Reforming Hearts and Minds: The Educational Reforms of the Polish Enlightenment

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I first embarked on this thesis experience with a rather abstract idea to write a work about the Enlightenment and Poland. The first theme has been one I have gravitated towards throughout my History education. I began to seriously consider the subject of the Enlightenment after reading Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile* while still in high school and found this time of great change, rationality, and education incredibly compelling. The second topic is one near to my heart since it encompasses my heritage. I therefore set out to join the two because, although I had learned about both extensively, I knew little about their synthesis.

I first extend my sincerest gratitude to my advisor, Professor Nancy Sinkoff. Beginning this process, I was not sure if I would be able to find anyone who could help me with my topic. Professor Sinkoff has not only been incredibly knowledgeable but has also been a dedicated and attentive advisor. She has shared my excitement for this project and has given me wonderful insight, encouragement, and care throughout the entire process. I could not have asked for a better advisor and it has been a true pleasure working with you. I must also thank Professor Phyllis Mack who graciously accepted the role of being my second reader. Your time and effort is much appreciated and essential to the success of this thesis. I also thank Professor James Masschaele for his help and confidence in my work and the Rutgers History Department for creating a wonderful learning experience. Lastly, the help of the archive librarians of both the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków and the National Library in Warsaw, Poland made my research experience abroad as fruitful as possible in the limited time I had. I thank them for their kindness and assistance in finding sources.
This whole process would not have been possible without the love, encouragement, and help of my friends and family. You have helped me through all this more than you know. Thank you for understanding why plans were sometimes cancelled and the thesis was my main topic of conversation. My especial thanks and love go to my parents who, as with any of my endeavors, have provided me with unconditional love and support. They have instilled in me a strong work ethic and a love for my homeland. Through the long nights and stress, thank you for never giving up on me.

I have learned so much throughout this process; I began my thesis as an unconfident student, doubtful that I would be able to finish a work of this magnitude. I cannot believe how much my outlook has changed in the past seven months. It has mainly been due to the people listed above who have shown me that a little faith and a lot of patience can see me through anything. My deepest thanks.
Chapter 1
Golden Liberties Turn Lackluster: The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at an Ideological Crossroads

“Poland is the only example in history of a State which deliberately committed political suicide for the sake of absolute individual liberty.”
- R. Nisbet Bain

The Enlightenment is a period often characterized by freedom: freedom of thought, religion, and person. It is known as a time of increasing secularization, empiricism, and reason. Prominent thinkers across Europe stressed the importance of civil liberties; the attention they drew to matters of politics, religion, science, and society trickled down into the educated masses and those who felt the strains of oppression began to rebel. Thus, a series of revolutions promoting liberty rippled throughout Europe. The revolutions were just as much ideological and intellectual as they were political. In some cases, radical liberal thought replaced the status quo in the name of reason and progress. While countries like France and England wrestled with the idea of how to free man from the chains all around him, another country, removed from the focus of the Enlightenment by its own customs, politics, and history, watched from afar.

Poland’s distinct history did not exclude it from experiencing the blossoming of liberal ideology during the Enlightenment but it did, however, use the ideology in a very different way than most of Europe. In France, monarchs, especially Louis XIV, ensured that the nobles were at their service and dependent on their good will. Power had become so centralized that revolution broke out as personal liberties were compromised. In France, the ideology of the Enlightenment and its proposed reforms served to loosen the grip of absolute monarchy and ensure more people with natural freedom. Poland saw the opposite; the widened gap between the nobility and the

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peasantry caused some to be incredibly rich and powerful while others devastatingly poor and powerless. Ironically, the cause of such disparity was a political system, based on “golden liberties,” embraced by Polish gentry known as the szlachta, throughout much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Enlightenment in Poland was a way to combat the “golden liberties” that were more harmful than helpful. Reformers used the same ideology that granted civil liberties to the French in order to centralize the government and inspire nationalism in Poland.

During the Renaissance, Poland entered what came to be known as its Golden Age. During the late fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, the country was renowned for its tolerance and liberalism; while most Western European countries were waging religious wars and expelling religious dissidents from their borders, Poland was relatively untouched by the fighting and furthermore, welcomed those of various faiths within its realms. The Roman Catholic Church, so integral in the societal and political makeup of other European countries, played a much lesser role in Poland during the fifteenth century. Due to the Church’s subordinate nature, strong monarchial leadership, and patronage amongst the nobility and gentry, Poland possessed the right conditions to flourish intellectually. King Kazimierz the Great supported the arts and education and in 1364 commissioned the creation of the Kraków Academy, the second university in central Europe. At its inception it was praised for its high standard of education and lack of religious management. Unlike the institutions of higher learning in France, England, and Germany, the Kraków Academy did not have roots in previous religious educational establishments. Its models were the secular academies in Italy, specifically Bologna and Padua. The Kraków Academy was comprised of posts in civil law, canon law,

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medicine, and the liberal arts but offered no religious instruction. The Academy benefitted from the addition of chairs in mathematics and astronomy and, in 1449, received an endowment for the classical poetry chair. If it is any testament to the standards of education, the Academy was renowned for producing, among its thousands of students, Nicolaus Copernicus, the man who, with his heliocentric model, would reshape the course of science for centuries to come. Recognizing Poland’s intellectual achievements up until the sixteenth century only makes realizing how far it was to fall in the next two centuries more astonishing.

In the sixteenth century, an idea called Sarmatianism enticed the szlachta and changed the course of Polish politics. The theory, perpetuated by many Polish writers of the time, claimed that the szlachta were not of the same stock as the peasantry but instead, their roots lay in warrior tribes from the Black Sea. This outlandish claim became the basis for a superiority that would shape the ideology of the gentry for the next century. Sarmatianism advocated liberty and the gentry embraced it as long as that liberty was in their interests. Because of Poland’s socio-economic and political development, Poland never developed a middle class. This led to two groups in society: the peasantry and the gentry, the latter ranging from being magnificently

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3 Ibid., 40.

4 Ibid., 68.

wealthy to extremely poor. This societal stratification meant that the wealthy and powerful, finding justification in the Sarmatian model, dominated Poland’s political affairs. Initially, the szlachta’s insistence on a more democratic government was applauded as a progressive measure. The creation of the Sejm, or parliament of Poland that was composed of landed nobility, was designed to institute a series of checks and balances on the king. Upon seeing the fate of French nobles at the hands of an absolute monarchy, the Polish nobility grew fearful that they too would be deprived of freedom. They demanded and acquired more and more individual liberties, and as they did it became increasingly clear that what was once deemed a progressive government was quickly turning into an oligarchy.
Once known as a powerful and liberal state in Europe, Poland began its downward spiral with the introduction of elective monarchy at the close of the sixteenth century after King Sigismund II August, the last Jagiellon ruler, failed to produce an heir. Even before that, the course of Poland’s history altered with the inception of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; the gentry insisted on the right to vote for the next King of the Commonwealth, regardless of whether or not there was a natural successor to the throne. The constitutional monarchy lessened the power of the monarch and forced him to be at the mercy of his subjects. The new system of government established key concepts such as the *pacta conventa*. This legal document was an agreement each king was forced to sign before sitting on the throne of the Commonwealth. Its political implication was significant. The *pacta conventa*, a product of “golden liberty,” severely limited the authority of the king; he was not allowed to name his successor, married only with the approval of the *Sejm*, and was subject to its political decisions. As time went on, these stipulations became even more limiting until the king was simply a figurehead. Knowing that the king would bow to the demands of the gentry in order to receive their approval in political matters, the magnates sought first to extend their power before they improved the country. Another check to the king’s power was the infamous *liberum veto*. This once-progressive and distinctive parliamentary device allowing even one man to stop any legislation from passing in the *Sejm*, was based on the idea of democracy. The desire to make voting as fair as possible fueled the use of the *liberum veto*. It prevented the rule of the majority from completely disregarding any opposition. But the power vested in this parliamentary device promoting “golden liberty” quickly turned it into a tool of anarchy as the privilege was abused and led to

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6 Zamoyski, 53.

7 Bain, 7.
futile parliamentary sessions. The death of Sigismund II August signaled the end of the Jagiellonian Dynasty and the inclusion of foreign monarchs into the line of succession. This was arguably the largest political mistake for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Often, these monarchs had few ties to the Commonwealth and frequently did not have any personal interest in improving the country. Even if they did, they were able to do very little as their power was limited and at the discretion of the Sejm. Poland’s elected monarchs, combined with the parliamentary tools created with good intention but corrupted by human nature, were unsuited for governing Poland; soon, the progress of the country stalled.

