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KOTARBIŃSKI ON INTELLECTUAL VALUES AND INTELLECTUAL ETHICS

Abstract

Tadeusz Kotarbiński never formulates explicitly the project of an intellectual ethics, but we can reconstruct his answer from his *Traktat o dobrej robocie* (1955; Eng. transl.: *Praxiology: An introduction to the Sciences of Efficient Action*, 1965) and his ethical writings. Kotarbiński does not formulate an explicit meta-ethics of values, and seems to develop a purely functionalist conception according to which there is nothing more in intellectual ethics than a conception of efficient action. However, he has a theory of practical values and skills that can be applied to the aims and norms of the epistemic domain. But can he secure a genuine conception of intellectual values if these are merely immanent to “efficient work”?

Keywords: Tadeusz Kotarbiński, intellectual values, intellectual ethics, praxeology

1. INTRODUCTION: THE PROJECT OF AN INTELLECTUAL ETHICS

My aim in this essay is to consider Tadeusz Kotarbiński’s answer to the classical problem of how to formulate the project of an intellectual ethics. Kotarbiński did not write very much on ethics: some of his essays on the subject have appeared in various places (Kotarbiński 1948, 1987, 1964),¹ but we can also extract a number of his ideas relevant to intellectual ethics from *Traktat o dobrej robocie* (1955; Eng. transl.: *Praxiology: An Introduction to the Sciences of Efficient Action*, 1965). In confronting his project of describing

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¹ Some of these essays have been translated into French (Kotarbiński 2017).

dobro robota, efficient work, with the problem of what it is to work well in the intellectual domain, I hope to make explicit Kotarbiński's answers to these questions.

The field of intellectual ethics is hard to delineate, but it most often, at least for a century, has taken the form of the Kantian question: "What ought I to believe?" and has been called, since the famous debate between William James and William K. Clifford, the "ethics of belief," although, in modern philosophy, the subject goes back at least to Locke. The issue was raised mostly in the context of religious belief, but it can be extended to all forms of belief and judgments and to all intellectual matters in general, ordinary as well as scientific. Are we responsible for our beliefs, thoughts, and judgments? And, if we are, what are the grounds of our responsibility? Can we be blamed or praised for them? Can we be right or wrong intellectually, in addition to being right or wrong ethically or practically? What kind of norms and values are at play here? The project of an intellectual ethics rests on the idea that there are values and norms in the epistemic as well as in the practical domain. There are three views about the relationship between epistemology and ethics and the possibility of an ethics of belief (Chisholm 1991, Haack 1997/2001):

- (i) Exclusive Disjunction between ethics and epistemology (exclusivism),
- (ii) Inclusion : epistemology is part of ethics (inclusivism),
- (iii) Overlap: there are common elements, without reduction, between epistemology and ethics (the overlap view).

These views can be formulated differently, depending on how one conceives of the main normative concepts: duties or oughts, values, or reasons. The questions therefore are: are epistemic duties (values, reasons) reducible to ethical duties, to values, or to reasons?

The inclusivist version is famously defended by Clifford: epistemic duties are ethical duties. Clifford raised the question of the effects of holding a certain belief. He argued that if the consequences of a particular belief (say, the belief of a ship owner that his ship is safe) are bad (say, the ship sinks and with it perish a number of immigrants), then one has to evaluate the consequences also from an ethical point of view. Clifford's view was that good believing is under the responsibility of the believer and that the consequences of believing can be bad. But Clifford was not a consequentialist about believing, and he did not take beliefs to be actions. He held that our responsibility lies first in our believing according to evidence, and with aiming at truth. In such an evidentialist theory of the ethics of belief, practical reasons and practical values

are extrinsic to the ethics of belief. Thus believing at will, or believing what is agreeable to us, is a violation of the ethics of belief, not because it often leads to bad consequences or possibly to good consequences (wishful thinking can be beneficial), but because it is against the very nature of believing. In this view, the ethics of belief, or intellectual ethics, is first and foremost the at least implicit recognition of the nature of believing.²

