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Non-anthropocentric Philosophy Between Object-Oriented and Thing-Oriented Ontology, or on Some Repetition in the History of Philosophy

Various trends in contemporary philosophy tend to compete with each other in terms of introducing the non-anthropocentric worldview. In the article, I compare two popular approaches within this field – Graham Harman’s object-oriented ontology and Jane Bennett’s new materialism – concentrating on their ontologies. The main goal of this comparison, however, is to show how the differences between them replicate the differences between Kazimierz Twardowski’s ontology, whose object-oriented ontology has recognized as its forerunner, and reism developed by his student, Tadeusz Kotarbinski, who can be regarded as the predecessor of new materialism.

Against Human Superiority

Non-anthropocentrism is, to put it simply, the opposite to anthropocentrism. There is a great variety in the meanings of the both terms and the

problems they entail (including metaethical issues), the discussion of which goes beyond the scope of this article. In what follows, I describe in a nutshell the normative sense of classical anthropocentrism.

Basically, this stance assumes that humans are the centre of the universe and the ultimate goal of it. For this reason, say proponents of this approach, all other beings should be evaluated in terms of usability for humans. Moreover, in accordance with this view, non-human entities do not have any other value than an instrumental one. The good of human beings is a superior value or the only value. That is to say, normative anthropocentrism is not a tendency to grant human beings a unique position and distinguish them from other entities, but rather the belief in human supremacy over them¹.

Non-anthropocentrism, in turn, does not acknowledge the sovereignty of human beings over the rest of the world. It does not mean that advocates of this view undermine the special character of a human being. They merely emphasise that humans are not conquerors of the land community, to quote Aldo Leopold, and they emphasize the internal connection of all beings. But most of all, non-anthropocentrists aim to reinforce the status of marginalized groups of various, broadly speaking, non-human beings. Thus, intensified efforts in this direction, which can be observed in the most recent philosophical works, are referred to as the ‘non-human turn’².

This non-anthropocentric or non-human turn constitutes not only some modification in the domain of ethics. It is a comprehensive change in the human perception of reality which requires the creation of a new, ontological frame for it. Two proposals come to the fore in this regard: the first one is object-oriented ontology and the other one is new materialism.

OOO

Object-oriented ontology (OOO) has developed on the ground of speculative realism. The latter takes its name from a conference held at Goldsmith’s College, University of London, in 2007. This movement builds its identity on the attempt to overcome correlationism according to which human be-

¹ Eccy de Jonge E., *An Alternative to Anthropocentrism: Deep Ecology and the Metaphysical Turn*, in: *Anthropocentrism. Humans, Animals, Environments*, ed. R. Boddice Rob (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2011), 307–308, 319; Robert Kirkman R., *Skeptical Environmenatlism. The Limits of Philosophy and Science* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 172.

² Richard Grusin, *Introduction*, to: *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), Kindle Edition.

ings – as subjects – only have an access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other³. Such a concept is the core of so-called philosophies of access, which can largely be identified with different idealisms. According to them, humans – as subjects – create the reality, or they are the ground of it. Speculative realism does not agree with any of the philosophies which privilege the ontological status of human beings over other entities. In order to cut itself off from correlationist ontologies, speculative realism eliminates the notion of a subject.

This move underpins OOO developed by Graham Harman which was later adopted and expanded by other scholars, including Levi Bryant, Iain Bogost, and Timothy Morton. Differences among those thinkers' ideas are often very subtle, but quite numerous, and thus, I decided to stick to Harman's project to present the key assumptions of OOO as clearly as possible.

Harman coined the term "object-oriented philosophy" in 1999 in his doctoral dissertation, which re-examined Heidegger's concept of the tool. A fully developed OOO was described in *The Quadruple Object* published in 2011 (the Polish translation came out in 2013). In the latest book by Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology. A New Theory of Everything* (2018), the core principles of it are reiterated, putting the premium on its non-anthropocentric implications⁴. Let us unpack them.

The starting point of Harman's OOO is a critique of two strategies in conceptualizing the problem of objects, which he reconstructs in the history of philosophy. The first one is 'undermining'. It asserts that objects are not fundamental – they are built on something more basic, more primordial, which is the proper theme of metaphysics. In other words, such an approach reduces objects to more ordinary elements, whether they are various components (e.g. atoms, quarks, qualities) or one special matter, physical or spiritual (e.g. apeiron, being)⁵. The second approach is referred to as 'overmining'. It assumes that objects are some kind of useless hypothesis. What actually exist are merely impressions, some manifestations in the mind, which, importantly, affect the entity that has those perceptions. This is then another kind

³ Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, Graham Harman, *Towards a Speculative Philosophy*, in: *Speculative Turn. Continental Materialism and Realism*, eds. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, Graham Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 3.

