

РЕЦЕНЗІЇ

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THE POPULARIZATION OF ANTHROPOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE POLISH HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SCIENCE.

Review of the monograph: Bożena Płonka-Syroka, *Medicine in Historical and Cultural Contexts – Study of Anthropology of Knowledge*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Medycznego im. Piastów Śląskichin Wrocław [The Silesian Piasts Memorial Editorial Office of the Medical University in Wrocław], Wrocław 2013, pp. 517, ISBN 978-83-7055-438-5.

Scientific research of Bożena Płonka-Syroka is characterised by systematic exploring of the same scientific problem, i.e. placement of medicine in historical, social and cultural context, and, most important, elaboration of a methodological and theoretical approach to analyse medical knowledge against the anthropological background¹. The research study published by Bożena Płonka-Syrokaen titled *Medicine in Historical and Cultural Contexts - Study of Anthropology of Knowledge* has undoubtedly contributed to promote this question among the historians of science (and other scholars) as it shows a particular research method to enable review of the history of science by examining theories, doctrines, approaches, concepts etc².

The author's writing style is very distinctive: all parts and chapters are clearly distinguished by headings (titles), the digressions of the inspirational research resources and the author's own conclusions are organised and presented in a logical sequence. The Introduction identifies the study purpose and clearly explains all necessary data, whereas extended bibliography contains many publications from a variety of countries, regarding directly the underlying study issues, but also reviewing some of them at the margin of other subject-related considerations. Part I of the study entitled *Perspectives of Anthropology of Knowledge* comprises three chapters in which the research anthropological perspective is consistently driven. (I. *From Historiography of Natural Science to Anthropology of Knowledge – The Shaping of New Research Discipline*, II. *Inspirations and Historical References in the Research Study of Anthropology of Knowledge* III. *Anthropology of Knowledge as a Research Project*). In Part II entitled: *Selected Problems of Practical and Social Medicine in the Historical and Cultural Context* the author indicates social and cultural context of certain historical and medical issues (I. *Importance of Social and Cultural Factors in Shaping a Problem-Oriented Medical Situation in the Field of Birth Control*, II. *Scientific and Extra-Scientific*

¹ See.: B. Płonka-Syroka, *Anthropology of Knowledge - A New Discipline of Humanistic Research*, „Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki” [Quarterly of History, Science and Technique] 2008, Y. 53, No. 1, p. 163–169; *Anthropology of Knowledge - A New Approach to the Studies of Natural History*, [w:] *Perspectives of Interdisciplinary Studies*, „Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis” No. 2066, History CLXXV; S. Rosik, P. Wiszewski (eds.), Wrocław 2006, p. 29–37; *Interpretive Traditions in the European Philosophy vs. Formation of the Standards of Anthropology of Knowledge* [w:] *Klioviae et in viae. Opuscula Marco Cetwinski dedicata*, A. Odrzywolska-Kidawa (eds.), Warszawa 2010, p. 261–268.

² Besides Płonka-Syroka, there were other researchers participating in the study dedicated to define anthropology of knowledge and specify its scope and purposes: Tadeusz Srogosz, Wojciech Wrzosek, Wiktor Werner, Leon Miodynski, Leszek Kleszcz, Jakub Mirkiewicz, Jaromir Jeszke. Compare.: *Anthropology of Knowledge. Discipline Study Approach*, B. Płonka-Syroka (eds.), Wrocław 2005.

Impact Factors Affecting Creation of Preventive Anti-Epidemic Measures in Western Europe (on example of selected countries), III. Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland's Medical Prevention Concept in Historical and Comparative Aspect). Part III Selected Issues of the Theory of Medicine in the Historical and Cultural Context is, in many ways, like the previous two parts, however, it regards theoretical medicine (I. Cultural Insinuations and Shaping the Image of Nature in the European Thought from the 16th to the End of the 19th Century. Summary II. Interpretation of the Phenomenon of Hypnosis in Medicine in the 18th - 20th Century, III. Carl Gustaw Jung as a Naturalist).

Anthropology of knowledge is defined by Bożena Płonka-Syrokaas a study of humans and all social, cultural and historical backgrounds and contexts affecting models of cognitive approaches to the world around them. The author draws our attention to these approaches as they are historically different and perceived by their originators as rational in a subjective sense. Their rationality is based on historically changeable criteria of cognitive obviousness and variable methods used to meet such criteria³. The fundamental cognitive aim of anthropology of knowledge is prospecting for adequate evidence, coherent description, critical analysis and rational reconstruction of historically changeable systems of beliefs and judgements that played important role for people living in the cultures and epochs included in the study, as they helped to adapt to their surroundings⁴. These beliefs – in the opinion of the Author – regard:

- 1) metaphysical context,
- 2) nature around humans - sense of natural order,
- 3) theory of the subjectivity of human being and its relationship to metaphysical context and natural order,
- 4) social relationships connecting humans with their surroundings,
- 5) human cognitive abilities - beliefs regarding sources of human knowledge, methods for gaining it, theories of truth and obviousness,
- 6) purpose of cognitive activities⁵.

