

In memoriam Piotr Lenartowicz SJ (1934–2012)

BIOGRAPHY, BY ROMAN DAROWSKI SJ

Piotr Lenartowicz—son of Wiesław and Krystyna, née Schneider—was born in Warsaw, 25th August, 1934. In 1951 he obtained his school leaving certificate from the John III Sobieski High School in Cracow. A year later he began his degree at the Faculty of Medicine of the Medical University of Warsaw, where in 1958 he obtained an MD diploma. From 1956 he worked as an assistant lecturer at the Department of Physiology of the Medical University of Warsaw, and from 1958 also at the Department of Physiology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. In 1961 he obtained his PhD on the basis of the dissertation entitled *The Influence of Ammonium Salts on Electrocardiogram and Directly Evoked Cortical Potentials*,¹ written under the supervision of Prof. Franciszek Czubalski at the Faculty of Medicine of the Medical University in Warsaw.

Lenartowicz joined the Society of Jesus on 1st November, 1960, and completed a two-year novitiate in Kalisz. From 1962 to 1965 he studied philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Society of Jesus in Cracow, where he obtained a canonical degree in philosophy, the equivalent of an M.Phil. Then, he studied at the Faculty of Theology at Collegium Bobolanum in Warsaw (1965–69), where he also obtained a licentiate degree. He took his holy orders in Warsaw on 17th June, 1968.

In 1971 he began his doctoral studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, worked as a chaplain at Westminster Cathedral from 1972 to 1973, and took part in Prof. Rom Harré's seminar at Oxford University. He gained his PhD degree in philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in 1975 on the basis of the dissertation entitled *Phenotype-Genotype Dichotomy: An Essay in Theoretical Biology*,² written under the supervision of Prof. Jerzy Szaszkiewicz SJ.

1. Piotr Lenartowicz, *Wpływ soli amonowych na elektrokortikogram i korowe potencjały bezpośrednio wywołane* [The Influence of Ammonium Salts on Electrocardiogram and Directly Evoked Cortical Potentials] (Warszawa: Wydział Lekarski Akademii Medycznej w Warszawie, 1961).

Having returned to Poland, for a year he was a university chaplain at the Catholic University of Lublin.

From 1976 at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Society of Jesus in Cracow, he lectured on the introduction to philosophy and the philosophy of animate nature, and from 1990 also on the philosophy of knowledge.

In 1985 he obtained a post-doctoral habilitation degree at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Cracow (presently the Pontifical University of John Paul II) on the basis of the book *Elements of the Philosophy of Biological Phenomenon*.³ In 1991, having obtained a *Nihil obstat* from the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education, the Grand Chancellor of the Faculty Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, nominated him *professor extraordinarius* at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Society of Jesus, and in 1999—*professor ordinarius*.

In 1993–2003 he was a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Cracow.

Between 2002 and 2004 Lenartowicz was a vice-rector of the *Ignatianum* Jesuit University of Philosophy and Education in Cracow (presently Jesuit University *Ignatianum*). In the first semester of the academic year 1986/87 he lectured on the history of philosophy and the philosophy of nature at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Colorado State University in Fort Collins (USA). From 1991 he also lectured at the Capuchin Friars Seminary in Cracow. From 1995 to 2001 he was the president of the Scientific Society of the Society of Jesus in Cracow. From 1995 he was the chairperson of the Department of the Philosophy of Animate Nature at *Ignatianum*.

Along with Prof. J. A. Janik he co-edited 4 volumes of the materials compiled from the *Science-Religion-History* seminars at Castel Gandolfo, which he attended for the years 1982–90. From 1978 to 1998 he also was a chaplain of the Daughters of Divine Love Congregation in Cracow (16 Pędzichów Street).

Lenartowicz participated in the Jesuits' European congresses, which professionally dealt with activity in the field of the natural sciences (Aix-en-Provence 1989, Barcelona 1991, and co-organised such an event in Gdynia, 1993), and in similar conventions for Jesuits lecturing on philosophy (JESPHIL: Zagreb 1995, Cracow 1998). He also took part in a few con-

2. Piotr Lenartowicz, SJ, *Phenotype-Geneotype Dichotomy: An Essay in Theoretical Biology* (Roma: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1975).