⁴ Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology. A New Theory of Everything* (London: Penguin, 2018), 61, 258.

⁵ Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Washington: Zero Books, 2011), 8–9.

of reductionism⁶. The author of *The Quadraple Object* distances himself from these both positions. He claims that objects are autonomous in two ways: first, as something that emerges from their pieces, and second, as something withholding itself from relations with other entities⁷.

Drawing upon this approach, Harman concludes that everything is an object: mailbox, electromagnetic radiation, curved spacetime, the Commonwealth of Nations, or a propositional attitude; all things, whether physical or fictional, are equally objects. In other words, the variety of objects – physical, fictional, symbolic – does not change the fact that they all have the same structure.

The first axis, or immanent tension, of this structure is the difference between an object and its features. We owe this concept, Harman holds, to Plato. Unfortunately, he described it as two separate kingdoms of eternal ideas and earthly things, and did not place it in objects. It was Aristotle who put this rift in objects themselves. Therefore, Harman sees OOO as the latest theory in the Aristotelian-Leibnizian tradition. He claims, however, that a substance does not need to be natural, simple, or indestructible⁸.

The second axis in the structure of the object is the difference between real and sensual objects. A sensual object is one which is experienced by another object, or more broadly, is the object which is in some relation to another object. Yet, all the relations, Harman believes, distort the object. This is due to the fact that every relation is aimed toward only a particular aspect of the given object and thereby simplifies it⁹. Harman points out that this phenomenon also occurs in relations between non-human objects. Fire burning cotton serves as an example. Harman says that fire makes contact only with the flammability of this material and does not know anything about its colour¹⁰.

The real object, ipso facto, is the one that can never be grasped, because every encounter with the object makes it a specific caricature (sensual object). Hence, real objects, according to Harman, exist in a private vacuum. They withdraw from any relations with other entities. This rule also applies

⁶ Ibidem, 10–12.

⁷ Ibidem, 16–19, see idem, *Object-Oriented Ontology*, 48–58.

⁸ Harman, *The Quadraple Object*, 16–19.

⁹ Ibidem, 43–44, see idem, *Object-Oriented Ontology*, 46–47.

¹⁰ Idem, *The Quadraple Object*, 44.

to features or properties. There are two kinds of qualities: sensual, as experienced by something or someone; and real ones, which are hidden¹¹.

It is of particular importance that Harman recognizes a Polish philosopher, Kazimierz Twardowski, as the predecessor of his theory of object. Twardowski (1866–1938) was Franz Brentano's student in a similar period as Edmund Husserl. Twardowski is best known for founding the Lvov-Warsaw School, which was a far-reaching movement in the history of Polish philosophy. It was an analytical school similar to the Vienna Circle in many respects, but the attitude of the Lvov-Warsaw School toward traditional philosophy was much more positive than that of logical empiricism¹². The most important of Twardowski's students were: Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, Jan Łukasiewicz, Alfred Tarski, Stanisław Leśniewski, and Tadeusz Kotarbiński. However, we cannot forget that Twardowski was not only a great teacher but also a great scholar. Twardowski was a very productive philosopher and his achievements reach every area of philosophy¹³. It would be impossible to list here all of Twardowski's most important concepts, so I will focus on the fundamentals of his theory of object that are essential for Harman's object-oriented ontology.

Twardowski presented his concept of the object referring to Brentanian theory of intentionality in his opus magnum *On the Content and Object of Presentations* (1894). The aim of Twardowski's theory was to distinguish "the presented, in one sense, where it means the content, from the presented in the other sense, where it is used to designate the object"¹⁴. That is to say, Twardowski assumed that we always need to separate the content and object in every mental act. Furthermore, Twardowski believed that every mental phenomenon is directed towards its object and not towards its content¹⁵.

Twardowski's distinction between the content and the object of a presentation can be then phrased as follows: the object of a presentation is *that which* is presented in a presentation and the content is *that through which* the object

¹¹ Ibidem, 47–48.

¹² Jan Woleński, *Kazimierz Twardowski*, in: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, access: 15.05.2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/twardowski>.

¹³ Anna Brożek, "The Significance of Kazimierz Twardowski in Philosophy and Culture", *Pro-Fil* 15(01) (2014), 42–43.

¹⁴ Woleński, *Kazimierz Twardowski*.

¹⁵ See ibidem.

is presented¹⁶. Jan Woleński underlines that an important argument which Twardowski gives in favour of this distinction, is that we can present the same object in two different ways by having two presentations with the same object but with different content¹⁷.

Twardowski also clarified the difference between act, content, and object. According to him, an act of presentation is a mental event which takes place in our mind at a certain time. Twardowski argued that the content is literally inside the mind and exists dependently on the act, as long as the act does. The object, on the other hand, is independent of the mental act, and not inside someone's mind¹⁸. The only exception is the case in which the content of some presentation plays the role of the object of another presentation.

