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BEAUTY, ART AND ELEMENTS OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION IN THE POLISH WRITINGS OF THE NEO-THOMISTS OF THE INTERWAR PERIOD²

Summary: Beauty, a property of existence in the Neo-Thomistic view, allows one to perceive it as a property of reality and of human artefacts, including art. It can be found in human behaviour and in the tradition of culture in the form of harmony, perfection and brilliance. An examination of beauty should be subject to the principal rules of study in metaphysics. Beauty is an important factor in the development of personality: it raises and ennobles. The love of beauty incorporates rest and respite, which are necessary for human development. Not being subject to the virtue of prudence, art itself does not seek to make man better, because it is all about creating a work of art. Neo-Thomists see a conflict between morality and art in this fact; the risk does not occur when the artist takes ethics “as his or her own”. In this case, he or she unknowingly creates ethical works or art. Art is undoubtedly of great social importance and it should fulfil an important social mission through aesthetic education by making available to the widest possible group of people truth, beauty and goodness.

Keywords: Neo-Thomism, beauty, art, aesthetic education, artistic education, humanism, harmony, objectivism, Kazimierz Kowalski, Karol Górski, Barbara Żulińska

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² The article is a shortened and slightly changed version of my chapter „Piękno, sztuka i elementy edukacji estetycznej w pismach polskich neotomistów dwudziestolecia międzywojennego” published in the monograph *Sztuka i jej wartości* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego 2017, 15–35).

Introduction

Neo-Thomism is a new reading of Thomas Aquinas' philosophy and its broad and creative continuation. One of its main versions was the Leuven Neo-Thomism School³ started by Désiré J. Mercier⁴. The incentive for the development of Neo-Thomism was provided by the *Aeterni Patris Encyclical* of Pope Leo XIII (1879)⁵. The Neo-Thomistic programme emphasised the need to develop not only metaphysics but also theories of cognition, logic, psychology, sociology and natural science⁶. Neo-Thomism was not a simple return to the 13th-century Thomism and it gained the status of a philosophy that was open to the contemporary achievements of natural sciences in the opinion of its many inspirers and creators. The medievalist studies outside of Leuven (e.g. conducted by Franz Ehrle, Étienne Gilson, Clemens Baeumker, Pierre Mandonnet) showed that the opinions disseminated by the proponents of different philosophical orientations about the fall of the medieval philosophy have no objective grounds in the original works. Such hypotheses are supported by prominent authorities, such as D.J. Mercier, É. Gilson and Jacques Maritain⁷.

The Neo-Thomists' contribution is not limited to the interpretation of new problems or the correction of old comments in the original works of the medieval philosophers. Their scope is wide⁸. However, it is possible to briefly summarise it in the following way: J. Maritain popularised the Thomist thought; É. Gilson discovered its depth and relevance; Mieczysław A. Krąpiec and his colleagues Stefan Swieżawski, Marian Kurdziałka, Karol Wojtyła, Andrzej Maryniarczyk, Zofia J. Zdybicka gave it an adequate rank by formulating the contemporary version

³ For other versions of Neo-Thomism, see e.g. Mieczysław Gogacz, „Tomizm egzystencjalny na tle odmian tomizmu”, in: *W kierunku Boga* (Warsaw: Wyd. ATK 1982), 59–82; Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, „Tomizm transcendentalizujący”, in: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, vol. 9 [Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu (hereinafter PTTA) 2008], 512–514.

⁴ The primacy granted to Désiré J. Mercier is sometimes questioned as this development occurred in similar directions also in other locations – including in Poland in Lviv – independently of him and without any connection to Louvain (C. Głombik, „Galicjskie początki neoscholastycznej odnowy polskiego katolicyzmu”, in: *Galicja i jej dziedzictwo*, ed. Andrzej Meissner, Jerzy Wyrozumski, vol. 3 (Rzeszów: Edit. WSP 1995), 119–120.

⁵ Barbara Żulińska informs that the revival of Thomism is the achievement of the Polish resurrectionists, who sent a *Memorial* to Leo XIII requesting the recognition of Thomism as the leading philosophy of Catholicism (see: eadem, *Ku zmartwychwstaniu. Zagadnienia pedagogiczne* (Trenton: Wyd. Siostr Zmartwychwstaniek 1955).

⁶ Zdzisław Pawlak, „Tomizm łowański”, in: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, vol. 9 (Lublin: PTTA 2008), 508.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 509.

⁸ The reflection of these changes in pedagogy is more broadly discussed by e.g.: Janina Kostkiewicz, *Kierunki i koncepcje pedagogiki katolickiej w Polsce 1918–1939* (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls” 2013), 87–190; Tadeusz Kaszuba, „Piotr Semenenko a odnowa filozofii scholastycznej”, *Studia Philosophiae Christianae* 2(1968): 219–223.

of realistic philosophy in the process of its development and developing its basic fields related to the understanding of the world, man and culture⁹. Neo-Thomists were known to depart from the mainstream of Thomism and direct their thinking towards deformations, which consisted in the Thomist realism sometimes losing “what was its essence, namely its autonomy in relation to other sciences and philosophies and the neutrality at the point of departure”¹⁰. The contemporary circles of philosophers in the area of the Christian culture consider realistic philosophy in the version of existential (Neo)Thomism to be one of the most adequate methods of both qualitative and humanistic understanding of the world, man and his actions¹¹.

