

Roman Murawski (Poznań, Poland)

THE PHILOSOPHY OF HÆNE–WROŃSKI*

15th August 1803, the catholic Feast of the Assumption played a significant rôle in the scientific biography of Hæne–Wroński (1776–1853). On that day, during a ball on the occasion of birthday of the First Consul, Wroński experienced an illumination. In remembrance of this he assumed a new name – Maria.

Two problems stood in the center of Wroński's interests:

- the creation of a new philosophy – achrematic philosophy¹ which overcoming the world of things will reach the Absolute and the creation principles in order to deduce from them a logically consistent theory of the whole reality,
- a profound reconstruction of the system of science, a beginning of which should be a reform of mathematics (the latter should consists of deducing all domains of mathematics from a unique general principle, namely from *the absolute law of algorithm*).

We are interested here mainly in the first problem.

1. Predecessors and contemporaries

Philosophical system of Hæne–Wroński developed at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries is usually counted as a messianistic philosophy. This philosophy was established under the influence of German thinkers such as Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. But it has various specific features making it different than German thought. It was rather spiritualistic than idealistic, it maintained the existence of a personalistic God, was convinced of the eternity of soul, of the absolute superiority of spiritual powers over the corporal ones.

Hæne–Wroński belonged to the earlier generation of Polish messianists, he was in a sense a forerunner. Others were active between 1830 and 1863. One should mention here Bronisław Trentowski (1808–1869), Józef Gołuchowski (1797–1858), August Count Cieszkowski (1814–1894), Karol Libelt (1807–1875), Józef Kremer (1806–1875). They were unanimous with respect to fundamental theses but differed strongly in details. The unique center of

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¹ From the Greek *chrema* – thing.

this trend was Paris but they worked in fact in isolation: Trentowski in Germany, Gołuchowski in a village in the Congress Kingdom of Poland¹, Cieszkowski and Libelt in Great Poland, Kremer in Cracow. There were professional philosophers among them but an important rôle was played also by poets: Mickiewicz, Słowacki and Krasiński as well as persons actively engaged in religious work such as Towiański. What was common for them were their messianistic views. They differed in argumentation as well as in results and conclusions. The three great national poets wanted to create Polish philosophy, scholars – an absolute philosophy. The latter knew quite well European philosophy and referred to it, the former – spontaneously developed their own systems. Some of them were rationalists, the others – mystics.

Their common feature was that they attributed to philosophy not only a cognitive function but also a significant rôle in the realization of the reform of life and in the liberation of the mankind. Their philosophy was filled with the belief in the metaphysical meaning of nation and with the conviction that a man can fulfill his/her vocation only in the communion of spirits formed by a nation, that just nations determine the development of the mankind. Polish nation has a special task – the task of being a Messiah among other nations. According to them a nation forms an intermediate link between an individual and God.

2. Philosophical system of Høene–Wroński

The starting point of the philosophical system of Høene–Wroński was the system of Immanuel Kant. In fact he wanted to study philosophy under the direction of Kant – unfortunately when he decided to do this, Kant retired already. In the Marseille period among first works of Wroński one finds the work *Philosophie critique decouverte par Kant, fondée sur le dernier principe du savoir* (1803) – a philosophical dissertation on the philosophy of Kant sent to Kościuszko² and Dąbrowski³. Unfortunately almost the whole edition of the book has been destroyed in a fire of a printing-house. It was in fact the first extensive work written in France and devoted to Kant – French philosophers got to know the achievements of the master from Königsberg with a delay and rather unwillingly being convinced of their own superiority.

According to Wroński, Kant made a mistake treating the knowledge (the reason) and the objective being as something heterogeneous instead of as homogeneous. This led consequently to dualism of the knowledge and being, of phenomenological and noumenal worlds. To overcome this limitation one should derive both from a higher principle: from the Absolute. One can see here also the influence of Schelling whose system tends towards absolute

¹ Congress Kingdom of Poland was a puppet state under Russian imperial rule from 1814 to 1915, constitutionally in personal union.

² Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746–1817), Polish national hero, general and a leader of the 1794 uprising against the Russian Empire. He fought in the American Revolutionary War on the side of Washington. In recognition of his service he became in 1783 a naturalized citizen of United States.

³ Henryk Dąbrowski (1755–1818), Polish general and national hero, organiser of Polish Legions during the Napoleonic Wars.

idealism and which – according to Høene–Wroński – was an anticipation of the absolute knowledge.

The starting point of Høene–Wroński was the assumption about the rationality of the world. If the world were not rational then theoretical investigations as well as technology would be impossible. But the rational order of the world can be explained only by assuming that it exists and develops according to a certain law. Høene–Wroński claimed that he has discovered this law. He called it *the law of creation (loi de création)*. He spoke about it in a mysterious way. It formed the kern of his philosophy. It made possible not only to get to know the structure of the reality but also to describe and to rule the processes. It should provide the method of accurate cognition and activity.

Høene–Wroński distinguished chrematic and achrematic philosophy. The source of the former is the world of created things. It looks for the conditions of their existence till the absolutely independent condition, i. e. the Absolute which overcomes the world of created objects. The whole philosophy existing so far belongs to this trend. The starting point of the second type of philosophy, i. e. of the achrematic philosophy, comes beyond the sphere of things. It is independent of experience and it forms the world as a set of conditions present in the mind of the creator of the universe. It transcends the world of created things and provides an analysis of fundamental principles. It reaches the most important principles of any being and eliminates the gap between the knowledge and the being proposing their synthesis in a direct inspection¹.

The mind of a human being and the mind of the Absolute are of the same nature. But since the mind of a man has some limitations caused by our physical being, hence it possesses smaller power and smaller domain of activity. The mind acts – both in a human being and in the Absolute according to the law of creation. The mind does not discover it but it sets it up and imposes it to itself. Høene–Wroński deduced this law from two elements, namely from the knowledge and the being. The development consists of associating and diametrical splitting of those elements. Taking successive positions: neutral, diametrical or dominating one upon the other they take various forms and exert various influences and in this way form the whole richness of the world. The knowledge is subjective, active, spontaneous, it acts in a free and intentional way. The being is objective, passive, inert, unable to create any feature. It is a material on which a variety of phenomena is being put. Knowledge is universal, it applies to an unbounded number of individual objects. It gives the meaning and the variety to the world. In the world of things both elements, i. e. the knowledge and the being, interact and determine each other.

The law of creation is derived by Wroński from the very nature of the Absolute. The latter grants it to itself. In the first creation act the Absolute is being divided into knowledge (subject) and being (subject). The knowledge is the auto-creation (*autogenia*), the being is the auto-establishing (*autotezja*). Further the autocreation goes in accordance with the law of creation and leads to the full autocreation of the Creator. The law of creation guides this

¹ One can see here connections with the Husserl's transcendental reduction.

autocreation and simultaneously is being derived from it as its component.

In the posthumously published work *Messianisme, philosophie absolue* (1876) presenting the functioning of the law of creation Wroński constructs an architectonics of the world. The whole reality is captured in *systems* (*syste-maty*). A system of a smaller degree of generality follows from a system of a higher degree. At the top of this hierarchy stands the system of auto-creation of God. Next are:

1. the formation of God by itself,
2. the creation of the reality,
3. the creation of the world,
4. the creation of a human being,
5. the formation of a human being by himself/herself,
6. the formation of the absolute religion,
7. the progressive development of the mankind.

In this way Wroński derived the whole universe from the single law of creation. He was convinced that he succeeded at the place where Descartes failed – namely in deducing the whole human knowledge from a single principle and according to one single method. This implies the need of a reform of the hitherto existing human knowledge, the need to reform the science. To do this one should apply the law of creation – this would make possible to order and to steer them towards the ultimate goals. The reform of the science should begin – according to Wroński – from mathematics. The reason of this was his conviction that the value of the law of creation can be checked just in the case of mathematics. Hence he aimed to deduce all theorems and methods of mathematics from the general principle.

