

PHILOSOPHY OF THE JESUITS IN LITHUANIA SINCE THE 16TH UNTIL THE 18TH CENTURY

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Abstract. In the philosophy of the Jesuits of this period one can distinguish philosophy connected with teaching, i.e. taught at schools led by the Jesuits, and *Civic* philosophy, not connected directly with teaching. This was mainly social, economic, and political philosophy, especially philosophy of the state, law and the like.

The following comments and reflections refer to the period since the beginning of the activity of the Jesuits in Lithuania, i.e. since the second half of the 16th century until the end of the 18th century.

In the philosophy of the Jesuits of this period we have to distinguish:

- 1) Philosophy connected with teaching, i.e. taught at schools led by the Jesuits: in the Vilnius Academy and in three other colleges;
- 2) *Civic* philosophy, not connected directly with teaching. This was mainly social, economic, and political philosophy, especially philosophy of the state, law and the like. I will discuss this item briefly at the end.

The following comments constitute the most significant conclusions from my researches into the philosophy of the Jesuits in Poland and Lithuania. I have been conducting these researches systematically for thirty years. I have published some books and numerous papers on these issues. (Cf. Ziemiański 2005, pp. 13-43, 53-66).

I. Development of the Jesuit philosophical education

In the 16th century the Jesuits established all over the Republic of the Two Nations (i.e. mainly Poles and Lithuanians – a united Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania) four centres for teaching philosophy. The first one was the College in Vilnius [Vilna, Wilno], which in 1579 was transformed into an Academy. Piotr [Petrus] Skarga was the first Rector of this Academy. Philosophy was taught there already from 1571. Three other colleges with philosophical studies were established in: Poznań (philosophy from 1585), Braniewo / Braunsberg (from 1592) and Kalisz (from 1597). These colleges offered separate, complete, normal three-year philosophical studies, which the the Jesuits conducted until the suppression of the Jesuit Order in 1773.

In the 17th and 18th century philosophical education in Lithuania developed: in Kražiai [Kroże] – philosophy from 1654, in Kaunas [Kowno] – from 1725 and in the *Collegium Nobilium* in Vilnius – from 1759. In all these centres studies continued until the suppression of the Jesuit Order in 1773. Of course, the structure of studies, their length and quality differed greatly in various colleges. There were, for example, complete, i.e. three-year studies, or two-year studies; a new course began every year or every two years, and so on.

Didactic work in the field of philosophy was carried out over two centuries by a great number of academic teachers. In the Vilnius Academy alone, since its establishment in 1579 until the suppression of the Jesuit Order in 1773, more than 200 professors and academic teachers lectured on philosophy. It is obvious that as regards quality this number represented the whole range: from outstanding to very weak.

The Vilnius Academy was the main and leading Jesuit university in Poland and Lithuania. The staffing and the scope of teaching were the most complete there. In the history of culture, also philosophical culture, it played an eminent role. Especially during the 17th century it was an important centre of philosophical thought, which effectively competed with the Cracow Academy and wielded influence all over the united Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania.

II. The most eminent Jesuit philosophers

We have to mention at least four of them:

Martinus **Smiglecus / Śmiglecki** (1563-1618), Professor of the Vilnius Academy, an eminent European logician and philosopher, the author of a monumental work *Logica [...] selectis disputationibus & quaestionibus illustrata [...]*¹. This work is a collection of treatises concerning the problems of logic with special consideration given to metaphysics. *Logica* was published four times: Ingolstadt 1618 and Oxford 1634, 1638, 1658. It served in Oxford as an academic textbook. Śmiglecki is also the author of an economic-ethical treatise *O lichwie* [On Usury]² and of several theological treatises. In philosophy Śmiglecki reveals a considerable originality. He follows a path somewhere in between Thomism and Suarezianism. „Śmiglecki's work, as regards doctrine, was not Thomist enough for the supporters of Thomist Aristotelianism, and too Thomist for the representatives of the already crystallized Jesuit school” (Czerkawski 1992, p. 178). Modern research reveals that „Śmiglecki was in Poland an initiator of the current of scholastic metaphysics, continued – in a sense – in the metaphysics of Leibniz and Wolff” (Domański et al. 1989, p. 357).³

Antonius **Skorulski** (1715-1777), professor of the Vilnius Academy, the author of the textbook *Commentariolum philosophiae* (Vilnius 1755), the most prominent – apart from Benedictus Dobszewicz – philosopher in Lithuania in the 18th century. He skipped many traditional philosophical issues, but discussed at length modern philosophical currents and the progress of the natural sciences (Darowski 1996, p. 69).