During the 20th-century interwar period (1918–1939) in Poland, a circle of philosophers of education and educationalists who took Neo-Thomism as the basis of their thinking created a scientifically meaningful environment. In this short period, they produced a huge scientific output which strongly supported the development of pedagogy in an extremely valuable – because highly humanistic – direction. In their pedagogical concept, none of the groups working on the development in Catholic pedagogy in the interwar period in Poland departed from their Neo-Thomistic foundations. The philosophical realism that is characteristic of the foundations of this pedagogy is present not only in (Neo)Thomism (Jacek Woroniecki, Wincenty Granat, Kazimierz Kowalski, Jan Salamucha) but also in the Catholic pedagogy of culture (Jan Ciemniewski, Zygmunt Bielawski, Barbara Żulińska) and the personalistic pedagogy oriented at social (Stanisław Podoleński, Aleksander Wóycicki, Karol Górski) and existential (Józef Roskwitalski, Ludwika Jeleńska) issues¹². Nowadays, neotomism is the basis for philosophical and pedagogical reflection (eg. in the works of Marek Rembierz¹³ or Maria M. Boużyk¹⁴); it is also a keenly developed current of contemporary pedagogy (e.g. in the works of Mieczysław Gogacz¹⁵ and his followers or Jarosław Horowski¹⁶).

⁹ Tomasz Mioduszewski, *Spór o realizm w lubelskiej szkole filozoficznej* (Ząbki: „Apostolicum” 2013).

¹⁰ Andrzej Maryniarczyk, „Tomizm”, in: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, vol. 9 (Lublin: PTTA 2008), 507.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² The extensive bibliography of the works of the above-mentioned authors is contained in: Kostkiewicz, *Kierunki i koncepcje*, 649–697.

¹³ Marek Rembierz, „Realizm metafizyczny jako inspiracja myśli pedagogicznej. O refleksji antropologiczno-pedagogicznej Stefana Świeżawskiego i jej znaczeniu dla teorii wychowania oraz analiz metapedagogicznych”. *Polska Myśl Pedagogiczna* 2 (2016): 135–174.

¹⁴ Maria M. Boużyk, „Myśl pedagogiczna Adama (Jacka) Woronieckiego w wybranych publikacjach z okresu 1903–1918”. *Polska Myśl Pedagogiczna* 1 (2015): 221–240.

¹⁵ Mieczysław Gogacz, *Podstawy wychowania* (Niepokalanów: Wydawnictwo Ojców Franciszkanów 1993).

¹⁶ Jarosław Horowski, „Pedagogika neotomistyczna w Polsce w XX wieku. Od koncepcji wychowania do teorii wychowania”. *Polska Myśl Pedagogiczna* 3 (2017): 45–61.

In the interwar period in Poland, the problem of beauty and aesthetic education was above all engaged by Kazimierz Kowalski. However, these issues were raised by Karol Górski and Barbara Żulińska, Stefan Szuman¹⁷, as well. Their works will become the basis for the Neo-Thomistic definitions of beauty, art, and aesthetic education used in here.

Beauty from the Neo-Thomistic perspective

The views of Neo-Thomists on beauty are the consequence of their views on “finite” being and are consistent therewith. It is assumed here that the view on the knowledge of the material world or the world connected to the matter exerts a significant influence on human activities and life. In this regard, Thomism has a theory of form and matter which explains “both the permanence and changes of the material world according to certain results of experience and the great principles of metaphysics of being”¹⁸. In relation to the supernatural world, explanatory methods are provided by the Thomist theology, which – together with the Thomist philosophy – has knowledge of the causes and effective remedy of spiritual crises. The Thomistic views on these issues affect the way and contents of resolutions in social, moral and civic education, which is emphasised by the Neo-Thomists themselves and which K. Kowalski expresses through his references to the role of authority (also the authority of God) in building social and educational relations and in the preparation of man for establishing good relationships through education¹⁹.

Both Thomism and Neo-Thomism have their own theories and concepts of beauty, which were complemented gradually as they developed. Their dominant point of departure is the recognition of beauty as a property of being. But before we touch its depths, one can generally say that beauty (*kalós* in Greek, *pulchritudo*, *pulchrum* in Latin) is a property of “the reality, human artefacts, including art, and human behaviour expressed in the Western tradition in the form of harmony, perfection or brilliance, which – being viewed or viewable – arouse pleasure”²⁰. It is worth mentioning that this definition – although given by a contemporary

¹⁷ Particularly remarkable are the forgotten but still prevailing works of Stefan Szuman, such as: idem, „Cele wychowania estetycznego”, *Przyjaciel Szkoły* 14 (1925): 401–404; idem, *Sztuka dziecka* (Warszawa: Książnica – Atlas 1927).

¹⁸ Kazimierz Kowalski, *Św. Tomasz z Akwinu a czasy obecne* (Poznań: Księgarnia Św. Wojciecha 1935), 45.

¹⁹ Kazimierz Kowalski, „O społeczeństwie, władzy i autorytecie”, *Ruch Katolicki* 2(1932): 102–111.

²⁰ Piotr Jaroszyński, „Piękno”, in: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, vol. 8 (Lublin: PTTA 2007), 199.

philosopher of art – both conforms with the understanding of beauty by the Neo-Thomists and is rooted in it too.

The Thomistic views on beauty – as already mentioned – are part of its views on the finite being. This fact is important in relation to beauty for two reasons. Firstly, beauty in the order of a “detached essence” is formally independent and therefore can be the subject of an independent branch of philosophy – thus there is place for aesthetics in Neo-Thomism and it forms a developed branch of knowledge. This is worth emphasising as aesthetics and the place for beauty derive from the structures of Thomism as a philosophy and are not a consent to the “developmental need” of the culture or humanity. Secondly, concrete beauty and real artistic creativity are part of the moral order – this fact has multiple effects and contexts apart from the fact that beauty cannot be the exclusive and ultimate goal of human interests.

In addition to beauty being an object of aesthetics, it also includes the activities that produce beautiful items (so there is place for e.g. the principles of beauty and art there). Its scope includes – probably most tangibly and practically – the products of the activity mentioned above, i.e. the works of art and the knowledge of beauty itself (aesthetic cognition)²¹. On the other hand, aesthetics was defined by Neo-Thomists as “the rational science or philosophy of beauty in general”²².

