

## The 9<sup>th</sup> Polish Congress of Philosophy (Gliwice–Katowice–Wisła, 17–21 September 2012)—report

*Andrzej Gielarowski*

In accordance with the tradition cherished by the Polish philosophical community for nigh on 90 years, the 9<sup>th</sup> Polish Congress of Philosophy was held in Wisła in September of 2012. The Committee on Philosophical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences (headed by Piotr Gutowski) and the Polish Philosophical Society (headed by Władysław Stróżewski) entrusted the organization of the Congress in 2012 to the Institute of Philosophy of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Silesia in Katowice, and to the Department of Applied Social Sciences of the Faculty of Organisation and Management, Silesian University of Technology in Gliwice. The Organising Committee was headed by Jacek Rąb (Silesian University of Technology) and Andrzej Kiepas (University of Silesia).

The Congress in Wisła was the 6<sup>th</sup> congress of the Polish philosophers after the Second World War, since the first three took place in 1923 (Lviv), 1927 (Warsaw) and 1936 (Cracow). The post-war history of the Polish philosophers' congresses was resumed at the All-Poland Philosophical Congress, which took place in Lublin in 1977. The next congress was held in Cracow in 1987, and the subsequent ones in Toruń (1995), Szczecin (2004), and Warsaw (2008). It appears that the tradition of congresses, whose aim is to integrate the milieu as well as to show its condition during a several-day academic event, has become a fixture in the Polish philosophers' calendars. This was to be seen in the numerous attendance by the representatives of the discipline at the Congress in Wisła. Papers were entered by over 600 persons, for whom 28 thematic sections were created (including two foreign-language sections where the sessions were held in English and German).

The opening of the Congress took place on Monday, 17<sup>th</sup> September, at 3.00 pm, after the majority of the participants had registered and checked

in at the Gołębiowski Hotel. The inauguration, presided over by the Congress Secretary Aleksandra Kuzior (Silesian University of Technology), took place in the Conference Hall of the hotel. After a performance by the Academic Choir of the Silesian University of Technology, speeches were delivered by Andrzej Karbownik, rector of the Silesian University of Technology in Gliwice; Wiesław Banyś, rector of the University of Silesia in Katowice; Władysław Stróżewski, president of the Polish Philosophical Society; and Piotr Gutowski, president of the Committee on Philosophical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The inaugural lecture entitled *On Convictions in Life and Art* was delivered by Władysław Stróżewski.

Professor Stróżewski, who, as a full-time staff member of the Faculty of Philosophy of the *Ignatianum* Jesuit University in Cracow, still actively participates in the academic life, stated, *inter alia*, that the most important way of testing the value of an object (or a state of affairs), a certain conviction is to question its necessity: “must it be like that?” This question should be posed as long as we do not have a clear, absolutely obvious answer. As long as we are haunted by doubts (which we ourselves should also provoke), we should keep asking the question about the necessity. It is a vital question, for it is owing to this question that we can rule out which cannot withstand verification. We should strive after convictions which are certain, that is the ones which turn into unquestionable propositions. These are convictions capable of constituting our “fundamental option,” our principal outlook on the world. It can also be based on faith, but it must be a faith which has attained the ultimate conviction by the decision of the intellect and the will. One should never give up the superior function of the intellect, which allows rejection of false convictions, and the transformation of uncertainty into certain convictions. However, the condition to be met here is a thorough insight into the essence of a given conviction, and not only its contents and object, but its power, origin and degree of legitimacy. We always live in a world of convictions, argued Stróżewski. But these convictions must be well-founded, based on the truth so that we can live in the truth.

The lecture by professor Stróżewski was one of the most important intellectual events of the whole Congress. Still, each day brought many interesting lectures and speeches, for it comprised two main parts: forenoon panel discussions, which took place on a parallel basis; and section sessions, which took up most of each day. An so the Congress participants were faced with a difficult choice of one of the many interesting proposals. The second day of the Congress featured parallel panel discussions on the following subjects: philosophy and the job market, philosophy and

art, and sex difference as a philosophical problem. On the third day the subjects proposed for discussion were whether philosophy still needs a history of philosophy; philosophy, politics, religion; philosophical contexts in literature and poetry; politicality and post-democracy. On the last day of the Congress, the third panel block was dedicated to the following issues: ethics and business; philosophy and sport; philosophy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; sustainable development—philosophy, ethics, politics; and technology—philosophy—society.