Benedictus **Dobszewicz / Dobševičius** (1722-1794), professor of the Vilnius Academy, he is – among other things – the author of two extensive works *Placita recentiorum philosophorum explanata* (Vilnius 1760) and *Praelectiones logicae* (Vilnius 1761), in which he attempted to combine harmoniously tradition with modernity in philosophy (Bargieł 1980, pp. 146-206).

Matthias Casimirus **Sarbievius / Sarbiewski** (1595-1640), professor of the Vilnius Academy, the author of a work on poetics, *De perfecta poësi* (Tatarkiewicz 1991, pp. 289-293), occupies an important place in the history of European aesthetics.

¹ The first edition: Ingoldstadt 1618, vol. 1-2, format 4, 1632 pages.

² Vilnius 1596, later more editions.

³ On the philosophy of Śmiglecki see especially Czerkawski 1992, pp. 182-192; Darowski 1994, pp. 185-224; Nowak 1981, pp. 113-172; Nowak 1980/82, pp. 135-150.

III. The characteristics of the philosophy of the Jesuits in Lithuania

1) The philosophy of the Jesuits in Lithuania constituted a separate philosophical current. It came from the West, from Jesuit academic centres, especially from the Iberian Peninsula and from Italy, particularly from Rome. It was a *new Jesuit Aristotelianism*, belonging to the so-called *second scholasticism*, developed by the Jesuits in the second half of the 16th century⁴.

In the teaching of philosophy the Aristotelian doctrine was expected to be, for the Jesuits, a doctrinal authority. However, it soon turned out that in the 16th century it was difficult to teach Aristotelianism in its medieval form. Therefore, the Jesuits tried to give a new form to the philosophy of Aristotle. They did it in the second half of the 16th century, during the preparation of *Ratio Studiorum*.

The main protagonists of this current were Professors connected with the Roman College, especially: Pedro da Fonseca (Portugal), the author of *Institutiones dialecticae*⁵ and *Commentarii in libros Metaphysicorum* (Rome 1577), Francisco de Toledo (Toletus; Spain), the author of *Introductio in dialecticam*⁶ and of the commentaries on the philosophy of nature; Benito Pereira (Spain), the author of *De communibus omnium rerum naturalium principiis et affectionibus* (Rome 1576), and Francisco Suárez (Spain), the author of *Disputationes metaphysicae* (Salamanca 1597).

The novelty of *Jesuit Aristotelianism* consisted first of all in the gradual emancipation of the natural sciences and in the recognition of the greater autonomy of the philosophical disciplines – supporting however the view that Christian Revelation and the philosophy of Aristotle generally correspond with one another.

In Vilnius this current was initiated in the second half of the 16th century by the first academic teachers of philosophy, who were either foreigners (John Hay from Scotland, Pedro Viana, Diego Ortiz and Miguel Ortiz from Spain), or Poles educated in Rome (Leonard Kraker, Marcin Śmiglecki, Hieronim Stefanowski). Compared to the philosophy practised in Lithuania till then, it was a new current.

2) *In terms of content*: This philosophy was generally Aristotelianism modified by Christian commentators of the Stagirite, especially Thomas Aquinas. The Jesuits introduced into it a Suarezian tinge. The exceptions

⁴ See on this subject Lohn 1995, pp. 79-91.

⁵ 1st edition: Lisbon 1564, 53rd (!) ed. Lyon 1625.

⁶ 1st edition: Rome 1591, 18th ed. Milan 1621.

were: Hay and Viana. The first one was a Scotist, and the second a Thomist. Both of them taught in the Jesuit College in Vilnius before it was transformed into an Academy.

As far as the views of Suárez SJ (1548-1617) and the Suarezian school are concerned, the following statements appear most often:

1) The human mind first and directly acquires knowledge of individual, concrete, particular beings, not of general ones; the latter only secondarily and indirectly; 2) Possible being, i.e. potential being (*ens possibile*) is not a real, authentic being (it does not exist beyond our minds); 3) In contingent beings there is no real difference (*distinctio realis*) between an essence and existence, but only a mental (conceptual) one (*distinctio rationis*); 4) The prime matter (*materia prima*) is not pure possibility, but already has some act, i.e. some actuality, some kind of existence, existence independent from the form; 5) There are „modes” (*modi*), that is modalities, i.e. real modifications of beings, which serve various functions in the structure of beings. At the same time, however, some Jesuits remained critical of modalism; 6) The principle of the individuation of beings is not matter, but their own entity (*ipsa, propria entitas entium*).

