

**Towards a Universal Civilization**

Edited by Józef L. Krakowiak

Magdalena Środa / Jacek Migasiński (eds.)  
**Barbara Skarga in Memoriam**

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## Barbara Skarga in Memoriam



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## Foreword

We hereby hand to the reader a volume devoted to the person and work of Barbara Skarga (1919-2009). She is a unique character in the Polish intellectual and cultural life, but also one virtually unknown abroad, except the meager milieu of her readership in France. Dubbed “the first lady of Polish philosophy” for a good reason, she has contributed to shape not only the Polish philosophy but—since the 1989 transformation, through her teaching—to the style of public debate, too. Her works, in setting the highest standards of philosophical writing, contribute to the achievements of the Polish philosophy not only in the field of history of philosophy and metaphilosophy but also metaphysics. Her disciples and successors, representing different generations of active Polish philosophers, occupy major positions in the current spectrum of Polish philosophy.

To understand the power of Barbara Skarga’s philosophical influence, one needs to understand the two aspects of her philosophical roots: theoretical and moral-existential. The problem areas initiating her philosophy stemmed from the ideas of a group of scholars called “the Warsaw school of historians of ideas” with its flagship names such as Leszek Kołakowski, Bronisław Baczko or Andrzej Walicki. Also the reflection on the philosophy of Aristotle, Husserl, Heidegger and Levinas as well as the history of ethical ideas mark the most important achievements of her work. On the other hand, her output originates from the extraordinary and extremely dramatic events of her life, which give a living testimony to the apparent cliché platitude of “mind over matter.” The philosophical output of Barbara Skarga is thus a proof of continuity and longevity of an important tradition of the 20th-century Polish Philosophy, but it also testifies to a strict connection between a philosophy that yields to no external pressure and to the character of the thinker practicing it.

In recognition of the status enjoyed by Barbara Skarga in the Polish humanities and cultural life, and of the importance of her work, the University of Warsaw—upon a motion of its Senate—resolved in 2008 to ceremonially renew her doctorate, defended in the walls of the university nearly 50 years before. This corresponds to being granted an honorary doctorate, which had already been granted to her by Nicolaus Copernicus University of Toruń in 2000. Both these acts were a symbolic repayment of a moral and intellectual debt incurred by the Polish academic, or, more broadly, civic community throughout the recent decades.

Herein, the reader will find both the documentation of this event, along with biographic information and a synthetic discussion of Barbara Skarga’s writings, and also some selected passages of her works written in various stages of her activity, endorsed for publication by Barbara Skarga herself. The editorial board only wish to hope that the presentation will become the proverbial “window on the world” for the original and crucial fragment of the contemporary Polish philosophy—the writings of Barbara Skarga.

The publishers of the present volume sincerely thank the editors of the periodical “Dialogue and Universalism”—in particular Messrs Janusz Kuczyński and Leszek Krakowiak—for their gracious permission to reprint most of the texts published therein.

*Jacek Migasiński and Magdalena Środa*



# **A ceremony dedicated to the renewal of Professor Barbara Skarga's Ph.D., University of Warsaw, May 19, 2008**

## **Opinion for the Senate of the University of Warsaw on Prof. Barbara Skarga's doctorate renewal**

*Prof. dr hab.\* Władysław Stróżewski*

Professor, habilitated Doctor, Barbara Skarga is the greatest living Polish philosopher. I say this knowing all too well that she will protest. In the book-length interview *Innego końca świata nie będzie* [There Will Be No Other End of the World], she said: "I do not consider myself a philosopher; I only philosophize now and then. When filling in a questionnaire, under 'occupation' I write 'researcher,' or '*professor emeritus* of the Institute,' and that's it. I never write 'philosopher'" (Kraków 2007). And yet, if what it means to be a philosopher is to tackle the most basic issues and attempt to solve them at one's own responsibility, then Barbara Skarga is a philosopher. Is she the most prominent one? It depends on the benchmark applied, and this can be disputed. According to my own criteria, the answer is: yes. "At one's own responsibility" is not to say alone or in isolation. On the contrary, true philosophy was always formed in overt or covert dialogue, in creative continuation, or in protest. Prof. Skarga analyzes various philosophical ideas and systems, ancient and modern, mostly referring to Husserl, Heidegger, and Lévinas. They inspire her, yet in her dialogue she can be their opponent. This way, her philosophizing is in direct contact, but also demonstrates a peculiar sort of tension, with the modern European philosophy, which means it constitutes an integral part of this philosophy. Owing to this, her position within Polish philosophy becomes ever more prominent. Barbara Skarga is not a "purely academic" philosopher. She managed, despite the ghastly experiences of which we all know very well, to study a vast number of philosophical works. Yet, to the same degree, or even more, she is able to draw upon her own often dramatic experiences. This makes her sensitive to the needs and pains of our time and stimulates her to speak about important matters of the present day. She has written great articles for the weekly magazine *Tygodnik Powszechny* and the daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* on issues as important as love, hate, citizenship, freedom, hope, ethics, and politics, which have only partly been published in her book *Człowiek to nie jest piękne zwierzę* [Man Is Not a Beautiful Animal]" (Kraków 2007), whose title probably relates to a deep "Lecture on Man," which is to be found in its contents, all others being about man, too. Prof. Barbara Skarga's philo-

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\* Post-doctoral research, in Polish science, leads to the penultimate degree of "habilitated Doctor" [Polish—"dr hab"] second only to "professor ordinarius" [Polish "profesor zwyczajny"], which is conferred by the President of Poland. Though normally titled "prof.," it is also common to refer to professors proper as "prof. dr hab.,"; translator's note.

sophical inquiries can be divided into two periods. The first is the work which includes issues related to the History of Philosophy. She has devoted much time to French Positivism in particular and has written dissertations e.g. *Comte. Ortodoksja i rewizja w pozytywizmie francuskim* [Comte. Orthodoxy and Revision in French Positivism]; she studied Polish Positivism as well, which resulted in *Narodziny pozytywizmu polskiego (1831–1864)* [The Birth of the Polish Positivism]. Also, together with Anna Hochfeldowa, she wrote a monograph on Polish Positivist philosophical thought in the two volumes of *700 lat myśli polskiej* [700 years of Polish thought], to which we must add *Kłopoty intelektu. Między Comte'm a Bergsonem* [Troubled Intellect. Between Comte and Bergson], and something definitely beyond the Positivist domain, the excellent book *Czas i trwanie. Studia o Bergsonie* [Time and Duration. Studies on Bergson].

