



THE POLISH  
CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY  
IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

# Piotr Lenartowicz

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I.

PIOTR LENARTOWICZ SJ:  
PERSON AND WORK



# BIOGRAPHY

## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Piotr Lenartowicz, the son of Wiesław and Krystyna née Schneider, was born on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August 1934 in Warsaw. He passed his school leaving certificate examinations in 1951, completing his education at the Jan Sobieski Secondary School in Krakow. A year later he started medical studies at the Medical Faculty of the Medical Academy of Warsaw, which he completed in 1958 and was awarded with a diploma in medicine.

In conversation with Prof. Zbigniew Wróblewski he would honestly admit that his choice of medical degree was one taken through a process of elimination. For he was neither taken by humanistic nor technical fields of study, and given that there were so many doctors in his family he decided to pursue a career in medicine.<sup>1</sup>

Even though his decision to take up medicine as a degree was not particularly motivated by any calling in this direction or an affiliation for medicine as a career—as we shall become convinced—that this decision was to have a huge impact on his academic-philosophical undertakings. While in his second year, Lenartowicz signed up for the “physiologists circle.” And it was there he was to be noticed by Prof. Franciszek Czubalski, the eminent doctor and physiologist, who

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Z. Wróblewski, “Rozmowa z Piotrem Lenartowiczem SJ,” in *Vivere & Intelligere. Wybrane prace Piotra Lenartowicza SJ wydane z okazji 75-lecia Jego urodzin*, ed. J. Koszteyn (Kraków: Wyższa Szkoła Filozoficzno-Pedagogiczna “Ignatianum”, Wydawnictwo WAM, 2009), p. 26.

having perceived in Lenartowicz the makings of a good experimenter and scientist employed him in 1956 at the Department of Human Physiology, which he headed at the Medical Academy of Warsaw. The post was that of assistant lecturer and later, upon completing his medical degree, he proposed he do a PhD at the Department of Human Physiology, Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw and that he also applied for a scholarship grant. There also, under the guidance of Prof. Czubalski, Lenartowicz was to prepare his thesis entitled *The influence of ammonium salts on electrocorticogram and the cortical potentials indirectly evoked*,<sup>2</sup> on the basis of which he was to be awarded in 1961 the degree of PhD at the Medical Faculty of the Medical Academy of Warsaw.<sup>3</sup>

The almost ten-year contact with both Departments of Physiology allowed Lenartowicz to become acquainted with the methods and methodology of natural research. He quickly became aware, however, of how the extremely important precision and technical perfection for experimental research was bought at the price of a fragmentary and partial look at a living organism, while the results of research obtained recalled the “pieces of some jigsaw puzzle or other,” which someone had forgotten about or had simply been unable to complete into a coherent and finished image.<sup>4</sup>

## HIS ENTRANCE INTO THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

While studying at the Medical Academy of Warsaw, the idea of entering the Society of Jesus started to take shape in Lenartowicz’s mind. After his fourth year he approached the then Provincial Superior Stanisław Wawryn SJ, who was of the view that he first should complete his medical degree. And so Lenartowicz finished his medical

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<sup>2</sup> The work was published as: P. Lenartowicz, “Wpływ soli amonowych na elektrokortigram i korowe potencjały bezpośrednio wywołane,” *Acta Physiologica Polonica* no. 7 (1961), pp. 365–380.

<sup>3</sup> About Piotr Lenartowicz, as one of Professor Czubalski’s post-war students, information may be found in the extensive work: A. Trzebski and E. Szczepańska-Sadowska, “Katedra i Zakład Fizjologii Doświadczalnej i Klinicznej,” in *Dzieje I Wydziału Lekarskiego Akademii Medycznej w Warszawie (1809–2006)*, vol. 3, ed. M. Krawczyk (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Czelej, 2009), p. 896.

<sup>4</sup> Z. Wróblewski, “Rozmowa z Piotrem Lenartowiczem SJ,” pp. 26–28.



degree and with his medical diploma once again met with the Provincial Superior. Yet on learning that this “freshly graduated” young man had been offered the chance of doing a PhD and had been awarded special grant by the Polish Academy of Sciences he was of the view that such an opportunity could not be passed by. “As a result of that—as Lenartowicz was to recall—I remained and within the course of two years, having murdered about ninety cats, I did my PhD.”<sup>5</sup>

After having submitted his PhD thesis to the dean’s office of the Medical Faculty of the Medical Academy of Warsaw (yet prior to the actual defence), he, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, entered the Society of Jesus and commenced a two-year novitiate in Kalisz.<sup>6</sup>

So why did he choose to enter the Society of Jesus? Well, Lenartowicz had listened with great interest to his father’s (Wiesław’s) accounts of an almost 5-year stay in Stalag XVII B in Krems an der Donau in north-eastern Austria. From 1940 onwards the camp had started to receive French and Belgian prisoners-of-war, amongst whom were many Jesuits. Their knowledge, culture and piety were to make a great impression on Wiesław Lenartowicz. He became friendly with one of the Belgian Jesuits—Richard de Smet, who was a seminarian at the time. This friendship was to last the years of captivity and Father de Smet, who was to become after the war an eminent Indologist of world standing, was to visit the Lenartowicz family several times either while on his way to or returning from India.<sup>7</sup>

These wartime reminiscences of his father together with the talks he had had with Father de Smet during his short visits to Warsaw were to arouse in Lenartowicz an immense interest in the Society of Jesus, in which not only was knowledge valued but rather the constant and relentless requirement to deepen it and to submit oneself to constant philosophical and theological reflection. So when there arose in him a calling to take the cloth, the choice of order was an obvious one.