As an object of aesthetics, beauty can be studied. Since beauty is a property of being, it should be subject to the principal rules of metaphysical studies. In its classical version, being is examined as both being and the properties of being called transcendentals (apart from being, these include thing, one, something, good and the truth). The status of beauty with regard to transcendentals is debatable, which, in my view, is less important from the perspective of specific sciences than from the perspective of metaphysics itself.

Being part of the moral order, beauty raises the problem of relationships in all matters related to it – mainly between art and morality. In the Thomistic theory of beauty, we can find a harmonious and balanced synthesis of both objectively transcendental and humanly psychological factors²³. They all fall into the category of beauty. Currently, this position is maintained by Piotr Jaroszyński²⁴.

Some authors believe that beauty may not be included in transcendentals because it does not refer to every being since some things are ugly (P.M. de Munnynck), not all are harmonious (M. de Wulf), beauty does not refer to every element of being but only to the form (M.-D. Philippe); some claim that beauty is only a genus of good (J. Kleutgen) while others say that it is a synthesis of recognised transcendentals – especially of the truth and good (A.B. Stępień). This group of

²¹ Kazimierz Kowalski, *Zagadnienie piękna*, seria: *Studia Gnesnensia* (Lwów: Drukarnia Dominikańska 1932), 48.

²² Ibidem.

²³ Kowalski, *Św. Tomasz*, 50.

²⁴ Jaroszyński, „Piękno”, 201.

philosophers, however, is a minority and most Neo-Thomists claim that beauty is a separate transcendental property of being, even though it is a synthesis of the truth and good (e.g. E. Gilson, M.A. Krąpiec) or the truth, good and being (e.g. E. Chapmann) or even all transcendentals (J. Maritain).

At present – as theoreticians claim – beauty is most frequently indicated in relation to art, sense perception and feelings²⁵. This was not always the case. In their reflections, ancient Greeks associated beauty first with reality (cosmos) and morality. Noteworthy are the traditions of the relationships between beauty and morality: firstly, they are older than Christianity; secondly, they do not bring the art (work) to the first plan.

Within the area of the Neo-Thomistic tradition lies also the problem of aesthetic impression. The Neo-Thomists of the interwar period generally acknowledged the existence of two extreme directions for interpretation of aesthetic impression which exert influence on a false interpretation of beauty:

- the first is aesthetic sentimentalism, which values the significance of the impression of beauty too low by exposing sense perception equal to sentimental realisation of the order and proportion (e.g. G.W. Leibniz, A.G. Baumgartner);
- the other is aesthetic rationalism, which maintains that aesthetic cognition has no connection or has little connection to the senses. According to the creators of this direction (G.W.F. Hegel, Neo-Kantists), it is the soul that produces forms of beauty (aesthetic objects). Reaching these forms (attaining them) results in aesthetic experiences (impressions). From aesthetic rationalism emerged aestheticism, which wanted to include all the speculative and moral life exclusively within beauty²⁶;
- Neo-Thomists are equally critical of the studies in aesthetics and the tendencies in culture that wanted to establish the artist or viewer as the ultimate criterion of beauty and art (subjectivism and aesthetic individualism); this also applies to the directions which saw this criterion in society (aesthetic sociology).

The rejection of these extreme theories is the basis for indicating and recognising the universality of the Neo-Thomistic theories.

1. Knowledge of beauty in the aspect of its educational role

Both Thomism and Neo-Thomism assume that aesthetic cognition is included in the entirety of human cognitive activity and is one of its kinds. It is an inward, sensory and mental activity. It is worth emphasising the universality of the roads leading to the knowledge of beauty stressed in Neo-Thomism. It is claimed here

²⁵ Ibidem, 199–201.

²⁶ Kowalski, *Zagadnienie piękna*, 47.

that aesthetics tries to explain all issues “with the deepest natural causes and reasons, both psychological and metaphysical”.²⁷

As all things are first perceived by the senses and then “investigated by the mental cognitive power, the objects of cognition (in the earthly dimension) are the material forms realised in a material way, “i.e. *the being of objects that are material* or connected to the matter. Hence, it is impossible to make aesthetic cognition without a sensory perception (which I will return to – JK). So, the beauty that is available for *direct* human cognition”²⁸ can only be the beauty of beings, or perceivable objects. Logically related with that is the claim that in field of “the artistic cognition, the artist’s and viewer’s personalities and the objective values of the work of art play an important role in creating the aesthetic impression”²⁹. And although it is assumed here that man experiences beauty through his senses, imagination and mind, one sees the necessity saying that “every philosophy of beauty should ultimately finish its theses through metaphysical examination of the question of beauty in general”³⁰. The knowledge of beauty is obtained in the context of and on the background of metaphysics but also with the exposure of views on man (anthropology) and all assumptions of epistemology – and then there is some room for the specificity of its cognition.

Among the views on man – in the context of the ability to know beauty – the importance of individual issues is as follows:

- The first is the attitude of Thomism to reason, which “emphasises – on the one hand – the absolute value, objectivity and true value of the natural human cognition, and on the other hand it upholds the thesis of the analogy of minds, the superiority of the angelic mind, and especially of God’s, over human’s”³¹.
- The second power of man is the will which, by virtue of his nature, strives for good (although Neo-Thomists give education some tasks in this regard – e.g. M. Gogacz). The will is the cause and basis of the dynamism of human activities (hence stagnation, ossification or stability are not among the characteristics of the Catholic culture). The study of human will is balanced, does not cause despair or exaggerated cult of one’s own will, does not harm the freedom of human will (it has unique conceptions of freedom of choice, which are dynamic and free of determinisms!) – although it grants the central place to the God’s Will. Thus, it surrenders the personal life of individuals to the natural law and supernatural ethics³².