There is something else more important here, however. Her historical and philosophical investigations led her to metatheoretical reflection, which found its expression in her book *Granice historyczności* [The Limits of Historicity] (1989). This set the stage for a period of her own philosophical inquiry, which usually concerned the fundamental issues belonging chiefly to metaphysics. Before this, she published significant discoveries in the area of the Philosophy of History, rather than the History of Philosophy. These investigations analyzed the concept and theory of “intellectual formation,” a concept invented and studied by Prof. Barbara Skarga. Intellectual formations are sorts of historical structures that are relatively autonomous, but change with time. They are subject to various influences, and affect the course of history. Within an intellectual formation there are four layers: problems, conceptual categories, rules of sense, and *episteme* (as she rightly put it in her last book, she would prefer to call the latter *doxa*). Each of them is carefully described and analyzed. The last level is particularly important as it brings together the component parts of the previous ones, unifies the formation; the most important is the level of reflection on the period's most fundamental issues, including metaphysical ones.

Metaphysics and its problems now come to the foreground of Barbara Skarga's creative reflection. And again, it is a fundamental reflection starting with the question of what is the meaning of “metaphysics” and the “metaphysical”? In particular, she refers to the study of the sources of metaphysics. The last chapter of her *Kwintet metafizyczny* [The Metaphysical Quintet] (Kraków 2005) is dedicated to it. “Metaphysics used to be like the air spread over the ages; one breathed it, created its variants, enriched with new ideas, or criticized it fervently. Who asked why it was born at all? Merely a few.” In our times, there were two such daring philosophers: Martin Heidegger, and, somewhat marginally, Michael Foucault. The author pays major attention to the proposal offered by Heidegger, whom she refers to most often in many contexts. After Heidegger, she repeats that metaphysics concerns, above all, the mystery of the ‘being of being’ which is contained in the being of a human—*Dasein*—the foundation and source of the metaphysical. “The result of Heidegger's considerations can be concluded in the combination of three phenomena proper to human existence; understanding of being, temporality and the projecting imagination, but all three lead to the acceptance of the finiteness of the human being, which is not some sort of its property, but rather an infinite covert shivering of all that exists. It is finiteness, the fear of death, which constitutes the deepest foundation for metaphysics. One cannot stop at that. He-

idegger's conclusion needs to be enriched with a new existential moment—hope. It reminds one of P. Tillich's idea of the courage of being, whom she does not refer to. The words from the last paragraph of the chapter discussed are crucial: The metaphysical is inscribed in hope, for it is hope that gives us the power to be and enables us to overcome time... We think, create, convinced that there is still time for us, that there will be something of us which survives us, even if it were an illusion. The project, always individual and unique, tends to have its original logic and brings up the question of sense ... The anxiety that fills us then gives rise to the question of what the human being is. Any question about being is of its nature a metaphysical question. What is the conclusion of these dissertations? The metaphysical constitutes the core of our existence. If we were able to destroy the metaphysical *arche* which is inherent in us, what would we become?"

One of man's most important problems is the question of identity. Barbara Skarga first takes up the issue against the backdrop of a broad discourse concerning identity and difference, in one of her earlier books *Tożsamość i różnica. Eseje metafizyczne* [Identity and Difference. Essays on Metaphysics]. The analyses carried out here refer to a number of historical sources: Damascius, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and above all, Heidegger, Lévinas and Bergson. These last three are clearly phenomenological thinkers, and based their work on the original experience of "I," and there are many aspects that surface as a result of these analyses. The purpose here is to reach the essence, the *eidós* of "I," my "mineness," "selfness," i.e., to reach the dynamic identity that constitutes itself in time, which constantly changes not only our present, but our past, too. We treat the past selectively, as a result of—as Ingarden would put it—"time perspectives," emphasizing some events which we consider to be significant, and skipping over others. The concept of difference so deeply analyzed by Heidegger, Lévinas or Derrida, is vitally important here; the differences, inherent in us, and constituting us in a way (important reference to the Hegelian Oneness of Being and Nothing), cannot be absolutized. However: the experience of "selfhood," i.e., identity, the unity of my self, remains inexorable as an experience most original for myself.

An important part of the experience of the human being is time. It is no wonder that Barbara Skarga keeps returning to it, and in the *Metaphysical Quintet* she devotes a large analytical chapter to it. The first authority she appeals to is Plato, with his famous definition of time as a "moving image of the motionless eternity," and as she argues, only against eternity can we understand the mystery of time. Do we not refer to eternity when we say that everything passes, changes and reaches its terminus? This is something other than eternity, which lasts. Time is neither continuous nor linear. It is a sequence of events that can dramatically change its course. And they do, until the ineffable limit which no inquiry into time can explain.

