

## THE SCHOLASTIC MORAL PHILOSOPHY IN LITHUANIA

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The scholastic moral philosophy in Lithuanian schools has never been studied up to now.

The course in moral philosophy, in ethics, was to be taught in the last year of instruction and was to conclude the philosophy program. However, due to the lack of time, most often, the philosophy program was concluded with metaphysics, and ethics was not even begun. In the judgement of educators of the time, this was not a serious deficiency, because the student would proceed to the faculty of theology and there take a course in moral theology. This could be used to explain the fact that in the manuscript section of the research library of the State University of V. Kapsukas in Vilnius only four ethics courses are preserved. The first is an ethics course (No. 2056) taught at the Vilnius University in 1684, probably, by Jeronimas Burba.<sup>1</sup> This was established indirectly. In the notes of a physics course (No. 2175) taught in 1682-83, and made by the same student as those of the ethics, Lithuania, Vilnius, and the Jesuits in Vilnius are mentioned several times. Thus, we may conclude that the course was taught at Vilnius. In the register of academic degrees granted by the university, the **Laureae Academicae**, it is indicated that in 1681-1684, the philosophy course at the university was taught by Jeronimas Burba. And this fits courses No. 2175 and No. 2056. Furthermore, on the last page of course No. 2056, Burba's name is indicated. The second surviving ethics course is the course taught by Motiejus Karskis in 1699 at Vilnius University (No. 2090). There is a second example of Karskis' ethics course (No. 1230), written down by another student. In this course, neither the author, nor the place, nor the year are indicated, but a comparison of the two courses shows that they do not differ in a single word. This is perfectly understandable, since the lectures were dictated. The third surviving ethics course, it seems, belongs to Kristupas Einoravičius, which he gave at the Vilnius university in 1703 (No. 771). The author of this course is not indicated, however, from various inscriptions it can be established that it was given at the Vilnius University. In the **Laureae Academicae** it is indicated that Einoravičius taught philosophy at the Vilnius University in 1700-1703.<sup>2</sup> This fits course No. 771. The fourth surviving ethics course was taught by Jacobus Rahasch, probably a German, in 1700 (No. D 1156). There are no indications as to where it was taught, but when an academic degree was granted to him, the **Laureae Academicae** indicates that he taught philosophy in the Kražiai college.<sup>3</sup> Some authors (S. Rostovsky, K. Estreicher) claim that the noted historian A. Kojalavičius (Koyalowicz), who also taught philosophy at the Vilnius university, in 1645 published the **Compendium Ethicae Aristotelicae**. However, the attempt to locate this work was not successful.

Thus, even if not regularly, ethics courses were taught in Lithuanian schools during the period of scholastic philosophy. In the **Laureae Academicae**, there are some dozen or so entries concerning ethics courses taught in the Vilnius University. Sometimes, ethics was taught by a person who did not teach in any other area of philosophy. The position of such an "ethics professor" in the Vilnius University was occupied by T. Rainutis in 1784, I. Burnevičius in 1734, and others.<sup>4</sup>

Like the metaphysics course, the ethics course was short. J. Burba's course takes up 24 pages, while the other ethics courses take up only ten or a dozen pages. However, when the ethics course was taught by a separate teacher, the course, very likely, was expanded.

From the point of view of the problems raised, the course by K. Einoravičius differs somewhat from the others, which others in this respect are completely alike.

These are the questions discussed in Rahasch's ethics course:

Moral philosophy, or plainly stated, ethics. Only one treatise discusses the nature of ethics, man's natural happiness, and the moral virtues.

About the nature of ethics. About the natural happiness of man. About the moral virtues in general; about the mean and the opposition of the virtues to vices. About the moral virtues separately: about wisdom; about justice; about temperance; about courage. About death.

As everywhere else in scholastic philosophy so in the ethics course, Aristotle was the chief authority. The problems of the ethics course are clearly taken from Aristotle's **Ethics**. However, just like the metaphysics course was not the teaching of and commentary on Aristotle's **Metaphysics**, so the ethics course, because it was so short, touched upon only some of the problems of Aristotle's ethics, this was based upon the authorities of the period of the flourishing of scholasticism and the so-called second scholasticism.