This scheme applies to all kinds of objects, which Twardowski classified in two ways. The first classification is with respect to existential categories – we have possible and impossible objects, existing and non-existing objects, real and unreal objects. The second is with respect to metaphysical categories – there are particular and general objects, simple and composed objects, physical and psychical objects¹⁹.

Harman finds the very basis of Twardowski's theory – doubling between an object outside the mind and content inside the mind – as a powerful source of inspiration. Twardowski's concept of a unified object outside the mind and a highly specific presentational content inside the mind seems to be significantly coherent with Harman's idea of a division between real and sensual objects²⁰. Moreover, Harman appreciates Twardowski's overall approach to metaphysics, according to which it is the science of objects in general – whether these are physical masses or mental entities²¹. It is plausible to say that, in Harman's view, Twardowski's philosophy is object-oriented.

The above presentation is a rough outline of object-oriented ontology. OOO involves many excessively broad-brush notions, and numerous claims seem to be problematic or not convincing²², but the discussion of this, again,

¹⁶ Brożek, *The Significance of Kazimierz...*, 44.

¹⁷ See Woleński, *Kazimierz Twardowski*.

¹⁸ Kazimierz Twardowski, *On the Content and Object of Presentations. A Psychological Investigation* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 4.

¹⁹ See Brożek, *The Significance of Kazimierz...*, 44.

²⁰ Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, p. 47.

²¹ Ibidem; see idem, *Object-Oriented Ontology*, IV, 49, 90.

²² See Magdalena Holy-Luczaj, „Recenzja książki Grahama Harmana *Traktat o przedmiotach*”, *Kwartalnik Filozoficzny* XLII (2014), 229–234.

goes beyond the scope of this article. The aim of my analysis was to show how OOO attempts to dissociate itself from the anthropocentric metaphysics. This strategy could be summed up in three statements. First, objects and only objects exist. Second, all objects are on an equal footing: no object can be recognized as constructed by another object. Third, all objects have the same structure (each object is different from its features and each object is always a real and sensual object). Such a description of reality is supposed to enable OOO to prove that the extraordinary and privileged metaphysical condition of human beings is a superstition²³.

We can ask, however, if OOO succeeds in this. Harman believes, like Twardowski did, that an object is always an object, no matter whether it is a general object, a physical object, or a fictional object. Therefore, the world of OOO is filled with various entities, including beings such as pixies, utopias, and unicorns²⁴. OOO aims to reinforce their status, indicating in their structure a tension between their sensual and real identity, which means that we never fully grasp their oneness. By granting them such autonomy, Harman wants to upgrade the ontological position of those objects. This intention is clear. In doing so, Harman attempts to tear down the last bastion of metaphysical anthropocentrism: abstract and fictional objects are no longer seen as dependent on human beings.

But does such a picture of reality indeed abolish anthropocentrism? Getting oriented toward something is, as I understand it, the same with being focused on what one finds to be significant. Ontology oriented toward objects recognizes all their kinds as worth our attention. As a result, object oriented ontology enhanced the status of the intelligible sphere of reality (abstract or ideal objects) which is not susceptible to injury or damage. Harman seems to forget about such a dimension of the identity of beings. Steven Shaviro (theorist of non-anthropocentric panpsychism) makes an excellent argument in this respect. He says that it is hard not to agree with the epistemological claim made by Harman in his favourite example of fire burning cotton (when fire burns cotton, it only encounters a few properties of the cotton, e.g. inflammability, and does not access all of its qualities). Shaviro agrees that neither human mind nor the fire apprehend, “know”, all the qualities of the cotton. Yet, he emphasizes, there is a level of existence which is beyond the epistemological one. As the cotton is burned, even those of its properties to which

²³ See Bryant, Srnicek, Harman, *Towards a Speculative Philosophy*, 4.

²⁴ Harman, *The Quadraple Object*, 7.

fire is wholly insensitive are themselves altered or destroyed. And this is the dimension of the encounter of two entities, which is rather a definitive one²⁵. I do agree with this criticism. I find the possibility of harming another being when I encounter it as more primordial than the fact I will never fully know it. And such vulnerability is always inextricably linked with the material condition of beings. General/ideal/abstract/fictional objects are free from such a threat. And here comes a doubt: Harman's ontological extensionism, which embraces all kinds of objects equally, can result in us losing sight of the fact that some entities are vulnerable while some are not.

Furthermore, only humans have access to intelligible objects since they belong to the logocentric domain. For this reason, such objects do not directly affect non-human beings. By the same token, they have a smaller range of influence on the world shared by humans and non-humans. Thus, they seem to occupy a significantly different position in metaphysical order than material beings. The latter are able to come into contact with each other and interact, which can result even in their irreversible destruction.

