

Andrzej Łukasik

## STANISŁAW LEM'S PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS, CONCEPTIONS, AND INSPIRATIONS. INTRODUCTION

doi:10.37240/FiN.2022.10.1.2

Stanisław Lem is regarded primarily as a science-fiction writer and futurologist, a visionary for technological societies. In our opinion, he was also a philosopher, and in his fiction and non-fiction works he took up many important philosophical problems. This collection of papers includes part of the results presented and discussed during the symposium “Stanisław Lem’s Philosophical Ideas, Conceptions and Inspirations,” organized by the Institute of Philosophy, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Polish Philosophical Society [Polskie Towarzystwo Filozoficzne], and the journal *Philosophy and Science. Philosophical and Interdisciplinary Studies* [Filozofia i Nauka. Studia filozoficzne i interdyscyplinarne] in Lublin, 18th November 2021 (online). The year 2021 was celebrated in Poland as the “Year of Stanisław Lem;” 18th November was celebrated as the “Word Philosophy Day.” Through our project, we would like to pay tribute to our great thinker. Additionally, we include articles written by Sébastien Doubinsky, Bernd Graefrath, Peter Swirsky, Jan Pleszczyński, Łukasz Kucharczyk, and an extensive analysis the book *Filozoficzny Lem*, edited by Filip Kobiela and Jakub Gołka. We would like to thank all the authors who contributed our project.

1. **Solaris** is undoubtedly the most famous novel written by Lem. The main character of the novel, psychologist Kris Kelvin, is sent to the planet Solaris to find out if it is possible to communicate with the alien ocean that covers almost all its surface. The ocean is very mysterious, and we don’t know whether it is a living and conscious alien entity. “It builds structures called ‘mimoids’ that might or might not have a meaning; it sends ‘guests,’ who might have or might not have a purpose.” Kelvin’s “guest” is Harrey, a doppelganger of his ex-girlfriend, who tragically committed suicide. Kelvin tries to understand what is going on in the space station and tries to understand what messages the ocean sends.

Sébastien Doubinsky in his article *Unspeakable Otherness—an Essay on the Failure of Cognitive and Epistemic Communication Tools in Stanislaw Lem’s Solaris* analyses some philosophical problems regarding the possibility of communication between humans and aliens. In his essay, Doubinsky suggests that “by showing the limits of language as the means to express a satisfying epistemic frame, Lem’s parabola could be seen as an attempt to show the reader the existential limits of our anthropocentrism and scientific hubris.” Some things turn out to be beyond of boundaries of our understanding. “The Solaris Ocean is the embodiment of all the possibilities of human understanding, as well as its ultimate failure.”

2. Bernd Graefrath in his paper *Lem’s Philosophy of Chance in his Fiction and Non-Fiction* analyses the far-reaching role of chance both in gaining knowledge and in explaining the development of cultural norms. Lem has freed himself from human illusions, that the universe was planned as a comfortable home for humans. In his fiction and non-fiction, we find a view of the world that accepts the important role of chance both in biological and cultural evolution. Graefrath discusses the role of chance in the philosophy and sociology of science, cultural norms, and tradition, and claims that “our biological evolution did not aim to produce humans, and this evolution without a designer could just as well have led to other species.”

Especially in Lem’s *Golem XIV*, we find evolutionary Darwinist anthropology, which anticipates the theory of the “selfish gene,” later developed by Richard Dawkins; this is an evolution without a designer. On the other hand, “once a natural intelligence has developed in the struggle for existence, this intelligence can be used to introduce planning and design!”

3. In the paper *The Cassandra Symbol, or How Not to Be a Prophet*, Peter Swirski criticizes futuristic fiction and futurological predictions for a very long time. Giving the example of Crestview Genetics, a company in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where polo riding horses have been cloned, he claims that the “future is already today, although it is a future unanticipated by even the most pedigreed futurologists.” The author notes that most of the predictions such as futurologists like Hugo Gernsback or Herbert George Wells turn out to be inadequate.

What about Lem? It is often said, he was not only a science fiction writer and a philosopher but also a futurologist. He appears to anticipate—albeit under different names—artificial emotion, virtual reality, search engines, nanobots, bionics, e-book readers ... “Should Lem be read, not to say revered, as a futurologist?”—asked Swirski. He answered: “On balance, evidence suggests that in any proper—which is to say scientific—understanding of the term, the answer has to be No.” But what is “scientific futurology”?