The system of beliefs consisting of the above elements is defined by Bożena Płonka-Syrokaas “knowledge”. She thinks that any anthropologically-oriented historian should seek to find any evidence of these theories both in scientific practice of a variety of educational facilities (scientific schools, colleges, scientific societies etc.) and in the society living around the scholars, since the beliefs - as she emphasises - are not identical. As they are widely popular in the communities, they not only model common world view, but also build foundations of worldviews of future scientists⁶. It must be repeated after Płonka-Syroka that “no-one is born to be a scholar, but as they grow up in a particular cultural environment, they acquire all the beliefs regarding natural approach to the world that is perceived by this community as an actual image”⁷. Each researcher can enrich the resources used to reconstruct the epoch at issue through analysing both the beliefs that were perceived in certain culture as scientific and the ones that were deprived of this status or had never been perceived as scientific, and thus will be able to answer the following questions:

- 1) what beliefs are regarded in a community as normative, and what beliefs are deprived of this status,

³ Ibidem, p. 178. For further information about definition, scope and aims of anthropology of knowledge, see also: p. 165–178.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 179.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibidem, p.170

⁷ Ibid.

2) why some believes are permanently pushed out of the field of science by people establishing patterns and defining standards of knowledge in one society, whereas the same patterns are perceived as acceptable scientific standards in other communities,

3) what are the conditions for promotion of some concepts and theories and granting to them status of a standard; on the other hand, what are the reasons for blocking the other theories⁸.

The researcher underlines that any anthropologist of knowledge should always seek to find **cognitive strategies** chosen by a scientific society against the problems perceived as real and requiring solution. Such society composed of individual entities seeking and perceiving these problems differently, over the time creates its own **subjective problematic situation**. Bożena Płonka-Syroka defines this situation as a set of issues considered as important, possible or necessary etc. to be solved using the methods accepted in this society. The methods become relative compared to cultural values, patterns and technical abilities of the community in which they are created⁹. Where an issue may become a problem requiring solution in one community, the same issue may be perceived as completely different in another social group, since all societies explored by historians use different theories of the reality of the world and form separate **cognitive structures (universa)**. A **problematic situation** is always created within the boundaries of one coherent vision of the world/ **universum** that includes adequate questions and provides answers which can be accepted as based upon facts and rational. Questions accepted by one universum as possible to be posed will not be given the same status in another, similarly as the responses to them¹⁰. Bożena Płonka-Syroka emphasises that there are deep-rooted cultural reasons for this, as it is deemed that individual cognitive entities are facing the same world in the cognitive process, however, concepts created by them differ for obvious reasons. In the author's opinion this objection is of ontological nature, because anthropology of knowledge is based on the concept of the objective world that is perceived and experienced by people by subjective means¹¹. These concepts will begin to exist if people are able to pose a question related to a particular area of the reality. On the contrary, if such a question is not posed, the surrounding reality will remain neutral in the cognitive sense. As a consequence, all analysed concepts regarding the world around us (which are the main target of the human cognitive activities) should be questioned and investigated in such a way so that a researchers should pursue retrieving of questions that were of cognitive significance to the creators of the concepts. This theory defines scientific activities as undertaken in response to the questions that are regarded by the entities included in the studies as possible to be asked, asking these questions is deemed reasonable and leading to potential solutions, and responses become a basis of social practice¹².

Cultural implications are also obvious during selection of research hypotheses by scientists. The Author adopts a theory that insights into human nature are not based upon discovering of "pure facts" by researchers and then building of a theory there on, but actually it runs in an opposite direction, i.e. beginning at the point of creation and adoption of a hypothesis enabling definition of "a fact" as feasible. In this context,

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 182.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 176.

¹² Ibid.

hypotheses can be made by personal cognitive entities within a broader cognitive structure, i.e. an ideal of science acceptable by researchers. In the opinion of the Author, sets of hypotheses not contradictory to each other, put forward by individual scientists help the entire aggregation of researchers build one coherent vision of the world /*universum* in accordance with the cultural rules that enable such merger¹³.

Keeping such a vision in mind, the researchers may ask questions regarding the nature as they can refer to some criteria to accept answers. The process of naturalisation of a *universum* created on the basis of a culture involves repetition of experiences using certain rules and patterns which lead scientists to similar results; this helps them design new experiences that extend the previous ones towards a selected direction. Scholars doing research within one *universum* become increasingly certain over the time that the rules adopted by them are not culture-related human constructs, but they can be associated with global features. Thus, the scientists become sure that in their investigations they deal with the real world rather than a historically created construction made by a target society as a result of their deep-rooted believes¹⁴. In the naturalization process, cultural imputations play an important, yet somehow “invisible” to the investigators role. “It is not consciously perceived by their students and successors, either, who live within a perspective that has already been naturalised in accordance with certain rules”, argues the Author. “The natural surrounding is perceived by them as an empirical experience, since the rules allowing the access to it, that had been established by people defining the boundaries of the discourse, are being seen as naturally existing, as natural laws, constant theories accepted as obvious without requesting evidence”¹⁵. On the other hand, due to continuous transformations observed in the scientific world, the image of the world / *universum* is being denaturalised. This is a result of differences of opinions of groups whose visions of the world are based upon various cultural aspects. At the same time, any cultural imputations used during the process of creation of this vision, are displayed¹⁶. Płonka-Syrokawrote „In the structure of competing scientific ideals, elements of many discourses created in different points of time and different social and cultural environments, are present, as a result of which researchers living in different universa shaped by these ideals, adopting the same research questions as true, give different answers to them in accordance with their own research perspective. In one ideal some questions are regarded as important and directing to fact-based responses, whereas in the other the same questions are refused as non-scientific. For this reason, in the other *universum* the areas of reality that were not included in questions will not be described, as some questions were pushed out of the boundaries of the discourse considered as scientific”¹⁷.

