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Christian Philosophy? The Analysis of the Neo-Scholastic Argumentation of Franciszek Gabryl and Kazimierz Wais

Introduction

One of the better-known elements of the debate concerning Christian philosophy was a discussion which was going on in the 1930's, started by Bréhier, who questioned both the possibility of the existence of such philosophy and the historical fact of the formation of the systems to be called by this name. The rationalism and naturalism of Greek thought, which was the basis of forming Christian philosophy, in his opinion excluded any possibility of any relation with the supernatural order and suprarational cognition.¹

The opposite of this standpoint includes the views represented by Gilson, who spoke not only in favor of the existence of such philosophy, which cannot be understood without considering the Christian

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¹ Stanisław Kamiński, “Metody współczesnej metafizyki” [Methods of Contemporary Metaphysics] in *Filozofia i metoda* [Philosophy and Method] (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1993), 82.



context in which it arose, but also in favor of a philosophy which is consciously cultivated under the effect of revelation regarded as an indispensable aid to reason and hence having the full right to be called Christian. Besides, although none of the domains investigated by philosophy is closed to it, it concentrated on problems of key importance for religion. Consequently, the specific feature of this philosophy is also the fact that it proved especially creative in the sphere of reflections on the existence of God and His nature as well as the origins, nature, and destiny of the human soul.²

The requirement of rationality, which is satisfied by Christian philosophy, limits the range of the studied religious truths to those that are accessible to rational verification. Gilson specifies that the characteristic study conducted by him refers to the historical concretizations of Christian philosophy, while an attempt at creating the concept “Christian philosophy,” abstracting from the context of its formation, leads to the conclusion that “no philosophy can be Christian in the same way as it cannot be Jewish or Muslim, and the concept of Christian philosophy is devoid of any sense like the concepts of Christian physics or mathematics.”³

The impossibility of cultivating Christian philosophy as such already appeared earlier in the statement of other authors representing neo-scholasticism associated with Christianity, or more closely, with Catholicism. In this context, the standpoint of D. Mercier, initiator of the renaissance of scholasticism at the Leuven Institute of Philosophy, deserves to be mentioned. Besides being rather reserved in using the notion of “Christian philosophy,” he recommended avoiding naive direct apologetics:

² Étienne Gilson, *Duch filozofii średniowiecznej* [The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy] (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1958), 39. The book includes a series of lectures delivered at the University of Aberdeen in 1931 and 1932.

³ Gilson, *Duch filozofii*, 38 (my translation.)

Beware of searching for evidence of our religious conviction in too daring, however unnecessary hypotheses. Let examples explain our thought. [...] a few years ago, a famous French astronomer posed a thesis on the formation of the solar system, which in certain points changed Laplace's theory and according to which our planet was supposed to have been created before the sun. Didn't we see immediately that some apologists grabbed this alleged evidence to confirm the Biblical description of the date of the sun light and declared themselves instantly without any scientific investigation to be for Fay and against Laplace?⁴

It seems that while wanting to be in agreement with Mercier's intentions, the concept of naive apologetics would have to include the tendencies to an eclectic choice of arguments to support particular Christian truths which are within the philosophical discourse from among different systems of thinking, without any care taken for the inner coherence of this argumentation.

What we can see in the statements by Polish neo-scholastics from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries who had an opportunity to study in Leuven and get acquainted with the program of renewing Scholastics formulated there is consistent avoidance of the name "Christian philosophy," but also emphasis placed on the fact that the reflection cultivated by them did not exceed the competences of natural reason. This was reflected for example in the postulate to avoid direct apologetic involvement, i.e., a confessional approach to philosophy and science. Such an attitude would be expressed in striving to correlate their claims with the data of the Revelation interpreted within theology, which was written about by Mercier in the cited fragment. On the other hand, the so-called negative rule of faith was observed

⁴ Desiree Mercier, "Neoscholastycyzm (warunki jego żywotności)" [Neo-scholasticism, the conditions of its vivacity], *Przegląd Powszechny* 81, no. 1 (1904): 6 (my translation.)

which forbade accepting what contradicts faith as true, and attempts were made to rationally justify *preambula fidei*, i.e., the fundamental truths of the Christian worldview possible to be explained rationally.

