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NOTES ON LITHUANIAN THINKERS

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In the recent past, Lithuanian thinkers have not been primarily concerned with technical philosophical issues. Little has been written in the fields of logic, epistemology, and metaphysics; much more, in such areas as the philosophy of religion, of education and of culture. Why this emphasis? Perhaps, it can be explained by certain historical circumstances. As a new state, and a nation in many ways unaware of its cultural past, Lithuania had to develop a culture with almost no local intellectual traditions from which to draw. Political, educational, and cultural institutions had to be established and these needed some broader framework of ideas in terms of which to approach their problems. Thus, the revival of national and political life made prominent many intellectual voids which persons with philosophical training are best suited to fill, but which do not fall within the scope of formal philosophy. The pressure to produce usable ideas tended to push more technical problems into the background. Philosophical theory can be deferred; the general need for ideas has to be satisfied immediately.

Perhaps the very void in ideas gave rise to considerable competition for cultural leadership. Central here was the question whether Lithuanian culture was to be Christian and Catholic, or secular. In a very clear way, this competition was reflected in the organization of the arts faculty of the university in Kaunas. When the university was founded in 1922, two essentially parallel faculties of arts were established, a faculty of theology and philosophy, and a faculty of the humanities. The faculty of theology and philosophy was attended almost exclusively by those Catholics who wished to study the liberal arts in the light of their religious world-view. This competition determined not only the organization of the university, but is reflected across the whole breadth of Lithuanian culture, in political and social thought, in literature, in the arts.

A central figure in Lithuanian thought, Stasys Šalkauskis, was one of the leading teachers in the faculty of theology and philosophy and for a time served as its rector. Both Maceina and Girnius were students in this faculty and began their professional careers as members of it.

The presence of such interests, from the point of view of a more formal conception of philosophy, represents a loss. The need to write for the general public makes technical precision and thoroughness almost impossible to achieve. On the other hand, there is a certain gain. All three, Šalkauskis, Maceina, and Girnius, have exerted considerable influence upon their culture. They have been very often called upon to develop programs for a variety of religious, political, and literary movements. As an example of such involvement, one may refer to the declaration "Towards the Formation of an Organic State" published by a group of young Catholic intellectuals in 1936. This declaration in many ways represents the main intellectual opposition to the dictatorial tendencies of the ruling nationalist party. It attempted to turn Lithuanian politics in the direction of a more democratic state, strongly committed to dealing with social problems. Maceina was one of the authors of the text. Almost all of the sixteen signers were graduates of the faculty of theology and philosophy and were former students of Šalkauskis. Šalkauskis, thus, appears as at least the godfather of the declaration. Because they wished to exert a more immediate influence, in many of their writings, these thinkers bear a strong resemblance to such philosophers as Sartre and Marcuse. The direction of reform, and its methods, is conceived very differently. However, in both cases we find the attempt to reconstruct society in accordance with some ideal pattern.

Given such religious and cultural interests, it was almost natural that Lithuanian thinkers would be attracted by the existentialist current in philosophy. Vladimir Soloviev, a nineteenth-century Russian religious philosopher, looms as an especially influential figure. Šalkauskis wrote his doctoral dissertation on the conception of the world-soul in Soloviev. Vladimiras Šilkarskis published a book and several articles devoted to Soloviev. He spent the last years of his life — in exile, in Germany — in publishing a German edition of Soloviev's writings, of which at least three volumes appeared. In his **Mystery of Iniquity**, Maceina again return to Soloviev and his conception of the antichrist.

The same Maceina carefully followed the development of existentialist thought. His the **Drama of Job** is avowedly a work in the existentialist tradition. In it, he attempts to establish atheistic existentialism. Girnius, in his doctoral dissertation **La liberté et l'être**, studied the existentialist metaphysics of Karl Jaspers. A still younger thinker, Vincentas Vycinas, is an exponent of Heidegger. His first book, **Earth and Gods**, is an exposition of Heidegger. His second book, **Greatness and Philosophy**, investigates the problem of the nature of philosophy from the Heideggerian point of view.

Circumstance of this kind conspired to turn the attention of Lithuanian thinkers to what at times has been called the philosophy of life, to the task of working out well-grounded life-plans both for individuals and for the whole nation. The two thinkers to whom this issue of **Lituanus** is devoted show strong traces of such preoccupation. Both, as was said, were associated with the faculty of theology and philosophy and are spokesmen for a Christian culture.

These notes can provide only a very rough impression of some of the more noticeable characteristics of Lithuanian thought. This thought itself remains largely unstudied and in its history there are many gaps. Almost completely unknown is everything prior to the twentieth century. Late medieval Lithuania contributed its share of students to European universities and had its own institutions of higher learning in which philosophy was taught. But all of this even when studied, has not been studied from the point of view of philosophy. A lecturer in the philosophy department in the state university in Vilnius in occupied Lithuania, Romanas Plečkaitis, has devoted some effort to this early period and perhaps his researches will fill in some of the gaps. Of the scholars in exile, perhaps Girnius has shown the most interest in the history of Lithuanian thought and has, on occasions, promised to treat this subject more extensively.

