

The significance of Kant's philosophy for the revival of Polish philosophy at the turn of the 20th century

Patryk Głowacki

Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland  

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This year’s 300th anniversary of Immanuel Kant’s birth provides a special opportunity to revisit his works and explore the most recent academic output on his philosophy. Unfortunately, anniversaries also tend to encourage trivialization and ossification of established convictions. This is brought to our attention in the introduction to the present issue of *Studies in the History of Philosophy* by editors Radosław Kuliniak and Tomasz Kupś, who comment: “Once again, commemorative conferences, solemn celebrations, and perhaps receptions with cakes bearing the philosopher’s image, from which hardly anything will remain – except fleeting memories – will be organized.” (p. 5). To make things worse, it is easier than ever to lose orientation in the rapidly growing literature on Kant and his philosophy. According to the bibliographies compiled by Margit Ruffing, published in “*Kant-Studien*”, the number of academic publications on Kant amounts to 1000 year on year; it will not come as a surprise if this jubilee year proves to be record-breaking in this regard. One might ask then whether yet another book contributes anything significant to the discourse. In the case of the work I am reviewing – the special issue of *Studies in the History of Philosophy*, devoted entirely to the Polish reception of Kant’s philosophy – there are a number of reasons why the answer should be “yes, it does”.

Leszek Kołakowski, one of the most recognizable contemporary Polish philosophers, concluded that “we are not the nation of philosophers. Granted, we had Thomists, Kantians, Hegelians and phenomenologists in Poland, but we have never had someone like Thomas Aquinas, Kant, Hegel or Husserl.” (Kołakowski 1992, p. 109). Such a lack can be explained by the fact that while other European countries were developing their national idiolect, Polish philosophers concentrated their entire intellectual effort on the survival of the nation (18th century), and then the restoration of national independence (19th century). For Poles living in the area annexed by Russia, Prussia and Austria, the academic language was the one imposed by the partitioners – and which one that was could vary depending on the dynamic political situation. It should be considered ironic that Józef Hoene-Wroński and August Cieszkowski, who were perhaps the two most original Polish philosophers of the 19th century, published in French and German. Unlike the French, German and English people, the Poles, as a nation, may have missed the most opportune moment to create their own philosophy. To repurpose the famous term coined by Helmuth Plessner, we could state that, on the grounds of philosophy, Poland is the Delayed Nation, which, at the end of 19th century, eagerly took to catching up on its philosophical backlog. It was during that period that Kant became a prominent figure of reference, regardless of whether somebody treated him as a philosophical friend or foe. It seems that this state of affairs is reflected well by Stefan Pawlicki’s quote, which serves as the epigraph to the introduction of the issue of *Studies in the History of Philosophy*: “He who wishes to be a philosopher in the true sense of the word, must indeed confront himself with Kant, and that in earnest, because all the contemporary philosophy is to an extent a commentary on him, and without him it becomes incomprehensible.” (p. 5).

In the second half of the 19th century, there were only two universities where Polish was the language of instruction. They were located in the Austrian Partition, a consequence, albeit indirect, of Austria’s defeat in the war with Prussia (1866). It was these universities that provided a home for Polish philosophical thought; since the Enlightenment, if not earlier, this kind of institutional support had been essential for philosophy to thrive within the university setting. The University of Lviv became the vanguard of Polish philosophy at that time, its influence extending well beyond the borders of Austrian Partition. In the history of Polish philosophy that period is referred to as the reign of the Lwów-Warsaw School, which, from the end of the 19th century until the onset of the Second World War, set the tone of Polish intellectual life. Kazimierz Twardowski (1866–1938),

a Viennese student of Franz Brentano, was the School's informal leader. It was Twardowski, together with Henryk Struve (1840-1912) and Władysław Weryho (1868-1916), who, in equal parts, should be credited for the revival of Polish philosophy, for which Kant was an important point of reference.

