

## **POLISH ENLIGHTENMENT DEBATE ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ORDER**

*Janina Rosicka\**

### **RESUMEN**

Uno de los debates sociales y económicos más importantes de la Ilustración polaca fue el debate denominado «Peasant Question». El debate duró 100 años, desde 1765-1795, los últimos años de la independencia polaca. La «Peasant Question» se convirtió en una escuela de pensamiento social para la clase media, y forzó a la mayoría de ellos a revisar su antiguo concepto de nobleza como un monopolio. Todo esto dio como resultado un nuevo significado de nobleza en relación con la propiedad y la justicia. El artículo consta de cuatro partes. En la primera «Economía moderna en el Este y Oeste de Europa» se presentan las principales diferencias en el pensamiento económico en Europa. En la segunda «Polonia 1760-95» se describe el estado de Polonia. La tercera trata de la «Peasant Question», en particular se presentan opiniones de tres grupos, los conservadores, los liberales y los radicales. Y por último, se exponen las conclusiones.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Ilustración polaca, «Peasant Question», clase media, nobleza.

### **ABSTRACT**

One of the most important social and economic debate in the Polish Enlightenment was a debate called the «Peasant Question». The Polish gentry - the szlachta discussed the reform of a country. The debate lasted one hundred years from 1765 to 1863. The paper deals with the initial period of this debate embraced years 1765-1795, the last years of Poland independence. The Peasant Question became a real school of social thinking for the szlachta, and forced the majority of them to revise their old understanding of nobility as a monopoly for virtue. It resulted in a new meaning of nobility relating to property and justice. The paper consists of four parts. In the first «Modern economics in West and East Europe» the main differences between ways of economic thinking in these parts of Europe are presented; in the second «Poland 1760-95» the state of Poland is described; the third deals with the Peasant Question, in particular it presents opinions of three groups of the participants: Sarmats («conservatives»), Teachers («liberals»), and Romantics («radicals»). «Conclusions» ended the paper.

**KEY WORDS:** Polish Enlightenment, Peasant Question, szlachta, nobility.

After a brilliant Renaissance which was economic, political and the cultural approach to Europe Poland experienced a long economic, social and intellectual decline. It started in the

(\*) Chair of Economics in Jagiellonian University Cracow (Polonia).

seventeenth century and lasted one hundred years until the fifties of the eighteenth century. The economic and political power belonged to the gentry. This was a strange system of extreme decentralisation of power in the age of absolutism in Europe. To a greater extent to overcome inertia of the decline, which contributed a debate, called the «peasant question». It started in 1765 and lasted until 1863. The peasant question became a real school of social thinking for the Polish gentry. The Polish gentry wrote about themselves and for themselves. They debated their identity, definition of nobility, and the state. Each of these three topics embraced problems connected with understanding of property. This paper deals with the initial period of this debate. During the last three decades (1765 - 95), cultural (especially the reform of schools) and political changes forced some of the gentry to revise their thinking of nobility as a monopoly for virtue. It resulted in a new meaning of nobility relating to property and justice. The biggest success of the debate in the initial period was to shake the old Sarmatian belief that it was impossible to reconcile morality with economic interest. Polish Enlightenment 'just ethics of interest' was more complicated than the Western ethics of interest. It was a specific theory of exchanges 'something for something': only a noble can be an owner of an estate however his duty was to earn his nobility, particularly by his relationship to peasants; in other words: property should belong only and only to this part of gentry which fulfil their economic and social duties.

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## 1. MODERN ECONOMICS IN WEST AND EAST EUROPE

In West Europe after 1700 new economic theories were very important. Mercantilistic, Physiocratic and Scottish Enlightenment ideas co-operated with new forms of behaviour comprising the new commercial society. They described new social phenomena in a special way, which we may term «direct description». This distinctive feature is clearly seen in comparison with Central and East Europe. The borderline between the West and the East ran along the Elbe River. East of the Elbe, people thought in a different way using different categories.

In order to understand German cameralism and other trends in German economics, Keith Tribe claims we have to consider them from the point of view of «economic pedagogy». It was a special kind of economic literature (tracing its origin back to ancient times) combines art of keeping property with the art of Christian life. The priority of morality caused a tendency to show principles of safe economic life rather than to strain after originality. So, Tribe emphasizes that Germans fixed their attention on certain conditions to secure economic order and welfare, and paid a little attention to effective allocation of resources. (Tribe 1988, ch.i)

It seems that the difference arose from two reasons produced by cultural dissimilarities. Firstly, the German economy, like all of other Central European economies, was a traditional agrarian, even a patriarchal, economy of families. In contrast, the Scottish view of economy was a description of a new commercial society - economy of individuals. Secondly, as I have already said, the Central and East-European economies were governed by agrarian values. Those values were verbalised and disseminated by Christianity. The main aim of religious analysis of the economy was to show the safe room for human activities, and in that case the adjective 'safe' meant both no economic and moral (sinless) risks. The natural shape for this mixture of Christian sermon and of modern science became this «economic pedagogy».

