

Polish Philosophy of the Second Half of the 19th Century towards Kant

Barbara Szotek

University of Silesia, Katowice, PL

SZOTEK, B.: Polish Philosophy of the Second Half of the 19th Century towards Kant.

Roč./vol. 1, 2015, č./ No. 1, ISSN 1339-8970, pp. 37–44

In the paper author makes an attempt to closely observe Polish philosophical life in the second half of 19th century from the point of view of the reception of Kant's philosophy. The overview of the 19th century Polish philosophy shows that although Kant's philosophy at that time practically did not attract a bigger group of experts, or its devoted propagators, its influences on Polish philosophy were undeniable. Obviously, taking into account the positions held by Polish thinkers towards Kant, as well as the problems, which were brought to the foreground, one may speak about varied but complicated attitude to Kant's philosophy. So called "third phase" of spreading the news about Kant in the country is of special interest, generally taking place at the turn of 19th and 20th century. From this point of view, the article is an attempt to answer the question: What was the course of reception of Kant in positivism in Poland, taking into consideration particularly the "third phase" of reception of Kant's philosophy?

Key words: Polish philosophy – Kant – Positivism

In modern European thought a few breakthrough ideas can be indicated, which were, as a rule, gradually maturing, and included prominent minds to become the beginning of new world outlooks, new views of the place of the man in the world, and most of all were the inspiration to undertake basic philosophical issues anew. It is generally believed that critical philosophy of Kant constitutes one of such breakthrough stages in the history of human thought. And the reason for this is – as it is argued – that Kant himself, put an end to all dogmatisms, metaphysical and uncritical systems, by forming the idea of pure reason.

However, it cannot escape one's notice that Kantian Copernican revolution was, above all, opening of the way to knowledge based on the analysis and critique of the very cognitive process (Andrzejewski 1983, 101). Owing to this fact, the critical philosophy of Kant gained wide recognition, not only during the life of its creator but even later both in Germany as well as other European countries. Also in Poland this philosophy could not pass unnoticed.

Piotr Chmielowski, one of the best literary critics and historians of Polish literature of the second half of the 19th century, distinguished in his article "*Kant in Poland*" three phases of spreading the news on Kant philosophy. The first period was supposed to include the main discussions carried on about the heritage of Kant before 1830. The second period was connected with the history of Kantianism in Poland between the uprisings, that is, in years 1831 – 1864. And the third one – starting the "reversal towards Kant proper" – was supposed to take place after the decline of January Uprising, precisely in the last years of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century (Chmielowski 1904, 393–394).

It is significant that – according to Chmielowski – only in this third phase they addressed Kant directly and the importance of his theoretical works had been noticed. For, in first two phases either practical questions developed by the author of *Critique of Pure Reason* were tackled – directly rejecting or at least criticizing his theory of cognition – or he was paid homage from the distance, that is "criticism" was treated as a meaningful phenomenon, but only of historical significance. On this basis it has to be acknowledged that when in 1876 Hans Vaihinger stated that "The first question asked to the philosopher today, and not necessarily with respect to his theory of cognition, is: what is Kant for you?" (Vaihinger 1876, 31), the atmosphere in Germany was quite stabilized. While in Poland, more or less at the same time, Kant was appreciated at best "from the distance" and without penetrating into the subtleties of his philosophy.

Indeed, the second half of the seventies in Poland did not pass in the idea of "reversal towards Kant", the reversal signifying, on the one hand, taking up reliable analyses of his philosophy and on the other hand – revealing legitimacy of starting the works at the theory – cognitive program on the basis of Kantian criticism. However – as Henryk Struve underlined many times – just at this time the view expressing the need to reckon with Kant was presented in Poland. The writer in whose work there has been found the echo of "German call" was – as Struve stated – Stefan Pawlicki. But also the author of *Positivism and the tasks of critical philosophy* pointed himself as one of the first writers postulating clear attitude towards Kant philosophy as the "father of philosophical criticism" (Struve 1891, 15).