It is impossible to discuss all the issues that have made their way into the major works of Prof. Skarga. Let us only mention that in the *Metaphysical Quintet* we find fascinating reflections on evil, a chapter that specifies the phenomenological understanding of its experience and a thorough analysis of the problems of its source. When it comes to the question of evil, Prof. Skarga refers to the Christian writers, St. Augustine, and to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, who were deeply moved by the question of evil, and which they, in a sense, solved. The question arises why evil has not

been eliminated, after all. It was undertaken by Leibniz and Kant, Lévinas and Hannah Arendt. What is her opinion on this subject? She does not aspire to attain the ultimate answer. She does suggest, however, that it is not rooted in the “I,” but arises between “You” and “I.” “There is plenty of meanness in the social being. We are, then, stuck in an incurable dichotomy which cannot be overcome, a dichotomy between utopian dreams, a desire for brotherhood, the closeness of others, the perfection of social forms (even though it was never given to us), on the one hand, and the stream of viciousness, hate, tragic wars and evil, on the other.” The situation is tragic in the sense that evil never comes true in isolation, but appears in the totality of the universe, which lapses into chaos and insecurity.

The philosophical ideas of Barbara Skarga, concerning many issues and published in a number of books, make a logical coherent whole. The majority of them, for the most part, belong to metaphysics, to its varieties that are oriented towards the question of what man is and the way he is, to the questions that concern man’s life. It is by no accident that Prof. Skarga keeps coming back to the three-question of Kant’s: “What can I know, what should I do, what can I expect?” Her attempts to answer them, constitute the leading idea in all her philosophical effort.

Prof. Skarga does not shy away from expressing her opinions on public issues. For many people in our country, she is one of the very few moral authorities. Her friendship is, for those who have been honored with it, a gift more precious than gold.

Prof. Skarga has achieved excellence, not only in the *bios theoretikos*, but also in her *bios praktikos*. She conducts a great seminar that has produced a number of doctors in philosophy. She played an important part in the establishment of the TKN (Society for Scientific Courses) and later, the TKiPN society for the dissemination and promotion of sciences. During the years 1981–84, she presided over the KNF (Committee for the Philosophical Sciences) at the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN), where I was honored to be a member. As a result of her motion, the *Obraz współczesnej filozofii polskiej* [The State of Contemporary Polish Philosophy] was created, which showed the achievements of Polish philosophy and its researchers in tertiary education, scientific societies, publications, and in philosophical periodicals. The *State...* gave a good account of the philosophy of the period; work was to have been undertaken to continue the report but, unfortunately, it has been abandoned. Another important initiative, luckily implemented by Prof. Skarga, was the organization of a major scientific conference dedicated to rationalism. It was undoubtedly one of the best philosophical conferences ever organized in our country. Let us note that Prof. Skarga was, for many years, the editor-in-chief of the *Ethics* journal. She also suggested the idea for, and produced, the multi-volume publication *Przewodnik po literaturze filozoficznej XX wieku* [A Guide to 20th-Century Philosophical Literature].

I believe that the above is sufficient rationale for the claim I took the liberty of making at the beginning of this text.

Prof. Andrzej Walicki,  
 A Real Member of the Polish Academy of Sciences,  
 Professor Emeritus of the Notre Dame University, Indiana, USA.

I consider it a true honor to have been chosen to render the *output* of Prof. Barbara Skarga, whom I have known and increasingly come to admire over the last half-century.

The works she has authored abound and span a number of disciplines, to which my affinity is variably close. I see in them phases of an evolution of the field of research, one changing into the next, but not in linear continuity. Her intellectual evolution consisted of tackling ever more ambitious problems of an increasing theoretical significance, which were ever closer to European (mainly French and German) philosophical modernity. Her doctoral dissertation, written under the supervision of Prof. Nina Assorodobraj, is a large sound monograph on Polish Pre-Positivism, *Narodziny pozytywizmu polskiego, 1831–1864* [The Birth of Polish Positivism, 1831–1864] (PWN, 1964). It is a pioneering work, and still the fundamental one in the miserably scarce literature on the subject. Its major advantage is the penetration of the whole of the source literature, which is so difficult to get hold of. It was made possible by many years of effort in the Polish Philosophy Bibliography and Documentation Unit of the PAN's IFiS (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology). After receiving the degree, the author dealt with French Positivism in Modern Philosophy Unit of IFiS. During the next decade, however, she had to return to 19th-century Polish philosophy working with Prof. Anna Hochfeldowa on the monumental two-volume anthology, *Filozofia i myśl społeczna w latach 1865–1895* [Philosophy and Social Thought in 1865–1895], as a part of the series *700 lat myśli polskiej* [700 Years of the Polish Thought]. This anthology—a selection of original texts with a lengthy preface and detailed comments—is a true milestone in the research on Polish Positivist thought. Prof. Skarga did not do further research in this field, but there can be no doubt that she did make a permanent contribution to it. In so doing, she had a hand in the History of Polish Philosophy becoming a separate sub-discipline of the History of Philosophy.

Prof. Skarga's work on French Positivism yielded a monograph on Comte, an edition of his *Discourse on the Positive Spirit*, and also her habilitation dissertation, *Orthodoksja i rewizja w pozytywizmie francuskim* [Orthodoxy and Revision in French Positivism] (PWN, 1967). The latter gives evidence of the author's contribution to the accomplishments of the "Warsaw school of the history of ideas," mentioned in the author's bio. Prof. Skarga made very creative use of Bronisław Baczko's suggestion that, in the doctrine under investigation, one ought to focus on its soft spots as sources of its different interpretations; she detached herself from the Comtist scientific agenda to stress the significance of his "religion of Humanity"; despite the stereotypes reinforced by Polish positivism, she precisely placed Comtism in the intellectual ambiance of what in Poland is called the "Romantic Period." Yet, she demonstrated the manner in which it paved the way for the scientific positivism of the latter half of the century. In brief, it is an exemplary monograph within the broad scope of the History of Ideas, close in terms of methodology to the four books of 1964–1965 (by B. Baczko, L. Ko-