While West-European economic thought concentrated on rational use of resources, East-European economic thought became more complex and socially orientated. The lack of a distinct focus reflected the discovery of its difference from the commercial economy and from commercial society. The differences were recognised by the writers in many theories, ranging from absolute praise for their own tradition, to a recognition of the conditions of underdevelopment, called by Enlightenment writers «wildness» or «savagery». The variety of theories was accompanied by triviality caused by an absence of specialisation. However this variety allowed East-European writers to keep in mind topics neglected by West-European discussions. In this way German writers became the first who recognised the importance of macroeconomic implications concerning administration and management. They first introduced these sciences into university teaching. During the nineteenth and twentieth century this central focus of cameralism was ultimately parcelled out between economics, and administration, politics, sociology, and management.

To simplify, we can say that West-European writers saw society through the structure of things, and the Central and East-European writers considered society through people's behaviour. The Westerners discussed the concept of property and their patron became John Locke. The Easterners discussed customs and the possibility to control human passions by the state, and their patron became Christian Wolff. In Poland, fringed by both West and East culture, Locke and Wolff have met together. Their arguments have been used by the szlachta in the debate about the Peasant Question.

## 2. POLAND 1760-95

Poland experienced a long economic, social and intellectual decline during the second half of the seventeenth century and lasting until the 1750s. The Polish political system was a kind of the old republicanism, called by historians the «gentry democracy». The power belonged to the gentry. There were three pillars of this system: free elections of kings (it started in 1572), the requirement of unanimity in taking Parliamentary decisions (called *liberum veto*), and gentry self-government extending from local parliaments to the main Parliament (called the *Seym*). In the eighteenth century this composition became a strange system of extreme decentralisation of power in the age of absolutist consolidation of power in Europe.

With some exceptions, strong but not very rich gentry (*szlachta*), poor peasants, and poor townspeople created Polish society. In Poland the word «*szlachta*» had a wider meaning,

embracing both gentry and noblemen. It was about 7% to 10% of Polish population. The szlachta was not monolithic. They consisted of: rich families (about 10 percent of the szlachta population, there were one hundred very rich magnates families, and people possessing from one to several estates), people possessing not a lot of land (40 percent, they had only a few or even none of serfs), and at last, the majority, consisted of landless people, embraced about 50% the szlachta population, the subject of the magnates manipulation. The szlachta called their privileges, especially the liberum veto and the self-government, the «golden liberty», and made them an object of their cult. The principle of the golden liberty allowed activities of the Parliament to be blocked by a single parliament member. It made it possible to expand serfdom and to limit townspeople, and it brought perpetual pressure to bear on the king's power. The szlachta did not accept the institutions of a modern state such as a standing army, strong administration, and a Treasury. They regarded those institutions as tools of absolutist power. The lack of central authorities, standing army, the weakness of royal and executive powers, and empty treasury, were accompanied by an inefficient agriculture with serfdom.

That anachronistic political system was supported by a baroque culture unique for Poland - Sarmatism (Cynarski 1974, Michalski 1973, Tazbir 1976). The economic sphere was dominated by patterns of this culture. Collective ties among the gentry's were created by such values as liberty (anarchy in fact), brother equality (which was, in front of the structure of the szlachta, superficial indeed), and virtue (understood as a strange mixture of things connected with noble descent and Catholicism). Mobility was opposed to the advantages of rural life. Acceptation parochialism became the basis of liberty. This attitude advocated life in the country instead of curiosity about life, and a philosophy of enduring, instead of critical reflection on oneself and the world. Recurrence of rural activities was contrasted with danger of the modern cult of changes. As a result in an economic life there existed two main rules specific of an archaic society: autarky and the neglect of career. Sarmatism was a mixture of West and East culture. From the West, sarmatism took the chivalrous culture with its personal patterns and the cult of Ancient Rome. From the East - through the mediation of Turkey - came such features as ostentation in clothes, approval of laziness, contempt for townspeople, and the custom of long lasting feasting. So that meeting between the rivalrous heroism and the East culture turned out badly. The szlachta accepted only those values that directed admiration toward the szlachta. Sarmatism became a kind of gentry's religion. The leading feature was one of the East provenience - inertia. Sarmatism offered for the landless szlachta the glamour of being nobles in recompense for their low economic status. At the same time it animated energy of the szlachta towards ostentatious consumption through the neglect of career. The sarmatian pattern of behaviour was an excellent example of Veblenian conspicuous consumption and idleness. Based on that understanding, the szlachta's main missions became the persecution of novelty, no reforms, no foreign institutions and inventions. In this way the szlachta created a hopeless plight of a weak state with no future.

