

Hegel in Poland

Hegel w Polsce

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Abstract: Hegel's philosophy arrived in Poland in the late 1830s and became central to philosophical discourse during the Romantic era. Following failed uprisings, Polish thinkers adapted Hegelianism to address national crises, focusing on the philosophy of history and emphasizing activism, voluntarism, and national regeneration. August Cieszkowski and Edward Dembowski adapted Hegel's historical idealism to emphasize future emancipation and material engagement. However, Hegel's influence waned with the rise of positivism and Marxism. Later, post-war Marxist reinterpretations, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, revived scholarly interest. Thinkers such as Tadeusz Juliusz Kroński, Bronisław Baczko, and Zbigniew Kuderowicz examined Hegel's contributions to ethics, aesthetics, and political philosophy. Meanwhile, translators like Adam Landman made his works available in Polish. Despite the dominance of the analytical Lwów-Warsaw School, Hegel's influence persisted through selective reinterpretation rather than strict adherence. Hegel's influence in Poland reflects an evolving dialogue between philosophical systems and the sociopolitical needs of a stateless, and later, postwar nation.

Keywords: Hegelianism in Poland; Polish Romantic philosophy; Cieszkowski; Marxism and Hegel; Philosophy of history

Abstrakt: Filozofia Hegla dotarła do Polski pod koniec lat 30. XIX wieku i stała się centralnym punktem dyskursu filozoficznego epoki romantyzmu. Po nieudanych powstaniach polscy myśliciele zaadaptowali heglizm do rozwiązywania kryzysów narodowych, koncentrując się na filozofii dziejów i kładąc nacisk na aktywizm, dobrowolność i odrodzenie narodowe. August Cieszkowski i Edward Dembowski zaadaptowali historyczny idealizm Hegla, aby podkreślić przyszłą emancypację i zaangażowanie materialne. Jednak

wpływ Hegla osłabł wraz z rozwojem pozytywizmu i marksizmu. Późniejsze, powojenne reinterpretacje marksizmu, szczególnie w latach 50. i 60. XX wieku, ożywiły zainteresowanie badaczy. Myśliciele, tacy jak Tadeusz Juliusz Kroński, Bronisław Baczko i Zbigniew Kuderowicz badali wkład Hegla w etykę, estetykę i filozofię polityczną. W międzyczasie tłumacze, tacy jak Adam Landman, udostępnili jego dzieła w języku polskim. Pomimo dominacji analitycznej Szkoły Lwowsko-Warszawskiej, wpływ Hegla utrzymywał się poprzez selektywną reinterpretację, a nie ścisłe przestrzeganie zasad. Wpływ Hegla w Polsce odzwierciedla ewoluujący dialog między systemami filozoficznymi a potrzebami społeczno-politycznymi bezpaństwowego, a później powojennego narodu.

Słowa kluczowe: heglizm w Polsce; polska filozofia romantyczna; Cieszkowski; marksizm i Hegel; filozofia dziejów

Hegel's thought reached Poland at the end of the 1830s and by the first half of the 1840s became the chief subject of discussion and controversy in Polish philosophy. It was a sign of an intellectual revival and proof of the importance of philosophical problems in the intellectual culture of the time. The reception of Hegelianism contributed a new element to the Romantic thought which had developed after the defeat of the November 1830 Uprising. Polish writers – and there was almost no philosopher who did not make a reference to Hegel – sought support in his theoretical schemas to resolve the important problems of the epoch. These were, first, the search for the cause of the fall of the nobles' republic in the 18th century and the failure of the 1830 revolutionary upsurge and, secondly, attempts to show ways of liberating the nation from alien rule and to determine its historical place among the nations of Europe.

The predominant interest was in the philosophy of history since, with the help of the constructions of the historical process inspired by Hegel, one could justify the claim of the Poles to a place among the nations of Europe. Hence the Polish followers of Hegel, having different aims from the Master, necessarily modified his historico-philosophical (or *historiosophic*) schemes in an essential way: while Hegel had seen the realization of the ideal in the present, his Polish followers emphasized the importance of the future: for the fulfilment of mankind's mission.

