

## Sociological Struggles for Shattered Mirror of Knowledge

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The attempts that I and Julita Pieńkosz made in our paper which appeared in the first volume of *Roczniki Historii Socjologii* [*Yearbooks of the History of Sociology*], and which aimed at evaluating the condition and possibilities of the history of sociology in Poland, sparked off a debate whose subject was not intended. Radosław Sojak, the author of the first polemical reply, changed the direction of the debate by rephrasing the initial question from “how should the history of sociology be done?” to “what type of history of sociology does sociology under reformation need?,” assuming that selected research methods applied in the sociology of scientific knowledge would remedy the situation (Sojak 2012). We do not see any arguments against using the achievements and guidelines from other sub-disciplines; however, we cannot agree with the statement that the history of sociology is only a type of meta-sociology: a genre of philosophical and social considerations, which does not make any meaningful contributions to advancing the development of research in sociology.

Our 2011 text aimed at showing methods which were in use in the history of sociology for some time, notwithstanding its theoretical, mythological, or ideological involvement. We argued that “making the subject-

matter historical” is necessary, and, from this point of view, we supported contextualism.

Taking into consideration a wider range of sources, historical context and details, as well as being more precise in selecting sources and in asking research questions (which have been missing from “histories of theories”), are the conditions which need to be met in order to make the knowledge about the subject-matter more objective and give it a chance to distance itself from contemporary arguments.

From the point of view of the sociology of scientific knowledge, such an approach is unacceptable because it is utopian (in the case of contextualism). In this context, Sojak argues that the presentistic model of the history of sociology is “the lesser of two evils,” which, in his view, at least preserves the *status quo* of history by closing the chapters of its story (similarly to closing the “black boxes” of knowledge) without being overly critical. This, in turn, allows other sociologists who do not deal with history to focus on the future discoveries.

Owing to that, the integrity of sociology itself is preserved, which seems to be the most important aim for Sojak, because for him, the condition of the entire discipline, which is not fully epistemically developed, remains a concern. Its hermeneutic and uncertain existence, in Sojak’s opinion, is threatened because of the hard-hitting and secessionist ambitions of the history of sociology (Sojak 2012: 26–29).

We do not agree with this statement. We do not think that sociology is threatened in any way by writing about its history, and hence we should take care of the integrity of the discipline in advance, which can be achieved by connecting these two fields by refined categories of the sociology of knowledge. This is supported by the fact that sociologists have for decades independently conducted meta-sociological discussions about the condition and possibilities of their discipline, in which they have also used fragments from the history of sociology. Secondly, it is difficult to imagine a scientific discipline which is completely disjointed from its history and, contrary to what Sojak thinks (2012: 28), it is the representatives of exact sciences who have the most comprehensive knowledge about the history of their discipline. The best histories of physics are not written by practitioners, but by professional historians who know the discipline to such a degree that they can elucidate it. From this point of view, the historiography of the history of sociology is unique even in comparison with psychology or economics because, in most cases, it is the product of practitioners who devote their time to it, usually when they finish their sociological career. However, this does not mean they apply sociological tools to their research. In consequence, the history of sociology still remains a *terra incognita*, and, as a consequence, the identity of the discipline suffers (Sica 2006).

A solution to this “fascinating problem,” as Sojak puts it, illustrated with the following question: “how to conduct research into the history of sociology while remaining a sociologist, but at the same time being outside my own context?,” can come true in the form of specific research and theoretical questions we are still waiting for. Sojak’s skepticism towards the benefits of objective history of science is understandable. This is so because the stance of the sociology of knowledge breaks off the discussion on the essence of the history of thought, including the sources of its dynamics, by assuming a nearly complete disjunction of creating knowledge from any type of agency or direction. There are no unambiguous and causative paths for the development of knowledge. This assumption is typical for post-modern followers of precursors of sociologists of knowledge, such as Scheler or Mannheim, for whom the fact that the paths of scientific considerations are not determined but changeable makes it impossible to unambiguously define the sources of scientific creativity.

Thus, history becomes a tool for auto-reflection, and its image is a constant epistemological revolution, with a special reference to (political) conflict (Collins 1998: 11-13). Such a pessimistic image of the possibilities of history, which we owe to the failure of explanations which take into consideration only ideological factors, caused the pursuit of non-intellectual sources of ideas in material evidence from laboratory practices. However, it does not have to constitute a reason for refuting attempts at systematic, historical and sociological research of the history of science, and especially of sociology.

Still, we should appreciate Sojak’s concern for the strategic place of sociology among other contemporary social sciences. Nevertheless, I would like to emphasise that abandoning historical investigation into any type of scientific activity or directing it according to the current needs, despite the possibility of bringing short-term benefits for science as an institution, may in the long run lead to unintended side-effects.

One result of “the lack of history” of a discipline is not appreciating classical evolutionism in sociology. Both the current and the historical interpretation of Charles Darwin’s or Herbert Spencer’s achievements have never been successful. The fathers of sociology, the likes of Durkheim and his students, can be excused by their lack of an appropriate temporal perspective or inherently cultural or ideological obstacles. However, their attitude towards the rudimentary evolutionary claims ingrained a lack of trust in sociology towards suggestions about a link between humans and their products or humans and animals. Although Durkheim included in his works some arguments in favour of discovering social facts in architecture, transport routes or technology on par with language, law and customs, they turned out to be too weak. Next generations of sociologists until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century accepted the division between

the world of humans and objects, or the world of humans and animals, together with a critique of evolutionism, which solidified the anthropocentric image of the social world. In the end, several turns and paradigm shifts were necessary in other sciences so that the issues of the social meaning of habits or artifacts could return. Clearly, this empirical area was then, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, already occupied by sociobiology, social psychology, and currently by cognitive sciences.

