James´s Contribution to the Crystallization of Interactionist Sociology

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James´s contribution to the crystallization of interactionist sociology. The article is devoted to evaluation of the contribution of William James as one of the founders of pragmatism to the origin of interactionist sociology. Along with the general recognition of special role of James among sociologists, we sometimes encounter a certain underestimation of his influence. The neglect of relevant attention to his legacy was partly conditioned by the overall silence concerning the founders of interactionism that dominated over American sociology thanks Parsons. But in fact it was Jamesian postulate of *radical empiricism* that was so important for the formation of empirical orientation in early American sociology. A Jamesian emphasis on the empirical world as the point of departure and the point of return became the starting point for the interactionism in its research as well as in its social politics, which was based on the principle of *meliorism*, which was the cornerstone of Jamesian pragmatism. Pragmatism also declared the conception of *active human being,* which *became* the fundamental principle of early interactionists (W. I. Thomas, R. Park. G. H. Mead). This idea followed from Jamesian conception of the *stream of consciousness.* In *The Principles of Psychology* James has developed an original theory of "multiple Self", which was the source of the Coolean and the Meadean conception of Self. His analysis of the elements of Self (Me and I) prepared the development of the reference group theory and the theory of role sets. James abandoned the position of dogmatic monism and tends toward pluralism. His persistent attempt to relativise the Self, the consciousness, the truth, led him to the discovery of a world that is very similar to our "risk-filled", uncertain and fallible post-modern world. The fruitfulness of James´s legacy is evident today, when his idea of the "multiple Self" is successfully applied to building a theory of identity of post-modern man.

The recent rise of interest in pragmatist philosophy, which, according to Hans Joas, "possesses an incredible modernity,, (Joas, H., 1993, p. 1), has also closely touched contemporary sociology. To be convinced of this fact, it is enough to mention a publication such as *Verstehen and Pragmatism: Essays in Interpretive Sociology*, which presents the systematic efforts of prominent sociologists from the USA, England, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Poland and Japan to find "the epistemological affinities,, between two such different methodological orientations in sociology as *Verstehen* on the one hand and pragmatism on the other (Helle, H. J., 1991, p. X). In their book the authors emphasize the need to bring *up to date* the classical tradition in sociological methodology, which is linked with such names as Simmel, Weber, James and Mead. In this respect one can attend especially to the articles of G. D. Johnson and J. S. Picou, and T. Shibutani, which are especially devoted to the influence of pragmatist philosophy on the earliest conceptions of the interactionists. For example, G. D. Johnson and J. S. Picou place the problem of the philosophical underpinnings of Mead's social psychology in a Jamesian context. They argue that the continuity between James and Mead lies in the rejection of dualistic metaphysics. (Ibid., p. XIII) T. Shibutani also concentrates on the accentuation of the role of human agency in pragmatist philosophy, which is expressed as well in Mead.

This recognition of the general contribution of pragmatism to the emergence of early interactionism as one of the most influential schools in American sociology of the 20th century can serve as an additional argument for the timeliness of our theme. It is high time for an evaluation of the real contribution of William James, as one of the founders of pragmatism, to the crystallization of core ideas of interactionist sociology. However, his work is a good example of the impact of philosophy on the origin and subsequent development of one of the eminent schools in modern sociology.

James´s importance for a sociology

The importance of James's contribution to symbolic interactionism and to the distinctive approach "to the study of human group life and human conduct,, (Blumer, H., 1983, p. 1) is in general well known. This fact is especially emphasized by Herbert Blumer, who has mentioned William James among such American

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scholars as G. H. Mead, J. Dewey, W. I. Thomas, R. Park, C. H. Cooley, F. Znaniecki and so on. We find a similar acknowledgment of the role of James in the introduction of interactionism in the works of Manford Kuhn, who was the leader of the so-called "Iowa school„ of symbolic interactionism. (Kuhn, M., 1972, p. 57)

Along with the general recognition of the special role of W. James among sociologists, who analyse the link between pragmatism and interactionism, we sometimes encounter a certain underestimation of his role. Sometimes it appears in the form of an overestimation of the general impact of pragmatist philosophy as such, without naming personal representatives in James or Dewey. We find this impersonal approach in W. Skidmore's *Theoretical Thinking in Sociology*, which offers a comprehensive analysis of the philosophical foundations of symbolic interactionism. (Skidmore, W., 1974, p. 201-206)

Sometimes the analysts show their preferences for the Deweyan version of pragmatism over that of James. This perspective is another way of keeping James's personal contribution in the background. For example, H. Joas in his excellent article on symbolic interactionism, published in *Social Theory Today* (1987), emphasizes James in particular, who in his eventual impact on sociology has surpassed even Peirce, who himself "exercised almost no influence at all on sociologists„. (Joas, H., 1987, p. 87) But mediated also by his psychological works, James's impact is limited by a narrow framework of "a sensitisation to the subtleties of subjective experience„.