Stasys Šalkauskis. Šalkauskis was born in 1886 in the town of Ariogala in Lithuania. In 1905, he began to study law in the University of Moscow and received his degree in 1911. Like the whole of Russia, the university in Moscow was in the midst of revolutionary turmoil. Šalkauskis, apparently, stood aside from politics, although he appears to have had strong sympathies for the reformist wing, especially the constitutional democrats. Having been raised a Catholic, he remained a Catholic throughout, and became concerned about the irreligious tendencies among his fellow students. Already as a student, he began to read extensively in the works of Ernest Hello and Vladimir Soloviev. In 1911, Šalkauskis obtained a job in a bank in Samarkand in Turkestan, being attracted to the region for reasons of health. But he did not find a career in business attractive. In 1915, he went to Switzerland to study philosophy. He received his doctorate from the University of Friburg in 1920 and returned to Lithuania. Two years later, he became a professor in the faculty of philosophy and theology in the university in Kaunas, where he remained till his death in 1941.

Most of Šalkauskis' activity was directed towards the creation in Lithuania of an ideal social and cultural order. This order was to be based upon the ideals of patriotism, Christianity, and democracy. For Šalkauskis, a patriot must avoid nationalism on the one side, and feelings of national inferiority on the other. In his conception of the state, he placed a great deal of emphasis upon the solution of social and economic problems. Education was to be the main instrument of this reconstruction. Its aim was to produce an ideal man, who in his turn would create the ideal order. Towards this end, he was constantly proposing various educational projects. Among his many proposals, we find one for a gymnasium to educate the most gifted Lithuanians from all parts of the world. This school was to emphasize the teaching of foreign languages in order to break down Lithuania's isolation from other cultures. Eventually, Šalkauskis joined the Ateitis movement of Catholic students and intellectuals and became, probably, the major intellectual leader of the movement.

A great deal of what Šalkauskis wrote was of an occasional character, devoted to advancing whatever project he had on hand. Among his major writings are the **Sur le Confins de deux Mondes**, published in Geneva in 1919, in which he attempted to define the national mission of Lithuania, and **L'Ame du monde dans la philosophie de Vladimir Soloviev**, his doctoral dissertation, published in Berlin in 1920. Both of these appeared in French and only summaries were ever published in Lithuanian. His major contribution to Lithuanian philosophy, perhaps, is his **Bendroji filosofijos terminija (A General Philosophical Terminology)**, in which he attempts to establish a Lithuanian philosophical vocabulary.

Vladimiras Šilkarskis (his writings in German were signed Wladimir Szykarski). Šilkarskis was born in 1884 in Lithuania. In 1910, he completed the faculty of history and philology of Moscow university. After further study in Moscow and Tartu universities, he began his teaching career in 1917 as a lecturer at Tartu. In 1924, he was invited to teach in the department of Greek of the faculty of the humanities of the university in Kaunas. With the Soviet occupation, he moved to Germany and from 1946 taught in the university in Bonn, specializing in Slavic culture. Šilkarskis died in Bonn in 1960.

His major book, **Solowjews Philosophie der All-Einheit**, was written in German and published in 1932 in Kaunas. As has been noted, the last years of his life in Germany were devoted to translating and publishing Soloviev's writings. In Lithuanian, Šilkarskis contributed an introduction to the translation into Lithuanian of several of Plato's dialogues. He also published a number of essays on Socrates, Spinoza, and other subjects.

Vosylius Sezemanas (Sesemann). Sezemanas was born in 1884 in St. Petersburg. His father was a Swede from Finland, while his mother was descended from French Huguenots. In 1909, he completed the faculty of history and philology at the university in St. Petersburg. After further studies in Marburg, he was appointed a lecturer at St. Petersburg. After a number of lectureships, in 1923, he was invited to the philosophy department of the faculty of the humanities of the university in Kaunas. During the second Soviet occupation, Sezemanas was deported for several years, but was subsequently allowed to return to Lithuania.

His contribution to Lithuanian philosophical literature was substantial. In 1929, he published a textbook in logic. He wrote prefaces to translations of some of Plato's dialogues, and translated Aristotle's **De Anima**, published in 1959, with about 90 pages of introduction and commentary. To various publications of the faculty of the humanities, Sezemanas contributed a variety of articles, many of them written in German.



Antanas Maceina

Antanas Maceina. Maceina was born in 1908 in Lithuania. From 1928 to 1932, he studied philosophy and pedagogy in the faculty of theology and philosophy of the university in Kaunas. From 1932 to 1935, he continued his studies in Louvain and Friburg. Maceina received his doctorate in 1934 from the University of Vytautas the Great in Kaunas. In 1935, he was appointed to the faculty of theology and philosophy. After fleeing the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, Maceina taught at the universities of Freiburg and Münster.

