Chapter 1
Polish Metaphysics and the Brentanian Tradition

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1.1 Introduction

There is a view according to which the philosophy of the Lvov-Warsaw School is rooted in the tradition of British analytic philosophy and is closely linked to logical empiricism. Although this is not entirely false – both current had repercussions in the work of Polish philosophers – I wish to argue that the best way to understand and evaluate the most significant achievements of philosophy in Poland is to consider it in close relation to the Brentanian tradition, on the background of Brentano’s and Twardowski’s views, in particular. Brentano’s impact was twofold. It consisted, firstly, in the fact that his “scientific” style of philosophizing turned out to be very attractive for Twardowski and his followers in Poland, and, secondly, in the fact that he rejected Kant’s heritage and returned to the tenets of classical philosophy. But it would be hard to imagine the development of Polish philosophy without Twardowski’s essential modifications of Brentano’s main ideas. Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz in 1937 in a discussion of the particular influence of Brentano’s ideas on the philosophy of the time (Ajdukiewicz 1985a, 252), distinguished four essential elements in Brentano’s philosophy: (i) the theory of intentionality, (ii) the “pre-Kantian” theory of truth (i.e. the classical, Aristotelian conception of truth), (iii) ontological realism and (iv) the commitment to a theistic metaphysics. I will document the fact that all four Brentanian elements, though natural theology to a lesser extent, were embraced by at least some Polish philosophers – I focus on Stanisław Leśniewski, Tadeusz Kotarbiński, Tadeusz Czeżowski, Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz and Roman Ingarden – and that these ideas provided the foundation for some of their most significant and original achievements.

1.2 Twardowski on Intentionality and Truth

Twardowski rejected Brentano’s immanentism. Intentional relations obtain, Twardowski argued, between thoughts, that is, mental acts and external objects and
not, as Brentano maintained between thoughts and (mentally) immanent objects. Twardowski’s amendment to Brentanian immanent intentionality had at least two fundamental consequences. It allowed Twardowski to retain the study of intentional objects as the basis for formal ontology and thus to understand the latter as a “daseinsfreie Wissenschaft”: the study of intentional objects does not imply any commitment as regards real objects. For Twardowski, immanent entities are not objects but “contents” sharply distinct from the acts of presentation and their referent. Twardowski, following Brentano, conceived objects as the possible correlate of a presentation, but contrary to Brentano, claimed that an object’s being an object of presentation does not entail its existing in any real or possible way (Twardowski 1982, 27). It also allowed him to set up semantics as the theory of the relations between thoughts and language, on the one hand, and external reality on the other. According to Twardowski, since the mind, through its contents, is intentionally related to external objects, and since the main role of language is to intimate (kundgeben) what is in the mind, then linguistic signs are also in some substantial way related to external objects. In distinguishing mental actions from their products (on this, see Bobryk this volume), Twardowski is furthermore in a position to grant stability to intentional and semantic relations: the contents involved in intentional and semantic relations are to be conceived as the stable products of (certain aspect of events that take place in) the mind and not individual, subjective, perishing entities. As a result, Twardowski could easily accept that truth is a relation between thought and external reality and approve of ontological realism.

Twardowski did for a time vindicate the existential theory of judgment proposed by Brentano. Unlike Brentano, however, Twardowski also forcefully defended the idea that truth is absolute. Brentano believed that while a judgment may on the face of it appear to remain the same, its content may change from occasion to occasion, or from subject to subject (Brentano 1930, 26). This was a consequence of Brentano’s immanentism, according to which acts of judgments are conceived as real events in a way that leaves no room for any view of truth and falsity as timeless properties. One can find important consequences of Twardowski’s absolutism both in Leśniewski’s and Kotarbiński’s ontological views, as we will see, as well as in Tarski’s semantic definition of truth.

1.3 Leśniewski’s Ontology

“Ontology” is the name for a logical calculus which Leśniewski interpreted as an extended modern version of the traditional logic of names. Leśniewski’s Ontology is rooted in Twardowski’s theory of objects, which finds its roots in Brentano’s. Leśniewski’s aim is to establish nominalism and to express it in a precise logical language. Ontology is to be such a language. Leśniewski’s nominalism can be regarded as a result of his criticism of Twardowski’s doctrine of “general” objects. It is not clear why Leśniewski started with the analysis of general objects: as Wolenski suggests, it might have been the result of Anton Marty’s inspiration, whose major work Leśniewski knew and even intended to translate from German into