The primacy of modifying Hegel's philosophy of history (not only in the Polish context) belongs to August Cieszkowski (1814-1894). In his work *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie*, published in Berlin in 1838, Cieszkowski, faithful to the Hegelian triadic development, divided the whole of human history into three great epochs: past, present and future. In contrast to the contemplativeness of the Berlin philosopher, Cieszkowski emphasized the deed (*die Tat*), the activity of mankind conscious of the *telos* of history.

For Hegel, will was the attribute of thought; for Cieszkowski, thought was the attribute of will. There also appeared a tendency to "rehabilitate matter" as the sphere in which spirit realized itself. In addition to activism and orientation towards the future, Polish philosophers influenced by Hegel stressed personalism and voluntarism, in contrast to the panlogism of their teacher. Edward Dembowski (1822-1846), one of the "Hegelianizing" Polish Romantics, went so far as to attribute to Being a creative character.

Another important aspect of the Polish assimilation of Hegel was an interest in aesthetic problems, particularly evident in Józef Kremer (1806-1875), Karol Libelt (1807-1875), and Dembowski himself. It sprang from the belief in the "historiogenic" significance of art, which was characteristic of Romantic thought. In the Polish condition of statelessness, the belief had peculiar significance: the nation, imbued with the ideals of freedom transmitted through art and acting as a historical agent, was expected to achieve the restoration of the lost statehood. Artistic activity (according to Dembowski) not only expressed the self-knowledge of the subjects who shaped the future but also constituted a supreme form of "historiogenic" activity which creatively united the contents of social reconstruction with aesthetic contents.

The assimilation of Hegel's thought in 19th-century Poland was not in any spirit of orthodoxy. Hegelianism reached Poland when the thought of "the Berlin sage" was undergoing criticism and modification both inside and outside his school. The influence of Hegel combined with the assimilation of current French social thought and the influence of the ideas of the old Schelling and the so-called "late idealists" (Fichte and Weiss). Hegelian theoretical constructions, especially his panlogism, clashed with the Catholic doctrine dominant in Poland. The Hegelianizing Polish thinkers (except perhaps Dembowski) professed attachment to religion, but sometimes strayed outside the bounds of religious orthodoxy. Apart from religion, the opposition to Hegel's panlogism was inspired by a desire to stress freedom and the autonomy of the subject as against the decrees of the natural order or God. Even those who at the outset declared their loyalty to the Master's teachings sometimes reached conclusions far removed from Hegelianism. Others, such as Henryk Kamiński (1813-1865) or Bronisław Trentowski (1808-1869), constructed their systems with only slight reference to Hegel's teaching.

Generalizing, we may say that Hegelianism helped Polish writers to arrive at original solutions and fulfill the needs of a subjugated nation which, because it could not manifest its national identity in the political realm of "objective spirit", expressed it in the realm of "absolute spirit". The attempts at creating a "national" or "Slavonic" philosophy, so popular at the time, were aimed at asserting the historical role of the Polish nation in the future and expressed

the striving of the Poles to participate fully in the creation of a community of emancipated European nations.

The fascination with Hegelianism in 19th-century Poland gradually waned after 1846, the year of the Cracow insurrection against Austria, in which the young Dembowski perished. After 1848 interest in Romanticism ebbed away. Positivist tendencies gradually appeared and came to dominate Polish thought after the 1863 Uprising. At the time Hegel was known only from hearsay and in the few polemics in which he figured was not treated as a serious thinker.

In the period preceding the First World War, the predominant influence in Polish philosophical culture was wielded by the so-called Lwów-Warsaw School founded by Kazimierz Twardowski (1866-1938). Its adherents espoused minimalism in philosophy and followed models of precision elaborated in logic, mathematics, and the natural sciences. After the recovery of national independence in 1918, the school's hold on Polish academic circles became even stronger. In this intellectual climate, interest in Hegel was bound to be sporadic and its impact on Polish intellectual culture minimal.

Adam Żółtowski (1881-1958) published two books on Hegel at the beginning of the 20th century – *O podstawach filozofii Hegla* (*The Bases of Hegel's Philosophy*, Cracow 1907), and *Metoda Hegla i zasady filozofii spekulatywnej* (*Hegel's Method and the Principles of Speculative Philosophy*, Cracow 1910) – but they produced little response and the *Introduction to the Lectures* were translated into Polish, except for fragments of the young Hegel's article on the difference between Fichte and Schelling.