In the Enlightenment there appeared some attempts to change this political and economic order. Three periods are generally distinguished in Polish Enlightenment: the early, the middle and the classic. At the beginning, in the early Enlightenment, dated in Poland 1730-64, these efforts were visible mainly in Piarist schools (particularly in the Colegium Nobilium in Warsaw

founded in 1740). Offering modern ideas to the young Szlachta these schools competed successfully with the traditional Jesuit's learning. Lasted from 1765 to 1795; the middle period consists of two phases. During the first phase from 1765 till 1787, called after the last Polish king (who was Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski) the Stanislaus Enlightenment, educated by the Piarits generation undertook reforms. In 1773 they brought an institution for a modern reform in the educational area, the Commission for National Education came into being. The second phase embraced times of the important Sejm (called the Great Sejm, 1788-92) proceedings. During this phase Polish reformers have realised their political and social aspirations. They accomplished a modern Polish constitution called the Constitution of the 3rd of May in 1791, one of the earliest written modern constitutions in that part of Europe. The szlachta's reformers wanted to replace the old szlachta's republic with the modern state with its attributes: rights to vote for townspeople, standing army, efficient executive power, education, and the modern treasure. This Constitution was partly a result of the debate on the Peasant Question. There was a chapter (iv) entitled «Peasants». It offered personal freedom, to peasants and an appeal to negotiate individual agreements between the szlachta and peasants communities. Paradoxically these reforms brought Poland faster to a catastrophe. The constitution never became realised. The neighbours - Russia, Prussia and Austria were afraid of these changes. They pressed a possibility of the reform and became invaders in successive partitions of Poland in 1772, 1792 and 1795. And four years later passing the Constitution, third partition of Poland and the loss of independence made an execution of the Constitution impossible. Now the peasant question became a political tool in hands of Prussia, Russia and Austria. Poland lost its independence for over one hundred years. In spite of those obstacles the Constitution of the 3rd May became a great event to Polish people, and an important historical turning point. In the nineteenth century there was the full acceptance of the Constitution contents. The Constitution was treated as the political testament maintained by patriotic manifestations during celebrations of its anniversaries. Polish Enlightenment ended with the «classical period» 1796 - 1830. During this period hopes for gaining independence were still alive and the szlachta were elaborating schemes for country reforms. It is ended by a defeat of November Rising 1830 (the Russo-Polish War).

### 3. THE PEASANT QUESTION

In the Enlightenment and Romanticism the most important for the economy and policy in the Central Europe became a relationship between the szlachta and peasants. In Poland, the debate on this relationship started in 1765 and lasted until 1863. In others countries of Central and Eastern Europe the peasants question remained a suzerain's domains. It was only the Polish case that the real debate developed.

What in fact forced the szlachta to intellectual effort, and then to reform the state, the educational structure and their own behaviour, it was peasants' laziness. This laziness became the first recognised signs of the crisis. So the booklets of the Peasant Question were a result of a need to overcome a peasant passive resistance. There was no state strong enough to help the szlachta to solve their problems.

The Peasant Question became a discussion among the Szlachta, which means, among some Polish rulers wanted to preserve or to establish a new order within their estates, which we can call, without exaggeration, their kingdoms. This discussion about the szlachta estates became simultaneously a discussion about the state. According to the szlachta imagination only they were Polish citizens and Poland was some kind of federation of their estates. Polish society was rural. The majority of people lived in the country. The manor was not only the centre of social contacts; first of all it was a centre of economic activities. Production, trade, management, accounting, planning, technology, all these things depended on the behaviour of the landlord. Landlords even controlled foreign trade. They exported corn and timber and their consumption fixed the structure of imports.

The szlachta wrote about themselves and for themselves, and each of the authors wanted to convince each of the szlachta. In the initial period, rational arguments were not so much used. First of all the szlachta did not become accustomed to such arguments and the Enlightenment rational language was not very unserviceable for the writers' purposes. They wanted to court the szlachta favour, so they had to speak to them in their language. In result the authors gave vent to their feelings too, and this Enlightenment debate was a heated discussion full of excessive emotions.

Thanks to the szlachta brochures included spontaneous declarations (with rare exceptions, its authors financed and distributed their own editions), they possessed, from our point of view, a very important attribute; they show veracious and – so to say – «naked» opinions. The writers did not care especially for a selection of words. Reading these full of spontaneity «peasant question» booklets, we are in the comfortable situation to find the uncommon possibility in coming into direct contact with its authors, and even achieved more credibility than our modern polls.

