## ВОПРОСЫ ТЕОРИИ И МЕТОДОЛОГИИ

# HEURISTIC RESOURCES OF THE 'CLASSICS': PERSPECTIVES OF SOCIOLOGICAL ENLIGHTENMENT

D.G. Podvoyskiy

Sociology Chair Peoples' Friendship University of Russia Miklukho-Maklaya str., 10/2, Moscow, Russia, 117198

The article discusses the methodological question traditional for the humanities and social sciences (and, above all, sociology), namely, the question about their world view status, functions and aims. According to the author, 'sociological enlightenment' provides a chance to justify the purport of scientific research on the theory and history of sociology (research that is culturally significant beyond the narrow professional frames of sociology). The most important component of this 'enlightenment' is the demonstration of 'heuristic resources' of classical and modern theoretical sociology as a means of scientific explanation and conceptualization of social problems at a level comprehensible to non-academic audiences.

**Key words:** sociological enlightenment, sociological imagination, world view functions of social sciences, heuristic resources of 'classical' sociology, Max Weber.

Recently, the professional discussion on the place and role of sociology and sociologists in the Russian society has become considerably more intense. Any specialized activity (including the sphere of science) suggests the appropriateness for its agents to ask the following questions: 'for what purpose are we doing this?' and 'who will benefit from it and may find it useful?'. Every actor seeks legitimation of one's professional existence both for subjective and objective self-affirmation, internal and external justification of one's claims for the status, authority, prestige, etc. Russian sociologists, like other professionals, are trying to win public recognition, but their success is still far from being impressive (in this respect they obviously concede, let us say, to economists and psychologists). The profession of sociologist is becoming more widespread, while the potential demand for sociologists' work remains rather low. This situation gives rise to attempts to comprehend what is going on, which leads to a search for some individual and collective strategies aimed to overcome the unsatisfactory state of affairs. The latest debates over the 'public mission' and the purpose of sociology possess not only ethical, but also pragmatic implications. The science about society in Russia is seeking to obtain a greater 'social weight' [7; 9].

Representatives of the historical-theoretical branch of sociology have even more grounds for pessimism, as there is no demand for theoretical sociological studies in Russia today. In fact, the scientists of this group often 'self-legitimize' their work as follows: 'only we need our science, we are studying what we are interested in, we communicate with a small (extremely narrow) circle of 'our own kind' and we are quite satisfied with this situation' (and one has only to be surprised that such a group manages to exist somehow and survive financially in a society that tends to 'proletarianize' scientific work, not valuing highly intellectual work in general). This attitude is either 'defeatist' or reflecting a 'totally isolationist' and 'esoteric-sectarian' intention of thought of the 'great adepts', filled with intellectual smugness and superiority. Under such conditions, some most successful representatives of the discipline can 'stay afloat' and keep up their status, but the discipline as a whole — barely. Such a strategy dooms any specific branch of science in any given society (of Russian type) to oblivion and decline.

'Sociological enlightenment' provides a chance to justify the purport of scientific research on the theory and history of sociology (research that is culturally significant beyond the narrow professional frames of sociology). The most important component of this 'enlightenment' is the demonstration of 'heuristic resources' of classical and modern theoretical sociology as a means of scientific explanation and conceptualization of social problems at a level comprehensible to non-academic audiences. Theoretical sociology and its history can acquire the features of public knowledge, although not necessarily of a public sociology suggested by Michael Burawoy [5; 6; 11]. His representatives can produce and propagate 'sociological imagination' as a specific cognitive perspective, but again in a broader sense than suggested by Charles Wright Mills [4].

The words 'enlightenment, 'enlightener', 'enlightening' in Russian are often used in officiously bureaucratic speech, especially in the fields of education and culture, for they bear the imprint of excessive pathos and 'high style'. Hence — the light aura of insincerity and lack of modesty, sycophancy or bragging, etc. Individuals involved in the relevant verbal practices are quite aware that someone who calls himself an 'enlightener' most likely is not one, for the 'true enlightener' tends to avoid self-identification. These 'titles' are more appropriate for 'anniversary congratulations' and 'obituaries', but we use them due to the lack of better nominations.