Joas is convinced that "pragmatism's decisive influence on sociology took place only through John Dewey and George Herbert Mead„. These two men, "who had initially pursued a programme of 'naturalised Hegelianism'... recognized the crucial importance of a re-grounding of pragmatism on the foundation of the biological and social sciences„. (Ibid) But for Richard M. Cale, William James is considered to be "John Dewey´s philosophical hero, because his 'biological psychology' of the 1890 *Principles of Psychology* led Dewey out of bondage in the land of Hegel and into the wonderful land of naturalism„. (Cale, R. M., 1997, p. 49) Jeffrey Alexander also perceives the significance of James's "mode„ of pragmatism, with its strong "reaction to realism of any kind„, for American pragmatism in general, which "developed in direct antagonism to transcendental idealism in both its Kantian and Hegelian forms„. (Alexander, J., 1985, p. 264)

A certain underestimation of James's formative role in sociology appears in current "textbooks„ on the history of sociology. For example, in Ritzer's influential *Contemporary Sociological Theory* we find only two references to James. (See Ritzer, G., 1988, pp. 172, 183) Jonathan H. Turner in his work *The Structure of Sociological Theory*, which is very popular among undergraduates, devotes slightly greater attention to James because he mentions his name four times. (See Turner, J. H., 1974)

The evident deficiency of relevant attention to James was perhaps conditioned by the overall silence concerning the founders of symbolic interactionism that emerged in American sociology thanks to Parsons. Joas wrote that Parsons "did not devote a single word to the accomplishments of John Dewey´s and George Herbert Mead's pragmatist social philosophy or to the pioneering methodological achievements of the Chicago School of Sociology„. (Joas, H., 1987, p. 87)

That is why we would concern ourselves within the intellectual contribution of William James as one of the founders of pragmatist philosophy. It was James who developed certain ideas of Peirce; in the process creating the well-known version of pragmatism that became so popular in the USA and abroad. The postulate of *radical empiricism* that has undoubtedly influenced the formation of the general epistemological and methodological foundations of early American sociology, with its orientation to empirical research, plays an important role in this conception. In this respect James asserted, "The only things that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience„. (The Writings…, 1967, p. 136) The emphasis on the experiential origin of scientific concepts leads to a necessity of its *verification*. In the *Meaning of Truth* (1909) James assumed that the "*true ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify„*. (Ibid. p. 311) Truth is treated in pragmatism as a process which consists "namely of its verifying itself, its veri*fication*", as well as "its validity is the process of its valid*ation„*. (Ibid. p. 312)

This is the reason to claim that the true source of the empirical orientation in early American sociology was the philosophy of *pragmatism rather* than positivism. In this connection it is very important to make clear the Jamesian *critical* attitude to the current positivism, agnosticism and scientific naturalism, which represent the "'half-way empiricism' of our own day„. (Ibid. p. 134) Its principal deficiency consists in its *monism*, which James rejected completely. The attacks on positivism appear in different works of James, beginning with *The Will to Believe (*1897). As opposed to an established positivistic version of empiricism, James named his own empiricism "radical„ because "it treats the doctrine of monism itself as a hypothesis„. (Ibid)

In this point we agree with A. S. Bogomolov, who asserts that pragmatism in its American context was a substitute for *logical positivism*, which was so influential in Europe at that time. (Bogomolov, A. S., 1974, p.

218) In its origin American pragmatism was strongly influenced by the so-called "second positivism,, of Mach and Avenarius. This influence made it able to fulfil its the role in the United States, which was analogous to that of the "third positivism,, of the Vienna Circle. It is the epistemological dependence of pragmatism on empiriocriticism that explains the wonderful fact of the rise and subsequent intense development of the empirical trend in American sociology even in the twenties that is at the times when neopositivist philosophy was still early in its development. There is no doubt that the general epistemological orientation of pragmatism, formulated in the postulate of *radical empiricism*, had conditioned the prevailing interest of representatives of the Chicago school in the empirical problems of the social world.

