

JÓZEF NIŻNIK

On the Possibility of Development of Sociology

I

Among the assumptions accepted by scholars and scientists of various branches one at least is held in common. It is the assumption of development of science. It constitutes a starting point, more or less consciously realized, of any scientist's attitude to his discipline of knowledge. The development of science, or at any rate of his own discipline is for a scholar a basic *raison d'être*, a basis of his aspirations and hopes for making a further step forward in his field.

Sociologists, therefore, share the assumption of development of science with the representatives of other disciplines and like them, they dismiss the possibility of questioning this thesis.¹ In most sciences, at any rate, it seems obvious, and beyond any doubt. The very problem of development of science has long been regarded as completely separate from the subjects dealt with by the particular branches of knowledge. It became a domain of philosophy and as I have earlier shown, it seems that no agreement in question of the principle of this development may soon be reached.²

What I am going to consider here, is not, however, the development of science in general, but the problem of development of its one particular discipline, namely sociology. The expression *the development of sociology* appears in the works of sociologists as often as the term *development* is used in the works of other scientists with reference to their disciplines. Hardly any of them bothers himself with the problem of its meaning, although even a cursory analysis of various statements made by sociologists shows that even a cursory analysis of various statements made by sociologists shows that they are far from being unequivocal. So we arrive at a point where the indispensability of a notion is accompanied by its considerable equivocality, or even vagueness. The notion of *development* suggests above all some value, and in this sense the conviction of a sociologist that his investigations serve the development of sociology may be compared to that of a legislator who believes that his activity serves

¹ Characteristically, the book devoted completely to development of science contains no analysis of the formulation *development of science*. In the light of the content of the book it seems especially intriguing to establish the degree in which the partisans of various *schemes of development of science* agree in the assumptions they take as a point of departure for their investigations. The actual standpoints presented in the book can, naturally, serve as a basis for the reconstruction of the interpretation of the term *development of science*. See: E. Pietruska-Madej, *W poszukiwaniu praw rozwoju nauki* [In Search of the Laws of Development of Science] Warszawa: PWN, 1980.

² J. Niżnik, "Anarchizm teoretyczny a ważność wiedzy społecznej" [Theoretical Anarchism and Validity of Social Knowledge], *Studia Filozoficzne*, 10/1980.

justice. No wonder then, that the qualification of development is often simply a kind of apology with regard to one's own discipline or even solely with regard to one's own activity within its framework.³

The expression *development of sociology* may just help to make sociologists more self-assured, or only serve as an epitome of various changes taking place in this discipline in the course of time. And the only common feature of these changes would be their positive evaluation. Of course, if we agree to such a definition of the term *development*, tantamount to any positively evaluated change in time, the question of development in sociology will present no problem. We may then easily say that the history of sociology is a picture of its development.

However, while presenting the subject of my argumentation I was convinced not only of its underlying intricacy, but also of the fact that the problem it presents is not only confined to terminology. The question whether the development of sociology is possible, or in what terms can this development be rendered is, as it seems to me, one of the ways of investigating the theoretical status of our discipline.⁴

It seems that the notion of development of sociology functions in the minds of sociologists not only in various senses, but also in ones which are not legitimate with regard to this branch of science. As a result, at the very foundations of theoretical reflection on sociology illusions are created, which sometimes take the shape of serious errors and lead to unjustified theoretical claims. So if we want to use the term *development of science*, we have to be fully aware that in the case of sociology it means something different than in the case of many other disciplines.

I should like to emphasize here that I do not personally accept any assumption with regard to the meaning of the term *development*. Neither do I make it explicit here, nor try to base my argumentation on any implicit assumption. My statements regarding the notion of development do not represent my own position, but the convictions, openly or tacitly associated with this notion that can be observed in various scholarly texts.

Upon cursory reading it may seem that the present author tacitly accepts the notion of development identified with progress. So I should like to make it clear, that it is not my assumption, but a result of investigations aimed at answering especially two questions, namely 1) why is the assumption of development so common, and 2) which connotation of this term makes it so indispensable?