3) Suarezianism, and not Thomism, was, then, a dominating current in Jesuit philosophy in the period discussed. Therefore, the opinion of Wiktor Waşik (among others) that the Jesuits in Poland and in Lithuania were Thomists is incorrect (Waşik 1958, p. 67). However, frequently it was not pure Suarezianism; certain modifications were introduced and, as a result, this current was not homogenous, but rather diversified. This „diversity” signifies some independence and originality of views, even among academic teachers of the same period of time.

4) Closer and more exact analysis of the texts and views of an individual author as a rule reveals his individuality and consistently shows greater or smaller differences compared to other authors within the same current and in the same period. It is difficult to find two authors who would have identical views. Besides, there are differences in the way of presenting issues, in length, order and the like. So in order to avoid departing from the truth, each author should be approached individually, which is very difficult in works containing general conclusions.

5) In individual philosophical texts, from this period, we can usually distinguish four layers: a) First, is a selection of certain issues and fragments from Aristotle's philosophical treatises, which – according to the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* – were to be the subject of teaching. Often considerable cuts were made here, while their criteria were based on the regula-

tions of the *Ratio* on one hand, and on the other hand – on the needs and interests of students or readers.

b) The second layer of content is a commentary. Issues selected from Aristotle are in general presented in the spirit of Christian commentators, who modified certain opinions of the Stagirite in order to make his philosophy correspond with Christian doctrine. The Aristotelian themes were supplemented with new issues, not handled by Aristotle, or according to them, handled by him but insufficiently (God, angels, the creation of the world and the like).

Thomas Aquinas in particular and the Jesuit tradition, whose main representative was Suárez, occupied an important place among commentators.

c) The third layer comprises supplements coming from the authors of the treatises. These mainly consist in the gradual, but visible inclusion of certain issues concerning the natural sciences of the Renaissance, or later currents, into the lectures.

At first these were introduced tentatively and critically, but even that constituted information about the modern achievements of philosophy and the development of the sciences. With time, some of these innovations were assimilated and accepted. However, for a long time, nearly till the mid-18th century, the Copernican system of heliocentrism was not accepted, though information about it had often been spread – and many times with approval. This lack of acceptance resulted from the fact that Church authorities had banned acceptance of the Copernican system in 1616 and 1620.

d) The fourth layer comprises supplements consisting in the adapting of certain issues to the conditions and circumstances prevailing in Lithuania and in adding some issues particularly relevant there. These are individual attempts to update, in various ways, the lectures and the textbooks.

6) In terms of form: We can observe a gradual shift from commenting on various of Aristotle's treatises, and even particular books (*libri*) of some treatise, to a more general and more „collective” treatment of a given branch of philosophy (*in universam logicam, in universam physicam, philosophiam naturalem*), which led to the distinction of separate disciplines and a decrease in their dependence on the Stagirite. As the years went on, the bond between this new philosophy and Aristotelian doctrine was becoming more and more casual, not only with regard to the content, but also to the form.

From the mid-18th century the ordering of the philosophical disciplines according to Wolff's classification prevailed.

7) In lectures Professors used the scholastic method. This mainly consisted in presenting material within a disputation in the form of units each

of which was called a *thesis* – or question (*quaestio*), and which usually had the following parts: the formula of the thesis, an initial answer, i.e. a statement-thesis, an analysis of the terminology used, i.e. an explanation and distinguishing of the notions (*explicatio terminorum*), a presentation of various views (standpoints – *sententiae, adversarii*) on the subject under discussion and the elucidation of their groundlessness, a demonstration of the truth of the thesis in the form of syllogisms (*probatio*), some theoretical consequences resulting from the thesis proved (*corollaria*), and complementary issues (*scholia*). Naturally, only a fully developed *thesis* possessed all these parts.

8) The philosophy under discussion was created, taught and printed almost exclusively in Latin. One of the few exceptions is the treatise by Śmiglecki *O lichwie* [On Usury], written in Polish.