The postulate to reject the standpoints contradictory to faith was validated by means of the requirement of rationality since its adoption was to be preceded by the rational justification of credibility of the Revelation, which on the other hand imposed an obligation to follow this negative rule of faith, which is in accordance with the principle: “truth cannot contradict truth.” Obeying this principle and undertaking problems which were significant from the point of view of faith determined the specific character of the Christian way of cultivating philosophy.

Additionally, what should be considered one of the characteristic features of the ways of justification applied by neo-scholastics is the avoidance of the aforementioned confessional involvement not only in declarations and the choice of arguments derived from different philosophical traditions which would mean going beyond “intelligent eclecticism”, i.e., consent for what Mercier called direct apologetic engagement. With the aim of supporting the thesis that the Polish neo-scholasticism avoided such engagement, the author will present the results of studies on the legacy of two of its representatives, namely Kazimierz Wais and Franciszek Gabryl. They show the way of justifying the most significant truths included within *preambula fidei*, namely the existence of God and the existence of the human immortal soul.

I

Kazimierz Wais is the author of a work wholly devoted to the philosophical problems concerning God. The publication was a result of a cycle of lectures meant for the intelligentsia and delivered in Przemyśl in 1909. *Nota bene*, that was his only public appearance except didac-

tics at the clerical seminary, as he focused all his energy on scientific work.⁵ The first edition of “little theodicy,” as the Author called it in the Preface, was entitled *Czy jest Bóg i jaki jest Bóg* [Is there God and what is God like] and was published in 1912. The second, extended one appeared under a slightly changed title *Bóg, Jego istnienie i istota* [God, His existence and essence] in 1929. In the preface to the first edition Wais defines the task he set to himself in the following way: “present the existence of God, His essence, attributes and relation to the world—by means of the reason itself, and hence independently of the supernatural revelation.”⁶

Nevertheless, the requirement of the rational character of philosophical reflection emphasized by representatives of neo-scholasticism was not limited to the above formulated autonomy. The fragments under analysis show that their authors also cared about the coherence of the reasoning by giving up a syncretic choice of arguments derived from different traditions. A good example is the confrontation of K. Wais and F. Gabryl with the standpoint represented by Kant on the existence of God, the immortal soul and free will, or the postulates of practical reason questioned as a result of *The Critique of Pure Reason* that he needed, as is well-known, to found ethics. Gabryl compared the

⁵ Stefan Momidłowski, “Życie i działalność ś.p. Ks. Kazimierza Waisa” [Life and activity of deceased Fr Kazimierz Wais], *Collectanea Theologica* 16, no. 1 (1935): 7.

⁶ It would be hard not to notice the similarity between this declaration and the words by Anselm of Canterbury included in the *Prologue to Monologion*: “For the writing of this meditation they prescribed—in accordance more with their own wishes than with the ease of the task or with my ability—the following format: that nothing at all in the meditation would be argued on Scriptural authority, but that in unembellished style and unsophisticated arguments and with uncomplicated disputation rational necessity would tersely prove to be the case, and truth’s clarity would openly manifest to be the case, whatever the conclusion resulting from the distinct inquires would declare.” *Complete philosophical and theological treatises of Anselm of Canterbury* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000), 1.

thinker from Königsberg to a novelist who nearly leads the hero of the novel to death to save them unexpectedly at the very last moment: “In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant doomed certainty in cognition to destruction, but at the same time in *The Critique of Practical Reason*, he shows rescue for certainty.”⁷

The criticism of such reasoning is justified by the conviction that no agreement can be given to the autonomy of ethics in relation to the theory of being since this would be equivalent to dividing reason into various parts arriving at different conclusions. This is why even though Kant’s standpoint from *The Critique of Practical Reason* seems to confirm Christian views, Gabryl does not want to approve of his reasoning:

Therefore, if Kant had stuck to the result that he achieved in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, the result would have been very negative, Kant’s work would have been destructive, but he would not be blamed for inconsistency in thinking and loyalty in behavior. [...] Having buried the three aforementioned noumena by means of the criticism of pure reason, Kant introduces them again by means of the criticism of practical reason. It could easily seem to a careless reader that Kant handsomely repaired the harm while the way he did it was of minor importance.⁸

The effectiveness of this “repair” was, however, regarded by Gabryl as doubtful since Kant writes of ideas—postulates which the real being does not have to refer to. Therefore, Gabryl gives up looking for an ally in the Königsberg philosopher, the superficial interpretation of

⁷ Franciszek Gabryl, *Noetyka* [Noetics] (Lublin: Towarzystwo Wiedzy Chrześcijańskiej, 1929), 322 (my translation.)