3. Piotr Lenartowicz, SJ, *Elementy filozofii zjawiska biologicznego* [Elements of the Philosophy of Biological Phenomenon] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 1986).

gresses dedicated to philosophy, and was invited to give lectures by domestic and foreign scientific institutions (Austria, Slovakia, USA).

In 1995 he established cooperation with Dr Jolanta Koszteyn, a biologist and ecologist, an assistant professor at the Marine Ecology Department of the Institute of Oceanology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Sopot. In 1997 an official cooperation agreement was signed between the Faculty of Philosophy of the Society of Jesus and the Marine Ecology Department of the Institute of Oceanology of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Piotr Lenartowicz's long-standing teaching activity was proof of his unswerving ambition to continually convey to students the most recent and state-of-the-art knowledge and research in the field of biology, and to show—against this gradually updated backdrop—the meaning of terms related to the natural sciences and relevant for a philosophical perception of reality.

Father Piotr Lenartowicz worked almost until the very last day of his life. Despite his ailments, which—as it later turned out were the effects of cancer—he delivered lectures at the Ignatianum Jesuit University. Still in July 2012, as a supervisor, he took part in the doctoral examination of one of his students. He died in Cracow on the 10th October, 2012.

PUBLICATIONS

Phenotype-Genotype Dichotomy: An Essay in Theoretical Biology. Roma: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1975. 233 p.

Wprowadzenie do zagadnień filozoficznych [An Introduction into Philosophical Problems]. Kraków: Wydział Filozoficzny Towarzystwa Jezusowego, 1979. 130 p.

Elementy filozofii zjawiska biologicznego [Elements of the Philosophy of Biological Phenomenon]. Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 1986. 478 p.

Elementy teorii poznania: szkice wykładów [Elements of the Theory of Knowledge: Lecture Outlines]. Kraków: Wydział Filozoficzny Towarzystwa Jezusowego, 1998. 184 p.

Wprowadzenie do zagadnień filozoficznych [An Introduction into Philosophical Problems]. In collaboration with Józef Bremer, SJ, and Jolanta Koszteyn. 2nd ed. Kraków: Wydział Filozoficzny Towarzystwa Jezusowego / Wydawnictwo WAM, 1998. 151 p.

Wprowadzenie do zagadnień filozoficznych [An Introduction into Philosophical Problems]. In collaboration with Józef Bremer, SJ, and Jolanta Koszteyn. 3rd ed. Kraków: Wydział Filozoficzny Towarzystwa Jezusowego, Wydawnictwo WAM, 2000. 201 p.

Ludy czy małpoludy: Problem genealogii człowieka [People or Manapes: Problem of Human Genealogy]. Kraków: Wyższa Szkoła Filozoficzno-Pedagogiczna Ignatianum, 2010. 418 p.

A bibliography and selected articles by Piotr Lenartowicz, which illustrate his scientific interests and philosophical views, are to be found in the book:

Koszteyn, Jolanta, ed. *Vivere et Intelligere: Wybrane prace Piotra Lenartowicza SJ wydane z okazji 75-lecia Jego urodzin* [Vivere et Intelligere: Selected Papers by Piotr Lenartowicz SJ Published on His 75th Birthday]. Kraków: Wyższa Szkoła Filozoficzno-Pedagogiczna Ignatianum / Wydawnictwo WAM, 2009.

AN INTERVIEW WITH PROF. PIOTR LENARTOWICZ CONDUCTED BY
ZBIGNIEW WRÓBLEWSKI

The conversation passages below are excerpted from the interview, the complete transcript of which is to be found in the book *Vivere & Intelligere*.⁴ Zbigniew Wróblewski is a professor at the Department of Philosophy of Animate Nature of the Faculty of Philosophy, at the Catholic University of Lublin.