łakowski, J. Szacki, and A. Walicki), which are today associated with the period of the final formation and blossoming of the “Warsaw school.” Prof. Skarga’s study of Comtism marked the beginning of a series of works on French philosophy: the monograph-study of Renan (1969), Claude Bernard (1970), the greatly useful anthology *Filozofia francuska XIX wieku* [French Philosophy of the 19th Century] (1979), studies from various years collected in the volumes *Kłopoty intelektu* [Troubled Intellect] (1975), and *Przeszłość i interpretacje* [The Past and Interpretations] (1987), as well as a collection of original and innovative works on Bergson, *Czas i trwanie* [Time and Duration] (1982). Award-winning in France, they show how seminal the investigation of the history of philosophy can be in a “national section,” as it affords both a better understanding of the historical and cultural conditions of philosophy, and a chance to notice and reckon with the national peculiarities of a culture and the way they are manifested in philosophical thought. In the author’s extensive preface to the anthology of French philosophy, we find a convincing rationale for this approach. In her other studies on the subject, particularly the ones on Bergson (treated as a 20th-century philosopher), it is not the socio-cultural analysis that comes to the foreground—it is the theoretical contemplation of the grand and current problems of contemporary philosophy in its European perspective. This evolution makes Prof. Skarga different from the other representatives of the “Warsaw school” (Baczko, Pomian, Walicki), for whom the study of philosophy was a way to understand history (not vice-versa), and who, in institutional terms, spoke of themselves as historians in the 1970s.

According to Prof. Stanisław Borzym, Prof. Skarga’s close collaborator for many years, a decisive step in this direction was another monograph-study, *Granice historyczności* [The Limits of Historicity] of 1989 (see S. Borzym, “Barbara Skarga. Główne wątki filozofii” in id. *Przeszłość dla przyszłości* [The Past for the Future], Warszawa 2003). Along with the three initial studies found in *Przeszłość i interpretacje*, it is probably the most significant Polish contribution to philosophical reflection on the history of philosophy (i.e., the “philosophical history of philosophy,” as Stefan Świeżawski put it), undertaken in direct reference to history of science and the general history of ideas. The author introduces the notion of “intellectual formation,” applying it not only to the history of philosophy and ideology, but to the history of science, too. It enabled her to create an original synthesis of the accomplishments of contemporary theory of science (Kuhn’s paradigm theory), and Gadamer’s and Ricoeur’s hermeneutics; she was able to combine the inspiration coming from Leszek Kołakowski, while making use of the ideas developed by S. Amsterdamski and his historical philosophy-of-science orientation in Polish philosophy. Within each formation, Prof. Skarga distinguishes between four layers, which she describes in detail: problems, categories, sense rules and the supreme *episteme*. The *episteme* is neutral to the division into the real and the unreal, the rational vs. the irrational; operating with this notion is therefore a radical overcoming of rationalism and scientism (of the sort manifested in the book, *O filozofię bać się nie musimy* [We Need Not Worry about Philosophy]). *Episteme* is, in her design, an antidote to a radical historicism that places emphasis on changeability at the expense of identity. At this point, reflection on the history of intellectual culture led her to the metaphysical problem of “identity and difference,” which became the

subject of her later work. This included the book *Tożsamość i różnica* [Identity and Difference] (1997), which won the prestigious Długosz Award.

In this way, Prof. Skarga traversed the path from the history of philosophy, through a philosophical and methodological reflection on intellectual formations, and went on to face the central, and essentially metaphysical, questions of contemporary philosophy on her own. The evolution was aided by her involvement in the design and edition of the five-volume *Przewodnik po literaturze filozoficznej XX wieku* [A Guide to 20th-Century Philosophical Literature] (1994–1997), where various authors (many of them working under her direction) had selected and discussed the most momentous philosophical works of the 20th century.

For the author of this important guide (which notably included not only the western authors, but also the works of a number of Russian and Polish philosophers), Husserl's phenomenology, Heidegger's existentialism and Ricoeur's hermeneutics, but above all, the metaphysical philosophy of totality and difference by Emmanuel Lévinas, proved to be most important. The subsequent books by Barbara Skarga *O filozofię bać się nie musimy* [We Need Not Worry about Philosophy] (1999), *Ślad i obecność* [Evidence and Presence] (2002) and *Kwintet metafizyczny* [The Metaphysical Quintet] (2005), are a philosophical debate with these authors, enriched in a critical reflection on Foucault's Postmodernism or Derrida's Deconstructionism. However, the works also look back at the deep sources of modern philosophy in Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine and the "negative theology" of Dionysius the Areopagite.

A detailed presentation of these works is impossible within the scope of this brief review. As my research interests have never included Heidegger or Lévinas, I cannot competently speak on them.

Speaking in more general terms, Prof. Skarga is a philosopher of comprehensive mediation. I consider this to be an extremely valuable tendency today, when we no longer need polarity, ideas of an "enemy," or an idealization of struggle. What we need is the very mediation, understanding, and consensus, which do not really result from an alleged relativity, but from true respect for other people. In metaphysical terms, it is a mediation between identity and difference, unity (and totality) and plurality, between "me" and "them." Making the first segment of the dichotomies absolute leads to totalitarianism; doing so to the other, provides a rationale for an utter Deconstructionism (commonly referred to as nihilism), best expressed in the popular idea of the "death of man." Thus, in both cases, the victim is man, an individual who wants to remain himself or herself. Barbara Skarga opposes it in the name of neo-humanism, i.e., the kind of humanism that goes back to its Greek, Jewish (stressed by Lévinas), and sure enough, Christian roots, including the apophatic theology of the Areopagite. She sees the return as conditioned by a deep contemplation of the path of development taken by modern philosophy including Deconstructionism, in which she does notice some partial truth.