The year 1897, featured in the issue's subtitle, marked a turning point for Polish philosophy. It was then that "Przegląd Filozoficzny", the first Polish philosophical journal, was founded. Władysław Weryho, the journal's originator and first editor, received ongoing support from his colleagues Henryk Struve and Kazimierz Twardowski. The establishment of "Przegląd Filozoficzny" is recognized as the beginning of the modern era of Polish philosophy. It should be noted that the journal has been published continuously since its restoration in 1992, following a hiatus during the Polish People's Republic. "Przegląd Filozoficzny" influenced the Polish reception of critical philosophy; this influence, in the initial years of the journal's operation, is explored by Tomasz Kupś's article (Information on the worldwide reception of Kant's philosophy in *Przegląd Filozoficzny*). The journal featured numerous discussions of prominent Kantian scholarship, including books and articles by Paul Natorp, Martin Bollert, Friedrich Paulsen). It also included polemical pieces, and even reviews of international journals, such as "Kant-Studien". These contributions helped Polish readers stay up-to-date with trends and research in Kant studies. Importantly, "Przegląd Filozoficzny" played a crucial role in consolidating the Polish philosophical community. As Kupś notes: "This gave a sense of involvement in the very centre of important scientific developments and supported the process of revival of our philosophy" (p. 47). Devoting so much space to Kant indicated not only the global revival of his thought, under the banner of neo-Kantianism, but also the potential discovered by Polish thinkers in his critical philosophy. The notion of criticism – understood as non-dogmatic and unbound thinking – became the motto of a whole generation of Polish philosophers.

"Przegląd Filozoficzny" was not the only prominent philosophical journal established in 1897; while Władysław Weryho was developing his journal in Warsaw, Hans Vaihinger founded "Kant-Studien" in Halle, Germany. Its first issue features a notable Polish accent, as pointed out by Dorota Leszczyna. Her article provides behind-the-scenes information on the creation of Wincenty Lutosławski's (1863-1954) report on the reception of Kantian philosophy and its impact on Spanish thought. The commissioning of such a report was a consequence of Vaihinger's policy, who decided that one of the objectives of the journal would be to examine the reception of Kantian philosophy outside the German cultural circle. Dorota Leszczyna, in addition to analyzing and evaluating the content of Lutosławski's article *Kant in Spanien*, sheds light on the origin of Lutosławski's fascination with Spain. As she points out, it can be traced back to Lutosławski's youthful reading of Miguel de Cervantes's famous work *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, and found its fullest expression in his marriage to the Spanish poet Sofia Casanova. It was through her that Lutosławski gained privileged access to 19th century Spanish culture and philosophy.

Radosław Kuliniak's article provides an overview of the impact that Kant's philosophy had on Polish philosophical thought (Immanuel Kant's philosophy and the reconstruction of Polish philosophy at the turn of the 20th century). Kuliniak points to the synergistic relationship of three elements necessary for the emergence of Polish philosophy under Kant's influence. These are (1) the foundation of "Przegląd Filozoficzny", (2) the establishment of the Polish Philosophical Society, and (3) the availability of Immanuel Kant's works to Polish readers. Both *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Present Itself as a Science* and *Critique of Pure Reason* were translated into Polish at the beginning of 20th century – an early adoption compared even to other European countries. Henryk Struve deserves special credit in this regard. It is worth noting that despite his significant influence for the development of Polish philosophy, he is notoriously overlooked by academics in favour of Kazimierz Twardowski. Interestingly, Struve coined the Polish equivalent of the neo-Kantian slogan "Return to Kant": "Onwards with Kant" (p. 34), capturing the spirit of Polish philosophical engagement with Kantian ideas.

The Polish Philosophical Society, founded in 1904 by Kazimierz Twardowski, proved to be just as influential as "Przegląd Filozoficzny". In the same year, the Kant-Gesellschaft was established, which should not be seen as a coincidence. Kazimierz Twardowski, aware of Vaihinger's plan to form the Kant-Gesellschaft precisely in 1904, had decided to pre-empt his move, as "He was almost certain that the Austrian authorities in Vienna would support the founding of a world philosophical society rather than a local Polish initiative to unite our philosophers into a cohesive group of scholars" (p. 40). Consequently, on 12 February, the 100th anniversary of Immanuel Kant's death, the Polish Philosophical Society started its operation; the Kant-Gesellschaft, on the other hand, began its activity two months later, on 22 April, the 180th anniversary of Kant's birth.