Let us try to answer the question: 'whom and how is sociology able to 'enlighten'?' or, which is the same, 'what is the essence and specifics of 'sociological' enlightenment?'. As an enlightener, any scientist differs from the French public intellectual or traditional Russian publicist. It makes sense to follow Max Weber: the cognitive interest of a social scientist, like any other person, is value-oriented; and it would probably be different if we talk about other eras and civilizations, as we play intellectual games, including science, by the rules of our own culture and age. We always aim to answer quite specific — non-random — sets of questions, choosing non-random research paths for these purposes. Awareness of such a situation and its reflexive control are important measurements of serious scientific work that meets the requirements of 'intellectual honesty'. But to the same extent as the theoretical 'value-judgments' do not coincide with the 'practical evaluations', the position of the sociologist cannot be marked as politically or otherwise 'biased'.

Sociologists' ideological and ethical views, psychological types, 'relation to reality' can differ greatly not affecting too much the ability to perform the enlightening function, for it persists under significant variations of propagators' 'axiological profiles'. An enlightener usually is not an apologist of the status quo or a conservative, not necessarily an exposer or accuser, a critic of culture and institutions. He cannot provide straightforward and simple answers to the questions 'what to do?' and 'who is to blame?'. He is not necessarily a social optimist, who believes that the world can become a better place, especially as he knows that 'better' and 'worse' can mean quite different things to different people and groups. Perhaps, he even believes that despite the age-old aspirations of pilgrims and revolutionaries of all kinds the world, alas, 'will remain the same'. Prophets give us hope and faith saving us from doubts; scientists cannot cope with that, on the contrary, they multiply our doubts.

However, that does not mean we are dealing with an inveterate pessimist, whose non-constructive position provides neither comfort nor help. The social science cannot save members of society 'once and for all' from suffering, misery, injustice and other macro- and micro-, social not psychological, problems they experience; it cannot make social life 'perfect', 'ideal', free from conflicts, but it can make it more *understandable* — which is a sufficient justification for the existence of sociology. According to Weber, the constituent parts and the results of this understanding are (1): "the technology of controlling life by calculating external objects as well as man's activities", "methods of thinking, the tools and the training for thought" as well as "gaining *clarity*" ("it is presupposed that we ourselves possess clarity" (2) [2. S. 729].

'The voice of common sense' would beat off the claims of science with the objection that people are well aware of what is going on around them without any 'wise men' (sociologists and the like); what is more — some social scientists (phenomenologists, for instance) advocate the rights of common thinking. For thousands of years, millions of people all around the world happily survived without sociology, we all possess an impressive luggage of 'naive sociology' behaving as 'competent actors' in our everyday interaction with other individuals. However, we discuss, to put it according to A. Giddens, 'practical', not 'discursive' consciousness, or, as Weber would say, on the greengrocer level. If somebody, for whatever reasons, is not satisfied with the everyday interpretations of social reality, he can refer to the sociological explanations and probably will not be disappointed. It is these people ('the *not satisfied ones'*) who create a fertile soil for sociological enlightenment, which helps rather to achieve practical goals than satisfy the need for 'sacred', 'salutary' knowledge bestowed by philosophical and religious doctrines.

One who passed sociology through oneself 'with some useful residue' becomes more competent and skilled in 'understanding the real relationships' that form the fabric of social life. Such a qualification cannot be considered arrogant compared to the common statement that we 'discover the secrets of nature' (though, of course, relatively) while reading books on physics, chemistry, biology, etc. And it is true, regardless of our assessment of the cognitive successes of sociology, because it is clear that sociology loses to physics or almost any other natural science in a competitive pursuit for objective knowledge. This raises the old (again, weberian) question whether a scientist, especially

a sociologist, claims to determine the 'world view' of his listeners and readers? The answer can be twofold — yes and no, depending on the meaning of the term 'world view'. "No" — if we interpret it as a scope of 'ultimate values' that define meanings and purposes of human existence, a sphere of 'existential choice' preconditions, moral decisions, etc. Thus, an 'honest' social science never tells people 'what gods to worship' because it does not know that, or, to put it more precisely, sociology knows that there can be many different answers that have equal rights to exist, and the science does not possess criteria for choosing 'gods' and 'universal' life goals.