There are two ways to understand the epistemic evaluations which regulate an intellectual ethics. According to the normative version, the evaluations are deontic rules, in the form of *oughts* or imperatives. The famous Cliffordian formulation is that *it is wrong, always and everywhere and for anyone, to believe anything against the evidence*. The second version takes intellectual evaluations to be based on values instead of norms. This is a kind of virtue epistemology. But it too has two versions. On the reliabilist version, the agent has to acquire some cognitive dispositions in order to achieve good epistemic performance and to succeed in having true and justified, or apt, beliefs (Sosa 2011, Greco 2010). On the voluntaristic version of virtue epistemology, the believer must have a certain motivation towards the epistemic good, namely towards truth, and must develop this motivation into excellences and epistemic virtues. This version of virtue epistemology can give rise to a whole field of intellectual ethics as the study of the formation of epistemic virtues (integrity, honesty, humility, scrupulousness, etc.) and epistemic vices (dishonesty, negligence, etc.).

These are the main views within the inclusivist camp. But they cannot be described as full-blooded forms of inclusivism, because they do not reduce epistemology to ethics in all their versions. Rather, most of these versions entail the view (iii) that there is an overlap between epistemology and ethics. Thus, many virtue epistemologists deny that virtue epistemology can account for epistemological issues (Baehr 2011). But all versions take intellectual ethics to be a form of ethics, or a subfield of ethics, not forms of epistemology, although they accept an overlap between the two.

Opposed to inclusivist and overlap views are exclusivist ones, for which the domains of epistemology and ethics are perfectly disjoint. According to such views, there is no intellectual ethics, in the sense of a set of norms or values which could be both epistemic and ethical. There are, it seems, three kinds of conceptions giving this negative answer.

First, there is a positivistic view: science and inquiry do not deal with values and norms, which are governed by emotions or are neutral with respect to values. In other words, there is no other ethics of belief than correct episte-

² This is the view I argue for (see Engel 2019).

mology: good believing is just believing that which is true and justified or reliable, and there is no need to invoke other reasons to believe than epistemic ones. This view that was so prevalent in logical positivism in the 40s that Richard Rudner's paper "The Scientist *Qua* Scientist Makes Value Judgments," published in 1953, caused quite a stir: Rudner was denying the positivist dogma that good science just is science that conforms to scientific canons and rules.

Second, there is a functionalist view. This view need not deny that ethical values may play a role in the formation and evaluation of beliefs and in inquiry, but it denies that they play any explicit or guiding role. Does the believer (or inquirer) need to be conscious of the norms and values of belief and inquiry? Does he need a specific conception of the aim of belief or of the rules of inquiry? On a purely functionalist conception of belief, this has to be the case. Belief just has to function well, to be effective in order to be good or valuable. Beliefs must lead to the truth or have a high enough degree of probability, they have to lead to successful actions. Let us call this the *functional conception* of the ethics of belief. What we need is to know how believing functions well.

Kotarbiński's conception of efficient work seems, *prima facie*, to be a functionalist view. In this sense, it falls under the exclusivist category: there is no such thing as intellectual ethics, there is just a conception of what it is to act, and to work well, in the intellectual domain. If we have a conception of efficient believing and inquiring, and one does good work, the rest will follow. Praxeology seems to be concerned only with how to achieve efficient action within various domains, with the methods and not the ends, and to have no concern with the ethical values and norms regulating that domain.

All these exclusivist views of intellectual ethics are skeptical about the project, in the same sense in which Hume has been called a skeptic about practical reason: reason has nothing to do in the domain of action. Here, the idea is that moral reasons have nothing to do in the domain of intellectual work.

But is Kotarbiński simply a skeptic about intellectual ethics so characterized? I want to suggest here that he is not, and that he formulates an original conception of intellectual ethics, which has some interesting connections with virtue epistemology.