Education suffered along with the slowly collapsing government. Sarmatianism afforded the Roman Catholic Church a stronger presence in society. The invitation of the Jesuits to Poland during the Catholic Reformation changed the way Polish society approached schooling. The szlachta, once resistant to Church power, came to regard the Church as the ultimate authority in matters of education, as Sarmatianism articulated the unique role of the gentry, almost a kind of manifest destiny, to protect Christianity. The Catholic Church became an integral part of society during the seventeenth century and the clergy enjoyed considerable power in politics. As the Church assumed more power within a multi-national and multi-cultural Poland, toleration of other ethnicities and religions began to wane and the scope of knowledge accessible to youth dwindled. The manner in which students were treated also changed. They were expected to be obedient and never challenge the authority of their teachers. Coddling was expressly forbidden; a spoiled child would become “malicious, weak and lazy” and nothing forbade an authority figure

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8 Zamoyski, 101.

from beating the wickedness out of a child.\textsuperscript{10} As other countries began to adopt more modern methods of schooling, Poland’s educational system was become more primitive. The intellectual successes inspired by the Kraków Academy were quickly becoming a distant memory. The perversion of liberalism, particularly during the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, began to wear away at the foundation of the Commonwealth.

Any love of liberalism among the nobility slowly waned when the love of power overtook it. Political decisions were executed based on greed and personal advancement and not for the sake of good for the country. The disparity between the wealthy that owned and worked land and the peasants who could not afford any land grew greater with the increased presence and greater say of the \textit{szlachta} in political affairs.\textsuperscript{11} Those with considerable wealth grew wealthier while those who were poor remained so. The kings of Poland, bound by a system that left them devoid of much power, could not easily reverse the damage excess had inflicted. Weakened internally, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was in danger of being torn apart by its neighboring countries. The blindness to internal problems culminated with the three Partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793, and 1795 in which the Austrian Empire, the Russian Empire, and the Kingdom of Prussia, capitalizing on Poland’s weakened state and interfering in its politics, divided up the Commonwealth among themselves.\textsuperscript{12} The end of the eighteenth century signaled the end of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Its territory fell to the three countries that had set their sights on expanding their borders. After all the progress that had been achieved during its Golden Age, Poland was wiped off the map of Europe.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 27.

\textsuperscript{11} Bain, 5-6.

\textsuperscript{12} Zamoyski, 257.
As will be discussed in this thesis, Poland’s decreasing role on the world’s stage and its crumbling political and educational structures did not go unnoticed. Within Poland, there were those who saw the corruption and wanted to put an end to it before the country was in serious danger. Polish scholars and members of the gentry wealthy enough to travel throughout Europe were exposed to very different conditions in France, England, or Germany. The beginnings of the Enlightenment reached Poland slightly later than in France and England. The privileged classes of Poland, who studied in and traveled to Western European countries, expanded their intellectual horizons abroad and introduced new concepts and thoughts when they returned home. The influx of travelers was not one-sided. Printers from Germany and tutors from France and Italy sought employment in the Commonwealth, seeing in it a new market. They also brought with them ideas of the Enlightenment. The King of Poland, Stanisław August Poniatowski, was not a strong ruler, but what he lacked in political expertise he made up for in his dedication to intellectual pursuits. He hosted his Thursday Dinners where the most educated and prominent men met and engaged in intellectually stimulating conversation. He also began the first military academy in Poland, The Corps of Cadets in Warsaw, and a newspaper, the *Monitor*, modeled on the English *Spectator*, which circulated enlightened press. It was only a matter of time before the concepts infiltrating the west of Europe took root in Poland, not lacking reformers to promote its ideals in order to save their country from ruin.

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13 Zamoyski, 59.
14 Ibid., 231.
This thesis examines the work of three Polish reformers, Stanisław Konarski (1700-1773), Hugo Kołłątaj (1750-1812), and Stanisław Staszic (1755-1826) and the way in which they used Enlightenment ideology to not only improve the educational system within Poland but also to strengthen the Polish nation. They argued for more a centralized government where public good was placed before self-interest and sought to undue the damage Sarmatianism had caused.

At the heart of political reforms lay educational reforms. All three reformers recognized the importance of education in creating strong and patriotic citizens who used Enlightenment ideology to better Poland’s social and political conditions. Sensing that the country would not be able to fend off attacks from others or survive its own internal conflicts, Konarski, Kołłątaj, and Staszic recognized that the well-being of Poland rested in the hands of its youth. In order to mold a politician who would work for the benefit of the country, the educational system’s goal was to raise children to become good citizens, inculcated with the desire to serve and protect their country and institute change.

Although all three reformers focused on a broad spectrum of problems they perceived in the educational system of Poland, each focused on certain aspects of education and expanded the reforms of his predecessors. Konarski was concerned with the restoration of the Polish language after the Catholic Church’s favoring of Latin had limited the vocabulary and means of expression of Polish citizens. Kołłątaj primarily centered his attention on the inadequacy of the educational system in terms of science, medicine, and mathematics. He sought to infuse the existing curriculum with practical applications of knowledge and not just theoretical speculation in order to build a middle class in Poland. Staszic, in turn, responded to Enlightenment ideology promoted by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke as well as discussed formative education and its importance in creating a useful citizen. Each man’s educational reforms were not simply
limited to application of knowledge within the walls of an academic institution. The works of Konarski, Kołłątaj, and Staszic was just as political as they were scholastic.

During a time when Poland was losing a national identity because of the gentry’s concern with personal well-being, the three reformers’ works were instrumental in changing the way people viewed prosperity. The happiness of Poland depended first on the self-sacrifice of individuals. Contrary to what many other European thinkers were proposing for governmental reform, the three Polish thinkers advocated centralizing the government in order to secure the happiness of the whole; Poland’s hope lay in its ability to dissolve the noble’s grip on society and government. Reforming education was the only way to reform the government. The solution to Poland’s problems was a rehabilitation of society beginning from the ground up.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of how, although the reforms were begun too late to save the country from its fate, the progress made in the final years of Poland’s existence was vital to the survival and eventual prospering of Polish language, literature, and patriotism for the next century. In 1795, Poland no longer existed physically, yet its existence lay in the hearts and minds of its former citizens who believed that they would one day see an independent Poland. In the short time that Stanislaw Konarski, Hugo Kołłątaj, and Stanislaw Staszic implemented their reform ideas, they provided the Polish people with the tools that would see them through more than one hundred years of suppression.
Chapter 2
Stanisław Konarski: From Mother Tongue to Fatherland

“We will not stop imbuing in them [youth] the love of the fatherland so that the boys will from their youngest years understand what exactly is this love of fatherland recommended by all of us, how sweet and generous is its just rule over them, what they owe to their fatherland, what they should do for it throughout all their lives and how particularly important it is for them to mold themselves into good citizens so that they can properly repay the fatherland and sacrifice themselves to consolidate, defend, and organize it. This one should do, teach, and remind.”
- Stanisław Konarski

It was the aspiration of the reformers that the educational reforms of the Enlightenment in Poland would become the foundation upon which a new, solid, and strong state with patriotic citizens could be built. Stanisław Konarski (1700-1773), known as the “father” of Polish educational reforms entered the political arena at a crucial time. The Roman Catholic Church had increasingly tightened its hold over aspects of Polish social and political life, most apparently in the educational system. Konarski recognized that the bad habits leading Poland down a destructive path were the result of an intensifying conservatism in education and the influence of Sarmatianism that relegated liberty to very few Poles. His goal was to create thoughtful citizens who understood that “a practical solution of problems could be arrived at not by scholastic speculation but by the use of a ‘thinking mind.’” In order to create “thinking minds,” Konarski worked to reform the schools so that they provided modern and practical knowledge infused with patriotism. Only then could the problems of Poland’s ailing government be addressed: this time by selfless citizens instead of selfish gentry.


Stanisław Konarski’s past had a strong influence in shaping his reforms and pedagogical writings. He was born in 1700 into a family with noble roots but after losing both his parents, entered into the Piarist order in 1715. Because of his noble background and his entrance into the religious brotherhood, he gained access to higher education. The Piarists were committed to intellectual development; their history revealed them to be exponents of education that reached all classes, especially the poor.\footnote{Robert Bireley, \textit{The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450-1700} (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999) 131.} After completing schooling in Poland, Konarski studied in France and Italy. There, he formed his opinions on schooling from of his observations of the Italian Collegio Nazareno. Founded in 1630 by José de Calasanz who also founded the Piarist Order, the Collegio Nazareno revolutionized schooling with a curriculum...
grounded in secular education and a rigid schooling schedule. Classes were held five days a week with limited vacations. There was also a monthly oral exam testing students on the knowledge they had retained. Schooling emphasized mathematics, and instruction was carried out in a mixture of Latin and the vernacular. Konarski obtained a position in the school as a teacher of rhetoric. By working within the system, he closely observed the model that he would eventually carry back with him to Poland.