²⁷ Ibidem, 48.

²⁸ Ibidem, 49.

²⁹ Ibidem, 51.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Kowalski, *Św. Tomasz*, 37.

³² Ibidem, 39–40.

- By combining the spirit and matter of human nature, Thomism presupposes that the spirit dominates the body (its domination is important in the educational processes). This principle is coupled with the supernatural purpose/destiny of man. This involves the principles of the perfect and good action (virtue). The study of virtues is the explanation of the balanced view on morality that is appropriate and recommended to man.
- Social life and society are considered to be the product of the natural powers and potency of man and the expression of God's Will. They are subjected to the norm of morality whose ultimate principle (criterion and source) is neither man nor society, but the Creator's Wisdom and Will. Although man has connection with the society for the common good, it may not deprive him of his own purpose in any circumstance. In this regard, Thomism sits between individualism and anarchism on the one hand and collectivism and sociology on the other³³.

The above-mentioned assumptions are important due to the creator and the viewer and provide a point of departure for the discussion about their roles, rights, abilities, etc. On the other hand, in the highly ordered area of the entire Thomistic epistemology, noteworthy is the thesis that human cognition transcends the sphere of sensuality and embraces the essence of things, as well³⁴. It is worth noting that "man has no purely mental aesthetic intuition, i.e. no direct knowledge of non-material beauty"³⁵.

Returning to the role of aesthetic impression, in the Neo-Thomistic theory of knowledge of beauty, one should point to the fact that it incorporates a harmonious and balanced synthesis of both objectively transcendental and humanly psychological factors, which include: the intellectual element; emotional factors; the dexterity of the artist regarded as the direct cause of the work, the work itself – which is considered to be the purpose for the creative endeavour; and the idea – the pattern of the work in the artist's mind³⁶.

The above-mentioned elements of aesthetic cognition and education co-exist with its theoretical foundations, which imply that neither the artist nor the society is recognised as the ultimate creator of the beauty or its criterion – these are present in God, so the immensity of beauty can be found in supernatural reality only³⁷.

Another issue is the ability to judge the beauty and value of works of art (based on the principles of aesthetics and metaphysics of beauty). Such an ability

³³ Items, 34, 43.

³⁴ Ibidem, 49.

³⁵ Kowalski, *Zagadnienie piękna*, 49. Kowalski points out that this was proven by: O. Roland-Gosselin OP, *Peut-on parler d'intuition intellectuelle dans la philosophie thomiste?* (Phil. perennis. Festig. Geyser II, p. 709–730). As cited in: ibidem.

³⁶ Kowalski, *Św. Tomasz...*, 50.

³⁷ Ibidem, 50–52.

is commonly called an aesthetic taste³⁸. The state of this ability falls within the scope of aesthetic education. In the end, aesthetic cognition includes emotional factors, “thanks to which art captivates the viewer so that he strives to contemplate the beautiful thing [...]. This is the case due to «elements»”³⁹ incorporated in the work by the creator and – as already mentioned – expressing his “personality” and also through the moral values contained in the work.

2. Art in the context of the knowledge of beauty

A work of art is considered to be “an original work produced by the artist in an orderly fashion in a certain matter which includes and emphasises the value, i.e. the content of being of a certain general substance”⁴⁰. A work of art is considered to be “an objective support” for aesthetic impression. It is an object that was given brilliance and splendour by the artist. The act of art is not a slave copy of reality, but on the other hand, it is emphasised that “a work of art requires some fundamental consideration of existences of reality”⁴¹ while stressing that it should not be a slave copy of reality. The analysis of a work of art cannot give a sufficient answer to the question: what is art. One must also take into account the artist who is the creator of the aesthetic object and thus a subject of art. Art is also defined as a <subjective state> in the mind of the creator⁴².

The Neo-Thomistic theory of beauty and art uses the term of “rectitude”. So as not to alienate a contemporary artist, it must be added that the main “element” of <rectitude> (rectitudo) is based on the purposefulness of the works of beauty as such (Neo-Thomists themselves used the term “rectitude” in quotation marks – JK)⁴³. The purpose of art – in the broadest sense – is “to emphasise the value of being of an idea”⁴⁴. Among the above-mentioned “rectitudes”, which should not be understood as limitations of the artist, the tendency of the will for good and the speculative purpose (the beauty of form) is exposed. An actual inability of the artist to follow these “rectitudes” is justified with the possible fact of their ineptitude in life. As part of the justification, it is also stated that “[...] certain speculative superiority of aestheticians in the field of thought and ideals often stems from the intellectual superiority of art over technique and prudence”⁴⁵. By combining thinking about beauty with art, we can say that beauty is the correct pursuit of the creator’s will.

³⁸ Kowalski, *Zagadnienie piękna*, 51.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 54.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 52.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 54.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 55.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

The above-mentioned elements of beauty and its knowledge coexist with its theoretical foundations, which imply that neither the artist nor the society is recognised as the ultimate creator of the beauty or its testament – the immensity of beauty can be found in supernatural reality⁴⁶.

Elements of aesthetic education

So far humanism has had a lot of <faces> and roads for its realisation, and the essential reason for such state of things has been the anchoring of its creators and commentators in the realistic (including Neo-Thomist) or idealistic philosophy. The adherents of the latter – taking advantage of its rules (such as loyalty to ideas, their priority and the priority of thought) – use them to determine the development of science, pushing it toward ideologies (e.g. racism). Following in the footsteps of the Cartesian tradition (“I think so I am” rejected my realism), they made – to summarise this Neo-Thomistic conjecture – numerous errors, situating many issues beyond the objective and intersubjectively verifiable discourse. Idealism continually “multiplies pseudo-problems and <isms> that sanction their solemnity [...]; a priori visions of ideal civilisations and cultures; their implementation in politics results in social totalitarianism and cultural uniformity”⁴⁷. The aesthetic education incorporated in them can take on the traits of the former or latter tradition.

