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"Objawienie i oświecenie. Z dziejów  
libertynizmu w Polsce", Jerzy Snopek,  
Wrocław 1986 : [recenzja]

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tics of foreign works by its stronger didactic tendency, and by being more clearly oriented to reach a large number of readers (this feature is particularly noticeable in Cracow magazines).

Among foreign texts in Polish journals we observe an increase in the number of translations from German now almost equal to that of translations from French which were dominant in the preceding period. German literature was considered as something new, original and unusual both in Poland and in other countries. Translations from English literature held, just as before, the third place while the new literatures—Russian and American—made their first appearance among translations.

A bibliography divided according to the separate chapters of the book supplements the study.

*Sum. by the author*

**Jerzy Snopek: Objawienie i oświecenie. Z dziejów libertynizmu w Polsce (Revelation and Enlightenment. From the History of Libertinism in Poland), Ossolineum, Wrocław 1986, 288 pp.**

Look at the first man and you will discover the reason why he failed to be obedient, as I, the Eternal Father, required. Conceit, born from self-love and relish for his companion, made him desert the perfect obedience and drew him into disobedience. Through that conceit he lost the life in grace and his original innocence and fell into impurity and the greatest destitution, into which he drew his whole kind, I said.

(St. Catherine from Siena)

No, my dear priest, no rules in this world are rigid, nothing is worth reproof nor admiration, nothing deserves punishment nor prize; there is no deed which assented here to be unworthy, would not be justified five hundred miles away. In other words, there is no objective evil nor there is any immutable good.

(D.A.F. de Sade)

The above quotations express two different kinds of philosophy of life. The first one—fideistic, based on the dogmas, has been expressed by God's revelation, through the saint's mouth, as the only true one. It is a heresy to doubt it; and the relativistic and rational second conception, articulated by one of the enlightened heroes of the famous marquis, was said to have been nothing else but heresy.

Jerzy Snopek's book, supplied with a subtitle *From the History of*

*Libertinism in Poland*, treats of the conflict of the above two, excluding one another, trends. Having been published as the XXI volume of *Studia z Okresu Oświecenia* (Studies on the Enlightenment Period), by IBL, the work sheds new light upon the epoch, whose image had often been simplified and one-sided. This has been emphasized by the author himself, in presenting Enlightenment as a dynamic period, full of inner inconsistencies. The term “libertinism” itself ceased to be explicit, but since it became a historical category it is difficult to be substituted by any other one. Snopek applies a very general definition: libertinism is a “certain set of phenomena appearing in Christian culture in Europe in the 16th–18th centuries.” Elsewhere he formulates that notion with fuller particulars:

Libertinism consisted in making oneself free from the omnipresent authority of the Church, lifting the unprecedented, covering all the fields of life, domination of Christianity, irrespectively of the paths along which it was being done.

Not only the very term “libertine” itself, but also its etymology, permit its at least ambiguous understanding. The Latin *libertinus* meant a freedman, while the much later French *libertin* might be translated as a “free thinker,” but also a “debaucher.” Accordingly, one may distinguish (as, for example, Jerzy Łojek has done) two trends in the movement under that name; the first one has been defined by one of the scholars as *libertinage érudit*, the second is a result of vulgarisation of the phenomenon, which occurred mainly in France in the 18th century. Jerzy Snopek is well aware of the existence of the philosophical and erotic aspects. The first one takes a much wider place in Polish literature and, therefore, the author’s interest is focused upon it.

The phenomenon of libertinism in Poland, together with its main theses, is obviously not genuine, so the second chapter of the book is dedicated to detailed description of its antecedence in European and earlier-Polish philosophy and literature, as well as to presentation of parallel trends in other European countries and, at the same time, to the location of the phenomenon in the culture of Enlightenment. Among the precursors of the Enlightenment libertinism in Poland the author places such writers as Grzegorz z Sanoka or Jan Andrzej Morsztyn. While discussing selected Morsztyn’s lyrics, Snopek draws the readers’ attention to the formal measures depreciating Christian

symbols, applied also by the free thinking poets of the Enlightenment period.

The scope of the libertine atmosphere is the next problem emphasized by the author. Snopek stresses that he has used the word "scope" in several meanings. The milieus, in which the libertine attitudes were born, have been presented in Chapter III where one can find nine patterns of such attitudes. In that part of his book the author wants to show "that the demarcation line between libertinism and orthodoxy often runs in people rather than between them." He proves that on the examples of Adam Naruszewicz ("Libertynizm duchownego" [Libertinism of a Clergyman]), Stanisław Trembecki ("Libertynizm szambelana" [Libertinism of a Chamberlain]), Tomasz Kajetan Węgierski ("Libertynizm outsidera" [Libertinism of an Outsider]), Jakub Jasiński ("Libertynizm radykała" [Libertinism of a Radical]), as well as the milieus of aristocrats and scholars, of Jan Potocki ("Libertynizm podróżnika" [Libertinism of a Traveller]), Seweryn Klemens Radwański ("Libertynizm prowincjusza" [Libertinism of a Provincial]), finally Stanisław Starzyński ("Libertynizm epigona" [Libertinism of an Epigonus]). The common features of the philosophies of life represented by the real and very different persons are as follows: in the questions of faith—deistic views, negation of the dogmas imposed by the Catholic Church, anticlericalism; in the field of ethics—approval of Epicureanism; finally in the problem of epistemology—conviction of superiority of rational over sensual perception. Apart from nonconformistic attitudes (Węgierski) we encounter also moderate libertines (Jan Potocki) as well as those who were characterized by lack of determination and who exercised peculiar Nicodemism (Naruszewicz, scholars). Naruszewicz who, according to the author, "is a personification of the struggle of the old with the new" and Starzyński proclaiming the outworn free-thinking ideals in an altered historical situation, are interesting.