Zbigniew Wróblewski: *Your stay in Rome brought fruits in the form of two works. The first one concerned the problems of the reconstruction of the Hominidae lineage; the other one was a doctoral dissertation on the Phenotype-Genotype Dichotomy. Did you, Father, know back then the answer to the question of what the theoretical backbone of empirical research should be? . . .*

Piotr Lenartowicz: . . . In the book that I wrote later, and it was a textbook titled *Elements of the Philosophy of Biological Phenomenon*, I tried to clearly show that the minimum biological whole is a life cycle. You cannot go below the life cycle if we are speaking about the biological whole. So it's not an adult horse, not a pony, not a foal, not a germ cell, but a whole, individual life cycle. . . . If you don't take that into consideration, as a necessary backdrop, then all the works concerned with some fragments are like a man who, out of a complex electronic device, tore a piece of metal

4. Zbigniew Wróblewski, "Rozmowa z Piotrem Lenartowiczem SJ," [Interview with Piotr Lenartowicz, SJ] in *Vivere et Intelligere. Wybrane prace Piotra Lenartowicza SJ wydane z okazji 75-lecia Jego urodzin*, ed. J. Koszteyn (Kraków: Wyższa Szkoła Filozoficzno-Pedagogiczna Ignatianum / Wydawnictwo WAM, 2009).

with stumps of severed wires, heedless . . . of the role played by that piece of metal in the whole.

Z.W.: . . . *Coming back to the thread of how you developed your philosophical views, well . . . you cannot see any turning points, but a consistent development of what originally was probably just an intuition, but later on a systematic construction of a coherent stance within the framework of the Aristotelian system. . . .*

P.L.: I do not treat either Aristotle or St. Thomas as a dogma. Aristotle may have written a whole lot of rubbish, and there are some who fish out of Aristotle's works some silly bits which certainly are there. But in the theory of knowledge it seems to me that I have been following along the train of thought delineated by Aristotle, for whom the most interesting thing was the living organism. His theory of knowledge was suited to the study of living organisms. Also, the concept of substance was undoubtedly based on the concepts of the living organism. The Aristotelian notion of the living organism was holistic, that is developmental. He was interested in embryogenesis and treated it as a fundamental phenomenon.

The Aristotelian theory of knowledge along with its optimism, its concept of the absurd, the impossible, that is with the law of contradiction, with its respect for the testimony of the senses (which has been undermined and called into question for hundreds of years now), all this was once adopted by St. Thomas. . . . For me, treading the paths of such figures as Aristotle, St. Thomas or Stefan Swieżawski—with his commentary on St Thomas's *Treatise on Man*, which I consider excellent—is like walking on stilts over the abyss of the intellectual dying. . . .

Z.W.: *We are back in Poland. Did the new stage bring about the consolidation of the stance from the previous period?*

P.L.: In lectures I show a *matryoshka* doll. I take it apart, I peek inside, but it's still the same *matryoshka* doll, except that it is smaller and smaller. In this way I want to make students aware of the fact that whether we examine a human being on the anatomical scale, or whether we adopt the scale of various organs, tissues or cells, the same problem always transpires—the problem of developmental integration, adaptation, orientation, precision, materials economy, energy economy. In other words, these biological phenomena which fascinate us on the anatomical scale, and which we observe every day, can be found—thanks to technical equipment—in the life of the simplest bacteria. It doesn't really matter whether these processes take place on the macromolecular level, or whether they take place on the anatomical level. This is because these are always the same problems of orientation in the environment, orientation within one-

self. Regeneration can serve as an example here. Why does repair begin exactly there where it should begin, and why does it happen along the border between the healthy and damaged tissue?

Z.W.: *Father, you mentioned Dr Koszteyn. What were the effects of your collaboration with her?*

P.L.: Dr Koszteyn turned up, I believe, in the year 1995 . . . She came to Cracow in the late spring of 1996. Since that meeting our relation and collaboration have gained such “momentum” that already in 1997 in *Forum Philosophicum* we published our first joint article on adaptation. . . . We began writing joint works, and after some time she pointed out to me that we should give up the division into the vegetative and the animal soul. . . . And the key to all this is the problem of orientation in the environment. To illustrate this, let us take into consideration, for instance, a growing root. When we observe its growth, and we know where the sources of water are, then we don’t have any doubts that this root too knows where the source of water is. . . . Some biologist once wrote that each root sprout has a brain on its tip. That’s what the biologist said. Still, the idea was that the root tip behaves like someone who, let us say, in an avalanche puts his hand through a layer of snow to feel if there is a human body.

The problem of orientation turned up on the occasion . . . of the deliberation on the issue of reliability of the senses. The question of colors—whether colors are the colors of the reflected light, or whether they are a mental phenomenon . . . , or maybe colors are simply on, say, the spine of the book, which inside may be of a different color. The thing that strengthened our initial conviction that colors are not some mental reconstruction . . . was the experiments by E. Land, the inventor of the famous Polaroid. . . .

