

The History of Sociology in Poland. Assessing the Current State of Affairs

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This paper was written with two aims in mind. On the one hand, we wanted to determine the degree to which the history of sociology is a part of Polish sociology as a whole; on the other, we wanted to establish how research within the history of sociology is conducted. To determine the degree, we conducted a quantitative assessment of the condition of the history of sociology in Poland, which constitutes the first part of our paper. In order to measure research activity, we took into consideration several areas, namely: scientific journals, anthologies of source texts, and the number of institutes and departments at universities which study or teach the history of sociology.

Scientific journals are the aspect of institutionalisation of a given science which can be used in order to determine the level of activity in various disciplines. What was most important for us was to capture how the interest in the history of sociology looks like compared with other sociological topics and how scholars write about the subject. To achieve this end, we conducted an analysis of sociological journals which accept submissions in Polish. We excluded all journals dealing explicitly with the history of sociology, as well as the ones not written in Polish. As a result, the analysis included 74 issues of *Studia Socjologiczne*, 40 issues of *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, and 30 issues of *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, which were published between 1989 and 2008, and which were written on the history of sociology. We did not include texts which addressed the issue of the history of social thought. In choosing the articles, we considered their titles, headings, context, the circumstances in which they were produced, whether the texts addressed the issues connected with the works of classics, their biography, the context in which they worked, and whether they attempted to

establish the theoretical and methodological framework for studying the history of sociology.

We analysed 1,426 papers, including 739 from *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* (KiS), 343 from *Studia Socjologiczne* (SS), and 344 from *Przegląd Socjologiczny* (PS), as well as 636 reviews, of which 339 from KiS, 224 from SS, and 74 from PS. From all the analysed papers, only 27 addressed issues connected with the history of sociology, and only 25 publications reviewed books on the history of sociology. The largest number of papers on the history of sociology (14) could be found in *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*. This journal also published the largest number of reviews of books on the history of sociology (14). *Studia Socjologiczne* featured 14 articles and 10 reviews on the history of sociology. In the period which we chose for the analysis, only 1 article and 1 review addressed the topic of the history of sociology in *Przegląd Socjologiczny*. However, it should be noted that since 2002 Włodzimierz Winclawski has published “Excerpts from the Calendar of Polish Sociology” in *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, where he mentioned these events in Polish sociology which had the greatest influence on the development of the discipline. Certainly, these materials indicate that sociology is open to its past; they also constitute a valuable source of facts from Polish sociology, which are very rarely mentioned in coursebooks on the history of sociology. It is a rich empirical material, which in the future can be a starting point for many analyses of the history of sociology in Poland. However, we did not include these publications in our juxtaposition.

Table 1. A juxtaposition of the total number of papers and reviews with the number of articles and reviews concerning the history of sociology (HoS).

	Total number of papers	Papers on HoS	Total number of reviews	Reviews concerning HoS
<i>Studia Socjologiczne</i>	343 (100%)	12 (3.5%)	224 (100%)	10 (4.5%)
<i>Kultura i Społeczeństwo</i>	739 (100%)	14 (1.9%)	338 (100%)	14 (4.1%)
<i>Przegląd Socjologiczny</i>	344 (100%)	1 (0.3%)	74 (100%)	1 (1.4%)
Total	1426 (100%)	27 (1.9%)	636 (100%)	25 (3.9%)

An overview of sociological journals produced two outcomes. Firstly, it made it possible to determine the condition of the history of sociology with the use of quantitative methods. Secondly, it helped to indicate the main areas of interest within the history of sociology, therefore answering the question about the narrative methods and most popular topics—and thinkers—in the history of sociology.