The article co-authored by Radosław Kuliniak and Dorota Leszczyna and the article by Łukasz Ratajczak examine the history of translating the two above-mentioned works of Kant into Polish and discuss the difficulties connected with this process. Yet again, Henryk Struve emerges as a central figure, having served as editor of the "Biblioteka Filozoficzna" since the 1880s, under which the translations of Kant's works were published. Kuliniak and Leszczyna trace the path leading to the first Polish translation of *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Present Itself as a Science*. Despite Twardowski's reservations, Struve commissioned the translation to Romuald Grzymała-Piątkowski. The translation process proved arduous and "took more than three years" (p. 68) to complete. It is likely that it was completed largely due to Struve's determination and scholarly support for the translator during every stage of the process. Despite Struve and his collaborators' editorial efforts, this initial translation failed to stand the test of time. However, Polish readers did not have to wait long for a new rendition, as another translation, this time by Benedykt Bornstein (1880-1948), appeared in 1918. Bornstein's translation remains widely read to this day and was incorporated into the first Polish edition of Kant's collected works, edited by Mirosław Żelazny (Kant 2012, pp. 14-134).

Łukasz Ratajczak's article discusses the background of Piotr Chmielowski's (1848-1904) translation of *Critique of Pure Reason*. As we learn with a hint of apprehension, Struve initially intended to entrust the translation to Grzymała-Piątkowski, whose translation of *Prolegomena* had proven rather unsatisfactory. Ratajczak's article primarily offers an insight into the immense effort invested by Chmielowski in his translation. The scope of subject literature consulted by Chmielowski during his translation was truly impressive, encompassing works by such authors as Kuno Fischer, Erich Adickes, and Hans Vaihinger. Moreover, his preface to *Critique of Pure Reason*, still valuable today, contains numerous reflections that attest to his philosophical and linguistic acumen. Significantly, Chmielowski drew not only from the original edition of Kant's work but also from later critical editions by Kirchmann, Kehrbach, and Adickes. The letters from Henryk Struve to Piotr Chmielowski, which are appended to the article, provide further insight into Chmielowski's work and the specific translation challenges he faced. It should be noted that the reviewed volume, apart from the articles, includes the source materials translated into English under the section "Archive of Polish Philosophy." In addition to addressing issues of remuneration and deadlines, Struve's letters feature considerations regarding the translation of key Kantian concepts and even entire sentences that pose difficulties or introduce ambiguities in the target language. Reading these letters allows one to witness, in a sense, the birth of Polish philosophical terminology, much of which remains in use today. The passion and expertise with which the elderly Struve, at the age of 63, penned his letters to Chmielowski serve as a testament to his enduring interest and enthusiasm for Kant's philosophy. One can only lament Chmielowski's untimely death in 1904, a significant blow to the burgeoning Polish philosophical community. We can only surmise that he would have provided Polish readers with further translations of the German philosopher's works, maintaining the highest standards of quality.

The year 1936 is the closing date featured in the volume's subtitle. It was in this year that Roman Ingarden (1893-1970) delivered a series of lectures on Kant's Criticism at the University of Lviv. Ingarden was the next academic philosopher – following Kazimierz Twardowski and Mściśław Wartenberg (1868-1938) – to introduce his students at the University of Lviv to the intricacies of Kantian philosophy. However, Ingarden was not a student of Twardowski. Even though he received his philosophical education in Göttingen and Freiburg under Edmund Husserl, he was familiar with the Lviv tradition. While he often expressed criticism towards it, it is worth remembering that he took his first steps in philosophy at the gymnasium among teachers who were direct students of Kazimierz Twardowski. The reviewed volume of *Studies in the History of Philosophy* contains an article by Mariusz Pandura and Radosław Kuliniak, who explore Ingarden's epistemological approach to Kant's philosophy. It was indeed different from Twardowski's historical-philosophical approach and Wartenberg's metaphysically-oriented approach, and serves as a prime example of the pluralism and anti-dogmatism that prevailed in Lviv at the time. As a supplement to the article, the authors have prepared a reprint of the first four out of twenty-one lectures delivered by Ingarden at the University of Lviv during the academic year 1935/36. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the lectures were intended for students who were not necessarily well-versed in Kant's work. Therefore, they largely serve an organizational and recapitulative purpose.

The special issue of *Studies in the History of Philosophy* demonstrates the importance and revitalizing impact of influences from varied linguistic and cultural circles on our own culture. Creative assimilation of insights from other cultures enriches our local intellectual landscape and enables us to comprehend our own local issues better. The Polish reception of Kant's philosophy during the turn of the centuries could be a model for the responsible adoption of ideas from diverse cultural contexts; while embracing openness, Polish philosophy did not succumb to foreign influences and managed to preserve its own unique character.

Literature

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