2. INTELLECTUAL VALUES IN POLISH PHILOSOPHY

Although most of Kotarbiński's work is devoted to the theory of knowledge — his *Gnosiology* [*Elementy teorii poznania*] does not contain any section

devoted to the relations between epistemology and ethics — there are discussions of ethics in his work. His early dissertation “Utilitarianism and the Ethics of Pity” (Kotarbiński 1915, see Rabinowicz 2000) and his later writings on ethics show a deep interest in these issues. But his reism and his nominalistic attitude in ontology and in other fields seem to set his work apart from the theories of value developed in Poland at the time.

There is indeed an axiological project within Polish philosophy. In particular, Władysław Tatarkiewicz, another student of Twardowski, developed this field (Tatarkiewicz 1919, see Drabarek 2019). Tatarkiewicz divides values into five categories: (a) moral values (honesty, justice, kindness, nobility); (b) cognitive, or intellectual, values (truth, creativity); (c) aesthetic values (beauty and its varieties); (d) hedonic, or emotional, values (pleasure and its varieties); and (e) vital values, or natural goods (life, health, strength, good looks). This catalog of values was supplemented with a subdivision into three basic classes — i.e., values proper to man, to objects, and those on the border of these two. Tatarkiewicz raised the question of hierarchy of goods and of their combination. Most of all, he defended a realist and absolutist view of the Good, for which Kotarbiński had little sympathy.

In spite of strong positivist tendencies to think of ethics as just a matter of emotions, there was indeed in the Lvov-Warsaw School a discussion of academic ethics in Twardowski and his pupil Tadeusz Czeżowski (see Tyburski 2019, Drabarek 2019) and much reflection on the aims of teaching, especially in the university context, but there does not seem have been any discussion of the ethics of belief issues, at least in the form that it has taken in the James–Clifford tradition in English speaking philosophy (except in religious matters, which indeed form the background of much reflection on ethics in Poland³). In any case, I am not aware of any Polish discussion of a number of sub-issues in the ethics of belief debate at the time when Kotarbiński was writing, such as the voluntariness of belief: if there are duties to believe, belief must in some sense be under the control of agents, as practical duties are. It seems clear, however, that in the domain of the ethics of religious belief, many members of the Lvov-Warsaw School defended a rationalist position, or, to use Kazimierz Adjukiewicz’s turn of phrase, an anti-irrationalist view. So many of them would have been, if they had discussed these, unsympathetic to the views of James, and more in sympathy with the evidentialist view of Clifford. But Kotarbiński insisted strongly on the need to separate philosophy from

³ See Łukasiewicz, Pouivet 2012 and Woleński 2019 on epistemic duties, Łukasiewicz 2012 on Marian Przełęcki.

religion. Neither was he much concerned with issues in metaethics. These are probably the reasons why he did not address such questions directly.⁴

3. PRAXEOLOGY AND ITS PITFALLS

Prima facie, Kotarbiński's conception of praxeology seems to leave no room for the project of an intellectual ethics. Praxeology is a theory of action: of its types, its planning, preparation, and of the way agents can cooperate to be more efficient. It is mostly presented by Kotarbiński as the science of the efficacy of action. No need for an independent subject called "intellectual ethics," giving us a repertory of intellectual aims, values, and norms. In praxeology, we care for efficiency. In a number of places, Kotarbiński says that it is mostly a *technique*, a set of directives for achieving good results.

"Good results" seems to imply a form of utilitarianism. But this is not what Kotarbiński means. He tells us that the science of action has no trading with moral values or goals. As he says:

