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Article abstract

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# Teaching Aristotelian Ethics at the Racovian Academy: Considerations around Johann Crell's *Ethica Aristotelica*

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*This article focuses on the Socinian ethical treatise *Ethica Aristotelica*, written by Johann Crell in c. 1622 in Raków, Poland. It is commonly believed that this work, which systematized the theory contained in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, was a simple compendium intended for exclusive use at the Racovian Academy, an educational institution that welcomed students of diverse religious backgrounds. However, a careful reading of the treatise shows that behind a veil of Aristotelian thought, controversial elements of the Socinian faith were smuggled into the text. These were primarily the idea of Pelagianism and the belief in the human nature of Christ. In the present article, a careful analysis accompanied by several lines of evidence support the idea that *Ethica Aristotelica* also represents an instrument for promoting the Socinian faith, initially among the students of the Academy, and then, with the print of the first edition in the Netherlands in 1650, among other European confessions.*

*Cet article s'intéresse à l'*Ethica Aristotelica*, un traité d'éthique socinien rédigé par Johann Crell vers 1622 à Raków, en Pologne. Il est communément admis que cet ouvrage, qui systématisait le contenu théorique de l'Éthique à Nicomaque d'Aristote, était une simple compilation destinée à l'usage exclusif de l'Académie racovienne, un établissement d'enseignement qui accueillait des étudiants de diverses confessions religieuses. Cependant, un examen attentif du traité révèle que des éléments controversés de la foi socinienne ont été introduits dans le texte sous le voile de la pensée aristotélicienne, soit principalement l'idée de pélagianisme et la croyance en la nature humaine du Christ. Cet article propose une analyse minutieuse du texte accompagnée de plusieurs éléments de preuve soutenant l'idée que l'*Ethica Aristotelica* représente également un instrument de promotion de la foi socinienne, d'abord au sein des étudiants de l'Académie, puis, avec l'impression de la première édition aux Pays-Bas en 1650, au sein d'autres communautés religieuses d'Europe.*

## Introduction

Written around 1622 by the Socinian theologian Johann Crell, *Ethica Aristotelica*, *ad Sacrarum Literarum normam emendata* (Aristotelian ethics, revised in accordance with the Sacred Scriptures)<sup>1</sup> introduces us to the

1. I have relied here on the following Latin edition for both the *Ethica Aristotelica* and *Ethica Christiana*: *Ethica Aristotelica, ad Sacrarum Literarum normam emendata. Eiusdem Ethica Christiana, seu explicatio virtutum et vitiorum, quorum in Sacris Literis fit mentio [...]* (Amsterdam, 1681). For further bibliographic details, see Knijff and Visser, *Bibliographia Sociniana*, 77. For a contemporary Latin edition, you

problems of the Radical Reformation in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and the perplexities of religious tolerance established by the Warsaw Confederation in 1573. This small *oeuvre* on ethics was intended primarily as a textbook for young students of the Racovian Academy (in operation from 1602 to 1638), providing them with the basic terminology and concepts of Aristotle’s moral philosophy. From a wider perspective, this book might have served as an introduction to the greater project of Christian ethics, which Crell developed in another ethical writing, the *Ethica Christiana* (1650). However, the title itself suggests another aim of the treatise, not uncommon in religious circles: a revision of the *Nicomachean Ethics* according to the precepts of the Scriptures. This constituted an important theological theme for several confessions in the early seventeenth century that considered problematic the pre-Christian moral teaching of the Stagirite, who could not include the power and value of God’s revelation.

For the Socinians, the accommodation of Aristotle’s thought turned out to be—as will be demonstrated in what follows—a favourable opportunity to propose a specific Socinian reading of Aristotelian moral philosophy. This understanding reflected not only their Pelagian concept of human nature, commonly condemned by the Christian mainstream, but also the problems and dilemmas that they had to face in everyday life.

The reception of Crell’s *Ethica Aristotelica* was not limited to the milieu of the Socinians. Its fame went far beyond the borders of the small town of Raków and continued uninterrupted into the eighteenth century, although often in hidden forms, many of which are likely still to be discovered. In this respect, the work done by Sarah Mortimer, for example, on the influence of Socinianism in England in the context of the political turmoil of the 1640s and 1650s is important. She has demonstrated that Socinian writings, their ideas and lines of reasoning, frequently served as an intellectual source for many politically and religiously useful arguments, however, their origins were rarely acknowledged.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, there are no reasons to expect a different attitude in the case of Crell’s *Ethica*. To provide a perfect example, as late as 1751, Antonio Genovesi (1713–69), one of the main representatives of the Italian Enlightenment, copied

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may consider my edited work, Laskowska, *Rakowscy arystotelicy*. Please note that I have omitted detailed references to this edition here due to potential accessibility challenges and the inclusion of Polish language. Unless explicitly specified otherwise, all translations provided in this article are my own.

2. Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 3.

an extensive passage from *Ethica Aristotelica* into his *Elementa metaphysicae*, however without indicating the source.<sup>3</sup> Much earlier, parts of the *Ethica Aristotelica* were also included by the French philosopher and theologian Jacques Fournenc (1609–69) in his treatise *Universae philosophiae synopsis* (1655).<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, in both cases is used the same passage, on the efficient causes of virtue (*De caussis efficientibus virtutis*), where the uncontaminated human nature as the source of virtue is discussed.

Hugo Grotius was acquainted with Crell's *Ethica* as early as 1639, although he criticized Crell's excessive Aristotelianism, despite the many scholarly and useful things the work contained.<sup>5</sup> The same accusation would be made by the Socinians themselves regarding the content of the work. Significantly, Crell's ethics reverberated widely at the Academic Gymnasium in Gdańsk at the end of the seventeenth century. The philosophy professor and librarian there, Johannes Gottlieb Moellerus,<sup>6</sup> supervised a series of twelve disputes on the moral philosophy of Crell and Spinoza in 1697.<sup>7</sup> From a rigid Protestant point of view, he accused both of spreading atheism under the banner of Christian ethics. As Grotius had done before, he also criticized the Socinian's excessive Aristotelianism and rationalist moral principles. In particular, he condemned

3. For comparison, refer to Genovesi, *Elementa metaphysicae*, 263–70; and Crell, *Ethica Aristotelica* [hereafter *EA*], 23–30. It is noteworthy that Genovesi frequently reproduces Crell's text verbatim but selectively omits specific content, such as the assertion made by Socinians that the natural inclination to virtue is grounded in reason. Genovesi's emphasis in this context lies on the aspect of education.

4. Fournenc, *Universae philosophiae synopsis*, 114–19. Fournenc, unlike Genovesi, seeks to paraphrase Crell and give his thought an orthodox Catholic character.

5. Grotius in a letter to Martin Ruar (18 May 1639): "In Ethices compendio multa sunt docta, multa ad vitam utilia. Nimis in quibusdam aristotelizat. Verum hoc ipsum quoque deprehendisse, sed morte praeventum emendare nequise, ex praefatione disco" (In the compendium of *Ethics*, many things are learned, many useful for life. There is an excessive Aristotelian influence in certain aspects. The author acknowledges having perceived this fact. However, regrettably, untimely death prevented rectification, as evident from the preface). See Bock, *Historia*, 1:157.

6. Johann Gottlieb Moeller (1670–98) was a native of Gdańsk, the son of Solomon, and held the position of pastor at St. Anne's Church. In 1694, he assumed the role of a professor of the Greek language at the University of Rostock. Subsequently, in 1696, he became a professor of philosophy and took on the responsibilities of a librarian at the Academic Gymnasium in Gdańsk. His scholarly endeavours were centred on the fields of philology, theology, and philosophy.

7. Moellerus, *Dodecas disputationum ethicarum*. Excerpts from the disputation on Crell's ethics were published in Polish translation in Ogonowski, *Filozofia*, 152–56.

the passage of *Ethica Aristotelica* where Crell equates the passion of Jesus with the death of other people, not only Christians but even pagans. However, the most important is the remark that, despite their apparent heresy, Crell's ethical works were held in high esteem and recommended by orthodox people.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Crell's ethical works were not only known but also appreciated for their role in education.

Yet, *Ethica Aristotelica* has still not received sufficient attention among modern scholars. This seems even more surprising given the attention that the Socinians paid to morality and piety. Referring to recent works, Sarah Mortimer frequently labels Socinianism as an "ethical version of Christianity" or an "ethical religion."<sup>9</sup> Kęstutis Daugirdas, on the other hand, sees one of the main achievements of Socinianism in its "historisch-ethischen Religionsmodell" (historical-ethical model of religion), wherein the exploration of religious meaning is distinctively detached from the understanding of existence.<sup>10</sup>

Even in Poland, despite the intensive research on the Polish Brethren undertaken during communist times (1945–89) by scholars such as Zbigniew Ogonowski (1924–2018), Janusz Tazbir (1927–2016), and Lech Szczucki (1933–2019), the question of Socinian ethics codification remains practically untouched. The most recent study is a chapter by Martin Schmeisser, who has attempted to give a synthetic account of both of Crell's ethical works—*Ethica Aristotelica* and *Ethica Christiana*—placing them in the context of the Altdorf Academy.<sup>11</sup> As far as *Ethica Aristotelica* is concerned, Schmeisser describes it as a mere compendium, stating that Crell did not introduce any corrections to Aristotle. It consequently allowed the author to conclude that for Crell, Aristotle's teaching was not contrary to the norms of Christianity.<sup>12</sup> In the fol-

8. Ogonowski, *Filozofia*, 156.

9. Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 7, 25, 212.