The above concerns prompt us to believe that more non-anthropocentric flavour would have a project, which is oriented toward things (i.e. concrete, material individuals) and not objects (which are also abstract objects). Such an approach was adopted by new materialism.

New Materialism

New materialism is an umbrella term which covers a broad variety of theories in the field of philosophy, cultural studies, and the arts which emerged in the first decades of the 21st century. I shall present this current by referring to the theory of Jane Bennett. She is an author of the seminal book *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, and, on the other hand, she attempted to compare the perspective of new materialism with OOO²⁶.

The most fundamental assumption of new materialism is the rejection of the opposition between life and matter. New materialists claim that the domi-

²⁵ Steven Shaviro, *Consequences of Panpsychism*, in: *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. Richard Grusin, Kindle Edition.

²⁶ See Jane Bennett, *Systems and Things: On Vital Materialism and Object-Oriented Philosophy*, in: *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. R. Grusin, Kindle Edition.

nant metaphysical tradition has ascribed them two completely different sets of features: matter was static and absolutely passive, life was a pure dynamic force. The consequence of this was determinism, depriving non-human entities of agency or concentration on an abstractive force which was superior to concrete individuals constituting only mere embodiments of it²⁷. However, Bennett points out there was also an alternative tradition in the West, where fleshy, vegetal minerals are not encountered as passive stuff waiting to be awoken by some (often human) power, but they are seen as “lively forces around and within us”²⁸. Bennett speaks here, among others, about Lucretius and its atomism, Spinoza and the concept of *conatus*, Henry Thoreau and his idea of wildness, and the 20th century feminism of the body. New materialism finds them as its predecessors in struggling with a dichotomy of life and matter²⁹.

Recognition of the indissolubility between matter and life (understood as agency and productiveness) resulted in dismissing the idea of inanimate matter. That is to say, on the grounds of new materialism each form of matter is able to act. This rule applies not only to natural entities (e.g. rocks), but also artefacts (disposables, machines). New materialism then also eliminates a division between natural and artificial entities. New materialists hold that this is an unfounded construct, because artefacts are able to affect people and other beings³⁰.

In new materialism, the assumption that all beings are able to act is closely linked with the idea that all beings hang together. To express this concept, Jane Bennett employs the term ‘assemblage’ which names groupings of diverse elements in which any element does not absolutely determine other elements, but there is always some kind of interaction³¹. Furthermore, new materialism assumes that the identity of each being is shaped by the relation with other beings or, more precisely, by participating in the network of such relations. In other words, no entity can be properly understood, first, without taking account of its relationships with other beings, and second, without accepting that it always remains in those relationships.

²⁷ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), Kindle Edition.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

This brief overview of new materialism concentrates on its nonanthropocentric implications. In doing so, it cannot discuss in details all flaws of this stance, which are quite evident: many claims of new materialism are troubling and problematic just as much as principles of OOO and require deepening argumentation³². What is essential for us in this paper, however, is that a depiction of reality provided by new materialism is supposed to become new non-anthropocentric metaphysics, an important component of the non-human turn. Jane Bennett is, of course, aware that new materialism is one of the many theoretical proposals in this regard. She sympathizes with them, but it does not refrain her from exploring significant, philosophical differences between those various approaches, in particular between new materialism and object-oriented ontology (the same does Harman in the *Object-Oriented Ontology. A New Theory of Everything*³³).

The first major difference concerns relations. While OOO is the proponent of a “deeply non-relational conception of the reality of things”, new materialism perceives relations as the field where the reality of things can actually be fulfilled. Bennett concludes that OOO is concentrated on objects’ negative power to withdraw from any attempt to be fully known, engaged, never fully present (to another object), and new materialism sees relations as manifestations of the positive force of materiality³⁴.

The other dissimilarity between OOO and new materialism is related to the scope of their interest. Namely, Bennett criticizes OOO for including “to the category of object pretty much everything”³⁵. She is sceptical about Harman’s view that the distinction between ‘objects’ and ‘things’ is irrelevant. According to her, the terms ‘thing’ or ‘body’ have advantages over ‘object’ as they are better markers of lively individuation. They more clearly indicate their sensuous specificity and particular material configuration³⁶. This is important because, as Bennett highlights, “not just matter matters, but things (or bodies) matter a lot”³⁷.

Interestingly, she is not the first one to express such a belief. Bennett repeats the idea which was the principle of reism developed by Tadeusz Ko-

³² See Magdalena Holy-Łuczaj, „Posthumanizm: między metafizyką a etyką”, *Kultura i Wartości* 11(3) (2014), 53–54.

³³ Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology*, 275–279.

