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Philosophy and Sociology

1. Members of American sociology departments are amazed that Polish universities and the Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences administratively link philosophy and sociology. This surprise is based on the strongly grounded conviction that the two disciplines are completely deprived of substantive connections. While sociology is reckoned among behavioural sciences of consistent empirical ambitions, philosophy is regarded as something akin to art. In the desire to systematize knowledge in philosophy, instead of sociology proper, it is considered a virtue to ceaselessly seek new premises and thus solve anew and endlessly the same problems.

This division of philosophy and sociology which continues to assume an extreme form in the United States (along with examples of a return of sociology to philosophy), is also observable in European sociology.¹ This fact is all the more remarkable since the two disciplines were never completely distinct. True, it is difficult to consider philosophy a behavioural science, but not every type of sociology is conceivable in that category. On the other hand, there is much of art also in sociology.² More systematic considerations indicate that sociology has not been able to sever its genetic relations with philosophy. The founders of the former discipline: Comte, Simmel, Durkheim, Weber, Znaniecki, were to an equal degree philosophers as sociologists and their sociological reflections are based on concrete though varied philosophical foundations. Furthermore, despite first impressions, these thinkers do not belong to the imperishable but to the dead tradition of the discipline, but they are a continuous inspiration also for contemporary sociological thought. Given philosophical elements penetrate sociology with that inspiration. This is particularly obvious in Marxist thought in which elements of philosophy and sociology are almost inseparable.

This is why in relation to the distinctness of philosophy and sociology, one should consider rather the presumption of such distinctness in the awareness of a considerable part of sociologists than the actual substantive independence of these disciplines. But the presumption has very concrete effects. For the unconscious participation of philosophy in sociological reflection and research leads to the mystification of a number of propositions, especially on the level of assumptions. Such mystification consists, for instance, in the fact that their arbitrary character is not perceived

¹ Jean Piaget writes, for instance: "Relations between psychology or sociology and philosophy are ever looser and less effective, although in some countries universities continue to unite psychology, sociology and philosophy in the same department." — *Psychologie et épistémologie*, Paris 1971, Editions Gonthier Bibliothèque Méditations.

² R. Nisbet even published recently *Sociology as an Art Form*, Oxford University Press New York 1976.

and, on the contrary, they are treated as characteristic of the investigated object or of reality in general.

On the other hand, philosophy and sociology function as autonomous disciplines with undoubtedly different theoretical aims.

In his essay on the relation between philosophy and sociology Maurice Merleau-Ponty considers that the division of the two disciplines is of a cold war character as long as it appears that only their accurate demarcation enables to avoid their mutual annihilation. But this author calls attention to the absurdity of the situation which results from the erroneous assessment of the nature of both philosophy and sociology. It is no longer realistic to view philosophy as the "confirmation of the absolute independence of reason," and sociology as characterized by the scientific attachment to facts.³

2. In considering the relations between philosophy and sociology, three types of relations should be distinguished, two of which are treated here. First is the theoretical link between sociological thought and given philosophical orientations. We concern ourselves in this respect with the influence of the Kantian philosophical tradition on the sociological views of Max Weber or Talcott Parsons, for instance, of pragmatism on the conceptions of George Herbert Meade or with the significance of phenomenology for the ethno-methodological current in sociology.

Philosophy, however, is not limited to the views of given philosophers and the philosophical traditions associated with them. It is also, and perhaps primarily, a specific kind of discourse different than in other sciences. It has a unique way of posing questions and formulating problems. Philosophical discourse is characterized by continuous questioning even when ordinary or scientific discourse seems to have assured a complete conception of the subject and provided answers considered satisfactory. Hanna Arendt's interesting essay *Reflection. Thinking* provides a proximate idea of philosophical discourse. In relation to the Kantian distinction between reason and intellect, Arendt points to its consequence, the distinctness of thought and cognition and to the corresponding questions of meaning and truth. If science and to some degree also common-sense are preoccupied with the quest for truth, and their driving force is the desire for knowledge, the domain of philosophy remains the question of meaning and it is guided primarily by the need of thinking. "But the questions that are raised by thinking," writes H. Arendt, "and it is in reason's very nature to raise questions of meaning — are all unanswerable by common-sense and the refinement of it which we call science."⁴ The feeling of indispensable empirical relevance of their propositions so clear in the scientific and common-sense confrontation with reality is alien to philosophy.