The starting point of my argumentation is the observation that the axiological aspect of the notion of development evident in the application of this notion in sociology does not result in the least from those specific connotations in which this notion functions in the various texts. In other words, one is under the impression that regardless of the specific and various connotations of the term *development*, its indispensability is connected only with one connotation, which more or less (though more often

³ This was pointed out by Ernest Nagel, who wrote about the word "development": "It is frequently employed as a purely descriptive term to characterize several types of change; but it also functions in many contexts as an eulogistic label." E. Nagel, *Teleology Revisited and Other Essays in the Philosophy and History of Science*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1979, p. 260.

⁴ One can also follow another way by studying the object of cognition in sociology or the consequences arising for its theoretical status from the definite standpoints of philosophy of science (cf. e.g., note 2).

less) distinctly manifests itself as a basic connotation. At the same time, however, precisely this basic connotation finds no application to the discipline we are interested at present, that is sociology. This basic connotation is not my assumption. In the course of further analysis I am trying to reconstruct it, while seeking a connotation adequate to the hopes attached to the term *development* by scholars. So the intent of my further reasoning is, above all, to reveal the essence of those hopes, and consequently, to arrive at the connotation that we are interested in. In the next passage I am trying to show that the application of the notion of development as they appear in sociological texts clearly do not come up to the aspirations linked with the term by those who employ it.

II

Let us now consider the connotations in which the term *development of sociology* appears in the works of various authors dealing with theoretical foundations of sociology. The authors who employ it, have in mind, more or less clearly, various and different criteria of development of science. Those criteria can be roughly divided into immanent and transcendent. The former pertain to the characteristics of science itself, whereas next passage I am trying to show that the application of the notion of A good example of an immanent criterion would be the additiveness or cumulateness of results. Whereas a transcendent criterion would be, e.g., progress in control of reality. Illustration may be provided by the works of four chosen authors: Alvin Gouldner, Robert Nisbet, Robert Merton, and Stanisław Ossowski. In the texts I refer to, none of them formulated the question of development of sociology as a subject of his reflection. It clearly appears implicitly as an accepted assumption. However, upon the analysis of specific statements one can reconstruct a few basic connotations, in which the term in question functions there. Let us begin with the connotation which interprets **development as a growth of the number of valuable results**. In such an interpretation it is not essential what criteria we apply in qualifying the results as valuable, nor whether the value of results is limited in time, or whether this value is timeless. The basic thesis is beyond question: regardless of the criteria applied, certain results achieved in sociology were in one or another sense valuable. The conception of the theoretical status of sociology underlying such an interpretation of its development can be compared with that of art or philosophy. Namely, in the same way one can speak of development in philosophy or art. So that sometimes the affinity of sociology to art or philosophy is explicitly stressed.⁵ The book of Robert Nisbet is entitled *Sociology as an Art Form*.⁶ His view in this respect displays considerable coherence. A study of his other works corroborates that precisely such a view of sociology was his fundamental premise. In his book *The Sociological Tradition* he emphasizes that the most important sociological ideas were produced by imagination, vision and intuition, and not through solution of any problems.⁷

⁵ For the problem of the philosophical discourse in sociology see J. Niżnik, *Przedmiot poznania w naukach społecznych* [*The Object of Cognition in Social Sciences*], Warszawa: PWN, 1979, pp. 7—8.

⁶ R. Nisbet, *Sociology as an Art Form*, London: Oxford University Press, 1976.