As far as Pawlicki is concerned, in 1878 in the work under the title *Few Notices on the Basis and Limits of Philosophy* he called the reform of Kant "extremely more

thorough” than reforms conducted by Socrates and Descartes, and he called the method used by him “brilliant”. He stated also that “Who wants to be a philosopher in a real meaning of this word, has to necessarily and seriously reckon with Kant because all philosophy of those time is as if a commentary to him and without him it becomes incomprehensible “ (Pawlicki 1878, 31).

It is worth indicating that notices of Pawlicki concerning Kant philosophy were the response to the work of Morawski under the title *Philosophy and its Tasks* issued in the shape of the book in 1877 (before he published it in the shape of articles in “Lwow Review”). Morawski formulated the view that all the arguments conducted by the Królewiec philosopher in *Critique of Pure Reason* were directed against “the reality of God, soul and the world” and were aimed at consolidation of atheism, skepticism, nihilism positions exclusively. It must be added that this utterance was so extreme that it elicited the reaction not only in the environment of Catholic writers of that time but also roused indignation of some representatives of the previous epoch, for example Aleksander Tyszyński (Tyszyński 1904, 658).

Also Marian Massonius, the co-author of new criticism trend (Neo-Kantianism) in Poland, stated in the obituary of Morawski that although Priest Morawski was the professor of philosophy, he was not a philosopher in the scientific way. He was however – which he underlined strongly – an apologist, “who often used philosophy as a tool of church doctrine, or what he meant by philosophy” (Massonius 1901, 237). He described all his works as “literary”; however, those considered as “philosophical” had – in his opinion – no scientific bias.

It seems however – not entering in the matter if mentioned works had any influence, and if so, what was the influence on the interest in Kant philosophy – that it was becoming the fact. Slowly, the need to answer the question about the significance of Kant’s thought for modern philosophy started to grow. There also appeared the attempts to define the attitude of Polish philosophy towards Kant. What is more, in 1877, in the atmosphere of neocriticism there appeared in Poland the first work written of Henryk Goldberg *Philosophy and Knowledge*. In this work – as Skarga writes – Goldberg, undertaking some problems of theory of cognition, “referred to Kant, interpreting his theses from *Critique of Pure Reason* in a psychological way, as the rest of Neo-Kantians of those days”. Considering the subject of philosophy – the author added – and its significance for human knowledge he made conclusions bearing distinct traces of Fryderyk Albert Lange influence (Skarga 1983, 169).

First philosophical proposals of Goldberg were noticed by his teacher in the Main School. Struve and in his opinion the idea of F. A. Lange’s philosophy as poetical work, were first moved to Poland by Goldberg. Struve also classified his

pupil to Neo-Kantian movement, along with Władysław Mieczysław Kozłowski, Antoni Złotnicki, Adam Mahrburg and Marian Massonius (Struve 1911, 403).

It is worth indicating that Goldberg showed good knowledge of philosophical thought of that time, especially German philosophy, including at that time popular pessimism, philosophy of Eduard von Hartmann and Arthur Schopenhauer. It resulted – as Włodzimierz Tyburski writes – mainly from the fact that Goldberg attentively observed all that was interesting and significant in western philosophy, especially in German one. He devoted his critical commentaries to some of its achievements (Tyburski 1985, 61).

It cannot be excluded therefore – as it is suggested by A. Hochfeld in her work on influences of Neo-Kantianism in Poland – that, Neo-Kantian elements which were visible in Goldberg dissertation were taken from the works of Alois Riehel, or straightforwardly stated – as Tyburski underlines it accurately – that the influences of the early Neo-Kantianism in Poland were not limited only to the shape given to it by the author of *History of Materialistic Philosophy and its Significance Nowadays*.