The second type of relations between philosophy and sociology consists precisely in the presence in the latter of elements of philosophical discourse thus understood. The statement may even be risked that only the presence of that philosophical discourse differentiates sociology from

³ M. Merleau-Ponty, "La philosophe et la sociologie," *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, in: M. Natanson, ed. *Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, Random House, New York 1963.

⁴ H. Arendt, "Reflection. Thinking," *New Yorker*, Nov. 21, 1977.

common reflection on society.⁵ It is difficult to deny that despite the almost universal tendency to regard sociology an empirical science, the social reality is replete with elements inaccessible to direct observation and more susceptible to reflection which seeks meaning than to truth establishing investigation. It moreover seems understandable that as an element of the investigated reality, man is more interested in the question of meaning than in truth.

It should furthermore be noted that the first type of relation is also possible precisely because the manner of intellectual confrontation of thought with its object is inseparable in sociology from what we know from philosophy and call here *philosophical discourse*.

In reference to the role of philosophical discourse in sociology, some attention needs to be devoted to the paradoxical situation which has arisen in the sphere of philosophy — individual sciences relation. Briefly, that situation is characterized by the simultaneous crisis of epistemology which is the domain of philosophy and in the methodology of science, which has already acquired an autonomous position. The paradox consists in the fact that frustrated representatives of individual sciences turn to epistemology, while philosophers at the same time seem to desire to reduce epistemology to methodology. This flight from epistemology to methodology commences with replacement of a broad conception of cognition by a conception of knowledge which is almost spontaneously accompanied by the limitation of interest to scientific knowledge. Man's practical accomplishments associated with application for scientific knowledge seem to be the best justification for relinquishing troublesome epistemological problems. Even such key epistemological questions as truth and objectivity are thus suspended, if not entirely stricken from the field of interest.⁶

Examples of turning to epistemology are in turn to be found in physics as well as in sociology. Physicists such as Bohr and Heizenberg are also authors of philosophical works. In sociology, which is of most interest to us, the turn toward epistemological reflection is less obvious. This is mainly because authors resorting to this device, such as Habermas for instance, may simply pass as philosophers, or as in the case of the sociology of knowledge or ethnomethodology it is an almost imperceivable device. But there is no lack of sociological works which directly deal with epistemological problems.⁷

The situation in question seems at least in sociology to be the result of a prematurely proclaimed independence of that discipline from philosophy.

The simplified comparison below of the methodological and epistemological research prospects serves to better understand the need of epistemology as well as the inadequacy of methodology which makes itself felt in research failures.

⁵ Piaget considers that "the social sciences or humanities contain their own epistemology," *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁶ One example may be the well known book by T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962.

⁷ See, for inst., L. Gross, "An Epistemological View of Sociological Theory," *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 65, March 1960.

Methodology	Epistemology
<p>— assumes object of cognitive activity existing transcendently and objectively (both in the ontological and epistemological sense);⁸</p> <p>— assumes the existence of reliable methods of attaining knowledge;</p> <p>— aspires to define the proper conditions for applying acknowledged methods and to show how they lead to true knowledge.</p>	<p>— asks what is that object (and implicit in this question is a whole list of detailed questions as well as premises of one kind or another);</p> <p>— asks whether there is any relation between the object and methods, if so, what?</p> <p>— asks how truth should be understood, or whether the concept truthfulness is valid in the given context.</p>

The above comparison is exclusively illustrative. However, although it does not pretend to be complete, it does show what sociologists who prefer epistemology to methodology may expect as well as what philosophers who relinquish epistemology in favour of methodology may hope for. For both sides desire to solve problems appearing within their disciplines without taking into consideration problems ensuing from the discipline's borrowed perspective. Furthermore, by accepting an epistemological point of view sociology does not at all desire to adopt its entire subject matter. By applying elements of philosophical discourse (which it essentially did from its birth), that discipline brings within its orbit of interests those questions and the forms of their articulation which seem particularly actual at the given moment.