10. Daugirdas, *Die Anfänge*, 40.

11. Schmeisser, "Johann Crells."

12. Schmeisser, "Johann Crells," 107: "Crell's *Ethica Aristotelica* ist kein besonders origineller Text; sie stellt lediglich ein systematische und nach Themenkomplexen auf geschlusseltes Compendium zur *Nikomachoschen Ethik* dar. Sie verbessert daher in keiner Weise Aristoteles, wie ihr Untertitel *Ad Sacrarum Normam emendata* verspricht. Die Lehre des heidnischen Philosophen widersprechen offenbar für den Sozinianer Crell in keinem wesentlichen Punkt den Normen des Christentums; die sozinianische Ausformung der christlichen Glaubenslehre und die rationalistische Ethik des Aristoteles scheinen ihm vielmehr durchaus miteinander vereinbar zu sein; dies zeigte sich bereits in Bezug auf

lowing I will provide evidence showing significant changes introduced by Crell on Aristotle's thought.

Moreover, the present study will take a closer look at the content and meaning of *Ethica Aristotelica* in the context of teaching ethics at the Racovian Academy. In this respect, it seems particularly important to reflect on the question of what impact this work may have had on its readers at that time, and especially on the students of the Academy. In the following, it is argued that Crell's purpose was not only to introduce the concepts of Aristotle's moral philosophy but also to propagate and institutionalize the Socinian faith by subtly hiding it behind a veil of Aristotelian thought. For these reasons, I will also attempt to understand the relationship between the Socinians and Aristotle's authority itself, which has never been explicitly defined either by the Socinians themselves or by modern scholars. This article, therefore, will examine in more detail the complicated relationship between the Socinians and the authority of Aristotle, especially his *Nicomachean Ethics*. The analysis will focus on Johann Crell's moral teaching during the existence of the Racovian Academy (1602–38) using one of his basic philosophical works, *Ethica Aristotelica*, as the primary source.

### The Socinian education and the authority of Aristotle

#### *Aristotelian influence and educational dynamics in early modern Poland–Lithuania*

In its essence, Johann Crell's compendium *Ethica Aristotelica* represents the characteristic features of its epoch, aligning with the ongoing development of early modern Aristotelianism. For as the seventeenth century began, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* continued to play a crucial role in shaping moral philosophy discussions across various European educational institutions,

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die für den Sozinianismus essenzielle Freiheitsidee" (Crell's *Ethica Aristotelica* is not a particularly original text; it is merely a systematic compendium of *Nicomachean Ethics*, organized by topic. It therefore in no way improves on Aristotle, as its subtitle *Ad Sacrarum Normam emendata* promises. For the Socinian Crell, the teachings of the pagan philosopher apparently do not contradict the norms of Christianity in any essential point; rather, the Socinian formulation of the Christian doctrine of faith and the rationalist ethics of Aristotle seem to him to be quite compatible with each other; this already became apparent in relation to the idea of freedom, which is essential for Socinianism).

encompassing both Catholic and Protestant perspectives. Aristotle's authoritative position in education persisted as a central principle after the Reformation as well, particularly his moral-philosophical ideas.<sup>13</sup> However, the reception of *Nicomachean Ethics* underwent diverse interpretations and didactic modifications, driven by the imperative to align with the new socio-political and religious complexities of the post-Reformation era. This gave rise to diverse strategies for reconfiguring the content of *Nicomachean Ethics*, encompassing compendia (or textbooks), translations, paraphrases, dialogues, and commentaries.<sup>14</sup> In numerous academic spheres, particularly within Protestant contexts, the inquiry into the intricate interplay between ethics and theology, along with the interrelationship between pagan and Christian ethical frameworks, held a position of profound importance. While distinctive regional and denominational norms governing moral education took shape across Europe,<sup>15</sup> evading Aristotle in the realm of moral philosophy outright appeared unattainable; his commanding authority remained the essential cornerstone of any education striving for intellectual depth.

Likewise, the circumstances echoed in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, though characterized by a distinct demarcation between conservative Catholic and progressive Protestant institutions. The Cracow Academy, dominated by the Catholic Church, was already by the end of the sixteenth century an ossified institution, resistant to educational reform and dominated by scholastic Aristotelianism (often questioned by the professors themselves).<sup>16</sup> In 1603, "the path of St. Thomas" was officially recognized as the foundation for its teachings of philosophy and theology; among other things, Pedro da Fonseca's dialectics textbook was introduced. Concurrently, the Jesuit colleges had embarked on a trajectory of decline by the 1630s.<sup>17</sup> Protestant education, on the other hand, that consisted primarily of local *gymnasia*, which were located throughout the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, enjoyed greater flexibility and demonstrated a keen interest in modernizing teaching methods. This innovative breath resulted not only from a vivid response to the humanistic

13. Kraye, "Conceptions," 1280.

14. On different approaches to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, see Lines, "Aristotle's *Ethics*."

15. Lines, "Humanistic and Scholastic Ethics," 311–14.

16. Lepszy, *Dzieje*, 292; Augustyniak, *History*, 405. Cf. Quirini-Popławska, "Attempts to Modernize."

17. Augustyniak, *History*, 403.

ideals of the Reformation but also from the peculiar hierarchical structure of these schools. In such institutions, the decision-making role remained in the hands of one man, the landowner, who in most cases was also the school's patron. This was the case of the Gymnasium in Leszno, where Jan Amos Komensky (1592–1670) taught, and of the Racovian Academy, to mention just a few.

*The Racovian Academy (1602–1638): a beacon of tolerance and controversy*

The creation of the Racovian Academy in 1602, under the patronage of Lord Jakub Sienieński (1568–1639), who served as the palatine of Podolia and adhered to Socinian beliefs, is often viewed by scholars as a highly progressive and inclusive educational institution within the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.<sup>18</sup> In fact, its commitment to religious freedom was formally sanctioned by the school's statute (*Leges Scholae Racoviae*, 1602), which explicitly affirmed: “Modus ritusve precandi cuiusvis conscientiae ac religionis, in qua est educatus, permissus esto” (The means of ritual and praying of anyone shall be permitted, for his conscience and the religion in which he has been brought up).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, these regulations went beyond mere affirmation, explicitly outlining that students of differing faiths should not be compelled to participate in Socinian services and should be granted the freedom to observe their own religious practices, including attending their respective places of worship during holidays. As aptly noted by George Hunston Williams, “There is almost nothing to set them [the laws] apart from other such schools of other confessions except for the extraordinary degree of toleration that prevailed with respect to religion.”<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, students who were enrolled in the Racovian Academy were likely drawn not only by the institution's academic standards but also by its dedication to fostering religious tolerance. Consequently, the student body represented a diverse mix of national and religious backgrounds.

18. For instance, Kurdybacha, *Z dziejów*. For more on the Socinian tolerance, see Ogonowski, *Z zagadnień tolerancji*; and, recently, Quatrini, “Religious Tolerance.”

19. Translation by Nancy Wilson, in Williams, *Polish Brethren*, 78. For the Latin edition of *Leges*, see Kurdybacha, *Z dziejów*, 189. The original print of *Leges* is kept in the Public Library in Rotterdam, within the Remonstrant collection. Cf. Sandius, *Bibliotheca*, 175.

20. Williams, *Polish Brethren*, 72.



A significant presence among them were likely Polish Calvinists, a hypothesis substantiated by the presence of specific admonitions within Calvinist synodal records; these admonitions intriguingly highlight the pressing need for members to swiftly withdraw their sons from the Racovian Academy.<sup>21</sup> These succinct synodal notes offer an interesting insight into the discontent among the Calvinist authorities, arising from the choice to enroll their children in what they viewed frequently as an “Arian” school. Initially, these comments were rather broad, indicating the necessity of withdrawing children from the Socinian institution “to prevent [them] from becoming illegitimate” and placing them in the “Evangelical school.”<sup>22</sup> However, these admonitions persisted over time, evolving to include personal threats of consequences, such as exclusion from Holy Communion (1625).<sup>23</sup> This situation brings forth a pivotal question: Could the negative reaction of Calvinists to the Socinian institution suggest that the “remarkable tolerance” embraced by the Racovian Academy might not have necessarily included refraining from indoctrinating students? Or was it simply a matter of educational competition between the two confessions masked by a concern for orthodoxy? An in-depth examination of the educational materials utilized at Raków, such as *Ethica Aristotelica* for teaching ethics, has the potential to provide valuable insights for addressing these inquiries.

*Establishing ethical education:  
the Aristotelian fundamentals of the Racovian Academy*

In the context of the Racovian Academy, from the very beginning Aristotle’s moral philosophy played a key role as the cornerstone of ethical education in its halls. The initial rectors’ intellectual backgrounds provide compelling evidence. Christopher Brockhayus of Westphalia (d. 1605 in Raków),<sup>24</sup> serving as the first rector, delivered a disputation on Aristotle’s concept of justice titled “De iustitia ex mente Aristotelis” during the 1603 Raków synod, possibly as part of

21. Sipayłło, *Akta synodów*, 3:350, 382, 439, 456.

22. Synod in Lublin (1 June 1614), Sipayłło, *Akta synodów*, 3:350.

23. Sipayłło, *Akta synodów*, 3:464.

24. Bock, *Historia*, 1:78; Wallace, *Antitrinitarian Biography*, 2:443.

an examination. Another candidate from Westphalia, Bartholomew Vigilius,<sup>25</sup> applied for the co-rector position and presented a disputation on logic titled “De tribus legibus logicis,” which undoubtedly drew from Aristotle’s classical logic. Faustus Socinus, actively engaged in Raków’s church activities, likely observed and endorsed the appointment of these early rectors. It is worth emphasizing that the responsibility for teaching ethics consistently rested with the rector, underscoring its paramount significance in the educational curriculum.