We may differentiate three periods in this debate. The initial period lasted from 1765 to 1795. It helped the szlachta to name their problems and to find a good political solution in the shape of the Constitution of the 3rd of May. The Constitution was an attempt to solve the «peasant question». It included a chapter entitled «Peasants». The chapter offered personal freedom to peasants and an appeal to negotiate individual agreements between the szlachta and peasants communities. This period was the last one when the szlachta were in a position to start the reform of the state. The second period from 1795 to 1830's was crucial in radicalisation of the szlachta. And the third, decadent one, lasting till 1863, was limited to the Russian partition. During this period the szlachta repeated issues and solutions presented in previous periods except the most radical ones. (Rosicka 1984)

During the debate there appeared several books, and numerous booklets and papers. Some of the writers created new schemes for the emancipation of serfs, and some stood up for serfdom. The participants divided into three groups. The Sarmatian group defended the old gentry's position. The challenge to them came from the Enlightenment people and radicals. The Enlightenment people I will call the Teachers. They believed in education and promoted new ideas by using modern Enlightenment means. Radicals, whom I call the Romantics, used a radical argument and they wanted the full emancipation of peasants.

We will discuss the initial period of the peasant question debate embracing three last decades of the eighteenth century, the last years of Poland independence. During that period there were printed twenty-two booklets, of these: the Sarmatians edited four brochures; the Teachers fourteen; and the Romantics four.

### **Sarmats**

For the Sarmats, «Property is God's and man's right (Grabowski 1790, no pagination)». It embraces as well the property of land as the serfdom. Work is an attribute of peasants. «To give freedom to peasants will be diminution of the szlachta and God rights...The free populace will not do us - the nation (the szlachta used this word in the sense «the szlachta» J.R.) much good (Grabowski 1790, no pagination)». The gentry's property is superior to work, and the serfdom is the external form of this property. The coercion connects with the serfdom is requisite. The szlachta are convinced using coercion is vital: an anonymous writer states: «the peasant would not want to work if there has been no coercion ([...] *Mysli obywatelskie* 1780, no pagination)» and this sentence becomes the conclusive argument for the coercion.

The above statements expressed a Sarmatian will of survival. A Trinitarian Ignacy Grabowski recapitulated: «No interference because each of interference causes harm first of all the szlachta restful condition (Grabowski 1790, no pagination)». Each man had to stay on the place where he was born. Each change was against the Eternal Order, and «particularly speaking about an abolition of serfdom is against the Providence (Grabowski 1790, no pagination)». Peasant, serfdom and the szlachta together constituted a perfect entity. The social order of this perfect entity was a subject of the szlachta property, which was understood as prolongation of Providence Grace. To discuss the decrees of Providence, it was a «blasphemy». Another anonymous Sarmat offered in the title of his booklet «The Easy and Unfailing Way to Improve Serfs». He recommended» we can improve the peasants a lot; however this matter is reserved for us (JR the szlachta) only, and we are forbidden to speak about their freedom ([...] *Sposob latwy* 1792, p.10)». Man could not disturb God's law. God made the landlord the owner of the peasant. However the landlord should be a true father of his children-peasants.

In the Sarmatian brochures there were not statements concerning the difference between the szlachta and peasant; no stipulations of real improvement of the szlachta, it was rare to see some sentences about the peasants. Instead in each of these brochures there were many general statements like these: «serfdom does not harm anybody», or «Polish peasants have never been slaves», or «the true szlachta are fathers of their peasants». This absence of demands directed at the szlachta means that they did not notice any difference between the real gentry's attitudes and the patterns. According to the Sarmatian inspection the peasant was perceived as a part of property, sooner child than a man.

The Sarmatian understanding of the szlachta identity embraced both God's order and the order of the szlachta. God was a king of the szlachta, and the szlachta was a king of peasants. This understanding gave justice to landlords, and their property was composed of land property and property of the peasants work. The Sarmatian programme was simple and laconic: «no change». The Sarmats debated the Eternal Order, Grace, and Providence. So the debate

allowed with moral appeals, however this did not allow for their rationalisation. In the Sarmatian language, to make an appeal for a moral renaissance meant in fact to make a statement on the szlachta's corruption.

### **Teachers.**

The problem of property did not absorb the teachers attention. The focus was the relationship between the szlachta and peasants. They wanted - as an anonymous writer put it - «to shake the dust of contempt off the peasants ([...], *O wloscianach* 1791, p.47)». Their language was full of emotions: «In Poland a peasant is just the same as a beast. We are selling, buying, trading, exchanging, and forcing him to work (*P[oplowski]*1774, p.57)». A preacher put rhetorical questions about peasants: «Are they citizens of a foreign country? Are they your enemies? (*Karpowicz* 1777, v.ii, p.24)». F. Makulski wrote: «Poland needs today not exactly gallantry but citizen virtue; not exactly... smartness and wit but kind-heartedness (*Makulski* 1790, p.25). The Teachers spoke the Sarmatian language. It was not only the pragmatic need to be understood. They were just beginning to create their own language. They attacked bravely the most sensitive Sarmatian point - their belief in their perfection. They said that the Sarmatian justice was a fiction because it ignored other persons, and it was the justice of a selfish person.