However, pragmatism demonstrates a similarity with such scientistic philosophical schools as *positivism* and such *antipositivistic* forms of thought as *hermeneutics*. So J. Bleicher finds the "hermeneutical dimension,, in the work of the founder of pragmatism, Charles Peirce. (Bleicher, J., 1982, p. 26) These findings testify to the flexible as well as the seminal nature of pragmatist philosophy, thanks to which it was able to provide early American sociology with a relevant *humanistic* perspective. In his *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907), James challenges philosophers to turn away "from abstraction and insufficiency,,, "from fixed principles, closed systems,, towards "concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power,,. (The Writing…, 1968, p. 379) This challenge found a more vivid response among sociologists than among philosophers because it corresponded to their own need to state a close contact with the empirical social world. The emphasis on the empirical world as the "point of departure and the point of return,, (Blumer, H., 1983, p.22) of sociology became the starting point for the interactionism in its research practice as well as in its social politics, which was guided by idea of gradual social reforms. Interactionism then absorbed the well-known principle of *meliorism,* which was the cornerstone of Jamesian pragmatism.

A Jamesian conception of consciousness

However, a "melioristic,, universe would require according to James "the *active* (emphasis added) good-will of all of us, in the way of belief as well as of our other activities,,. (The Writings…, 1968, p. 739) The advocacy of the activist human being became one of the cornerstones not only of James' personal world-view, but also of Chicago sociology in general. For such of its representatives as W. I. Thomas, R. Park, G. H. Mead and others, human being was no longer the passive object of external influences, but a conscious being who is able to direct a change of values and institutions in a desirable direction. The appearance of the idea of the active personality in pragmatism may be explained as the reaction to the *determinism* of Spencerian evolutionary theory, or the instinct theory of the origin of society promulgated by Ward and Sumner. James was against the explanation of human behaviour as the consequence of extrasomatic (Spencer) as well as intrasomatic (Ward, Sumner) factors. For him human beings develop a range of possible behavioural choices to apply in any given circumstance, which makes it preferable to view human behaviour from an indeterministic rather deterministic angle. It is this standpoint that makes it possible to understand the dialectics of human freedom in the world of repressive institutions, which was a core idea for the representatives of early interactionism such as Thomas, Park, and Mead. And this idea became the core of the conception of Herbert Blumer, who became, according to Joas, the true heir of to the Jamesian legacy.

In our opinion, the idea of an *active* human being followed from Jamesian relativistic conception of the *stream of consciousness*, which was the fundamental idea of his psychology. Joas has correctly noted that James "did not take *action* (emphasis added) as his starting-point, but instead the pure stream of conscious experience,, (Joas, H., 1987, p.87), that has corresponded to the ideas of Bergson, Renouvier and other representatives of then current French philosophy. We can say that his early psychological works served to mediate between the philosophy of the time and the emergence of interactionist sociology.

James elaborated his own psychological standpoint in confrontation with the dominant school of psychological associationism, which was connected with names of Locke and Herbart. He criticizes them in his *The Principles of Psychology* for their *convenient* attempts "to formulate the mental facts in an atomistic sort of way, and to treat the higher states of consciousness as if they were all built out of unchanging simple ideas,,. (The Writings…, 1968, p. 30) On the contrary, James presents our thought as "a sensible continuous stream..., which is without breach, crack, or division,,. (Ibid. p. 31)

He opposes the Humean doctrine that our thought is composed of separate independent parts and proposes for the description of consciousness the more convenient metaphors of a "river,, or a "stream,,. James is convinced that "consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits,,. That is why the only true conception of the human mind is the "concrete and total manner of regarding its changes,,. (Ibid. p. 30-33) By introducing a new approach to the mind instead of its reduction to "atom-like,, sensations, James

had essentially transformed the contemporary psychological orientation. For him, human consciousness is not the *passive* mirror of the outer world in a Spencerian sense, but a property of the organism, which makes possible the *active* adaptation to this world in order to survive. While in the beginning James concentrated only on the "the *selectivity* (emphasis added) of perception and the apportionment of attention as a function of the subject's purpose,, (Joas, H., 1987, p. 87), he subsequently revealed the *creative* capacity of the human mind in relation to the stream of consciousness. The human being chooses certain possibilities from the continuous stream of experience in order to build from them his own world. This emphasis on an active position of mind considerably enlarges the interpretative capacity of traditional psychology, because allows it to take into account the peculiarities of particular individuals. At the same time James's excessive concentration on the "transitive parts,, of the stream of thought to the detriment its "substantive parts,, (The Writings…, 1968, p. 36) may lead to an undesirable relativisation of consciousness. However, this Jamesian position has prepared the ground for the crystallization of the notion of interaction as the principal unit of social life. Though James was not directly occupied with *interaction* as the standard sociological category, he used this concept in other contexts, for example in an explanation of social evolution, which is, in his view, a consequence of the *interaction* of the individual and the social environment. (Larson, C. J., 1986, p. 93) We also find comments of the sort of "dualistic *interactionism* (emphasis added) that James accepts in *Principles*...,, but in the context of the discussion of the problem of psychophysical parallelism. (Flanagan, O., 1997, p. 36)