Moralists, when instructing others how to live so as to avoid disaster and keep a clear conscience, discuss such matters, in so far as is necessary to shed light on the path of virtue and the wilderness of vice and downfall — in conjunction with the issues of effective behaviour. Such a mixed character can be seen in the fables of Babrios, Phaedrus, La Fontaine, Krasicki, Mickiewicz, Krylov, and others. If we take, for instance, the metaphor of a bull in a china shop, the point is not to stigmatize any ill-will or aggressive intent; it lies in a general, emphasized criticism of reckless or at least clumsy behaviour. Or take the moral of a well known fable: "Don't try to run before you can walk." This involves no ethical values, but rather rationality in the sequence of actions, a gradual acquisition of mastery. There are a great many such warnings and instructions in the rich corpus of fable writings, in which the virtues of goodness, honesty, and honour are constantly intertwined with recommendations to be clear and to look to one's own well-conceived interest, and with abstract statements entirely free from emotional propaganda, statements which deal in a detached way with such issues as purposefulness and anti-purposefulness or efficiency and non-efficiency of this or that way of setting about things. Thus, not a few praxiological threads can be traced in the fabric of fable-writing, although fables as such are neither principally nor to any extent treatise on good works, but fictions. (1965: 4)

In the intellectual domain, the issue of an ethics seems to be limited to the preservation of results: a kind of *hygiene*, or preventive medicine, through *prophylaxis* (1965: 28). Now, intellectual hygiene is by no means an empty ideal. It was, in many ways, the ideal and the practice of the Lvov-Warsaw

⁴ As Woleński (1990) suggests, Kotarbiński has not dealt specifically with the semiotics of value judgments and the logic of norms.

school in philosophy: to be clear, to define one's terms, to lay out explicitly one's premises and conclusion, to reject confusions and errors, and to cultivate and teach the science and art of logical thinking. In this minimalist conception of intellectual ethics, efficient work consists in just making sure that our intellectual practices are in order and function correctly. There is no intellectual ethics *as such*.⁵

However, Kotarbiński does not deny that there exist practical values, the values associated with good work, but he denies that these are specific *moral* or *ethical* values. There are just the values of efficiency in action. This is not good news for the project of an intellectual ethics, for an intellectual ethics implies at least a conception of the epistemic good or of epistemic norms. It needs to say what the intellectual or cognitive values or norms are, how we can know them and follow them or be guided by them, and a semantics of value statements.⁶ But if the main criterion is success in action, one can raise against praxeology the same objection that the one which is raised against skepticism about practical reason or ethical instrumentalism in Hume's sense: you can criticize someone for being inefficient, but that is only because this person does not adapt her means to her ends, you cannot criticize his ends. Just as one can be selfish but efficient in the practical sphere, one can be stupid but efficient in the theoretical sphere, or successful although ignorant, as we have plenty of examples every day, and even more so when our social world is driven by the norms of efficient stupidity and successful ignorance. In other words, it seems that praxeology rests on a form of pragmatism: what is rational to believe is what it is good to believe relative to a certain end. But there is no evaluation of the ends. You can be efficient at the service of nasty ends, just as Spoerri and Pesch, the mean valets of Doctor Mabuse in Fritz Lang's film, can be efficient.

Whether one formulates it as a theory of epistemic duties or as a theory of epistemic virtues, praxeology seems to have no room for *reasons*. Or to put it in the contemporary vocabulary of writers such as Derek Parfit (2011) and Thomas M. Scanlon (1998), it can be a theory of rationality, but not a theory of reasons, except for instrumental reasons. As Kieran Setiya (2007) puts it about the Humean conception of reason:

Reason is motivationally inert, since the role of efficiency is merely to transmit motivation from one's final desires to desires for the means to their satisfaction: it is not an original source of motivation. This picture of efficiency as a motivating trait is essential to the instrumentalist view; one would not be instrumentally rational if one merely

⁵ This is Roger Pouivet's verdict in Pouivet 2006.

⁶ This does not mean that praxeologists have nothing to say about the semiotics and semantics of action, see, e.g., Gasparski, Pszczółowski (1983).

knew, in a detached way, how to achieve one's ends, but had no tendency to do so. (Setiya 2007: 100)

Neither has praxeology any room for a theory of epistemic goals. In the most common conception of the epistemic goal, the aim of inquiry is truth, and the ultimate aim is truth. In other views, it is knowledge, or at least understanding (Sosa 2007, Kvanvig 2003). But in order to take truth as the epistemic goal, it is necessary to have a realist conception of truth: if truth is conceived in the minimalist or deflationist sense, it cannot be a goal.⁷ There can be many inquiries that use truth, but there is no ultimate value of truth. Now Kotarbiński was not a minimalist about truth in the contemporary sense, but he had a view according to which truth is not a genuine or substantive property, which has sometimes been called the “adverbialist theory of truth”:

In the classical interpretation, “truly” [in “Jan thinks truly”] means the same as “in agreement with reality.” . . . Let us . . . ask what is understood by “agreement with reality.” The point is not that a true thought should be a good copy or likeness of the thing of which we are thinking, as a painting or a photograph is. Brief reflection suffices to recognize the metaphorical nature of such comparison. A different interpretation of “agreement with reality” is required. We shall confine ourselves to the following:

Jan thinks truly if and only if

Jan thinks that things are thus and so,

and things are indeed thus and so.

. . . For instance, the central idea of the Copernican theory is . . . that the earth revolves around the sun; now Copernicus thought truly, for he thought that the earth revolves around the sun, and the earth does revolve around the sun. (Kotarbiński 1929, quoted by Kühne 2003: 344)

Adverbialism about truth was also Dewey's view:

It would be a great gain for logic and epistemology if we were always to translate the noun “truth” back into the adjective “true” and this back into the adverb “truly.” (1920: 156)⁸

Nevertheless, Kotarbiński claims to be a realist about truth and to define it as a correspondence with reality (1966: 100-113, see Woleński, Simons 1989, Niiniluoto 2002). But he disliked the idea that there could be other entities than concrete objects which make sentences true. Adverbialism about truth is also compatible with a form of pragmatism. Nevertheless, it is not

⁷ This was pointed out long ago by Bertrand Russell: “The theory that truth is an unanalysable quality seems to leave our preference for truth a mere unaccountable prejudice, and in no way to answer to the feeling of truth and falsehood” (1904: 75).

⁸ “An adverb expresses a way, a mode of acting” (Dewey 1920: 182).

clear that, for Kotarbiński, the property of being true was a real property. Neither is it clear that, for him, the value of truth — that is, the value of having true beliefs, is a genuine, ontologically independent property. One could even venture into taking praxeology as an adverbialist doctrine about action: what counts is *the way we act*.

4. OUTLINE OF A PRAXEOLOGICAL CONCEPTION OF INTELLECTUAL ETHICS

Does Kotarbiński's praxeology fall into the pitfalls of the instrumentalist conception of reason? And it is true that he shuns away from the project of an intellectual ethics? To both questions the answer is: no.

It is true that Kotarbiński rejects, in his investigations of the practical values of action, any explicit mention of values and norms, and distances his analysis from ethics or moral philosophy in the sense of an articulation of these values and norms. But this does not mean that he does not consider these values and norms to be present within action. So how are they present? The answer, it seems to me, is that they are present as dispositions and skills, in other words, as virtues, although he does not use that last word. In Aristotelian terms, virtue is the exercise, in the form of a disposition or habit, which can be transformed into a skill, a value, or an excellence. This seems clear in a passage of the introduction to his *Praxiology*:

An intermediate place is occupied by political essays, such as Machiavelli's *Principe*, socio-technical Utopias (Thomas More), and dissertations on practical wisdom (Plato's *Gorgias*). They owe their intermediate place not to a questionable prevalence in them of praxiological over ethical elements, but because they are insufficiently theoretical in nature. It is only ethical treatises, such as John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*, that are marked by predominance of theoretical elements. Among such treatises, some known to the present author include a considerable bulk of praxiological investigations, pride of place probably going to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, a work one of the principal ideas of which is that in the field of efficiency of action it is not desirable to identify the optimum measure of a factor which may vary in degree of concentration with its maximum concentration — that optimum should be sought in some medium between the two extreme possibilities. (Kotarbiński 1965: 12-13)

Here, Kotarbiński is neither denying that Machiavelli, More, or Aristotle have a conception of ethical values, nor that these values play a leading role in their conceptions of political and moral action. He is denying that they have to play an explicit role and that they have to be recognized as such by agents. They are, so to speak, immanent in action.