The problem of similarity between science and art has been perceived not only by sociologists. It has been discussed by philosophy of science in a much more general perspective. E. M. Hafner goes as far as to say that "the more carefully we try to distinguish artist from scientist, the more difficult our task becomes."⁸ The interest of the mentioned discussions is however focussed mainly on the very process of scientific or artistic work, on the characteristics of the products of a scientist or an artist, or on the reaction of recipients to those products.⁹ If we take into account the characteristics of art or science as historically separate domains of culture, the essential dissimilarities can hardly be denied. In the first place, however, these dissimilarities concern the natural sciences. If Kuhn, who made notice of them, had taken into account sociology in his polemic with Hafner, his task would have been much more difficult. An artist, while appreciating the works of the past, thinks it necessary to work according to a different canon. This is, says Kuhn, an example of ideology, where tradition is deemed to be dead, whereas the products of this tradition remain alive. Consequently, a problem arises, what can replace such categories as "right-wrong" or "correct-incorrect."¹⁰

Now the position of sociology is even more complicated as the category of truth finds here an extremely limited application. Moreover, it seems that besides the relation to tradition and its products which resembles the above-mentioned situation in art, in sociology we often have to do with a reverse relation. It happens that tradition remains alive in a greater degree than its products, though the latter do not ultimately lose their significance, either. The relation to the past is, at any rate, generally perceived as that element of the characteristics of sociology, which unquestionably makes it differ from other disciplines. I shall have to come back to this problem in the later part of this paper. The problem of relation to tradition is linked, on the other hand, with the role of innovation in art and science. The dissimilarity in this respect is the factor which distinguishes science from art most definitely. According to Kuhn it consists in the fact that an artist and a scientist each ascribes a definitely different importance to innovation as value in itself.¹¹

Let us move now to other meanings of the word "development" in sociological writings. The notion of development of sociology is frequently used in the sense that sociological reflection encompasses ever new questions, new spheres of problems, that within the bounds of sociology we observe the emergence of constantly new domains. This phenomenon is accompanied by the **emergence of new narrow specializations**. Such an

⁷ R. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers, 1966, pp. 18—19. "It is important to keep in mind, if only as a prophylaxis against vulgar scientism, that not one of the ideas we are concerned with—ideas that remain, let it be emphasized, central in contemporary sociological thought—came into being as a consequence of what we are today pleased to call 'problem solving' thought. Without exception, each of these ideas is a result of thought processes—imagination, vision, intuition—that bear as much relation to the artist as to the scientist."

⁸ T. Kuhn, "Comment on the Relations of Science and Art," in: *The Essential Tensions*, T. Kuhn (ed.), Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977, p. 341.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 341; the opposition between the activity of scientist and artists was also questioned by J. Łukasiewicz, J. Łukasiewicz, *O nauce [On Science]*, Lwów, 1934.

¹⁰ T. Kuhn, *The Essential Tensions...*, p. 345—346.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 350.

interpretation of development of sociology can be detected in the statement by Alvin Gouldner, which reads: "The intellectual development of sociology during the last two decades or so, especially the growth of the sociologies of occupations and of science, is, when fused with the larger perspectives of the older sociology of knowledge, one promising basis for the development of a Reflexive Sociology."¹² The process of increasing specialization within the framework of sociology, indicated by Gouldner, goes hand in hand with another phenomenon, mentioned sometimes as a sign of development. What I have in mind is precisely **the increasing institutionalization of the branch**, finding its expression in the creation of new university departments, lines of study, specialistic periodicals, and scientific associations.¹³

However, while development in the sense of institutionalization of a branch seems unquestionable, the emergence of narrow specializations within its framework is not always felt as a true measure of its development. According to Robert Nisbet since the beginnings of sociological reflection until now no change could be noticed in the basic "unit-ideas," which are the constitutive elements of sociology. They are: community, authority, status, the sacred, alienation.¹⁴

Sometimes it is maintained that what can be taken as a true measure of development of science is the **progress in control of reality**. So if natural sciences serve to control nature, it can be said likewise, that social sciences are expected to "control the people." This was, more or less clearly, a guiding principle of the trend of the so-called social engineering. A. Gouldner, while arguing this point, underlines that such a view objectifies people, suggesting that they can be manipulated as well as all other objects.¹⁵

There is a similar view on development of sociology, which however by-passes such difficulties by underlining that what is essential for development is the **growth of knowledge**. Moreover, such an interpretation of development arouses intuitively less doubt than other applications of this notion discussed above, though it cannot be sustained in the case of sociology, either. The objections with regard to this interpretation are however of different character. What is brought up as a charge is the specifics of social knowledge. Consequently, it is not clear in what sense one can speak of the growth of that special kind of knowledge that is gained in sociology. So that the very idea of growth seems doubtful. Let us look at those difficulties a little closer.