In her reflection on thought, seen as either moving along a path or going astray, the scholar subjects the illusions of rationalism and scientism to a stinging critique. She considers the deviations of rationalism as more dangerous than those of irrationality. She is radically anti-scientistic, even more so than Castoriadis, whom she charges with an incomplete overcoming of faith in scientific knowledge, the notions of reason



and fact (*O filozofię bać się nie musimy*). After Lévinas, she criticizes the modern culture of immanence, charging it with totalitarian consequences. She rehabilitates metaphysics openly, courageously and directly, but even in the metaphysical sphere she demonstrates caution towards totalistic systems and absolutes. She takes up Lévinas's critique of rationalist monism, seen as supplying justification for the violence that affects the "other" (it is worth noting that the idea is characteristic of some of the 20th-century thinkers of Jewish origin such as Lev Shestov and Isaiah Berlin). At the same time she sets out to defend the identity of "I," and the enduring values of the great tradition of European philosophy—ones dating back to ancient Greece—against total deconstructionism, which seeks to prove that there is nothing in the tangle of life which one could lean against, there is nothing that would provide at least a shadow of truth, rationality and sense" (*Ślad i obecność*) [Evidence and Presence].

In the works born of the last "metaphysical," stage of her intellectual evolution, Prof. Skarga aptly demonstrates the dramatic life of ideas, but she chooses to forgo a systematic exposition (something I, personally, miss). One gets the impression that philosophizing has become her life and that the book has become a kind of intellectual diary. The variety of topics and literary forms (dissertations, articles, and interviews) has given the author the opportunity to show different aspects of her thought in different contexts. It can be generalized that in strictly philosophical works, she represents progressive Conservatism (I consciously borrow the term from August Cieszkowski), which seeks to remain faithful to the great tradition of European philosophy, and thus, to Europe, which was born in ancient Greece, with its nascent philosophy. This Conservatism stresses identity and permanence in a world of plurality and change. The attitude is reinforced by an anti-utopian agenda, stemming from an opposition to experiments that cost humanity all too dearly. At the same time, the scholar postulates that we be constantly alert to particularist traditionalism, calls for openness to new trends of thought; she avoids the language of overt condemnation, as she assumes that contesting one's own heritage is a valuable trait of being European. In ethics, she concentrates on Lévinas's idea of forgiveness, the value of, and a need for, "understanding," made possible by Hermeneutics; she stresses the evangelical quality of Christianity, which provides no room for a legalistic rationale supporting hatred and revenge. In social issues, she clearly leans towards difference, plurality and an "otherness." It is a justified reaction to the totalitarian experience of the 20th century, and in opposition to contemporary identity-politics, which strives to force a nationally-tinged social conformity.

The above explain the professor's strong position on the "temptations of homogeneity," and the anti-liberal crusades in the Polish politics of recent years, including the idea of out-of-court universal screening for suspected Communist secret-service collaborationists of the previous era. She sees it as inconsistent with the tradition of European law (she wrote on this in the collection of articles *Człowiek to nie jest piękne zwierzę* [Man Is Not a Beautiful Animal], Znak 2007).

Prof. Skarga's dossier would be incomplete without a reference to her teaching passion and her ability to gather around herself her former students, now her junior colleagues, forever accompanying her in her intellectual quest.

In conclusion, Prof. Barbara Skarga, rightly dubbed "the first lady of Polish philosophy," has more than deserved her doctorate renewal at the University of Warsaw.



Prof. Jerzy Szacki  
 Professor Emeritus of the University of Warsaw

Prof. Barbara Skarga's accomplishments are great, and all the more impressive, as her biography is far from that of a typical scholar's. Her university studies begun before the war and continued underground during the wartime foreign occupation, could be continued only after a break of more than years, imposed by imprisonment and exile, an exile she returned from in 1955.

Since then she has worked relentlessly, and the fruits of her labors abound in her theses of the history of philosophy and excellent philosophical articles and dissertations. She has taken part in numerous collective research projects organized by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) (for e.g., *700 Years of the Polish Thought*), brought up a new generation of philosophers, and has been an active participant not only in the social life of the philosophical community, but society in general.

She is a prominent scholar and a remarkable voice in Polish public life. Though she shies away from politics, she practices it in her own Aristotelian manner, so to speak, by providing lessons in wisdom and civic virtues with what she does and writes.

I shall refrain from discussing Prof. Skarga's biography, partly on account of the relevant information having already been included in the documentation of the doctorate renewal motion, but also because of a recent publication of a volume with the interviews Katarzyna Janowska and Piotr Mucharski conducted with her. This is, in many respects, her true autobiography (as well as the story of her career: *There Will be No Other End of the World*, Kraków 2007), whose reliability I can be most assured of, and attest to as I have been able to follow her activities for four decades.

I cannot fail to mention the imprisonment and exile when I consider her memoirs, *Po wyzwoleniu* [After Liberation] (1944–1955), first published in Paris (1985) under the pseudonym Wiktoria Kraśniewska (Polish edition 1990; French translation 2000), to be part of Prof. Skarga's *output*. Free from martyrdom, clichés, and any prejudice whatsoever, it is remarkably precise in its description of that reality and exceptionally rich in sociological observations and analyses, the testimony has fallen in incomprehensible oblivion. For its information and literary value, and for the attitude it reveals, indeed, it deserves some mention in its own right.

Since we are speaking of doctoral renewal, we ought to focus on her accomplishments as a doctor of philosophy—a role she has fulfilled since 1961 when she submitted her doctoral dissertation about the birth of Polish positivism for *viva voce*. It was published in 1964, and for anyone researching 19th-century Polish thought, it remains a unique work in the field. In her memoirs, which came out in 2007, she plays it down and calls it boring, which is quite understandable given the contributory character of her work on the rather mediocre philosophy. The work foreshadowed her as a good historian, but not yet the great philosopher she would become. Its main advantage is the considerable erudition resulting from countless library visits, the skill of ordering dispersed historical material, and a propensity for clear exposition.