Ethics as a discipline was understood as follows: "Ethics is the science which studies the acts of man's will, which includes virtuousness and moral happiness."<sup>5</sup> The point of departure of scholastic ethics was the same as that of the ethical theories of antiquity. Aristotle and particularly the ethics of the Hellenistic period emphasized that the goal of man's life is the achievement of happiness. This view was taken over by St. Augustine who merely rejected the conception of happiness of antiquity. As a philosopher of Christianity, Augustine asserts that only god can give happiness. Augustine's views concerning the ends of man's life were further developed in scholasticism, without straying very far from their main principles. In Lithuanian schools also it was taught that happiness is the end of man's life. One course is even titled in this way: "The science about happiness, or ethics."<sup>6</sup> It was said that the object of ethics had been well stated by Thomas Aquinas; ethics establishes the rules for achieving the supreme good, i. e. happiness. Theology does not abolish ethics: to strive for god as the supreme end is the domain of theology and not of ethics. It was said that in striving for god, man is striving for happiness, however, we can achieve happiness only by means of a virtuous life, the rules of which are determined by ethics.<sup>7</sup>

Ethics was understood in a wide sense, including within it politics and economics: "What are the parts of ethics? I reply: politics, economics, and individual ethics."<sup>8</sup> With its object so expanded, it had to be something like social theory in general. However, this understanding of the object of ethics was mostly a nominal one. Political questions were discussed to some extent, with the attempt to adapt Aristotle's views to the spirit of the times. There were said to be three forms of government: monarchic, aristocratic, and democratic. The democratic form of government was rejected: it was said that the people would be incapable of ruling, for "where there is a multitude, there is chaos." Monarchy faces the danger of being perverted into tyranny, the aristocratic form, into oligarchy. Therefore, it was said that a mixed form is best, a king and parliament or senate.<sup>9</sup> This was the form of government of the Lithuanian-Polish state, and the intent was to justify it by arguments from Aristotle's philosophy.

Economics was not understood as concrete economics or political economy, but as the ability to take care of one's family and home, as the concern for the happiness of one's family. This understanding of economics was also taken from Aristotle who in justifying a slave holding system did not attribute human rights to slaves. Aristotle asserted that the level of morality is correlated with one's wealth, so that slaves, who completely lacked any wealth, were lowest in morals; honor, justice, and the like was foreign to them. Aristotle's position here was not consistent with the principles of Christian morality. The church, having justified feudal exploitation, tried to idealize feudal relations, to depict them as humane and thus it had to stand against extremes, against the transformation of serfdom into slavery.<sup>10</sup>

The questions of what was called economics, like those of politics, were touched upon only superficially or not discussed at all. Ethics was treated as the theory of individual conduct (**monastica sive solitaria**), providing advice on how to live and analyzing moral values. For this reason, it was considered in part theoretical, in part a practical science.

It was asserted that the end of human life, i.e. happiness, is in the good. And thus, the happiness one will find is dependent upon the good one will choose. The good (**bonum**) was divided into physical and moral. The physical good is to be found in man's sensory nature, in the realization of the aspirations determined by it. Thus, for example, satisfaction is characteristic both of men and of animals. The difference between the sensory goals of men and animals was pointed out: animals strive due to necessity, while in the sensory aspirations of men, reason participates and thus there arises here the possibility of free choice.<sup>11</sup> Thus the opposition between the sensory goals of men and animals was reduced to the opposition between freedom and necessity. This view is true, but limited, and it alone does not suffice to explain the qualitative difference in the sensory goals of men and animals. However, one should not expect scholasticism to explain man's sensory goals as the product of social relations.

The metaphysical opposing of the spiritual good against the physical, in the philosophy before marxism, is very characteristic of scholasticism, which, like the idealism of Plato, extended to the extreme the opposition between matter and spirit. Because of this, in Lithuanian schools also it was taught that the true good is a spiritual, moral good which one strives after with the guidance of reason. A necessary condition of happiness is the knowledge being strived for, while M. Karskis says outright, that the good is the knowledge of truth.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the view of Socrates is being followed here, to support which there were enough arguments in Aristotle's **Ethics**. Aristotle followed the Greek rationalistic humanism which originates among the sophists and Socrates and for which "the end of man is in rational conduct or, at least, in the irrational activity of the soul."<sup>13</sup>

Like that of the good, the source of evil was also sought in the intellect. If the good lies in moral actions, suitable to the nature of the intellect, then evil "is incompatibility with the nature of the intellect, which is called the light of reason, or the law of reason."[14](#)

The view that the good is contemplation of truth reveals the passive, spectator-like character of scholastic ethics. The scholastics did not concern themselves with the social content of the ethical values: the only concern was that the concepts of ethics be carefully defined and ordered within some system. The ethics course operated with definitions of ethical concepts which mean little or nothing at all, for example, "virtue is a perfect, independent, rational existence," and the like. And thus, scholastic ethics cannot be considered rationalistic, but rather more formalistic.