³⁴ Bennett, *Systems and Things*; see G. Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology*, 277.

³⁵ Bennett, *Systems and Things*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

tarbinski (1886–1981), a direct student of Kazimierz Twardowski. In what follows, I discuss the main differences between his ontology and the ontology of Twardowski, with whom he shared a philosophical ethos. This should help us see the remarkable similarity between their dispute and differences between OOO and new materialism, which can respectively find these two philosophers as their predecessors.

Concretism

Tadeusz Kotarbinski (1886–1981) was one of the most significant figures of the Lwow-Warsaw School. Yet, he is internationally not as well-known as its other members, e.g. Alfred Tarski, Stanislaw Lesniewski, Jan Lukasiewicz, or recently, Twardowski. This is unfortunate since his philosophy offers many interesting ideas.

Kazimierz Twardowski formed Tadeusz Kotarbinski as a scholar. It was Twardowski who is more than anyone else responsible for the rigorous thinking and scrupulous responsibility for words that are so characteristic of Kotarbinski's works³⁸. Kotarbinski, crucially for his thought, also inherited through Twardowski an interest in Franz Brentano and his school³⁹. However, Kotarbinski read Brentano differently than his teacher did. He also transformed Twardowski's realist orientation into a reistic, or concretistic approach.

Kotarbinski's reism is basically a doctrine according to which all existence is made up entirely of individual things, realia, or concreta⁴⁰. He developed this theory for almost three decades (ca. 1930–1960). A more specialized version of it was referred to as "somatism" or sometimes also "pansomatism" – this account highlights the thesis that individual things are to be identified

³⁸ Barry Smith, *On the Phases of Reism*, in: *Kotarbinski: Logic. Semantics and Ontology*, ed. J. Wolenski (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academics Publisher, 1990), 137; Klemens Szaniawski, *Philosophy of the concrete*, in: *Kotarbinski: Logic. Semantics and Ontology*, 189.

³⁹ Smith, *On the Phases of Reism*, p. 137.

⁴⁰ Tadeusz Kotarbinski, *The Reistic, or Concretistic, Approach*, trans. O. Wojtasiewicz, in: T. Kotarbinski, *Gnosiology: The Scientific Approach to the Theory of Knowledge*, ed. G. Bidwell, C. Pinder, (Pergamon Press, 1966, access: 15.05.2018, <http://www.ditext.com/kotarbinski/reism.html>; Smith, *On the Phases of Reism*, 138, see Szaniawski, *Philosophy of the concrete*.

in every case as physical bodies⁴¹. Finally, he decided to refer to his theory as “concretism”.

“Things and only things exist” – this was Kotarbinski’s credo as a reist⁴². He defined “thing” in conformity with the common usage of this word as “an object located in time and in space and having certain physical characteristics”⁴³. Philosophically, Kotarbinski drew in particular upon Aristotle’s concept of thing, mainly his treatment of the first substance in *Categories* and in *Metaphysics*⁴⁴. The most important assumptions of Aristotelian theory for Kotarbinski were that (1) all things are individual, (2) they are not predicable of a subject nor present in a subject, (3) they can exist on their own, while accidents require support from things or substances in order to exist, (4) they are prior in all senses⁴⁵.

Kotarbinski’s reism is a single categorial ontology; it rejects all categories other than that of thing⁴⁶. The consequence of it is a belief that all beings which fall outside this category are mere “hypostases” – fake entities created by human thinking.

According to Kotarbinski, universals, general objects, and properties are such made up entities⁴⁷. Kotarbinski claimed there is nothing like ‘roundness’. In fact, there is only an orange, which can be described as round. Kotarbinski, as a reist, believed that roundness does not exist as a property. He claimed that we experience only things as such. It is worth noting that this does not result in depriving things of their particular characteristics. On the contrary, as material, things always have their sensual identity – the fact that there is nothing like sweetness does not mean that things aren’t sweet, Kotarbinski holds⁴⁸.

Reism also rejects such kinds of entities as events, processes, and states of affairs, That is to say, on the grounds of reism, nothing like a “talk” exists; there are only talking people⁴⁹. By the same token, Kotarbinski excluded

⁴¹ Tadeusz Kotarbinski, „Zasadnicze myśli pansomatyzmu”, *Przegląd Filozoficzny* 38 (1935), 227–228; Smith, *On the Phases of Reism*, 138.

⁴² Idem, „O postawie reistycznej, czyli konkretystycznej”, *Myśl Współczesna* 4 (1949), 9.

⁴³ Szaniawski, *Philosophy of the concrete*, 187.

⁴⁴ Smith, *On the Phases of Reism*, 153.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, 154.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ Kotarbinski, *The Reistic, or Concretistic, Approach*.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

mental images and other immanent contents from the metaphysical universe. He claimed that there are no thoughts – there are only people thinking about something⁵⁰.