A Jamesian theory of Self

According to Larson the real attempts to build on his interaction frame of reference (Larson, C. J., 1986, p. 93) were evident in James's analysis of self-consciousness. That is the case because, in my opinion, the most significant contribution to sociology James made was his conception of self as "the crucial concept of interactionist research (Visano, L., 1988, p. 232),,. As a result of this conception James more than Dewey established interactionism as a social-psychological and sociological theory. This contribution is in the end more significant than his conception of radical empiricism. However, radical empiricism appears in the late stage of development of James's philosophy. It is paradoxical that James had already contributed more to sociology in his "pre-pragmatist" period. It was in this period that he edited his masterpiece *The Principles of Psychology,* which according to John McDermott "remains essential to any understanding of James (The Writings…, 1968, p. XXVII) ,,. This is true if we take into account that in this book James formulates the major foundational ideas of his philosophy or "metaphysics,,. James was not a pragmatist at the beginning, but he adopted certain ideas of Peirce that helped him to formulate the foundations of his own learning. According to Joas, James "narrowed, and thereby weakened, pragmatism's basic idea in a decisive fashion,,, but applied it to a great number of problems, "chiefly of a religious or existential nature (Joas, H., 1987, p. 87) ,,.

Parsons and his followers did not cite James's original conception of Self. In spite of this it had a strong influence on the conception of self not only in interactionism but also in American sociology as a whole. In light of recent approaches to the sociology of personality, we encounter a certain underestimation of the role of James in the interactionist school. James developed the idea of the "multiple self,, which was the source of the Coolean conception of the "looking-glass Self,, as well as the Meadean conception of the dual nature of personality. The self, for Mead, is split into I and Me. The "I,, for Mead embodies "the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others,,, while the "me,, is the organized set of attitudes of others, which one himself assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organized "me,, and then one reacts toward that as an "I,,. (Mead, G. H., 1934, p. 175)

But this was originally James's idea, for whom the total Self of me must have two aspects discriminated in it, of which for shortness we may call one the Me and the other the I. For James these discriminated aspects are not separate beings. His conception of Self supposes it's dividing into Me as "known,, and I as "knower,,. The Empirical Self or Me contains three constituents -the material Me, the social Me and the spiritual Me. The central position is occupied by the social Me, which is the source of the Mead's final notion of Me. Mead noted in this connection that "Cooley and James, it is true, endeavour to find the basis of the self in reflexive affective experience, i.e. experiences involving 'self-feeling' (Ibid. p. 173) ,,. We must state from the start that in spite of certain terminological identities between the conceptions of James and Mead, there are some essential differences in the content of their respective concepts. The "Me,, of Mead is not identical to the "Me,, of James, though both are very close in content. James was the author of the intriguing idea that "a man has as many social Selves, as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind...[h]e has as many different social Selves as there are distinct *groups* of

persons about whose opinion he cares (The Moral…, 1969, p. 46)„. Now it is not difficult to find the true inspiration of Mead's concept of "me„. James succeeded in overcoming the narrow limits of the simplicistic and linear conceptions of self in contemporary psychology: one man has only one self, and he was able to formulate the idea of the multifaceted man. C. J. Larson points out that Jamesian insightful analysis of the ingredients of self-consciousness prepared the development of "the reference group theory and the theory of role sets (Larson, C. J., 1986, p. 93) „.

In spite the evident relationship between both conceptions of Self, there still exists some doubt on this point. Some authors, for example J. D. Lewis and R. L. Smith mention that Mead was associated with that branch of pragmatism, which has represented „philosophical realism," while James and Dewey, were adherents of "nominalist pragmatism„. According to Lewis and Smith, the nominalist position does not consider the impact of macrosocietal phenomena "upon the consciousness of and behaviour of individuals." This view "conceives of the individuals themselves as existentially free agents who accept, reject, modify, or otherwise 'define' the community norms, roles, beliefs, and so forth, according to their own personal interests and plans of the moment„. In contrast, "the social realists emphasize the control of individual cognitions and behaviours by the larger community (Lewis, J. D. – Smith, R. L., 1980, p. 24) „. In this sense Mead fits better into the realist camp, while H. Blumer represents the nominalist one. Joas also comments on this distinction between "the strand of the tradition originating with Peirce and Mead from the one that leads from James, via Dewey, to Blumer„ (Joas, H., 1987, p. 83) But I suppose that there is continuity between James and Mead's conceptions of Self, although many researchers think that Mead received his conception of Self from Cooley and Dewey. By Ritzer (Ritzer, G., 1988, p. 172), Dewey is closer to the Mead (stages of socialization, selection between different alternatives, the selecting the optimal mode of action and so on.)