Making a necessary choice, let me draw the reader's attention to the speech by professor Krzysztof Zanussi, who took part in the Philosophy and Art panel. Zanussi emphasised the role of the cinema as a narrative art which, by telling some life story, at the same time reveals some wisdom. In the director's opinion, this wisdom constitutes a criterion of true narrative art. Wherever this wisdom narrative is missing, and wherever a philosophy of life, that is some coherent vision of the world is missing, we cannot speak about the narrative cinema. At any rate, the role of such an incoherent narrative is insignificant and even harmful. Zanussi pointed out that over the past few years the narrative of the European cinema has been "limping." And so it does not fulfill its role of conveying wisdom. By contrast, the director invoked the American cinema, which—though simple—is aware that an individual has some power over reality and so can change it. Relating to the subject of the panel, the director invoked the movie *Matrix* (Part I), where he discerned an intersection of ontology and film-making. Zanussi leveled severe criticism at contemporary post-modernist trends in the art. He criticized the obliteration of differences between the artist and the member of the viewing audience, claiming that not everyone has a right to be called an artist. The second accusation against postmodernism concerned the blurring of man's responsibility for the evil done. Presenting reality in such a way that responsibility for guilt is muddied, and suggesting that there will be no punishment for it, does a lot of harm to the contemporary man. In this context, the director referred to his comedy *A Heart in Your Hand*, which he meant to be aimed against postmodernist ideas propagated in the contemporary culture. Zanussi deplored the fact that in today's culture more and more often we deal with "celebritism"—famous figures are not associated with any art.

Among the many statements which were made during the aforesaid panels, the one by Andrzej Szahaj, dean of the Faculty of Humanities of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, was remarkable. Taking part in the panel Philosophy, Politics, Religion (along with Rev. Andrzej Bronk, Magdalena Środa, and moderated by the journalist Jacek Żakowski)

and answering the question about the role of religion (and the Catholic Church) in the present situation of socio-economic crisis, professor Sza-haj pointed to the existence of the personalist tradition within Catholicism, and referred to the benefits of the return to the research and exploration of this tradition, invoking such thinkers as Emmanuel Mounier, and particularly Jacques Maritain and his work *Man and the State*.<sup>1</sup> For a philosopher of politics and a philosopher of culture, who is not inclined towards Christian philosophy, but an expert in Habermas, Rorty and other postmodernism-related philosophers, it was an interesting and open voice, particularly when viewed against the backdrop of the speeches made by the other panelists, whose perception of the role of religion (and especially of the Catholic Church) in the contemporary Polish politics was almost exclusively critical.

The number of the lectures delivered was so great that it was impossible to participate even in the most of them. And so let me just mention the section which was most interesting for me—the section of the philosophy of dialogue (for the first time constituted separately), as well as the section of the philosophy of culture. It was in these sections that one could observe, *inter alia*, both the difficulties and challenges that the Polish philosophy is faced with. The sessions in the philosophy of dialogue section addressed the latest 20th-century developments in the concept of dialogue. However, the philosophy of dialogue was faced with the question of its practical application in social and individual life. This question does not seem to correlate too strongly with the issues of philosophy, which should—at least in its classical perspective—be a disinterested quest for the truth. But on the other hand it is a manifestation of the “pragmatization” of our life, which affects philosophers too. Still, the relevance of the philosophy of dialogue transpires in very touchy areas, so relevant for the present, which was demonstrated by Stanisław Krajewski (University of Warsaw). He presented his own concept of the philosophy of inter-religious dialogue (developed on the basis of the Jewish current in the philosophy of dialogue: Buber, Levinas, Heschel).

The proceedings of the philosophy of culture section were much in the same vein of the issues of contemporary culture. The chairwoman of the section, Zofia Rosińska (University of Warsaw), focused on the phenomenology of tolerance, examining its subjective determinants. In her lecture she obviously made a number of references to the existence of the contemporary man, which is led in a multi-cultural and global-

1. Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

ized world, where communication with other people espousing different moral convictions and customs, is an everyday experience. Both professor Rosińska's thorough lecture and the other lectures in this section displayed the interest that philosophy takes in the changes brought about by the contemporary world. These changes lead philosophers to take up new issues, which have probably never been encountered before. However, the aspiration to "update" the efforts of the Polish philosophy, so typical of both sections—philosophy of dialogue and philosophy of culture—at moments seems to make the impression that researchers value the novelty of issues more highly than the accuracy of philosophical thinking developed over many centuries.