It should be added that Marxist thought, which appeared in Poland at the end of the 1870s, showed no interest at all in Hegel's philosophy. Marxist writers had little interest in philosophy as such and treated Marxism only as a methodology and a theory of social development. The interwar Marxists merely repeated the current stereotypes about Hegel. Stefan Rudniański (1887-1941), associated with the Communist Party of Poland, took his views straight from Engels. Leon Chwistek (1884-1945), a logician and painter sympathizing with Marxism, denounced Hegel as an originator of contemporary philosophical irrationalism. According to Chwistek, there was only a historical connection between Marxism and Hegel, and the Marxist dialectical method was compatible with positivism and common sense (cf. his *Granice nauki* [*The Limits of Science*], 1930; English translation 1946).

One might have expected an increasing interest in Hegel's thought after the Second World War, when Marxism became the official doctrine and was widely propagated in Poland. This, however, did not happen, due primarily to the radically anti-Hegelian stance of Soviet Marxism, which was being forcibly transplanted to Polish soil at that time. The Soviet anti-Hegelian line dated

from 1931, when Stalin attacked both the pro-Hegelian “dialecticians” and the anti-Hegelian “mechanists”.

The attitude hardened still more when in 1947 A. Zhdanov launched a violent anti-Hegelian polemic during the discussion of Y. Alexandrov’s textbook of Western European philosophy. Moreover, the Polish intellectuals who propagated Marxism in the 1950s (e.g., Adam Schaff) had been formed by the Lwów-Warsaw positivist school and did not appreciate the inspirational role of Hegel’s thought in Marxism.

Interest in Hegel’s thought re-emerged as a consequence of the intellectual ferment caused in Marxist circles by Khrushchev’s criticism of Stalin at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. From 1955 onward, discussions of the vital problems of Marxism grew, including the significance of the early thought of Marx. This in turn was connected with the desire to recover its humanist and ethical contents in order to oppose the Stalinist interpretation of Marxism. The *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*, first published in Polish in 1958, attracted considerable attention. This re-orientation of interests among some adherents of Marx’s thought, who tried to make it less dogmatic and more intellectually satisfying, stimulated an interest in Hegel. Scholars began to examine the links between Marxist thought and the Hegelian tradition, to view Marxism from a Hegelian perspective, and to take an interest in the ideas of the Hegelian school and Feuerbach. The thought of both the young Marx and Hegel became the subject of university seminars and analytical publications.

The pioneer in this area was Tadeusz Juliusz Kroński (1907-1958), who from 1955 conducted a seminar on Hegel’s philosophy at Warsaw University, attended not only by students but also by university teachers. A man of subtle and incisive mind, brought up in the phenomenological tradition, Kroński also knew well the German philosophy of the 19th and 20th centuries and was fascinated by Hegel. He managed to infect a considerable group of students with his enthusiasm for Hegel in a lasting way. After his death, his studies on Hegel were collected and published by his friends in a volume entitled *Rozważania wokół Hegla (Reflections around Hegel, 1960)*.

His essay “*The Problem of Moral Evil in Hegel’s Philosophy of History*” (first published as an article in *Myśl Filozoficzna*, no. 1, 1957) is particularly interesting. In a scholarly and persuasive way Kroński defends Hegel against the charge of conservatism and immoralism. At the end of the essay Kroński writes:

Marxist philosophy has so far always done well out of a rational confrontation with Hegel, and done badly out of the dogmatic rejection of his merits. This was so even when Hegel was rejected in the name of anti-dogmatism.

The main result of this renewed interest in Hegel has been not so much the acceptance of any parts of the Hegelian system but rather a change in the style of philosophizing. Reflections on philosophy and the methodology of science, grounded in the theoretical heritage of the Lwów-Warsaw School, were supplemented by reflections of a new type, concerned with the historical process, the problems of value, society and culture the methodology of humanist sciences, etc. One should note that Hegel's influence here was indirect and was filtered through the work of the Dilthey school and the French interpreters of Hegel. A degree of assimilation of existentialist thought and a revival of the interest in phenomenology were also connected with the new trend. The writers whose ideas aroused particular interest at the time were J. Hyppolite, J. Wahl, A. Kojève, L. Goldmann and such earlier thinkers as Max Weber, Georg Lukács, and Gramsci.