Sociologists have rarely attempted to adopt an epistemological perspective with its entire inseparable baggage of problems. One of the few authors who has done so is Raymond Boudon who in his *Crisis of Sociology* discusses that discipline's epistemological uncertainty.⁹ But an epistemological conception most often constitutes a flight into the sphere in which other premises enable solutions which are impossible with the traditional approach to problems of sociological theory. This attitude entails great freedom in adapting philosophy to the theoretical needs of sociology.

Continuing the "illustrative" mode of argumentation, let us stop for a while at the so-called phenomenological sociology. This ever more virile current of theoretical (and in certain spheres also empirical) sociology is a good example of both of the above distinguished types of link with philosophy. For it, on the one hand, refers to phenomenology, that concrete philosophical orientation, while it on the other hand completely ignores that philosophy's fundamental postulates. The domination in its theoretical reflections of philosophical discourse and the epistemological perspective remains the only result of that reference.

⁸ On objectivity in the ontological and epistemological sense see the present author's "Przedmiot poznania a zagadnienie obiektywności w naukach społecznych [The Object of Cognition and the Problem of Objectivity in the Social Sciences], in: *Człowiek i Światopogląd*, March 1977.

⁹ But Boudon includes into epistemology also problems which I would consider methodological in light of the proposed distinction. In his case this is a result of a broader understanding of epistemology. R. Boudon, *La crise de la sociologie*, Geneva 1971.

Which fundamental principles of phenomenologic philosophy are ignored by sociology in relating to that philosophy? We have in mind here first of all its relation to natural attitudes or dispositions. Phenomenology dictates to take this attitude into the brackets. It is for that philosophy a constitutive measure of so-called phenomenological reduction, which is, among other things, a condition for penetrating the essence of things, hence of authentic cognition.

This promise turned out attractive to sociologists. The measure of phenomenological reduction also appeared useful. But it was not taken into account that the condition for realizing the above promise is to accomplish the reduction in reference to natural attitude, to which "the world of everyday life" corresponds in social consideration. The point of departure postulate of phenomenological sociology is the exact reverse of Husserl's directives. It calls for taking into the background the assumption that the world may be different than the one appearing within the framework of natural attitudes. As a result, the world of everyday life becomes the point of departure.

The very phrase "world of everyday life," suggesting the possibility of other worlds, can appear only in philosophical discourse. Moreover, the conception of many realities is not only implicit in the accepted terminology, but has been explicitly formulated by A. Schutz. That conception could only have arisen in the epistemological theoretical perspective. And the situs of such a perspective is in the theoretical reflection of phenomenological sociology. For only by abandoning ontological questions does it avoid confrontation with the thesis of the material unity of the reality. This is most obvious in the book by Berger and Luckman *The Social Construction of Reality*. It is obvious that the concept "reality" used by the authors of that interesting dissertation is very far from any ontological connotations.¹⁰

Most interesting in the genealogy of phenomenological sociology is the fact that the misunderstandings involved have not destroyed the utility of the basic concepts taken from philosophy, which despite their distorted understanding have served as the basis for original and fruitful theoretical conceptions.

This is hence an example of an old role fulfilled by philosophy in relation to individual sciences. With the progress of science it was often a source of intellectual stimulation and of conceptions whose development led to their autonomization within various branches of knowledge organized as scientific disciplines. Thus the idea of the atom created by philosophers centuries later became the foundation of a scientific image of matter.