The Socinians’ clear inclination towards Aristotle is not surprising, given their intent to establish a competitive education system for their community. Avoiding Aristotle would have risked isolating them from prevailing cultural norms. However, this preference was not without its complexities, especially considering their radical theological stance and critical view of the Christian philosophical tradition, including Aristotelian-Thomistic ideas. Notably, their perception of the Catholic Church as a wellspring of distortions, particularly in shaping the concept of the Holy Trinity, adds complexity to this preference.

In essence, the Socinians over time exhibited a stance of neutrality towards Aristotle: they refrained from explicitly branding him as irreligious or harmful, nor did they designate him officially as their authoritative figure. Amidst the vigorous debates of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries concerning Aristotle’s authority, assigning a unified and consistent approach to Aristotelianism among the Socinian scholars proves challenging. It appears that for the Socinians, Aristotle’s importance leaned more towards pragmatism than strict doctrinal alignment. However, upon analysis it becomes evident that Crell’s moral philosophy carried a distinct Aristotelian influence, which faced notable resistance among the censors within the Socinian congregation. It is vital to acknowledge that this stance was further complicated by the authority of Johann Crell himself, the main Socinian theologian with a robust Aristotelian background from the Altdorf Academy. Crell’s intent was to establish a more precise and Christian (or Socinian) elucidation of Aristotle’s teachings.

The central issue appears to have been that within Socinianism, a continuous challenge persisted, not directed towards the tools or methodologies taken from Aristotle for interpreting the Scriptures, such as dialectics, but rather directed at established authorities as mediators of disagreements concerning

25. He also served as a translator of Socinian literature into the German language. For more on Bartholomew Vigilius, see Bock, *Historia*, 1:982–83; cf. Wallace, *Antitrinitarian Biography*, 2:527–28.

the interpretation of Biblical texts. As was subsequently affirmed by Andreas Wissowatius in his work *Religio rationalis*, paramount importance in recognizing the truths of faith should be assigned to the innate *ratio sana* (common sense) of each individual.<sup>26</sup> This notion was regularly denoted by Socinian theologians as the *lumen rationis* (light of reason) or *lumen intellectuale* (intellectual light), signifying their belief that this served as the conduit through which God bestowed upon humanity the capability to comprehend him, distinct from the authority of any individual.

### *Socinianism as a new paradigm for ethical life*

Central to the Socinian faith was a profound emphasis on the practical application of moral principles through virtuous actions, accompanied by a deep understanding of divine purpose. This commitment to translating ethical theory into tangible deeds significantly influenced the Socinian's theological outlook, highlighting the importance of personal piety and conscious Christian choices over blind adherence to doctrines and rituals. Johann Crell, in particular, regarded every facet of theology as intricately linked to the practice of virtue, the sanctity of life, and genuine piety. He contended that theology, at its core, possessed a fundamentally practical nature.<sup>27</sup>

In essence, the ethical code of Socinianism predominantly adhered to the moral principles expounded by Jesus Christ in the New Testament, particularly in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7). Socinian belief centred on the idea of achieving moral transformation during one's earthly existence as the path to salvation. Notably, they found a sense of kinship with the Anabaptists due to a shared emphasis on the individual's free will in obeying God's commandments—an aspect that all Socinians considered as an absolute and indispensable prerequisite. In the Socinian perspective, faith was a rational choice made by each individual rather than an inherited genetic predisposition from one's parents. They firmly rejected the Calvinist concept of predestination, which,

26. Wissowatius, *Religio rationalis*, 5. For a deeper exploration of the interplay between reason and faith within Socinian philosophy, consider consulting Sascha Salatowsky's comprehensive study, *Die Philosophie der Sozinianer*. Salatowsky's work delves into the philosophical underpinnings of Socinian thought, shedding light on how reason and faith were reconciled and understood within the Socinian perspective.

27. Crell, *Oratio secunda*, 641.

in their view, undermined the significance of free will. According to Crell's perspective, this notion led to the paradoxical implication that God could potentially predestine individuals to commit evil acts, which contradicted God's inherently good nature.<sup>28</sup>

The awareness of moral principles and their practical application gave rise to what they referred to as the *salutaris doctrina* (salutary doctrine). This perspective stood in opposition to dogmatic theology and religious rituals, which were viewed as detrimental to salvation due to their reliance on opinions and concepts that were disconnected from the teachings of Christ. Furthermore, the doctrine of salvation held a political aspect: it was also, according to them, a proposal for a communal theology capable of reconciling different denominations and preventing religious violence. This idea was clearly expressed in correspondence from the Socinian elders to the Dutch Remonstrants in 1632, where they advocated for unity between their groups:

Praeclarum illud est Patris huius benignissimi donum, quod uberiores veritatis suae notitiam vobis impartievit et eam inspiraverit mentem, ut doctrinam illam quae secundum pietatem est, unice sequendam urgendamque censeretis [my emphasis] et dogmata quaedam illi adversa, saluti admodum noxia, quae altas iam in Ecclesia Christi radices egerant, convellere auderetis.<sup>29</sup>

(It is a wonderful gift of the most gracious Father that he has given you a richer knowledge of his truth and has inspired you with the confidence to recognize that *it is this doctrine of piety that must be utterly observed and insisted upon*, while dogmas opposed to it, very harmful to salvation, which are already deeply rooted in the Church of Christ, you dare to uproot.)

This deep commitment to morality can be traced back to Socinian Christology. From their theological viewpoint, the primary purpose of Christ's crucifixion

28. Crell, *Ethica Christiana*, 96: "Nam qui fieri posset, ut Deus eos homines produxerit, qui plerique omnes omnibus seculis necessario mali esse cogerentur? Certe qui id statuit, is Deum negat esse Deum" (For how could it be possible that God has created those people who, in most cases, would be compelled to be necessarily evil in all ages? Surely, the one who posits this denies God's existence as God).

29. For the Latin text, see Slee, *De geschiedenis*, 312–13; and for the revised Latin text, Chmaj, *Studia*, 255.

was to illuminate the path to eternal life for humanity rather than to redeem humanity's sins.<sup>30</sup> This perspective emphasized that adherence to Christlikeness was the key to salvation. The articulation of this vision often involved the use of concepts such as *pietas* and *sanctitas*, which Socinians, particularly Crell, frequently employed. Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–96) accurately described the Socinians as individuals who transformed Christianity into a moral philosophy, divesting it of its mysteries.<sup>31</sup>

*Faustus Socinus's complex engagement with Aristotle:  
morality, dialectics, and the Socinian tradition*

Given the significance ascribed to ethical behaviour, it might appear somewhat surprising that Faustus Socinus (1539–1604), the denomination's founder, did not establish a structured ethical system or participate in substantial discourse on the matter. However, upon scrutinizing precise passages within his theological writings and correspondence, we encounter a degree of fluidity or ambiguity in Socinus's stance concerning Aristotelian moral philosophy and its authority. Initially, he does not appear to hold a critical view of Aristotle. For instance, in one of his early works, *De statu primi hominis*, written around 1577, which was a polemic against Francesco Pucci (1543–97) on the topic of Adam's immortality, Socinus chose to incorporate some references to Aristotelian ethics, including his opinion on death (*Eth. Nic.* 3.6).<sup>32</sup> Similarly, in a discussion on free will with an anonymous French Calvinist in 1595, Socinus demonstrated no hesitation in invoking Aristotle's authority.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, a significant change in Socinus's approach becomes evident in his later work,

30. Socinus, *De Jesu Christo Servatore*, 1–2: "Ego vero censeo et orthodoxam sententiam esse arbitror Jesum Christum ideo servatorem nostrum esse, quia salutis aeternae viam nobis annuntiaverit, confirmaverit et in sua ipsius persona, cum vitae exemplo, tum ex mortuis resurgendo, manifeste ostenderit, vitamque aeternam nobis ei fidem habentibus ipse daturus sit" (I indeed hold, and I consider it to be the orthodox view, that Jesus Christ is our Saviour because he has announced, confirmed, and in his own person, both through the example of his life and by rising from the dead, clearly demonstrated to us the way to eternal salvation. Moreover, he will himself bestow eternal life upon those who place their faith in him).