Aristotle in his ethics maintained the doctrine of the "golden mean" and condemned incontinence and extremes. For him, the ideal man was the man of noble heart who finds the mean between extremes. Scholasticism took over Aristotle's conception of the "golden mean," treating it simply as an axiom. As between price extremes there is a mean price, neither too high nor too low, so in morals the mean lies neither in excesses nor in apathy. When a country is defended from its enemies, the same work is performed by the private soldier and the commander, because both are defending the country. But compensation cannot be made according to the principle of equality. The soldier is paid, but the commander has earned more honor and compensation. In this way, the mean is found.[15](#)

Another ethical axiom was the assertion that each virtue (except justice) has an opposite, a vice, and not only one but two if them. Those vices are the extremes, while virtue (**virtus**) is between them, for example:

|             |            |                           |
|-------------|------------|---------------------------|
| cunning     | wisdom     | foolishness               |
| prodigality | generosity | miserliness               |
| rashness    | courage    | cowardice and<br>the like |

The four major virtues were defined separately: prudence, justice, temperance, and courage. Prudence makes clear what should be chosen and what avoided. Following Aristotle (**Ethics**, book VI, chapter 2), a certain distinction was drawn between the concepts wisdom (**sapientia**) and prudence (**prudentia**). Wisdom was the wider concept and meant generally the correct judgement about things. While prudence is tied to moral choice; the object of prudence is that good which is chosen in the circumstances which apply. Wisdom, experience, and memory are the helpers of prudence.

Two kinds of justice were distinguished: **distributive justice**, or the giving to each according to his deserts and **retributive justice**, or the apportioning of punishment for evil done. Although justice was being explained in the abstract, without any social basis, but assertions that the justice expressed in laws (**iustitia legalis**) is universal justice, that the laws are applied to everybody, that they reward merit and punish transgressions, these assertions objectively justified existing laws as "universal justice."

Three kinds of temperance were distinguished: sobriety (**sobrietas**), temperance in eating (**abstinentia**), and chastity (**castitas**). These virtues were opposed to vices: drunkenness, gluttony, and lechery.

Aristotle had valued courage in a special way, considering it a virtue which came between cowardice and rashness, or overconfidence. Aristotle's thoughts about courage were repeated in Lithuanian schools following the third book of the **Ethics**. It was pointed out that true courage differs from courage understood in a vulgar way; bodily strength does not prove courage, spiritual strength is the important thing here. The virtues which accompany courage were reduced to magnanimity (**magnanimitas**), patience, and endurance (**longanimitas**). The last mentioned virtue was understood as "the constant and long lasting endurance of difficulties and dangers."[16](#) Although it was asserted that patience was necessary in trying to achieve an honorable end and in tolerating opposing views, nevertheless, the catholic church and her ideologists could never boast of tolerance. On the contrary, they were marked by intolerance for alien ideologies.

The ethics course was usually concluded with speculations about death. Here it was explained that the question of death separates into two parts, moral death and physical death. The first must be understood according to the gospels: as man came naked into this world, so leaving behind all things of this world, he leaves the world. The soul abandons the body and stands before the court of god. Physical death occurs when the vegetative soul leaves the body, it can no longer inform the body, the unity between the soul and body is destroyed. Thus, death is here being explained by arguments from theology and scholastic psychology. Among these speculations about death, noteworthy is the question about the causes of the shortening of man's life. Alongside all kinds of pseudo-questions and pseudo-problems, it was considered that one of the causes of the shortening of man's life was that the seventeenth century man was worn out by cares, work, incontinence, and all this directly hastens the coming of death.[17](#) Thus, already in the seventeenth century there were complaints about the increasing pace of living.

The absence of documents does not permit wider generalizations about scholastic ethics in Lithuania. On the one hand, characteristics of the morality common to men were presented within it, those which Christian philosophy had taken over from Aristotle and other ethical theories of antiquity. On the other hand, these elements of common morality were presented in an abstract manner, without contact with the spirit of the times and the reality of life. In the middle of the

eighteenth century, the teaching of ethics according to Aristotle seemed an anachronism even to the ruling circles of the country

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1 *Laureae Academicae*, p. 105, 326, 404, 498, 499.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 109, 266, 341, 414, 415, 507, 508.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 110, 135, 344, 510.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 350, 353.

5 No. D 1156, p. 409.

6 No. 771, p. 116 r.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 117 r.v.

8 No. 2090, *Ethica*, p. 105 r.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 105 v.

10 *Ibid.*

11 No. 771, p. 121 v.

12 No. 2090, *Ethica*, p. 106 v.

13 Aristotle, *Ethics*, book I, chapter 6.

14 No. 2056, p. 223.

15 No. D 1156, p.p. 502-503.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 507.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 508.