It allows to formulate a conclusion that representatives of the new criticism philosophy, and especially Massonius, despite of noticing Neo-Kantian phraseology in Goldberg dissertation and the fact that he touches some, typical Neo-Kantian issues as: substance – phenomenon, or the attitude in the constitution of phenomenon, did not include him in the representatives of Neo-Kantian movement in Poland or widely speaking – in the representatives of scientific philosophy.

The situation changed only in the eighties of the 19th century, as it is rightly mentioned by A. Hochfeld, when significant animation in Polish philosophy started. (Skarga – Hochfeld 1980, 69). And the attention Polish philosophers paid to the theory of cognition and getting to know the works of German as well as French Neo-Kantians was typical for it. In this way the eighties of the 19th century finished the stage of positivist philosophy development in Poland and opened at the same time what became known as a “new epoch” (Skarga 1975, 35). It was only then when they started to write more and more about Kant but as viewed by the critics of early Polish positivism. It happened so because a lot of rules and convictions which in the seventies seemed to be undeniable, started to become outdated or obsolete. First of all, scientific thought in its initial shape started to become outdated and along with it its main bearer and propagator – early Polish positivism. Now it had become precisely that what was accused of epistemological unconcern and intellectual poverty. One could also openly observe the attitudes of discouragement and pessimism (Tyburski 1989, 182 and next). Unfavorable atmosphere for science was created, and as its result science was losing its authority, for which young positivists fought so hard. It was not, however, the time in which serious study of Kant was conducted.

That does not make all the difference that – as it is assumed unanimously in literature – from the beginning of the eighties in Poland one could observe a positive interest in Kant’s philosophy. It resulted mainly – as it was rightly noted by Piotr Chmielowski – from the translating F. A. Lange’s *History of Materialistic Philosophy and its Significance Nowadays* into Polish done by Aleksander Świętochowski and Feliks Jezierski. This work appeared in 1881 and undoubtedly – as it is underlined by Chmielowski – became an impulse to undertake serious studies on Kant (Chmielowski 1904, 391-392). Therefore, slowly but still Polish philosophers started to respond to the slogan „zurück zu Kant” which sounded in Germany since 1860 (Chmielowski 1904, 391).

A good example might be an article of Mieczysław Kaufmann published in 1887 in “Prawda”, under the title *Kantism and Natural History*. Its author stated that for several years the revival of the science of “Królewiec giant” might be noticed, mainly in philosophical views of natural scientists, close to *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kaufmann 1887, 41). Although – as it seems – Kaufmann’s intention was to familiarize Polish reader “with the golden thread of Kant thought”, which can be spotted, in his opinion, in modern German science, one of his general claims evoked a strong objection against “Prawda” editorial office. The author of the article expressed his view that practically “the reversal towards Kant may be understood as a general keyword of philosophical circles of this time”. The editorial office, not waiting for possible polemics stated at once unanimously: “this is not the way it is and in general we have to stipulate a partial disagreement with the author’s arguments, overestimating, in our opinion, great significance of Kant” (Kaufmann 1887, 54).

It seems, that it is worth paying attention to this short polemics because it reflects the atmosphere of the reversal to Kant in a symptomatic way at the end of the 19th century. The example mentioned above testifies that the realization of the proclaimed slogans and postulates concerning the scientification of philosophy of that time was not easy. Because “Prawda” of Aleksander Świętochowski – which was to serve to raise a general level of scientific culture of the society – although it declared, with the pen of its philosopher-editor, recognition for Neo-Kantianism as a philosophical movement exempt from simplification of positivism in the range of the theory of cognition and even propagated leaving of the name “positivism” for the benefit of “critical and scientific philosophy”, it was still against all “comebacks” in science and philosophy. Świętochowski himself may have had a tendency – as it seems – to come out of Comte’s system, with the ambition to complete it with the problems of the theory and cognition, at the same time with the acceptance of different versions of positivism, rather than to return to Kant and build critical-scientific philosophy on the basis of Kant’s criticism.