31. Pufendorf, *Jus feciale divinum*, 343.

32. For example, *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum: Fausti Socini Opera Omnia*, 2:296.

33. Socinus, *Defensio disputationis*, 1:119.

*Praelectiones theologicae* (1609). In this context, Aristotle's role undergoes a noteworthy transformation, primarily functioning as evidence to support the argument that humanity cannot naturally grasp the concept of God's existence. Socinus contends that despite Aristotle's profound insights into understanding the natural world and describing the *machina mundi* (machine of the world), he failed to acknowledge the existence of the divine.<sup>34</sup> As a result, Socinus contends that divine revelation is a necessity for salvation, even for individuals of intellectual caliber like Aristotle, "qui ingenii acumine omnes superasse videtur" (who seems to have surpassed everyone in acuteness of intellect).<sup>35</sup> However, this perspective will be reversed by Johann Crell, who, in contrast to Socinus, not only embraces Aristotle's philosophy but also integrates it into the framework of natural theology.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, the most interesting and informative comments made by Socinus on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* can be found in his 1583 correspondence<sup>37</sup> to the young Polish nobleman Andrzej Wojdowski (1565–1622).<sup>38</sup> In this letter, Socinus not only regards the knowledge of God's will (i.e., theology) as the highest form of knowledge but also dedicates a significant portion of the letter to non-theological topics, including Aristotle's authority. Specifically, he encourages the young Wojdowski to delve into Aristotle's dialectic, emphasizing its utility in discerning truth from falsehood, particularly in the realm of sophistical refutations.<sup>39</sup> It is crucial to emphasize that both Socinus and the subsequent generation of Socinians held Aristotle's logic and the syllogistic method in high regard. Dialectics was considered a fundamental skill for a capable minister, especially during the early phase of the denomination's history, which

34. Socinus, *Praelectiones theologicae*, 4.

35. Socinus, *Praelectiones theologicae*, 4.

36. Ogonowski, "Teologia naturalna."

37. A letter from Sozzini to Wojdowski, dated 18 March 1583, originating from Pawlikowice, is available in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum: Fausti Socini Opera Omnia*, 1:469–71.

38. In 1598, Andrzej Wojdowski (1565–1622) and Krzysztof Ostrodt (d. 1611) undertook a missionary journey to Leiden. During their stay, their books were confiscated and burned, and they were banished from the country. Later, Wojdowski was a pastor of the congregation in Lublin and then in Raków. In 1611, during his stay in Kraków, he was beaten by students and drowned several times in the river, however he survived. He was the author of *Apologia ad Ordines foederati Belgii* (1599). See Sandius, *Bibliotheca*, 92; Wilbur, *History of Unitarianism*, 538–40.

39. *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum: Fausti Socini Opera Omnia*, 1:471.

was characterized by frequent public debates with opponents in the Poland–Lithuania region. In line with this dialectical approach, Socinus authored a concise logical work titled *Elenchi Sophistici [...] exemplis theologicis illustrati* for the benefit of young Krzysztof Ostorodt. This work possibly aimed to provide him with a succinct preparation before embarking on his mission to the Netherlands in 1598.<sup>40</sup> In this treatise, Socinus considered various kinds of logical fallacies and misunderstandings based on Aristotle’s *Sophistical Refutations*, however, using material taken from the Bible to justify Antitrinitarian beliefs. A similar approach is likely to have been employed in a lesser-known work by Jan Licinius, titled *Instrumentum doctrinarum Aristotelicum*, published in 1586 in Łosk; this work has not survived to the present day.<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that young adherents were indeed instructed in Aristotelian dialectics from the very inception of Socinianism, albeit with a clearly articulated aim of propagating Antitrinitarian beliefs. Interestingly, when it comes to moral philosophy, Socinus in the above-mentioned letter to Wojdowski links this knowledge to the “rerum naturalium cognitio” (cognition of natural things), for which he advises Aristotle’s philosophy. Ethics is placed by Socinus in the area of natural sciences (i.e., physics), akin to the perspective of Philip Melanchthon.<sup>42</sup> However, he insists on the *Nicomachean Ethics*’s superfluity on the path to salvation, emphasizing the exhaustivity of the revelation contained in the Bible—which did not stop him from pointing out the work’s usefulness a few lines later. He concluded that the essence of morality is not found in philosophy but, on the contrary, can be discovered only in theology.

40. See note 38 above.

41. For further insights into the content of the work in question, one can turn to its refutation, titled *Examen enunciationum et argumentationum*, authored by Franciscus Junius (1545–1602). An example of a logical error identified by Licinius is illustrative: “Omnes qui credunt Deum ex sua essentia alium Deum genuisse, duos habent Deos mutabiles; generatio enim est motus a non esse ad esse. Omnes Trinitarii credunt Deum ex sua essentia alium Deum genuisse. Ergo omnes Trinitarii duos habent Deos mutabiles. Maior est certissima, minor etiam a nullo negabitur” (All who believe that God, from his own essence, has begotten another God, possess two mutable Gods, for generation is a movement from non-being to being. All Trinitarians believe that God, from his own essence, has begotten another God. Therefore, all Trinitarians have two mutable Gods. The major premise is most certain; the minor premise will also be denied by none.). Junius, *Examen*, 30.

42. On Melanchthon’s concept of ethics, see Belucci, “Natural Philosophy.”

Finally, it is also important to remember that before Crell's arrival in Raków in 1612, two works on Aristotelian ethics had already been published in Strasbourg by a Socinian polemist, Adam Gosławski (c. 1577–1642): *De veritate et virtute morali* (1596), a university disputation, and *Libri primi Ethicorum Nicomachiorum interpretatio analytica* (1598), a commentary on the first book of *Nicomachean Ethics*. Moreover, historical records validate that Paweł Krokier, holding the position of rector at the Racovian Academy, authored an ethics textbook titled *Comentarii ethici*, likely drawing from the works of Aristotle.<sup>43</sup> It is presumed that this instructional material was employed by students at the Racovian Academy and circulated primarily in manuscript form. All of these works underscore the Socinians' early engagement with *Nicomachean Ethics*, thereby reinforcing the notion that Aristotelianism was not imposed upon them by Crell.

Without going into further details, we can surmise that Socinus's utilization of Aristotle displayed inconsistency, primarily guided by the pragmatic use of Aristotle's reputation rather than an unwavering endorsement of his philosophical tenets. These fragments of evidence suggest that both Socinus and subsequent generations of Socinian theologians and intellectuals did not categorically reject Aristotle's authority. Particularly in the realm of dialectical discourse against religious adversaries, they found value in Aristotle's tools. However, this ambivalent stance held by Socinus, and to some extent, by other Socinians, underwent a significant transformation with the arrival of Johann Crell, a German student of the Altdorf Academy, into the Socinian community in Raków in 1612.

### **A biographic summary of Johann Crell (1590–1633)**

Johann Crell, a prominent figure among the theologians of the Polish Brethren following Faustus Socinus, holds particular significance as the exclusive codifier of Socinian ethics. Originating from a Lutheran background in Germany, Crell experienced a transformative conversion to Socinianism, catalyzed by the influence of his professor, the crypto-Socinian Ernst (1572–1612) at the Altdorf Academy. His academic pursuits at Altdorf, spanning from 1606 to 1612, were dedicated to the study of languages and philosophy.

43. Bock, *Historia*, 1:204–5.



Significantly, Crell's philosophical inclinations were profoundly steeped in Aristotelianism, a tradition with which he developed a thorough familiarity during his scholarly pursuits at Altdorf. This Lutheran institution at the turn of the seventeenth century was replete with prominent scholars deeply engaged in Peripatetic thought, including luminaries such as Philipp Scherbe (d. 1605), Nicolaus Taurellus (d. 1606), and Ernst Soner. These scholars shared a common interest in exploring the realms of heterodox Aristotelianism, with a particular emphasis on the perspectives of the Italian Averroist, Andrea Cesalpino (1524–1603).<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Joachim Pastorius, the biographer of Crell, underscored Crell's profound admiration for Aristotle and included him in the list of Crell's revered ancient mentors, alongside figures like Simplicius of Cilicia and Alexander of Aphrodisia. Cesalpino was also recognized as one of Crell's contemporaries who influenced his philosophical outlook.<sup>45</sup>

Following the passing of Ernst Soner in 1612, Crell made a significant decision to relocate to Poland, where he found a new home within the Socinian congregation based in Raków.<sup>46</sup> His arrival was warmly met, and the church elders extended their hospitality, ensuring his well-being and comfort. In return, Crell dedicated himself to the congregation, undertaking substantial endeavours for its benefit. Under the guidance of Valentinus Smalcus, a pupil of Faustus Socinus and an authority in Antitrinitarian theology, Crell received thorough training, and his contributions would later prove instrumental in shaping the upcoming generation of Socinian ministers, emphasizing the importance of his role within the congregation.

Pastorius's biography paints a vivid picture of a man wholly consumed by the demands of writing and serving the Racovian congregation, to the extent that friends often had to persuade him to take a break. Between 1616 and 1621, he assumed the role of rector at the Racovian Academy, where his teaching portfolio extended beyond ethics to encompass theology, logic, physics, and Ancient Greek. Following his release from rectorial duties in 1621, Crell primarily dedicated himself to writing and instructing in theological seminars. During this prolific period, he authored significant works on ethics (*Ethica*

44. For recent work on the Aristotelianism of Ernst Soner, see Facca, *Early Modern Aristotelianism*, ch. 3; on the institutional and scholarly development of the Altdorf Academy, see Mährle, *Academia Norica*.

45. Pastorius, *Vita*, 3.

46. Bock, *Historia*, 1:120.

*Aristotelica* and *Ethica Christiana*), alongside treatises like *De uno Deo Patre libri duo* and *De Deo et eius attributis*, which held paramount importance within Socinian theology. He gained international fame for his *De satisfactione Christi* (1623), in which he engaged in a polemical discourse with Hugo Grotius regarding the essence of Jesus Christ's atonement.<sup>47</sup> He died prematurely from a plague in Raków in 1633, where he was also buried.