The natural sciences appear to be more independent of philosophy than are the social sciences. This is undoubtedly due to the immutability of the material reality. The properties of oxygen remain the basis of appropriate chemical analysis from the time they were established. The properties of human societies change in time and space. The social reality is not ready made on the pattern of material reality. It is in a constant process of change and — what's more — of creation. That is why investigation of this reality is associated with the ceaseless need of new concepts

¹⁰ This is further developed by the author in his article "Fenomenologiczny nurt socjologii wiedzy" [The Phenomenological Current in the Sociology of Knowledge], *Studia Filozoficzne*, 1977, No. 2.

and conceptions enabling the growth of social knowledge. Philosophy remains the source of such concepts for sociology owing to the fact that both disciplines entail philosophical discourse.

The links between philosophy and sociology under consideration are immanent in character. They flow from the fact that sociology is not independent as a scientific discipline. But sociology's turn to philosophy observable of late signals something more than the hitherto known genetic relations between these disciplines. Even though it is not an independent discipline, sociology is an autonomous one. The contemporary turn to philosophy is hence an expression of the crisis of sociology which desires to reconstruct its basic theoretical premises. It is the turn which does not reduce the existing division between the two disciplines. This is most probably why sociology's use of philosophy is so arbitrary, if not precarious. It is governed not by philosophers' ideas, but by the needs of sociology. Sociologists sometimes behave here like a housewife who reaches for a monkeywrench in order to drive in a nail. But most important in such cases is that the nail is driven in.

3. We have thus far considered the immanent relations between philosophy and sociology the source of which is sociology's lack of independence. We now turn to the philosophical problems of sociology (which to some degree attest to philosophy's dependence). The view is fairly common that real philosophical problems must arise from particular sciences. Popper, an advocate of such a view, recalls the undisputable fact that Kant's philosophy came into being from the deep conviction of the truth of Newtonian theory.¹¹ Roman Ingarden considers that the theory of cognition cannot accept the existence of subjects of other sciences solely on their own responsibility and that they are obliged to prove those subjects' existence.¹²

Philosophical problems of sociology belong of course to the domain of philosophy and must be resolved in its language. And it seems that these solutions ought not be belittled by sociologists.

The reference to philosophical problems of sociology suggests that these problems are different from those of philosophy of science in general which also pertain to natural science. This question is hence associated with the specifics of sociology as compared to natural science. This does not mean, of course, that only certain general questions of philosophy of science do not pertain to sociology. It only indicates that this discipline is also confronted with its own philosophical problems.

The genealogy of most arguments regarding the distinctness of the social sciences, particularly sociology, goes back to the 19th century discussion around the status of the humanities. Of course, the standpoints of the disputants of that period are of significance to the status of sociology to the extent that discipline is reckoned among "humanistic sciences." "Science of the spirit" with which Dilthey, Windelband, Rickert or Xenopol occupied themselves is primarily history.¹³ If Dilthey practically

¹¹ K. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations. The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1963, p. 72.

¹² R. Ingarden, *U podstaw teorii poznania* [*The Basis of the Theory of Cognition*], PWN, Warszawa 1971, p. 391.

¹³ See M. Wallis, "Obrona humanistyki w metodologii współczesnej" [*Defense of the Humanities in Contemporary Methodology*], *Przegląd Filozoficzny*, 1922, No. 25, pp. 113—130; E. Mokrzycki, *Założenia socjologii humanistycznej* [*Principles of Humanist Sociology*], PWN, Warszawa 1971.

identified social science and history contrasting them to natural science, in the opinion of Windelband, the relation between the social sciences and history depends on the ambition of the former. Insofar as general laws are concerned they are closer to the natural sciences which are nomothetic (nomistic) than to history which is idiographic. Rickert reckoned sociology generalizing science of culture, but he emphasized the distinctness of the science of culture, pointing out that its characteristic feature is the theoretical reference to values. Despite the essential theoretical divergencies between Dilthey and Rickert, the area of interest in the humanities in relation to natural science was in both cases a decisive argument in favour of distinction of the social sciences. This is why adherents of the distinctness of sociology concentrate on demonstrating that it is a humanist science. They point out that its subject matter is qualitatively different than that of the natural sciences, that it must apply methods which consider subject-object identity of cognition in all social sciences and that it has varied theoretical aims.

