

Roman Darowski SJ
University School Ignatianum
Cracow / Poland

PHILOSOPHY OF JESUITS IN LITHUANIA
since the 16th until the 18th century

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

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

- 1) Philosophy connected with teaching, i.e. taught at schools led by Jesuits (in the Vilnius Academy and in three other colleges);
- 2) *Civic* philosophy, not connected directly with teaching. It was mainly social, economic, 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 research into the philosophy of Jesuits in Poland and Lithuania. I have been conducting this research systematically for thirty years. I have published a few books and numerous articles on these issues¹.

Development of the Jesuit philosophical education

In the 16th century Jesuits established all over the Republic of the Two Nations (i.e. mainly Poles and Lithuanians) four centres of teaching

¹ Cf *Philosophia vitam alere*, Kraków 2005, 13-43, 53-66.

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 the Academy. Philosophy was taught there already since 1571. Three other colleges with philosophical studies were established in: Poznań (philosophy since 1585), Braniewo (since 1592) and Kalisz (since 1597). There were separate, complete, normal three-year philosophical studies there, which Jesuits conducted until the suppression of the order in 1773.

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

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

The Vilnius Academy was the main and leading Jesuit university in the Republic of the Two Nations; 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.

The most eminent Jesuit philosophers

We have to mention at least four of them:

Martinus **Smiglecius** / **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 [...]*². This work is a collection of treatises concerning the problems of logic with a special consideration given to metaphysics. *Logica* was published four times: Ingolstadt 1618 and Oxford 1634, 1638, 1658, where it served as an academic textbook. Śmiglecki is also the author of an economic-ethical treatise *O lichwie* [On the Usury]³ and several theological treatises. In philosophy Śmiglecki reveals great originality. He follows the way somewhere in between Thomism and Suarezianism. “Śmiglecki’s work as regards the doctrine was too little Thomist for the supporters of Thomist Aristotelianism, and too Thomist for the representatives of the already crystallized Jesuit school”⁴. More modern research reveals that “Śmiglecki is in Poland an initiator of the current of scholastic metaphysics, continued – in a sense – in the metaphysics of Leibniz and Wolff”⁵.

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 has skipped many

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

³ Vilnius 1596, later more editions.

⁴ J. Czerkawski, *Humanizm i scholastyka*, Lublin 1992, 178.

⁵ Z. Ogonowski, in: J. Domański, Z. Ogonowski, L. Szczucki, *Zarys dziejów filozofii w Polsce. XIII-XVII*, Warszawa 1989, 357. On the philosophy of Śmiglecki see especially J. Czerkawski, *Z dziejów metafizyki w Polsce*, 51-61 (similarly in the book *Humanizm i scholastyka*, Lublin 1992, 182-192); R. Darowski, *Filozofia w szkołach jezuickich w Polsce w XVI wieku*, Kraków 1994, 185-224; L. Nowak, *Gnozeologiczne poglądy Marcina Śmigleckiego*, in: *Z historii polskiej logiki*, Wrocław 1981, 113-172; L. Nowak, *Les idées gnoséologiques de Marcin Śmiglecki*, „Organon”, nr 16/17, 1980/82, 135-150.

traditional philosophical issues, but discussed at length modern philosophical currents and the progress of the natural sciences⁶.

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 philosophy⁷.

Matthias Casimirus **Sarbievius / Sarbiewski** (1595-1640), professor of the Vilnius Academy, the author of poetics *De perfecta poësi*⁸, occupies an important place in the history of European aesthetics.

The characteristics of the philosophy of Jesuits in Lithuania

1) The philosophy of 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 the *new Jesuit Aristotelianism*, belonging to the so-called *second scholastics*, developed by Jesuits in the second half of the 16th century⁹.

In teaching 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 version. Therefore, 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*.

⁶ R. Darowski, *Poglądy filozoficzne Antoniego Skorulskiego SJ (1715-1777)*, Kraków 1996, 69.

⁷ F. Bargiel, *Benedykt Dobszewicz SJ (1722-1794) a odnowa jezuickiej filozofii [...]*, in: *Studia z historii filozofii*, Kraków 1980, 146-206.

⁸ W. Tatarkiewicz, *Historia estetyki*, vol. 3: *Estetyka nowożytna*, Warszawa 1991, 289-293 and *passim*.

⁹ See on this subject Ch. H. Lohr, *Les jésuites et l'aristotélisme du XVII^e siècle*, in: *Les jésuites à la Renaissance*, Paris 1995, 79-91.

