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## STANISŁAW OSSOWSKI ON SCIENTIFIC CONTROVERSIES AND THE VARIETY OF PERSPECTIVES\*

### Introduction

Stanisław Ossowski was a member of the Lvov–Warsaw School, not a typical one though. Trained as a philosopher he became a sociologist, following in this particular way the anti–metaphysical and anti–philosophical program of the School. The transition to sociology may be a reason why his view of science is unorthodox, and substantially different from conceptions of fellow members of the School and from logical empiricism. Ossowski focused his attention on the social sciences, the others on the natural sciences. They compared the social and the natural sciences to emphasize the under–development of the social sciences. Ossowski did it to point up the peculiarity, but not the unnaturalness, of the social sciences. For him, their oddities were not weaknesses but idiosyncrasies parallel to the particularities of the natural sciences. Thus, his reflection on the plurality of scientific perspectives and controversies may be applied both to the social and natural sciences. What both types of science have in common is their social and historical nature. Both may be studied by a general science of science. In fact, in 1935 Ossowski designed, together with Maria Ossowska, a new scientific discipline that should include philosophical, psychological, sociological, organizational (political including), and historical studies of science<sup>1</sup>.

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\* This paper was presented at the session *Zagadnienia naukoznawcze w twórczości Stanisława Ossowskiego* [*The Issues of the Science of Science in Stanisław Ossowski's works*], organized by the Science of Science Committee of the Polish Academy of Science, November 27, 2003; and at the 5<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial International Fellows Conference, *Philosophy and History of Science*, organized in Poland by the Center for Philosophy of Science, University of Pittsburgh, May 26–30, 2004.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. Ossowska & S. Ossowski, *Nauka o nauce* [*The Science of Science*] (1935) in: *Dziela* [*Collected Works*], vol. 4: *O nauce* [*On Science*], PWN, Warszawa 1967, pp. 91–102. That his reflection on the plurality of scientific perspectives and controversies may be applied both to the social and natural sciences has not been fully recognized by Edmund Mokrzycki, who claims: *Ossowski's considerations on methodological features of the social sciences would – I believe – proceed differently and more profitably, if they were not considerations about peculiarities of the social sciences.* (E. Mokrzycki, *Filozofia nauki a socjologia. Od doktryny metodologicznej do praktyki badawczej* [*Philosophy of Science and Sociology. From Methodological Doctrine to Research Practice*], PWN, Warszawa 1980, p. 19) I think that Ossowski's idea of peculiarities of science was symmetrical in the sense that he could also talk about peculiarities of the natural sciences. However, in Ossowski's considerations there are also remnants of the neo–positivist idea of backwardness of the social sciences.

## Historical and social nature of science

The differences between Ossowski's and the neo-positivist picture of science were crucial: the latter was logicist, foundationalist, and ahistorical; his view was sociological, pluralist, and historical, i.e., much closer to the post-empiricist perspective of Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend. When he considers social and historical aspects of science he treats them as empirical phenomena. When he analyzes the key issue for the idiosyncrasies of the social sciences, namely, the multiplicity of aspects of social objects and phenomena, he separates himself from philosophical (epistemological and ontological) debates and emphasizes that he is interested in *empirically detectable differences in perceiving and describing reality*<sup>1</sup>.

For Ossowski, science is a social phenomenon, simultaneously composed of social and epistemological elements: scientific institutions, social roles, personal patterns, competencies, expectations, as well as conceptual apparatuses, problems, methods, etc.<sup>2</sup> Science is a factor in bringing about changes in social life, a factor itself subject to historical change: science leads to *facts that do not repeat themselves* and opens *still new possibilities* for individuals<sup>3</sup>. However, considering science as a social phenomenon did not mean to Ossowski studying it as an objective fact, analogous to natural facts, or reducing it to pure behavior. Social phenomena are correlatives of consciousness<sup>4</sup>. For him, science is a social phenomenon inasmuch as it is *commonly regarded to be a sphere of culture that develops continuously, and a social role of a scientist has been separated from the roles of a sage, a prophet, and a sorcerer*<sup>5</sup>.