In *Introduction to a Course of Mathematics* (London 1821) Wroński explained in a straightforward way the plans to reform mathematics – this work should present his plans to the general public. He begins by stating that any positive knowledge is based on mathematics or at least uses mathematics. He distinguishes four periods in the development of mathematics. The first one is the period when mathematics was carried on *in concreto*, i. e. there was no abstraction from the material reality, mathematics had a practical character (so was the case of mathematics in ancient Egypt and Babilon). The second period is the period of Greek mathematics. It can be characterized by the fact that abstraction was used but – according to Høene–Wroński – mathematical truths were *only particular facts* [cases] *and have still not reached the general truths*. The third period is the time from Cardan and Fermat till Kepler and Wallis. Some general truths did appear in mathematics, but they were isolated, they were *individual mathematical products*. In particular the formulas for solutions of equations of degree 3 and 4 have been found but there was no idea about the general setting of the problem. The last fourth period has begun with Newton and Leibniz. Then methods have been developed which can be applied to *all the appearances of the nature*. This period is characterized by the usage of sums of sequences, the only common tool so far.

The characteristic feature of all periods in the hitherto development of mathematics was – according to Høene–Wroński – that they were based on some relative principles. This means that there were no absolute principles and

– on the other hand – science should be based just on such ideas. Hence the prediction of the new higher stage in the development of mathematics. Its basis should be the reform proposed by Wroński. It consists of the division of mathematics into theory and technie (*technia*). All mathematical truths should be deduced from the unique highest law and in this way they should receive the absolute certainty.

Let's come back to the philosophical system of Høene–Wroński. Note that he did not explain what is in fact the Absolute, what are its essence and nature. Hence various interpretations are possible: it can be understood as God, as the mind, as *Ding an sich*. Wroński himself understood the Absolute still in a more abstract way than all those interpretations. He did not define its essence being convinced that a source of any being and any knowledge is in fact beyond being and knowledge and consequently cannot have any definition, neither ontological nor epistemological. Any definitions of the Absolute are always definitions not in its nature but only in relation to other beings and objects. So is, in particular, the case when one says that the Absolute possesses the highest reality, highest certainty, highest stability, that in it there is the infinite truth, the infinite right, the universal necessity, the complete harmony, the perfect identity, the maximal independence and the eternal source of creativeness. In order to get to know the Absolute *one should overcome the worldly conditions of a rational being* and to go up to the absolute reason. This can be done in a so called *pure inspection*, hence by intuition which is simultaneously a cognitive act as well as an existential act.

3. The philosophy of history of Høene–Wroński

Wroński's aim was not only to describe and to define the Absolute but rather to derive from it the whole diversity of the being according to a single law – the law of creation.

This law was for Wroński not only a principle according to which the being has been formed but also a principle that should be respected by any human being who wants to fulfil his/her destiny. Under this condition the mankind can move from the present political system which is full of antagonisms and inconsistencies to a completely intelligent system. In this way we come to the next feature of Høene–Wroński's system, namely to his messianism.

Wroński distinguished four periods in the hitherto existing history. Each of them put different aims, in particular: materialistic aims (Orient), moral ones (Greece, Rome), religious ones (the Middle Ages), intellectual ones (modern times till the 18th century). The 19th century is a transitional period. There are two trends struggling with each other: the conservative one that puts as its aim the right, and the liberal one aiming at the truth. The future of the mankind is in the unity of the right and the truth, of religion and science, in creating the epoch of *the absolute right and truth*. And here the significant rôle should be played by Slav nations – they will overcome the contrasts and antagonisms of the Romance and Teutonic peoples and lead the mankind to the period of absolute aims, to the fulfilment of the human destiny, to the discovery of the truth and to the immortality.

Since the philosophy leads to the cognition of the Absolute, it identifies itself with religion, it transforms the revealed religion into the intellectual religion. Consequently a discoverer of the absolute religion becomes in a certain sense a Messiah who having come to the boundaries of any cognition proclaims the unity of science and religion. Hence Wroński distinguishes two fundamental domains of the philosophy: the domain providing the knowledge about the reality (he called it theory/*teoria* or *autotezja*) and the domain directing the reality to enable it to reach its aims (he called it *technia* or *autogenia*). Just the second component (which joins the philosophy and politics) makes the philosophy of Høene–Wroński richer in comparison with e. g. the system of Hegel or the whole German idealism.