Using the Collegio Nazareno as his model, Konarski opened the Collegium Nobilium (College of the Gentry) in 1740 in Warsaw. This signaled the beginning of a new kind of education based on rational thinking supported by contemporary texts, practical knowledge, and the cultivation of citizenship. Like de Calasanz, he introduced math, science, and national history to the already existing curriculum of Latin and rhetoric and, most importantly, introduced formal study in Polish into the school. Up until his reforms, the Catholic Church strictly controlled education. In Jesuit schools teachers placed emphasis on religious education and Latin. The curriculum, unchanged since the sixteenth century, was based on memorization of Latin grammar and the study of prayer books. The books most widely available to the public were religious text because the Church largely controlled the printing presses. The Polish language was severely crippled by a schooling system that disregarded its importance and the hastily added foreign words, specifically French, to the Polish lexicon.

To remedy the decline of the Polish language, Konarski set up a strict plan of education; Latin was only taught once Poland had been mastered and regular exercises gave students a chance to translate from Polish to Latin and back again. This was a crucial addition to the

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schooling system. The use of Polish instilled a national identity into gentry youth and made them aware of their previously neglected mother tongue. While cultivating proper Polish, the exercises, instead of focusing on religious themes like the Jesuits did, accented patriotism. One translation written by Konarski contained advice such as “Poles should not seek to expand their borders but defend the ones that they already have” while another lamented that “the habit of suspending the Sejm [Parliament] without reaching any outcome is harmful and destructive for the Republic.”

Highly political, these sayings were inculcated into the minds of students from an early age and served as mantras for the rehabilitation of the Polish government. To match the emphasis on Polish in the written curriculum, Konarski reformed the reading list. Before his reforms, the texts were largely based on Jesuit writing, and did not mention any progressive views in science, mathematics, or even history. He remodeled the reading list to include contemporary Polish and French writers. It included such notable names as Descartes, Pascal, Rollin, Fénélon, de La Bruyère, and Rousseau. Because Polish translations did not exist of some French plays and Latin poems, he took it upon himself to translate them.

In addition to modernizing the literature of the school, Konarski placed an emphasis on the sciences and mathematics, areas sorely neglected by the Jesuit institutions.

Given the strength of the Order and its resistance to the Scientific Revolution, students were denied information spreading rapidly throughout Western Europe for fear of being deemed

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heretical or treasonous. The Piarist Order was much more open to new scientific theories than the Jesuits; de Calasanz was fascinated by science and kept a correspondence with Galileo. Konarski followed suit by, rather ironically, introducing the concept of Copernicus’ heliocentric model, which had developed from the mind of a pupil educated at the once great Kraków Academy, to the people who should have known it best: Copernicus’ own countrymen. But before 1746, there was no mention of the heliocentric model; schools operated under the Aristotelian model, insisting that it was, in fact, the Sun that orbited Earth, until the changes set forth by Konarski. Not only did Konarski expose his students to new theories of science and math, he encouraged them to ask questions and challenge what they were being taught. As the author and Piarist priest Jan Buba writes, “Acknowledging others’ views is not synonymous with accepting them.” Konarski’s goals were to expose students to contemporary knowledge and allow students to accept or reject what they found to be reasonable. In this way, students were not forced to believe or think in a certain way; rather, pure reason would be the basis for their decisions. By having strong convictions backed by rational thinking, a student would learn to not stray from his course while being persuaded by others. The old system of education lacked these fundamental rudiments so necessary for the development of life skills. Konarski’s solution to the outdated practices of the Church was to emphasize reason and empiricism in a school’s

22 Seidler, 4.

23 Bireley, 131.


* It was actually the Piarist Antoni Wisniewski who first encouraged the study of the Copernican model and, working with Konarski, introduced a new way of scientific thinking into Piarist schools.

curriculum. Yet the most important aspect of Konarski’s reform was the emphasis he placed on applying the knowledge students received.

In Konarski’s mind, the responsibility of schools extended further than simply teaching students contemporary knowledge; their foremost task was to instill a sense of citizenship in their students. Konarski saw clear ties between politics and education. His works include both pedagogical and political writings demonstrating that he felt both sets of reforms were necessary for the benefit of the state and of the Polish nation. Often, his writings overlap and treat one subject as the extension of the other. Success in the arena of politics was contingent on success in education. Konarski expressed his motivation in reform in *Mowa o konwiktach na skrypt pod tytułem: Skarga ubogiej szkachty, odpowiewaiaca. Z potrzebnemi, gwoli edukacyi w Polszcze szlacheckiej młodzi reflexyami* (Remarks on Boarding Schools: The Response to the “Lament of...
e the Poor Gentry.” With Reflections on the Necessary Reforms to the Upbringing of the Gentry Youth). He introduced his reasons at the very beginning of his essay:

Nothing more to it than simply the love of truth and my fatherland awakened and interested me: love of righteousness, that worthy people who serve their fatherland with all their might and do it [the fatherland] good . . . will not be stoned [persecuted] but rather that they will receive gratitude from all of us. Because ingratitude will make even the best people’s hearts turn away from doing useful works for the fatherland.26

Konarski appealed to his audience, comprised of the gentry, by explicitly equating reform and honor; if the nobles were righteous people they would support the reforms. Those who do not support the reforms were termed “ungrateful.” Konarski also associated reformed education with the advancement of the fatherland. Instead of squabbling over personal power and sabotaging the well-being of Poland, citizens should focus on using their skills to decide what is best for the country; he insisted that the good of the whole was personal profit. More importantly, he placed the responsibility of maintaining the welfare of the fatherland in the hand of its citizens. Its demise could only be attributed to the lack of attention and care given to education. He anticipated his critics’ charges in his writing: “Who could this [Konarski’s reforms] insult? Probably only the person who does not wish the fatherland well and his own private good.”27

Again, Konarski played on the egos and self-interest of the szlachta (gentry), insinuating that he who does not support reform will be responsible for the ruin of the country and, most importantly to the selfish gentry, for the ruin of their personal wealth and good. By teaching students that they had direct influence on the fate of Poland with every political decision they

26 Stanisław Konarski, Mowa o konwiktach na skrypt pod tytułem: Skarga ubogiey szkachty, odpowiedaiaca. Z potrzebnemi, gwoli edukacyi w Polszcze szlacheckiey młodzi reflexyami (Warszawa, 1760) 3.

27 Ibid., 30.
made, Konarski hoped that students would become active participants of the world’s events as opposed to passive observers of history.

The idea that they were a part of history and that history was applicable to the students’ lives was based on the newly reformed curriculum. Konarski found the study of history particularly important to the instilling young minds with patriotic thoughts. Although a clergyman, Konarski understood that in order to form a more patriotic populace, Polish modern history had to take precedence over ancient and Biblical history. Both, especially Biblical history, were too far removed from the present to be applicable to the contemporary world. Students needed to be taught to love the fatherland at a young age and he saw the learning of national history as a way to bind young hearts to Poland. Only later could the study of others’ histories be introduced into the curriculum. “First of all, it should be the goal of teachers to use history as a way to ignite the flame of virtue and dissuade any misdemeanor.” Konarski was most concerned with creating an atmosphere of learning where patriotism could thrive. He believed that what was taught in schools had to correlate with what was going on in the world. This meant that education in Poland was the basis for larger political reforms.

Because the Enlightenment in Poland was much more conservative than in the west of Europe, Konarski, as a clergyman, was not immune to believing that religion should be an important part of education and his writings are filled with religious vocabulary and expressions. He believed that a good education instilled students with morality. For Konarski, morality was the direct result of a religious background. This morality, inculcated by religious beliefs and nurtured in a good educational setting, would rear strong citizens willing to protect the common good and invest in the nation. In his *Mowa o kształtowaniu człowieka uczciwego i dobrego*

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obywatela (The Cultivation of a Righteous Person and a Good Citizen), Konarski wrote, “Whatever their choice of career, they [students] should always remember to serve with devotion both God and the Fatherland.”29 In order to do what is right with regard to the nation, students had to be moral, therefore, religious, beings. In the same speech, he writes that it is necessary for youth “to worship and love the Church as its mother and for it to be ready, by the example set by its ancestors, to spill blood and to give up its life in defense of the succession of its faith.”30, * Konarski created familial imagery by calling the Church a “mother” and consistently referring to the nation as the “father” land. This family portrait also placed the citizens as children who must respect and love both the mother and father and honor their ancestors. Although subtle, the strategic use of these words weaved together a picture of harmony, strengthening Konarski’s conviction that religion and the nation are tied, thus making a complete family.

Given his dependence on the approval of the gentry to institute educational reform and knowing his countrymen’s conservatism, Konarski was careful to never directly say anything negative about Poland’s system of government. Nevertheless, it is clear that he is sometimes critical of Polish politics. This is most evident in the documented responses to his reforms. Years after Konarski’s reforms, another reformer, Hugo Kołłątaj, wrote, “but the new and heretofore unknown school in our country, did not suit everyone, did not render many magnates proud.”31 He also mentioned “the most common complaint was that Konarski, a priest and a monk, should not meddle in political affairs, to not criticize proceedings of the Sejm [Parliament] and

*This speech, given on the 21 September 1754 during a meeting of both secular and religious speakers of the Senate, honored the opening of the Collegium Nobilium.