A particular role in the controversy regarding the distinctness of the social sciences is played by the views of Max Weber to which must be devoted a few sentences, though of a very preliminary character. Weber's conceptions were to bridge a gap between natural science and the humanities the distinctness of which was so strongly emphasized by 19th century German philosophy. He underscored the empirical character of the social sciences which consists in the fact that they investigate human action. Thus understood, the subject matter of social science was rather broadly conceived. Decisive was considered the role of thought rendering meaning to behaviour.¹⁴ The conception "the rationality of action" was to enable transition from empirical facts to ideas and motives.

In his argumentation regarding the status of the social sciences Weber was an unusually penetrating theoretician. He attempted to reject the views on the incomparable reliability of the results of social and natural science which he considered ungrounded. And on the other hand, he desired to establish the distinctness of the social sciences in relation to natural science and to history. He furthermore pointed out that the natural sciences are burdened with the same defects their representatives attribute to the humanities. He stressed that science is never in a state to attain a full picture of reality. It captures only fragments and aspects of the reality. Weber also stressed that general theoretical categories are as important in the social as in the natural sciences. Such a role is played, in his opinion, by theoretical constructions called "ideal types." Their indispensability also distinguishes sociology from history.¹⁵

Weber at the same time acknowledges to the humanities a considerable distinctness. He stresses their specific epistemological subjectivism. *Ver-*

¹⁴ M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, The Free Press, N.Y. 1964, p. 88. He writes: "Sociology (in the sense in which this highly ambiguous word is used here) is science which attempts the interpretative understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects. In "action" is included all human behaviour when and insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it. Action in this sense may be either overt or purely inward or subjective."

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109: "It has continually been assumed as obvious that the science of sociology seeks to formulate type concepts and generalized uniformities of the empirical process. This distinguishes it from history, which is oriented to the causal analysis and explanation of individual actions, structures and personalities possessing cultural significance."

stehen as a method is possible precisely because of this subjectivism which, in his opinion, does not undermine the ontological objectivity of science.

Weber's argumentation is continued by many modern authors who attempt to enrich it with new elements or to strengthen some of his arguments.¹⁶ They thus note that the world of interest to social science is the man made world in distinction from nature which exists independently of man. Society is not only created by people, but contrary to nature which is relatively immutable, society changes in time and space. Understanding, irrespective of the different meanings of that word in Dilthey, Weber and Znaniecki, seems a much more adequate method in those disciplines in which are involved the identity of the subject and object of cognition and which embrace phenomena transcending the sphere of directly observable events. But this would close the possibility of retaining in the social sciences the discourse required in the natural sciences.

The consequences of the described differences are of course that the social sciences have entirely different theoretical aims. Since generalization which would fulfil the conditions of scientific law is most often unattainable for it, the understanding of the social reality is adopted as its principal aim.¹⁷ Many of these elements consider explicitly or implicitly the conception of the humanist coefficient introduced into sociology by Znaniecki who wrote:

"Generally speaking, every cultural system is found by the investigator to exist for certain conscious and active historical subjects, i.e. within the sphere of experience and activity of some particular people, individuals and collectivities, living in a certain part of the human world during a certain historical period. Consequently, for the scientist this cultural system is really and objectively as it was (or is) given to those historical subjects themselves when they were (or are) experiencing it and actively dealing with it. In a word, the data of the cultural student are always 'somebody's', never 'nobody's' data. This essential character of cultural data we call the *humanistic coefficient*, because such data, as objects of the student's theoretic reflection, already belong to somebody else's active experience and are such as this active experience makes them."¹⁸