Authors of articles on the history of sociology most often chose to write about the classic thinkers of Polish sociological thought, such as Józef Chałasiński, Stanisław Ossowski, Florian Znaniecki, and Bronisław Malinowski. They opted for Ludwik Górski and Feliks Gross less frequently. Most of these works were purely historical: they were written either to celebrate some occasion or to commemorate an important figure. In turn, the authors wrote about such international classics as Max Weber and Emil Durkheim. These works on the history of sociology are focused on sociological authorities, whose timelessness has to be emphasised time and time again. Analyses of Georg Simmel's works have been conducted in a similar fashion for some time now. Apart from one text on Harriet Martineau, which appeared in *Studia Socjologiczne*, there are no other papers which analyse the works of less-known sociological figures. However, considering that there are so few articles on the Polish history of sociology, it is unsurprising that there are few texts on the history of sociology of other countries. We found only three works on the classics of Czech sociology, all of them written by Jarosław Kiliński.

A major part of the articles mentioned in the paragraph above approaches the classics' works without taking into consideration the historical, biographic, or social context in which these works were created, at the same time expecting that they will solve contemporary problems. Hence, the articles include remarks about whether these ideas are up-to-date and whether they can be used in contemporary research into social problems; these articles are also comparisons of works of classics with more contemporary ideas which test their usefulness from the perspective of contemporary theoretical problems. Such a way of presenting the history of the discipline contributes to extending knowledge about the intellectual heritage, but it does not tell us much about the cultural context in which these ideas were created. In their texts on classic thinkers of sociology, few authors took into consideration the context in which given ideas originated, i.e. the social and economic conditions of a given period, and the legal, institutional, or biographic issues which determine the creative processes.

Another problem that the history of sociology in Poland faces is the lack of discussions on methodological guidelines for research in the history of sociology. In the sociological journals we analysed, we did not find a single text which would address the problem of conducting research in the history of

sociology, its critical evaluation, or suggestions what a historian of sociology should know. It is an area which researchers of the history of sociology omit.

Synthetic approaches to the content of a given discipline constitute another element of the discipline's scientific, institutional, and didactic potential. Their character is determined by the range and intensity of research conducted by sociologists. There are only three textbooks on the history of sociology in Poland (Korte 2003, Ritzer 2004, Szacki 2001), with the last one dominating both university syllabuses and scientific texts, as well as constituting an authoritative point of reference for other disciplines of social sciences.

Notwithstanding the qualities of Szacki's fundamental work, *Historia myśli socjologicznej (History of Sociological Thought)*, it must be noted that—apart from being a compendium—it also shows that Szacki's methodology was ambiguous and that the textbook reinforces the presentist approach to the history of sociology. George Ritzer's textbook also takes into consideration only few historic assumptions in the history of sociology. Indeed, the author consistently models the picture of classic theories in order to lay out his own metatheoretical perspective, which he reveals at the end of the textbook. Bibliographical information that we can find in the book, containing some interesting and important historical details, make it possible to imagine the historical context in which a given thinker created his works, but they nevertheless are only Mertonian “ornaments.” The title of Hermann Korte's work, on the other hand, as the only one among the three books, contains the phrase “history of sociology.” The book can be said to be leaning towards the so-called contextualism. Although the author does not fulfil all the promises he makes in the introduction to his work, we can see that he believes that research into sociology should consider “the context of social development” (Korte 2003: 10).

The anthologies of source texts published in Poland (Kucia & Sztompka (eds.) 2006; Śpiewak (ed.) 2006; Furier (ed.) 2002) are used in teaching. As collections of texts, they constitute an important means of disseminating the theoretical heritage of sociology; however, they also express the preference of the editors and as such are not introductions to history. The anthology edited by J. Szacki entitled *Sto lat socjologii polskiej. Od Supińskiego do Szczepańskiego (A Hundred Years of Polish Sociology. From Supiński to Szczepański)* is immensely valuable. Both this publication and Włodzimierz Winclawski's *Słownik biograficzny (Biographical Glossary)* constitute the very best foundation to develop a synthetic history of Polish sociology.

We are aware of the fact that the basic function of anthologies is to introduce young adepts of sociology to work with texts. However, at the same time, they contribute to creating an image of the history of sociology in its fragmented and arbitrary form.