30 Ibid., 115.

parliamentary officials.” Konarski was treading a fine line between embracing modernity and committing political suicide. Yet, for all he risked by engaging in politics, Konarski was convinced that the system of government in Poland needed to be changed.

Poland’s elected monarchy, which was, on the one hand, unusual for Europe when most of Poland’s neighbors still had no parliamentary or electoral systems, was also detrimental to the country. Those elected to be king were often foreigners who were ill equipped to rule the country and had no emotional ties to the land or its people. Furthermore, some had no knowledge of Polish, which created distance between the ruler and ruled. Konarski’s educational reforms addressed the problems created by Poland’s elected monarchy. In *The Response to the “Lament of the Poor Gentry.” With Reflections on the Necessary Reforms to the Upbringing of the Gentry Youth*, Konarski explained that Poland needs a modern and wider-reaching educational system because if students could not receive the education they need at home, they would seek it abroad. This could only hurt the nation since they would be giving up their best minds and letting them form alliances with other countries. Another reason why the system of education needed to be strengthened was so that future leaders of Poland will be knowledgeable about their country. Konarski wrote,

> A speaker who desires to think well and attain fame in the Republic as an excellent speaker must distinguish himself in *comprehensive study and deep knowledge*. What can someone expect from a person relatively uneducated, unaware of national and foreign affairs, who has not read or does not read anything, who has not proceeded his speeches with studies in history, politics, philosophy, theology and national law? *How will that person reap beautiful ideas, how will he acquire topics worthy of the ears and judgments of learned people?*

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32 Ibid., 136.

33 Zamoyski, 177.

34 Stanisław Konarski, *Pisma Wybrane*, 156.

35 Ibid., 66.
Konarski believed that a mastery of various subjects was crucial to maintaining a successful government; he advocated that the gentry youth be exposed to many ideas and ways of thinking by reading books, a habit he believed would teach them more than any school instructor. The reforms proposed by Konarski focused on the betterment of its young citizens who would later be able to implement progressive measures and protect their country from invaders. What was lacking from Poland’s government before his reforms was practical experience and knowledge; only when politicians could gain both without looking toward other countries could the government of Poland become self-sufficient and flourish.

In order to combat the excesses of the gentry that were slowly driving Poland into anarchy, Konarski incorporated lessons of cooperation, camaraderie, and most importantly, meritocracy into his new educational system. He disagreed with the Jesuit Order’s harsh and abrupt manner when dealing with students. The punishments they inflicted on the youth were barbaric and promoted hostility between teachers and students and amongst the youth. Konarski adopted the Golden Rule into classrooms so that students would learn to treat each other with respect. The lesson in manners, enforced through years of schooling, would create civil young men willing to work together for a common cause, which Konarski defined as the political strengthening of Poland. Konarski also stressed the importance of meritocracy. To motivate Poland’s citizens to achieve scholastically and to ensure that Poland would be left with good teachers in the future, Konarski installed a system of rewards in the educational system. To become a teacher required three years of study at the teaching seminary and an additional two in

philosophy. The teachers most motivated and caring received promotions, but to deter those who were attracted to the rewards without having any intention in investing their time to becoming good teachers, he proposed a strict and regimented plan. In order to become a director of a school, the teacher had to first devote eighteen years to teaching with a good record. In this way, only the highly motivated would embark down a path lasting numerous years before reaping its rewards. By systematizing and standardizing the educational program, Konarski mirrored the changes he wished to see in politics, specifically that qualified individuals held power.

Every reform Stanisław Konarski implemented served a dual purpose: to create good students and good citizens. Knowing that gentry youth spent most of their childhoods in school and, due to their social standing, would one day have the political power to affect the government, Konarski molded them into contributing members of society from an early age. Patriotism inspired every lesson; Konarski imbued his students with a love for the fatherland that was so important for Poland’s survival. In 1771, King Stanisław August Poniatowski awarded Konarski’s educational reform efforts with a medal. Inscribed were the words “Sapere auso,” meaning “To him who had the courage to have a brain.” Stanisław Konarski’s reform work set the stage for others to follow in his path. The platform he managed to build in a little over thirty years at the beginning of the Polish Enlightenment served as a springboard for Hugo Kołłątaj, who expanded on Konarski’s work and continued to link education and politics.

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38 Buba, 40.

39 Kridl, 131.
Chapter 3
The Science Behind Building a Nation: Hugo Kołłątaj’s Creation of a Middle Class

“Only two subjects consumed my entire life: the improvement of public education and the improvement of the government of my nation.”

- Hugo Kołłątaj

Hugo Kołłątaj (1750-1812), a disciple of Stanisław Konarski’s, surpassed his predecessor in his scope of educational reform. Kołłątaj, indebted to the Enlightenment’s commitment to empiricism as the basis of all learning, expanded the curriculum to include a greater focus on the sciences. As both a political and educational reformer, Kołłątaj also articulated a social component to his reforms, desirous of making knowledge applicable to all of Poland’s citizens. He advocated the study of subjects that were not only useful to strengthening Poland, but also to creating a middle class in a country that sorely lacked this socio-economic group.

Hugo Kołłątaj’s childhood created much of the basis for his educational reforms. Uncommonly for the time, Kołłątaj’s mother was a driving force in his life. She provided him with a strong patriotic and religious background. His educational reforms reflected the values she instilled in him from a young age. Kołłątaj would later write, “education should make Polish youth into citizens and soldiers, holding in one hand the light of truth and in the other a defensive sword of the fatherland.”

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undoubtedly through his mother’s strong influence that Kołłątaj entered the priesthood, seeking to use his position as a clergy member to infuse Poland’s educational system with patriotic zeal. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Kołłątaj was not homeschooled. Instead, his parents sent him to a preparatory boarding school run by the Kraków Academy at the age of seven where he was given a basic education, which he later terms, “of read[ing] and badly writ[ing].” He continued his education in canonical law and French abroad, albeit under somewhat mysterious circumstances (there is no evidence of his graduating from any institution he supposedly attended), all the while recognizing its shortcomings. His personal observations of an inadequate educational system were an important factor for his level of involvement in the improvement of education. Upon finishing his studies, Kołłątaj returned to Poland intent on reforming the country and saw education as an integral component to reforms.

Kołłątaj was deeply involved in politics; his educational and political reforms often paralleled each other and one depended on the other. Kołłątaj’s most outstanding political contribution was his participation in the Great Sejm, also known as the Four Year Sejm (1788-1792), which produced the Constitution of May 3rd, 1791. A work he principally authored, the constitution was a testament to the progress Poland made during the Enlightenment. As the threat of the second partition loomed nearer, the Polish parliament took drastic and desperate steps to save the crippling country. The first written constitution in Europe abolished the liberum veto as well as granted religious and economic freedom, protection of labor, and protection and political

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44 Chamcówna, 59.
rights of the peasantry who heretofore had been subdued by serfdom.\textsuperscript{45} His dedication to equality and freedom were decidedly echoes of ideology circulating in enlightened Europe. Hugo Kołłątaj was perhaps more famous for his political thought and participation than his educational reforms, but what he advocated in politics he transposed to education. The fact that he cared to reform schools attests to the importance he placed on education and the role it played in political life. Because Kołłątaj understood school to be a microcosm of society, he realized that what was taught in school would eventually be reflected in modern society. Furthermore, Kołłątaj reformed education as a way of ensuring that the political reforms he, and reformers like him, had worked to obtain would continue into the following centuries.

As an active participant in the French Jacobin group and later one of the leaders of the Polish Jacobins, Kołłątaj’s made his political views clear in both the Great Sejm and educational reforms; it was he who sought to persuade parliament to take radical measures in the reform of Poland. The Polish Jacobins, like their namesake, were products of an Enlightenment ideology focused on the abolishment of serfdom, the equality of the classes, and the lessening of the Catholic Church’s say in politics. The Polish Jacobins were also supporters of the French Revolution, considering it to be the vehicle for change that would usher in the aforementioned

\textsuperscript{45} Zamoyski, 248.
Hugo Kołłątaj sitting at a desk surrounded by books and papers, markers of education, with the scales of justice in the background.