⁸ Gabryl, *Noetyka*, 328 (my translation.)

whom could lead to the conclusion that the effect of his *Criticism* is at least to some extent convergent with the Christian standpoint.⁹

Wais treats Kant's views in this respect slightly differently. On the one hand, he states that "Kant's ethical proof cannot be defended."¹⁰ It is not only untrue from the point of view of anthropology saying that man has an inherent pursuit of happiness in nature and such motivation cannot be eliminated as Kant wants to do, although, as is emphasized by Wais, certainly this should not be the only motif. The role assigned to God emerging from Kantian considerations also cannot be accepted.¹¹

On the other hand, while referring to "some Christian thinkers," Wais tries to reconstruct the evidence for the existence of God pertaining to Kant's reflections, namely of deontological and eudemonic character.¹² The former, while acknowledging the existence of moral laws within us which are independent of our will and the trespassing of which gives rise to a sanction in the form of pangs of conscience, and commanding us to change our behavior, ultimately refers us to the law-

⁹ If Gabryl had wanted to treat Kantian postulates for practical reason as an argument for the existence of God, it would have sufficed not to formulate the accusation that those were only ideas of whose real existence we know nothing. Then it could be tentatively that in fact Kant proposes theist philosophy.

¹⁰ Kazimierz Wais, *Bóg, Jego istnienie i istota* [God, His existence and essence] (Lwów: Biblioteka Religijna, 1929), 134.

¹¹ "If there is autonomy of morality, i.e., moral rules depend on us only if the bliss of the future life is necessarily connected with morality as its cause, then God is redundant. You will say with Kant that God rewards, and even has to reward virtue; however, for me it is an obvious thing that in this case he plays a secondary, or rather unnecessary role." Wais, *Bóg, Jego istnienie i istota*, 134. (This and future quotes from the book are in my translation.)

¹² On the grounds of *The Critique of Practical Reason* itself, moral argumentation in favor of the existence of God does not lose its value since the question about the source of postulates finds the answer in inner experience. It is only placing these problems in a broader Kantian context and considering the results of *The Critique of Practical Reason* that eliminates the value of these considerations, as Gabryl emphasizes.

giver—God.¹³ The other, which starts with the pursuit of happiness common to all people, states that if all other desires that appear already on the level of animals are satisfied, it cannot be otherwise in this case while referring to man. He also has to be satisfied, and this can be fully and lastingly done only by God.

Although Wais sees a greater logical correctness of this evidence (built on the idea from *The Critique of Practical Reason*) as compared to *stricte* Kantian ideas, what he ascribes to them is only probability. On the other hand, he considers Thomas Aquinas' Ways to be the argumentation which gives certainty since "in the mind of man who understands their meaning, they cause the state of strong reconciliation with their ultimate result, which is summarized in the sentence: God exists."¹⁴ This is, however, free certainty, different from necessary certainty and devoid of perfect certainty and hence leaving space for free choice.

It also deserves to be noticed that the two proofs referred to by Wais attempt to give the answer to the second part of the question appearing in the title of the first edition of his Theodicy, since the conclusion following from them is not only the existence of Primary Cause but also its nature as Being—the Creator of immortal man. The attributes of God's nature are of course viewed by him more broadly in the chapters which—due to the limited scope of the present article—have to be

¹³ "Laws necessarily require a lawgiver, and common and absolute laws require the supreme lawgiver. Indeed, the reason for the laws spoken about here can be neither people, who are their subject, nor their upbringing or environment. [...] Hence, there is God as the highest lawgiver of moral norms." Wais, *Bóg, Jego istnienie i istota*, 135–136.