Kotarbinski also dismissed the concept of pure matter or matter as such as inadequate. This is another example of abstract hypostases in Kotarbinski's view. As a result, pansomatism, or reism, is a "materialism without a matter"⁵¹. This is, however, not that paradoxical as it might seem at first glance. The idea of a matter is too ambiguous and needlessly distracts us from the fact that only individuals exist⁵². This is the point of critique of all hypostases: Kotarbinski argued that granting any substantiality to such objects as abstract or general entities, properties, states of affairs, and mental images is pointless as it turns our attention from real things, which are always material, particular individuals.

Kotarbinski clarified this view by saying that a thing is in every case a physical body. He initially defined body as "extended in space and time" and as "bulky and lasting"⁵³. Then, he added the further condition that bodies are "inert". In other contexts, Kotarbinski preferred to define body as that which is extensive, bulky and lasting, and as such "offers resistance"⁵⁴. He chose this second description for a reason: it emphasizes the activity (agency) of material things instead of presenting them as purely passive. This was important for Kotarbinski, because he stressed that reality for a reist is not a "static conglomerate" ("a mere sum") of "rigid and changeless solids", but it is a "fabric composed of changing things"⁵⁵.

Why then did he decide to speak sometimes about things as inert bodies? The answer is quite simple: Kotarbinski aimed to show that he employs the name 'body' in the sense of physics and not biology (where it is interchangeable with 'organism'). Nevertheless, this may cause some confusion. This is also the case with the word 'thing'. The problem here is another extreme –

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ Andrzej Leszczyński, "O materializmie filozoficznym T. Kotarbinskiego", *Studia Filozoficzne* 1 (1985), 124.

⁵² See Marta Zareba *On Tadeusz Kotarbinski Reism and the Praxeological Theory of Action*, in: *Tradition of the Lvov-Warsaw School: Ideas and Continuations*, eds. A. Brozek, A. Chybinska, J. Jadacki, J. Wolenski, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2015), 199.

⁵³ Tadeusz Kotarbinski, "Zasadnicze myśli pansomatyizmu", *Przegląd Filozoficzny* 38 (1935), 283-284.

⁵⁴ Idem, *The Reistic, or Concretistic, Approach*; see Smith, *On the Phases of Reism*, 142, 154.

⁵⁵ Kotarbinski, *The Reistic, or Concretistic, Approach*.

‘thing’ is usually associated with inanimate entities, inorganic solids. In order to avoid these difficulties, Kotarbinski finally decided to employ another term “the concrete”⁵⁶. It does not refer to a heavy, rough building material made from a mixture of crushed stone, sand, cement, and water but to every single entity that exists in a physical form.

This term has many advantages. It refrains from maintaining the dualism of animate and inanimate, which Kotarbinski rejected. He believed that “the boundary between the living and the dead nature is blurred”⁵⁷. This is closely related to his view that there is a continuum of sentience in different bodies⁵⁸. Such a concept, in turn, is linked with his claim that soul is identical with some part of the body (but pansomatism does not prejudge which one⁵⁹). Barry Smith comments on this, pointing out that, as for Spinoza, so also for Kotarbinski, it is as if in the case of sentient beings one single substance is able to support two different systems of mutually incommensurable modifications⁶⁰.

Finally, the notion of “the concrete” is free from the dualism of the natural and the artificial, which Kotarbinski also rejected. When he provided examples of things (bodies, concretes), he also listed a watch⁶¹. There is nothing in the doctrine of concretism which lets us think about artefacts as ontologically inferior.

This last (but not least) point seems to be a good moment to start discussing similarities between Kotarbinski’s concretism and Jane Bennett’s new materialism. There are basically three concepts they share.

First, it is a clearly materialistic orientation. They are not interested in objects – they are oriented toward material things or bodies. Concretism and new materialism recognize them as the primary (or actually the only) components of reality. What is of particular importance is that those both theories dismissed the idea of matter as such and are focused on particular, concrete individuals.

Second, concretism and new materialism underscore the activity, power, and lively character of all things. In doing so, these two theories refute the

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ Idem, *O różnych znaczeniach słowa «materializm»*, in: Tadeusz Kotarbinski, *Wybór pism*, vol. II, (Warszawa: PWN, 1958), 88.

⁵⁸ Kotarbinski, *Zasadnicze myśli pansomatyzmu*, 290.

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ Smith, *On the Phases of Reism*, 149.

⁶¹ Kotarbinski, *Zasadnicze myśli pansomatyzmu*, 283.

dichotomy of static or passive matter and pure force or life which was so common in the history of philosophy.