Source: Historia Naturalis

ideals.\textsuperscript{46} His writing reflected Jacobin ideology, particularly the idea of class equality. Many of these ideas were incorporated into the new constitution but they were also reflected in his educational writings. In what is undoubtedly the result of his Jacobin background and familiarity with French nationalist writings, Kołłątaj proposed a plan drawing parallels to the pamphlet *What is the Third Estate?* (1789) written by the French priest Abbé Sieyès. In this reworking of the French Estates General, Kołłątaj imagined three groups of people: the first estate was composed of property owners, including the gentry and rich townspeople, who influenced the

government most strongly because of their acquired wealth; the second comprised of teachers, priests, and military “do[ing] their duty to make government strong and stable” and the third estate encompassed everyone else, “enjoy[ing] freedom both of person and of hands” while remaining under equal and fair contracts and the protection of the law.\textsuperscript{47} Although a much more conservative plan than the one proposed by his French counterpart, Kołłątaj’s afforded more political and social representation to the lower classes, ensured their rights, and for the first time defined a middle-class made up of educated and conscious citizens. In order to implement this plan, Kołłątaj had to first create a middle class; this he did through his educational reforms.

Kołłątaj hoped to plant the seeds for the development of a middle class, which would be comprised of doctors, lawyers, and teachers, professions vital to a well functioning state. They provided necessary services to the public, itself an Enlightenment concept. Doctors cured the sick, lawyers defended the law, and teachers cultivated a youth that would one day contribute positively to society. But most importantly, doctors, teachers, and lawyers were middle-class professions. Most European countries had had a growing middle class for at least one hundred years before some of Poland’s intellectuals began forming one.

A political intervention in the educational system was necessary for the creation of a middle class. Specifically, Kołłątaj argued for the secularization of education and the emphasis on a social component in his vision of the Polish school system. In Kołłątaj’s mind, school was a reflection of a society that all students would eventually enter; the educational system was to provide lessons in morality that would transition into students’ adult social interactions. Kołłątaj, through his own observations and experiences, lamented the state of children’s moral character before Konarski’s reforms. In \textit{Stan oświecenia w Polsce w ostanich latach panowania Augusta

\textsuperscript{47} Seidler, 18.
III, *The State of Enlightenment in Poland in the Last Years of August III's Reign*), Kołłątaj wrote, “no one supposed that the breeding ground of bad habits was in common [plebian] schools, that the prevention of these bad habits lay in the education of youth, whose small offences, without any correction, turned into major shortcomings.”

Kołłątaj observed that there was no camaraderie in Jesuits schools; students from different classes would often fight, encouraged by teachers whose own rivalries fueled anger and hostility toward those of other views. Under an atmosphere of fierce competition and contempt for others, it was inevitable that the only lessons students that were taught were those of how to put aside civic values and cooperation in favor of personal advancement.

To remedy the wrongs Kołłątaj observed, he became involved in the Commission for National Education (*Komisja Edukacji Narodowej*). Founded in 1773, the commission was responsible for overseeing education after the dissolution of the Jesuit Order. As an active member of the Commission and a contributor to its derivative, The Society for Elementary Books, which introduced translated Enlightenment literature to schools, Kołłątaj worked to democratize education by providing schooling for a larger group of people. Under his direction, the Commission also secularized education by taking it out of the hands of religious orders, like the Jesuits, and transferring power to the Sejm, or Parliament. By doing so, Poland developed the first Ministry of Education in the world. Not only did it secularize education, the Commission updated the existing curriculum, introducing modern sciences and math, and reformed the pedagogy practiced under the Jesuit system.

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48 Kołłątaj, *Stan oświecenia w Polsce w Ostatnich latach panowania Augusta III*, 64.

49 Ibid., 59.

Schools under the control of the Catholic Church stunted the intellectual growth of the youth causing Poland’s students to fall increasingly behind their Western European counterparts. Jesuit schools were focused on general schooling and not concerned with adequately preparing its students for more concentrated studies such as medicine. Kołłątaj’s observed in *The State of Enlightenment in Poland in the Last Years of August III’s Reign*,

As for skills: a course on Aristotle’s philosophy was given, with all the Arabic additions and commentary of St. Thomas. Besides a general course, there were many separate tractates on philosophical material . . . Descartes, Gassendi, Leibnitz, and Newton were not mentioned, only to refute their philosophies, always ending in assertion that a Christian philosopher should never go after new philosophical sects, but should indeed stick to one, that of Aristotle.\(^5\)

Never having been introduced to modern scientific authors, students were unfamiliar with a practical approach to science. In his assessment of the Kraków Academy’s science department in *O wprowadzeniu dobrych nauk do Akademii Krakowskiej i o założeniu Seminarium Nauczycielów szkol wojewódzkich* (About the Introduction of Good Learning in the Kraków Academy and of the Establishment of the Teachers’ Seminary in Provincial Schools), Kołłątaj advocated that “The physiology class, or the theory of medicine, needs a separate hall equipped with a collection of aborted babies, monstrosities, and skeletons” from which to learn.\(^5\) These laboratories provided students, especially those studying medicine, with variable conditions under which they could learn. This approach prepared them for actively participating in science and learning from experience; theoretical knowledge only equipped students with abstract speculations. In his reform of the Kraków Academy, which served as an example for other Polish schools, Kołłątaj stressed the importance of empirical knowledge. Kołłątaj was a man of the

\(^{51}\) Hugo Kołłątaj, *Stan oświecenia w Polsce w Ostatnich latach panowania Augusta III*, 76.

Enlightenment and as such, his ideas reflected the Enlightenment’s debt to the Scientific Revolution. His writings referred to the work of Descartes and Newton among others and by doing so, supported their thinking by including their works on schools’ reading lists. Believing that “experience will enlighten them [students] more than words,” Kołłątaj insisted that theoretical knowledge was important but it was absolutely necessary to provide students with practical knowledge in order for them to learn to think for themselves and question their surroundings. This was important because a student was taught to analyze, rationalize, and be selective about the information he finds. A student who was taught such a way of thinking in the classroom would employ these same techniques in modern society. They would no longer blindly accept spoon-fed information, but would challenge others and be persistent in seeking truth. “So that children will not look at school as their prison but rather as a pleasant dwelling,” Kołłątaj also encouraged students to ask questions, seek answers, and enjoy the learning process. Unlike the Jesuit system of education, which encouraged memorization as a way for knowledge to enter the student, Kołłątaj’s reading list allowed the student to actively pursue intellectual interests instead of passively receiving facts. By teaching young children good learning habits, Kołłątaj hoped to ensure that Poland’s future leaders would apply those same skills taught in grade school to political matters, thus being more likely to consider and accept necessary changes.

While advocating the inclusion of rational science education, Kołłątaj also recognized the importance of good teachers who possessed practical knowledge in their fields. His reforms focused not just on what was taught but how it was taught. It was not enough to learn the

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53 Przepis kommissyi edukacji narodowey na Szkoły woiewodzkie. (Warszawa, 1774) 9.

54 Przepis kommissyi edukacji narodowey na Szkoły woiewodzkie, 11.
theoretical content of a subject; by possessing practical knowledge, teachers tailored their lessons to the needs of the subject in practice. In this way, schooling was not so far removed from daily life. Those thinking of a career as an educator had to receive instruction in pedagogy because being a good teacher depended on a teacher’s mastery of a subject coupled with his ability to convey information to students. Kołłątaj, therefore, set up a teaching seminary for those entering the profession. Those who wanted to teach were first faced with certain qualifications they needed to complete successfully to prove their competency. By rationalizing and organizing educational pedagogy, Kołłątaj’s merit system created capable, deserving teachers. In *The State of Enlightenment in Poland in the Last Years of August III’s Reign*, Kołłątaj wrote:

> every new teacher had to first ground himself in the knowledge of French and Polish . . . some were trained in mathematics and physics, others in moral philosophy or natural laws . . . in history or geography; they were encouraged to read newly published works in French and to translate them into Polish.55

Furthermore, Kołłątaj expected teachers to practice the learning habits they instilled in their students. These high standards ensured that educators imbued their students with a thirst for knowledge and set the example that a person needed to be intelligent, worldly-minded, and competent to hold a position of influence. This idea, begun in the classroom, branched out into the political sphere.

Although he was a Catholic priest, Kołłątaj saw the danger of an overly zealous religious education. In *The State of Enlightenment in Poland in the Last Years of August III’s Reign*, Kołłątaj exposes the conditions of both academic and moral education prior to Stanisław Konarski’s reforms. The increasing influence of the Catholic Church on Polish intellectual growth was most evident in its control of the educational system. In the amount of time the Jesuit order existed in Poland, it had gained significant influence as it controlled the majority of

55 Hugo Kołłątaj, *Stan oświecenia w Polsce*, 42.
educational establishments; thousands of pupils passed through the wall of its sixty-six established schools when Pope Clement XIV finally dissolved the Order in 1773.\textsuperscript{56} The dissolution of the Jesuit order and the seizure of the Jesuit’s control of education in favor of secular control were met with discontent from former Jesuits who held power for so many years. With the reform of the Kraków Academy, many pamphlets opposing the progress Kołłątaj initiated began to crop up in the city. The pamphlets disagreed with the changes to the educational system, most strongly the idea that with education and work, a person could improve their station in life. One such pamphlet advised a person “to do what he was born to do” and stick to tradition. Yet for all the Jesuits’ hostility to the Kraków Academy, the institution’s supporters published their own thoughts. In a bold declaration, one pamphleteer responded to the aforementioned pamphlet, saying, “Heretic in sheep’s clothing, do you live in a city or in a secluded monastery? You call us peasants… but both lords and peasants come from the same mother, Eve.”\textsuperscript{57} The use of religious references served to remind the Jesuits opposing reforms of the responsibilities and values of the Catholic Church. Christianity viewed itself as a loving and helpful religion, and its followers believed they could tolerate and respect others’ views. The opposition to progress was the result of envy, pride, and greed, three of the seven deadly sins. The criticism came with the threat of loss of power. 