According to Alexander, "Mead's work represents the most significant translation of pragmatic philosophy in sociological theory (Alexander, J., 1985, p. 265) „. But there remains the question, who was the true heir of James's legacy?

James´s influence on Meadian social psychology

In order to decide this it is necessary to turn to the works of Mead. We find in Mead's *Mind, Self and Society* the confrontation of two main schools in psychology. One of them is the behaviorism of J. Watson, which Mead attacks. He argues, "there remained, however, the field of introspection, of experiences, which are private and belong to the individual himself (Mead, G. H., 1934, p. 2) „. But for Watson this field did not exist. "There was no imagery, and no consciousness. Watson explained the field of so-called introspection by the use of language symbols (Ibid. p. 3) „. Watson explained the whole field of inner experience in terms of external behaviour. Such behaviour was regarded as the field that was accessible to the individual alone. "That, in brief, is the point of view of Watson's behaviorist psychology„. It aims "to explain the experience of the individual without bringing in the observation of an inner experience, a consciousness as such (Ibid) „. In his battle against radical behaviorism, which ignores the consciousness, Mead leans upon arguments of James. He cites his well-known article "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?„ and states that James pointed out that if a person is in a room, the objects of the interior could be looked at from two standpoints. The furniture may be considered from the standpoint of the person. But the same objects can be regarded as physical part of a physical room. What James insisted upon was that the two cases differ only in an arrangement of certain contents in different series. The chair, for instance, involves the experience of the individual. Now one can take a cross-section of both of these two orders so that at a certain point there is a meeting of the two series. The statement in terms of consciousness simply means the recognition that the room lies not only in the historical series but also in the experience of the individual. There has been of late in philosophy a growing recognition of the importance of James's insistence that a great deal has been placed in consciousness that must be returned to the so-called objective world.

Both James and Dewey were influential in the formation of Mead's epistemology. Dewey has argued, that meaning emerges from communication, and Mead himself follows him: "Meaning is a content of an object which is dependent upon the relation of an organism or groups of organisms to it (Ibid. p. 80) „.

Both James and Dewey helped Mead to crystallize the relationistic theory of personality, which emphasizes the relation between the subject (Self) and the object (out-groups). This was the effect of the influence of German romantic philosophy as well as the philosophy of Feuerbach. The relationistic conception of Self is incompatible with the conception of a "substantive soul„ which Mead abandons. This idea is very fashionable today, notably in discussions between essentialists and social constructionists.

Conclusion

With respect to the significance of James's ideas for interactionists in particular, and to recent sociology in general, it is noteworthy to point out their wonderful modernity. They offer a way for the development of modern trends in the theory of the "multiple Self„ as well as the conception of the "pluralistic social universe„. In this regard James remains the inspiration not only for the interactionist but also for a phenomenologist like A. Schutz and more standard sociologists such as P. Sorokin. James abandoned the position of dogmatic monism and tends toward pluralism. "*Prima facie* the world is a pluralism (Ibid. p. 134) „"

James embraced the idea of a pluralistic universe, one that is open to novelty, to freedom and chance. This is the indeterministic world that we find in Blumer. Blumer points out the emergent nature of the macro-societal world. This indeterministic nature of social macro-units is conditioned by the uncertain, indefinite nature of I as a component of the Self. At this point James's conception approximates the conception of the existentialists. Many specialists note this fact. (See e.g. Roth, J. K., 1969, p. 3)

James's persistent attempt to relativise the Self, the consciousness, the truth, led him to the discovery of a world that is very similar to our "risk-filled„ uncertain and fallible post-modern world. Thanks to his relativism, the Self became a changing, mobile, unstable entity. The fruitfulness of James's legacy is evident today, when his idea of the "multiple Self„ is successfully applied to building a theory of identity. Instead of a stabilized identity we find the destabilizing identity of the post-modern man. Instead of an essential identity we find the constructed identity. Instead of a primordial nature of man we find strategies of identification. His ideas have served as the starting point for the formulation of the contemporary conceptions of meaning, derived not only from particular individuals, but also from generation groups and cohorts. The permanent impact of James's legacy in contemporary circumstances confirms the observation of Joas, that "pragmatism is extremely modern„. (Joas, H., 1993, p. 1)

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