¹⁴ Wais, *Bóg, Jego istnienie i istota*, 139. "However, it needs to be added that the certainty spoken about here cannot be connected with such a state of mind where any difficulties and accusations against it disappear. [...] In our case to have certainty it suffices to recognize that the truth concerning the existence of God excludes the statements contradictory to it."

left out. The quoted fragments show, however, that neo-scholastics conduct a critical dialogue with contemporary philosophical thought and set high requirements for the argumentation on which to base their standpoints. Justification of the existence of God, which is one of the tasks set out in their reflection, is based on a solid, rational foundation and it is free from naive apologetics.

II

One of the significant issues of the Christian worldview was the existence of the immortal soul. By reducing the phenomena traditionally considered as signs of a human soul's action, psychology, which was developing rapidly in the 19th century, quite frequently questioned its existence. Two manuals of psychology appeared at the beginning of the 20th century: four volumes by Wais, which came out in the years 1902–1903, and the volume by Gabryl published in 1906. Both include argumentation in favor of the substantiality and immortality of the soul. Wais regards psychology as a part of philosophical anthropology, thus revealing the influence of Mercier, who emphasized that psychology was a part of philosophy dealing with the human soul and treated its subject broadly, stating that this subject is “the whole man, i.e. man viewed in all signs of life.”¹⁵ As opposed to post-Cartesian traditions, ascribing only the domain of conscious phenomena to psychology, the Belgian scholar referred to the Aristotelian concept of the soul by distinguishing its functions: organic life—its nature and origins, sensory, i.e. animalistic life, also viewed from the angle of the origins

¹⁵ Desiree Mercier, *Psychologia* [Psychology] trans. Antoni Krasnowolski (Warszawa: *Przegląd Filozoficzny*, 1901), 6. (This quote is in my own translation from Polish.)

and nature, and mental, i.e. rational life, where apart from the nature and origins of man, the issue of man's destiny also appears. This most important part obviously includes the conclusions on the substantiality, spirituality, and non-complexity of the human soul. Wais likewise refers to this concept by analyzing the work of reason and will within man's mental activities, with the aim of explaining the whole of those phenomena through the cause, which is the soul.

Gabryl, on the other hand, leaves out vegetative signs and begins with sensory cognition to move on to mental cognition reflected in the creation of images, notions, judgments and finally reasonings, which are qualitatively different and which are externalized in speech.

The comparison of the content of the manuals by Polish neo-scholastics with the work by Mercier (published for the first time in Leuven in 1883) shows that this area of knowledge is gradually freeing itself from the problems which are the subject of Christian revelation. The Polish authors omit the issue of man's destiny to which the Belgian philosopher devoted a paragraph entitled *Nauka Wiary o nadprzyrodzonych przeznaczeniach ludzkości* [Knowledge of Faith on supernatural destinies of humanity].

While discussing sense impressions, the Polish philosophers raise the issue of their subject. In this context, they also undertake a discussion with the materialistic interpretation, reducing the subject of the impression to the human body, especially the brain, as well as with spiritualism, questioning a direct part of the body in sensing and limiting its role to the adoption of the stimulus.

While rejecting the materialistic interpretation, Wais at the same time states the unity and indivisibility of impression, which is supposed to exclude the possibility of sensing it only through the body composed of many parts. Because this argument derives from the Cartesian tradition, the author feels obliged to outline the difference between his standpoint and spiritualism, which he rejects: "Although sensing is one, it is not singular as Cartesians believe. The arguments

they refer to only prove that a singular element, i.e., the soul takes part in sensing.”¹⁶ This addition is significant inasmuch as the argument quoted above was used to justify the spirituality of the human soul.¹⁷