At a time when other countries were reaching the height of the Enlightenment, Poland was lagging behind. Academically, schools were failing because the Catholic Church ignored progress. Criticizing the educational system’s cultivation of a Christian child to one possessing intellectual truths, Kołłątaj wrote:

\textsuperscript{56} Bienkowska, 84.

\textsuperscript{57} Chamcówna, 55.
religious schools gave youth the practice of excessive devotion, they were told continuously about religion, virtue, the need to always follow the tenants of a Christian upbringing; they had none of the grounding of pure moral philosophy, a good understanding of natural law or political and economic learning. A student taught to accept everything as undisputable fact and, as often was the case in religious schools, frightened with promises of damnation would “subject reason to blind obedience,” and never develop the courage to rebel if necessary. Students educated in this harmful manner would later become Poland’s politicians and the circle of corruption would never cease. Students who concerned themselves solely with religion were not living in the present. The Catholic Church taught its followers to look ahead to an afterlife where they would be rewarded for their earthly troubles and suffering. This view denied the followers of Catholicism self-determination and free will. By giving the state the power to control education, Kołłątaj was essentially separating the earthly from the spiritual. He provided students with the ability to control their destinies and, by extension, the fate of the country.

Believing that political change could only come about through an educated population and that one influenced the other, Kołłątaj knit together education and politics. Doing so, he freed education from the Catholic dogma preventing the spread of ideas challenging religious, political, or societal orthodoxy. The secularization of education was an important step in strengthening the government, allowing it to ground its citizens in reason as opposed to undisputed tradition. With the introduction of such ways of thinking, schooling became much more applicable to daily life. The newly reformed schools provided knowledge that could be used outside of the classroom, which would seek solutions to problems the nation faced.

58 Hugo Kołłątaj, *Stan oświecenia w Polsce w Ostatnich latach panowania Augusta III*, 110.

59 Seidler, 16.
Kołłątaj’s educational reforms were not exclusively intellectual; they also encompassed an economic element that made schooling more practical for a modern world. Subjects in the humanities were still important, but he argued that the addition of more heuristic learning would ultimately make Poland stronger; its citizens developed skills that were useful not only in cultivating the mind but also improving productivity in a country that had grown increasingly stagnant. Kołłątaj begun by understanding that the adoption of an economic policy focusing on agriculture would shift the focus of politics, allowing lower classes to become more involved in the political process. Because Poland was an agrarian country and most people worked on the land, their combined production efforts could inspire political change; economic life controlled where the nation’s money flowed. Kołłątaj wanted to capitalize on Poland’s economic strengths and give Polish laborers a greater say in the allocation of resources. In order to move Poland forward economically, he believed that adopting a Physiocratic perspective would propel the country into economic stability and make it a more dominant force on the European stage.\(^6\) This theory was based on the belief that a country’s prosperity depended on the use of its land. The Physiocratic system was a major factor in Kołłątaj’s educational reforms. In order to make education more pertinent to its citizens, his reforms mention the study of agriculture, a subject heretofore unimaginable in schools. He saw value in the production of food and realized reliable techniques resulted in higher crop yields, ultimately resulting in a higher income.

Kołłątaj’s reform efforts combined the theoretical with the practical. His changes to the educational system introduced agriculture into schools, making farming a skilled labor rather than a means of subsistence. By creating a hybrid between an unsophisticated profession, farming, and modern science, chemistry, Kołłątaj ushered in a new science able to generate

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results instantaneously and to be readily applicable and useful to the self-sufficiency of the country. In his plan for the improved Kraków Academy, *About the Introduction of Good Learning in the Kraków Academy and of the Establishment of the Teachers’ Seminary in Provincial Schools*, Kołłątaj wrote:

> The professor of this class [Agriculture] should possess outstanding knowledge in Polish agriculture and agricultural chemistry otherwise he will never thoughtfully begin this instruction for our country. Not knowing Polish agriculture he will not know how to usefully apply chemistry to it; knowing agriculture without the knowledge of chemistry he will not know how to explain on what depends the improvement of our agriculture and how to execute it accurately.\(^6\)

By teaching agricultural methods, Kołłątaj was teaching independence and self-reliance. He empowered the lower classes and instilled a sense of civic duty in students. When workers produced more for the nation and were rewarded for their efforts, they would begin to feel useful to the nation. Feeling appreciate, they were more apt to participate in political life and steer politics in a direction that would benefit the greatest number of citizens. Kołłątaj’s educational reforms began the reconstruction of society as a whole, a process that continued into the nineteenth century.

The educational reforms implemented by Hugo Kołłątaj expanded on Stanisław Konarski’s initial goals of instilling patriotism and morality into students who would one day become moral and integrated citizens. Such people possessed a sense of duty and responsibility to the success of Poland that would trump their desire to fulfill selfish ambitions. Where previously politics had little to do with schooling, Kołłątaj strengthened the connection between them. Kołłątaj secularized Polish schools and by doing so, was able to incorporate the learning of modern science formerly prohibited by the Jesuit institutions. Not only did he dissolve the religious orthodoxy preventing new ideas from entering the classroom, he also strove to make

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the education students received more practical and applicable to their daily lives. This included an economic component that, along with more advanced studies in the sciences and pedagogy, turned ordinary workers into skilled laborers who provided important services to Poland. These people formed the middle class Kołłątaj’s educational reformers sought to introduce, and by the very nature of their labor, these members worked toward a common goal of improving the nation. Hugo Kołłątaj, by outlining the clear ties between politics and education with his reforms, set the tone for Stanisław Staszic’s reflections on citizenship in a more enlightened and liberal Poland.
Chapter 4
One Man’s Liberalism is Another’s Conservatism: How Stanisław Staszic Used Liberal Ideology to Argue for Conservative Values

“Different countries’ governments allow for different means in order to attain happiness because they take into account the various skills from its citizens. This is why it is necessary for each country to have its education agree with its government.”
- Stanisław Staszic

Stanisław Staszic (1755-1826) was born and grew up in a time very different from Stanisław Konarski and Hugo Kołłątaj. Politically, Poland had already witnessed two partitions. Unlike Konarski who still hoped for the reform of his country before it was divided, Staszic’s hopes remained that one day Poland would be able to regain its independence by implementing the reform efforts of Staszic’s predecessors and his own work. His writings on the reform of education in Poland, which this chapter will explore, illustrate a profound debt to the European Enlightenment.

Stanisław Staszic was born into a gentry family whose support he always had to achieve a higher education. Staszic showed his intellectual ambitions at a young age; he translated Racine’s poem *On Religion* when he was just fifteen. He entered the priesthood shortly thereafter, mostly to appease his mother who was a deeply religious woman. However, he showed a greater love for his studies and at his father’s urging, traveled and studied abroad to make the most of his education. Staszic was sent to Göttingen, Leipzig, and Paris to attend university, studied under French naturalist Daubenton and French zoologist Brisson, and traveled extensively throughout Europe between 1777 and 1781. While in France, Staszic met and

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befriended Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, a French naturalist known for his work *Histoire Naturelle*, or *Natural History*. Staszic admired Buffon’s work greatly and translated it into Polish to expose a larger audience to Buffon’s ideas.\(^6^4\) His academic pursuits abroad as well as his contact with famous thinkers of the Enlightenment influenced Staszic’s work. Also influential was his employment for the prominent statesman and noble, Andrzej Zamoyski, when Staszic returned to Poland. A man of the Enlightenment, Zamoyski was a humanist devoted to securing the liberty of Poland through political reforms and supported the abolition of serfdom. Working as a tutor, he educated Zamoyski’s children and took advantage of his extensive library that contained volumes of books Zamoyski acquired during his education and tenure as a statesman. Staszic completely engrossed himself in works by the most prominent and modern thinkers of Europe and adopted their ideas to fit his imagining of a newly reformed Polish state.\(^6^5\)

Based on his own experience and his reading, Staszic recommended that learning begin in the home as soon as a child was born. His idea of early education was not one of academic curriculum but rather an education based on empiricism, practical knowledge and one acquired organically; a child did not need a building designated as a school to learn. Given his extensive education, Staszic incorporated the thoughts of the eminent Enlightenment thinkers, particularly English philosopher John Locke. Locke first introduced his idea of *tabula rasa* in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) where he wrote, “let us then suppose that mind to be . . . white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? . . . To this I answer, in one word, from experience.”\(^6^6\) Drawing on Locke’s idea of *tabula rasa*, the

\(^{6^4}\) Ibid., 21.