Social knowledge can be understood, among others, as a certain state of awareness, or a set of social ideas. Although this concept does not exhaust in the least all kinds of knowledge represented by sociology, this aspect of sociology seems of special significance. But, in fact, it is hardly possible to speak about the growth of knowledge understood as *awareness* or *social ideas*. Though Stanisław Ossowski considered the distinction of social knowledge and social ideas necessary, other authors, e.g.,

¹² A. Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, New York: Avon Books, 1970, p. 489.

¹³ S. Ossowski, "On the Peculiarities of Social Sciences," in: *Dzieła [Works]* vol. 4, Warszawa: PWN, 1967, p. 284; "Modern empirical sociology achieved what had been sought by representatives of sociology since Comte: a clear-out field of study, its own tasks, own methods, own institutions."

¹⁴ R. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition...*, p. 5—6.

¹⁵ A. Gouldner, *op. cit.*, p. 492.

Gouldner speak outright of *knowledge conceived as awareness*. Notwithstanding whether the product of sociology, which Ossowski calls *social ideas* will be classified as knowledge, or whether it will be regarded as a result of different sort, the very fact of its existence bears upon the evaluation of possibility of development in sociology. Even if one can speak of *growth* or *development* of *awareness* or *social ideas*, the meanings of the terms *growth* or *development* will then differ completely from the ones taken into consideration when we speak of the development of a branch of science. An apt statement seems that of Ossowski's, who wrote that

"The history of social sciences is the history of knowledge in a certain domain and at the same time a history of social ideas, and the latter, if we take them apart from the technical means of their realization, and from the scientific apparatus used for their justification, cannot be ranged in time in the line of progress, just as art, as literature or religious mysticism."¹⁶

The very "ranging in time in the line of progress" is precisely such an interpretation of development, which almost completely rules out the possibility of development of sociology. A similar conclusion may be reached if we regard the knowledge achieved in sociology as a type of awareness. According to Gouldner's statement the qualification of development would then be unclear if only because the very function of the category of truth would in this case be changed. "In a knowing conceived as awareness, the concern is not with 'discovering' the truth about a social world regarded as external to the knower, but with seeing truth as growing out of the knower's encounter with the world and his effort to order his experience with it."¹⁷ In this case it would even be hard to define the meaning of the growth of sociological knowledge (or of development conceived in this way). It is hard to establish any kind of preference with respect to one or other type of order or interpretation. Above all, there are no independent criteria in this respect. That is, criteria that would not refer to any further values. One of such criteria is among others, that of truth, whose function in sociology, as we have seen, is very special.¹⁸ Other criteria seem equally unclear, as e.g., that of clarity of theory, or effectiveness of practical activity based on the knowledge achieved. (E.g., activity based on a given theory may be effective in one society, and completely ineffective in another. On the other hand, if we anticipate such an eventuality by accepting the validity of the theory only in respect to a limited number of definite societies, it will be clear that this type of knowledge rules out the development of sociology at least in one and very important sense.) Therefore by admitting that sociology, apart from simple information about facts, which at any rate always require some kind of interpretation based on theory, is above all a formative factor of our awareness, or a discipline whose final aim is understanding, we have to arrive at the conclusion that the category of development conceived as growth of knowledge, is for the determination of the theoretical status of this discipline completely useless. Its status has been determined by the very concepts of awareness and understanding referred to in the characteristics we accepted.