In the introduction to the next chapter, dealing with the libertine atmosphere Snopek claims that libertinism "was not capable of giving any substitute able to balance the powerful and wide-spread, by multicultures tradition, culture-creating power of Christianity," nevertheless it became a germ of revaluation and transformation of the traditional model of culture, and thereby it contributed to evolution of the Christian doctrine. In order to indicate the growing interest in the

new ideas the author quotes the data concerning reading of the free-thinkers' works, presents a libertine as a literary hero, discusses the analogies between libertine and utopian literature, and finally signals such questions as the social and territorial range and occurrence of the signs of that intellectual trend in fine arts. The subchapter entitled "Utopia a libertynizm" (Utopia and Libertinism), in which Snopek proves that despite fundamental differences between the utopian writers (aiming at creation of a comprehensive positive programme) and the libertines (restraining themselves almost exclusively to negation of the found system) there are certain similarities in anti-Christian tendencies in free-thinking and utopian works in their civilizational trends. (The author distinguishes the primitive and civilizational utopia.) He proves it on the example of two utopian works written in the Enlightenment period in Poland, namely *Filozof podróżny do kraju mieszkańcom Ziemi nieznanego* (*Philosopher Travelling to a Country Unknown to Terrestrials*), written by an anonymous author, and *Podróż do Kalopei, do kraju najszczęśliwszego na świecie* (*Travel to Kalopea, the Happiest Country in the World*), by Wojciech Gutkowski. Both authors' attitude to Christian religion, its forms of worship and rituals is full of criticism. They incline towards deism, disbelieving in the possibility of God's interference in the world's fate.

Chapter V deals with refutations of libertinism. J. Snopek emphasizes that the term "refutation" is borrowed from rhetorics and used in a particular meaning—as the name of a certain type of polemic works, appearing derivatively, in response to objections raised by the free-thinking authors, in defence of the endangered values. They usually do not appear until the distressing opinions start to spread out. The author presents a list of several dozen refutational works issued in Poland in 1752–1826. There are both genuine works and translations from other languages, often in the form of a dialogue between a slow-witted libertine and his witty opponent.

One of the subchapters is dedicated to the ground problems discussed by the authors of works refuting the religious free-thinking. J. Snopek articulates it in the following way: a) deprivation of the century, false philosophers; b) problems of fanaticism and tolerance; c) philosophical base of atheism. Atheism and deism; d) problems of matter and materialism; e) questions of soul, its nature and immortality.

ty; f) problem of mind. Freedom and borders of thinking; g) need of religion and the origin of religion; h) questions of the highest good—understanding of happiness, virtues, passion; i) truth and exclusivity of Christian faith; j) dogmas in the light of reason; k) question of clergy.

As one can see both ontological and ethical questions, both the problems of faith and of perception have been discussed. However, the author draws our attention to the fact that the above presentation is far from genuineness. The authors of the discussed works often confine themselves to quotations of adequate arguments from the Bible, without trying, in concert with their fideistic philosophy of life, to explain anything in a rational way.

That is, in brief, the contents of the book. The reader receives a valuable position, abundant in factual data, examples and arguments, containing detailed bibliographic information. J. Snopek retains the so desired scholars' distance to the discussed problem, his statements are objective, therefore his stern evaluation of libertine movement, inserted at the end of his book, is rather startling.

It is a doubtless truth that libertinism had not much to offer instead of the faith in God ruling the world, nevertheless it is also true that by applying rational presumptions and transferring the point of gravity from eternal to worldly life, it brought a little light to the apparently happy existence of those, whose fate expresses Jan Potocki using the beautiful parable quoted by Jerzy Snopek:

When [...] I governed the province entrusted in my care by the highest sultan, some of his subjects happened to find a streak of precious metal. Each of them dug out his own path and everybody hoped to find a treasure. After a long and arduous work their lamps died out, but such was their eagerness that not only they failed to notice it, but they called, as they had before: "I have found gold, the others have only copper and tin!" He, who from the highest firmament sees an ant in the depth of an abyss and hears the ripple of its feet, also saw those unhappy creatures in the dark depths of the earth and could have lit their dead lamps, could have sent down a ray of light eternal which surrounded him, but he did not do it; he only left hope and safety to each of them, enough to provide them with happiness.

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