However, it was a fact – as Skarga writes – that this time is marked by directing of the Polish philosophers attention at the theory of cognition. He also adds that after 1880 articles about Kant started to appear as if from a cornucopia. Representatives of Polish philosophy like Władysław Mieczysław Kozłowski, Mieczysław Kaufmann, Seweryn Smolikowski, Maurycy Straszewski, Witold Rubczyński or at last Marian Massonius, Adam Mahrburg and Mścisław Wartenberg wrote about him. However, another main representative of new critical trend in Poland, along with Massonius, namely Mahrburg, on the hundredth anniversary of Kant's death, in 1904, did not hide the fact that in Poland practically no-one took an interest in Kant until then. Among his works many publications are devoted to critical analyses of Kant's philosophy which lead us to use them according to one's own consideration.

Mahrburg article under the title *Emanuel Kant* was to present his views in the most general way, taking into special consideration – as the author assured – tangent points of Kant's doctrine and the issues of modern science in general and philosophy in particular (Mahrburg 1914, 287). On this basis one can state that it was just an anniversary homage paid by Mahrburg to the Królewiec philosopher. Simultaneously, the author practically supported the opinion, quite popular among the group of philosophers, that the knowledge and influence of Kant's writings in Poland are still not sufficient. The subject was described, for example, by Antoni Lange in the article *Emmanuel Kant*, W. M. Kozłowski in his *Kant and Urgent Issues of the Century* or P. Chmielowski in the study *Kant in Poland*. Also Massonius published the article *Immanuel Kant*, bringing nothing above what he had already written before, especially in his Doctor's thesis in 1890 under the title *Über Kant's transzendente Ästhetik* (Massonius 1890), which actually included the first discerningly conducted criticism of Kant's philosophy in Polish literary output (Szotek 200, 63–109).

It is essential that nearly all authors generally expressed conviction that Polish thought should be enriched by a thorough knowledge of Kant's philosophy. They concurred that really at the beginning of the 19th century one can speak about new interest in Kant, however, the important fact is they understood this interest in a different way. However, more so, they understood it in a way different to the one of Polish positivism. And – what has to be underlined – they hoped again to discover possibilities of using different motifs of Kant's philosophy in order to build up their own philosophical positions, often digressing from positivist and scientific roots.

Indeed, still at the beginning of the 19th century, only few experts of his philosophy could be counted, although – as Mahrburg wrote – “All more distinguished philosophers of our time have gone through Kant school and all of them feel the influence of his powerful thought” (Mahrburg 1914, 307). But the incentive to a deeper familiarization with his works was constantly renewed by

Polish philosophers. Weryho's statement was really characteristic in this aspect, speaking in the name of the editorial office in the program article opening the first issue of "Philosophical Review" in 1897. He stated there that in these days "A general reversal towards Kant was emphasized" (Weryho 1897/1898, V). The sense of this Weryho statement resulted mostly from – as it may be considered – his attitude towards philosophy in this time.

The editor of "Philosophical Review" demanded first of all that philosophy should be practiced in "concise" and "scientific" ways. Therefore, it was supposed to be based in its investigations on the results of sciences, along with the critical epistemological reflection.

"Being based on the sciences results – he wrote – and at the same time on the analysis of the crucial cognitive processes, philosophy creates general rules and hints, which serve as the basis of the further progress of these sciences (Weryho 1897/1898, II). What is more, and the same important, philosophy, thanks to the ordering of some notional categories and presenting of different solutions, and at the same time working on the critical attitude, may – in his opinion – constitute the basis of formulating one's own, independent convictions, preferably based on the research carried out individually.

Indeed, "criticism" in its very wide and general understanding, became a current slogan at that time. But it referred in a higher degree to general theory and cognition reflection rather than to real Kant continuation. However, as far as "Philosophical Review" was concerned, even despite of such ambiguous understanding of criticism, one could easily realize that by his understanding of philosophy Weryho declared his adherence to positivist and Neo-Kantian trend.

