PHILOSOPHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
OF KOTARBIŃSKI'S PRAXIOLOGY

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Tadeusz Kotarbiński, a representative of the famous Lvov-Warsaw School of Logic was the founder of praxiology: the science of efficient action. He began to form it in the period of his philosophical studies at the University of Lvov, before the First World War. He continued to form praxiology, also known as the logic of action, till the last years of his life. The fullest exposition of it appeared in his book A Treatise on Good Work (1955a) which was translated into many languages, and whose English translation (1965) was entitled Praxiology: An Introduction to the Science of Efficient Action. Besides this, he wrote many works on metapraxiology - projecting its contents and expanding the problem connected with praxiology. He lectured on praxiology at the University of Warsaw, and my opinions are based not only on my knowledge of his written, but also on his lectures and on my memories of his seminars and the problems discussed there. The subject of this discussion is the philosophical and methodological assumptions of the theory of efficient action.

Implications of reism

Kotarbiński declared himself as a supporter of the branch of materialism which was professed among others by Franz Brentano at the end of his life, and which is called reism. Ontological views amount to accepting the existence of material things and actions of individuals only. So the agent is an acting individual. Only he acts and it cannot be said of a human organization that it acts as an agent. 'The organization acts' is an abbreviation, and means: the organization consists of separate individuals, each of whom acts. Here is no collective action, but a distributive one.

The concept of action in the determining definition limits its scope to men. Maybe in another language we could assume that elephants, dogs, computers etc. act; but in the language of praxiology, 'action' is consciously confined to the individual subject. The term 'action' is also used as an abbreviation, because in fact there is no action but an
acting agent. Action belongs to the category of events, and they are either changes or states of things. If we distinguish events considering what happens to things, considering variability or invariability of certain features in a given interval, such distinction will also refer to actions. Above the theory of action Kotarbiński constructs a theory of events which is more general than the theory of action, which, in turn, is more general than praxiology, i.e. the theory of action evaluated from the point of view of efficiency.

The theory of events examines cause-effect relationships, functional sequences and simultaneity of events; the theory of action is concerned with particular cases of causal connection, that is causation when the cause is an agent.

In his approach to praxiology Kotarbiński does not expose the assumptions of ontological reason or of semantical reason, because he does not state explicitly that genuine names are only those which have real designations, and all the others are pseudo-names. From those we must either pass to genuine names or we must find out what the relation between them and concrete thing is. In the lectures on praxiology these postulates are fulfilled implicitly. For instance, following Eugeniusz Gblewicz (see: 1983), Kotarbiński adopts the definition of goal: John's goal is a certain event (c) means, that John has made some effort in order to bring about the event (c). John represents a concrete agent. And in reality there is no goal without the agent. 'Goal' is a pseudo-name, and the same refers to 'event'.

Similarly in Plato's Dialogues the notion of courage is reduced - it does not exist, there are only people whom we call courageous, i.e. we ascribe certain features to them, for instance strength or character.

As a consequence of reism one must accept that there is only one ontological category - the category of things. However, we have several semantic categories - events, features, relations, and many others; language expressions belong to the same linguistic category if their exchange (replacement of one expression by another) does not turn a sensible statement into a nonsensical one.

Precise terminology and adequacy of assertions

Kotarbinski's positivistic and scientific attitude was shown in his methodological formulation of praxiology; it was also methodology in general, embracing all actions. Methodology of sciences including that of deductive and inductive sciences, and on the lower level methodology of particular sciences deal only with a certain sort of actions. As methodology has not only theoretical tasks - praxiology describes how people act, and evaluates the efficiency of their actions, but it also serves practical purposes - it formulates directions which inform one how, in certain conditions and with assumed goals, to apply the sequence of actions in order to achieve efficiency, that is, to realize the event which was adopted as a goal. In this formulation the evaluation of efficiency is the relation of agreement of the effect and the goal, and it can be verified or falsified. Other estimations of efficiency also be-