The main protagonists of this current were professors connected with the Roman College, especially: Pedro da Fonseca (Portugal), the author of *Institutiones dialecticae*¹⁰ and *Commentarii in libros Metaphysicorum* (Rome 1577), Francisco de Toledo (Toletus; Spain), the author of *Introductio in dialecticam*¹¹ and the commentaries for 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 natural science and in the recognition of greater autonomy of 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 philosophy practised so far, it was a new current.

2) **In terms of contents:** This philosophy was generally Aristotelianism modified by Christian commentators of the Stagirite, especially Thomas Aquinas. Jesuits have introduced in it a Suarezian tinge. The exceptions were: Hay and Viana. The first one was to be 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) Human mind first and directly acquires knowledge of individual,

¹⁰ 1st edition: Lisbon 1564, 53rd (!) ed. Lyon 1625.

¹¹ 1st edition: Rome 1591, 18th ed. Milan 1621.

concrete, particular being, 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 exist beyond our mind); 3) In contingent beings there is no real difference (*distinctio realis*) between a essence and existence, but only a mental (conceptual) one (*d. rationis*); 4) The prime matter (*materia prima*) is not pure possibility, but already has some act, i.e. some actuality, some kind of existence, independent existence); 5) There are “modes” (*modi*), that is modalities, i.e. real modifications of being, which serve various functions in the structure of beings (specific being links). 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*).

3) Suarezianism, and not Thomism, was then a **dominating** current in Jesuit philosophy in the period discussed. Therefore, the opinion of Wiktor Wąsik (among others) that Jesuits in Poland and in Lithuania were Thomists is incorrect¹². 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 exact analysis of the texts and views of an individual author as a rule reveals his individuality and consistently 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 not possible in the works containing general conclusions.

¹² W. Wąsik, *Historia filozofii polskiej*, Warszawa 1958, vol. 1, 67.

5) In individual philosophical texts we can usually distinguish four layers: a) First, it is a selection of certain issues and fragments from Aristotle's philosophical treatises, which according to Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* were to be the subject of teaching. Often considerable cuts were made here, while their criteria were based on the regulations of *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 a spirit of Christian commentators, who modified certain opinions of the Stagirite in order to make his philosophy correspond with Christian teachings. The Aristotelian themes were supplemented with the new issues, not handled by Aristotle, or according to them, handled by him but not sufficiently (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. They mainly consist in slow, but visible inclusion of certain issues concerning natural history of Renaissance or later currents into the lectures.

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

d) The fourth layer comprises supplements consisting in adapting certain issues to 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 Aristotle's treatises, and even individual books of a given treatise, to a more general and more "collective" treating of a given branch of philosophy (*in universam logicam, in universam physicam, philosophiam naturalem*), which led to the distinction of individual disciplines and their smaller dependence on the Stagirite. As years went on, the bond between this new philosophy and Aristotelian doctrine was becoming more and more casual, not only with regard to the contents, but also to the form. Since mid-18th century the order of sciences in philosophy according to Wolff's classification is prevailing.

7) In lectures professors used scholastic method. It mainly consisted in presenting material within disputation in the form of units called *thesis* – or question (*quaestio*), which usually had the following parts: formula of the thesis, initial answer, i.e. statement-thesis, analysis of the terminology used, i.e. explanation and distinction of the notions (*explication terminorum*), various views (standpoints – *sententiae, adversarii*) on the subject under discussion and elucidation of their groundlessness, demonstration of the truth of the thesis in the form of syllogisms (*probatio*), some theoretical consequences resulting from the thesis proved (*corollaria*), 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 the Usury], written in Polish.

9) In the 18th century a considerable tension increased between the former way of practising philosophy and the "more modern" currents of philosophy (*philosophia recentiorum*). In this context, a problem arose referring to the importance of scholastic philosophy for the religious and theological concepts and the manner of presence of the Christian thought

in contemporary culture as such. Jesuits were convinced that the Aristotelian philosophy and the whole Christian concept of reality ran into danger because of the influence of the 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 big influence on other Jesuits. Around mid-18th century many Jesuits realized that there was the need for making former philosophy, especially the philosophy of nature, correspond with the new natural history. Therefore, they started to accept modern scientific discoveries and to modify their philosophical views. This process led with time to greater limiting of the purely theoretical speculation in favour of the knowledge based on the empirical experience (e.g. Dobszewicz and others). As a result, gradually less and less time was set aside for metaphysics in favour of philosophy of nature and new physics. In consequence metaphysics often used to be very limited.

