

OBITUARY OF KLEMENS SZANIAWSKI

Klemens Szaniawski was born on March 3, 1925 in Warsaw, the son of an intellectual family which included some prominent writers. He died of heart failure in Warsaw, on March 4, 1990. He is survived by his wife and one daughter.

Szaniawski was known to the wider Polish community not only as an eminent Polish academic, but also as a person deeply involved in the struggle for civil liberties, democratic values and cultural freedom.

During the German occupation Szaniawski joined the clandestine Warsaw University as a philosophy student. His teachers were members of the so-called Lvov-Warsaw School which included Tadeusz Kotarbiński, Maria Ossowska and Stanisław Ossowski, a school that encouraged strict logical rigour and analytical skills but which was at the same time sensitive to social and moral conflicts.

After the failure of the Warsaw uprising in 1944 (in which Szaniawski, then aged 19, took part) he was captured by the Germans and sent to Auschwitz. Having survived the Nazi concentration camp, he resumed his studies in 1945. Later on he taught logic and methodology at Warsaw University, where he became a professor and the Chairman of the Sub-Department of Logic. From the early 1960s until his death he was the President of the Polish Philosophical Society. For many years he was a member of the Editorial Boards of many journals (*Erkenntnis*, *Studia Logica*, *Synthese*, *Theory and Decision*).

In the late 1970s Szaniawski became one of the most active members and spokesmen of democratic opposition in Poland. In 1980–1981 he chaired an umbrella body (closely linked with Solidarity) which united various artistic and scholarly associations. He was an organizer of the Congress of Polish Culture, which was interrupted violently by the imposition of martial law. Szaniawski was arrested but released soon afterwards.

During martial law he chaired various underground bodies (The Committee for Independent Culture, The Council of National Education). Disliked by the Communist government, for many years he was not allowed to travel abroad, despite many invitations from foreign academic institutions. (Only in 1989 was he able to take up a Fellowship at the Wilson Center in Washington, DC, to which he had been elected in 1982.)

In 1984 Szaniawski was democratically elected Rector of Warsaw

University, but the Communist government vetoed the election. In 1989 Szaniawski participated in the round-table negotiations between Solidarity and the representatives of the Communist Party, which eventually resulted in the formation of the first non-Communist government in the Soviet block.

Although not a churchgoer, at the end of his life Szaniawski had close links with Christianity.

At first it seems a bit surprising that Szaniawski did not leave any substantial political writing. But this is less surprising when one takes into account the fact that the main theme of almost all his articles is **rationality**. For him rationality was not axiologically neutral; it constituted an integral component of the European cultural tradition. In the rationality of conviction man's dignity was discerned, and in the rationality of behaviour lay man's chance to resist the elements of nature and of society. Szaniawski was concerned that the irrationalism of social life (so overwhelming in a Communist system!) undermined confidence in an attitude founded on rational arguments.

Using game theory, statistics and probability, Szaniawski studied various formal models of human behaviour, focusing less on their applicability to actual situations, than on trying to grasp inconsistency of our naive intuition about rationality, and to clarify the meaning of the term *rational decision*. He was aware, however, that the most serious threats to rationality might have their origins not in the lack of precise theoretical postulates, but in the systematic tendency of the human mind to see reality in a deformed way (e.g. wishful thinking, cognitive conservatism, false judgments made under social pressure).

Szaniawski contributed much to the theory of decision. He examined different criteria of decision-making (minimax, Laplace, Hurwicz criteria), and proposed his own ones. His investigations into the role information plays in decision-making resulted in the definition of the (*pragmatic*) *value of (perfect) information*. The value of information is defined in terms of the change in utility or loss, due to the optimal use of information, and is relative to the criteria of decision-making. Szaniawski also attempted to show how the concepts of *decision* and of *information* can be exploited in the methodology of science.

In one of his recent articles, he examined the limits of the (Bayesian) theory of decision-making, when applied to a doctor's choice of therapy.

A scholar of sharp, subtle mind, very sensitive to art, literature, moral and religious issues, Szaniawski was a man whose influence enriched all those fortunate enough to have contact with him – friends, students, colleagues.