In entering the Society of Jesus, Lenartowicz already had a definite outline of how he would function in the order. For he was well

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<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> When news came to Kalisz about the date of his doctoral thesis defence, Lenartowicz obtained a two-day pass to travel to Warsaw.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. W. Lenartowicz, *Wspomnienia szwoleżera*, ed. P. Lenartowicz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2005), pp. 92–93 as well as the caption for photo XXIV.

aware that the achievements of the biological sciences had a fundamental influence on moral-ethical attitudes, the hierarchy of values and man's outlook on the world in general. That they reflected themselves more or less audibly not only in the concepts broached by philosophers of living nature, sociologists and psychologists, but also in the decisions taken by legislators and constitutionalists. And this finds its reflection in the lives of individuals and society as a whole. Lenartowicz was conscious of how important it was to have a correct understanding of biological research and their correct interpretation. He wanted to deepen this understanding within the order and this understanding he wished to share with others.

### PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES: PHD, POSTDOCTORAL DEGREE, PROFESSORSHIP

After completing his two-year novitiate in Kalisz, Lenartowicz began to study at the Society of Jesus' Faculty of Philosophy in Krakow (1962–1965) obtaining the canonical degree of BPhil, equivalent to the Polish tertiary education degree level of *magisterium*.

At this time the hard core of the three-year degree program were six subjects, two subjects a year: epistemology and ontology (1<sup>st</sup> year), the philosophy of life (known as rational psychology) as well as the philosophy of inanimate nature (2<sup>nd</sup> year), and finally ethics and theodicy (3<sup>rd</sup> year). During this degree program Lenartowicz came to the conclusion that the philosopher of nature should first and foremost involve themselves in the search for, and testing of natural wholes. With total clarity he perceived that what he had been doing once in the Department of Physiology “had been playing with parts, completely beyond the whole, not considering or evaluating that very whole, or considering the whole to only a small degree.”<sup>8</sup>

From 1965 to 1969 Lenartowicz studied at the Bobolanum Theological Faculty in Warsaw where he was also awarded a degree. After three years of theological studies he was ordained priest by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 1968 in Warsaw.

In 1971 Lenartowicz started his PhD degree program at the Gregorian University in Rome. Much suggests that in travelling to Rome

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<sup>8</sup> Z. Wróblewski, “Rozmowa z Piotrem Lenartowiczem SJ,” p. 31.

he had not yet decided on the subject of his PhD. What he did know was that he had to write an article on the subject of man's origins, an article promised Father Roman Darowski SJ. He started therefore "to wade into the subject literature of human evolution and instead of writing a PhD thesis, for a year and half or so" he wrote that article.<sup>9</sup> And so the interest in paleoanthropology was to germinate within Lenartowicz that was to accompany him to the end of his professional life.

His stay in Rome was to be interrupted by a trip to London, where Lenartowicz was delegated as a chaplain at Westminster Cathedral (1972–1973). He also found time to participate in the seminars run at the time at Oxford University by Prof. Horace Romano (Rom) Harré, the eminent British philosopher. In addition he was to spend every available minute in the library of the Natural History Museum, making notes and microfilms of thousands of pages of literature connected mainly with the biology of development and animal adaptation to environment. These questions considered within the context of genotypes and phenotypes were to not only become the background for his PhD but were to constitute the foundation for the philosophy of animate nature he conducted.

Following his return to Rome, Lenartowicz wrote—under the tutorage of Prof. Jerzy Szaszkiwicz SJ—a doctoral thesis entitled *Phenotype-genotype dichotomy*<sup>10</sup> and on the basis of this he was to obtain the degree of PhD at the Gregorian University in 1975.

The reflections contained in *Phenotype-genotype dichotomy* concerning the concept of genome, phenotype, adaptation, the cycle of life were developed by Lenartowicz and fine tuned in *Elements of the philosophy of the biological phenomenon*.<sup>11</sup> He was to awarded the post-doctoral academic degree in 1985 at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Krakow.

In 1991 the Great Chancellor of the Faculty, the Superior General Peter Hans Kolvenbach SJ nominated Lenartowicz to the position of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 34. The article mentioned by Lenartowicz was published in 1972. Cf. P. Lenartowicz, "O wczesnych stadiach ewolucji człowiekowatych," in *Człowiek i świat. Szkice filozoficzne*, ed. R. Darowski (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 1972), pp. 160–213.