While undertaking this problem, Wais emphasizes: “Spirituality, which is non-materiality of the human soul must not be confused with singularity,”¹⁸ thus definitely giving up the argument derived from the tradition which was critically assessed and rejected by neo-scholasticism. The analysis of sensing only leads him to the statement that it is a common function of the soul and the body. Gabryl, on the other hand, arrives at the same conclusion in a different way. First, he proves that the materialistic interpretation does not suffice to explain how impressions coming from external stimuli are created in the subject because it is known that these stimuli diametrically differ from the effects they cause. That is why it should be assumed that “in its impressions, the sense comprises a purely subjective side which cannot be explained only by the movement of the matter.”¹⁹ The subject of sensing also cannot be the soul itself, since when we are deprived of some sense, we are deprived of some impressions. Besides, contrary to the

¹⁶ Kazimierz Wais, *Psychologia* [Psychology] (Warszawa: Geberthner i Wolf, 1902, vol. I), 195. (This and future quotes are in my own translation.)

¹⁷ “Some spiritualistic philosophers from the Platonic or Cartesian schools believe that sensing requires a non-complex subject as it is principally non-complex and indivisible itself; Balmes also got tempted by this argument and quite a few followers of Scholastic doctrines accepted it without noticing that it contradicts the most fundamental statements by Scholasticism. Those writers confuse two principally different concepts, unity, or undivided still going on and non-complexity, or indivisibility. Sensing is one; however, it is non-complex but extended and hence it is only an illusion to believe that non-complexity, that is spirituality of the human soul, can be proved by means of the attributes of sensing.” Mercier, *Psychologia*, 235 (my translation.)

¹⁸ Wais, *Psychologia* [Psychology] (Warszawa: Geberthner i Wolf, 1903, vol. 3), 151.

¹⁹ Franciszek Gabryl, *Psychologia* [Psychology] (Kraków: Księgarnia i Stereotypia Kozańskiego, 1906), 153. (This and future quotes in my own translation.)

Cartesian belief that impression is something simple which cannot be divided and thus must have an unextended soul as the subject, Gabryl was convinced that sensing is a complex act which is extended like the organism. This is why it exists in the extended and divisible substance. If then neither the soul nor the body separately makes the subject of impressions, it must be their combination.

Gabryl remains faithful to the method of argumentation also in relation to the soul's substantiality by pointing to the necessity of the existence of the subject of psychical acts and showing the insufficiency of attempts to explain them in the spirit of materialism. Likewise, starting from psychical symptoms, Wais argues in favor of the existence of their subject: "Everybody acknowledges the existence of psychical symptoms. But if there are symptoms, there must also be their subject. Who will believe, for example, that a thought was possible without a thinker, or wishing without a wisher? This would mean saying that there is movement but there is nothing which moves, that there is action but there is nothing which acts. [...] Therefore, the existence of psychical symptoms necessarily calls for the existence of substance."²⁰

When justifying the substantiality of the soul, both philosophers also refer to the testimony of consciousness pointing to the existence of the self where psychical acts are subjectified and which determines each man's identity.²¹

Wais, following Mercier, understands the spirituality of the soul as the latter's non-materiality, which is the inner independence from the matter consisting in the capacity of performing at least certain acts without its participation, whereas non-complexity is the condition of

²⁰ Wais, *Psychologia*, vol. 3, 127–128.

²¹ Cf. Wais, *Psychologia*, vol. 3, 128–137. Gabryl, *Psychologia*, 393–394. In his *Psychology*, Mercier leaves out the issue of the human soul's substantiality while emphasizing the unity of the psychophysical nature of man. On the other hand, he is concerned with proving the spirituality and non-complexity of the soul.

this spirituality. Hence, the justification of spirituality means pointing to the acts which are carried out independently of the body. Gabryl, on the other hand, reduces the soul's spirituality first of all to its non-complexity:

The concept of spirit comprises the following features: spirit is substance and not an affliction or function of the matter, as Jodl would like it to be; this substance is simple, meaning not composed of quantitative and material parts; finally, this substance must be endowed with reason and will. The notion of simple self (*ens simplex*) should not be the stone of offence since it is used not only by metaphysics but mathematics as well [...] As far as the soul's simplicity is concerned, however, we cannot be content with the negation of complexity only; indeed, the notion of simplicity applied towards the spiritual self expresses a very positive feature, namely that the self does not possess any parts on whose existence the existence of the whole would depend, but that it is a substantial being, one in itself, undivided and indivisible.²²

The justification of non-complexity will consist in the analysis of human actions as the signs of the soul's activity from the angle of their simplicity with the aim of showing that their subject is simple. According to the adopted concept of psychology as the philosophy of man, clearly accented by Wais, the issue of the soul's immortality is also undertaken within the framework of psychological considerations.²³ The first (metaphysical) argument for the natural immortality of the soul is its non-complexity and spirituality. The ethical argument

²² Gabryl, *Psychologia*, 405.