In Lithuania, Maceina devoted his writings to education, social questions, and the philosophy of culture. In 1934, he published his dissertation **Tautinis Auklėjimas (National Education)**. This was followed by **Kultūros filosofijos įvadas (Introduction to the Philosophy of Culture)**, in 1936; **Socialinis teisingumas (Social Justice)**, in 1938; **Pedagogikos istorija (History of Pedagogy)**, in 1939; **Buržuazijos žlugimas (The Downfall of the Bourgeoisie)**, in 1940.

In his later writings, Maceina becomes more concerned with religious issues. His books devoted to religious questions are **Didysis Inkvizitorius (The Grand Inquisitor)**, in 1946 and 1950, a German translation appeared in 1952; **Jobo Drama (The Drama of Job)**, in 1950; **Saulės Giesmė (Song of the Sun)**, in 1954, a study of St. Francis of Assisi; **Didžioji Padėjėja (The Great Helper)**, in 1958, reflections upon the role of Mary, the Mother of Christ; **Niekšybės Paslaptis (The Mystery of Iniquity)**, in 1964, a German version appeared in 1955; **Dievo Avinėlis (Lamb of God)**, in 1966, reflections upon the christology of the Eastern Church. His most recent work, being published in 1969, is titled **Sowjetische Ethik und Christentum: Zum Verstandnis des kommunistischen Menschen**. In 1965, Maceina published a collection of poems **Gruodas (The Frozen Ground)**, under the pen-name, Antanas Jasmantas.

Maceina is a Catholic in his thought, and openly so. He accepts the existence of revelation without reservations and, at least in his published writings, without questioning it. For him, the words of the creed that God became man, lived among us, and died among us express a literal truth. They refer to actual events which took place at a definite point in time. Maceina accepts the history of salvation as this has been traditionally interpreted by Christianity. Given this background, in his religious works, his aim seems to be to depict human life and history as that appears from the point of view of revelation.



Juozas Girnius

Juozas Girnius. Girnius was born in 1915 in Lithuania. In 1936, he completed the faculty of theology and philosophy of the University of Vytautas the Great in Kaunas, with concentration in philosophy. He then studied abroad in Louvain, Freiburg, and at the Sorbonne. In Freiburg, he attended Martin Heidegger's lectures. From 1941 to 1944, he taught in the University of Vytautas the Great. In 1951, Girnius received his doctorate from the University of Montreal. At present, he is the editor of the Lithuanian cultural monthly **Aidai (Echoes)**, and one of the editors of the **Lithuanian Encyclopedia**.

Girnius' doctoral dissertation was devoted to the metaphysics of Karl Jaspers. A shortened version in Lithuanian, under the title **Laisvė ir Būtis (Freedom and Being)**, appeared in 1953. He has also published **Tauta ir Tautinė Ištikimybė (The Nation and National Loyalty)**, 1961; **Žmogus be Dievo (Man Without God)**, 1964; **Idealas ir Laikas (The Ideal and Time)**, 1966, a reflection upon the tasks of the Ateitis movement of Catholic intellectuals and, more generally, of the whole Lithuanian community in exile.

Girnius' thought centers around the moral problems of men. He places a great deal of emphasis on human freedom and, in the light of freedom, attempts to interpret our moral tasks. Thus, national loyalty is primarily a moral matter, a way to remain free and fulfill our human vocation. His religious thought often returns to the same themes. Its basis is our common human experience and universal moral concerns.

NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION

This translation attempts to be a literal translation. It tries to reproduce the author's text as closely as possible. The major change was the dropping of emphasis. Both Maceina and Girnius like to use italic type to emphasize key words and sentences. However, since in translating it was not always possible to reproduce the emphasis exactly, and since such devices are rarely used in contemporary English writing, it seemed best to drop the use of italics entirely.

Footnotes have been renumbered, but are reproduced as the authors give them. Any additions by the translator — in the footnotes and in the text — are enclosed within square brackets.

Among the major problems in translating was the fact that Lithuanian does not have definite or indefinite articles. Thus, there is nothing, except the context, to indicate whether "the," or "a," or no article at all should be used. There is a considerable difference in English between "the man," "a man," or "man" in the abstract. The reader should always remember that the choice of articles was the translator's. Interpretations based upon the use of or the absence of articles should be attributed to the authors with extreme caution. A very difficult word was the word "kaltė" used most often in the excerpt from **Man Without God**. In some contexts the word seemed ambiguous; it could mean either an evil act, a sin, or an attitude towards this act, guilt. It is possible that in some contexts both senses were intended by the author. In this excerpt, the word "sin" should not be given any especially religious sense. Any transgression of a moral law is a sin, and not only the transgression of a religious law.

