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THE SOCIAL AND THE COMMON. A SOCIOLOGICO-PHILOLOGICAL STUDY

Summary

This book is an old-style scholarly dissertation which consists of 53 numbered sections supplied each with many footnotes. The subtitles (listed in the above table of contents) indicate main topics, which all revolve around the problem of whether and how conceptual images of the “social reality” created by “social scientists” depend on ethnic languages they use to portray that reality.

The initial sections of Part I focus on the impact of some linguistic paradigms and philosophies of language (Austin, Wittgenstein, Searle) on sociological theorizing, while the final sections deal with the understanding of the “social” in the writings of Comte, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and Znaniecki. Part I is closed with an overview of the problems that lie within the boundary area between the sciences of language and sociology.

Part II begins from discussing the problem of linguistic relativity in defining the subject matter of sociology. Some historical cases (the Greek-Latin origin of *sociologie*, Weber’s decision to replace *Gemeinschaftshandeln* with *soziale Handeln*) justify the claim that two attributes, known in the English speaking world as *social* and *common*, are central to sociological discourse. There are four patterns of co-existence of these two concepts in major European languages: (i) the Byzantine pattern (Greek and East Slavic languages) in which the social is reduced to the common (*koinos*); (ii) the Latin pattern (Latin, Romance languages and English) in which *sociale* and *commune* as distinct but complementary concepts; (iii) the German pattern, turned into a theoretical distinction by Tönnies and Weber, with *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* functioning as opposite categories; (iv) the West Slavic pattern, where both adjectives etymologically grow out from one root, so that the concepts they represent, however distinct, seem very close to each other. These patterns were identified by the author after an analysis of a number of texts containing the words that denote various forms of supraindividual entities or describe relational ties between human beings. Whereas *society* – in the meaning the term were to acquire in sociology – appeared in the age of Enlightenment, the oldest general term of social thought is the ancient Greek word *koinōnia*. This noun was used by Aristotle at the very beginning of his *Politics* as a generic term for *polis*. Some 80 translations of the initial passage into 10 languages (from Latin to modern Greek and three Slavic languages) are but part of a large multilingual collection of texts that the author examined in his book. The collection comprises Greek New Testament, where *koinōnía* is an important concept too, classical social treatises, mainly by French mas-

ters, papers (e.g., Etzioni's ASA presidential address taken here as representative of the communitarian understanding of "community"), and many other sources, including few articles in Polish newspapers containing the noun *wspólnota* (community), which word has recently become prominent in "Polish patriotic discourse" (see Appendix 2). Sociological conclusions from philological analyses are presented in the final sections of Part II. They are illustrated with a picture given in Section 53. The theoretical distinction between two types of interpersonal relationships, *communal* and *social* (associative), combines in itself three binary oppositions: (i) living together vs. living apart; (ii) a tendency toward interpersonal similarity or developing collective identity vs. an inclination to remain different or preserve individual identities; (iii) a stroke of fate or free choice as a basis for (i) and (ii).