Still any science is the world view 'at least partly', because it produces a certain 'perspective of the world' (Weltanschauung), which is just as subjective in its ultimate axiological grounds (take, for example, the idea of intrinsic value of the strive for explicit knowledge). Thus, sociology, producing a special kind of life experience conceptualization helps the 'owner' of sociological thinking to see the world of public (societal, locally social or interpersonal) relations 'in a new light'. Sociology is not a 'natural eye' — it is rather 'glasses' or 'lenses', 'additional optics', 'vision amplifier'; it determines not what to see or what makes sense, but how to look at the situation (although all these options are closely related). A fly's eye is different from an elephant's eye, and an illegal migrant's sight — from a middle class girl's sight, for people have their own autopoietic looking projections. However, flies and elephants, migrants and young women, as well as generals, professors, journalists, ministers, businessmen, etc., sometimes are 'short-' or 'farsighted'. And for some of them, at least in some cases, sociological 'focus' or 'sight adjustment' can clarify something.

Every science, and sociology in particular, finds its controversial, partly tragic identity between the Ecclesiastes and Fr. Bacon: knowledge increaseth sorrow and gives strength at the same time. The one who 'knows', who is 'experienced' is not necessarily happier than the one who 'lives by one's emotions' not being inclined to different forms of reflection and analysis of natural and social macro- and microcosm. Knowledge is likely to 'reward' those named by 'ordinary people' as 'wise men' with additional and more specific types of 'miseries' — these are a kind of 'payoff', 'sacrifice', 'related costs'. Nevertheless, even by the most conservative estimates, 'pluses' of possessing a social science intellectual resource do prevail.

Of course, not everyone is convinced by the famous scholars' axioms that 'it is better to know than not to know' and 'it is better to live a more conscious life'. Therefore, the axiom is to be turned into a theorem that can be proved with the help of 'pragmatic' considerations. The impressive achievements of the exact sciences, affecting our every-day life every minute in the most obvious way, do not allow us to question the usefulness of the research work within their disciplinary boundaries even at the theoretical level of the fundamental problems that do not directly correlate with the needs of 'practice' as understood by 'ordinary people'. 'Outsiders' may consider mathematics an extremely, sophisticatedly abstract field of science, but it 'works' — this fact is sufficient both for general 'cultural legitimization' of mathematics and for attracting thousands of people to exploring its findings. Most social sciences and humanities can only dream about such a state of affairs (especially in Russia), that is why sociological enlighten-

ment is one of those narrow paths which may reduce the lack of demand for scientific knowledge about society (even if only in a long term perspective and local context). Such an enlightenment makes sense simply because there is no essential difference in the justification of scientific 'pragmatists' while studying living or inanimate nature, people, history or culture.

Obviously, the scientific conceptualization of the social experience of individuals and groups is much more adequate than most of the everyday conceptualizations (though not always), especially in terms of potential practical results. Although some 'miseries' derive from 'excessive awareness' that may turn dysfunctional ('woe from wit'), much more of them are, on the contrary, caused by unawareness. People often suffer both subjectively and objectively from low awareness, low level of understanding of what is happening to them and around them. Thus, the sublime thesis that 'it is better to know than not to know' is easily justified by an ordinary one — 'the more informed and aware — the more adapted' (on the average, conditions being equal). The prosaic and realistic approach of sociology to its object is as follows: if social relations cannot be changed 'absolutely', crucially, entirely, at least they can be changed 'partially' within the circumstances existing here and now, but at the same time not static, not given once and for all. However, to limit the influence of annoying and bothersome facts that form the social reality one should at least know how this very reality is organized and functions, or, according to Z. Bauman, it is important to understand how the social world works — otherwise it 'will work you out' [1; 8].

Every year we happen to discuss with students real or imaginary 'cynicism' of sociology, defining it usually as posing research questions that wittingly or unwittingly lead to the intellectual 'erosion of authority', 'deconstruction' and 'falsification' ("If the science leads to anything, then it is apt to make the belief that there is such a thing as the 'meaning' of the universe dying out at its very roots!") [2. S. 717—718]. In such cases we are to prove that the recognition of 'polytheism of values', of 'social and cultural relativity' of any system of beliefs and views (including the one you share yourself) does not necessarily lead to cognitive and behavioral 'unscrupulousness'. If my life perspective, 'a picture of the world' is not the only true and universal one, it does not become meaningless and irrelevant for me at my particular point of social space.

