

ANNA BROŻEK

TWO PAPERS BY MARIA OSSOWSKA INTRODUCTION

Maria Ossowska was one of the most significant representatives of the Lvov-Warsaw School (LWS), who focused on the sphere of axiology.

She was born as Maria Niedźwiecka on the 26th of January, 1896, in Warsaw. In 1915, she entered the University of Warsaw. Initially, she studied biology and the philosophy of nature but soon she turned to semantics. As a student of Jan Łukasiewicz, Tadeusz Kotarbiński, and Władysław Tatarkiewicz, she was very well trained in logic, all other philosophical disciplines, and the history of philosophy. Very active and hardworking, she soon became a chairwoman of the Scientific Circle of Philosophy Students.

She wrote her Ph.D. dissertation on the ethical system of the Stoics under the supervision of Jan Łukasiewicz (1921). In the academic year 1921/1922 she went for a scholarship to Sorbonne (Paris). During her stay in France, she corresponded with Bertrand Russell and visited him in England. After returning to Warsaw, she got the position of assistant at the University of Warsaw. In 1924, she married Stanisław Ossowski, an aesthetician and sociologist, whom she met during their studies.

She received her habilitation in Warsaw in 1932 on the basis of her works in semantics ("Słowa i myśli" [Words and Thoughts], 1931). After habilitation, she moved her interests to the theory of morality. In 1933, the Ossowskis moved to England for two years. They attended the seminars of Bronisław Malinowski and George E. Moore.

The Ossowskis spent World War II in Warsaw. Since the University of Warsaw was closed by the Germans, who occupied the city from 1939 to 1945, Ossowska opened her underground seminar, which lasted till the summer of 1944. Lectures and exams took place in her apartment. During the war, Ossowska continued her scholarly work, and, at the same time, she supported

Poles of Jewish origin by cooperating with the underground organization “Żegota.”

In the spring of 1944, the Ossowskis left Warsaw, afraid of being arrested. They spent the rest of the war in Legionowo (nearby Warsaw) and Bukowina (a small town in the Tatra Mountains). Their apartment was completely burnt during the Warsaw Uprising, which broke out on August 1, 1944.

After the war, the Ossowskis moved to Łódź, where Ossowska got the chair of the Department of Science of Morality. However, already in 1948, she came back to the University of Warsaw. In 1952, together with her husband, she was removed from the university by the communist government. She returned to the university in 1956. In the years 1956-1962, she also worked at the Polish Academy of Sciences. Active in her late years, in 1960, she delivered a cycle of lectures at Bernard College in Columbia University (New York); seven years later she lectured in Philadelphia.

She died in Warsaw, on August 13, 1974.

In her mature years, Ossowska’s main aim was to establish a new, objective discipline concerning problems of morality. Ossowska was especially interested in *descriptive ethics*, which she considered interdisciplinary. She was convinced that comprehensive studies of morals should include the psychology of morality, the sociology of morality, and the history of morality, as well as methodological and semiotic analyses. As a representative of the LWS, she put a special emphasis on conceptual distinctions and proper justification of theses.

We present here the translations of two papers by Ossowska: “The Model of a Citizen in a Democratic System” and “On the Concept of Dignity.”

It is worth emphasizing that the first version of the paper “The Model of a Citizen in Democratic System” was prepared during WWII and published originally in the conspiracy (Smoła 1983). In 1946, Ossowska published its full version as a booklet. She stresses that her model is a “designed” one — namely, it is not purely descriptive but contains idealizing elements. In fact, the virtues of a citizen listed by Ossowska are numerous, demanding, and rarely exemplified by one person. What is interesting from the perspective of axiology in the LWS, her model contains elements of various axiological areas, from epistemic values (open-mindedness, criticism, intellectual honesty), to social and moral values (ability to cooperate, generosity, civil courage), to aesthetic taste.

The paper “On the Concept of Dignity” is a lecture that Ossowska gave during her jubilee (50 years of scholarly work). In her various analyses of ethical concepts, Ossowska continued the tradition of the LWS, in which conceptual analyses played an essential role. The object of this analysis — the concept of dignity — is perhaps also not accidental. In the historical context of

Ossowska's life, there were numerous examples of depriving people of their dignity (some of these examples are mentioned in the paper). However, in her milieu, Ossowska was considered a positive incarnation of dignity. (She was called "the lady of Polish philosophy" for a reason.) At the beginning of her lecture, Ossowska reveals her own attitude towards scientific work, which was her most important vocation. It is an interesting confession of someone, who, as one of the first women to receive a habilitation at a Polish university and as a devoted thinker and teacher of philosophy, became a personal model for many Polish female scholars.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Smola M. (1983), *Bibliografia prac Marii Ossowskiej* [in:] M. Ossowska, *O człowieku, moralności i nauce: Miscellanea*, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 588-603.