According to the judgment of writers such as T. Krajewski, one can distinguish in the Polish philosophical thought of the years 1956-1968 two schools of thought among the Marxists: the "positivizing" and the "Hegelianizing" – and these two orientations are still dominant today. One must also mention the influence of post-war polemics and trends in Western thought on the evolution of positions within Polish philosophy.

A particular role in the revival of interest in Hegel, albeit of an indirect kind, was played by a group of Polish scholars who undertook a systematic and wide-ranging inquiry into 19th-century philosophical and social thought. The main inspirer of the inquiry was Professor Bronisław Baczko, whose own development as a historian of philosophy had been to some extent influenced by Kroński. Besides his own studies in the area, Baczko conducted a highly successful seminar at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences during 1958-1968; it attracted a considerable group of young scholars who followed in his footsteps.

The knowledge of Hegel's ideas proved undoubtedly fruitful in the historical studies of the group. The stimulating influence of Hegel on Baczko himself is clearly noticeable in his collection of essays *Człowiek i światopoglądy* (*Man and World-views*, 1965), especially in the studies of *Hegel and Rousseau* and *The Hegelian Right and Left in Poland*, and also in his fundamental work *J. J. Rousseau: samotność i wspólnota* (*Rousseau: Solitude and Community*, 1964; German edition 1970).

A pupil of Kroński, Zbigniew Kuderowicz, is the author of a work on the moral thought of the young Hegel (*Doktryna moralna młodego Hegla*, 1962) and of a number of articles on different aspects of Hegel's thought.

One should also mention here the name of Andrzej Walicki, a distinguished specialist in Russian thought (see especially his *The Slavophile Controversy: A History of Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*,

Oxford 1975) and also in Polish thought (*Filozofia a mesjanizm (Philosophy and Messianism)*, 1970). Walicki's pioneering and revealing studies of the sources and ideological horizons of Cieszkowski's thought are particularly noteworthy.

Other names worth mentioning are Jan Garewicz, a Polish Schopenhauer scholar who has worked on the relation of Cieszkowski to the German tradition; Aleksander Orłowski, the author of studies on the links between Polish and German thought in the 19th century; Karol Bal, who wrote a monograph (1973) on Hegel's connection with the Enlightenment tradition; and the author of this survey, who has concentrated particularly on the study of the Hegelian school and the young Marx, and on Hegel's philosophical anthropology and political thought.

A separate mention must be made of the translation of Hegel's works into Polish. Here the greatest merit is due to the indefatigable Dr. Adam Landman, who has translated *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (with J. Grabowski, 1958), *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1963, 1965), *Lectures on Aesthetics* (with J. Grabowski, 1964, 1966, 1967), *The Science of Logic* (1967, 1968), and *The Philosophy of Right* (1969).

Hegel's presence in the contemporary intellectual culture of Poland is still very much felt today. His thought stimulates interest and discussion, although very few attempt to take him literally or to develop any of his fundamental philosophical propositions. Probably because of the strength of the Lwów-Warsaw logical school, the interest in Hegel's dialectical logic seems to be weaker in Poland than in the Marxist milieus of other countries.

To this there are two noteworthy exceptions. One is the work of L. S. Rogowski on directional logic and the Hegelian thesis on the contradiction of change (*Logika kierunkowa a heglowska teza o sprzeczności zmiany*, Toruń 1966). The author attempts to explain the Hegelian thesis by attributing to it a definite logical sense which may be expressed in non-contradictory terms and given the form of an axiomatic multi-variable logical calculus. His book is an application of the formal conceptual apparatus of contemporary logic to a problem in Hegelian logic.

Another, even more recent work, is the study by Adam Synowiecki of Hegel's concepts of Being and Thinking as the sources of Marxist methodology and dialectical logic (*Byt i myślenie: U źródeł marksistowskiej metodologii i logiki dialektycznej*, 1980). The author subjects Hegel's ontology to an unusual interpretation (e.g., he expresses it in the form of graphs) and attempts to find in it a basis for the corresponding Marxist theory.

One might also mention in conclusion an attempt by Marek J. Siemek to work out an interpretation of Marxism as an integrally conceived historical materialism. The chief inspiration of Siemek's work seems to have come from

the Hegelianizing Marxism of Lukács (whose work *Der junge Hegel* Siemek translated into Polish) and from some of L. Althusser's methodological conceptions.

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