This was the case regarding several books published in the 1960s, as a part of the series *Myśli i Ludzie* [Ideas and People] (monographs on Comte, Renan, Claude Bernard), or an edition of *Discourse on the Positive Spirit* she prepared for the BKF (Library of the Philosophy Classics). These were excellent and exemplary works, but they did not surpass the historical-philosophical standard. They gave thorough knowledge on the subjects under investigation, but they did not yield new methodological solutions, neither did they present the author's world-view. The noticeable novelty was that the author had now revealed herself as an able researcher of the French thought (her expertise in French philosophy would come to be her distinguishing feature as researcher for years to come, whereas her anthology of 19th-century French philosophy, published in 1978, has remained unequalled since).

Notably, her habilitation dissertation, *Orthodoxy and Revision in French Positivism* (1967), is distinctly resourceful in methodological terms, and foreshadows those works by the author where the essential idea is a general reflection on how the history of philosophy should be done: *Przeszłość i interpretacje. Z warsztatu historyka filozofii*. [The Past and Interpretations. From the Inventory of a Historian of Philosophy] (1987), and *Granice historyczności* [The Limits of Historicity] (1989). These books indicate that the subject can be pursued in such a way as to go beyond a mere reconstruction of the ideas of the prominent classics in their historical context.

The books were a rebellion against historicism, and a return to the grand questions, or simply, to philosophy. A philosophy capable of transcending the epistemological horizon of positivism, to which she had committed her earliest studies, was then becoming the main subject. The breakaway from positivism was marked by the book *The Troubled Intellect—from Comte to Bergson*. This book, published in 1975, filled numerous gaps in the knowledge regarding 19th-Century French Philosophy and signaled a major shift away from facts, towards problems, and away from positivism. She became interested in the anti-positivist breakthrough, and the kind of philosophy that emerged from it. Its first symptom was the volume, *U progu współczesności. Z dziejów doktryn antypozytywistycznych* [At the Gates of Modernity. On the History of Anti-Positivist Doctrines] of 1978, with her preface and notes, the other being *Czas i trwanie* [Time and Duration], a great study on Bergson (1982).

The volume completes a cycle of monograph-studies by Barbara Skarga whose main methodological conclusion would seem to be the book *Granice historyczności* [The Limits of Historicity]—an attempt to answer the fundamental questions any historian of philosophy, conscious of their discipline, must ask themselves. One of these is whether they belong to the clan of historians or whether they are philosophers. In her later works, Prof. Barbara Skarga would choose the latter possibility.

As the initiator and editor of a five-volume guide to the philosophical literature of the 20th century, she once again acted in the capacity of a historian-recorder. But her most important works would be, from this point, in the realm of philosophy proper rather than its history. Moreover, this philosophy would not fear to venture into metaphysics and raise its fundamental questions, adding to those already raised concerning anthropology, ethics, and the very calling of philosophy (about which, in line with the title of her 1999 book, we need not worry). In her response to these questions, Skarga enters into dialogue with post-Heideggerian philosophy, thus indicating her profound

knowledge and propensity for the critical acquisition of modern philosophy. Even so, in this philosophy, what seems to attract her are the elements of a return to the classical tradition rather than any continued destruction (as is the case with the Deconstructionists).

Since this is not my field, I do not dare elaborate on it, but I can confidently say that without her series of books beginning with *Tożsamość i różnica. Eseje metafizyczne* [Identity and Difference. Essays on Metaphysics] (1997), Polish philosophy would now be much poorer. She modestly says in the book-length interview: "I do not consider myself a philosopher; I only philosophize now and then." Nevertheless, it was she who wrote the beautiful *Kwintet metafizyczny* [The Metaphysical Quintet] (2005), and other metaphysical works. She also educated a number of her disciples, among whom one can find very prominent philosophers. Her teaching merits a separate discussion as, barred from university teaching under Communism, she was able to form her own kind of department where a number of independent young people found support and inspiration. In the 1980s, she effectively organized a large-scale scholarship assistance program beyond the structures of the official system. After 1989, she became the source of a creative ferment in Polish philosophical circles. She helped initiate the community's self-assessment and in her new capacity as the President of the KNF Committee for Philosophical Sciences, she vastly contributed to the institution of the supremacy of content-based discussion. Even though her method of doing philosophy arose criticism, nobody can have any doubt that we are dealing with a personality of great proportions, and her accomplishments cannot be ignored. In her works, whatever concerns the ethics of scientific research, or ethics in general, transcends the bounds of any single school, and this is a major field of Prof. Skarga's research.

In an attempt to summarize her output, I would emphasize, on top of ethics: (1) historical and philosophical studies concerning Polish and French Positivism; (2) the monograph on the philosophy of Bergson; (3) her explorations into the methodology of the history of philosophy, including her seminal concept of "intellectual formations"; (4) her attempt to renew metaphysics and a peculiar philosophy of existence; (5) the writing of successful articles; and (6) her autobiographic reflection on an inherent cognitive value.

The author's civic merits, which vouch doctorate renewal, span from her activity in the Vilnius district of the resistance Home Army and the unique underground education system to her well-known appeals for an elevation of the public debate and the quality of political life in the 3rd Republic. As a scholar, Prof. Skarga has kept her doctoral vow throughout.

I, therefore, can have no doubt that the motion to renew her doctorate at the University of Warsaw is supported by irrefutable arguments.