In order to better understand his conception of intellectual values, we have to attend to his views on skills. In a late paper on skills (Kotarbiński 1971), he emphasizes that the practical values are to be implemented by skills. He distinguishes clearly between theoretical and practical skills:

As to the term “practical,” it will be applied, in the first approximation, to those skills which are not theoretical. A combination of operations will be treated as theoretical if and only if its main objective is to find a well-substantiated answer to a question. . . . The difference between practical and theoretical skills becomes still clearer if we compare the content of those research operations which belong to practical skills with the content of those research operations which belong to theoretical skills. But which operations are to be called *research operations*? Those which are observations, or experiments, or reasonings or manipulations-in general, all operations which are performed in order to learn something. Let us in this connection separate from the whole of a given skill all the research operations and call those sets of research operations sciences. Under this terminological convention, tailoring as science is only a proper part of tailoring as practical skill, etc. The same holds for theoretical skills: botany as science is merely a proper part of botany as theoretical skill. For instance, drying plants and placing them in a herbarium belongs to botany *qua* skill, but not to botany *qua* science, i.e., as that part of a skill which is termed science. Now those sciences which belong to practical skills differ definitely from those which belong to theoretical skills: in the case of the former, everything serves the preparation of a most efficient performance of mental operation which always consists in conceiving means to an end. (Kotarbiński 1971: 158-159)

And he introduces clearly the adverbialist theme at which I have hinted above:

We have in turn to reflect on the meaning of the term “methodology.” The provisional explanation would be: methodology is the science of methods, and hence the methodology of practical skills is the science of the methods used in exercising practical skills. This, however, requires further explanations, and above all realizing better the meaning of the term “method.” Now, as it seems, a method always implies a *way of acting* [my emphasis — P. E.]. All action in turn is a process, and a way of acting is a structure of a process, for instance of a process of walking a certain distance. (Kotarbiński 1971: 159)

A student of methodology as the science of methods is concerned first of all with comprehending the conditions of their greatest possible *efficiency*. It is so because there are better and worse methods in the sense of greater and lesser efficiency, that is, effectiveness, greater and lesser productivity, and greater and lesser economy in the use of disposable time, space, matter, and energy. . . .

At this point, it will be useful to discuss briefly the relationship between general directives of efficiency and statements about causal relations, and above all the distinctive characteristics of *general directives* (directives here meaning recommendations and warnings). The usual form of such directives is that of an imperative sentence: “be careful,” “do not steal,” etc. But in most cases they are abbreviations of conditional imperative sentences: “if you do not want to be run over by a vehicle, be careful when crossing the roadway,” “do not steal because otherwise you will risk a punishment and disapproval by honest people,” etc. Imperative directives differ from statements, that

is, declarative sentences, in that the criterion of truth and falsehood is not applicable to them. But the meaning of a directive can easily be analyzed into elements so as to bring out its declarative element and the element that might be termed stimulative. The declarative element is obtained by the replacement of the imperative form by a declarative one. (Kotarbiński 1971: 161-163)

At this point, where action needs directives, we find the most important concept of Kotarbiński's methodology of action: that of *the reliable guardian* (Pol. "opiekun spolegliwy"). The reliable guardian is reliable in the sense that he possesses the relevant practical knowledge, but also in the sense that he is *trustworthy*.⁹ This idea figures, for instance, in a self-portrait that Kotarbiński published at the end of his career (Kotarbiński 1977) and in a short paper (Kotarbiński 1966): a reliable guardian is an individual who has understood the ethical values and who is ready to transfer his understanding to others. The notion of a reliable guardian has been much commented on. Kotarbiński describes this figure as "honest" and "to be trusted." But why is the reliable guardian a guardian, and why is he reliable? Is it because the guardian is an expert, and competent in a domain? But one can indeed be competent and ethically nasty. Neither is the good guardian a kind of impartial observer in Adam Smith's sense. I suggest that the best interpretation of the notion of a *reliable guardian* is Aristotelian. The guardian is reliable and trustworthy because he has a kind of practical wisdom. But in what sense? We can get some hints from chapter VIII of the *Praxiology*, where Kotarbiński discusses the "praxiological values of action." He asks:

What then contributes to their greater or lesser degree of efficiency? Strictly — in what respect do we evaluate agents qua agents when we evaluate them from the point of view of efficiency of action? (Kotarbiński 1965: 75)

He distinguishes acts which are effective, noneffective, or indifferent to reaching a goal. But there is a threat of relativism: what goals, what kind of efficiency? We encounter again the problem of instrumentalism about reasons and values: there are as many values as there are objectives or goals. But Kotarbiński's view is not relativist. What he means by the practical values of action is the whole set of values through which one acts. He says in the same chapter:

In its synthetic sense, it [the efficiency of an action] means all those values taken as a whole; in this interpretation, the more efficient an action is, the more it approaches the ideal of embodying all the values of good work, and that in the maximum degree. All of us — I mean healthy individuals who are neither small children nor decrepit elders — walk efficiently. And yet at one time, we had to learn to walk, and we walked clumsily. At that time, every movement had to be tried out with close attention, as when we learn to

⁹ I am indebted here to Wlodek Rabinowicz, who indicated to me Kotarbiński 1987.

do things with our left hand, our right hand being temporarily immobilized. Now that we are adults, we walk automatically, “without thinking about it,” and this is one of the indications of efficiency: the more efficiently one acts, the more is left to automatism in one’s movements, the greater the variety of actions which “are done by themselves.” The same refers to talking, reading, writing, etc. (Kotarbiński 1965: 85)

This sounds very Aristotelian indeed, for Aristotle held that there is a unity of the virtues: if you have one, you have all the others. So what is it to be sensitive to values, in this sense, and in the sense in which the reliable guardian has this kind of sensitivity? We have here not only a problem of relativism, but of circularity: if the ethical values and the values of efficient work just are the practical values, who is supposed to evaluate these values and according to what criteria? If the criteria are just those of efficiency within a domain, what more can we say than this: these are the values which are *the way* we work well. We may say that there are various kinds of value, but these are just the various ways in which one is efficient. But efficient for what? For being efficient. Without a standpoint which could be at least external to action and its rules, it is difficult to say in what sense the values of action are values. It is also difficult to say whether epistemic values depend on or are a subset of practical values, which is one of the central issues of intellectual ethics. If Kotarbiński had meant to say that the epistemic values depend on values of action, he would have been a pragmatist. We have seen that he was tempted by such a view, but rejected it as too relativistic. The dilemma which Kotarbiński encounters is this: if one takes values as independent of actions and practices, we risk reifying them and to adopt a form of axiological realism, which reism does not allow, but if one takes these values to be just immanent to our practices, the values disappear, and are just adverbs of our action: working well, doing well, thinking well. The reliable guardian advises us, but he is not supposed, in Kotarbiński’s view, to tell us what to do, or to give us moral prescriptions or rules. He is just supposed to tell us how to act, that how to act is *the way he does*.

Kotarbiński often seems to identify rationality with efficiency, but this is not the case:

The better an action is adapted to circumstances and to everything that can be formulated in a true statement, the more rational it is. Here again we refer to another technical evaluation — rationality of action. A distinction must be made here between factual and methodological rationality. When reference has been made above to adaptation to truth, we meant factual rationality. And we mean methodological rationality whenever we consider the behaviour of a person to be reasonable, or rational, because he behaves according to the recommendations of the knowledge he has at his disposal (his knowledge is interpreted here as the amount of information to which, in view of its

justification, should be ascribed a sufficient probability to guide one's behaviour as if it were true). (Kotarbiński 1965: 88-89)