1. Neo-Thomistic theory of cognition in relation to elements of education – including aesthetic education

Within the area of the Neo-Thomistic theory of cognition, one must not – writes K. Kowalski – play with fictions or base one’s claims on the relative conclusions arising from a selected idea, from the disturbances of sensual or other powers. The Neo-Thomistic philosophy is a vital re-creation of the order of the universe in the human mind, the knowledge of what is or can be⁴⁸. K. Kowalski undertakes the task of identifying the most important features of Neo-Thomism which, in his opinion, have the deepest impact in the field of pedagogy. These are: “absolutism, intellectualism, spiritualism, objectivism and realism of Thomas Aquinas’ philosophy”⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ Kowalski, *Św. Tomasz*, 50–20.

⁴⁷ Henryk Kiereś, „Idealizm”, in: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, vol. 4 (Lublin: PTTA 2003), 725.

⁴⁸ Kowalski, „Pożyteczność zasadniczych cech filozofii św. Tomasza dla wychowawców”, 93–94.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 95.

Absolutism, which means the objectivism and absoluteness of Thomism here, continues to have important relations with the qualitative characteristics of education. A characteristic of the philosophy of St. Thomas is the principle that human reason cannot be satisfied with relative truths. The mere possibility of scepticism – claims Kowalski – is a proof of the tendency of the reason for absolute statements. On this issue, St. Thomas “assimilates and deepens the position of St. Augustine on the knowledge of absolute truths [...]. For the educator and education, this principle is of fundamental importance. The value of absolute truths and rules gives the educational work a constant orientation, consistency and uniformity. It protects against overestimation of trivial experiences and generalisations of particular insights and serves as a protection against momentary moods, the illusionary power of momentary success or transient failures. For the student, on the other hand, the conviction of the value of absolute truths is the beginning of a solid, unified and harmonious life orientation that opens the eyes to the value of long-term and consistent self-improvement⁵⁰.

The absolute (objective) truth gives direction to the principal powers – reason and will; it does not destroy the dynamism of life, spiritual work, the freedom of discussion and examination. It is worth emphasising the fact that K. Kowalski acknowledges the entire area of relative issues which cannot be objectively declared. This should not, however, be interpreted as a consent for cognitive or moral relativism. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that this is the result of the consistent application of the principle of objectivism – as it means that the problem itself or its solution may not be sufficiently (examined) known.

In the philosophy of St. Thomas, the characteristic of objectivism – in Kowalski's interpretation – is attributed to the statements of the mind which “reproduce the objective situation, self-included and independent of any conscious action of the powers of the cogniser. Thus, it is contrasted with [...] any theories of subjectivist sentimentality, intuitionism and voluntarism”⁵¹. This is opposed by the human thought which became – as Kowalski argues – the centre of “religious occupations” of Protestantism and which distanced itself from the objectivism, selecting the human self as the “centre of the universe, attributing creative cognition, independent will to it [...]. Hence, many <modern> people – in theory at least – build their world and the view the world on the basis of purely subjective factors, which are not subject to any rules or norms [...]. In fact, these people surrender to theoretical, unstructured influences of their will, feelings, fantasies and other lower powers in their lives”⁵². In this way they create an anarchy of intellectual life, which – according to Kowalski – impacts their practical life and the entire reality.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, 96.

⁵¹ Kowalski, „Pożyteczność zasadniczych cech...”, 106.

⁵² Ibidem.

Such a state of thought in science translates into the practice of education and carries negative consequences therefor. The youth who absorb the atmosphere of the environment imbued with subjectivist attitudes approve of the ambiguity of scientific thought, excessive subjective ambitions, lack of obedience to the overriding laws. Thus, one can see the failure to recognise the virtues of others and respect objectively justified opinions of other people on a daily basis in the behaviour of people who have allegedly received education⁵³.

As a result of respecting objectivism in education in the processes of cognition and morality that occur there and in aesthetic (artistic) education, the participant (pupil/ student and teacher/lecturer):

- is not and does not feel as “the centre of the universe”; recognises that his reason is not God’s creative powers (although it can and should be creative in itself);
- is dependent on external objects in cognition – their reality is confronted with them and intentions related to them;
- their individual will is not supreme because it has to reconcile their decision with the moral norms (although it has the freedom to choose while taking this norm into account).

Only these elementary rectitudes – straight from the realistic order (and reason), from the realistic (and also Thomistic) philosophy of cognition and education – protect the school (also the higher school) against “going into service” of an idea, an overriding principle, a political project, an ideology – whatever it may be.

In the field of education, this results in the acknowledgement of the authority and obedience (understood as in F.W. Foerster cited below) as fundamental values. The objectivism of St. Thomas’ philosophy is considered one of the conditions of healthy educational theory and practice. Experts in St. Thomas’ philosophy find two methods in moral education: deductive and architectural, which allows to apply general principles to specific cases – hence the individual element does not disappear either in moral or educational philosophy⁵⁴. Neither does it disappear in the creative work of the artist, in the aesthetic experience and aesthetics.

(Neo)Thomism is an intellectualistic system – reason is the supreme power of human nature. The development of reason towards perfection is the most important of man’s goals in the natural order. Kowalski derives the obligations related to the educator’s attitude from this very principle: he should be a loving person who cultivates the mind; he should be characterised by optimistic life intellectualism in relation to himself and the work with the student⁵⁵. K. Kowalski cites rele-

⁵³ Ibidem, 107.