However, sociology, like any science, frees one's consciousness (of course, not every and not entirely) from the alleged obviousness of common sense, pointing to the complexity and ambiguity of what people consider simple and certain, and, on the other hand, shedding light on what put them at a standstill. The sociological refocusing of personal cognitive optics, if it happens at all, leads at least to partial 'collapse of the familiar world and comfortable illusions', causes 'existential shocks', etc., which are quite painful. Nevertheless, if there is a 'fertile soil' of interest and attention, in this way sociology becomes a kind of theoretical school of rational thought and action, thus performing the function of value- (3) or rationally oriented navigation in one's social experience.

A 'sociologically competent' actor 'sees' one's position within a multi-level system of social life coordinates, analyzing his own biographical situation and life chances with the help of relevant sociological tools. When planning any course of action he always solves a 'non-trivial' optimization problem consisting of such parameters as his own

and his interaction partners' spiritual and material interests, parties' available resources, external conditions, forecast outcomes of events, etc. A man with a developed sociological imagination (being or not being a professional sociologist) analyzes objective and subjective peculiarities of one's and others' social positions; wonders to what extent his thinking and behavior, as well as the thinking and behavior of others, are determined by complex sets of social influences; tries the sociological theories luggage on himself and his close and extended social circle (family, friends, colleagues, organization, city, country, ethnicity, denomination, etc.). Such an individual can rationally design divergent trajectories of one's actions, predict the expectations of others within given institutional and situational frames of interaction, make realistic life plans, because he is aware of the complex networks of circumstances, contexts, consequences and results of his own and others' actions.

Sociological cognitive optics also provide a useful effect for the axiological and ideological (not just instrumental and rational) reflection, if an individual needs that. It is hard to say whether mathematics regulates one's understanding of social relations, but no doubt that sociology does. 'Sociologically formatted' consciousness aimed at solving practical problems, including the values related, correctly draws a pretty coherent, clear and sketchy 'picture of reality', devoid of reductionism' 'vulgar simplicity' (4). To some extent, it overcomes inconsistency and randomness, eclecticism and syncretism of everyday thinking analytically dissecting reality — thus complicated value conflicts of social life become more clear to us, at the same time our own value aspirations also get clarified.

"If you take such and such a stand, then, according to scientific experience, you have to use such and such means in order to carry out your conviction practically. Now, these means are perhaps such that you believe you must reject them. Then you simply must choose between the end and the inevitable means. Does the end 'justify' the means? Or does it not? The teacher can confront you with the necessity of this choice. He cannot do more, so long as he wishes to remain a teacher and not to become a demagogue. He can, of course, also tell you that if you want such and such an end, then you must take into the bargain the subsidiary consequences, which according to all experience will occur. Again, we find ourselves in the same situation as before. These are still problems that can also emerge for the technician, who in numerous instances has to make decisions according to the principle of the lesser evil or of the relatively best... We can and we should state: in terms of its meaning, such and such a practical stand can be derived with inner consistency, and hence integrity, from this or that ultimate position. Perhaps it can only be derived from one such fundamental position, or maybe from several, but it cannot be derived from these or those other positions. Figuratively speaking, you serve this god and you offend the other god when you decide to adhere to this position. And if you remain faithful to yourself, you will necessarily come to certain final conclusions that subjectively make sense... Thus, we can force the individual, or at least we can help him, to give himself an account of the ultimate meaning of his own conduct. This appears to me as not such a trifling thing to do, even for one's own personal life. Again, I am tempted to say of the teacher who succeeds in this: he stands in the service of 'moral' forces; he fulfills the duty of bringing about self-clarification and a sense of responsibility. And I believe he will be the more able to accomplish this, the more conscientiously

he avoids the desire personally to impose upon his audience or suggest his own stand" [2. S. 729—730].

Probably, today many 'producers', 'translators' and ''consumers' of sociological knowledge would consider these words from "Science as a Vocation" old-fashioned and lofty. However, if you take into account the 'heart of the matter' and not the 'form' of it, there is nothing that could become principally obsolete.

