

SUMMARY

The editors of „Etyka” invited us to publish proceedings from the conference held in December 2004 to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of prof. Maria Ossowska’s death. It is a significant decision since prof. Ossowska always stressed that she was not an ethicist but a investigator of morals. In the memory of many people she is present, however, as both a representative of a descriptive science of „moral facts” – a science she considered to be her mission to create – and a moral role model. Maria Ossowska always stressed that the work of ethicists should be itself a subject of sociology of morals. The present publication is a proof that this interest has been reciprocated.

The conference – which was organized by Katedra Socjologii Moralności i Aksjologii Ogólnej Instytutu Stosowanych Nauk Społecznych, Warsaw University – was inspired by the atmosphere surrounding Maria Ossowska which spread over perhaps not particularly wide circles, but circles that reach well beyond the group of her students and people professionally associated with the branch of science she specialized in. This phenomenon is not easy to explain. Perhaps it is a response to the postmodern world which questions the idea of searching for well-justified truths and does not encourage a search for elite role models. Certainly, there are those who do not feel at home in this world. Maria Ossowska, who uncompromisingly and passionately searched for the scientific truth as if it were the highest good for her, drew their attention. Especially that she is remembered as a person of exceptional personal merits. She is therefore a perfect candidate for a role model, particularly for those who value independent thought and do not want to just follow marked routes. It is perhaps the fascination with this exceptional personality that determined a thread of reflection during the conference. At the time she begun her academic career Maria Ossowska had to overcome significant difficulties to win recognition in a men’s world. It was the time when women begun to succeed also in the field of science, although they were rare exceptions. One should stress that entering this man-dominated world, Ossowska did not give up her gender. For those who knew her personally she was not only an exquisite scholar but also a perfectly-mannered lady.

The papers contained in this issue were presented and discussed during the conference. Some contributions have been expanded by their authors. From discussions only those opinions and comments were selected that referred to the

theoretical topics discussed in the conference. I would like to thank Ms. Maria Ofieska – the editor of many works of Maria Ossowska – for her collaboration in the preparations of the articles for publication.

THE IDEA OF THE CONFERENCE

It has been 30 years since Maria Ossowska's death. This fact alone is a sufficient reason to commemorate the scholar who made such significant contributions to Polish science. The organizers of the conference, however, intended more than just to commemorate a great scientist. We believe that Maria Ossowska's legacy is particularly important now. It sometimes happens in the humanities that a scholar's work takes new meanings many years after her death. Maria Ossowska had a rare ability to reconcile personal sensitivity to human problems, and so to moral phenomena, with the stance of a researcher who analyzes them thoroughly. She did that with an admirable independence. It is a difficult and rare ability which is particularly important now, especially in Poland, where independent thought about morals is almost disappearing. I am referring to thought of someone who does not need to look for confirmation of her views to a religious or moral authority. Professor Ossowska was exactly that kind of person. She was an empirical proof – a proof so important now – that independence of moral thought is possible. And that such independence is not a threat to morals but on the contrary: it can make valuable contributions to it. I am convinced that our conference will be a source of reasons for such a conclusion.

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trans. by *Paweł Łuków*