⁵⁴ Kowalski, „Pożyteczność zasadniczych cech...”, 108–109.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, 98.

vant excerpts from *Summa Th.*, where St. Thomas recommends not surrendering to the authority of the teacher. What is more, he warns not to succumb to passions, fantasies, will and other circumstances in the knowledge of sympathy and antipathy. On the Neo-Thomistic ground, such an intellectual attitude harmonises with loyalty and obedience⁵⁶ to the educator. Improving the reason is justified by its function that controls moral conduct, but it is not the human mind that is the ultimate instance here. It is the Reason and Will of God⁵⁷. It is believed that acceptance of the truths of faith not only does not dishonour reason but elevates it and human dignity in the optics of God's love (the super-nature does not destroy nature). The rights of the will are confirmed in the analysis of the act and in its primary role in the pursuit of the supernatural purpose. In the harmony of collaboration of reason and will, the purpose of reason is to know and indicate the order and the purpose of will it to make it happen and maintain it.⁵⁸

From the spiritualism consisting in the superiority of the spirit over the matter, it follows that the body culture (physical education) recedes into the background in the field of education and may not disrupt the "theoretical and practical primacy of the spirit in general and in particular the hegemony of education, development and refinement of the spiritual powers"⁵⁹. Sensory powers, however, should not be despised or destroyed but organised and subordinated to the reason and will.

Realism. K. Kowalski writes about the St. Thomas' philosophy that it is realistic and synthetic and based on the assertion that human reason recognises real objects; he teaches that human reason can reach knowledge of "absolute certainty" and not just knowledge of representation and abstraction.

Knowing and utilising "the power of three degrees of Aristotelian abstraction, the critical-realistic philosophy of St. Thomas leaves Kant's critique, Bergson's intuitionism, Scheller's phenomenological and intuitive philosophy of religion, psychologism, positivism, pragmatism, sociologism, historicism and scientism far behind"⁶⁰. The breadth of views and optimism about the issue of cognition provide important pedagogical support in the pedagogical process. "Critical but fair appreciation of the power of human reason, the realisation that the will – together with the human soul – is not distorted and corrupted at its bottom, will allow

⁵⁶ Obedience is not to be understood as mindless submission, but rather as acceptance of being, a spiritual need, loyalty to ideals and values (see: Janina Kostkiewicz, *Wychowanie do wolności wyboru. Ponadczasowy wymiar pedagogiki Fryderyka Wilhelma Foerstera* (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls” 2008), 197–212.

⁵⁷ Kowalski, „Pożyteczność zasadniczych cech...”, 99.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, 100–102.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, 103. K. Kowalski writes that sports records should be placed lower than mathematical ones in the hierarchy of pedagogical values. This principle of domination of the spirit over the matter is the basis for e.g. the ethics in sexual education and ethics of sexual life (ibidem, 104).

⁶⁰ Ibidem, 109.

it to avoid the errors which were introduced by the unbalanced and pessimistic theories of pseudo-reformers, Hobbes and others, in the context of realism”⁶¹.

What does this type of realism bring to education? The fruit of the deep and moderate optimism of St. Thomas is the principle of trust and absolute sincerity. The principle of sincerity is derived by Kowalski from the inalienable fact of Thomistic theology that man “is created by God in his essence and his existence”⁶². As a finite being (existing for a moment in history in the natural world) that is dependent on God, the only true way to relate to Him that man has is the way of sincerity.

Sincerity, trust, simplicity and obedience are qualities that, in Kowalski’s interpretation, stem from the philosophy of St. Thomas for the entire sphere of educational activities. The original sin (the crack on good human nature) and the principle of loving one’s neighbour results in a positive, optimistic, friendly pedagogy (which results from the pursuit of good) that protects the dignity of the student and the educator⁶³.

Being under the influence of St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas accepts that learning and gaining knowledge is “leading the mind out of the potency of cognition into the act of cognition”⁶⁴. K. Kowalski points out that the acquisition of knowledge can take place either through one’s reason (*inventio*) or using external help (*disciplina*). It is worth emphasising that “*discipline*” did not mean “rigour and oppression” in its original meaning in school language. A result of the work of St. Augustine and the “imposed” continuation by St. Thomas is the comparison that the work of the teacher is like the work of the doctor whose medicine is used by nature for recovery. From both of them comes the knowledge that the student is active in the process of acquiring knowledge (he is not a container to be filled with messages by the teacher) and reacts to the shared knowledge and uses it to acquire more knowledge⁶⁵.

Following K. Kowalski’s analyses, it is possible to derive not only elements of pedeutology and general methodology of education (general didactics) from the philosophy of St. Thomas. Here are the foundations of the organisation of the teaching-learning process, later found in the works of 19th-century didacticians in a developed or changed form. These elements of didactics are noticed

⁶¹ Ibidem, 110.

⁶² Ibidem, 111.

⁶³ Kowalski reaches for specific issues of St. Thomas’ philosophy and brings closer the most important – in his opinion – issue of “the judgements of neighbours” (ibidem).

⁶⁴ K. Kowalski, *Nauczanie i nauczyciel podług św. Augustyna i św. Tomasza z Akwinu*. W: tenże, „Św. Tomasz z Akwinu a czasy obecne”, dz. cyt., 166.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, 167.

and developed in the next text⁶⁶ not only by K. Kowalski but others⁶⁷, as well. According to Kowalski, “communication of knowledge” (K. Kowalski’s formulation) consists of three stages: first, “the conception in the mind of the content of what is to be communicated, secondly verbal expression through which that which is conceived by the mind presents itself and penetrates into the mind of the student, and finally the explanation of the thing expressed, through which it becomes clear”⁶⁸. The teacher’s thinking process demonstrated in the above steps and presented to the student becomes a tool in the mind of the student so that the student can acquire new knowledge. In this way, the teacher conducts this transfer of student’s knowledge from potency to act, becoming the perpetrator of his perfection. Kowalski refers here not only to relevant excerpts of the *Summa Theologica* but also to many of its interpreters⁶⁹.