The latter remark cannot be related to the speakers in the forenoon part of the special symposium (one of the following five: 1. "Man and Transcendence"; 2. "Philosophy of Death"; 3. "Contextualism"; 4. "New Ways of Phenomenology"; 5. "Varieties of Explanation") dedicated to the philosophy of death. The chairman of the section, Ireneusz Ziemiński (University of Szczecin), made an introduction into the subject matter of the section, speaking about philosophy as *meditatio mortis*, treating the reflection on death not so much as "the art of dying," but as one of the tools of posing and possibly resolving philosophical problems. Barbara Chyrowicz (Catholic University of Lublin), Jacek Hołówka (University of Warsaw), Dariusz Łukasiewicz (Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz), who delivered their speeches, presented different aspects of the issue of death (ranging from death as sacrifice and resignation, through life boredom which makes one see death as deliverance, to the issue of what follows death, that is, *inter alia* hell), combining various thought perspectives. The philosophers who have their origins in analytical tradition displayed solid philosophical methods and openness to other ways of reflection. Also, this session proved that philosophical thinking can be both thorough, existentially engaging, as well as topical.

Among the special symposia, particularly remarkable were: the "New Ways of Phenomenology," moderated by Andrzej Przyłębski (Institute of Cultural Studies of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań), "Man and Transcendence," presided by Artur Mordka (Interfaculty Institute of Philosophy of the University of Rzeszów). The appearance of these sections proves that in Poland the subject of phenomenology is still alive and continues to be developed, and that Polish philosophers do not evade new approaches to the traditional subject matter. It is worth noting here that both the symposia were held under the auspices of Polish phenomenology societies: the Polish Association

of Phenomenology (“New Ways of Phenomenology”) and the Jan Patočka Phenomenological Society (“Man and Transcendence”).

To conclude, it is worth enumerating the subject-matter sections and their chairpersons: 1. “Axiology”: Władysław Zuziak (Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow); 2. “Teaching Philosophy”: Aldona Pobjewska (University of Łódź); 3. “Ecophilosophy and Philosophy of Sustainable Development”: Włodzimierz Tyburski (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń); 4. “Epistemology”: Renata Ziemińska (University of Szczecin); 5. “Aesthetics”: Andrzej Lorenz (University of Wrocław); 6. “Ethics”: Andrzej M. Kaniowski (University of Łódź); 6a. “Bioethics”: Barbara Chyrowicz (Catholic University of Lublin); 6b. “Business Ethics”: Wojciech Gasparski (Leon Kozłowski University, Business Ethics Centre, Warsaw); 7. “Philosophy and Social Sciences”: Andrzej Niesporek (Silesian University of Technology); 8. “Anthropological Philosophy”: Andrzej Przyłębski (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań); 9. “Philosophy of Dialogue”: Krzysztof Wieczorek (University of Silesia); 10. “Feminist Philosophy and Gender Studies”: Magdalena Środa (University of Warsaw); 11. “Philosophy of Language”: Urszula Żegleń (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń); 12. “Philosophy of Culture”: Zofia Rosińska (University of Warsaw); 13. “Philosophy of Law”: Marek Piechowiak (University of Social Sciences and Humanities); 14. “Philosophy of Nature”: Anna Latwiec (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw) and Janusz Mączka (Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow); 15. “Philosophy of Religion”: Janusz Łukasiewicz (Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz); 16. “Philosophy of Society and Philosophy of Politics”: Jacek Rąb (Silesian University of Technology) and Anna Kuzior (Silesian University of Technology); 17. “Philosophy of Technology”: Andrzej Kiepas (University of Silesia); 18. “Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science”: Andrzej Klawiter (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań); 19. “Eastern Philosophy”: Beata Szymańska (Jagiellonian University in Cracow); 20a. “History of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy”: Miłowit Kuniński (Jagiellonian University); 20b. “History of Polish Philosophy”: Barbara Szotek (University of Silesia); 20c. “History of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy”: Agnieszka Kijewska (Catholic University of Lublin); 21. “Logic”: Andrzej Wiśniewski (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań); 22. “Metaphilosophy”: Tadeusz Szubka (University of Szczecin); 23. “Methodology and Philosophy of Science”: Adam Chmielewski (University of Wrocław); 24. “Ontology and Metaphysics”: Jacek Wojtysiak (Catholic University of Lublin).