9) In the 18th century a considerable tension arose between the former way of practising philosophy and the „more modern” currents of philosophy (*philosophia recentiorum*). In this context, a problem arose regarding the importance of scholastic philosophy for religious and theological concepts and the manner in which Christian thought was present in contemporary culture as such. The Jesuits were convinced that the Aristotelian philosophy and the whole Christian concept of reality were in danger because of the influence of modern philosophical currents. Initially, they decidedly and strongly defended the former positions and rejected any new philosophy, especially the philosophy of Descartes. The main representative of this tendency was Georgius [Jerzy] Gengell (1657-1727), who exerted a big influence on other Jesuits. Around the mid-18th century many Jesuits realized that there was a need to bring the former philosophy, especially the philosophy of nature, into correspondence with the new natural sciences. Therefore, they started to accept modern scientific discoveries and to modify their philosophical views. This process led in time to a greater restriction of purely theoretical speculation in favour of knowledge based on empirical experience (e.g. Dobszewicz and others). As a result, gradually less and less time was set aside for metaphysics, in favour of the philosophy of nature and the new physics. In consequence the metaphysics developed was often very limited.

10) The lectures in the textbooks, *Theses / Assertionones* and the lecture notes (manuscripts), especially from the 17th century, often proved to be an impressive logical education not only for Professors, but also their students. Various forms of repetition and polemical exercises (*disputationes*) served this goal. A considerable weight was attached to the skill of analysis

and the clear distinguishing (*oportet distinguere*) of notions and terms in discussions and polemics.

The origins of certain branches of contemporary formal logic can be found in some works, especially in the manuscript lectures on logic (dialectics). Traditional (scholastic) Jesuit philosophy – in spite of various reservations which can be formulated with regard to it – constituted an excellent training in abstract thinking.

IV. Civic philosophy

A separate, extensive and important field is the philosophy of the Jesuits not directly connected with academic teaching, though its roots do lie in the philosophy taught in colleges, especially in ethics (*ethica, oeconomica, politica*). This *civic* philosophy inspired the activity of many Jesuits and non-Jesuits. It particularly concerns social, economic and political philosophy, comprised in non-philosophical writings (e.g. textbooks of theology, law and the like). It was also present in preaching. It emerged mainly from concepts relating to the philosophy of the state and law, among other things in regard to such issues as the attitude to parliamentarism, religious tolerance, the peasant problem and the like. These fields, however, have not been examined sufficiently so far. Father Skarga, the first Rector of the Vilnius Academy, belongs among the leading representatives of this philosophy, who in their activity, especially in writing and preaching, dealt with public and civic issues. Skarga did not produce any philosophical textbook or academic treatise, but in his activity he showed a lively interest in philosophy and to a considerable degree dealt with civic issues: social and political. His views in both fields can be gathered and systematized on the basis of his writings, mainly *Kazania sejmowe* [Sermons for the Sejm / Parliament]. The *Sermons* constitute a kind of social and political treatise providing an assessment of the situation of the state and the rules of its restructuring.

The peasant problem was the subject of interest and concern for many Jesuits, especially in sermons. Among those who dealt with these issues more systematically, some deserve a special mention:

Martinus Śmiglecki in the treatise *O lichwie* [On Usury] (from the 5th edition in 1607) defends peasants from excessive serfdom. He proposes for them to be able to buy themselves out and move somewhere else (the issue of personal freedom). Joannes Chądzyński / Chondzinskis in the work pre-

served in the manuscript *Compendium de iure et iustitia* (1647) demands for peasants the right to ownership of property bought by them and alleviating their plight. In the text *Discurs kapłana jednego [...]*, written as an „open letter” to society, he presents the tragic situation of peasants and decidedly stands up for them.

Aron Alexander Olizarowski (around 1610-1659), a former Jesuit (he left the order after having finished philosophical studies in Pułtusk in the years 1633-36), the Professor of canon and civil law in the Vilnius Academy (since 1644), in his book *De politica hominum societate* (Gdańsk 1651), very boldly defends peasants' rights against the privileges of nobility and calls for the protection of their civil rights, demonstrating a profound insight into the social and political relations of the time. This work was the first systematic source of knowledge concerning this society and state, and was marked with thoroughness and a concern for the lot of society, especially for its proper education.

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