In spite of the fact that the Teachers wrote only a little about property, they formulated a realistic program of reforms employed Physiocratic ideas (Rosicka 1995, pp.401-20). The main demand was freedom for the peasants. «What is a benefit of slaves to the Country needing citizens» - a priest Karpowicz lamented over peasants in his «Physiocratic» sermons (*Karpowicz* 1777, p.11). The author of «*Dusza krajow*» [*The Spirit of the States*] wondered: «it is strange that in Poland, which is such a great lover of freedom, there are so many more slaves than free people ([...] *Dusza krajow*, no pagination). A governmental journal, the «*Monitor*» tried to show economic benefits of serfs emancipation: «Our own profit demands to save our tools of our welfare. We have to take care of them and deal with them like with indolent and unhappy friends («*Monitor Warszawski*» 1765 n.26)». The Teachers held their own estates up as model examples for the Sarmats, and journals have presented descriptions of these estates embracing patterns of contract of lease.

For the Teachers, property remained in the moral sphere and it was understood as the Sarmatian sequence: virtue gives the privilege of power; the power gives land property; the land property gives leadership under the condition that the owners are not corrupted. The new owner, according to the Teachers' requirements, had to understand his nobility-virtue as a kind of a citizen's duty to fulfil. That personal pattern combined old element of the szlachta virtue with the new ones - the old virtue became a task, which needed education. Sarmatism understood the szlachta virtue as a spontaneous realisation of the szlachta heritage delivered by the szlachta blood.

Instead of the old feudal dependence and non-economic compulsion, the Teachers proposed a new social tie - economic compulsion. The landlord would be come a landowner, and the serf would be come an agrarian worker and a person who pays a rent. The Enlightenment



natural law gained a compromising interpretation: freedom for everybody, property for the Polish gentry. So, the Sarmats could say: «We are entitled to freedom by our nobility», and the Teachers could say: «Our nobility put us under an obligation to do some effort».

In the heat of the discussion the Teachers exaggerated economic effects: «a landlord makes a contract of lease with the emancipated peasants. And he will gain more than he had from serfdom because peasants having hope for the future freedom and profit will be susceptible to pay a lot.» («Pamiętnik Historyczno-Polityczny» 1789, v.iv, p.976). They were calling to industrial activities: «Sheep-folds and woollen manufactures will be a treasure for our Country» («Pamiętnik Historyczno-Polityczny» 1789, v.iv, p.976), and priced development of commerce and trade.

In the cultural sphere, that program wanted to transform the Sarmatian refined and warm vision of agrarian existence into a cool vision of economic control. The program introduced a new picture of Poland crowded with dynamic agrarian managers instead of the idle Sarmats. Its incompleteness resulted from the lack of connection between property and work. It did not resemble the puritans' programme. There were no townspeople's and small farmers' values such as providence, frugality or diligence, and there remained only one tool of reforms, namely the Enlightenment education.

Towards an education of the Sarmats, the Teachers created an educational lobby. In 1772 the lobby brought into being a kind of ministry of education, the so-called Commission of National Education. The Commission's task was to reform Jesuit schools, in particular: to prepare a uniform program of education together with new modern handbooks; and to verify skills of old teachers. One of the most important sciences became a «moral science». A Physiocrat, Antoni Poplawski wrote new manuals of moral science. The Teachers did not forget about peasants. In 1770 the bishop of Vilnius threw a program of peasants' education open to competition. Grzegorz Piramowicz, the author of the «Primer for peasants» became the winner. In his «Notices for Teachers» he wrote: «We have to allow serfs to read, write and count in a parochial school (Piramowicz 1960 [1787], p.29)».

### **Romantics.**

The Romantics were more radical. An anonymous writer put «I do not see but one difference between me and my peasant, only that one being the result of a blind chance Karp 1791, p.3-4). For the Romantics the relationship between landlord and peasant relied on hypocrisy. It became a relationship between stronger and weaker, and exploiter to the «slave». The writers were not very interested in landlord behaviour. They had no need to convince themselves of the szlachta corruption. Their goal was to show new values and new solutions. The coming Poland had to be a civilised dynamic country with a new «civilising» freedom, and «without savagery», in which will live together a certain szlachta, clever townspeople and diligent peasants, and each of them posses some kind of property.

The object of the first interest of the Romantics became just, as for the Sarmats, the connection between freedom and property. The Sarmatian view of freedom and property was an affectional and religious one. The Eternal supreme law embraced all their sacred things,

including land property and serfdom, so they did not need some sophisticated arguments. The szlachta freedom was limited by being a good Christian towards their serfs. This freedom plus property of both land and serf connected the economic sphere with power. To sum up the szlachta ruled, and peasants worked. The question of political rights of peasants was left out of account. It would be a blasphemy to discuss God's things. The second reason was with whom? The Sarmats did not see participants in such debate. The part of the szlachta who wanted reforms were «simply mad» and arrogant, they were not the true Christians. The peasants were the Christians but they are not persons.