All these elements - as Płonka-Syroka argues – affect the believes and judgements of scientists and form a sequence of **cognitive conventions** adopted by them, that may be:

- 1) individual - a theory formulated by a scientist is perceived negatively by other scientists or triggers no response in the society,
- 2) group – a theory formulated by a scientist wins some followers who decide to accept its methodology and thought as realistic,

¹³ Ibidem, p. 444.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 445.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

3) social - a theory formulated by a scientist is widely accepted by other scientists and the society living in this territory¹⁸.

When analysing the extent of social acceptance with respect to a cognitive convention, Bożena Płonka-Syroka emphasises that it is directly related to introduction of the concept into institutional practice of science. Concepts that are popular in some scientific groups, are incorporated in the foundations of scientific schools that conduct research practice in accordance with these theories, whereas concepts that are more widely accepted become bases of normative theories. Moreover, they are accepted not only within one school, but also in the entire educational system of the country, or even the continent¹⁹. Further, the Author argues that: “In a historical and social context, false acceptance of a system of theories presented by people influencing science and setting scientific standards is possible, and when the context is changed, we witness a sudden erosion of cognitive structures that are not defended by anybody. A historian should verify the reasons why one system of theories was more widely accepted both by the scientific society and other social groups”²⁰.

The theoretical discussion presented in such a way was used by the Author to construct more extended research narratives regarding anthropological aspect of the history of knowledge, in particular history of medicine. The study focused both upon birth control and anti-epidemic measures, and the views of Christoph Wilhelm Hufel and Carl Gustav Jung, nature in the European thought of the 16th - 19th centuries, or last but not least - summary of hypnosis²¹.

In conclusion to our research we should think about practical use of theoretical and methodological discourses of the Author. Her book is full of research references and information that are particularly beneficial for historians of historiography and methodologists of history. We must note that no historian is only a historian in the first place! Historians are humans placed in a cultural environment and determined by it. Pessimism of the Cracow School of History will be seen differently if we realize that Walerian Kalinka, a historian-Resurrectionist, when writing “The Great Sejm”, during the intervals between the volumes tried to identify his sins during the Ignatian meditation.²² Interesting thing about Franciszek Rawita-Gawroński, a historian and a landowner is that he constructed his theory of the Turanian origin of the Ukrainians and Ruthenes while planting strawberries in the land that was regarded by the same Ukrainians and Ruthenes as the land inherited from Saint Vladimir.²³ Can we therefore say that Kalinka *contemplated* and Rawita *made* historiography? The historical science will have to find an answer to this question in future. On the other hand, a question about how culture affects human beliefs and personal knowledge, forms extra-regional knowledge on a group-level or a system of social and cultural beliefs, may be scientifically advantageous. This approach compels so called “mixture of genres” - a very up-to-date notion in modern humanism. However, in our opinion using the concept of culture, some selected elements of methodology of anthropology of knowledge or even looking for its historiographic equivalent (anthropology of historiography) by an

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 181.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 182–183.

²¹ See analyses included in Part 2 (p. 191–436) and Part 3 (p. 439–504) of the paper.

²² For further information: N. Morawiec, *Bread, Books, Strawberries. History Made by Rawita-Gawroński (Inception of Anthropology of Knowledge/Historiography)*, [at:] *Private Life of the Poles in the 19th Century*. M. Korybut-Marciniak, M. Zbrzeźniak (eds.), Olsztyn 2013 p. 67–89

²³ For further information: N. Morawiec, *Religious Experiences, Historiography vs. Aims of Epistemology of History (printing in progress)*.

anthropologist does not mean that “the historian is no longer a historian”. Wojciech Piasek claimed that “Hybridisation of disciplinary identity of contemporary scientists provokes objections only of those who understand the boundaries of disciplines and interdisciplinarity in classical modernistic way”. In line with this theory, we state that boundaries of disciplines are only of cultural and institutional nature and thus crossing them should pose no problem²⁴.

²⁴ W. Piasek, *Methodology of History and History of Historiography against Cultural Diversity*, [at:] *Faces of the Past*. W. Wrzosek (eds.), Bydgoszcz 2011, p. 335.