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THE UNIVERSAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY: AN INTRODUCTION

An encyclopedia is a work that serves the continuing education (Gk. ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία) of individuals and whole societies. In the tradition of western culture, encyclopedias were and are the most universal way of providing information and education. Encyclopedias produced by specific academic institutions are also a testimony to the knowledge they acquired and a sign of the level of culture that a national or international society has achieved. Compiling then an encyclopedia on a specific domain of knowledge and making it available to society is not a matter of the ambition of a group of scientists, but primarily an expression of concern for the level of education and scientific culture in a society.

Among different kinds of encyclopedias, philosophical encyclopedias play an indispensable role in the formation of culture. Philosophy, which permeates such essential domains of culture as cognition, behavior, and production, is the *logos* (reason) for the culture of every nation or society that makes it possible for their members to discover a higher—rather than merely expedient—end of life and action.

The philosophers of the Catholic University of Lublin, Poland, who are members of the Polish Thomas Aquinas Association, a section of the Società Internazionale Tommaso d’Aquino, and who tirelessly work to develop a deeper understanding of our philosophical cognition

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of the world and man, decided to answer the human need for philosophy by writing and publishing *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, and so to stand on guard for the cultural heritage of mankind. The Società Internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino (*nota bene*, Card. Karol Wojtyła, presently St. Pope John Paul II, was one of its founding members) is one of the best known worldwide philosophical societies whose chief purpose is to spread and develop philosophical culture.

The initiative for writing and publishing the multi-volume *Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, came from Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, O.P. (one of the most prominent Polish philosophers), and his fellow scholars, who together formed an academic circle that—in the second half of the XX century, i.e., the most difficult time for philosophy and humanities in Poland—developed, defended and fostered independent philosophical cognition, and in so doing became guardians of a culture fit for the human person. Therefore, the people who initiated the work on *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy* were aware of the great labor and difficulty it entails, but also of their responsibility for the cultural and social standards in the contemporary world. They treated this task as a duty to truth and a service to the culture of thought.

The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy is primarily focused on fundamental philosophical problems. They are presented in a way that takes into account existentially important metaphysical issues, and considers their solutions in the context of the entire history of philosophy. This approach allows the readers to form an opinion on which solutions are correct and which are not. The problems are presented in objective language and in the form of a lecture: it is a distinguishing mark of this encyclopedia. Such a presentation is to show the understanding of the problems by indicating the real factors (not merely theories) the negation of which entails the negation of the fact that is given for explanation. For this reason, the authors, while discussing a problem, do not restrict themselves to relating various

views and positions, but they also propose rational and well-grounded solutions.

Besides entries directly focused on philosophical problems, *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy* also contains review entries which survey and summarize various philosophical systems that laid the foundation of modern and contemporary culture, and determined specific ways of understanding the world and man. The review entries are not only aimed at describing phenomena of thought that led to the formulation of particular philosophical systems or methods, but also at helping the reader understand various phenomena and processes of thought that occur in contemporary culture (science, ethics, art, and religion).

Moreover, philosophical positions and views are also discussed in biographical entries on famous thinkers who had an important influence on the history of philosophy, and marked out different ways of understanding the world of persons and things. These biographies are a source of information about particular thinkers, and offer the reader an opportunity to get acquainted with the context in which a particular philosophical idea or interpretation arose.

The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy gives special consideration to the heritage of classical philosophy, as it is the basis of the identity of Western culture. But it also carefully considers the achievements of Indian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Muslim, Jewish, Incan, and African philosophies, whereby it provides a broad and universal perspective for understanding philosophy in general.

The authors of *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy* represent academic institutions not only from Poland, but also from Spain, Italy, France, the United States of America, Russia, Ukraine, Bielorussia, Estonia, Slovakia, and others. Such a wide cooperation has been made possible because of the involvement and contribution of the Societa Internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino whose members represent philo-

sophical schools and institutions from around the world. The Scholarly Committee and the Editorial Team of *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy* has been established by members of this Society.

The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy was first published in Polish in 2000–2009. At present, it is being revised and prepared for publication in English. This initiative is guided by three fundamental goals: *first*, to include a significant group of philosophers (about 700 authors of *The Encyclopedia*) from central Europe in a worldwide philosophical discourse, which thus far has seemed inaccessible to them; *secondly*, to provide and disseminate the understanding—developed in different cultural and social traditions—of the world, man, human action, and that of philosophy itself; and *thirdly*, to give the English-speaking world an opportunity to learn about achievements of a wide range of philosophers from Central Europe, including in a special way those from Poland.

The English version of *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is projected to appear in 10 volumes, each containing around 500 entries. We hope that it may contribute to the strengthening of the foundations of philosophical and scientific culture all over the world.

In this special issue of *Studia Gilsoniana*, the reader can find a selection of problem, review and biographical entries (in the form of academic articles) which will soon appear in the English edition of *The Encyclopedia*. The selection includes the entries for the following topics: “Abortion,” “Atheism,” “Beauty,” “Civilization,” “Man,” “Étienne Gilson,” and “Mieczysław Albert Krąpiec.”