### The origins of *Ethica Aristotelica*

According to Socinian accounts, Johann Crell was encouraged to undertake the writing of *Ethica Aristotelica* by his close friend, a minister and theologian named Jan Stoiński (1590–1654).<sup>48</sup> This endeavour likely commenced around 1622 during a temporary relocation necessitated by a plague outbreak in Raków.<sup>49</sup> It seems, however, that in the Socinian congregation the need to reformulate ethics in the spirit of Socinian beliefs had existed for a long time. Such a textbook could be useful in didactics, and the very fact of having one could significantly increase the prestige of the Racovian Academy, thereby bolstering the denomination's influence and institutionalization. Furthermore, the work's political relevance for the Socinians should not be underestimated. Christian morality, viewed as both a cornerstone of faith and a unifying factor among dissenting denominations, could facilitate peaceful coexistence. This takes on added significance in the context of Poland's political landscape during this period. In the first half of the seventeenth century, the political sway of non-Catholic minorities, including the Socinians, waned as Counter-Reformation forces gained prominence. Signs of these changes were evident in the 1610s, with a surge in disturbances against dissident groups, at times even endangering lives. In 1627, Catholic authorities went as far as prohibiting public disputes involving "Arians." Consequently, the written word emerged as the primary tool for advocating for Socinian freedoms and rights.

It can be reasonably inferred that *Ethica Aristotelica* was finalized prior to 1624. This conclusion is drawn from Crell's correspondence with Martin Ruar,

47. See Grotius, *Defensio*.

48. Pastorius, *Vita*, 6. For an English translation of Pastorius's *Vita*, see Williams, *Polish Brethren*, 139.

49. Pastorius, *Vita*, 6. Notably, the plague of 1622 likely claimed the lives of individuals such as Valentinus Smalcus and Benedictus Wissowatius.

where he mentions the completion of *Ethica Christiana*, a work that already contained references to *Ethica Aristotelica*.<sup>50</sup> Subsequently, *Ethica Aristotelica* circulated in manuscript form, spreading not only within Raków but also among various Socinian congregations and educational institutions.<sup>51</sup> The elders of the congregation probably delayed the publication of *Ethica Aristotelica*, waiting for the necessary corrections to be made by Crell. Tragically, he passed away prematurely in 1633, and as a result, his work remained unpublished until 1650. The precise reasons for his failure to provide an amended version between the completion of the book in 1624 and his death in 1633 are not well documented. It was only in 1635 that the synod took the initiative to appoint Ruar to oversee the collection of all existing copies and to produce a final, corrected version for publication.<sup>52</sup> We can guess that these copies most likely contained corrections by other ministers, suggesting that the final form of the *Ethica Aristotelica* could be the result of the contributions of many.

### Structure and content of *Ethica Aristotelica*

#### *Considerations on the title*

The title, *Ethica Aristotelica, ad Sacrarum Literarum normam emendata*, clearly indicates the official purpose of the work: a revision of Aristotelian ethics in accordance with the Holy Scriptures. This places Crell's work within the framework of the European currents of reconciling the authority of Aristotle's

50. Bock, *Historia*, 1:126: "Ut aliquid de rebus nostris scribam, ante Synaxin Czarcowianam 'Ethicam Christianam' cum Deo bono absolvi eamque ob causam non nunquam quatuor per diem horas, quaquam non continuas ei rei impendi" (To write something about our affairs, I completed "Christian Ethics" before the Czarow Synod with the grace of God. For this reason, I frequently dedicated four hours per day, although not continuously, to this matter).

51. Christopher Crell, in his *Dissertatio*, references a close associate of his father, presumably Martin Ruar, who "collegit exemplaria diversa" (gathered diverse manuscripts) of both *Ethica Aristotelica* and *Ethica Christiana* for the purpose of revision and subsequent publication. Crell, *Dissertatio*, 1. This act of "collecting copies" from assorted Socinian congregations suggests a deliberate dissemination of these materials in multiple locations, likely for instructional and scholarly purposes.

52. During this synod, it was further resolved that the task of printing would be entrusted to Jan Stoiński and Joachim Stegmann (Bock, *Historia* 1:147). Additionally, historical records indicate that the synod of 1655 commissioned Jerzy Ciachowski for the translation of *Ethica Aristotelica* and *Ethica Christiana* into Polish; however, the ultimate fate of these translations remain elusive to contemporary scholarship.

moral philosophy with Christian theology. However, it should be noted that we cannot be certain about the extent to which the title was conceived of by the author. In fact, all the decisions concerning the preparation and printing of the Socinian works—including their titles—were frequently made collectively by Racovian synods. Moreover, Ruar, who was credited with revising Crell's works, used to manipulate titles in quite an extensive way. An emblematic example is represented by Crell's famous work, *Vindiciae pro religionis libertate* (1637), which in the synodal reports existed under the title *De servanda pace et etiam haereticis*.<sup>53</sup> Alternatively, the interference of the publisher, who wanted to boost sales with a catchy title, may also have been a factor. In the case of Crell's *Vindiciae*, it seems that making a subtle allusion to *Vindiciae contra tyrannos* was intentional, and as Martin Mulsow suggests, may have been intended to bring the text into the French monarchomachy debate.<sup>54</sup>

In the context of *Ethica Aristotelica*, its title bears a striking resemblance to Antoni Walaeus's work on ethics, the *Compendium ethicae Aristotelicae ad normam veritatis Christianae revocatum* (1620). This resemblance might indicate a purposeful decision by either the Socinian church or Crell that could be seen as an act of goodwill towards Dutch Calvinists, potentially in an effort to win their favour. Confronted with a growing wave of persecution in Poland–Lithuania, the Socinians elevated the pursuit of political unity to a central objective. As the evident reluctance of Polish Calvinists to entertain the idea of unification with the Socinians became clearer, the Socinians shifted their aspirations towards Western prospects.

### *Aristotelian elements*

While the question of Crell's Aristotelianism is a topic for a more comprehensive discussion and requires a separate commentary, several key elements are pivotal in Crell's idea of Aristotelian Socinianism and will be discussed in the following. Ogonowski rightly stated—as Otto Fock has done before<sup>55</sup>—that Italian heterodox Aristotelianism, which Crell encountered during his studies

53. Bock, *Historia*, 1:149.

54. Mulsow, ““New Socinians,”” 53–55.

55. Fock, *Der Socinianismus*.

in Altdorf, played a significant role in developing Crell's thought.<sup>56</sup> In particular, I am here referring to Crell's fascination with the thought of Andrea Cesalpino, who constructed a pantheistic model the world, vigorously discussed by the Altdorf professors. Cesalpino's ideas left an indelible mark on Crell's intellectual journey, albeit subject to critical scrutiny, particularly in matters pertaining to theological tenets. The essence of Cesalpino's perspective on the nexus between God and the world, as interpreted by Crell, is expounded upon in chapter 4 of his treatise, *De Deo et eius attributis*. In what follows, I will focus only on the essential inspirations of Aristotle's moral philosophy as contained in his *Ethica Aristotelica*, to contextualize them with Crell's Christian revisions.

With respect to its composition and structure, *Ethica Aristotelica* is essentially a Latin compendium of *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is organized into four distinct chapters, each addressing specific aspects of ethical philosophy:

1. *De beatitudine* (On happiness), covering *Eth. Nic.* 1, 1094a–1101b;
2. *De virtute* (On virtue), covering *Eth. Nic.* 2–7;
3. *De voluptate* (On pleasure), covering *Eth. Nic.* 7 and 10; and
4. *De amicitia* (On friendship), covering *Eth. Nic.* 8

Some of the chapters are enclosed with moral precepts (*praecepta*), which are practical advice aimed at reinforcing the Christian spirit, often also containing the emendations of Aristotle. The primary structural framework adheres to Renaissance dialectical principles. In this arrangement, every chapter commences by endeavouring to define the existence of the object under consideration (*an sit*), its essence (*quid sit*), and its fundamental components (*divisio*), followed by a discussion of qualities (*qualis*), adjunctures (*adiuncta*), causes (*causa*), and opposites (*opposita*). The work is predominantly characterized by citations from classical texts, especially from Cicero (*De officiis*; *Tusculanae disputationes*) and Seneca the Younger (*De beneficiis*; *Epistulae*). These references imbue this ethical discourse with a distinct Stoic essence. Moreover, in the section on law (*De virtute*, ch. 17) there are numerous references to the *Digesta Iustiniani*. It is noteworthy that quotations from the Bible are relatively sparse, with a predominant focus on excerpts from the New Testament epistles where they do appear. Their particular accumulation can be

56. Ogonowski, *Socynianizm a Oświecenie*, 159.

found in the precepts on chastity and celibacy.<sup>57</sup> Among his contemporaries, Crell explicitly acknowledges Julius Scaliger, with discernible references to his *Exotericarum Exercitationum Liber XV* in the section addressing *affectus* (*De virtute*, ch. 4: *De materia virtutis*).<sup>58</sup>