It was then that we concluded that . . . we must acknowledge the existence of *epiphenomena*. We borrowed that word from philosophical literature, but we gave it a slightly different meaning, namely it seemed to us that energy—which is a *material* and energetic potential—is one thing, and the epiphenomenon of this energy—the pure, actual color of the object—is another thing. Similarly, the energy of sound wave—*matter, that is the unactualized potential of a sound wave*—is one thing, and the sound that we hear is another thing. We can get to know the one and the other, but the epiphenomenon is a pure act, and not a material; there is nothing material-like in there. You cannot make anything out of color. You cannot make anything out of the sound that you hear. If we have a sound wave, for that matter, we can use it to demolish something. However, the sound of

the collapsing walls of Jericho is a pure act, which no one and nothing can now make use of. . . .

Z.W.: Following on from the examples that you, Father, invoked, there systematically transpires an assumption that the paradigm of the object of philosophy is life, and that with biological examples one can illustrate all major philosophical problems. How do traditional problems which usually fall in the area of metaphysics fit within such a concept of philosophising: a famous question—why is there something rather than nothing, the existence of the world, truth, good, beauty? Of course these are watchwords, but more often than not the presentation of suitable viewpoints in this field has not made any direct reference to the natural sciences, say, biology.

P.L.: Well, I did not intend to be a Solomon, who could embrace all and everything in his knowledge. I don't deal with "everything." I deal with biology, which I consider very important. This is my favorite domain. I can see how important biological problems are for the philosopher, even though I wouldn't argue that they are *the only* problems for the philosopher. That's not what I say, or think. I don't deal with ethics or aesthetics, though in the world of biology aesthetics is what counts. I can also see in what way physics tries to physicalize and mathematize everything, with terrible consequences for the proper description of the facts themselves. And I can see how some humanist philosophers soar in a balloon into some spheres of intellectual riddles or shenanigans, questioning those regularities of nature, without which there is no correct view of life. I have found myself a niche, a little burrow, where I sit, but I also know that my concepts cannot be a skeleton key to understanding "everything." . . .

Z.W.: *Everything is a derivative of the natural sciences, including biology, which you, Father, love so much.*

P.L.: I emphasize natural *knowledge*, which becomes accumulated like sedimentary rock. And I discern this natural knowledge not only at universities, but also in the activity of a number of the co-called primitive peoples, who perfectly know the properties and regularities of the surrounding world, thanks to which they are able to survive in extreme conditions. And that is true natural knowledge. Even though it is not verbalized, even though it is not expressed in any precise way, it is still knowledge, e.g., about something that is poisonous, something that is medicine for one illness or another. On the other hand, science is like a set of drawers which change every few hundred years. Monism is a foundation for a certain conception of science. But there was also a different conception of science in the times of, say, Newton or Kepler, . . . for whom God was a totally incontrovertible foundation of reality. . . . Nowadays we live in

the era of predominant materialism and atheism. This is actually an academic norm at all universities, even Catholic ones. The atheist is a normal and fully-fledged academic, whereas he who is a believer, is tolerated, or alternatively the opinion is that his is some other truth, and that the believer lives in two worlds of two different truths—the natural one and the theological one. But how much longer is that state of affairs going to last? I consider that not long. And I consider that ontic pluralism is a vision of reality which can be substantiated and defended more easily than the monistic vision. . . .

Z.W.: Arguably, monists explain the phenomenon of developmental integration with the aid of the genome viewed from the materialist perspective.

*P.L.: The materialist genome is exactly a structural genome, and not a dynamic genome. What follows from the observation of the development, adaptation and regeneration of living forms is not a vision of a (chemical or anatomical) structure but of a *factor*:*

- which is a *unity*, and not a set of factors;
- which has a certain *orientation* in the environment and within itself;
- which has the ability to *manipulate* itself and the environment;
- which operates within the limits of some *norm of reaction* (that of a tortoise, stork, monkey or bee);
- which displays some potentiality to erect structures, which in turn in their functionality (energy efficiency) are quite literally *unimprovable*.