10) The lecture of the textbooks, *Theses / Assertionones* and lecture notes (manuscripts), especially from the 17th century, often prove an impressive logical education of not only professors, but also their students. Various forms of repetitions and polemical exercises (*disputationones*) served this goal. A considerable weight was attached to the skill of analysis and clear distinction (*oportet distinguere*) of notions and terms in discussions and polemics.

The origins of some 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 about it – constituted an excellent training of abstract thinking.

Civic philosophy

A separate, extensive and important field is the philosophy of Jesuits not directly connected with academic teaching, though its roots do lie in the philosophy taught in colleges, especially in the 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 the concepts referring to the philosophy of the state and law, among other things in such issues as the attitude to parliamentarism, religious tolerance, 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 to the leading representatives, who in their activity, especially in writing and preaching dealt with public and civic issues. Skarga did not produce any philosophical textbook or an academic treatise, but in his activity he showed a lively interest in philosophy and to a considerable degree coped 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 of Sejm / Parliament]. The *Sermons* constitute a kind of social and political treatise providing the assessment of the situation of the state and the rules of its restructuring.

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

Martinus Śmiglecki in the treatise *O lichwie* [On the Usury] (from the 5th edition in 1607) defends peasants from too bog serfdom. He postulates for them to be able to buy themselves out and move somewhere else (the issue of personal freedom). Joannes Chądzyński / Chondzinskis in the work preserved in the manuscript *Compendium de iure et iustitia* (1647) demands for peasants the right of ownership of properties bought by them and alleviating their plight. In the text *Discurs*

kapłana jednego [...], written as an “open letter” to the society, he presents the tragic situation of peasants and decidedly stands up for them.

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

Bibliography

J. Czerkawski, *Humanizm i scholastyka*, Lublin 1992; R. Darowski, *First Aristotelians of Vilnius*, „Organon”, nr 15: Warszawa 1979, 71-91; R. Darowski, *Filozofia w szkołach jezuickich w Polsce w XVI wieku*, Kraków 1994, (bibl.; Résumé, 411-437); R. Darowski, *La philosophie dans les collèges des jésuites en Pologne au XVI^e siècle*, „Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie”, Bd. 43: 1996, Heft 1/2, 154-170; R. Darowski, *La philosophie des jésuites en Pologne du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle – essai de syntèse*, „Forum Philosophicum”, t. 2, Kraków 1997, 211-242; R. Darowski, *Studia z filozofii jezuitów w Polsce w XVII i XVIII wieku*, Kraków 1998; R. Darowski, *Studies in Philosophy of Jesuits in Poland in the 16th-18th Centuries*, Kraków 1999; *Lietuvos filosofinės minties istorijos šaltiniai*, t. 1, Vilnius 1980; J. J. Jadacki, *Sławni Wilnianie. Filozofowie*, Wilno 1994; L. Piechnik, *Dzieje Akademii Wileńskiej*, t. 1-4, Rzym 1983-1990; R. Plečkaitis, *Nowa myśl filozoficzna i przyrodnicza w czasach rozkwitu jezuickiej Akademii Wileńskiej*, in: *Jezuici a kultura polska*, Kraków 1993, 269-277; R. Plečkaitis, *Początki*

logiki matematycznej w jezuickiej Akademii Wileńskiej, in: *Jezuicka ars educandi*, Kraków 1995, 181-198; S. Pyszka, *Professori di Vilna in difesa dei diritti umani dei contadini negli anni dal 1607 al 1657*, Roma 1987; *Filozofia i myśl społeczna w latach 1700-1830*, oprac. M. Skrzypek, Warszawa 2000; R. Plečkaitis, *Lietuvos filosofijos istorija*, t. I, Vilnius 2004; R. Plečkaitis, *The history of philosophy in Lithuania (I)*, "Forum Philosophicum", t. 10: 2005, 159-166; S. Pyszka, *L'insegnamento della filosofia morale nelle scuole dei gesuiti polacchi e lituani ed in particolare nell'Accademia di Vilna, 1642-1774*, in: *Philosophia vitam alere*, Kraków 2005, 569-588; R. Plečkaitis, *Filozofia prawa w dawnym Uniwersytecie Wileńskim*, in: *Philosophia vitam alere*, Kraków 2005, 513-530; F. Bargieł, *Prawodawstwo jezuickie dla studiów filozoficznych w Polsce i na Litwie w połowie XVIII wieku*, in: *Philosophie & Musicae*, Kraków 2006, 245-259; S. Pyszka, *L'insegnamento della Philosophia moralis nell'Università di Vilna nel XVII secolo alla luce dei manuali*, in: *Philosophie & Musicae*, Kraków 2006, 559-584.