Third, concretism and new materialism reject dualisms of animate and inanimate beings as well as natural and artificial beings. Those two theories, by concentrating on the materiality of what they find to be real entities, place a premium on what is shared by all such beings instead of underlying the differences between them. In order to not introduce divisions in the domain of material beings, concretism and new materialism speak only about things or bodies, keeping in mind, however, that those two names are problematic: things are linked with inanimate entities while bodies are often identified with organisms. This is against the intentions of concretism and new materialism which aim to jointly analyse those two groups of beings. Thus, the name “concretes” seems to be the most handy and convenient since it doesn’t connote senses related to animateness or non-animateness and naturality or artificiality. Unfortunately, in English the word “concrete” is linked with building construction rather than philosophy.

Nevertheless, the ideas discussed above seem to make it plausible to recognize Kotarbinski as a predecessor of new materialism. Almost seventy years earlier, he suggested that philosophy should orient itself towards material entities, in which divisions between so-called animate and inanimate, sentient and non-sentient beings are of minor importance (it is also no accident that Spinoza is mentioned in the context of the both theories).

The resemblance between new materialism and concretism is even more interesting if we take into account the dispute, on the one hand, between new materialism and object-oriented ontology, and, on the other, between Kotarbinski and Twardowski.

Repetition

Kotarbinski and Twardowski had a similar attitude towards doing a philosophy. It was the ethos of intellectual rigour and responsibility for word. They were reluctant to use poetical metaphors (in philosophical texts), which obscure the picture of reality. Yet, they believed that different ontological concepts reflect the structure of reality in the most suitable way.

Kotarbinski thought it was his reism that actually meets the requirements of Twardowski’s philosophical programme: getting rid of concepts which are

abstruse and cloudy. This is why Kotarbinski rejected the doctrine of mental contents propounded by his teacher and also argued against the existence of general objects, which was assumed by Twardowski.

On the other hand, it was Twardowski who pointed out that the doctrine of reism had already been presented some years earlier in Brentano's works. This provoked Kotarbinski to claim that he is the only "consistent and conscious" somatist reist. He argued that Leibniz, too, could be viewed as a precursor of reism, because he can be seen as a "spiritualist reist" who accepts souls or spirits as the only type of thing. Brentano, in turn, is a dualist reist who accepted both bodies (*res extensa*) and souls (*res cogitans*). Leaving aside whether it is the only possible interpretation of Brentano's ontology, it can be said that Kotarbinski believed he had gone one step further than Brentano in insisting that all things are physical bodies⁶².

There was no hostility, we should remember, between Twardowski and Kotarbinski. The differences between them resulted from the will to be most in tune with the programme of philosophy, which offers only precise and clear concepts. The same kind of divide occurs between OOO and new materialism. In their case it is not, of course, the postulate of clarity in doing philosophy, but it is the non-anthropocentric paradigm that is their joint starting point from which, however, they go in different directions. Jane Bennett argues that the scope of OOO is too broad: it should be focused on material things as the basic components of reality.

Kotarbinski's and Bennett's call to focus on material things (bodies, concretes) can be, as I believe, interpreted as their *affirmation*. Getting oriented toward something is always grounded in the intuition that this thing is worth special attention, preoccupation, and care. Bennett postulates to concentrate on the materiality and agency shared by humans and things, which constitutes the framework of reality that is no longer seen through anthropocentric lenses. Such a non-anthropocentric pursuit is not explicit in Kotarbinski's works, but they are in line with it – he also underlines the ontological kinship of human beings and other concretes. Recognizing all objects, to include abstract and universal beings (which, in addition, can be accessed only by humans since they are located in the logocentric domain) as equally worth ontological inquiry blurs or dilutes this metaphysical affinity.

It is worth emphasizing that reinforcing the status of material sphere by concretism and new materialism does not mean that their representatives

⁶² Kotarbinski, *The Reistic, or Concretistic, Approach*; Smith, *On the Phases of Reism*, 171, 181.

hold culture and the arts in low regard. Interestingly, Bennett and Kotarbinski have again quite similar views on their importance.

Jane Bennett believes that literary objects such as essays and poems are special bodies. They effectively have their own. Bennett links it with their ability to convey messages via words as well as with their specific sensuality: sounds of words, smells in the reading room and so on⁶³. This concept, unfortunately, seems somehow unsatisfactory. Bennett doesn't provide a fully-fledged ontology of texts as bodies (or things). We should, however, do justice to her: she emphasizes that this concept is only "some gesture"⁶⁴. What Bennett makes clear is that she perceives literature as able to shed more light on non-human bodies, such as plants, animal, trash, and household objects by rendering human perception more acute⁶⁵.