The Romantics refused to fight against this religious argument. Instead they ingeniously made capital of a Sarmatian «theories of conquest», and in this way they touched the Sarmats sore spot. These theories elucidated the difference between the szlachta and peasants, as a result of an ancient Roman tribe Sarmats conquest of the peasants' progenitors (on theories of conquest see: Malecki 1907, Serejski 1965). The Romantics maintained that the natural and historical tie between property and work had been brutally interrupted by the ancient Sarmats conquest. In result the property, this «cement of society», has become the «szlachta monopolistic privilege». This privilege has «transformed free men into slaves», and «property, which has to work as a stimulus» to develop, transforms into a «guard of the szlachta privilege» ([Karp] 1791, p.16).

This, enriched by the theory of conquest, interpretation brought a new definition of property limited to land. For the Romantics, as an empirical thing, property became a possession of land. They used the both words «property» and «land» interchangeably. The subject of the Romantic property had to be only and only a thing not a man. This modern understanding of property has underpinned by adaptation of Lockean theory. The Romantic-Lockean property became a prerequisite of freedom. The freedom appeared a power could provide background for both, most needed in Polish conditions features namely, inclination to work, and to be a true Polish citizen.

First of all the Romantics showed this property - according to Locke - as the prerequisite of freedom (Rosicka 1994, pp.237-52), laying particular stress on its anti-serfdom significance. The most radical Romantic, Józef Pawlikowski writes: «freedom is the most important property ([Pawlikowski]1788, p.80)». Three years later a masked author supplements: «giving political rights to peasants will be absurd if we do not give them the right to land property ([Karp] 1791, p.13)». The Romantics even see the historical connection between work and property, and they adapted also John Locke's theory of freedom subordinate to property, and used it against the Sarmatian anarchical insubordination.

These Lockeanian statements brought two important arguments on an economic, and on patriotic value of «true» (in a romantic sense) property. The Romantics put stress on a new modern economic understanding of property (introduced into the debate by the Teachers) as a «spur» to effective work. They showed that this new function of property could rescue the szlachta. The Romantics said about the rescue because they presented the szlachta, parallel as the participants of the debate used to present peasants, as prisoners of a not effective economic system, in particular, prisoners of barbarous serfdom and inconvenient coercion. Pawlikowski

and others emphasised that during the «state of nature» the true legitimisation to the right to ownership was labour because «only the user of land became the land proprietor» ([Pawlikowski] 1788, p.72).

Following Karpowicz's sermons the Romantics used invented by the Teachers, the «patriotic» interpretation of property showing a direct relation between property and love for the country. An anonymous brochure expressed peasants' complaints in these terms: «we have no country because we have no property ([...] Uwagi praktyczne 1790, p.130)». The next period of the Peasant Question debate (when Poland has lost her independence) would be dominated by this topic.

The Romantics thought radically: Polish society would be ill so long as property will be a privilege. Their statements were a total negation of Sarmatism. Unfortunately, the Romantic programme appeared totally politically wrong. The program has been addressed to those people (the Sarmats composing a majority of the szlachta) for whom this program has reserved no room. The Sarmats consisted mainly of the poor szlachta - the owners of one village, and they were afraid of troubles with the covering of labour costs.

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First of all the writers debated their identity. The question of the szlachta identity was very important, and all other questions were depended of it. As a matter of fact to discuss the identity was to discuss a social order. In particular: to put a question «who are we?» meant in fact a statement: «we are in the transition period»; to answer this question meant «what do we have to do: to defend or to fight for our own property». The answer needed not only a description of their customs and behaviour, but also, demanded a redefinition of the nobility. So the debate became a critical review of szlachta Sarmatian values. The problem of identity was formulated in a plural number and it required a reply, not only to the question: «who are we?» but also: «who should we be?» The most important issues were to mark out a boundary between the szlachta and peasants and to describe their mutual relationship.

The Teachers proposed to separate the szlachta from the peasants by means of money rent. It was a call to polarisation of the Polish society into two separate communities: the moral and active gentry, and the lazy peasants. Instead of coercion, the Teachers prompted education. Teaching Physiocratic doctrine in schools furthered the Teachers' activities. According to Mirabeau, the Polish peasant was called the slave, and the odium of this name made the szlachta seem to be oppressors, which the image was used by the Romantics. In the background there was the Sarmatian picture of the infantile and restively insubordinate peasant. This peasant desperately needed some mixture of care and coercion, and therefore he could not be separated from the szlachta. From the combination of these two pictures resulted a need for examine of the nobility and the demand for peasant's education.

Paradoxically, the szlachta considerations concerning the nobility became the most concrete. Though they debated the Sarmatian concept of virtue, in fact the main topics became property of land and peasant work. Both of these problems needed moral, social, and economic analysis concerning property and justice.