It should be emphasised that the Polish sociologist has an access to a large number of translations which are considered classics. Such series as “Myśli i Ludzie,” “Biblioteka Myśli Socjologicznej” and “Biblioteka Socjologiczna” ensure a constant flow of new translations. This considerable supply of works of classic thinkers, however, is not reflected in the quality or the number of historical syntheses. Summing up, teaching the history of sociology is dominated by the propaedeutic function. As such, it does not realise any scientific ambitions (Śpiewak 2007).

We would also like to turn our attention to the institutional aspect of the development of the history of sociology in Poland. Among 16 universities in Poland, only six have established “historical” departments which have “the history of sociology” or “the history of social thought” in their name. These are Zakład Historii Socjologii at Adam Mickiewicz University, Zakład Historii Socjologii i Badań nad Wielokulturowością at University of Szczecin, Zakład Socjologii Ogólnej i Historii Socjologii at Nicolaus Copernicus University, and Zakład Myśli Społecznej at University of Warsaw.

Of course, this data does not provide the full picture because scholars who study the history of sociology also work at university departments which have other names and scientific profiles. However, this situation does not foster the development or teaching of the discipline, especially, as Jerzy Szacki remarks, “the average sociologist has a superficial knowledge of the history of their discipline and does not consider that learning about its past would enrich their theoretical awareness” (Szacki 1991c: 21). In the majority of cases, the history of sociology is taught by people who study a completely different branch.

An analysis of topics of PhD theses and habilitations, conducted by Sojak and Wincenty, revealed that out of 459 PhD theses written in the period between 1989–2000 none addressed the topic of (broadly construed) history of sociological thought or history of sociology. The situation is better in the case of habilitations because 5 out of 184 dissertations addressed the problem of the history of sociological thought (Sojak & Wincenty 2005: 166). In the period between 1992–2005, only two MA theses written on the history of sociology were awarded the prestigious Florian Znaniecki Prize. The Section of the History of Sociology of the Polish Sociological Association, established in 1995, brings together 65 members, but its meetings attract few participants. The section does not have a website, which could be used to disseminate information about the Section’s activity. The institution’s activity, which can be seen mainly during congresses of the Polish Sociological Association, is focused on the reception and the influence of Polish sociology on the international sociology and *vice-versa*. Defining the field in this way limits the scope of research to comparative studies.

Concerning teaching the history of sociology, to assess its state we studied course syllabuses at different universities (14 syllabuses from 7 universities). We analysed the names of the courses, their aims, teaching methods (emphasis on theory, context), as well as considered classic thinkers whose works are taught most often.

Having analysed the syllabuses of courses in the history of sociology, we observed that the taxonomy and history of the discipline are confused. It is clearly visible in the very names of the subjects. Depending on the institution, students attend such courses as “Classic Sociological Theories,” “The History of Sociology,” “The History of Sociological and Social Thought,” or “Classic and Contemporary Sociological Theories.” If we take a closer look at the basic aims of the courses, we will see that they are aimed at systematising pre-sociological thought and “early sociology” and at showing their value to the contemporary discussion in social sciences, but most importantly, they are aimed at teaching the classic theories, which influenced the development of sociological thought. According to authors of some courses, it is “not only important for the development of knowledge and seeking truth, but also for building the identity of sociology.” It is yet another erroneous consequence of the belief that it is necessary to rehabilitate the classic thinkers for sociology, so that their outdated theories can contribute to the accumulation of sociological theory. Presenting the history of sociology in such a way does not have much to do with “the truly historical history of sociology.” Although some course authors enumerate “the reconstruction of the theoretical and historical contexts of the origins of sociological theory and methodology” among the aims of the course, when compared with the literature recommended to students, it becomes clear that this aim is not fulfilled. It is impossible to systematically analyse the origins of ideas in a given historical context if we take into consideration only textbooks and selected classic texts, without using information from secondary sources, such as diaries, letters, analyses of journals, the institutionalised organisation of science, the dependence of science on political field, and others. Despite the fact that they would help the student to understand the historical context in which given ideas were created or how they functioned at that time, we will not find these types of source texts or publications in recommended readings lists.

