. The entirety of Ajdukiewicz's arguments seems convincing, apart from the distinction between verbal derivation and intuitive derivation (and meanings), which perhaps requires certain supplements.

275

[| 456] **Kotarbiński, Tadeusz**, *Elementy teorii poznania logiki formalnej i metodologii nauk* [*Gnosiology: The Scientific Approach to the Theory of Knowledge*]. Lwów: Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego Imienia Ossolińskich 1929, VIII + 483 pp.

The development of Polish philosophy in the last thirty years [in the 20<sup>th</sup> century] has given it a distinctive profile that, in terms of prevailing tendencies and methods, differs from philosophical traditions in other countries. This methodological separation from international philosophical trends created considerable difficulties in teaching philosophy at Polish universities. The

available textbooks differed significantly in both approach as well as content from the philosophical principles being taught and implemented in university lectures. In order to address this pedagogical gap, three comprehensive philosophical textbooks have recently been published: Władysław Witwicki's treatise on psychology; Tadeusz Kotarbiński's book on epistemology, logic, and methodology; and Władysław Tatarkiewicz's history of philosophy. The publication of original Polish textbooks in these philosophical disciplines should be welcomed with recognition. They fill a significant gap in Polish academic literature and express the increasingly mature independent tendencies of Polish philosophy. The most original among these textbooks is Kotarbiński's book.<sup>3</sup>

276

The originality is clear in Kotarbiński's selection of topics in his new textbook. The first section includes discussions of language, specifically semantic theory. Semantic research is actively pursued in Poland, although from widely different theoretical perspectives. The second part addresses issues [457] of the theory of knowledge. The third section introduces readers to the basics of formal logic. The fourth section provides an overview of the general methodology of sciences. The fifth section examines the distinctive characteristics of the major scientific disciplines. The [reviewed] textbook, intended for persons preparing for examination of the "main principles of philosophical disciplines," focuses primarily on those branches of philosophy that are recognized in Poland as meeting scientific standards. The textbook also includes essential psychological observations. This material is discussed primarily in relation to the theory of knowledge. Another distinctive feature that makes this book representative of contemporary Polish philosophy is Kotarbiński's approach to philosophical problems, which emphasizes absolute clarity and precision in both thought and expression. Kotarbiński aims to expose certain murky, but traditionally sanctified problems as illusory. Finally, one can find in this book results obtained by Polish scholars, particularly in the third part of the publication devoted to logic.

However, Kotarbiński's individual intellectual approach gives the publication its remarkable quality. The publication does not read like a mere compilation

---

3 [See Kotarbiński 1929 [1966)].

---

of various philosophical positions. When Kotarbiński presents other scholars' views, he expresses them in his own distinctive way of expression, and provides original analysis of individual positions. This approach undoubtedly compromises the historical accuracy of Kotarbiński's account. The method usually enhances the clarity of his exposition of philosophical problems. Kotarbiński's original views are contained in the semantic, epistemological, and methodological sections. Kotarbiński's reism comes to the foreground in semantics and ontology. His radical realism appears in epistemology. Reism provides a unifying perspective throughout the entire publication. This unification is also largely responsible for giving the book the character of a cohesive philosophical treatise rather than a conventional textbook. Many philosophical systems turn out to be essentially textbooks, compilations of foreign views equipped with more or less original contributions from their creators. In Kotarbiński's case, the textbook turns out to be an interesting philosophical system. However, this systematic approach did not work to the advantage of either the textbook or the system itself. The textbook exceeds the appropriate difficulty level, given that it was originally intended as an introduction to philosophical disciplines. For advanced students and other readers, who already possess some familiarity with philosophical issues, the book will serve as a valuable repository of philosophical knowledge that has been critically examined and originally interpreted. The textbook format allowed Kotarbiński to include material that might not have found a place in other types of philosophical publications. For example, analysis of the humanities was included. However, the textbook format prevented Kotarbiński from discussing freely and extensively those issues that were closest to his heart and regarding which he had the most expertise to offer. Consequently, Kotarbiński has been criticized for treating various issues with unequal emphasis. One might, therefore, regret that urgent pedagogical requirements prevented this textbook from developing organically. The most valuable textbooks emerge naturally, when they represent the culmination of an author's lifelong academic achievements. This kind of culmination would previously be announced in a series of monographs.