For Ossowski, science is also a historical phenomenon. *One of the features of mature science is its continuity*, states Ossowski in 1962, and adds – almost like Kuhn – that in the natural sciences earlier stages have only historical significance, even though they may contain discoveries of lasting value<sup>6</sup>. In the social sciences, on the other hand, past achievements may be still present in contemporary research practice as a source of inspiration and ideas, or may have been criticized and abandoned<sup>7</sup>.

The transition to mature science happened when science changed from being a *treasure-house of wisdom* into an *unified and irreversible drift*, a se-

<sup>1</sup> S. Ossowski, *Funkcja dziejowa nauki* [The Historical Function of Science] (1923) in: *Dzieła*, vol. 4, pp. 9–32 and S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych* [On the Peculiarities of the Social Sciences] (1962) in: *Dzieła*, vol. 4, pp. 125–316.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, pp. 128–129.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *Funkcja dziejowa nauki*, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> E. Mokrzycki, *Ossowskiego koncepcja nauk społecznych* [Ossowski's Conception of the Social Sciences] in: *Studia Filozoficzne* 3/1974, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 226.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 220.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, pp. 222–223. Historical considerations of Ossowski are analyzed in details by J. Goćkowski, *Wolność i odpowiedzialność w uprawianiu nauki. Stanisław Ossowski o normalnym życiu naukowym* [Freedom and Responsibility in Practicing Science. Stanisław Ossowski on Normal Science] in: *Etyka* 24, 1988, pp. 157–163.

quence of theories that invalidate earlier theories. This transition gave *dynamic continuity to the creative collective work of generations*, and turned science and technology into a field of a *swift and unstoppable progress*<sup>1</sup>.

However, when Ossowski describes in 1923 existing science, his picture is very different from Kuhn's portrait of normal science dominated by one paradigm. Ossowski's picture is closer to Feyerabend's. He finds in science variety and tolerance, freedom of thought and individuality, desire for originality, and even an anarchist slant. *In our democratic republics intellectual life drowns in a vein of anarchism. There are no emperors, no authorities. All views should be permitted*<sup>2</sup>. He notices that a *religious, fanatical attitude toward science disappears*, that scientists move from believing to taking up opinions, and that they are interested in *discovering novelties*, rather than in *discovering unknown truths*. If science is not any more *a revelation of perennial truths* its value is either practical or purely creative. It fulfills itself in practical applications and the main criterion of its evaluation is the practical usefulness of its results; or it is like art, *valuable by itself*, and manifests something more fundamental than practical demands and applications, namely, intellectual needs, the spontaneous faculties of human reason, or the power of life<sup>3</sup>. Accordingly, Ossowski finds two main attitudes in twentieth century science: utilitarian and modernist. A modernist attitude is characterized by a tendency to set free science from experience: science (mathematics, physics) ceases to be a picture of the real world, its reality is the world of the artist, not the world of *God or Nature*<sup>4</sup>. Ossowski also indicates decadent consequences of the abandonment of a fanatical attitude in favor of a modernist one, namely, because creativity requires geniuses. He even comments in a sarcastic vein: *A scientists, who is not a genius, better be a fanatic*<sup>5</sup>.

However, the plurality and diversity of scientific positions and views are not the exclusive mark of contemporary science, a recent product of the historical process of cultural degeneration. Their source is the complexity of reality itself, which is manifest in the case of social reality but characterizes also the natural one.

### Diversity of scientific perspective

The complexity of (social) reality means that every phenomenon or object has many aspects. These are accompanied by a diversity of scientific viewpoints that stems from the *difference in prisms we use to look at the shapes and colors of the world*, and not from variations in the organs of sight which look out upon the world<sup>6</sup>. In other words, individuals and social groups perceive and characterize reality through different spectacles.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> S. Ossowski, *Funkcja dziejowa nauki*, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *Funkcja dziejowa nauki*, pp. 15–17.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *Funkcja dziejowa nauki*, pp. 17–19.

<sup>5</sup> S. Ossowski, *Funkcja dziejowa nauki*, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 195.