<sup>10</sup> P. Lenartowicz, *Phenotype-genotype dichotomy: An essay in theoretical biology* (Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1975).

<sup>11</sup> P. Lenartowicz, *Elementy filozofii zjawiska biologicznego* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 1986).

professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Society of Jesus in Krakow, and in 1999 at Belweder, the presidential palace in Warsaw, he was made a full professor.

### **AN EXTREMELY BUSY MAN**

The time between return from Rome and the acquiring of subsequent academic degrees was spent on not only intensive academic work but also teaching. As a lecturer he was first connected with the Society of Jesus' Faculty of Philosophy in Krakow (now the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow). From 1976 he lectured there on the philosophy of animate nature, and from 1990 equally on the theory of cognition. From 1995 to 2010 he headed the Ignatianum's Department of the Philosophy of Animate Nature, and from 2002 to 2004 he was vice-rector of the Higher School of Philosophy and Education "Ignatianum" in Krakow.

He also lectured at the Higher Seminary of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin in Krakow (1991–2008), at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Krakow (1993–2003) and at the Philosophy Faculty of Colorado State University at Fort Collins (1986–1987).

Additionally, he headed the Academic Association of Jesuit Priests in Krakow from 1995 to 2001. From 1982 to 1990 he participated in seminars organised by John Paul II at Castel Gandolfo entitled "Science—Religion—History" (together with Prof. Jerzy A. Janik he edited four volumes of materials from these seminars). He participated in European congresses of Jesuits dealing with research into the field of the natural sciences (Aix-en-Provence 1989, Barcelona 1991, Gdynia 1993) as well as in similar meetings of Jesuits lecturing in philosophy (Zagreb 1995, Krakow 1998). He took part in numerous conferences on matters philosophical and was invited to lecture by an array of academic institutions both in Poland and abroad (Austria, Slovakia, USA).

Father Piotr Lenartowicz SJ worked almost to the very end. Despite having cancer he continued to teach at Ignatianum to the end of the 2011/2012 academic year. He was still active as a tutor at the PhD defense of one of his students in July 2012. He died on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2012.

## ACADEMIC INTERESTS

Lenartowicz's academic interests were concentrated around the philosophy of animate nature, paleoanthropology, as well as the theory of cognition; areas that found their reflection in the numerous academic articles he produced as well as in the three extensive monographs he wrote: *Elementy filozofii zjawiska biologicznego* [Elements of the philosophy of biological phenomenon],<sup>12</sup> *Ludy czy małpoludy. Problem genealogii człowieka* [People or manapes: Problem of human genealogy]<sup>13</sup> and *Elementy teorii poznania* [Elements of epistemology].<sup>14</sup>

Undoubtedly it was the philosophy of animate nature that was the main area of his interests. In his opinion philosophers' research and inquiry should be conducted within the context of ontogenetic life cycles linked together in a generational line. The foundation of a life cycle which in a non-arbitrary way concerns the said "border" of the "minimal biological whole," is immanent developmental dynamics, that is the integrated construct of different correlated body structures which condition the overlapping of varied biochemical, physiological and behavioural processes.

Lenartowicz's second area of interest—equally important and *de facto* contained within the philosophy of animate nature—was paleoanthropology and the investigation into the origin of man connected with it. He attempted in the works written to identify those elements of our notions on early hominids that are well documented and to separate them from elements based on *a priori* assumptions. In analysing the results of paleoanthropological research as well as following discussions on the taxonomic status of prehistoric hominids, he came to the conclusion that there is a high possibility that various forms of hominids were not separate species but rather ancient ecotypes of *Homo sapiens*.

The experience obtained as a result of his empirical-philosophical works was to significantly affect his epistemological views. He was

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<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> P. Lenartowicz, *Ludy czy małpoludy. Problem genealogii człowieka* (Kraków: Wyższa Szkoła Filozoficzno-Pedagogiczna "Ignatianum", 2010).

<sup>14</sup> P. Lenartowicz, *Elementy teorii poznania* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, Akademia Ignatianum, 2014).

an opponent of all forms of Representationalism (Epistemological Dualism) and a clear adherent of Presentationalism that is the conviction that we truly can know phenomena and objects situated within our surroundings. Sensual-intellectual understanding—particularly of man alone—lies at the basis of our aspirations to search for and reveal truths, to understand the deepest reasons for the phenomena and things with which the human consciousness comes into contact. He characterised it as “cognitive optimism,” that is the conviction that we are able—as equally in our daily lives as in the natural sciences—to gradually acquire reliable knowledge on the subject of reality. Admittedly we commit mistakes, become misled. But we are able to discover these errors and eradicate them. The revealing of a mistake is no “coffin nail” for human cognition—quite the opposite, in fact, for it constitutes man’s cognitive triumph.