There are several reasons why the history of sociology is taught this way, ranging from the fact that it is often not taught by historians of sociology, to the fact that certain contents of curricula are imposed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, which requires that basic courses should teach about the history of sociological and social thought. It follows from the Ministry’s recommendation that courses should teach about the past proto-sociological and sociological theories (sociological positivism, historical sociology, sociocultural

evolution, Marxism, psychoanalysis, humanistic sociology, antinaturalism) so that it is “possible to see the theoretical disputes held in contemporary sociology” (this fragment can be found on the Ministry of Science and Higher Education’s website).

Summing up, it can be said that the studies into the past of sociology constitute a small margin among other scientific interests of Polish sociologists, and considerations over the history of sociology are often flawed. Why is that so? We think we should look for the reason of this problem in the lack of a consistent methodology of this discipline and the lack of a broader reference to the methods of understanding the history of sociology, which was a subject of discussion in the West in the 1970s and 1980s. Until now, the history of sociology, not only in Poland, has not dealt with confusing theoretical taxonomy with the history of sociology.

Theoretical and methodological foundations of the history of sociology in Poland

Jerzy Szacki, a distinguished Polish historian of ideas, addressed the problem of theoretical and methodological recommendations for Polish historians of sociology. It should be noted that Szacki’s opinion in the debate on studying the history of sociology in Poland is decisive, but it is also one of few opinions, which means that it is blindly accepted. Under these circumstances, it is worth having a closer look at his views on the methods and sense of the discipline he practised.

In the introduction to the Polish edition of *Social Thought from Lore to Science* (Polish edition: 1964), Szacki saw “the underdevelopment of the history of social thought” and the fact that sociologists are unable to write about the history of their discipline with the use of sociological methods. As a result, according to him, “genealogical” works are created, whose main purpose is identifying and self-determining particular researchers and their groups. As a result, Szacki states, there is a gap between empirical and theoretical sociology, which confuses empiricists in collecting facts. This leads to stating that theory is a vital part of sociology, which in turn leads to stating that studying its history is vital. According to Szacki, there are no such researchers (or, more broadly, authors) who would question the fact that the knowledge of heritage is essential, but at the same time there are few people who believe that the history of ideas should exist as an independent, specialised subdiscipline. In Szacki’s view, the problem of studying the history of social thought involves solving two questions. First of all, (1) to what degree it can be deemed a social science, and (2) to what extent its results

can be considered important for sociologists (Szacki 1964: 13-16). Szacki answers that the history of social thought must be related to sociology because otherwise, without taking the historical perspective, the collection of statements about it would remain a collection of unrelated messages (Szacki 1964: 18). The second issue—the utility of the history of social thought—consists in “questioning the division of labour established in humanities by research practice;” hence, a historian of thought, working across many disciplines, has to remind their representatives that all of them deal with different aspects of a single historical process (Szacki 1964: 29). This function, which Szacki distinguishes at the beginning of his work, would consist of supplying examples of durability of certain conceptions, systems of values, and analyses from the sociology of knowledge because the history of ideas is a part of the processes of producing ideas. In short, it is about supplying classic models to societies which are ready to use them in developing their own theories (Szacki 1964: 30-31).

We shall call this perspective of writing about the history of ideas Marxist, whose basic principles are: (1) that knowledge changes with the change of the social contexts and particular social situations, and (2) that this knowledge, in order to be relevant at a given point in time, must be beneficial for the vision of society and historical process (Szacki 1964: 32). Szacki developed this perspective in his later works, in which he recommended that a historian of ideas should not only systematise historical material and classify historical ideas, but also show the logically possible means of theorising (Szacki 1975: 20). Hence, it can be seen that Szacki wishes that a historian should be first and foremost a theoretician who would deliver a number of stances and models for contemporary theoretical disputes (Szacki 1975: 12).