### Aspects of reality

We talk about aspects of an object when only certain similarities and connections of an object are emphasized<sup>1</sup>. An object of studies has various aspects because scientists locate it within different conceptual frameworks, which means that they abstract from some of its features, elements, or relations, as well as from some constellations it belongs to<sup>2</sup>. When scientists talk about the plurality of aspects they mean either different scopes of problems asked or the divergent characteristics of a studied object. In the first case only certain questions are asked, like then when one studies a political aspect of a poem ignoring its artistic value. In the second case particular accounts of an object point at its different properties, parts, or states, they differently define its essence, evaluate its significance in opposite ways, etc. In this case different depictions of an object reveal disparate interpretive traditions, express various viewpoints of scientists, or manifest their prejudices. Accordingly, we can distinguish between *problem-aspects* and *characteristic-aspects* of objects under study, though in some situations it is difficult to separate them<sup>3</sup>.

Insofar as we can avoid neither the plurality of research problems and interpretive traditions nor subjective preferences and prejudices, aspectual accounts are unavoidable. Science is, inescapably, pluralist, composed of a variety of perspectives, viewpoints, interpretations, conceptual frameworks, and normative frames of reference. Any object of scientific research is, inevitably, a correlative of plurality of conceptual apparatuses and normative systems used by working scientists.

The fact that reality always is accounted for in an aspectual way has important consequences for classifying phenomena, ranking them, and for dividing history into periods. An amending and refining remark is necessary here. Ossowski himself talks about classifications but – I believe – he does not think in terms of classes of abstraction that are the basis of a correct classification but in terms similar to Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance. Ossowski's interpretation of science does not allow a space for an universal hierarchy of species and genres, within which every object has its own place determined by its essence. *An object has different aspects when it is considered as an element of various conceptual categories that bring out its resemblance to these or those objects.*<sup>4</sup>

It is not only the variety of conceptual categories that gives rise to multiplicity of aspects; also the diversity of constellations, within which an object is placed, brings about the difference of aspects in terms of which it is conceived. In particular, locating historical events in different periods changes

<sup>1</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, pp. 196–197.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, pp. 200–203.

<sup>4</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, pp. 196–197.

their aspect<sup>1</sup>. And the third source of diversity of aspects lies in the various ranking of considered objects or their elements and in the different distributing of emphasis given to objects being considered, which is similar to deciding what is a figure in a picture and what is its background<sup>2</sup>.

An act of abstracting from properties, relations, or parts may be conscious or unconscious, when it is conditioned by prejudices or inherited tradition. When it is conscious, a criterion of selection may consist in an *impressive utility*, i.e., *postulated influence on the minds of readers or listeners*<sup>3</sup>, in an *immanent standard of importance*, or in the *significance of elements of reality for the course of described events*<sup>4</sup>. A particular case of the conscious abstraction is a study *directed by the principles of a [political – B. T.] fight or propaganda that uses a certain picture of reality to influence people in order to achieve particular goals*<sup>5</sup>.

### Schools in science

Multiplicity of aspects, diversity of problems, heterogeneity of characteristics must lead to controversies, contradictions in opinions, and plurality of positions and schools.

Ossowski claims that the presence of schools is a feature of an early stage of the development of a given scientific discipline; an *evidence of its immaturity*<sup>6</sup>. As it matures a *tendency to integrate schools into one stream* results from several processes, namely, from *the development of communication and the diminishing of the isolation of research centers*, from the separation of science from *magic and religious wisdom*, and from *the change in the role of the scientist and the change in opinions on the development of science*<sup>7</sup>. *To overcome existing controversies is one of the tasks of science in the contemporary sense of the term*<sup>8</sup>, – says Ossowski – and this motivates him to look carefully at the situation in the social sciences, in which schools and debates among them are still present.

For Ossowski, a scientific school is not simply a local center based on direct personal relations, but – in agreement with his account of social phenomena as the correlatives of consciousness – a group singled out by its *view of problems and aims of a given discipline that is consciously opposed to po-*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 199. Another Ossowski's statement that chimes with the later Wittgenstein is the following declaration: *We will not look for an account of an aspect tout court. What we need is a clarification of some expressions in which this term appears as a syncategorema* (S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 195).

<sup>3</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 198.

<sup>4</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 199.

<sup>5</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 198.

<sup>6</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 224.

<sup>7</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 225.

<sup>8</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 224.