The above-mentioned state of affairs needs to be complemented with the assumption adopted previously by St. Thomas that in the human mind there exist the so-called first principles that cannot be “poured in” by the teacher and which are due to “divine causality”, but the student’s mind can be reinforced by the teacher. Omitting the complexity of the explanations of the entire problem, it is worth emphasising that “the teacher’s words play the same role in the learner’s cognitive process as real objects. However, they are more prone to evoking knowledge than sensory things because they provide a better expression of the truths that the teacher already has in his mind”⁷⁰. In the problem of the methodology of education, specific indications are provided in St. Thomas writings: e.g. a good teacher stoops to the level of the student, which results in him dividing the content of the subject into parts that do not outweigh the learner’s ability to comprehend.

Kazimierz Kowalski claims that St. Thomas applied these recommendations masterfully in his *Summa*, attributing a high rank to the teaching profession, which entailed such a rank for a school as a social institution too. In the opinion of K. Kowalski, St. Thomas did not make the mistake of the anthropocentrism typical of ancient and many medieval thinkers. While emphasising the value and meaning of the “finite being”, i.e. the teacher-man, he saw that it was in his ability

⁶⁶ Kazimierz Kowalski, „Filozoficzne podstawy dydaktyki katolickiej”, *Miesięcznik Katechetyczny i Wychowawczy* 8(1937): 136–149.

⁶⁷ Cf. e.g. Wincenty Granat, „Podstawy niekatolickiej i katolickiej dydaktyki”, *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 35(1935): 455–473; 36(1935): 136–149; Antoni Jankowski, „Wychowanie i nauczanie”, *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 32(1933): 245–260; Witold Rubczyński, „Praca nad umysłowością, wolą i charakterem”, *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny* 1(1931): 3–36.

⁶⁸ Kowalski, *Nauczanie i nauczyciel*, 168.

⁶⁹ E.g. for: Martin Grabmann, “Die Psychologie des Lehrens und des Lernens nach dem hl. Thomas von Aquin”, *Die christliche Schule* 1(1910): 145–151.

⁷⁰ Kowalski, *Nauczanie i nauczyciel...*, 170–171.

to really support the student in cognition. He interpreted this fact simultaneously as a proof of the goodness and perfection of God⁷¹.

Beauty, art and its educational tasks and postulates of Neo-Thomists created a methodology of aesthetic education that takes into account the psychology of aesthetic experience. It was applied in the pedagogical practice of B. Żulińska. In her theoretical views on these issues, we find numerous references to the most eminent psychologists: J. Sully, W. Zienkowski and S. Szuman. Żulińska's contribution consists in addressing the role of beauty in the child's life. Its world of art, B. Żulińska claims, already exists in play. For children, there are no fields of art – text, rhythm, melody, body movement are all one; drawings and cut-outs are an expression of the aesthetic life. One must not discourage from even the most spontaneous artistry with one's criticism or irony. It is not enough to allow the child to let its imagination run wild – this imagination must be educated. Here, beauty itself is an educator and the role of the educator is to be just an intermediary. Beauty should permeate all education⁷².

Comparing the above to the realities of the 20th-century interwar period, K. Kowalski writes that so many of the so-called modern people build their own philosophies of life solely by taking into account “purely subjective factors, which are not subject to any objective rules or principles [...] In fact, these people surrender to theoretical, unstructured influences of their will, feelings, fantasies and other lower powers in their lives”⁷³.

2. Art in personality development

Neo-Thomists agree that broadly understood education must not be limited to the upbringing of the intellect. Recognising the truth and beauty as the attributes of being as such, Karol Górski argued that it is possible to speak of the truth or beauty depending on the way of cognition and the point of view. This important insight is reinforced by the fact that he views the use of beauty and the pleasure that flows from it as a part of the order of the intellect⁷⁴. In his view, in higher education particularly important is the awareness of the academic teacher that cognition of being occurs in two ways – through slow and mundane learning based on dispute and reasoning and through sudden revelation in contemplation. The latter, in particular, applies to beauty⁷⁵. However, the educationalist is

⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 175. St. Thomas' view on the role of the teacher and the process of cognition (teaching-learning) is complemented by his reflections on the gift of reason, which Kowalski recommends as particularly useful for the teacher [ibidem: K. Kowalski refers to: M. Meschler, *Die Gabe des heiligen Pfingstfestes* (Freiburg 1922), 242].

⁷² Żulińska, *Ku zmartwychwstaniu*, 603–620; Also, „Więcej twórczości”. *Miesięcznik Katechetyczny i Wychowawczy* 10(1930): 465–470. See also: Kostkiewicz, *Kierunki*, 293–294.

⁷³ Kowalski, *Pożyteczność zasadniczych*, 106.

⁷⁴ Karol Górski, *Wychowanie personalistyczne* (Poznań: NIAK 1936), 56.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, 55.

interested in the question of what is educational – i.e. personality-creative and developmental – meaning of beauty?

The answer, in my opinion, can be found in the kind and the result of cognition: “the excess of joy, which is the essence of the pleasure of beauty, flows” from the knowledge of beauty (through contemplation and revelation)⁷⁶. This thesis is developed by K. Górski, taking into consideration the educational point of view. In the love of beauty, Górski sees the rest and respite necessary for development. This pleasure of beauty is not entertainment – it is the rest and respite coming from another kind of cognition. Respite is conducive to bringing order in relations with the world, proper evaluation of the cognised being and interpersonal relations.