4. Paweł Polak and Roman Krzanowski, in the paper *Stanislaw Lem’s Visions of a Technological Future: Toward Philosophy in Technology*, in

contrast with Peter Swirski, maintain that Lem foresaw the future of information technology better than most scientific experts, and his visions of the future information-based societies have proved to be astonishingly accurate. They give the following examples: the Internet, ubiquitous information network, robotics, AI, superintelligence, synthetic poetry ...

Moreover, Lem can be considered as a founder of the concept of *philosophy in technology*, which is a perspective on technology and philosophy that explores the deep implicit philosophical foundations of technology and humanity. The authors focus on Lem's technological prophecies and explore what can they tell us about his philosophy. They maintain that the key to the effectiveness of Lem's vision is his method in which a thought experiment plays a crucial role.

Three of Lem's works have been analysed—*Summa Technologiae*, *Fables for Robots*, and *Cyberiad*—in which he perfected his art of prophecy. Lem uses the scientific convention to explore the relationship between man and technology, our position among other species, and even the existence of God. According to Lem's critical perspective, which is contrary to a naïve interpretation of science and technology, this “does not bring us eternal bliss or new enlightenment.”

The authors point out deep philosophical problems in Lem's thought about technological development and maintain, that “we do not understand the technology we create and cannot foresee all its consequences.” Nowadays, in our information-based societies, questions about the directions of future technologies “take on a unique significance.”

5. Jan Pleszczyński, in the paper *Natural and Technological Ratiomorphism in Communication (in the Context of some Ideas of Lorenz and Lem)* [in Polish: *Naturalny i technologiczny racjomorfizm w komunikacji (w kontekście niektórych idei Lorenza i Lema)*], claims that modern media technologies dominance over the contemporary sphere of intersubjectivity reveals certain phenomena in the human world that did not exist in the pre-Internet epochs. One of them is “technoratiomorphism.” The author uses this term to define “a hybrid operating in accordance with biological ratiomorphic mechanisms and overlapping with technological rationality.” The Author tries to show some of the effects the presence of technoratiomorphism in communication brings to social and individual life. His arguments refer to Konrad Lorenz and evolutionary epistemology, as well as interweaving them with certain themes found in the works of Stanisław Lem.

6. Filip Kobiela, in the article *Betrization and Ethicsphere—Two Literary Concretizations of Lem's Idea of Technology of Ethics* [in Polish: *Betryzacja i etykosfera—dwie literackie konkretyzacje lemowskiej idei technologii etyki*], reconstructs, analyses and compares two of Lem's visions that

concern the application of the future development of science and technology in order to construct an enhanced society. Two concretizations of his idea concerning the technology of ethics are discussed: the *betrization* presented in the novel *Return from the Stars*, and the *ethicsphere*—presented in the novel *Observation on the Spot*.

The author discusses the specifics of Lem's philosophizing, both in terms of its form and content, and identifies its main subject as concerning the problem of the influence of technological development on man, society, and sphere of values. In the "Conclusion," the Author indicates where Lem's considerations figure within the typology of utopia proposed by Bernard Suits.

7. Łukasz Kucharczyk, in the article *The Body and the Universe: On Corporeality in Stanisław Lem's Return from the Stars*, analyses Lem's concept of the Body and the Corporality portrayed in the novel *Return from the Stars*. The protagonist Hall Bregg has returned to the Earth after a journey lasting him 10 years. According to the theory of relativity, the Earth has aged 127 years. Bregg—the stereotype of masculinity—is confronted with a decadent and egalitarian society, which may be referred to as the reunion of masculinity with femininity. Such a storyline allows the multidimensionality of the issue of Corporality to be shown, while the Body itself is an epistemological metaphor of modernism and postmodernism. In addition, the Body is depicted in the *Return from the Stars* as a figure in a mask and a costume. In this context, the problem of aestheticization and old age. Furthermore, the Body in Lem's novel will be also interpreted as part of the Universe—as the boundary between what is temporary and what is infinite and transcendent. The human body will be also put in opposition to the automated body.

8. At the end of the collection of essays, we can find a paper by Andrzej Łukasik, Barbara Dzida, and Tomir Jędrejek entitled *What Did Lem Think Over?* This is an extensive analysis the book (published in Polish) written *Filozoficzny Lem. Wybór tekstów Stanisława Lema i opracowania. Tom 1. Naturalne czy sztuczne? Byt, umysł, twórczość*, edited by Filip Kobiela, and Jakub Gomułka (Wydawnictwo ALEHEIA, Warszawa 2021, p. 555).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR — PhD, habilitation, prof. UMCS, Department of Epistemology and Ontology, Institute of Philosophy, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland.

ORCID: 0000-0001-9939-9135

Email: andrzej.m.lukasik@gmail.com