*sitions of other 'schools'*<sup>1</sup>.

From a historical perspective, scientific (and philosophical) schools can be either *teaching schools*, with a master and his students, or *religious sects*, with a doctrinal leader, a prophet, and his followers<sup>2</sup>. The boundary between them is not absolute, and does not separate scientific schools from philosophical ones; it is rather established during the historical changes of the science. To support this view it suffices to recall the ancient Pythagorean School which was simultaneously a scientific and philosophical school and a religious sect. Even in a teaching school *a notion of orthodoxy is preserved (...) the faithful and the heretics are kept apart, a correct line of the doctrine development is drawn, and deviations are identified*<sup>3</sup>. Examples can be taken from philosophy, psychology (psychoanalysis), sociology (Comte's school, Marxism).

However, it is not the difference between (scientific) schools and sects that interests Ossowski most. He concentrates on the conditions of creating and maintaining schools *that resist unifying tendencies*. The conditions are most clearly visible in the case of philosophical schools that are particularly resistant to acts of integration appealing to empirical arguments. In their case, disagreements are fundamental, *doctrinal*<sup>4</sup>, conflicts are insoluble<sup>5</sup>, because their *basic assumptions do not have a verifiable form*, and communication *serves to impress and express, it reveals attitudes, associations, moods, principles, etc.* When *basic assumptions can be neither logically confirmed nor refuted* – Ossowski adds – *the participation in a school is a matter of a personal inclination and individual decision*<sup>6</sup>. I think, however, that in saying this Ossowski has *lost* for a moment his sociological instinct that would not allow him to accept an idea of a free agent who consciously and willingly joins a philosophical *sect*; in other words, an idea of a subject not exposed to any earlier influences of upbringing and education, to other social *powers*, and cultural pressures.

Another possible situation, more typical for science, is a conflict between schools holding unverified opinions<sup>7</sup>. Disagreement between them is *in principle temporal and should stimulate research*, and their conflicts are not insoluble but – at most – have not yet been solved<sup>8</sup>. In other words, this is a situation, in which *there are alternative hypotheses clearing up problems vital for a given discipline, and none of them has been yet refuted*<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, pp. 230–231.

<sup>4</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 228.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 226.

<sup>6</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 226.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 226.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 228.

<sup>9</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 227.

Finally, a third situation is a *practical* controversy between schools<sup>1</sup>. They do not argue about insoluble issues, they do not accept alternative testable hypotheses, but they differ in the problems they pose, in tasks they set up, in concepts or symbols they mobilize, in methods they use, and in the style of presenting their results<sup>2</sup>. This sort of controversy is also possible between philosophical schools, e. g., the Vienna Circle and the Lvov–Warsaw School.

Ossowski admits that a pure form of these conflicts is rare in real science; the controversy between Darwinists and Lamarckists had features of the first and second situation; arguments among Polish schools of history in the nineteenth century have elements of all three situations<sup>3</sup>.

Moreover, Ossowski believes that in the twentieth century social sciences third type of debates begins to dominate. *The differences are constantly reduced to varieties in problems, methods, and ways of presenting results. Moreover, methods that turned out to be effective become more universal, like in the natural sciences*<sup>4</sup>. The social sciences also *liberate their theories a the pattern of philosophical schools having their own doctrines*<sup>5</sup>.

#### Controversies in science: their insolubility and materless

As I have already mentioned, the plurality of aspects of reality, the diversity of problems and characteristics lead often to *conflicts of aspects*, that is, to *contentions over how to conceptualize phenomena and objects or how to combine them in constellations*<sup>6</sup>. Another type of debates are *conflicts of descriptive propositions* that happen when *an object – studied under the same angle – is classified into disjoint categories*<sup>7</sup>.

Controversies over the nature of objects or phenomena, over the way they should be understood, i.e., conflicts referring to definitions, may be, and usually are, insoluble because *they are either based on the absolute evaluative judgments or on an 'intuitional' comparison of incommensurable properties*<sup>8</sup>. Behind any insoluble controversy there is dogmatism, i.e., an attempt to absolutize either *evaluative* or *descriptive* judgments<sup>9</sup>. All parties of such conflicts credit (their) judgments with *unconditional priority or exclusivity*; they absolutize properties taken into account, so aspects that are simply different get to be opposite and rule out each other; they prefer one-factor explanations, talk about the essence of things, about factors and forces that determine *in the*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 227.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 229.