Kotarbinski's ontological views on culture, in turn, are closely linked to his struggle with hypostases. In accordance with his idea that there are no other entities than concretes, Kotarbinski claims that we shouldn't substantialize the matter of humanities. Thus, we shouldn't recognize objects investigated by various humanities or the works of arts as autonomous entities⁶⁶. He provides a few examples. One is psychology. Kotarbinski says that psychology does not investigate pain, intelligence, psychic phenomena in general, but it examines people who are in pain, who are intelligent, and so on. Literature is a different case. Kotarbinski holds that there are no grounds to treat literary works as objects, even intentional ones. We are not likely, he explains, to recognize a conversation as some kind of being – there are only two talking people and words which they pronounce. It is the same with poems, novels, and essays: they are words written down by some people. The proper perspective to think about literary works is rather to recognize them as means to influence, sometimes with great power, other people.

The idea that literary works first and foremost affect people introduces the context of ethical turn. It is a belief that literature somehow contributes to changing our perception of the world. In this sense, it can strengthen non-human turn and its values. Readers can concentrate on such a dimension of the acts of reading: they can search in literature for ways to live more sustain-

⁶³ Bennett, *Systems and Things*.

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ Tadeusz Kotarbinski, „Humanistyka bez hipostaz”, *Mysł Filozoficzna* 1 (1952), 257–270.

ably and feel liveliness hidden in things, and reveal more of the threads that bind us together with them⁶⁷.

Conclusion

What should non-anthropocentric ontology be oriented toward? Which aspects of reality should it highlight to consolidate a non-anthropocentric paradigm? Graham Harman, one of the leading speculative realists, claims that the ontology of non-human turn should be object-oriented. He alludes to the tradition of metaphysics of objects, in particular to the theory of one of its founders, a Polish philosopher, Kazimierz Twardowski. According to Harman, non-anthropocentrism of OOO lies in recognizing every entity, whether physical or abstract and mental, to be equally an object. As such, they all have the same, specific structure. Moreover, on the grounds of OOO, any object cannot be fully known by any other being, including human beings.

Such an account was criticized by Jane Bennett, a representative of new materialism. She argued that such a scope of ontology is too broad. We should rather be focused on the lively materiality of things or bodies, which is the basis of affinity between humans and non-humans. Bennett sees material beings and their activity as the crux of reality. For this reason, she holds that non-anthropocentric philosophy should have a thing-oriented-ontology.

Interestingly, Tadeusz Kotarbinski, Twardowski's student, followed this path seventy years earlier. He had quite a similar intuition to that of new materialists: he argued that ontology should concentrate on things, concretes or bodies instead of investigating objects. The latter group is too general and includes beings, which are mere hypostases. They unnecessarily distract us from what is significant and worth our attention – individual, material things.

Unfortunately, new materialists do not refer to Kotarbinski's theory. This is not only due to the language barrier (the most important of Kotarbinski's works have been translated to English), but also, and foremost, to the peripheral status of Polish philosophy (Harman taking advantage of Twardowski's concepts is an exception). Yet, I believe it was worth making an effort to show

⁶⁷ See Bennett, *Systems and Things*.

that there was a philosopher who had similar concepts to that of new materialism and argued for them in an interesting way, and as such he can be seen as a significant predecessor of new materialism.

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Abstract

Non-anthropocentric Philosophy Between Object-Oriented and Thing-Oriented Ontology, or on Some Repetition in the History of Philosophy

The paper analyzes differences between Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology (OOO) and Jane Bennett's new materialism as two possible non-anthropocentric ontologies. It also shows how their dissimilarity replicates the differences between Kazimierz Twardowski's ontology whose OOO recognizes as its forerunner, and reism developed by his student Tadeusz Kotarbinski, who can be regarded as a predecessor of new materialism.

Keywords: Object-oriented ontology, new materialism, Harman, Bennett, Twardowski, Kotarbinski

Streszczenie

Nieantropocentryczna filozofia między ontologią zorientowaną-na-przedmiot i ontologią zorientowaną-na-rzecz, albo o pewnym powtórzeniu w historii filozofii

Artykuł analizuje różnice między ontologią zorientowaną-na-przedmiot (OOO) Grahama Harmana i nowym materializmem Jane Bennett jako możliwymi ontologiami posthumanizmu. Jego celem jest przede wszystkim pokazanie, w jaki sposób odmiennosc tych dwóch projektów powtarza różnice między ontologią Kazimierza Twardowskiego, którego ontologia zorientowana-na-przedmiot postrzega jako swojego prekursora, i reizmem stworzonym przez jego ucznia – Tadeusza Kotarbińskiego – który mógłby zostać uznany za teorię wyprzedzającą rozwiązania nowego materializmu.

Słowa kluczowe: ontologia zorientowana-na-przedmiot, nowy materializm, Harman, Bennett, Twardowski, Kotarbinski