Z.W.: But this is the sphere of facts and is rather indisputable.

P.L.: I believe that it is an argument. If an organism repairs its damaged organs in a perfect way, then it means that it has been put to an intelligence test, nay—it has passed the intelligence test. Now, if anyone says that the notion of intelligence can be explained, just like any other physical-chemical notion, in the same way with the aid of material excerpted from mineral matter, then I can see no way to further continue the conversation.

I distinguish two kinds of errors: the error of negation and the error of affirmation. The error of negation takes place when I can't see what is there to be seen. The error of affirmation takes place when I see what is not there to be seen. Monists can of course reproach me with the error of affirmation, claiming that I can allegedly see spirit where there is no spirit. I, for that matter, would tell the ones who criticize me—if only I could have any way of accessing them—that it is in fact an error of negation: you don't see what is there to be seen. So what we have is a gridlock.

But coming back to the important question you asked—what would we

gain by opening out to the hypothesis that within the living organism there is some sort of “sprite” which acts intelligently. I could either make his situation easier or more difficult, taking into consideration this hypothetical parameter of intelligence and orientation. I think that such an experiment could be devised, but then it would mean that living organisms can do much better than we think. . . . If we create conditions which do not allow for the possibility of intelligent behaviour, then we will never notice this intelligent behaviour, neither in the tiger, nor in the mouse, nor in a plant. . . .

In the 1950s in *Nature* Peter Mora published a short text which dealt with the idea that in living organisms there was manifested something that he called *urge*, which might be rendered synonymously as “aspiration” or “tendency.” A microbiologist and biochemist, Mora claimed that this *urge* was also to be seen in bacteria, on the molecular level. He never used the word “teleological,” but we might say that it is some sort of aspiration which is manifest precisely in the tendency to mend, to repair, towards a certain independence from the influence of environment. Well, these are all manifestations of this immanent dynamics of the genome. Structures become damaged and repaired. . . .

The “conspiracy” that has been in operation for a few hundred years now is not concerned with some marginal issue of “sprites,” but with the fundamental problem of whether it is legitimate for materialistic monism to determine the shape of knowledge of the natural sciences. . . .

Z.W.: *And how about the origins of man?*

P.L.: The difference between man and other organisms is such that organisms multiply only through material. This means that their multiplication is like copying the same book, e.g., *Pan Tadeusz* in a single or ten thousand copies. Even if all the copies but one are destroyed, then nothing is destroyed, for the whole of *Pan Tadeusz* is saved. But man is created as a separate species. Man is a copy of nobody. . . .

According to Aristotle and St. Thomas—and I share the same viewpoint—the soul that gives man “personality” is the same soul which determines his “individuality.” As St Thomas Aquinas wrote, “anima rationalis est forma corporis.” Which means that man does not have two souls, one for creating the body, the other one for creating the intellect. The human soul is through and through biological, not being only biological though. . . .

Z.W.: *You were one of the organisers of the seminars which took place at Castel Gandolfo—“Science—Religion—History.” . . . The issues concerned with the relations between these areas became somewhat closer to you, Father,*

inter alia, because of the editing of these books. There emerges a problem concerned with attempts at theological and philosophical interpretations of the theory of evolution. It has potentially rich implications which can be developed in various directions—in a materialist or theistic vein. What is your view on the matter of the possibility of theistic interpretations of the theory of evolution? . . .

P.L.: I consider it all a sham. In fact theories that absolutely do without God are advanced, for the God hypothesis in the theory of evolution is completely superfluous, yet the existence of God is added on to satisfy those who believe. . . .

Z.W.: *Pardon me, but most scientific theories—if not all of them—do not need the God hypothesis.*

P.L.: That's what materialists say. To my mind the necessity of God in bio-logy is clearly visible at every turn. This is to say that when I consider, say, the origin of life, the better I understand what a cell is and how it functions, the less convincing for me is the claim that it all happened without the act of a Being that is wise or a genius. In a way, aversion to the teleological vision also manifests the fear of the discovery of the Creator's role. . . .

Z.W.: *I want to ask you, Father, about your views on everything, or almost everything, since you can still meet people who are ambitious enough to have such views. But you say that you are interested in a small, but tremendously distinct part of reality, that is life.*

P.L.: The fact that it is spatially small does not prejudice anything.