Despite these shortcomings, which result more from external circumstances than from any fault of Kotarbiński's, the publication presents itself impressively.

It enriches Polish philosophical literature with a book [458] of extraordinary value. This textbook will undoubtedly influence future Polish philosophical publications. Kotarbiński's book will either provoke theoretical objections or stimulate further research on the basis of the results contained in it. Reism, in particular, encounters strong resistance, because it radically challenges established ways of thinking. An accurate analysis and critique of reism—as it seems to me—is contained in Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz's critical study, published in volume 33 of *Przegląd Filozoficzny* [*The Philosophical Review*]. However, this is not the right place for a substantive examination of Kotarbiński's numerous original views. Kotarbiński's views are expounded concisely and clearly in his absorbing publication, which merits attention not only from specialists, but also from all those who value authentic philosophical culture.

### **Bibliography | Bibliografija**

- 278    Ajdukiewicz, Kazimierz. 1931. *O znaczeniu wyrażeń*. Lwów: Wydawnictwo Polskiego Towarzystwa Filozoficznego we Lwowie.
- . 1978. "On the Meaning of Expressions." Trans. by J. Giedymin. In Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, *The Scientific World-Perspective and Other Essays, 1931–1963*, ed. by J. Giedymin, 1–34. Dordrecht—Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Kotarbiński, Tadeusz. 1929. *Elementy teorii poznania logiki formalnej i metodologii nauk*. Lwów: Wydawnictwo Zakładu Narodowego Imienia Ossolińskich.
- . 1966. *Gnosiology: The Scientific Approach to the Theory of Knowledge*. Trans. by O. Wojtasiewicz. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
-





*Phainomena 34 | 132-133 | June 2025*

## **Transitions | Prehajanja**

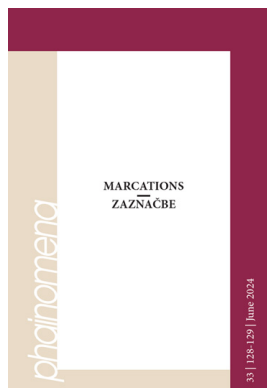
Dean Komel | Paulina Sosnowska | Jaroslava Vydrová | David-Augustin Mândruț | Manca Erzetič | Dragan Prole | Mindaugas Briedis | Irakli Batiashvili | Dragan Jakovljević | Johannes Vorlauffer | Petar Šegedin | Željko Radinković | René Dentz | Malwina Rolka | Mimoza Hasani Pllana | Audran Aulanier | Robert Gugutzer | Damir Smiljanić | Silvia Dadà



*Phainomena 33 | 130-131 | November 2024*

## **Human Existence and Coexistence in the Epoch of Nihilism**

Damir Barbarić | Jon Stewart | Cathrin Nielsen | Ilia Inishev | Petar Bojanić | Holger Zaborowski | Dragan D. Prole | Susanna Lindberg | Jeff Malpas | Azelarabe Lahkim Bennani | Josef Estermann | Chung-Chi Yu | Alfredo Rocha de la Torre | Jesús Adrián Escudero | Veronica Neri | Žarko Paić | Werner Stegmaier | Adriano Fabris | Dean Komel



*Phainomena 33 | 128-129 | June 2024*

## **Marcations | Zaznačbe**

Mindaugas Briedis | Irfan Muhammad | Bence Peter Marosan | Sazan Kryeziu | Petar Šegedin | Johannes Vorlauffer | Manca Erzetič | David-Augustin Mândruț | René Dentz | Olena Budnyk | Maxim D. Miroshnichenko | Luka Hrovat | Tonči Valentić | Dean Komel | Bernhard Waldenfels | Damir Barbarić