## Laudatio

*Prof. dr. hab. Jacek Migasiński*

Dear Professor,  
Your Magnificence,  
Dear Dean,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor to pay homage to Professor Barbara Skarga and her work, on behalf of our *Alma Mater* academic community on this ceremonial renewal of the doctorate defended here at the University of Warsaw. It is the highest distinction a mother-university can confer on her doctor. The honor is the greater, and the joy the more so, as I can take the liberty to regard myself as the professor's disciple, having for thirty years participated in the unofficial seminar she has conducted. What I will provide is not only a student's praise of his master, but also an opinion shared by both academic and non-academic communities, which has been summarized in the review of Prof. Barbara Skarga's works and life achievements, presented by unquestionable authorities such as the professors Andrzej Walicki, Władysław Stróżewski and Jerzy Szacki. Today's ceremony is, thus, in some way the payment of a debt that our academic community or—more broadly—all of the Professor's readers and audiences have entered into over the last several decades. Our Honorable Doctor is, as we all know, one of the most enlightened figures of Polish, as well as non-Polish, humanities. And her work organically grows from the extraordinary experiences of her own life. Prof. Stróżewski has emphasized this: "Barbara Skarga is not merely an 'academic' philosopher. She managed, despite the ghastly experiences of which we all know very well, to study a vast number of philosophical works. Yet, to the same degree, or even more, she is able to draw upon her own experiences, often dramatic." Prof. Szacki joins in, saying: "Prof. Barbara Skarga's accomplishments are ... all the more impressive as her biography is far from that of a typical [academic] scholar." Allow me to begin the presentation of the great accomplishments of the Doctor, by recalling some biographical facts. She began her studies in 1937, taking a course on electricity at the Warsaw Institute of Technology (at the Warsaw University of Technology), which, after studying three semesters, she changed for humanities at the King Stephen Báthory University of Vilnius, choosing philosophy as her major and mathematics as her minor. When, in December 1939, the university was closed, Barbara Skarga attended the underground seminars of her professors H. Elzenberg, T. Czeżowski, K. Górski, S. Srebrny, and passed all the required exams. She also participated in underground secondary education, and taught Latin and Maths. She was also involved in the insurgence Home Army as a courier, and then the commander of communications of the Vilnius district. She was arrested for this by the Soviet authorities, convicted, and sentenced to ten years in a labor camp in the Soviet Union. Following the completion of this sentence, she was banished to permanent exile in Kazakhstan. She wrote of these years in *Po wyzwoleniu*

[After Liberation] (1944–1955), the first labor-camp account by a woman, first published in Paris (1985) under the pseudonym Wiktoria Kraśniewska (Polish edition 1990; French translation 2000). Prof. Szacki writes this about the book: “Free from martyrdom clichés and any prejudice whatsoever, remarkably precise in its description of that reality, and exceptionally rich in sociological observations and analyses, the testimony has fallen in incomprehensible oblivion. For its information and literary value, and for the attitude it reveals, indeed, it deserves some mention in its own right.”

When, thanks to her family’s efforts and a lucky historical coincidence, Barbara Skarga returned to Poland in 1955, her life’s prospects, despite the beginnings of the “thaw,” did not look bright. This time, life did show its bright side to her, however. She met friendly, or simply reasonable, people at the Polish Academy of Sciences Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, who helped her make her first steps in the profession. In 1957, she obtained her Master of Arts degree in the extramural mode, and started working at the Polish Philosophy Bibliography and Documentation Unit of the PAN’s IFiS (Institute for Philosophy and Sociology). Her doctoral dissertation was written under the supervision of Prof. Nina Assorodobraj (*Narodziny pozytywizmu polskiego, 1831–1864*) [The Birth of Polish Positivism, 1831–1864], whose reviewers were Prof. B. Baczek and Prof. Henryk Markiewicz. In 1962, due to an “inappropriate biography” she was barred from university teaching in the People’s Republic of Poland and she started to work as assistant professor in the Modern History of Philosophy Unit of the Polish Academy of Sciences Institute for Philosophy and Sociology. In 1967, she defended her habilitation thesis: *Orthodoxy and Revision in French Positivism*. In 1975, she was given the title of *professor extraordinarius* [associate professor]. In 1988, the title of *professor ordinarius* [full professor] was conferred to her.

From 1981–1984, during the hard times of the martial law and its direct aftermath, Prof. Skarga was President of the Philosophical Sciences Committee (KNF) of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN). In this capacity, she not only fulfilled her statutory duties, but she also organized an aid campaign for her detained colleagues. She was the founder of the underground TKN (Society for Scientific Courses) later on changed into the TKiPN (Society for Dissemination of and Support for Sciences). She is a regular member of the Polish Academy of Arts (PAU). In 1993–2006, she was the editor-in-chief of *Ethics* journal. In 1995 she was awarded with Order of the White Eagle and became the head of the Order of the White Eagle board, which she resigned from in 2005. In 2000 she received the doctor *honoris causa* title at the Nicolaus Copernicus University of Toruń (UMK). She is a laureate of numerous literary and other awards. In 2007 the French government, in recognition of her merits in the field of promoting French philosophical culture in Poland, granted her the degree of Commander of the National Order of Merit. When the transformation of the 1990s created opportunities for teaching at universities, she gave lectures and seminars, and thus inspired many young students of philosophy and the humanities in general. One can say that through her teaching (subjected to restrictions) and publications, she has shaped views of a large group of active philosophers of several generations and set for them—and for many others—the highest standards in philosophy.

