

## Janina Kotarbińska (1901–1997)\*

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In 1995, the Polish philosophical world solemnly celebrated the centenary of the founding of the Lvov-Warsaw School of Philosophy, generally considered one of the most significant movements in contemporary Polish philosophy. Today, we bid farewell to Janina Kotarbińska, who was among the outstanding representatives of this school; her works may be considered as perhaps the purest exemplar of the philosophical style characteristic of that school, and she herself – as a symbol of this glorious tradition of our philosophy.

Born in 1901, she earned her doctorate and habilitation at the University of Warsaw, where she also worked at the philosophical seminar led by Tadeusz Kotarbiński until 1939. After the war, she was a professor and head of the Department of Logic, first at the University of Łódź and then from 1951 to 1972 at the University of Warsaw. I was fortunate to be one of her first students and closest collaborators, so I know how much all those who had the opportunity to listen to her lectures, participate in her seminars, and study her remarkable works owe to her.

Janina Kotarbińska's area of interest encompassed broadly understood logic – logical theory of language and logical theory of science. In this field, she achieved valuable and widely appreciated results (recognized, among others, with the Jurzykowski Foundation Award). Engaging in the main issues discussed in contemporary semantics and methodology, she contributed proposals that were noteworthy in every respect – meticulously balanced and convincingly justified. However, perhaps as valuable as those concrete results is the very model of philosophizing – the model of thinking and writing – that she conveyed to us through those works. Each of these works is the fruit of profound reflection and extraordinary theoretical conscientiousness. Each is characterized by a tremendous responsibility for words,

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conciseness, clarity, and simplicity. We never encounter clichés, showiness, or superficiality. Behind each phrase lies an authentic thought. Through her entire theoretical activity, Janina Kotarbińska taught us scholarly integrity.

Her analytical-critical style of philosophizing was an expression of a general intellectual attitude that can be described as rationalism. It was critical rationalism, free from any dogmatism, and at the same time extremely consistent and universal. It manifested itself not only in the field of theoretical reflection – scientific and philosophical – but encompassed the entirety of Janina Kotarbińska's thoughts and views. We were always astonished by the rationality of her perspective on matters of politics, ideology, and religion – a perspective that was sober, rational, free from any prejudices, extremes, or emotions. While professing and advocating a deeply rationalistic worldview, Janina Kotarbińska safeguarded the intellectual tradition of the Lvov-Warsaw School in the difficult conditions of our post-war reality. By passing on the most precious values of this tradition, she was an unwavering bastion of rational thought – reliable, enlightened and reasonable – in the turbulent history of post-war Polish philosophy. And in this spirit, she educated and raised numerous generations of listeners, students, and collaborators. There are no words today to express our deep gratitude to her for this.

But not only for that. There is something equally important that must be said today. Janina Kotarbińska's view of the world was – as I emphasized – a deeply rationalistic and consequently thoroughly secular view. Well, contrary to what is sometimes claimed about such a possibility, this view and the associated intellectual attitude were, in Janina Kotarbińska's case, accompanied by highly commendable moral convictions and behaviours. The morality represented by Janina Kotarbińska – professed and consistently realized by her – is an incredibly noble morality and highly rigorous in its demands. The moral ideals she professed corresponded to the principles of guardianship ethics and practical realism advocated by Tadeusz Kotarbiński. Particularly close to her was – opposed by Tadeusz Kotarbiński to utilitarianism – the “ethics of mercy”. She remained faithful to these ideals throughout her life.

And it was an exceptionally difficult and tragic life. The early death of her father, which placed the burden of supporting the entire family on her shoulders, followed by the war with all its horrors. Her stay in the ghetto, from which she miraculously managed to escape thanks to the help of friends, her arrest in 1943 and imprisonment at the Pawiak, followed by internment in concentration camps

in Auschwitz and Ravensbruck until liberation. The loss of loved ones – victims of the Holocaust. And finally, in the last period of her life – severe illness and the death of her husband, Tadeusz Kotarbiński, and her own long-term weakness.

This difficult task that life placed before her, Janina Kotarbińska fulfilled in a manner that evokes the highest admiration and respect. She was someone whom one could always rely on, everywhere and at all times. Not only her closest ones, to whom she was deeply attached, but also all those whom fate brought into contact with her, could rely on her: her colleagues and students, her fellow prisoners in the camps, who remained sincerely grateful to her until the end. The Auschwitz Cross was, moreover, the distinction she valued most highly. She was a faithful and devoted companion to Tadeusz Kotarbiński throughout his life, dedicated after his death entirely to the care of his scholarly and ideological legacy. She fulfilled all social functions – be it head of the department or dean's duties – often in difficult conditions, with remarkable conscientiousness and integrity. She was a person of great intellect and great rectitude, with a tremendous sense of responsibility for her words and actions. She was characterized by genuine modesty, yet at the same time, principledness and steadfastness in fundamental matters. She left us all a model of clear and independent thought, as well as a model of a dignified and just life.