In the introduction to the first edition of *History of Sociological Thought*, Szacki recapped and developed the assumptions of the Marxist perspective on the history of sociology. These are (1) pragmatism, which assumes the usefulness of the “permanent motifs”—models (Szacki 1981: 14), and (2) contextualism, which assumes that ideas should be understood as expressions of social and historical forces (Szacki 1981: 26). Szacki first formulated these assumptions 20 years ago. His development involves replacing the history of ideas (the history of social thought) with the history of sociology, with the latter divided into three categories (this division was based on the analogous scheme postulated by J. Schumpeter in the history of economics): the history of sociology, the history of sociological thought, and the history of sociological analysis (Szacki 1981: 19).

Szacki returned to the problem regarding the identity of a historian of ideas in three articles published in the volume *Dylematy historiografii i idei oraz inne szkice i studia* (*Dilemmas of History of Ideas and Other Sketches and Studies*) (Szacki 1991a, b, c). In the first one, Szacki states that a historian of

ideas is inevitably involved in the problems of his ambiguous identity because it is unknown whether she or he is more of a “historian reconstructing past events” or rather a “guardian of the myths that are still alive.” This dichotomy remains unresolved. A historian of ideas should fulfil the roles of both: a historian and a mythologist, emphasizing the latter aspect of his work. According to Szacki, this “duality of the role” is connected with conflicting expectations towards a historian of ideas: formulating a contextual description and creating a timeless “classic space for dispute over eternal ideas.”

The article mentioned above summarizes the arguments of “contextualism” and “presentism” (proponents of the first perceive the researchers of the past as “facts,” whereas the others call them “colleagues,” partners in their theoretical discussions), without settling the dispute about the two tendencies (Szacki 1991a: 17–18).

Another paper in the collection begins with postulating a problem in the way sociologists perceive the history of their own discipline, which Szacki refers to as “the poverty of historical interests.” A majority of sociologists knows classic thinkers of their discipline only superficially because research is becoming increasingly specialised and scientific, which supports the belief in the necessity to learn only about the latest achievements (Szacki 1991b: 21). This negative statement was formulated already 30 years ago. As a counterbalance, the existence of the history of sociology was argued to be necessary. Szacki reiterates the suggestion that the history of sociology should be perceived as a tool used to criticise contemporary theoretical achievements. At the same time, he justifies conducting research within this “partially-scientific” (not entirely sociological) sub-discipline by showing the potential sources of research interests: integrating, theoretical, evaluative, cataloguing, erudite and pedagogical. As a result, it turns out that the basic function of historiography of sociology is education, and works devoted to it are not historical, primarily because they were created out of theoretical motivations. Szacki concludes that, for this reason, a historian of sociology is to be partially excused from the duty of having a reliable historical workshop. Thus, Szacki argues that a historian of sociology (a historian of ideas, a historian of sociological/social thought) is a researcher trapped between two extremes—“pure history” and “pure sociology”—which makes that person neither a historian nor a sociologist. Her or his research domain and activities is take place in in a fixed space, which lacks a spatiotemporal dimension and is encapsulated in the dialogue with her or his predecessors. As the reasons for such a state of affairs (which is manifested, for example, by the lack of syntheses), Szacki enumerates: (1) heterogeneity and complexity of the subject of research; (2) shortage of partial studies; (3) multi-linear nature of the historical process which gave rise to sociology and its multi-paradigmatic character; (4) “open character of sociology,” which is its ability to

absorb the achievements of other human sciences, which makes it necessary to learn about the intellectual history of humanities in general. All this leads Szacki to the conclusion that it is impossible to write one history of sociology (of a given period, country, person) taking into account its “true historicity.” According to Szacki, such a history, notwithstanding the attempts made to write it, is an utopian synthesis, which is impossible to come into life (Szacki 1991b: 34). The usefulness of the history of sociology returns with its new functions: (1) unmasking apparent scientific revolutions; and (2) providing empirical materials for reflections on philosophy and sociology of social sciences (Szacki 1991b: 35).