The concept humanist coefficient assumes a new meaning in the context of the contemporary phenomenological sociology current. Perhaps the most essential innovation introduced by this current is its pointing to the relation between the sociological conception and common thinking of the social reality. There is no doubt that this idea is implicit in Znaniecki's conception, though it was never systematically developed.¹⁹ I recall it at this point in order to call attention to the fact that while the natural

¹⁶ Particularly characteristic is Max Weber's influence — previously an aspiration to T. Parsons — on phenomenological sociology which constitutes an opposition to the latter's methodological perspectives. This influence was already noted in the works of A. Schutz and is further evident in P. Berger and T. Luckman.

¹⁷ In reference to "understanding," it is necessary to distinguish it as an end and as a method. This is not always clear in works using that term.

¹⁸ F. Znaniecki, *The Method of Sociology*, New York 1934, pp. 36—37. It should be remembered that the source of the idea of the 'humanist coefficient' are the works of F. C. S. Schiller. It is to Znaniecki's credit that he transferred that idea to sociology.

¹⁹ This is to be seen especially in Znaniecki's *The Social Role of the Man of Knowledge*, Columbia Univ. Press, N.Y. 1940, p. 64: "While the knowledge of the technologist evolves out of the technical knowledge of the occupational specialist, the knowledge of the scientist who deals with cultural phenomena originates in that set of non-specialized information about language, religion, magic, economic processes, customs, mores, persons and groups which individuals in a given society are supposed to (know) in order to perform the roles of members of this society."

sciences' vision of reality is ever more distant from the common-sense view of the world, social science seems to return to the latter perspective. Although it does not have full confidence in common sense, social science regards it as an unavoidable and reliable point of departure.

The social sciences, remaining within the latitude of most epistemological and methodological problems denoted by the philosophy of science, are thus the source of additional questions which is specific to them. It may be appropriate to address certain key philosophical questions exclusively to them.

The most general aim of the social sciences, like all others, is cognition. This statement seems not only banal but also paradoxical. The desire and need to comprehend nature is easy to understand, considering its autonomous existence independent of man and, what's more, its resistance to human activity. But the social reality is the work of man himself. How then are we to understand the desire to cognize it? A closer look into the matter shows however, that the basic function of social science is essentially not cognition or even understanding of the social reality. At least equally important is its participation in the creation and transformation of that reality.²⁰ That is due in part to consciously formulated practical aims and partly to the inevitable ties between the social reality and the ideas formed about it. Stanisław Ossowski considered the intervention of programmes of action in the statements about reality to be one of the "peculiarities" of the social science.²¹

It needs to be stressed that transformation of the social reality has here almost a literary meaning. It hence should not be identified with what is sometimes called transformation of our material reality — which only means adaptation of the material world to changing human needs. An adapted material world continues to operate under the same physical laws which made its adaptation possible. The transformed social world requires other concepts and develops according to hitherto unknown patterns.

Research practice in the social sciences is determined by the existing state of knowledge, application of a particular conceptual apparatus, coefficients flowing from conscious or unconscious practical aims, the researcher's socially shaped world view, system of values, etc. The mutability and complexity of the social reality make it possible to legitimately apply competing philosophical and methodologic premises.²²

It is my opinion that precisely the complexity of man's social world and the fact that it undergoes a ceaseless process create a situation unthinkable on such a scale in the natural sciences, although certain of its symptoms are observable there too. We thus obtain competing images of the social reality which are equally credible from a theoretical viewpoint.²³

²⁰ A. Podgórecki enumerates five basic functions of sociology: social diagnostics, apologetic, expository, theoretical and sociotechnical — "Pięć funkcji socjologii" [The Five Functions of Sociology], in: *Socjotechnika* [Sociotechnics], Warszawa 1968.

²¹ S. Ossowski, "O osobliwościach nauk Społecznych" [On the Peculiarities of the Social Sciences], in: *Dzieła* [Works], vol. 4, PWN, Warszawa 1967, pp. 218—219.