All this seems to have the greater educational significance, the more mature (in psychic volitional terms) the person we are dealing with is. The more exposed to chaos (disorderly excess of stimuli, information and experiences) our student is (this kind of student is primarily a high-school or university student), the more important effects of knowledge of beauty (joyful respite) will be. This demonstrates the necessity of providing opportunities for contemplation of beauty in the process of the organisation of study.

The educational and developmental effects are achieved through the knowledge of beauty, because the student – as a subject of aesthetic impressions – engages not only his senses in the knowledge of beauty but also his constructive imagination (fantasy), mental factors (his mind and will), i.e. all of his mind, not to mention the lower desire powers. A Neo-Thomist, however, will not agree with the view that man experiences the unity and depth of his soul through aesthetic intuition⁷⁷.

In aesthetic education, the sincerity of art is important at every level of education. The proper attitude towards art is an important factor in the development of personality: art raises and ennobles only if it is sincere; if it delights, then it brings pleasure. The sincerity of art in its personality-creative mission does not equate with the truth. From the viewpoint of its educational role, it is the artist's sincerity that is the most important in the work – claims K. Górski – and the artist's insincerity gives birth to an insincere work. Being recognisable by the audience, this insincerity becomes dangerous if the artist – seeking admiration for the work – deliberately appeals to the audience's lower instincts or if he himself has not been able to liberate himself from them during the creative process.

Insincere art inhibits the development of personality – says K. Górski – and pleases those who do not have the inner simplicity that is typical of developed personalities. The evil of this insincerity lies in the fact that it evokes in the viewer the same feelings that gave birth to the insincerity in the heart of the artist in the

⁷⁶ Ibidem, 56. See also: Kostkiewicz, *Kierunki i koncepcje*, 386–388.

⁷⁷ Kowalski, *Zagadnienie piękna*, 50.

first place. Thus e.g. through its sincerity or insincerity, art becomes the master of the creation of man's (pupil's, student's or adult's) personality. In these facts, art comes close to ethics. There is an important relationship. Neo-Thomists argue that art itself is not subject to the virtue of prudence and does not seek to make man better; it is about the work of art. In fact, Górski sees a conflict between ethics and art there. It is illuminated by the principle that the artist possessing ethics "as his own" unknowingly created works of ethics. However, if the artist were to impose ethics on himself (without internal consent), he would become a slave to his art. On this issue, K. Górski identifies with the views of J. Maritain expressed in *Art et scholastique*⁷⁸.

Ending

Beauty, considered to be a property of being in the Neo-Thomistic views, allows one to see it as a property of reality and of human artefacts, including art. Its conception allows it to be found in human behaviours and in the tradition of culture in the form of harmony, perfection and brilliance.

The love of beauty incorporates the rest and respite necessary for human development. Not being subject to the virtue of prudence, art itself does not seek to make man better – because it is all about the work of art. Neo-Thomists see a conflict between ethics and art in this fact. However, the danger does not occur when the artist takes ethics "as his own" – in such a case, he unknowingly creates ethical works. Man should not "worship" art as it does not bring him or art itself any good results. The proper attitude towards art is an important factor in the development of personality: art raises and ennobles if it is sincere; if it delights, then it brings pleasure. The sincerity of art seems to be an issue of special importance to Górski – he does not equate the sincerity of art with the truth in the personality-creative mission that art pursues. The recognition of beauty as a property of being translates into the rules of aesthetic cognition. The high rank of aesthetics in Neo-Thomism makes aesthetic education very important, as well.

Seeking manifestations of the insincerity of art, Neo-Thomists come to the following conclusions: "Humanistic hedonism created the lie of the Renaissance, which survived for several centuries – the lie so often seen in the falseness of colours, lights, [...]. In the worship of beauty, humanism exaggerated to the degree of being insincere. Naturalism introduces the cult of ugliness and disharmony so clearly visible in certain modern musical directions based on disharmony and

⁷⁸ Karol Górski, „Szczerłość w sztukach pięknych a światopogląd katolicki”, *Prąd* 1(1936): 1–16.

cult of dissonance⁷⁹. Will this message give a chance to Neo-Thomistic concepts of beauty, art and aesthetic education in the modern world?

Piękno, sztuka i elementy edukacji estetycznej w pismach polskich neotomistów dwudziestolecia międzywojennego

Streszczenie: W poglądach neotomistów piękno uznawane jest za własność bytu, postrzegane jest jako właściwość rzeczywistości i ludzkich wytworów, w tym sztuki. Można je odnajdywać w sposobach ludzkiego postępowania, w tradycji kultury pod postacią harmonii, doskonałości lub blasku. Badanie piękna podlega naczelnym regułom badań w metafizyce. Piękno jest istotnym czynnikiem rozwoju osobowości: podnosi i uszlachetnia. W umiłowanie piękna wpisany jest wypoczynek, wytchnienie niezbędne dla rozwoju człowieka. Sztuka sama w sobie nie podlega cnotie roztropności, nie dąży, by człowieka czynić lepszym, jej chodzi o dzieło. W fakcie tym neotomiści dostrzegają konflikt między moralnością a sztuką; niebezpieczeństwo nie zachodzi jednak, gdy artysta posiada etykę „na własność”, wówczas bezwiednie tworzy dzieła etyczne. Sztuka posiada bez wątpienia wielkie znaczenie społeczne i powinna spełniać doniosłą misję społeczną przez edukację estetyczną, poprzez udostępnienie jak najszerzym warstwom ludzkości piękna, prawdy i dobra.

Słowa kluczowe: neotomizm, piękno, sztuka, edukacja estetyczna, edukacja artystyczna, humanizm, harmonia, obiektywizm, Kazimierz Kowalski, Karol Górski, Barbara Żulińska

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⁷⁹ Ibidem, 58–59.

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