The last and the most extensive paper presenting the methodological foundations of the history of sociology in Poland contained in this collection is entitled “Socjologia współczesna a klasycy socjologii” (“Contemporary Sociology and the Classics of Sociology”) (Szacki, 1991c), where we can find the same statements that were developed in the previous works of the author. As the main problem of historiography of ideas, Szacki proposes an unsolvable antinomy between two approaches to the practice of the history of sociology—presentism and contextualism, which he refers to as the “historical” approach and the “mythological approach,” accordingly. Then he presents arguments for the latter option as a better-suited to the work of a historian of ideas. According to Szacki, the “myth” in the theoretical achievements of social sciences is more important than the “fact” because it refers to these “important” statements that have gained a dimension which crosses the borders of history, and which can be a subject of evaluation (true-false, right-wrong, valid-irrelevant, etc.). The mythological approach is justified because: (1) as in the case of philosophers, sociologists of the past are best understood as contemporary ones, and when their statements are treated as a prefiguration of contemporary theories; (2) translation into a modern language, and thus “distortion of meaning” resulting from it, is necessary anyway (e.g. by means of translation); (3) in the case of sociology, the differences in contexts are not that significant because its history is relatively short; (4) a mythological approach enables the researchers to restore old theories (Szacki 1991c: 41-43). The adoption of a mythological perspective (more familiar to a sociologist) entails important consequences in the postulated image of an ideal work on the history of sociology, which Szacki says should: (1) be useful (provide theoretical, educational, and other benefits); (2) be based on the analysis of selected texts; (3) use the language with which a contemporary sociologist is familiar (e.g. use the so-called “unit-ideas”) by changing the “archaic,” incomprehensible language of classics; (4) be comparable to the contemporary and individual theoretical findings, and thus open timeless dialogues, the so-called anachronic hermeneutics.

Summarising the views on the status of Szacki’s history of sociology, one should begin with a general remark regarding the perspective of

writing the history of sociology. The constant rehabilitation of the classics of sociological thought is necessary to preserve the theoretical pluralism which would not have been possible without revitalizing the theory with its classic elements, i.e. the ones from the past. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to mythicise the sociological tradition of thought by organizing it because it is impossible to oppose the “primary chaos” of past statements (events), but it is possible to argue with their generalised and reduced forms.

In the context of the contrast between presentism and historicism, which can be found in Szacki’s works, it should be noted that the methodological perspective (we can call it a mythological or a Marxist one) he described is a variation of presentism, mainly because it does not use a Mertonian separation of the sociological theory from the history of sociology. Moreover, in Szacki’s recommendations, we can find a source of a specific (mythological, presentistic, infantile, parochial) attitude sociologists take towards their own past. A clearly visible Marxist determinant (emphasis on usability) hinders a historicised reflection on the past, causing a decline in the interest in the field and lowering the methodological standards (Kilias 2008: 33). The perspective Szacki embedded into Polish studies on the history of sociology is not the only available solution.

A different point of view is possible—to follow the development of sociological thought not as a perfected objective knowledge, but as a process of creating self-knowledge of specific social groups . . . (Winclawski 1991: 5)

We will not present the arguments against presentism in the mythological convention of writing the history of sociology, leaving this issue for further research. Neither will we state whether such a methodological decision was determinative to the state and the development of the history of sociology in Poland—rather, we will attempt to describe it.

Presentism and contextualism. Advice regarding research in the history of sociology

Apart from Szacki’s methodological proposal, which he scattered over several papers, there was no discussion concerning how to conduct research in the history of sociology in Poland. In contrast, as early as in the 1950s, Robert Merton tried to introduce a non-classic history of sociology in Western sociology.

Merton accused sociologists of lacking the skill to differentiate between the history of sociology and its theory, which resulted in creating a mythology of the past.

Medical schools do not confuse the history of medicine with modern systematic medical knowledge, similarly, biology departments do not identify the history of biology with the current theory used to interpret biological research. (Merton 1957: 4)

At the same time,

... what sociologists do is neither a decent history of sociology, nor systematics, but a poorly thought-out hybrid, which results in a “parochial,” almost Pickwickian conception of the history of sociological theory as a set of critical summaries of past theories, spiced with short biographies of major theorists. (Merton 1967: 2)

Ironically, despite the emergence of the “new history of science” (among the representants of which Merton sees Thomas Kuhn, Everett Mendelsohn, Charles Gillispie, or Derek Price), sociologists cannot leave this “parochial” approach.

