

AD HONOREM STANISŁAW LEM (12. 9. 1921 – 27. 3. 2006)

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EDITORIAL

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The comprehensive, approximately seven-hundred-page encyclopaedia by the German publishing house Metzler entitled *Philosophie - Die Werke aus drei Jahrtausenden* (Pöhlmann, F. et al (eds.) (2016): *Philosophie. Werke aus drei Jahrtausenden*. J. B. Metzler Verlag) includes Stanisław Lem among the authors of the key philosophical works of the three millennia. The work that was chosen by the editors as representative of Lem's philosophical output, and which enabled them to include Lem in the company of philosophers (alphabetically right after Leibniz), was *Summa technologiae*, published in its original language in 1976. The author of the text, introducing the main themes of the *Summa* in the encyclopaedia, justified the choice of this title on the grounds that, unlike his other philosophical works *Philosophia przypadeku* (1968), *Fantastyka i futurologia* (1970), Lem was satisfied with the *Summa technologiae* even in later retrospective reflections on his work. In one of the many interviews concerning this book (dated 1987), Lem explained that in it he was interested in the absolutely improbable. What was probable, as a rule, did not occur. Only what is absolutely improbable happens. He wrote *Summa* precisely because even under these circumstances certain predictions are possible.

Readers of Lem's texts, however, would consider him a philosopher even if philosophical encyclopaedias or dictionaries did not rank him among the canonical authors of his discipline. We might say that Lem the philosopher, who was originally trained as a physician and who made his literary debut in 1946, was generally known as a science fiction author and as a journalist. The reason why we pay attention to him in this special issue of Pro-Fil on the occasion of the centenary of his birth is not only the impressive scope and content of his literary work, but also the reach, which is due to the inventiveness and originality of his philosophical thinking focusing on variously distant futures. Lem was always sceptical about the possibility of credible predictions of the future. Nor did he believe that there were any laws of development in Europe or the world, that it was possible to establish any comprehensive trends of development, because the possibilities of destabilization always exist and are always manifest. He did not think that, given the density of contingencies, it was in fact possible to make credible predictions, and he did not regard futurology as a science. Yet his reflections of the future are precisely what would rightly belong in the canon of the core literature of philosophers, scientists and, better still, politicians. In his reflections, Lem never lost his sense of what is possible, even if it seems unlikely, with respect to the development, functioning, and future of technology and humanity. However, as a sceptic whose illusions about the great future of human society diminished to

a microscopic level as he grew older, he did not lose his humour, which for him was also a figure of cognition.

Lem published more than 40 books, with an approximate print run of 57 million copies, and his books have appeared in more than 700 editions in 57 languages. In one of his many published interviews, Lem mentioned that one of the books that introduced him to the world of science, scientific and philosophical reasoning, and the reflection of phenomena that stimulated his unquenchable curiosity was the publication of *The Internal Constitution of Stars* (Cambridge 1926) by the astrophysicist Arthur Eddington (1882–1944). Eddington was the author who managed to present the then sixteen-year-old Lem with fascinating facts from the world of scientific research in an engaging way. In this case, Eddington showed him how mathematical deduction can be used to describe what the interior of stars contains. I suspect that Lem may have had a similar effect in many areas on later generations of those who came into contact with his books, heroes and stories in an age in which interest can be aroused in the phenomena that science investigates and that stimulate the minds of philosophers. At least for our generation, this was certainly true. However, experienced practitioners and scholars of various disciplines had already found surprising inspiration and very detailed thinking about philosophical and scientific problems in his texts. They were often surprised by what, when and in what context Lem had already envisioned.

The breadth of Lem's interest and the insightfulness and originality of his thinking are illustrated by the contributions of the authors you will encounter in this issue of Pro-Fil. We wish you an inspiring read and hope it might encourage you to return to reading Lem's texts. This will remind you that his texts, animated by memories of his past imaginings of the future, are disturbingly often accurate commentaries on the present and the immediate future.