This reversal towards Kant started, however, a bit too late, when scientific thought started to be outdated and other tendencies, modernistic tendencies, started to be more significant. They were especially expressed in the attempts to find the possibilities to overcome agnosticism (getting to know what is nor recognizable) within the scope of Kant's views as well as refer to Kant's theory of culture and philosophical anthropology to justify the conception of the man as an acting creature (Szymańska 1976, 229).

The process of reading of Kant's works has changed. The cognitive process started to be formulated as a kind of human activity, based on constant mastering in gaining of the knowledge, which is as a result the condition of constant improvement of the man and his happiness. Kant thought, and first of all, his philosophy of the man was read as a philosophy of the act – as a philosophy of the man who gets to know, acts and, at last, creates culture.

The beginning of the 19th century in Poland displays such a variety of interests in Kant – with relation to what was characteristic to positivism – that actually one could again speak about the return of Kant. But this reception of Kant's philosophy was of a particular kind. Namely, for Polish philosophers Kant

was rather a means than a target. Basically one paid attention only to these sides of Kantianism from which benefits for given targets and interests could be attained.

References

- ANDRZEJEWSKI, B. (1983): Problem of the Noumenon in Kantism and Neokantism. In: Kozłowski, R. (ed.): *In the Circle of Kant Inspirations*. Warszawa – Poznań.
- CHMIEŁOWSKI, P. (1904): *Kant In Poland*. Philosophical Review, p. 4.
- KAUFMANN, M. (1887): *Kantism and Natural History*. Prawda, nr. 4, nr.5.
- MAHRBURG, A. (1914): Emanuel Kant. In: Spasowski, W. (ed.): *Philosophical Writings of Adam Mahrburg*. T. 2. Warszawa.
- MASSONIUS, M. (1901): *R.I.P. Priest Marian Morawski*. Książka, nr. 6.
- MASSONIUS, M. (1890): *Über Kant's transzendente Ästhetik*. Leipzig.
- PAWLICKI, S. (1878): *Few Notices on the Basis and Limits of Philosophy*. Kraków.
- SKARGA, B. – HOCHFELDOWA, A. (1980): Polish Philosophical Thought in Positivism. In: Hochfeldowa, A. – Skarga, B. (eds.): *700 years of Polish Thought. Philosophy and Social Thought in years 1865–1895*. Cz. 1. ed. Warszawa.
- SKARGA, B. (1975): On Few Problems of Polish Positivism. In: Skarga, B. (ed.): *Polish Philosophical and Social Thought*. T. 2. Warszawa.
- SKARGA, B. (1983): Theoreticians of Positivism. In: Walicki, A. (ed.): *Outline of Polish Philosophy 1815–1918*. Warszawa.
- STRUVE, H. (1911): *History of Logics as a Theory of Cognition in Poland*. Warszawa.
- STRUVE, H. (1891): *Positivism and the Tasks of Critical Philosophy*. Biblioteka Warszawska, T. 1.
- SZOTEK, B. (2001): *Marian Massonius and Neocritical Polish Philosophy*. Katowice.
- SZYMAŃSKA, B. (1976): Antoni Lange and Kant's Thought. In: Garewicz, J. (ed.): *Kant's Heritage. Materials from Kant Session*. Warszawa.
- TYBURSKI, W. (1985): Henryk Goldberg on the Subject of Philosophy and Ethics. In: *Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Philosophy*. T. 9. Toruń.
- TYBURSKI, W. (1989): *Ideology of Science in the Consciousness of Polish Intellectual Circles of Positivism. Development – Metamorphosis – Breakdown*. Toruń.
- TYSZYŃSKI, A. (1904): *Critical Writings*. T. 4. Kraków.
- VAIHINGER, H. (1876): *Hartmann, Dühring und Lange zur Geschichte der Deutschen Philosophie im XIX. Jahrhundert. Ein kritischer Essay*. Iserlohn.
- WERYHO, W. (1897/1898): *Introductory Word*. Philosophical Review, nr 1.