At first glance, Crell's ethical framework does not appear substantially different from conventional ethical treatises designed to prepare individuals for life within a civic society. Within this paradigm, ethics is construed as a "disciplina practica, rationem humanae felicitatis consequendae explicans" (practical discipline that elucidates the path towards achieving human happiness), with happiness itself explicitly delineated in Aristotelian and secular terms as "the highest good."<sup>59</sup> Notably, the author appears to underscore earthly objectives through the frequent use of the Latin term *felicitas* rather than *beatitudo*. Also, in *Ethica Christiana* we do not find the concept of happiness (or the highest good) defined in accordance with Socinian theology. However, it seems that Crell started to work on this issue, for in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* we find a small sample of Crell's text entitled *Discursus de felicitate*.<sup>60</sup> This gap would later be filled by Samuel Przytkowski's *De Christianorum summo bono* (1636)<sup>61</sup> and Andreas Wissowatius's short treatise *De hominis vera beatitudine* (1682).<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, while Crell does acknowledge, following Aristotle, the superiority of contemplation over the practical life, he dedicates most of his work to the exploration of moral virtue and the concept of friendship. An intriguing aspect emerges in the chapter devoted to virtue, where a comparison is drawn between the pedagogy of ethics and that of history.<sup>63</sup> These two disciplines are even equated, with ethics imparted through *praecepta* and history through *exempla*, both equally serving to inspire the pursuit of virtue and the avoidance of vice. Indeed, historical examples, predominantly from antiquity, frequently

57. Crell, *EA*, 79.

58. Crell, *EA*, 32–69.

59. Crell, *EA*, 1. See *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum: Johannis Crellii*, 551–52.

60. See *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum: Johannis Crellii*, 551–52.

61. Published anonymously under the title *Dissertatio quam Fausti Socini operibus praemittere voluit Eques Polonus*, the title *De Christianorum summo bono* is preserved by Bock, *Historia*, 2:672.

62. It was published together with other small ethical and theological works by Andreas Wissowatius in *Stimuli virtutum, fraena peccatorum* (1682).

63. Crell, *EA*, 27.

make their appearance. Crell's primary emphasis is directed towards the section on virtue, which constitutes the majority, encompassing three-quarters of the entire work. This portion clearly delves into virtue ethics, prioritizing the nurturing and refinement of virtuous character traits. Crell contends that a person possessing virtuous qualities will inherently gravitate towards making ethical choices. It is worth emphasizing the effort Crell made to organize the concept of virtue according to Aristotelian categories, dividing it into three core elements: (1) pertaining to causes, (2) concerning affections as the matter of virtue (*affectus*), and (3) configuring this matter into a form, a duality interpreted by Crell as both a middle state (*mediocritas*) and a deliberate choice (*consilium/prohairesis*).<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, within the domain of virtues, the importance of *voluntas* (will) and *liberum arbitrium* (free will) was strongly emphasized. These parallel Aristotelian Greek concepts of *boule* and *prohairesis* harmoniously aligned with the overarching Socinian emphasis on human freedom, moral agency, and rationality in the sphere of religious matters. However, it is evident that Crell extended the scope of his "mediocrity" concept beyond the accepted boundaries within Socinian doctrine, provoking opposition from Socinian authorities. In book 2, chapter 5, in consonance with Aristotle, he classifies the *mediocritas* as a form of virtue impacting all emotions, including love (*charitas*, *amor*), even in the context of one's devotion to God.<sup>65</sup> Remaining a steadfast critic of socio-political radicalism, Crell warns of the adverse consequences associated with both excessive and deficient expressions of love. Love cannot flourish if an excess of it harms our nature or causes us to neglect our duties, which, according to Crell, can be seen in Christian groups dedicated solely to prayer.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, an improper object of affection can lead an individual astray.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, when love is commended in the Scriptures as a virtue, it is specifically the moderate form of love that is extolled.<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, in the *Ethica Aristotelica*, there is a clear intervention by the Socinian correctors, presented as a *nota bene*, containing the following content:

64. For instance, Crell, *EA*, 40.

65. Crell, *EA*, 47.

66. Crell, *EA*, 47.

67. Crell, *EA*, 64–65.

68. Crell, *EA*, 40.

Auctor ab amicis interpellatus de hoc Ethices compendio in lucem edendo, dicebat se in eo nimis anxio pede Aristotelis orbitam pressisse, qui uniuscujusque virtutis naturam in mediocritate positam censuit. Id vero non semper ita habere, se postmodum ex divinis oraculis comperisse.<sup>69</sup>

(When asked by friends about publishing this compendium of ethics, the author said that he had trodden too closely in the footsteps of Aristotle, who believed that the nature of each virtue is placed in a middle state. However, he later discovered from divine inspiration that this is not always the case.)

Could this have been among the principal causes for the Socinians to postpone the publication of Crell's *Ethica Aristotelica*? Even Hugo Grotius, upon examining the text, perceived that Crell tended to "nimis aristotelizat" (over-Aristotelize), despite the presence of much that was both scholarly and practically valuable.<sup>70</sup>

Upon conducting a more thorough examination of concepts like happiness, friendship, and pleasure, it becomes evident that Crell predominantly adheres to the concepts and definitions articulated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The apparent prevalence of unalloyed Aristotelianism is quite surprising, particularly considering that the work originates from a prominent theologian associated with one of the radical factions of the Reformation. This inclination is likely attributed to Crell's approach of distinguishing ethical considerations from strictly theological ones within *Ethica Aristotelica*. Here, the exploration of morality and ethical actions, on the one hand, and the contemplation of their divine causes and purposes, on the other, were treated as discrete domains of study.

### *Socinian elements*

As previously indicated, *Ethica Aristotelica* was originally designed as a pedagogical tool at the Racovian Academy, a place where students from various religious backgrounds often studied together. This diversity naturally invites an exploration of the practical dynamics concerning coexistence within such an

69. Crell, *EA*, 49.

70. In a letter to Martin Ruar (17 May 1639); see Bock, *Historia*, 1:157.



academic milieu. The central inquiry of this article arises: Was the instruction religiously impartial, devoid of any substantial apprehension among students not adhering to the same beliefs? Alternatively, was there a possibility that students were exposed to some form of deliberate denominational influence? In this context, *Ethica Aristotelica* serves as a noteworthy illustration of the Socinian approach to educational policy. Despite its outward appearance as a standard instructional manual, this textbook discreetly incorporates contentious ideas. Upon closer examination, particularly within the section devoted to virtues, one can uncover a number of Socinian reinterpretations cleverly interwoven between the lines.

*Reimagining salvation: Socinian views on virtue's reward*

The Socinian perspective notably highlights the concept of salvation as a recompense for virtue, commonly denoted by Crell as “vitae futurae [or immortalitatis] praemium” (English hereward of future life [or immortality]).<sup>71</sup> Socinus himself maintained that this perspective served as a means by which God sought to inspire virtuous conduct among individuals. However, this concept carried a weighty implication, highlighting the profound link between one's deeds and salvation and, in doing so, firmly rejecting the notion of predestination in favour of a straightforward principle: virtuous deeds are the pathway to eternal life. This Socinian concept also finds resonance within the pages of *Ethica Aristotelica*: “Inter fructus autem virtutis eminent vitae futurae praemium, de quo theologus. In hoc autem seculo rectae conscientiae gaudium” (Among the fruits of virtue is the reward of the future life, a matter of theological concern. Yet in this world, it bestows the joy of a clear conscience).<sup>72</sup> Or in relation to the heroic virtue: “Quod ad primam virtutis heroicae speciem attinet, quae exercitatione potissimum paratur, ea multum juvatur doctrina et sapientia, ea praesertim, quam Divinae nobis tradunt Literae, quae futurae vitae praemium virtuti proponit et perfectae virtutis officia exemplaue ostendit” (As for the first type of heroic virtue, which is chiefly cultivated through practice, it is greatly aided by learning and wisdom, especially that which the Divine Scriptures impart to us.

71. For instance, relevant passages can be located in the following places: Crell, *EA*, 24, 27, 248; *Ethica Christiana*, 471; *Oratio secunda*, 646; *Discursus de felicitate*, in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum: Johannis Crellii*, 551.

72. Crell, *EA*, 24.

These Scriptures propose the reward of virtue for future life and illustrate the duties and examples of perfect virtue).<sup>73</sup> Notably, the latter fragment underscores Socinian conviction that the Scriptures serve as a moral guide.

This seemingly straightforward connection between virtue and salvation in Socinian philosophy gives rise to a host of contentious issues, chiefly revolving around the imperative role of divine revelation. Crell's perspective raises questions about whether figures like Aristotle and other pagans could achieve salvation—a topic extensively debated among Renaissance humanists. What is the fate of virtuous non-Christians? Additionally, beyond the assurance of immortality, was divine revelation truly deemed indispensable? If someone can imitate Jesus Christ without knowing his teachings, can they still attain eternal life? These questions belong to the significant domain of natural theology in Crell's discourse, as they inquire into the potential for salvation beyond the scope of Christianity. While Socinus steadfastly proclaimed that salvation unequivocally rested upon revelation (for it is necessary to obey God consciously), Crell's perspective introduces an element of uncertainty into this ongoing discussion.<sup>74</sup> These reverberations of uncertainty resound particularly within the pages of the *Ethica Aristotelica*, where the intricate relationship between human nature, virtuous living, and divine revelation continue to be a subject of contemplation, especially in the section on fortitude (see, in particular, the chapter on heroic virtue).