¹⁶ S. Ossowski, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

¹⁷ A. Gouldner, *op. cit.*, p. 493.

¹⁸ Cf, on the same subject J. Niżnik, *Przedmiot poznania w naukach społecznych...* [The Object of Cognition in Social Sciences...], p. 114.

While sustaining the concept of *development* interpreted as *growth of knowledge* it would not be out of place to consider Robert Merton's view in this respect. Merton, who like most sociologists, assumes development of sociology as an undeniable fact, clearly accepts its interpretation as *growth of knowledge*. The historians of sociology, he maintains, describe this development in two ways. In the first case the development of sociology is rendered by the term *adumbrationism*. In other words, it is assumed, that any new theory is some kind of a shadow of a past one, and nothing can be said, that has not been said before. In the second case, it is maintained that the development of sociology is achieved through a sporadic appearance of new orientations and through gaining knowledge by research carried out within the framework of these orientations. This knowledge, in the formation of which a large part is also played by documented anticipations and past attainments of the discipline, contributes to general resources of sociological knowledge. While admitting that it is possible to speak of growth of knowledge in sociology, Merton says that it is not a kind of knowledge which can be cumulated. He also indicates a convincing way of testing the cumulativeness of knowledge. He writes :

"The severest test of truly cumulative knowledge is that run-of-the-mill minds can solve problems today which great minds could not begin to solve earlier. An undergraduate student of mathematics knows how to identify and solve problems which defied the best powers of a Leibniz, Newton, or Cauchy."¹⁹

So that, without dismissing the qualification of development with respect to sociology, Merton is clearly aware of the fact that this development is deprived of one, perhaps the most essential, characteristic, associated with the process of development.

Ossowski, also fully conscious of the difficulties connected with the problem of development in sociology points to the "double birth" of the discipline. "Sociology as a science was born twice, and each time as a different science."²⁰ he writes. At this point one can hardly doubt that the double birth is an alternative for the idea of development. The first birth took place in the first half of the 19th century, the second in the 20th, with the emergence of empirical sociology. The discontinuity of the history of "great" sociological theory and empirical sociology also finds its reflection in contemporary sociology. Empirical studies, although always invoking such or other theoretical basis, remain a relatively autonomous preoccupation of sociologists, who most often reduce the connection between those investigations and sociological theory to their own declarations.

III

In my hitherto reasoning I have surveyed some of the connotations of the term *development of sociology* as they appear in the works of sociologists. I drew attention to the applications of the term whereby it denotes 1) growth of the number of valuable results, 2) emergence of new

¹⁹ Robert K. Merton, *On Theoretical Sociology*, New York : The Free Press, 1967, p. 27.

²⁰ S. Ossowski, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

specializations, 3) increasing institutionalization of the discipline, 4) progress in control of reality, 5) growth of knowledge.

It seems noteworthy that the problem of development has not been formulated as a subject of analysis in most texts, which served here as a source of information on the ways of interpreting the notion of development. The notion appeared occasionally in the course of analyses devoted to other subjects or even, as one of the matters taken for granted, it was completely overlooked. It seems however, that the importance attached to the qualification of development is due only to one connotation of this term, and it is precisely the one which is not, and cannot be taken into account in sociology. In other words, sociologists who use the term *development* in various senses tend to derive from it some satisfactions, made possible by the very connotation of the term, which finds no application to their discipline, altogether.

While formulating this view I have to answer a few specific questions :

- 1) Why should only one meaning of the term "development" determine the importance of this notion ?
- 2) What is this meaning ?
- 3) Why is development of sociology in this sense impossible ?
- 4) Of what consequence is all this for the theoretical status of the discipline ? (It might seem, at first sight, that the consequences are only destructive, which is not the case.)