By the application of the law of creation, statements of the revealed religion should received the certainty of the knowledge. This idea united the absolute philosophy and the absolute religion developed on the basis of Christianity and it should be realized in the history of the mankind tending towards the ultimate aims. Messianism should fulfil the promises given to the mankind by Messiah–Christ.

The progress of the mankind consists of the constant and permanent ascent to the higher principles of knowledge. In the last period of the development the reality of the Absolute will be scientifically established. Then the dogmas and mysteries of the revealed religion will be explained, sehelian (from the Hebrew *sehel* – mind) church will be established. In this church the religious worship will consist of practising the fine arts. It will be a complement and the fulfilment of the Christianity. Wroński developed those ideas in particular in a letter to the pope Leo XII (1827).

A man will successively regain freedom from the inert conditions of his/her corporal nature and will still more and more use spontaneous conditions of his/her spiritual freedom. This progress will be accompanied by the development of the consciousness till the appearance of the absolute consciousness. At the final step a man will subordinate his/her freedom to the law of creation and will consciously join the creative activity of the absolute mind.

The big reform of the mankind can be realized by a synthesis of act and thought, hence by uniting the activity of two nations leading in those domains, i. e. France and Germany. After 1830 Wroński digressed this conception and began to proclaim the messianism of Slav nations guided by the Russian tsar. According to him Slavs have a special historical mission – the mission of synthesizing the German thought (i. e. the philosophy) and the French act (i. e. social programmes) and of reaching the ultimate aims. Hence Slavs should close the epoch of antinomies and open the epoch of truth. In the latter the idea of *the God's Kingdom on the earth* should be realized.

Høene–Wroński advertised the messianism till the end of his life, developed it in numerous works and popularized it. He attempted to arouse the interest of his contemporaries in his ideas, addressed monarchs, printed proclamations to nations, wrote prospectuses, founded associations, published journals. He deeply believed in the infinite power of the human mind. He was convinced that only the mind regaining its freedom from the earthly limitations will lead the mankind to its culminant predestinations.

The philosophical doctrine of Høene–Wroński is in fact idealistic. Mystical elements are intertwined in it with the radically rationalistic ones. Hence it belongs both to the rationalistic trend as well as to the romantic one. It is a specific combination of metaphysics, the philosophy of history, religion, ethics and politics. This explains Wroński's interests not only in the philosophy as such but also his engagement in the policy.

4. The reception of the philosophical ideas of Høene–Wroński and his followers

The philosophical conceptions of Høene–Wroński as well as his philosophy of history have found various and differentiated evaluations and have caused various reactions. Honoré de Balzac saw in him one of the most intelligent persons (cf. his letter to Madame Hańska from 1st August 1834 – it can be found in: *Pisma* of T. Boy–Żeleński, vol. XII, Warszawa 1958, p. 231). Add that Balzac devoted to Høene–Wroński a novel *Balthazar Claes ou la Recherche de l'absolu* published in 1834.

The contemporaries criticized Wroński or did not understand him. The reason was on the one hand the ambiguity of his considerations, on the other his attitude full of haughtiness and predominance having their source in his conviction of the absolute value of his conceptions. Karol Libelt¹ wrote that the world has lost in him a thinking writer of exceptional talent because his mind has chosen a wrong direction. Józef Ujejski² reproached Wroński with charlatanry and even paranoia. Wincenty Lutosławski³, one of the last neomessianists, taunted him with the lack of the university education and with the self-exaltation. He wrote also that from the writings of Wroński one can learn in a very complicated way very simple truths.

Wroński's ideas awoke interest of occultists (independently of the fact that he separated himself from them). Papus (Gerard Encausse) wrote in his *Traité méthodique de science occulte* (1891) that Høene–Wroński owes his deepest ideas to cabbala. E. Lévi mentioned Wroński a couple of times in his *Histoire de la magie* (1860).

The first notorious continuator of the philosophical ideas of Høene–Wroński was Antoni Bukaty (1808–1876), a philosopher, historian and engineer. He was active in France where he moved after the decline of the November uprising (1830).