It is clear from such passages that Kotarbiński refused to separate rationality from reason and rejected the instrumentalist conception. Reason implies a form of correctness, but not simply in the sense of doing well because one is successful. Reason entails that our actions are successful and our beliefs are true. This is the sense in which Kotarbiński called his own view a "practical realism." How does this transpose to the intellectual domain? Kotarbiński invokes an intellectual as well as a practical value here, creativity:

[In what] reliability consist in? Reliable (cf. German *zuverlässig*) is whatever can be trusted and depended upon. It is obvious that a job is worthy of confidence if it embodies the whole gamut of values of a good job and as such ensures a good product. A product is reliable if it can be depended upon, that is, if it ensures durability and infallibility in use. A substandard product is the opposite of a reliable product; an element of reliability or sometimes only a substitute for reliability, consists of the assurance that a given product will be repaired if necessary. All this can, of course, be graded. What, then, remains to be discussed? At least one practical value of action, one which is among the supreme values. I mean here creativeness, a creative character of activity. A creative action consists in achieving something new and valuable precisely by its being new. Thus, every effective action is creative, but there are varying degrees of creativeness. (Kotarbiński 1965: 93)

A "master" in a given speciality is a person whose general skill in a given respect is not surpassed by anybody else's. The point is not that one must follow masters, but that one has to try to become one.

If this is correct, the intellectually good person, or the reliable one, is the person who has a good character. This does not mean that he has to be necessarily conscious of the values that he illustrates, and that he has to teach them explicitly as imperatives or expressions of duties in the Cliffordian style. He can manifest these virtues in his intellectual conduct, and if he works in an intellectual profession, especially if he is a philosopher, by carrying out his inquiries with the desire for clarity, exactness, and intellectual scruple that was so characteristic of the Lvov-Warsaw school. For Kotarbiński, the refusal to use empty words and "onomatoids" was part and parcel of this hygiene of the mind.¹⁰

So the basic idea is that efficiency is the disposition to be motivated towards the satisfaction of values, and in any way independent of a conception of these values. Intellectual virtue is the sensitivity to the values of truth, and intellectual vice an indifference to it. One cannot be sensitive to these values and inefficient, and if one is efficient, one is *eo ipso* sensitive to them. But for

¹⁰ See Pouivet 2017 on this aspect.

Kotarbiński to be a full-blown realist about values, he would have to accept that the values are not simply immanent in the activities, intellectual or otherwise, but are independent realities. But he refused to grant this, for it would have meant accepting a form of axiological realism. This is not without danger, for if there is no way to understand practical values than in the way they are embodied in actions, there is no more axiology than efficient technology within a domain. And if this is the case, then intellectual ethics becomes very thin.¹¹

CONCLUSION

This is all of course very sketchy, and in many ways speculative. By way of conclusion, I would like to compare Kotarbiński's views with those of a contemporary ethicist, Kieran Setiya. In his book *Reasons without Rationalism*, Setiya says:

On the view that I defend in this book, the question [why should I be moral?] rests on a mistake. When I say that one should act as a good person acts, I am thinking of good character in general, not the moral virtues in particular. But I treat these virtues — ones like justice and benevolence — in the same way as any others. They are not subordinate to the non-moral virtues of prudence or efficiency, or of “consistency” in action. If a virtuous person would be moved by certain considerations, it follows that they count as reasons to act. So if justice and benevolence are really virtues, they correspond to reasons in their own right: it belongs to good practical thought to give weight to the kinds of considerations to which the just and benevolent person is sensitive. The answer to the question “Why should I be moral?” is not, on this account, supplied by further reasons to be moral, which are certified as reasons by a standard other than ethical virtue. It is supplied by the fact that having the moral virtues is a matter of being responsive to considerations that therefore count as reasons to act. (2007: 3)

Replace here “moral virtues” by “intellectual virtues,” “reasons to act” by “reasons to believe,” and you have the kind of intellectual ethics that, if I am correct, Kotarbiński was after, but did not articulate fully.

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¹¹ I concur here with Anna Zielińska's conclusion (2008), although I am not sure that her idea of a “grammar” of action in the Wittgensteinian style can make room for independent values.

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