In gaining a more certain understanding of Crell's perspectives on the subject, it is valuable to consult his *Oratio secunda, cur nec Moses nec philosophi perfectam virtutem praescribere et constanter urgere potuerint* (1650). This text provides additional clarity on aspects that may be ambiguous in *Ethica Aristotelica*. In his oration, Crell draws a clear distinction between pagan and Christian ethics, primarily arising from a shift in the fundamental purpose of virtuous behaviour—a shift which, in turn, facilitated the attainment of perfect virtues. For Crell, Aristotle's ethical framework primarily centred around earthly goals, with a significant focus on the welfare and harmony of the state; this was similar to the emphasis on these goals in the approach of Moses and the Decalogue.<sup>75</sup> With the teachings of Jesus Christ, however, Christians trans-

73. Crell, *EA*, 180.

74. Ogonowski, *Socynianizm a Oświecenie*, 101.

75. Crell, *EA*, 97–98; *Oratio secunda*, 645.

cended these worldly concerns, buoyed by their conviction in salvation and the promise of eternal life. Consequently, the ethical framework of paganism, bound by the inescapable reality of death, hindered the pursuit of perfect virtue, which is inherently challenging due to the pervasive fear of one's finite existence. God's disclosure of the reward of immortality through Christ acted as a catalyst for promoting exemplary moral conduct, thereby eliciting the highest virtues within individuals.

Importantly, Crell, in the *Oratio secunda*, admits the existence of exceptional individuals, mainly philosophers who can practice perfect virtue without the help of revelation. He mentions the example of Socrates, who, in fact, in the *Ethica Aristotelica* often serves as an example of perfect conduct.<sup>76</sup>

The emphasis on the concept of salvation as a reward faced substantial criticism from religious adversaries, who contended that it implied a transactional view whereby humans are virtuous simply for personal gain. Interestingly, Jacques Fournenc, a French Oratorian who drew inspiration from Crell's *Ethica Aristotelica*, incorporated the above-mentioned quotation (EA, 24) into his work, *Universae philosophiae synopsis*, however, he replaced the contentious Crellian statement "among the fruits of virtue is the reward of the future life" with more acceptable "among the inner joys (*gaudia interna*) is the reward of the future life," thus softening this problematic for him relationship between virtue and salvation.<sup>77</sup>

Contemplating salvation as a reward for virtue entails specific implications within Socinianism, and these are likewise mirrored in the *Ethica Aristotelica*. Primarily, the significance of free will becomes paramount, as there is no reward without merit. From the Socinian perspective, individuals exercise their free will to opt for virtuous actions and uphold moral principles. The decision to nurture virtues and lead a morally upright life is a conscious and voluntary choice enabled by free will. This theme is further explored in *Ethica Aristotelica*, where an equally comprehensive section is dedicated to the concepts of choice and free will.<sup>78</sup> Notably, the emphasis in this exploration is on demonstrating the existence of free will at every juncture of human life, a position that might have

76. Crell, *Oratio secunda*, 646. For Socrates as an example of a steady and calm mind, resilient in the face of adversity, see, for example, Crell, EA, 84.

77. Fournenc, *Universae philosophiae synopsis*, 114.

78. See Crell, EA, 59–69: *De voluntate et arbitrio humano* (2.7), *De consultatione* (2.8), and *De prohairesi seu consilio* (2.9).

triggered cognitive dissonance among Calvinist participants of the Socinian education.

*Socinian insights into fortitude*

The most substantial revision within Crell's interpretation emerges within the chapter dedicated to courage (*fortitudo*), intricately intertwined with the concept of endurance (*patientia*). Directly stemming from this examination is the concept of heroic virtue (*virtus heroica*), the utmost manifestation of courage, which is elaborated upon as an appendix in the second book, *De virtute*. These discussions also encompass important considerations of social ethics, particularly in relation to participation in wars and the moral imperative of resisting evil. Crell regards courage as the most eminent among the virtues due to its inherent difficulty in attainment, necessitating a profound detachment from worldly concerns and even a willingness to disregard one's own life.<sup>79</sup> As previously discussed, it is a virtue that calls for divine revelation for its complete realization. Crell, who typically held a conservative view on women's roles throughout *Ethica Aristotelica*, also acknowledges women's capacity for courage, albeit with the restriction that they should display it to a lesser degree than men.<sup>80</sup> Certainly, the accentuation of this virtue, as understood by the Socinians, arose not only from its significance in relation to piety but also as a necessity stemming from the escalating persecution endured by this Antitrinitarian faction within the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Crell's perspective asserts that genuine Christian courage becomes evident when individuals, akin to Jesus Christ and the early Christians, consciously choose to lay down their lives for a just cause or person, with piety being the most esteemed reason for such sacrifice.<sup>81</sup> These words appear essential: "Mors quae justitiae causa suscipitur, Dei judicio est pulcherrima ideoque Christiana fortitudo in ea occupatur" (The death undertaken for the sake of righteousness is, in the judgment of God, the most beautiful, and therefore Christian courage

79. Crell, *EA*, 95–96.

80. Crell, *EA*, 179: "Foeminas major decet modestia et verecundia. Earum fortitudo (nam nec haec est foeminis prorsus adimenda) ab audacia longius debet discedere quam virorum" (Greater modesty and decorum befit women. Their strength [for this is by no means to be entirely taken away from women] should depart farther from boldness than that of men).

81. Crell, *EA*, 95–105: *De fortitudine et patientia* (14).

is engaged in it).<sup>82</sup> In his work *Ethica Christiana*, Crell explicitly labels this form of courage as the “fidei custos” (guardian of the faith).<sup>83</sup>

It is discernible that the Socinian theologian sought to cultivate a sense reminiscent of the early Christian ethos within the young students of the Racovian Academy and among other readers. This aligned with the Socinian perspective on the corruption of Christianity from the fourth century onward and their call to return to the roots of the faith. Interestingly, Crell subjects the motivations behind self-sacrifice to meticulous analysis, and this passage provides the most comprehensive illustration of Crell’s perspective on how Christian teachings diverge from Aristotle’s ethics.

The basic difference explained in the *Ethica Aristotelica* is as follows: pagans, including Aristotle, possessed well-defined concepts of courage, which Crell labels as “political courage” (*fortitudo politica*). They lacked, however, a distinctly articulated idea of humanity’s ultimate goal, salvation and eternal life, as revealed by Jesus Christ. Crell observes that Aristotle predominantly associated fortitude with acts of warfare and death for the sake of earthly glory, thus restricting its significance to the temporal realm. Christ’s revelation of eternal life rendered this form of political courage obsolete. His sacrifice introduced a novel perspective for humanity, centred on the concept of the “heavenly fatherland,” transcending the ancient pagan notion of sacrificing solely for earthly renown and enabling individuals to devote themselves to the glory of God.

According to Crell’s interpretation, Christian courage involves a deliberate choice to lay down one’s life for the sake of justice, construed as the personal adherence to divine commandments. This viewpoint explicitly incorporates a correction of Aristotle and draws inspiration primarily from the Bible: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>84</sup> This Christian kind of death was pleasant to God for which he would adequately reward. Nevertheless, Crell advocates for the utmost prudence and avoidance of life-threatening risks, citing the Biblical injunction “estote prudentes sicut serpentes, simplices sicut columbae” (be prudent as serpents, innocent as doves), which he interprets in the following way:

82. Crell, *EA*, 98.

83. Crell, *Ethica Christiana*, 2.

84. Matt. 5:10 (King James Version).

Prudentia serpentina ad declinanda pericula pertinet, simplicitas columbina ad incorruptum pietatis studium et apertam veritatis professionem, si quis mortis aliorumve malorum metu ab ea nos conetur abstertere.<sup>85</sup>

(The serpentine prudence pertains to avoiding dangers, while the dove-like simplicity relates to an uncorrupted devotion to piety and an open profession of truth, if someone attempts to deter us from it through fear of death or other evils.)

The exaltation of death in Crell's interpretation is unsurprising, mirroring the harsh realities faced by the Socinians—a persecuted religious minority accustomed to risking their lives for their beliefs. Acknowledging the inhospitable environment surrounding the Socinian church, Crell establishes stringent guidelines for confronting death, delineated in detailed precepts appended to the chapter on courage.<sup>86</sup> The foundational principle posits that the well-being of the community is the paramount good, justifying the sacrifice of one's life for it. This principle is complemented by a form of *ordo caritatis*, implying that sacrificing one's life holds greater value for fellow Christian than for those outside the community. In this context, Crell employs the concept of utility (*utilitas*), advising that when confronted with the dilemma of choosing between two brothers in the faith, preference should be given to the one who is "gloriae divinae et humanae saluti utilior" (more useful for the glory of God and the salvation of men).<sup>87</sup> Their sense of exclusivity, coupled with what may be an undercurrent of apprehension, most vividly encapsulates their stance towards strangers:

Quod ad alienos attinet, ut pro eorum vita temporaria tuam ponas, non est committendum; cum fieri non possit, ut vita hominis a fraternitate nostra alieni gloriae divinae et aliorum saluti, quae res omnibus sunt praeferenda, sit utilior, aut aequae utilis sit, atque tua.<sup>88</sup>

85. Crell, *EA*, 100.

86. Crell, *EA*, 99.

87. Crell, *EA*, 99.

88. Crell, *EA*, 99.

(As for outsiders, putting your own life at stake for their temporary existence is not to be undertaken. Since it cannot happen that the life of a person outside our fraternity is more advantageous for the glory of God and the salvation of others—matters that should be prioritized by all—or equally advantageous as your own.)