Jean-Claude Kaufmann remarked that this is the result of two or three lost opportunities for reading Darwin, the lack of basic knowledge of his works, and the intellectual context of their emergence, and, above all, ignorance of his intentions and recipients of his publications. The lack of a reliable history did not serve sociology at all. Currently, sociology proceeds to study basic processes in the formation of a society and an individual from a much more disadvantaged position than cognitive sciences (Kaufmann 2004: 23-26).

Coming back to the discussion, I would like to emphasise my own and Pieńkosz's position from a few years ago, when we were accused of naivety and methodological takeover, which probably resulted from not delivering our ideas clearly. In fact, it does not contain anything radically new since at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s a small group of historians of social sciences decided to break with the conventional history of ideas. Robert A. Jones was one of them. He presented recommendations for historians of sociology who should examine history at the expense of systematics, combine the skills of a historian and the skills of a sociologist, take the study of the past as a value in itself, understand the study of the past by identifying the original recipients of historical artifacts of science—statements, texts, books, speeches. We have presented this position before (Pieńkosz and Dominiak 2011: 23), and by repeating it now, we would be more cautious with using the concept of “context.”

Contrary to the fears of the sides of the discussion, it is not about the assessment postulating the only and objective past in a given historiographic form. The “truly historical” history of sociology means, first of all, taking into account the crucial dynamics of the temporal sequence of events because the history of sociological or social thought is often presented as an atemporal set of assertions and categories distinguished not as part of the historical and social process, but as a “classical theory.”

The next important step on the way to a greater materialisation of the history of sociology would be the application of research questions, assertions and assumptions of sociology itself. Initially, one could take into account very basic, common research perspectives, to check which specific groups we are dealing with, what their internal structure is, what their social structure is, what forms of interaction patterns they create, what their interests are, what subgroups they form, and how they differ from other scholars and/or intellectuals. This

set of questions, acceptable by many sociologists, draws attention to sociological phenomena which have been omitted in the history of its theory, i.e. interactions, institutions, inequalities, power, legitimisation, relations with the environment, the exchange or strengthening of knowledge (Fleck 2008) .

The indication of the neglected empirical domains, such as social engineering evoked by Sojak, is very useful; however, at the same time, it makes a selected portion of history subject to evaluation because it is assumed that practical and interventionist actions of social scientists are a “good” and “desirable” contribution to various types of reformist operations. This kind of approach is the expression of a pragmatic desire to turn the history of science into a practical discipline which would facilitate a social or a sociological reform. It is the way of relating to the past, which distorts its image, leading to presenting only its most useful topics, at least from today’s perspective. Together with Julita Pieńkosz, we tried to point out that this leads to an evaluative and simplified history of the discipline, limited to its “major achievements” being presented in an ascending order towards this day. A modest and basic assumption a historian of science makes, should remind us that we do not know whether the events were “good” or “bad,” “useful” or “harmful” before we know their consequences or side-effects.

This should not be the role of a historian of science, particularly in case of sociology. We do not think that it would involve seeking “high” examples of doing science, thereby merging with the sociology of scientific knowledge. What seems more important is the fact that there is still a lack of synthetic and comprehensive descriptions of specific historical and social processes sociologists have been a part of. On the other hand, it is optimistic that due to some detailed archival research (e.g. Winclawski 2001-2014; Hübner 2013), we have empirical material that allows us to examine what is known and to verify this knowledge in the domain of social sciences.

Summarising, in my opinion Jarosław Kiliński (2013) is right. In the course of the discussion, he stated that the answers to the text confirm the diagnosis sketched by Pieńkosz and myself: it is nothing new for sociology being indifferent to attempts to make its past historical or sociological. However, linking the history of sociology with the sociology of scientific knowledge seems obvious because they are similar in terms of the development of social sciences—sociology which departed from philosophy at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the sociology of knowledge which did the same in the 1920s and 1930s. The relationship between different varieties of sociology and philosophy is unquestionable and became ubiquitous together with the professionalisation of the former (Collins 2005). However, this does not make sociologists more susceptible to impractical metaphysical speculations, and that therefore the latest type of the sociology of scientific knowledge should be universally applied.

Perhaps the sociology of scientific knowledge and the history of sociology, with different conceptual framework and theoretical tradition, are not predestined to form a common sub-discipline. Perhaps they are just competing disciplines, as in the history of science competition is a completely normal phenomenon. There are many indications that the sociology of scientific knowledge has more sophisticated theoretical models which, being developed on the basis of methods of sciences, are inadequate to the subject of research of scholars both working in social sciences and in humanities.

*Translated by Monika Boruta-Żywiczyńska.*

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#### *Abstract*

Author defends his stance, which assumes separating research fields of sociology of knowledge and history of sociology. He gives an example of the history of evolutionary ideas which recognized as non-canonical contributed to that sociology abandoned some important research areas. In what follows, he postulates further objectivization of knowledge about the history of sociology and rejects the universalist arguments used in the sociology of scientific knowledge.

*Keywords:* history of sociology, sociology of scientific knowledge.