\(^{6^5}\) Ibid., 24.

mind as a blank slate, Staszic argued that “there is no inherent knowledge; every sensation is feeling brought on by the senses,” explaining, “people are neither good nor bad by nature. Whatever their senses imprint on them directly affects their thinking. However they think, they will act. Education teaches a person to think; therefore, education can render a person good or bad.” Using Locke’s idea that people are born without preconceived notions and only acquire their ethics through experience and sense perception, he said that soul and body are connected and that the body does the bidding of the soul. Because people are influenced by everything around them, education plays a crucial role in the development of a child. Taught from a young age to distinguish right from wrong, children grew up to be good people and good citizens. The latter emphasis on the political effect of good education was particularly relevant in late eighteenth-century Poland. It was therefore possible to mold children into the type of citizens Poland needed, citizens caring for the fate of their country and ensuring its good by using their intellect and morality to serve it. Staszic wrote, “In this nation lies invincible force, great force, that, having fully developed in physical and moral strength, knows the most effective way to use the strength of its mass [population] and the resources of its land.”

Staszic’s plan was to reform education in such a way that it would capitalize on the force of the nation, ideally challenge children to be better people and cultivating a patriotic soul capable of doing good deeds for the fatherland.

Staszic also drew inspiration from another great Enlightenment thinker: Jean-Jacques

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69 Staszic, *Uwagi nad Życiem Jana Zamoyskiego*, 16.
Rousseau. Only one difference prevented him from fully accepting what was considered to be the foremost treatise on education, *Émile: Or, On Education* (1762). Staszic was deeply convinced that education and citizenship were closely tied, in fact, inseparable from one another. Education’s foremost duty was cultivating *useful* citizens who would contribute productively to Polish society. Rousseau saw a conflict between a person’s freedom and their duties as a citizen. According to Rousseau, in order to be a dutiful citizen, an individual had to give up his personal freedom and yield to the good of the nation. He therefore writes:

> everything should therefore be brought into harmony with these natural tendencies [happiness and goodness], and that might well be if our three modes of education [nature, things, and other men] merely differed from one another; but what can be done when they conflict, when instead of training man for himself you try to train him for others? Harmony becomes impossible. Forced to combat either nature or society, you must make your choice between the man and the citizen, you cannot train both.

Understanding the correlation between mind and body, Staszic disagreed, finding no conflict between personal happiness and the duties of citizenship. Very similarly to Rousseau’s argument in *Émile*, Staszic observed that the desire to attain happiness is the main motivator behind people’s thoughts and actions. But while he agreed that education could not eradicate the innate desire for happiness and self-preservation that, as in the szlachta’s case, led to greed and corruption, he argued that education had the ability to transform the target of this desire. Instead of focusing on individual liberties, an educated gentry could pour their efforts into securing the greater good, allowing more people to benefit from their work. A good education’s aim was to focus the student toward serving the country and acquiring happiness through citizenship. He realized that self-interest and public good were linked; one was dependent on the other. When a

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person realized that the only way to be happy is to give up his own will and submit himself to the public good, he attained happiness because he felt useful. Staszic wrote in *Uwagi nad Życiem Jana Zamoyskiego*, “because the happiness of the man-citizen is inseparable from the happiness of the whole society; because its [society’s] happiness depends on the usefulness of all its members; the result of national education should be making its citizens useful.”\[^{72}\] He explains this further by defining freedom and citizenship. “Being a citizen means . . . giving up your own will and your strength and power to society; so no one is enslaved but rather everyone is obedient. A person loses freedom only when he stops being obedient. The most essential trait of a citizen is obedience.”\[^{73}\] Freedom or enslavement was a personal choice; Staszic believed that a person was only enslaved when he is purposely rebelled against the good of the nation. As long as a person felt he was not being forced to act against his will, he would be free. Education was necessary in order to instill a strong sense of citizenship by emphasizing morality and patriotism. These two components ensured that a child would always find common good preferable to self-interest.\[^{74}\]

Despite his disagreement with Rousseau about the compatibility between freedom and citizenship, Staszic held Rousseau’s opinions about patriotism in high regard. This is most obvious in his blatant paraphrasing of Rousseau’s thoughts on patriotism in the latter’s *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, a work written specifically for the reform of the struggling country. Agreeing with Locke and Rousseau that children are shaped by experience and are born with no notions of good and evil, Staszic saw the necessity of education beginning  

\[^{72}\] Ibid., 18.  
\[^{73}\] Ibid., 20.  
right from a child’s birth. As Rousseau wrote in The Government of Poland, “The newly-born infant, upon first opening his eyes, must gaze upon the fatherland and until his dying day should behold nothing else.”  Staszic wrote in his Reflections on the Life of Jan Zamoyski that, “a child, upon first opening his eyes, should not see anything other than his fatherland, for whom he may be called upon one day to shut his eyes [die].” Rousseau’s reforms for Poland continued with the foundation of strictly Polish literature, history, and law to the exclusion of other nation’s works. Staszic elaborated on these ideas, writing:

May the first book a child reaches for be the history of these people he must live among. He is unfeeling and deaf to the plight of the Assyrians and Medes because he has no ties to them; but to the history of his own ancestors, of his own father he will always listen keenly and to him these histories will always be interesting. It is a great mistake in all these educations, which first teach the history of far-away times and places. Curiously and ashamedly, we Poles admit to know very little about ourselves.

Staszic believed that instilling fierce pride in the fatherland from birth ensured the child’s attachment to his patrie. He lamented that the educational system of the past encouraged students to learn about and admire other countries, specifically France, and to continue their educations abroad. Staszic saw this as being extremely detrimental to the well-being of Poland. Such children, educated with no emphasis on Polish history, literature, or language so therefore no national pride or love of fatherland, left Poland and devoted themselves to another country, one they developed more feelings for based on their educations and travels. Furthermore, on their return, their foreign outlook made it difficult for them to contribute to Poland’s political situation. “What could such a citizen, elected senator or minister . . . remedy something about the fate of his homeland when he only thought about France, and did not know the state of things in


76 Staszic, Uwagi nad Życiem Jana Zamoyskiego, 22.

77 Ibid., 22.
Poland? When it will be time to get to work, he will only then sit down to learn.”

Staszic saw this as a serious fault to the system of government at work in Poland. A leader possessing no knowledge of Polish customs and laws would only waste time learning them when he should be improving conditions in the country. He criticized those who would take leadership roles in Poland without knowing the conditions under which they should be working; there were many such instances in Poland’s history, most notably, the invitation of foreign rulers to sit on Poland’s throne. Although the monarch had little real power in Poland, the complete apathy of some of the rulers did nothing to promote equality or patriotism in the country.

Staszic also had a solution to the problem of Polish youth’s growing ties to other countries. He first proposed an academic curriculum centering on Polish history. Second, he suggested forbidding youth to visit foreign cities, particularly Paris, France, until they reached an appropriate age when their travels would result in educational advancement and not moral degradation. Although a conservative plan and one shying away from the influences of the west, it was successful in binding young hearts to Poland. His plan for education also directly upheld Rousseau’s belief that a “truly national education belongs exclusively to men who are free” because freedom meant a desire for common good. An education stressing the importance of national pride resulted in students willing to fight for Poland’s existence and well-being.

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78 Ibid., 22.


Although he disapproved of the idea of students focusing their attention abroad, he by no means discouraged traveling and learning through travel. Staszic’s travels throughout Europe were fundamental to his education; through travel, he encountered new ideas and acquainted himself with the leading thinkers of the time. He left Poland at the age of twenty-two, he kept travel journals while he was abroad and documented his experiences in each country. England made the biggest impression the young Stanisław Staszic’s mind. What most delighted Staszic was the government’s support of education and innovation. As far as advancement in the sciences was concerned, England was Europe’s leader. Of the many museums he observed, Staszic made note of the “various skeletons and demonstrative brain models for surgical education, skulls cut down the middle, wax representations of a woman at the moment of her
“giving birth” and other tools encouraging scientific discovery. Poland was just beginning to expand its scientific pursuits, backed by the Commission of National Education and Hugo Kollataj’s reforms, and Staszic found models to emulate by visiting English institutions such as museums and academic societies. While in England, he observed the workings of the Royal Society, which promoted scientific discussion and experimentation and engaged the greatest scientific minds of the eighteenth century, as well as the Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and Commerce. The formation of such societies gave people an incentive to learn and create; their contributions to England were rewarded with prestige and recognition. Staszic observed that, “patriotic zeal formulated and upholds this society [England]. It is not supremacy that influences it, nor does it build patriotism, but revives a love for glory. Is such a nation not the adornment of our world? . . . This society is a model for every nation to follow!” A system of rewards compelled citizens to create, seemingly for personal glory, while benefitting the country with the construction of new inventions and economic progress.