In a reflection on the development of the discipline, the idea to distinguish the history of sociological theory from the systematics of theory, would ..., facilitate the emergence of a sociological history of sociological theories. (Merton 1982: 26)

According to Merton, the systematics of theory was to “present a selected accumulation of small fragments of old theories that survived empirical test.” The “truly historical” history of sociological theory should deal with the following problems:

- The complex origin of various branches of sociological thought and their development;
- The link between theories and their changing social sources;
- The social rank of promoters of a given theory;
- Its relations with changing social organisation of science;
- Proliferation and modification of the centres of the sociological thought;
- The means by which the changing social structure and culture influenced a theory (Merton 1967: 2).

According to Merton, the basic goal of the history of science is to understand how it developed either in particular disciplines or in the entire system. Above all, the history of sociology does not serve to preach contemporary sociologists on how to use current theories, methodological practices and techniques of science they practice. “The history and systematics of scientific histories can be combined on the condition that their distinctiveness is confirmed first” (Merton 1982: 27).

The researcher of the history of sociology, in order to give an accurate and reliable description of the past of her or his discipline, like any other historian of science (or a historian in general), should pay more attention to materials such as autobiographies, letters, results of analyses of scientific journals,

conference programs, or secondary texts: presentations, lectures, and discussions. The use of such sources facilitates understanding the process of intellectual circulation of ideas, their current discussions and the process of the introduction of their effects (intellectual products) into the public record of thought and theory, or their marginalisation and exclusion.

Such condition is not characteristic of sociology alone. The historiography of social sciences is much more susceptible to presentism and anachronism than the historiography of natural sciences. The history of physics, chemistry, and biology is generally written by historians of science, not by researchers, and it is rooted in a historical context. Meanwhile, most scholars who deal with, for instance, the history of sociology, do not consider themselves historians; rather, they call themselves theoreticians who teach at sociological departments and who publish their papers in sociological journals, not historical ones. They are far from even attempting to understand sociological knowledge as rooted in a historical context, conditioned by a set of complex factors. Yet, historians of social science should treat scientific knowledge as a set of arguments formulated in response to specific questions, and they should understand the legitimacy of these theories in the period they emerged in, so that we could see historical change as a process of the emergence of a theory—in other words, we should try to understand the knowledge of a given period in its own categories (Stocking 1968: 8).

Merton's claims became a starting point for a new reflection on the history of sociology for some historians of social sciences only at the end of the 1970s. Presentism, which had been cultivated in the history of sociology, capturing the past of particular theories outside the historical context, which John Peel, after Herbert Butterfield (1931), referred to as the "whiggish history," was in the opposition to historicism or, more broadly, the so-called contextualism. Presentism shows the past as an inevitable progress towards increasingly enlightened, perfected ideas, and classics as the undisputed and only heroes of this progress. According to the proponents of contextualism, such an interpretation of the history of science is normative, it aims to judge rather than to understand, and in the long run does not serve a scientific reflection. Peel argued that proper historical work consists in something completely different from systematising the views of the classics in terms of a current theoretical needs. The truthfulness or falsehood of classic theories is confirmed by making references to contemporary categories; such an attitude is incorrect because these theories grew in a different reality, they were a response to other problems and were a result of other goals (Peel 1971 after Jones 1983). Peel, like other contextualists, believed that presentism does not control chronology, which is key to history, but binds the past and the present in an artificial and anachronistic way.