Of course, the sociological thinking equipment neither makes anyone a 'god' or 'prophet' nor eliminates 'purely human weaknesses' — it helps us 'see better', primarily in instrumental terms, provides 'no esoteric secrets', is open and potentially accessible to all, just as in Weber's description of physical principles that explain the motion of the tram: of you do not know them, you can always *find* them *out*. Besides, 'sociologically advanced' consciousness is just an 'abstract model' of some specific theoretical and practical interest, which is implemented in real life only in relative, limited and partial forms. It could be argued that the capacity for social reflection is not a specific product of sociological enlightenment but a quality of the 'clever man' (including the 'clever greengrocer'''), i.e., a quality that does not depend directly on education and professional training. At the same time the sociological focus on the life problems cannot be considered the only 'scientific and expert' one, as there are other even more popular and famous perspectives, such as the psychological perspective (5).

Literature, as well as the theater and the cinema, provides much more authoritative, though not expert in the narrow sense, knowledge of the social life intricacies. Their huge impact, unreachable for any science even in the most popular presentation, is determined by the 'natural language' of communication with the audience (even if the language is to a large extent socially stratified, readers do not need any 'special training' to understand it). The playing fields of sociology and literature, of course, are fundamentally different, nevertheless, they share the enlightening function. I have often heard from the 'sociologically aware' public that many prominent Russian and foreign writers (6) demonstrated in their works a remarkable understanding, close to sociology, of certain events and facts. They could know little or nothing about the sociological interpretations of cultural, historical or psychological phenomena, but they had a 'flair' to capture the 'typical' and 'universal' in the individual images, the 'socially significant' in the characters and 'situational case studies' (or construct them using fantasy and imagination, but always in the 'epoch representing' manner). Every great social scientist, in fact, tried to solve the same problems by other means — by creating an image of one's society at the systematic and conceptual level.

One of the ways to fully enjoy the charm of the sociological studies passes through the history of sociology. Permanent reflection (and rethinking) of the 'classics' (7) within and outside the professional boundaries, its popularization and interpretation with reference to the current realities is an aim of sociological enlightenment. You may ask, why the classics? Unfortunately, a lot of my colleagues not dealing with the history of sociology consider it a boring affair, a kind of 'robbing', 'archeology of ideas'. They may not say so, but they think that there is nothing new and relevant for today in the works of Durkheim (Weber, Simmel, Tönnies, Pareto, Mead, Park, Parsons, Homans, etc.). However, if they do appeal to the 'dusty' authorities of the 'old masters', it turns out that they do not really know the classics and interpret them wrongly. Moreover, the desire

to go with the times encourages them to look for and choose 'something fresher' (Alexander, Urry, Beck, Ritzer, Castells, Latour, Baudrillard, or at least Luhmann, Bourdieu, Giddens, Erving Goffman).

Serious scholars of sociological history often admit that the theoretical sociology of the early and mid-twentieth century is greater, stronger and *clearer* in the heuristic and conceptual terms than many later intellectual 'innovations'. Besides the classical heritage in the West was long ago mastered — texts were read and interpreted in due time. In Russia, the situation did not presuppose such work for a long time, and when it changed everybody tried to keep up with the mainstream not paying attention to yesterday's wisdoms. But the classics remain classics, thus, to fend it off means to impoverish oneself. The continuing relevance of the classics is not just a cliché, a trite phrase of the teacher — as we can see, the classical sociological theories, developed abroad to explain the phenomenon of *modernity*, do work (albeit with reservations) in contemporary Russian society. Both culturally and institutionally Russia has not 'been through' modernity, has not 'got used', 'reflected' and 'diagnosed' it yet, therefore it faces the challenges of 'not too cozy and friendly' modernity right now (8). And there are no better conceptual tools for adequate scientific description of modernity than the ones the 'high' sociological classics offer.