Another continuator of Wroński was Samuel Dickstein (1851–1939), a mathematician, historian of mathematics and an educator. He catalogued and described scientifically the Kórnik collection of Wroński's writings – he made it in the book *Katalog dzieł i rękopisów Høene–Wrońskiego* [*The Catalogue of Works and Manuscripts of Høene–Wroński*] published in Cracow in 1896⁴. He

¹ Karol Libelt (1807–1875), Polish Messianic philosopher, political and social worker.

² Józef Ujejski (1883–1937), historian of Polish literature, professor of Warsaw University.

³ Wincenty Lutosławski (1863–1954), professor of philosophy.

⁴ S. Dickstein, *Katalog dzieł i rękopisów Høene–Wrońskiego – Catalogue des œuvres imprimées et manuscrites de Høene Wroński*, Nakładem Akademii Umiejętności, Kraków 1896. Also in: S. Dickstein, *Høene Wroński. Jego życie i prace*, Nakładem Akademii Umiejętności, Kraków 1896, pp. 239–351.

is also the author of the book *Hæne–Wroński. Jego życie i praca* [*Hæne–Wroński. His Life and Work*] (1896)¹. A catalogue of Wroński's works was also prepared by Bolesław J. Gawecki, *Wroński i o Wrońskim* (1958)².

In Poland the interest for Wroński's ideas and conceptions was shown mainly by people being not professional philosophers. In the interwar period the Messianistic Institute was established in Warsaw – it was active between 1919 and 1933. Its leader was J. Jankowski. Among its members were Paulin Chomicz, Czesław Jastrzębiec–Kozłowski and Jerzy Braun. In the institute many translations into Polish of Wroński's works have been prepared. In 1933 Association of Hæne–Wroński has been established in Warsaw – Paulin Chomicz became its president. In the board there were Cz. Jastrzębiec–Kozłowski and J. Braun. The organ of the association was the journal *Zet*. After the Second World War the main initiator of the revival of Wroński's thought in Poland was J. Braun. In 1962 he founded in the Warsaw Club of the Catholic Intelligentsia [Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej] a Section of Polish Philosophy. The philosophical conceptions of Wroński have been studied there. In 1965 Braun left Poland. After his departure the studies have been continued in two sections: Section of the Philosophy of Religion (directed by Czesław Domaradzki) and Section of Polish Religious Rationalism (led by Jan Łuszczewski). In those sections were active among others: Jastrzębiec–Kozłowski, A. Madej and L. Łukomski as well as J. Niementowski. Łukomski is the author of the book *Twórca filozofii absolutnej. Rzecz o Hæne–Wrońskim* [*The Founder of the Absolute Philosophy. About Hæne–Wroński*] published in 1982. Both sections existed till the mid 80s.

5. Conclusions

Summing up one should say that Wroński belonged to the best European metaphysicians of the beginning of the 19th century. He distinguished himself by the scientific background and the extensiveness of aims. He was in fact an outstanding person and one of the most original thinkers. He knew many (a dozen or so) languages, had good knowledge in various domains, he was a scholar [erudite]. On the other hand his considerations were too abstract, his thought too ambiguous, he had problems to express clearly his ideas. Simultaneously he was absolutely self-confident (what sometimes was close to arrogance) and has ignored works of others and formulated arbitrary opinions about them. He was rather a difficult person in contact and this has certainly influenced the fate of his ideas.

The philosophical ideas of Hæne–Wroński did not find any echo. He had no big circle of supporters, successors or students. He was alone. Perhaps this is the reason why Hæne–Wroński belongs to scientists who are rather forgotten today.

¹ S. Dickstein, *Hæne Wroński. Jego życie i praca*.

² B. J. Gawecki, *Wroński i o Wrońskim. Katalog dzieł filozoficznych Hæne–Wrońskiego oraz literatury dotyczącej jego osoby i filozofii* [*Wroński and about Wroński. Catalogue of Philosophical Works of Hæne–Wroński and of the Literature on Him and His Philosophy*], PWN, Warszawa 1958.