One must therefore write about the history that really took place, and not about the Whig myths. Thanks to this approach, it is possible to show that theories are a product of special purposes and are linked with a special moment. (Peel 1971 after Jones 1983)

Contextualism had an impact on sociology also due to the representatives of the Cambridge school, with such political scientists as Q. Skinner, J. Dunn and G. Pocock (Cambridge School of Political Thought). These researchers criticized the presentist approach in historiography of ideas more severely than sociologists. They reflected upon the issue of understanding classic texts of political theory. The conclusion of these works was to negate seeing the past of the discipline as a timeless collection of written heritage which enables us to compare any of its ideas and to create an artificial dialogue between them and their authors. In contrast, according to the contextualists, the texts of the classics should be analysed not as abstractions, but as a social activity *per se*, which falls into the category of “illocutionary force”—the intentions of statements, proposed by John Austin (Jones 1983). In order to read them, it is necessary to reconstruct the linguistic conventions that govern the design of these acts in a specific society, to perceive and interpret idioms, figures of speech, the manner of speaking about politics, and language games. Moreover, Skinner recommended studying less-known authors of political theories as a way to understand the context in which the ideas of “classics” emerged.

The views of contextualists on the historiography of ideas were neatly summarized by Robert A. Jones in his paper entitled: “The New History of Sociology” (1983). The paper presents a recommendations of historical methods in research on the past of sociology. Similarly to Merton, Jones states:

The history of sociology should separate the theory from history (systematics vs history), while the scope of its research should go beyond the public record towards the recondite knowledge.

In studying the history of sociology, it is crucial to combine the role of a sociologist and a historian. However, it requires a particular preparation because the history of sociology (regardless of what sociologists think of it) is a field of specific skills, practice, source-based work, and a full-time commitment.

The past of the discipline may be beneficial to the present also in a theoretical sense, but it can be reached only when we study the former just to get familiar with it.

The meaning of the classics’ opinions, ideas and thoughts can only be known if we determine to which recipients they were addressed. In analysing the past of the discipline, one should skilfully combine facts and theories, not “discover new truths.”

The aim of writing the history of sociology should be to understand, not to judge; an attempt to grasp the legitimacy of ideas in the past, however irrational would they seem nowadays (Jones 1983).

These recommendations, as well as the “new history of sociology” project, have, unfortunately to a small extent, been carried out by researchers dealing with the past of the discipline. Until now, there have not been many syntheses that meet the assumptions of the idea. For example, “Geschichte der Sociologie Wolf Lepenies” (1981) has not yet been translated. In turn, so far, the best monograph about Emil Durkheim has been “Emile Durkheim. His life and work: A Historical and Critical Study” by Steven Lukes (1973).

The end of the 1970s gave rise to such associations dealing with the history of sociology as “Cheiron,” “The Durkheim Group” and “The Research Committee on the History of Sociology—ISA.” The first journal devoted to the history of sociology “The Journal of the History of Sociology” was created eight years later. Although due to the lack of interest, the journal ceased to be published in 1987, the section of the history of sociology within ISA, as well as “Cheiron,” have been functioning since their emergence. They organise scientific conferences, publish newsletters, and financially support the study of the history of sociology.

So far, the treatment of “classics as colleagues,” or what Robert Merton called the dialogue between the living and the dead, is much more popular a way of practicing the history of sociology. Many sociologists who study Weber or Durkheim, try to bring selected fragments of their theories in such a way that they answer the questions of contemporary sociologists. Therefore, in their works, there is no difference between the works of classics and the contemporary theory. This approach is not wrong, because—as Neil Smelser shows—some elements of the classical theory can be considered useful for reflection on contemporary problems, if the researcher is trying to understand the context in which a theory was created. However, this type of reflection on the past of the discipline should not be synonymous with studying the history of sociology—it should be a domain of the systematics of theory.

Translated by Marek Placiński.

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The History of Sociology in Poland. Assessing the Current State of Affairs

Abstract

Considering Polish historiography as its example, the article shows the contingent status of the history of sociology. Apart from institutional restrictions (e.g. organization of scientific work, curricula), obstacles of a methodological and theoretical nature were also emphasized to exist. Finally, some basic parameters of the theoretical discussion between presentism and contextualism were adduced.

Keywords: sociology in Poland, history of sociology, methodology.