Let us then come back to the connotations of the expression *development of sociology* mentioned above. I shall now try to take a possibly most favourable attitude towards the very idea of development in sociology. I should like to say therefore, that the above presented critical commentary to the reconstructed connotations of this idea as formulated in the quoted texts does not necessarily lead to the rejection of any of these connotations. Let us then look at the situation in which the idea of development of sociology will be found if we accept all these connotations together as a kind of synthetic definition. At first sight the development of sociology conceived in this way seems to arouse no doubt. Let us note, however, that the elements of this synthetic definition are by no means independent of each other. At least three of them cannot be regarded as the expression of development of the discipline unless they involve the two others. These two crucial elements are the growth of the number of valuable results and growth of knowledge. And yet those two elements are also interdependent, in one definite way. Namely, the growth of the number of valuable results will signify development of sociology only when and if it is tantamount to the growth of knowledge. The whole difficulty is now shifted and rests in the interpretation of the *growth of knowledge*, the term I dealt with earlier on. As we have seen, the importance of some results in sociology is limited to a certain period of time. However, what makes the problem of growth of knowledge in sociology so complicated, is not the very time limit but its theoretical consequences. The transitoriness of some ideas is not only a characteristic of science in general, but a sheer condition of growth of knowledge. For the later is sometimes identified with replacement of some theories, i.e., definite scientific achievements of the past, by new theories with greater explanatory power. It means that those new theories make possible not only the solution of definite problems formulated earlier but also of problems which are completely new. So that what we generally have in mind while

referring to the growth of knowledge is the cumulativeness of knowledge in the sense explained earlier after Merton. Whereas in the case of sociology cumulativeness of knowledge is a matter which arouses enormous doubt.²¹

In other words, even when we reconstruct the meaning of the expression *development of sociology* on the basis of its different connotations actually appearing in sociological literature, it seems that it renders beyond any doubt only the fact of some changes within the discipline occurring in time. However, upon analysis, it seems doubtful whether we can attribute, even formally, the name of development to those changes, unless we overlook some important intuitions accompanying this term. What are these intuitions? What is the factor which so unquestionably determines the positive sense of the term *development* in the cases when we use it with the intention of positive evaluation? It should be noted here, that the term *development* is at least occasionally mentioned in a way which rules out a positive evaluation. This happens, e.g., when we speak of *development of an illness*. In such cases no evaluation is meant at all; we bring into focus the teleological aspect of the notion, which has only a descriptive value. *Development of an illness* signifies that the typical symptoms earlier defined are gradually revealed. Nevertheless, it is clear that when speaking of development of a scientific discipline we have in mind a process that is evaluated positively, and its teleological aspect almost completely disappears.²² And if its orientation towards a definite aim does appear in this context, it is not an immanent feature of a process in question, but the intention of its agent.

The last observation constitutes a turning point in my reasoning. It seems that while looking for a definition of development with a positive undertone, we must focus on such an interpretation of development, which can be related to purposeful cognitive activity of man. If we draw attention to the aspect of science in which it is a **purposeful activity** we can characterize the formal conditions of the possibly best course of this activity. So the meaning of development sought after refers to the process of best organization of purposeful cognitive activity. And it is the results of this activity which can serve as a point of reference in the evaluation of its course. One can presume that precisely this connotation of the term underlies most statements on development of science and makes development a necessary assumption in any consideration of science.

Speaking on *purposeful cognitive activity*, the expression of which is science, I simply have in mind the fact that it is an activity directed by questions formulated in advance. Let us now consider in what sense we can speak of development of so conceived purposeful cognitive activity of man.

Philosophy is also such an activity in a sense. A philosopher is also guided in his reflection by questions formulated in advance. These questions are, however, of a different type, many of them continue to exist throughout the history of philosophy in unchanged form, and the subsequent answers to them cannot be ranged in the form of one possible sequence, which would be both a sequence of time and logic. Philosophy

²¹ On the subject of "cumulativeness" and "anticumulativeness" see E. Pietruska-Madej, *op. cit.*, p. 142 ff.