The 'sociologically enlightened' individuals, though limited in number, created ultimately by the efforts of sociologists, are the basis of 'normal life' for theoretical sociology that will help it acquire a 'healthy' professional identity not similar to the identity of 'a ressentiment invalid, trapped within four walls and despising the world'. Almost nobody knows Russian sociologists, especially dealing with the historical and theoretical problems, even in their own country. And, at least in part, they are to blame for such a situation, because over the past decades, as a community of experts they have 'promoted' themselves badly (9), although the sociological enlightenment performed solely by the modest means of teaching, research, publishing and translation can be of certain 'practical' use. In the current situation of the lack of institutional mechanisms of influence of social science on society (and the state) sociology, regardless of any authoritarian tendencies, forms a special type of thinking that is flexible, open, prone to constructive questioning, criticism and self-criticism, resistant to manipulative influences from various ideologies and mythologies, media, market, policy, etc., pluralistic and tolerant, recognizing the positive value of lifestyle diversity, anti-fundamentalist and anti-essentialist, revealing the 'non-heteronomy' of any social structures, etc., thus itself being more *free* — this is not so little.

#### **NOTES**

- (1) Here and henceforth quotations are taken from: Max Weber: Essays in Sociology / Translated and edited by H.H. Gerth, C. Wright Mills. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1946. P. 129—156. URL: http://media.pfeiffer.edu/lridener/DSS/Weber/scivoc.html
- (2) Weber's last remark sounds particularly symptomatic: in the social science discourse today we can easily identify a cluster of texts, terminologically 'unfriendly to readers', whose authors flaunt its 'pseudo-esoteric uncertainty' [10; 12. P. 42—59].

- (3) Natural sciences in most cases (as opposed to the social sciences) do not perform the function of value-rational navigation.
- (4) Of course, simplicity of (sociological) explanations is not necessarily vulgar.
- (5) However, one must recognize that psychology leaves a lot of things in the vast field of interpersonal relations without any explanation.
- (6) An attempt to suggest at least an approximate list of specific names as an illustration makes no sense. Any examples here would only reflect one's range of reading, aesthetic tastes and thematic preferences. Probably the legacy of 'ethically oriented' authors, 'open' or sometimes 'strident' moralists (such as Leo Tolstoy and Dostoevsky) least likely corresponds to the sociological perspective it is better suited for the needs of social philosophy. The 'writer-observer', sometimes ironic, not making explicit moral judgments, eager to understand the world of human relationships (such as Chekhov), whose eyes work on the principle of non indignari, non admirari, sed intelligere is much more 'sociological'. Delicate satirists (Gogol, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Mikhail Bulgakov) are extremely 'sociologically grasping'. Vladimir Vysotsky was a master of freestyle sociological portraying of typical human characters in the Soviet period. In the world literature, there are some works that explain the content of specific sociological conceptions literally in the nuances and details (eg.: G. Orwell's "Animal Farm" and R. Michels' "Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy").
- (7) There is a good selection of materials on the concept of 'classics' in [3].
- (8) Generations of zealous and not too zealous builders of communism, along with their children and grandchildren, fell into the arms of the 'old' modernity with 'strong inclusions of national identity'. Until that, they knew such an unexpected 'capitalist' version of modernity only by hearsay, having no chance to experience its advantages and disadvantages. This is exactly the problem, which puzzled Tocqueville and Spencer, Weber and Sombart, Tönnies and Simmel, Scheler and Mannheim, Cooley and Mumford, Horkheimer and Marcuse.
- (9) 'Bad' promotion here refers to its absence.

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# ЭВРИСТИЧЕСКИЕ РЕСУРСЫ «КЛАССИКИ» И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКОГО ПРОСВЕЩЕНИЯ

### Д.Г. Подвойский

Кафедра социологии Российский университет дружбы народов ул. Миклухо-Маклая, 10/2, Москва, Россия, 117198

В статье обсуждается традиционный для методологии социально-гуманитарного познания вопрос о мировоззренческом статусе, функциях и целевых установках общественных наук (и прежде всего социологии). По мнению автора, шанс на обоснование смысла научных изысканий в области теории и истории социологии (причем такого, который способен наделить их культурной значимостью за пределами узкопрофессиональной среды) дает перспектива «социологического просвещения». Ее важнейшим компонентом становится демонстрация «эвристических ресурсов» классической и современной теоретической социологии как средства научного объяснения и концептуализации проблем человеческого общества на уровне, доступном для внеакадемических аудиторий.

**Ключевые слова:** социологическое просвещение, социологическое воображение, мировоззренческие функции социальных наук, эвристические ресурсы «классической» социологии, Макс Вебер.

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