*Heroism as a divine attribute: Socinian perspectives on heroic virtue*

Crell elevates the notion of Christian courage to a more exalted status, categorizing it as a heroic or divine virtue (*virtus heroica* or *divina*). While the *Nicomachean Ethics* (7.1, 1145a20) does make reference to this virtue, Aristotle does not delineate specific traits of a heroically virtuous individual, suggesting a relative lack of emphasis on this aspect in his work. Crell's perspective posits that *virtus heroica*, in a general sense, is characterized as a state of moral excellence that empowers individuals to surpass the typical constraints of human nature, emerging in challenging and discomforting circumstances.<sup>89</sup> The primary exemplar is Jesus Christ. To understand Crell's concept of this virtue, it is vital to have a look at its underlying causes, as meticulously outlined by Crell. He methodically classifies the heroic virtue into three distinct groups: (1) coming from practice (*exercitatione, usu, assuetudine*) and learning (*doctrina, sapientia*); (2) coming from nature (*natura*) and divine inspiration (*divini spiriti afflatu*); and (3) coming from mixed causes.<sup>90</sup> The first cause emphasizes the role of Divine Scriptures, but also of secular philosophy, unhesitatingly termed as "humana sapientia" (human wisdom).<sup>91</sup> Crell assigns significance to philosophy (as he did in *Oratio secunda*), especially in acquiring prudence, which he refers to as the "eye of virtue" (*oculus virtutum*). This faculty, in turn, is instrumental in guiding the pursuit of the correct objective.<sup>92</sup> It is discernible that this is another subtle Socinian proposition, indicating that the decision to choose eternal life and embrace Christianity is, in essence, a rational choice guided by ordinary human prudence. Crell identifies individuals possessing this virtue, including not only Christians who excel in it but also pagans, such

89. Crell, *EA*, 182–83.

90. Crell, *EA*, 180–81.

91. Crell, *EA*, 180.

92. Crell, *EA*, 180.

as the philosophers Pythagoras, Socrates, and Aristotle, as well as statesmen such as Aristides, Epaminondas, and Regulus.<sup>93</sup>

However, what is interesting here is that possessing the heroic virtue can also be intrinsic to human nature or given by God (the second cause): “Natura, princeps heroicae virtutis causa est in iis, qui indole generosa et heroica sunt praediti, et nil nisi sublimia spirant, ad eaque magno quodam impetu sponte sua rapiuntur, et omnia impedimenta summa vi perrumpunt” (Nature is the primary factor in the development of heroic virtue in those with a generous and heroic character, breathing only the sublime. They are driven to it spontaneously by a powerful impulse, breaking through all obstacles with unwavering strength).<sup>94</sup> Therefore, in theory, one could posit that an individual might inherently embody moral perfection, showcasing remarkable willpower and confronting challenges independently. This interpretation finds support in the section where Crell discusses the general causes of virtue, attributing significant importance to nature once again.<sup>95</sup> Crell discusses a set of inherent natural inclinations towards virtue, delineating two distinct types. The first kind is universal, inherent in all humans, and stems from reason. Conversely, the second type appears to inject a hint of Pelagian flavour:

Altera est peculiaris et perfectior, quae iis tantum inest qui singulari naturae bonitate sunt praediti, et generosa indoles dicitur; qua qui praediti sunt, eos ad virtutem natos factosque dicimus.<sup>96</sup>

(The second is specific and more perfect, existing only in those who are endowed with exceptional goodness of nature, and it is called noble disposition. Those who possess this are said to be born and made for virtue.)

These perspectives naturally challenge established notions of original sin and cast a shadow on the prevailing understanding of human nature embraced by the magisterial creeds. Nevertheless, Crell extends this perspective by citing

93. Crell, *EA*, 181.

94. Crell, *EA*, 181.

95. Crell, *EA*, 23–24.

96. Crell, *EA*, 24.



Jesus Christ as an exemplar of such inherent virtue, labelling him as “omnis virtutis perfectissimum exemplar” (the perfect example of all virtues):<sup>97</sup>

Potest et alia virtutis heroica tradi divisio, quod ea vel sit excellentia omnium virtutum moralium, vel quarundam, vel unius tantum. Prima illa in Christo omnium perfectissime enituit. Enituit deinde in Apostolis, post Spiritum Sanctum coelitus acceptum. Praeterea in aliis divinis viris ac Christianis, pro ratione status ac conditionis uniuscujusque, nunc clarius nunc obscurius. His adde divinos quosdam viros, sub antiquo Foedere, qui hac virtute inclaruerunt, quantum eius temporis ratio ferebat.<sup>98</sup>

(Another classification of heroic virtue can be given, that it either consists in the excellence of all moral virtues, or of some, or of only one. The first of these shone forth most perfectly in Christ; it then shone in the Apostles after receiving the Holy Spirit from heaven. Furthermore, it manifested itself in other divine men and Christians, more clearly or obscurely, depending on each one's circumstances and condition. Additionally, consider certain divine men under the Old Covenant who became illustrious in this virtue as much as the circumstances of their time allowed.)

Even if we entertain the idea of a certain scale of heroic virtue (though not explicitly stated), it would have likely been a point of contention within mainstream theology for Crell to align Jesus Christ not only with the apostles and other Christians but also with previously mentioned pagans like Aristotle and Regulus. This equating, however, is in line with Socinian theology, which assumed that Jesus died on the cross solely as a human being. For only the suffering of Jesus as a man, devoid of any divine element, held soteriological significance. This appears to be the message Crell aimed to convey to his readers.

### *Socinian perspectives on precepts*

Lastly, it could be fruitful to highlight that Crell's extensive Aristotelian compendium incorporates practical moral directives referred to as “precepts.” Within this framework, we encounter not only customary Christian guidance

97. Crell, *EA*, 182.

98. Crell, *EA*, 182–83.

but also precise recommendations intended to assist students in navigating the intricate terrain of ethical complexities, often referring to distinct Crellian concepts.

However, one example seems especially interesting: it is a precept *on friendship* reported in the fourth book. It states that children under the condition of a hierarchical relationship are forced to obey their parents, but, interestingly, this role could be broken in favour of “more experienced and wiser people”:

In omnibus autem prorsus non tenentur liberi obedire parentibus, sed in iis, quae cum honestate non pugnant. Ac praeterea cum de re agitur, cujus non satis gnari sunt parentes, peritiorum ac prudentiorum iudicium sequi possunt liberi, sed ita, ut quam modestissime a parentum iudicio discedant, non vero ita agant, ut imperitiae parentum illudere vel auctoritatem spernere videantur.<sup>99</sup>

(However, children are not bound to obey their parents in all things, but in those things which do not conflict with honesty. Moreover, when it comes to a matter of which the parents do not know, the children may follow the judgment of more experienced and wiser people, but in such a way as to depart as modestly as possible from the judgement of the parents, but not to act in such a way as to appear to ridicule the inexperience of the parents or to reject their authority.)

It seems possible that the principle of obedience formulated in such a way may have had significant consequences for the original faith of the Academy’s young students and may have been an element that could have encouraged conversion, especially of young adolescents stepping forward in defiance of their parents’ faith. In fact, apart from the conditions of religious persecution sustained by the political authorities, often limits to the conversion were related to families and relatives who did not accept the decision to adopt a new faith. Crell’s words also reflected his own experience, as he came from a Lutheran family where his conversion was never fully accepted.<sup>100</sup>

99. Crell, *EA*, 234.

100. Pastorius, *Vita*, 11: “Non referam nunc, qua animi moderatione, quicquid aerumnarum mutatae religionis causa Juvenis subeundum habuit, pertulerit; omittam alia multa infracti animi specimina, quibus virilis illius aetas effloruit” (I will not now recall with what moderation of spirit he endured the

## Conclusions

An analysis of *Ethica Aristotelica* reveals its dual purpose, combining didactic objectives with subtle religious propaganda. Despite the Socinian commitment to tolerance, as outlined in the school's statutes, there is evidence that subliminal indoctrination was not beyond consideration. This duality is better understood in the socio-political context of the Counter-Reformation's advancement and increased hostility towards Socinianism in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. To navigate this challenging environment, Socinian beliefs were presented in a somewhat veiled form within the framework of Aristotle's authority and Christian corrections to *Nicomachean Ethics*.

A critical aspect of Crell's approach was introducing the shared nature of Jesus Christ with humanity, challenging orthodox views. By adding *natura* as a third cause of virtue, alongside *doctrina* and *exercitatio*, Crell introduced a Pelagian flavour, denying corrupted human nature and original sin. Jesus, in Socinian theology, serves as a human example of heroic virtue achievable by all.

Crell's strategic aim was to meet the identity needs of Socinianism while efficiently spreading the doctrine. The Racovian Academy played a central role in this strategy, aiming to educate individuals observant of Socinianism. This education could potentially exert capillary political influence on society. The multi-confessional nature of the Racovian Academy further supported institutionalization, acting as an instrument for free conversion to Socinianism.

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bitterness he had in his youth, for the sake of his changed religion; I will omit many other examples of the unbreakable spirit with which his adult life flourished).

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