In the debate property was defined more clearly, then justice. Only in the Sarmatian expression, property was a bit mystical, physical, biological and sensorial. As connected with the gentry's heritage and as a means of the gentry's virtue, property involved the burden of protection of the peasant. The Teachers cleared away both these mysticism and biologism, and they stressed a relationship between proprietor, and a thing called land. They saw in land property a means to fight against peasants' poverty. The Romantics made from property the just reward for work. In the eighteenth century, during the first period of the debate, property was understood mainly as a duty of practising virtue. In the first half of the nineteenth century, it became a proof that the owner understood both: his own interest, and the interest of the peasants. If an estate gave profits, and peasants paid their rent, the owner's behaviour has become moral.

Justice in the Sarmats' view was a state compatible with the Sarmatian and Catholic past. Simultaneously, it was also the individual expression of nobility on the distinct understanding, that it was exclusively reserved for the szlachta. They did not raise the question of the nature of justice, and in their writings the peasant was absent. Against the Sarmatian backgrounds we can see the Teachers' innovative activities. They said that in Poland there was no justice because justice requires that all people be free. They saw the state not so much sanctified by religion but rather defined by the relationship among people. Their justice was social justice. It was not only the Sarmatian personal relation of noble and peasant. That justice was interpreted as a political and economic question, and as a beneficial settlement. The Romantics contrasted the Teachers' rational argumentation with the purity of their intentions. On the surface they said much the same things as the Teachers. However the question of justice was for them an imperative, not a compromise. Their justice was a state of society where the most useful part of that society possessed just the same rights as the gentry. Peasants were to take possession of freedom and property in exchange for their work.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

At a first glance, it seems that each group ignored the others. However the second phase of the debate (1795 - 1830) showed a significant evolution of disputants especially concerning personal patterns. The Sarmats adopted the Teachers' pattern and the new Sarmats tried to improve the old Sarmats. The Teachers created the image of an equivalent of the Western man of interest, a manager-landlord. He knew agronomy and economic calculation. He collected money rents from peasants, and he worked on his estate using agrarian workers. The Romantics gave a total critical estimate of their society. Their main weakness remained still the same: slender support in society of their radicalism and unpractical programmes. Now their goal became a total negation of the Polish reality.

The biggest success of the debate was to overthrow the old Sarmatian belief that it is impossible to reconcile morality with economic interest. The Sarmatian society was a xenophobic closed one. Within such societies the patterns of behaviour were very important because they provided the patterns of making decisions. Within open societies the patterns of

behaviour were not so much important because each member of community was more independent. The Teachers' image of manager-landowner was a step forward in a building of man's modern independence. The Polish Enlightenment variant of a man of interest became a pattern created for the «third way». However he remained a noble he was not a Sarmat. At the same time he was not an egoistic capitalist. He combined economic rationality of his behaviour with moral purity (work for the independence of his country). The aim was the just society; the mean was the rational and active economy. The clarity of used means was washed away by the noble aim. For that reason, this meeting, on the one hand, of both the old ethics of virtue and the szlachta equality, and on the other, the modern commercial ethics of interest, resulted in unclear diagnosis and unclear solutions.

In the West, property became a symbol of new commercial society, a human right and a main pillar of the economy. In Poland property did not play such an active and mobilising part. Why? The Polish property was not surrounded by a compact set of values, which would be identical for everyone, whether no matter who landlord or peasant. The main function of these values should be a consolidation of society, not its division. In Poland property defended the szlachta prestige. It reflected the weakness of townspeople. Polish «just ethics of interest» differed much from the Western ethics of interest. In the West townspeople fought for prestige and social promotion. The szlachta goal became survival. The just ethics of interest did not allow for such freedom as the pragmatic Western patterns of behaviour did. According to the ethics of interest there was a simple identity between the individual and social interest.

The Polish manager-landowner did not experienced lightness and spontaneity as his capitalistic brother man of interest had. First of all, this was a result of a weak Polish market. The capitalistic market created a mirror for the activities of the man of interests. In case only neighbours of manager-landlord could become reviewers. Effects of a manager-landlord's reforms could not be seen immediately. Giving freedom to peasants threatened insolvency for the peasants and a lack of agrarian workers. Other activities such as agrarian industry needed skilled workmen and time. The man of interest received information about his activities almost immediately. He lived in the World described by money, profit, and commodities. The manager-landlord lived in the tangible World of the country's biology - the corn, the land, and the peasant, not in the World of abstract capital or anonymous agrarian workers. The man surrounded by concrete things cannot see himself from a side-view. It was a situation with a paralysing effect. Only a few could be men of action. The rest would prefer the support of tradition.