The wealth of the above-mentioned sections shows a wide array of academic interests of the Polish philosophers. During the Congress a joint

session of the Committee on Philosophical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Polish Philosophical Society took place. At the beginning of the session Andrzej Grzegorzczak was presented with a nomination to an honorary member of the Committee on Philosophical Sciences. On the 22nd August this year professor Grzegorzczak celebrated his 90th birthday. The laudation was delivered by Jan Woleński. In it he emphasised that he had personally and for a long time known professor Grzegorzczak, who is a versatile man—a philosopher, an academic and a believer. He is known for his honesty and straightforwardness, his independent thought and steering clear of connections—political, social, religious and even academic ones. In 1950 Andrzej Grzegorzczak obtained his doctor's degree with the dissertation *Topological Spaces in Pointless Topological Algebras*. The supervisor was the well-known mathematician Andrzej Mostowski. On the basis of the work *Some Classes of Recursive Functions* he was employed as associate professor at the Institute of Mathematics of the Polish Academy of Sciences. In 1961 he was awarded the title of *professor extraordinarius*, and in 1972—*professor ordinarius*. Until 1968 he also worked at the University of Warsaw. In 1974 he moved to the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, where in 1982 he became the head of the Department of Ethics. In 1999–2003, already retired, he was the chairperson of the Committee on Philosophical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Not only in Poland, but also all over the world, professor Grzegorzczak is renowned for his achievements in the field of mathematical logic. As he thanked for the appointment to an honorary member of the Committee of Philosophical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences and for the laudation, professor Grzegorzczak, with a veritably actor-like talent and expressive gesticulation, recited one of his poems referring to the dancing Socrates.

In the second part of the session, Piotr Gutowski made an introduction into the discussion concerning the tasks that in the near future the Polish philosophical milieu is to take up in relation to the drastically decreasing number of applicants for admission to university, elimination of philosophy classes in non-philosophy fields of study, unavailability of free-of-charge philosophy studies as a second degree, parceling out of philosophy (e.g. detachment of ethics and treating it as a separate field of study), and creating various para-philosophical fields of study, which for marketing reasons do not refer to “philosophy” in their names. The discussants agreed that, irrespective of the proper efforts taken by the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, we—Polish philosophers—must undertake some joint and well-thought-out ac-

tivities to promote philosophy as a valuable field of study. In this kind of promotion, we should, to a greater degree than so far, utilize the mass media (the press, radio, television, multimedia and the Internet). Also, a point was made about the necessity to promote the Polish philosophical thought and to create its positive image outside the country. Attention was drawn to the necessity to take greater care of young, talented doctors of philosophy so that they do not have to leave the country and look for jobs abroad. One of the discussants pointed out the glaring disproportion between the credit points awarded for philosophical publications and the ones awarded journal publications in the fields of social or natural sciences.

The strictly academic sessions of the 9th Polish Congress of Philosophy were coupled with numerous artistic events. Some of the attendant events were: a concert by the Symphony Orchestra of Zabrze Philharmonic, a performance by the *Karlik* band, a commemorative soirée dedicated to late Polish philosophers, a performance by the *Korez* Theatre, a trip to the Cieszyn castle, a performance by the Silesian String Quartet, and the Philosophers Ball, during which the band *Preludium* gave a performance. The Ball was coupled with a sumptuous dinner party and a ceremonial closing of the 9th Polish Congress of Philosophy in Wisła, which on the evening of the 20th October 2012 was performed by Waldemar Czajkowski (Silesian University of Technology, Department of Applied Social Sciences of the Faculty of Organisation and Management, Silesian University of Technology), Dariusz Kubok (University of Silesia, Institute of Philosophy at the University of Silesia) and Adam Grobler (a deputy chairman of the Committee on Philosophical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences). The final closing of the Congress took place on the 21st October 2012, in the forenoon as the Congress participants left Wisła.