²³ "If the study of the soul is to be comprehensive, truly scientific and deep, it must aim at indicating the highest and ultimate causes in order to answer the questions: what is the human soul, what are its beginning and end, who are we and where are we going?" Wais, *Psychologia*, 8.

referring to divine justice was also regarded as convincing.²⁴ Although the teleological and psychological arguments on the desire of happiness, intellectual and moral perfection, which will not be satisfied in the life on earth, were also used, this was done with significant objections and, as was remarked above, while proving the existence of God.

Gabryl emphasizes the significance of solving the problem of the soul's immortality in the aspects pertaining to the worldview as well as the practical importance and uses it to explain the numerous discussions around this issue which he joined with his book *Nieśmiertelność duszy ludzkiej w świetle rozumu i nowoczesnej nauki* [The human soul's immortality in the light of reason and modern science]. Pointing to the practical consequences of views as the reason to accept or reject theism was considered by him as a poor argument. On the other hand, in case of a discussion with positivism, which he regarded as guilty of lowering the moral level of society by narrowing the perspective of man only to the mundane dimension, he also referred to this argument. However, it needs to be remarked that it appeared in the context of reflections on the common good and this is the reason why using it seems justified.

Conclusions

Despite the fact that the reference point for the Polish neo-scholasticism was the program of its renewal prepared in Leuven and articulatio-

²⁴“Any law requires the due sanction; the law must hold in one hand the penalty for criminals and the wreath of reward in the other for those who behave in accordance with it. God is not only just, but He is justice itself; therefore, He must mete out penalties and rewards with mathematical accuracy and according to human needs and because if He does not this justice on the earth, He must complete it in future life.” Gabryl, *Psychologia*, 435.

ed on the Polish ground in the words by Mercier published in *Przegląd Powszechny*, Gilson's differentiation into philosophy as such and its historical concretizations makes it possible to better understand its representatives undertaking the tasks which are characteristic of Christian philosophy, without giving it this name.

The argumentation analyzed in the present article is representative of the Polish neo-scholasticism of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries²⁵ and it shows the attention paid to the rational character and the observance of the rule of confessional non-engagement, which does not stand in opposition to the observance of the negative rule of faith. It undertook issues which are important from the point of view of the Christian worldview. It seems then that Polish neo-scholasticism, inspired by the European one, did not fall behind it and realized the maximalist ambitions reflected in the problems undertaken and the level of justifying it in a similar manner.

²⁵ Documenting this through the analysis of the rest of their statements and the publications of other neo-scholastics is not possible within the framework of one article; for more on this subject, see: Rafał Charzyński, *Problem polemiczno-apologetycznego charakteru neoscholastyki polskiej* [The problem of the polemic-apologetical character of Polish neo-scholasticism] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2016).



Christian Philosophy?
The Analysis of the Neo-Scholastic Argumentation
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SUMMARY

The paper analyzes the argumentation that the representatives of Polish neo-scholasticism, Gabryl and Wais, used to justify the existence of God and the immortal human soul. The analysis shows the high intellectual requirements observed by both thinkers. Not only have they avoided naive confessional apologetics, but they were critical when choosing arguments from different philosophical traditions as well. The scientific activity of the two scholars was a reflection of the program of the renewal of scholasticism formulated in Leuven. The features of this program were both restraint in using the term “Christian philosophy” and avoiding confessional apologetics on the one hand and the preservation of its specificity on the other. This specificity was expressed in undertaking the traditional tasks of Christian philosophy: undertaking the justification of *preambula fidei* and the observation of the negative role of faith.

Keywords: Apologetics, Christian philosophy, neo-scholasticism, negative role of faith, Gabryl, Wais

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