The educational standards Staszic saw in Europe varied significantly from country to country. Staszic praised an orphanage in England that “agree[d] to house children, who, from poverty, or lack of parental compassion or care, are nurtured and educated to fulfill duties for a hardworking life and most basic services.” This orphanage’s design appealed to Staszic because he believed it made otherwise burdensome children into useful citizens. Another such

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82 Ibid., 186.

83 Ibid., 187.

84 Ibid., 126.
institution in Germany, Waysenhaus, also made use of its poor, young citizens by providing them with free meals, boarding and a rudimentary education, as well as the practical skills befitting their social rank, such as learning to chop wood.

Staszic’s travels also exposed educational systems that were lacking in Staszic’s eyes. In Italy, where Stanisław Konarski had gained so much insight into educational reform and had found a model for Polish schools, Staszic saw mere shadows in the Italian countryside of the exceptional education Konarski saw in Rome. In Florence, Staszic wrote, “foremost in this country [Italy] is ignorance. Learning without sincerity, not many French books, among the Italian ones, only the theoretical kind. In Florence, there is no study of science or practical skills, only that of art, painting, woodworking, architecture, music, etc.”

Staszic was concerned that the only thing Italians cultivated was an appreciation for the arts while sacrificing an education that could benefit a unified Italy. In many ways, Italy was experiencing a similar situation to Poland’s. Before the nineteenth century, Italy was a conglomerate of city-states. The challenges of unification were similar to those of Poland after the partition; in order to create a distinct national identity, Staszic, as well as other reformers, believed it was necessary to start with the refashioning of the educational system. Italy, by focusing its educational efforts on art instead of citizenship, was only hurting itself, creating “Florentines who d[id] not have their own spirit of freedom. They had been raised to be good, gentle, without customs, without an open mind, stagnant, little thinking.”

Staszic’s observations come seventeen years after the founding of the Commission of National Education that made significant strides to introduce into Poland a curriculum in line with Enlightenment ideology based on reason and empiricism. It is interesting

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85 Ibid., 69.

86 Ibid., 90.
to note how quickly these changes swept through Poland that his writing reflects such assurance of the superiority of a Polish education.

Though Staszic learned much by visiting other countries and took back ideas on how to strengthen Poland, the most important thing he learned from his time abroad was how the rest of Europe perceived Poland. In his journals he wrote:

Born of such worth and such virtuous parents, of a father who sacrificed so much for his fatherland, I had to be embarrassed of my birth everywhere I went. Everywhere I found it to be held in contempt, rejected from honor, from office, from land. Unjust is it, that the more I began to think, the more it surprised me. This became the reason that I began to reflect and seek the root cause of this misrepresentation and persecution.\(^87\)

His time abroad proved how incredibly backward and stagnant Poland, once so progressive, had become. This observation fueled his reform efforts. His reforms sought to incorporate Enlightened thinking back into Poland and prove that working for the common good would not only help Poland regain its independence but would actually ensure the happiness of everyone. Working toward a common goal, Poland’s citizens would improve their quality of life. Staszic’s reforms were just as much political as they were educational. By cultivating thinking citizens, the Polish educational system created patriots capable of using rational thought to direct Poland on a path to success they had not seen since their Golden Age.

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 22.
The End is Only the Beginning: Eighteenth-Century Reforms Inspire Nineteenth-Century Revolutions

“Poland, losing its freedom, regained its dignity, and ‘is not yet lost.’”

-Jan Buba\textsuperscript{88}*

Poland’s educational reforms were more than efforts to modernize schooling; they were first and foremost concerned with the creation of a new, modern Polish citizenry that would have broad concerns for society and the Polish public as opposed to the narrow, class-oriented concerns of the Polish \textit{szlachta}. Thus, the three educators whose works have been discussed above defined education as molding a child into a citizen. Stanisław Konarski, Hugo Kołłątaj, and Stanisław Staszic saw the need to instill patriotism and carry out reforms from the bottom up; children were prime targets for reform efforts because all three men believed they were more susceptible to new ideas and had no perceived notions hindering their learning. Konarski, Kołłątaj, and Staszic all began with the reform of schools in the hope of cultivating middle class, patriotic citizens. The corruption of the Polish government by a political system controlled by powerful magnates, its lack of a middle class, and the largely ignorant and intolerant views of the \textit{szlachta}, made reform efforts in Poland a slow process. It was difficult to create a new educational system that would form lawyers, doctors, and teachers who would uphold law and order in the country based on public good.

The three reformers were well aware of their country’s reputation outside Poland. In Diderot’s \textit{Encyclopédie}, a compilation of knowledge written and read by the most Enlightened people of Europe, Poland was described as a country “combining the dignity of the king with the


*These are words taken from the Polish national anthem. The anthem begins with “Poland is not yet lost/while we live/What foreign force has taken from us/We shall take back with the sword.”
name of a republic, laws with feudal anarchy. . . abundance with poverty. . . . Nature endowed this country with everything that is necessary to live, yet Europe knows no people that would be poorer; Poland’s chief source of income is the sale of her throne. . . . The nobility and the gentry can do whatever they will, the core of the nation groans in subjection.”

This unfortunate representation was ultimately grounded in truth and the three reformers recognized the injuries caused by Poland’s “Golden Liberties.” Konarski first observed how neglected the educational system had become. His reforms served as a reminder that without a broad foundation of patriotism, there would be no nation. Kołłątaj carried through reforms more specific to Poland’s societal makeup. By introducing science to the curriculum and tying education to politics, Kołłątaj forged a middle class. Staszic’s reforms, in turn, focused on active citizenship from the first moments of a child’s life and argued that liberal ideology can set a man free by focusing his attentions on the greater good. The three reformers began working at a time when Poland’s chances of retaining independence were slim, but made significant strides despite the short amount of time Poland remained independent. Even though Poland lost its political independence, the reform efforts of the three men contributed to the sense of Polish patriotism and citizenship that nurtured nineteenth-century Polish rebellions.

The impact of educational reform was subtle but very profound. Although the reforms did not last past Poland’s partitioning, they inspired a dialogue of freedom, equality and true liberal values that permeated throughout many areas of political and intellectual life. Politically, Polish patriots fought for the country’s freedom throughout the nineteenth century. The clearest example of an attempt to break the bonds of Poland’s foreign oppressors was led by a man brought up with those ideas. Tadeusz Kosciuszko was educated at the Corps of Cadets, an

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institution focusing on military education in Warsaw. A product of the Enlightenment, the Corps of Cadets cultivated Kosciuszko’s patriotism and he quickly rose to the top of his class with his skills in architect and military strategy. Kosciuszko contributed his talents to both insurrections in Poland and to struggles for freedom abroad, namely, the American Revolution. After his participation in the American Revolution, Kosciuszko led an uprising in Poland after the second partition. Supporting the Polish Constitution of May 3rd, 1791, Kosciuszko said, “I want nothing for myself. This is about the deplorable state of the fatherland, rescuing the nation and bringing happiness to its residents.” He built his army around the peasantry, promising them freedom and land of their own. The Kosciuszko Uprising was ultimately a failure, but the success of its organizer in creating a Populist movement was attributed to the Enlightenment ideology he acquired through his education. The reforms inspired Polish Romanticism, the focus of which was the creation of an idealized free nation. The movement gave way to the genius of authors like Adam Mickiewicz and musicians like Frédéric Chopin, who both infused their work with the theme of deep patriotism. The Enlightenment’s educational reforms allowed Polish Romanticism to blossom.

The Polish Enlightenment’s dedication to reason, freedom, and liberty also affected those abroad. The Irish statesman Edmund Burke praised the Polish Constitution, whose values were echoed in the educational reforms of the time, calling it the “a masterpiece of political wisdom and a glory to all mankind.” Newspapers across Europe and America also commended the efforts of Polish patriots; when Poland had lost its independence, they bemoaned the loss.

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91 Ibid., 183.

92 Ibid., 150.
the November Uprising against Russian rule broke out in Poland, an update on the fighting appeared in England. It contained a war song written anonymously. The song urged Polish patriots to “fight the fight of pride . . . lead on to battle gloriously, if you would have your country free; if Poles ye burst your fetters now, you’ll brand the despot’s kingless brow.”

Poland would indeed fight its oppressors but it would take more than one hundred years for the country to regain its independence. In that time, Polish culture, literature, and a love for the fatherland blossomed, no doubt due in part to the foundations laid down during the Enlightenment with regard to educating a new class of citizens who cared about the fate of their country.

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