The volume and theoretical value of Barbara Skarga’s work go way beyond this ceremonial presentation. Prof. Stróżewski writes succinctly that “Professor ... Barbara

Skarga is the greatest living Polish philosopher,” while Prof. Walicki states that “Prof. Barbara Skarga is rightly dubbed ‘the first lady of Polish philosophy.’” I will now try to sketch the main problem-framework within which the Professor’s work has grown. In my opinion, five problem areas can be identified in Prof. Barbara Skarga’s work, and they overlap with the chronology of her interests in philosophy. The first area is concerned with research on Polish and French positivism. In her publications, she focused on the historical context of ideas in which Polish positivism came to life and its involvement in national and historiosophical issues, and then extracted its characteristic features. Naturally, the next stage was a return to the founder of positivism, August Comte, and studies on his philosophy. Then it was the time she focused on the debates amongst Comte’s French disciples following the master’s demise. The publication of her research results was an absolute novelty in Poland. The main works of the period include the aforementioned doctoral dissertation, three monographs in the series *Ideas and People* (*Myśli i Ludzie*; Comte—1966, Renan—1969, Claude Bernard—1970), and a monumental two-volume anthology, *Filozofia i myśl społeczna w latach 1865–1895* [Philosophy and Social Thought: 1865–1895] written together with Anna Hochfeldowa as part of the series *700 lat myśli polskiej* [700 Years of the Polish Thought]. Prof. Walicki says: “This anthology—the selection of original texts with a lengthy preface and detailed comments—is a true milestone in the research on the Polish Positivist thought.” Finally, we need to include in the above mentioned stage her work on orthodoxy and revision in the French Positivism, which Prof. Walicki describes as “an exemplary monograph within the broad scope of the History of Ideas, close in terms of methodology to the four books of 1964–1965 (by B. Baczeko, L. Kołakowski, J. Szacki, and A. Walicki), which are today associated with the period of the final formation and blossoming of the ‘Warsaw school.’”

The second stage of her research developed organically out of the first one, and consists of works on topics other than the positivist issues within 19th-century French philosophy. They include deep analyses of French Spiritualism developed by Maine de Biran, as well as Eclecticism, Neo-criticism, various philosophies of reflection and religion. This exploration found its climax in Prof. Skarga’s book on Henri Bergson, whose thought have great influence on her research for years to come. The key publications of this period include a fundamental anthology of 19th century French philosophy (1978), which in Prof. Szacki’s words, still “remains unequalled,” and the books *Kłopoty intelektu. Między Comtem a Bergsonem* [Troubled Intellect. Between Comte and Bergson, 1975], as well as *Czas i trwanie. Studia o Bergsonie* [Time and Duration. Studies on Bergson, 1982]. Prof. Walicki writes that “the works show how seminal the investigation of the history of philosophy can be in a ‘national section’ as it offers both a better understanding of the historical and cultural conditions of philosophy and a chance to expose and analyze national peculiarity of the culture and the way it manifests itself in philosophical thought.”

While during the first two stages of her research career, Prof. Barbara Skarga did an excellent job as a historian of philosophy, the third stage can be said to be the period in which she elaborated her own unique philosophical stance, resulting from her reflections upon the history of philosophy. She developed her own kind of a “metaphilosophy,” which reflects upon the problems of ideological trends that shape a given



period (she calls it “intellectual formations”). It also contemplates the dialectic of “change and permanence,” and some ideas that determine the rhythm of historicity of each period’s intellectual life. In her investigation of the intellectual formation problem, Barbara Skarga analyzed the process of passing from one formation to another, and exposed the issues that anticipated and prepared the emergence and reception of theoretical novelties. She demonstrated that in the midst of changeable discourse, we may find relative stability of the main categories, which warrants that in a given formation some permanent “rules of sense”—the models of rationality—remain the same. Therefore, historicism cannot mean a set of dispersed positions that fall prey to nonsensical changeability; it must have its limits—albeit in different forms—at the fundamental questions of the human existence, that are metaphysical questions. The main works from this period include books *Przeszłość i interpretacje* of 1987, *Granice historyczności* (1989; French translation 1997), and finally, the project and editing of a five-volume Guide to 20th-Century Thought (1994–1997), which was awarded by the *Literatura na Świecie* periodical.

The fourth group of problems which attracted Prof. Skarga’s attention at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s are her works on metaphysics, in which she raises the greatest metaphysical issues, such as the sense of being, the origin of evil, human beings’ place in the world, the legitimacy of transcendence. She confronted philosophical projects, offered by such contemporary thinkers as Heidegger, Lévinas or Derrida, with the theories created by the great thinkers of the past: Plato, Aristotle, Pseudo-Dionysius and Leibniz. This was, however, something more than an interpretation of somebody else’s position. In fact, it was an attempt to work out her own approach to these essential questions of philosophy, an attempt which took into account all of the critiques of “metaphysics,” from the Kantian, scientific understanding of “metaphysics,” to its post-modernist “deconstruction.” Barbara Skarga’s approach to philosophy as seen in these works was open to various types of philosophical reflection. We may find texts where she used the methods of phenomenology and hermeneutics. Prof. Walicki states that: “she represents progressive Conservatism (I consciously borrow the term from August Cieszkowski) which seeks to remain faithful to the great tradition of European philosophy, and thus, to Europe, which was born in ancient Greece, with its nascent philosophy. This Conservatism stresses identity and permanence in a world of plurality and change. The attitude is reinforced by an anti-utopian agenda, stemming from an opposition to experiments that cost humanity all too dearly. At the same time, the scholar postulates that we be constantly alert to particularist traditionalism, calls for openness to new trends of thought; she avoids the language of overt condemnation, as she assumes that contesting one’s own heritage is a valuable trait of being European.” The key works on this subject area include *Tożsamość i różnica* (1991) *Ślad i obecność* (2002) and *Kwintet metafizyczny* (2005).

The fifth problem-area we can distinguish in Prof. Skarga’s work, one constantly permeating her reflection and particularly noticeable over recent years, is the problem of moral and civic issues. It has been analyzed both in articles published in cultural periodicals, in daily press, and in public speeches and in her book-length interview *Innego końca świata nie będzie* (2007). Excerpts from this interview have also been published in her book, *Człowiek to nie jest piękne zwierzę* (2007). In her analysis of