The Peasant Question became a real school of social thinking for the szlachta. The writings were a kind of mutual aid. That mutual aid was more helpful in identifying the szlachta both as a social group and as a social member, not so much in solving practical problems was. The peasant question forced the majority of the szlachta to revise their understanding of nobility as a monopoly for virtue. It resulted in a new meaning of nobility relating to property and justice. It was a specific theory of exchanges «something for something». An estate was inherited but a noble had to earn his nobility. The understanding of this mutual relation was very difficult for the Sarmatian majority. In Sarmatian culture the care of Providence was perceived as a reward for being a Christian bulwark (in Latin: *ante murale*). In fact Providence

was taken for granted as an attribute which belongs mechanically to the nobility and it was a comfortable justification of the szlachta indolence. Now the szlachta had to earn the blessing of Providence by moral and economic activities. It was an agrarian equivalent of the process of politicisation of Grace, described by J. G. A. Pocock, as the replacing Providence by cultivating politics (Pocock 1975, part i, ch.i).

The Polish ethics was more complicated. It embraced three stages. The first stage was acceptance of chivalrous patriotism. It means that the szlachta, and only the szlachta, had to be ready for sacrifice and heroism, in order to fight in defence of the Country. Then - on the second stage - the landlord had to define his own economic interest. He had to do so by himself possibly by means of educating. «Himself» in that case meant that the weak market could not prompt him what he should do. At last, in the third stage he had to abandon his Sarmatian heritage, especially the emotional attitudes towards land and peasant. One of the strongest rules of Sarmatism was the rule of neglect of career. The acceptance of the new pattern meant rejection of that rule. In result in the Polish conditions, the process of transforming landowners became the process of the self-denial of the szlachta majority. It was a hard position to escape from, and this szlachta fix plus unclearness of those stages, and lack of coherence, were serious barriers against popularising the pattern of manager-landowner.

What about the Enlightenment French and English ideas? Montesquieu and Wolff's philosophy of the state, Locke's pedagogy and theory of property, Physiocracy, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's pedagogy was popular in Poland. They made a creative fermentation. However that debate was a peculiar one. Its exceptional character was caused by the anachronistic Polish political system.

The debate on the Peasant Question remained a Polish question only. It was recognised as the most important issue by the Polish gentry. In the eighteenth century Russia there were different trends and during the Enlightenment the system of serfdom became more firmly established. In 1758 the Russian empress Elizabeth confirmed the gentry's monopoly of land property and property of peasants. In 1760 a law allowing the gentry a punishment of transportation peasants to Siberia for theft, drunkenness and other activities confirmed the gentry's ownership of peasants. The next Russian empress Catherine the Great supported this policy. In 1765 she enacted a law on transportation with hard labour for insubordinate peasants. It was up to the gentry to decide about a length of peasant's punishment. Two years later a new law forbade peasants to complain against the gentry. The punishments were 'eternal' transportation with hard labour plus flogging (Bazyłow 1985, v.i, pp.330-1; 338-40). The Russian peasant was a real slave. However during the Enlightenment only one anonymous book appeared embracing some sentences concerning peasants. It was «Trip from Petersburg to Moscow» (1790) by Alexander Radischev.

Who won? Whose viewpoint lasted longer? The Western world swarmed with men of interest, the Polish gentry stayed in their estates. The man of interest became a symbol of capitalistic society's success. The Polish gentry remained tragic persons in a myth - fighting knights in successive insurrections for the independence of Poland and simultaneously they remained people unable to give freedom to the peasants. West Europe believed in individuals and had been introducing liberalism and democracy. Prussia believed in military order and had

been introducing this order in the state. Austria and Russia followed Prussia. Poland could not effort to give unequivocal positive answer; she could effort to give the negative answers: «no» for army, and «no» for individuals.

A little digression on the present day, from 1975 to 1989 the debate on the state was conducted in similar terms as that one from two hundred years before: the lack of full independence, and economic underdevelopment. The starting point was also the same: the moral censure of the hypocrisy of communistic propaganda. The participants showed that the nomenclature's justice is corrupt. So there have formed three groups and three different discourses which are still working in the last decade of the twenty-century. Contemporary Sarmats are present in a postcommunistic party. They appeal to the past and they use an old communistic language. Their program is the program of efficient opportunists. The Teachers are represented by Union for Freedom, the party full of good will, but not very efficient. As for the Romantics, the Polish Rights, they want only justice and on behalf of that justice they want to square up against the communists. For them this act is the preliminary condition of the real starting off. They believe if the Polish society cleans up, the rest will go smoothly. The question of property remains the centre of attention and the communistic Sarmats hold back, resisting privatisation of the state property.

That present-day discussion about property and justice is even more unclear than the Peasant Question was. The disputants' language is obscure. The elements of that discussion come down from the so called «Balcerowicz's programme» or a «shock therapy» for the Polish economy. As in the Peasant Question the main programme was created by the Teachers so the Balcerowicz's programme was created by the Union for Freedom (at that time its name was the Democratic Union), our present Teachers. The similar words in the almost identical economic and political programmes are used by each of those groups. For the Romantic Rights and for the postcommunistic Sarmats that economic programme is used mainly as a tool of propaganda. That intellectual and political robbery reinforces the natural confusion accompanying the reformatory programme. In fact instead of one global discussion there are three different discussions within each of those three groups, and the economic content of the debate becomes not so important.

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