²² On the elements of teleology in the notion of development see E. Nagel, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

has created a separate form of discourse. (And the presence of this discourse in sociology bears on its theoretical status in a considerable degree.) And nobody tries to take the results of philosophy as a point of reference in speaking of its *development*. If such a formulation of development of philosophy sometimes occurs, it refers to a completely different phenomenon, namely a growing interest in this type of intellectual activity in some periods of history or in some areas of the world.

So that philosophy, just like literature, which is also sometimes regarded as a cognitive activity, should be excluded from the field of our present interest. After all, if we agree with the earlier quoted distinction by Gouldner, who suggested that knowledge can be understood either as information or as consciousness, the knowledge achieved in philosophy or in literature, would foremostly constitute *consciousness*.

What remains the subject of my interest is, in other words, such a type of purposeful cognitive activity of man, the course of which is being evaluated also with respect to the results achieved. In this way the notion of development would be limited to denotation of processes, marked by the following characteristics :

1. A given state of affairs is not possible without the former existence of states preceding it.
2. A subsequent state of affairs is better than the previous ones in a sense that it is closer to the intentions of man or to his cognitive aims.
3. The process in question is irreversible.

One can hardly deny that these characteristics continue to rest on intuition, in other words, the proposed interpretation of development can still be regarded as arbitrary. It is my sincere conviction, however, that this interpretation comes closest to the meaning in which the term functions in science as a tacit assumption, charged with a positive evaluation. Taking such a meaning as our point of departure we can speak both of the development of science and, if we retain in point (2) only a more broadly conceived notion of "intention," e.g., the development of economy.

There is no doubt that so interpreted notion of development is very close to the notion of progress. However, if the distinction made between the two terms seems justified, it is because the notion of *development*, at least in the proposed interpretation, relates the positive evaluation of the process to the intentions of man, whereas *progress* suggests an evaluation of the process with respect to its immanent qualities.²³ However, this distinction is often forsaken. It was not taken into consideration by S. Ossowski, when he claimed, writing about "social ideas," that they cannot be ranged in a line of progress.

If we assume that the significance of the qualification of development, is determined by such an interpretation of the term which can be characterized by the above three qualities, it seems almost self-evident that this qualification is in the case of sociology deprived of substantial justification. However, I shall try to put together some arguments.

²³ A. N. Condorcet holds the immanent features of human nature, and not human intentions to be the motive power underlying the progress of civilization. He wrote e.g. : "Ces observations sur ce que l'homme a été, sur ce qu'il est aujourd'hui conduiront ensuite aux moyens d'assurer et d'accélérer les nouveaux progrès que sa nature lui permet d'espérer encore." A. N. Condorcet, "Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain," in : A. N. Condorcet, *Choix de Textes*, Paris : Société des éditions Louis-Michaud, p. 80 (my italics—J.N.). He often used the terms "développement" and "progrès" alternately.

Let us note that sociology is a discipline practiced clearly in a paradoxical way. Namely, its object, if we agree to call it "social reality," undergoes constant changes. These changes have both a historical and geographical aspect. Even if we take theoretically identical vicissitudes of time and space, disregarding changes in minute distances of time and space, a variety of aspects and methodological approaches is still possible, as a result of which our actual object of cognition is almost in each case different. At the same time sociology, even among social sciences, seems to be almost the only one in which the past concepts lose their significance in such a small degree. As Stanisław Ossowski underlined

"Sociological writings containing reflection of past ages, saying nothing of the writers of the 19th century when read directly, can be instructive and inspiring for a contemporary sociologist in various ways (not only as documents of the period)."²⁴

This paradoxical aspect of sociology is reflected in the dealings of sociologists themselves. A sociologist, as Ossowski remarked, feels entitled both to draw on the achievements of the past, and to act as if all knowledge started with him :

"he constructs his own conceptual apparatus, poses old questions anew, he often makes discoveries, which were already made by others, or which have even become common knowledge, and by formulating them in a new language gives them the appearance of novelty."²⁵

