

Introduction

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Polish philosophy goes back to the 13th century, when Witelon, famous for his works in optics and the metaphysics of light, lived and worked in Silesia. Yet, Poland's academic life only really began after the University of Cracow was founded in 1364 – its development was interrupted by the sudden death of King Kazimierz III, but it was re-established in 1400. The main currents of classical scholastic thought like Thomism, Scottism or Ockhamism had been late – about a century – to come to Poland and they had a considerable impact on the budding Polish philosophical scene. The controversy between the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna* was hotly debated.¹ Intellectuals deliberated on the issues of conciliarism (whether the Common Council has priority over the Pope) and curialism (whether the Bishop of Rome has priority over the Common Council). On the whole, the situation had at least two remarkable features. Firstly, Polish philosophy was pluralistic, and remained so, since its very beginning. But it was also eclectic, which might explain why it aimed to a large extent at achieving a compromise between rival views. Secondly, given the shortcomings of the political system of the time as well as external pressure by an increasingly hegemonic Germany, thinkers were very much interested in political matters. Poland was a stronghold of political thought (mostly inclined towards conciliarism) and Polish political thought distinguished itself in Europe

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This introduction offers a very general and equally concise overview of the history of Polish philosophy. More may be found in the following works (in English, French or German): G. Krzywicki-Herbert, "Polish Philosophy", in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, P. Edwards (ed), v. 6, New York, Macmillan, 1967, 363–370; Z. Kuderowicz, *Das philosophische Ideengut Polens*, Bonn, Bouvier, 1988; J. Czerkowski, A. B. Stepień, S. Wielgus, "Poland, Philosophy in", in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, E. Craig (ed), v. 7, London, Routledge, 1998, 483–489; J. Woleński, "Philosophy", in *The Polish Cultural & Scientific Heritage at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, E. Szczepanik (ed), London, *Polish Cultural Foundation*, 2003, 319–343. Further (selected) bibliographical information about particular periods, movements and persons will be provided throughout the introduction.

¹ On this particular issue Polish philosophers were influenced by Wycliffe who had been and still was very popular in neighbouring Prague. Most settled for the modern ideal.