²² Adorno properly conceives the highly complex character of social reality: "Society is full of contradictions and yet determinable; rational and irrational in one, a system and yet fragmented; blind nature and yet mediated by consciousness. The sociological mode or procedure must bow to this," *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, Harper Torchbooks, Harper and Row, N.Y. 1976, p. 106.

²³ In physics such a situation is observable with the theory of light where the corpuscular coexists with the wave theory.

The qualification of epistemological relativism is at the same time definitely out of place here.²⁴ The unavoidable question then arises: how can contradictory and competing bodies of knowledge of social reality be equally credible? It may be said that that is due to certain of that reality's characteristics, as suggested above. But that suggestion has at best the force of a hypothesis, inasmuch as the source of the reality's characteristics is cognition and that is precisely the subject of discussion. It hence seems that another question should be posed here: what is it that we apprehend in the process of cognition in the social sciences? For it is certain that it does not embrace the totality of the social reality involved. Still more essential is the fact that regardless of theories of cognition rejecting the assumption that its end is knowledge of finished objects "awaiting" investigation, this assumption is in essence present in all cases from the moment it is intended to formulate the aim of cognitive activity in the social sciences. In undertaking research the sociologist — by the nature of things — expects to comprehend something which already exists in the investigated reality. Without questioning the existence of objective reality, we must be aware of the fact that the direct object of cognition, or that which emerges as a result of cognition of the *comprehended object*, is the result of an intricate process constituting the acts of cognition with the participation of a complex of determinants. Taking into consideration the discordance between the common-sense intentions and expectations of the social sciences and the unavoidable complexity of the factors which decide what is actually apprehended, as well as the entanglement of the social sciences with programs of action and practical aims (noted above) we are led to the conviction that *the question of the subject of cognition* is the key to unraveling the petrified misunde standings regarding sociology's epistemological status.

I believe that this is one of the basic philosophical questions which cannot be resolved by sociology alone, although that is indispensable for that discipline.

4. A considerable distance between theoretical reflection and empirical research seems to be one of sociology's characteristic features. This is moreover, both a substantive distance, consisting in operating with theoretical categories in empirical researches with considerable conventionality and arbitrariness, as well as a distance which may be called imprecisely "psychological". With the latter case we have in mind the fact that a considerable part of empirical research is conducted without full awareness of the theoretical premises behind them.

Robert Merton notes the dominance of the theoretical or empirical orientation in sociologists' professional attitudes. While the former desire to generalize at any price, the latter are concerned first of all with registering empirically justified facts. As Merton writes, the identification motto of the first group would be:

"We do not know whether what we say is true, but it is at least significant."

Representatives of the second group would say:

²⁴ The qualification "epistemological relativism" assumes the existence of internally immutable objects whose cognition differs according to place, time or the cognizer's personality. While variability of the results of cognition — the question precisely at issue here — is due to and attests to different subjects of cognition, as suggested by this author in further argumentation.

"This is demonstrably so, but we cannot indicate its significance."²⁵

Such dissonance between theory and empirical research is not necessarily due to different predispositions among sociologists, to their education or ignorance. Everything indicates that it is unavoidable for basic reasons.

The philosophical discourse comprised in theory pertaining to the question of meaning is simply not translatable into exclusive cognitive aims of empirical sociological research. The dissonance in question is hence undoubtedly the result of distinctness of thinking and cognition as well as of meaning and truth, of which Hanna Arendt wrote.

Although such a solution is not free of further problems, it should be postulated that discussions on the relation between sociology and philosophy be focussed on theoretical reflections in sociology. It is known that not all theoretical efforts in that discipline are expressions of a desire to generalize (as Merton suggests). But all are to a greater or lesser degree under the influence of one or another philosophical tradition and all have to do with elements of philosophical discourse. Finally, all are in a position to benefit in sociology from philosophical thought.

²⁵ R. Merton, *On Theoretical Sociology*, The Free Press, New York 1967, p. 139.