The phenomenon mentioned by Ossowski shows, on the one hand, that sociologists perceived the above mentioned changeability of the object of their investigations and on the other, that they cannot get completely free of the approaches to the subject established and formulated in the past. One could even suspect that the usefulness of the concepts of old masters signifies that some elements of social reality remain constant regardless of its generally fluctuating character. Whereas this need not necessarily be the case. We can observe examples of "investigating" procedures which consist in "fitting" of the currently observed facts into the theories and rational apparatuses formed in completely different conditions and referring to reality which has long ceased to exist. It seems that such endeavours are at least sometimes made unconsciously, and sometimes they even lead to a more or less successful modification of reality according to the ideology applied.

While indicating the paradoxical character of sociology I do not want to say at all that discarding of its past is a condition of its development. I rather tend to believe that this paradoxicality is one of the characteristics of sociology and results from its special theoretical status. Similarly, the very nature of this discipline determines the fact, that the qualification of development is in its case a misconception or, at any rate, it leads to misconceptions.

Coming back to the above three characteristic points of the process of development let us also note, that the successive "states" in which sociology found itself are incomparable in respect of their closeness to the intentions of man. What we have to do with here is both non-identity of intentions and a lack of adequate criteria.

What can be treated as such a criterion in natural sciences is the abi-

²⁴ S. Ossowski, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

lity of science to answer the questions it has not been able to answer in its previous stage, and which it answers in the next stage, while retaining full capability of answering the hitherto questions. Viewing sociology in such a perspective one is led to think that its hitherto attainments contain some answers to all the possible future questions. On the other hand many of the newly formulated answers continue to refer to the same old questions, which are being answered over and over again. One can of course claim that the questions are only ostensibly identical, since the reality they refer to has already changed. At any rate, while comparing the successive stages of sociology, it is hardly possible to say that some of them were better than the previous ones, by being closer to the cognitive intentions of man.

In other words sociology may be treated as such a special type of purposeful cognitive activity which does not undergo any development.²⁶

Those however, who cannot get reconciled to the lack of development in sociology can find some comfort in the fact that their case may be defended at least in one point. Namely, it can be maintained, that what does undergo development is the means of gaining sociological knowledge, namely, something that may be called methodical efficiency and methodological consciousness of the discipline. There still remains a question whether development conceived in this way contributes to the growth of the cognitive capabilities of sociology. In my opinion, its only effect is a change of the language in which the results of investigations can be formulated.

I should still answer the fourth of the above formulated questions, namely what consequences for the theoretical status of sociology arise from the statement that sociology does not undergo any development. As my previous reflections show this feature of sociology cannot be regarded as a defect. The problem of development of sociology has been determined by the most fundamental assumptions regarding its object and cognitive tasks. In this situation it is hardly possible to speak of the effects of incapability of development on the theoretical status of sociology, since its status is determined in a considerable degree by the very fact that it does not undergo any development. Stanisław Ossowski places most part of sociological works, in their number also contemporary ones, "somewhere between physics and literary writings."²⁷ However, even such a statement does not provide an evaluation of maturity of this discipline, but is rather an attempt at defining its theoretical status.

The acceptance of the fact that sociology is a science that *by its very nature cannot be developed* rules out any attempts at comparison with developing sciences and frees the discipline from the charges of delay and at least a part of sociologists from concomitant complexes. Last but not least, one can expect, that by excluding *development of science* from the repertory of fundamental motivations of their research activity, sociologists will be able to perceive that the tasks of sociology as a social knowledge of man are dictated above all by contemporaneity.

²⁶ It is worth recalling here what Max Weber said with regard to this problem: "Moreover, there are sciences to which eternal youth is granted, and the historical disciplines are among them—all those to which the eternally onward flowing stream of culture perpetually brings new problems," M. Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, New York: The Free Press 1949, p. 104.

²⁷ *op. cit.*, p. 302.