<sup>4</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 236.

<sup>5</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 231.

<sup>6</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 204.

<sup>7</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 204.

<sup>8</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 205.

<sup>9</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, pp. 205–208.



*last analysis*; and they classify or evaluate objects along to incommensurable criteria<sup>1</sup>. Their disputes become insoluble because they fail to notice, or do not want to notice, that they formulate elliptical reasonings, that their arguments should be relativized, that the differences of problems do not induce the inconsistencies of descriptive judgments, and that a description of a selected aspect requires comparative accounts<sup>2</sup>. In short, they do not relativize their statements and criteria of validation, they do not ask *valid in which respect?*, they take descriptions and values to be absolute<sup>3</sup>.

Ossowski believes that in many cases insolubility is spurious and can be eliminated when the sides of a dispute *admit the relative nature of their statements*<sup>4</sup>. A contention turns into a solvable controversy when conventional means, such as ranking scales, indicators, standards of comparison and estimation are adopted. All such measures allow scientists to relativize descriptive and evaluative judgments to particular aspects of objects or to certain viewpoints. Then a *conflict of aspects* is brought to an end, and a discussion referring to factual states begins<sup>5</sup>. Then dogmatic and insoluble conflicts turn into empirical or practical controversies.

There is also another way of relativizing judgments – a social one. It happens when concepts and judgments are related to views, standards, or values accepted in (studied) social groups or milieus<sup>6</sup>.

*Correct relativization* allows disputants to realize that a controversy was matterless, pointless, so that it can be abandoned<sup>7</sup>. In a controversy without a real substance *opposite opinions are not contradictory because they either refer to different issues or do not have logical meaning*<sup>8</sup>. However, if a disagreement cannot be removed in a rational way because it is motivated by inconsistent social or political aspirations, intentions, purposes, programs, etc., a controversy is not matterless<sup>9</sup>.

In this remark Ossowski reveals political and ideological aspects of opinions and controversies in the social sciences. These aspects are related to a communicative, and not cognitive, function of scientific judgments. They are particularly manifest in absolute judgments that lack – according to Ossowski – logical value and empirical sense precisely by reason of their unconditionality<sup>10</sup>. Their only value and function is communicative: they express ideas, feelings, desires, and – mainly – they exert influence on people's attitudes and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, pp. 205–219.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, pp. 217–218.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 206.

<sup>4</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 209.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 208.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 209.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 218.

<sup>8</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 218.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, pp. 218–219.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 207, p. 216.

behavior<sup>1</sup>. They play an important role in all sorts of social practices, in particular, in a political practice, but also in science since absolute judgments can act as methodological principles that lay out research<sup>2</sup>.

From the description of scientific controversies Ossowski derives several normative judgments referring to the freedom and responsibility of scientists. As Janusz Goćkowski shows, he emphasizes: the freedom of discussion and publication, the freedom in the access to literature and empirical data, and the liberty to choose problems, aspects, and scientific doctrines. The culmination of all scientific liberties is the freedom of proceeding toward truth. In the light of these liberties scientists' obligation is to retain intellectual independence, to be responsible for applying methodological rules and principles of scientific reliability, and to take care of a proper intellectual atmosphere of science<sup>3</sup>.

Considering insoluble (spuriously or genuinely) scientific conflicts Ossowski derives examples from sociology, psychology, and cultural anthropology, such as the debate between nativists and environmentalists<sup>4</sup>, orthodox Freudians and neo-Freudians<sup>5</sup>, adherents of associationism and supporters of Gestalt psychology<sup>6</sup>, behaviorists and introspective psychologists<sup>7</sup>, advocates of diffusionism and anthropological evolutionists<sup>8</sup>, Marxists and *bourgeois sociologists*<sup>9</sup>. He refers particularly often (even if sometimes indirectly) to Marxism, which he usually (though not always) criticizes<sup>10</sup>.

The criticism of Marxism leads Ossowski to a reflection on the sources of a peculiar danger that threatens science (particularly sociology) there where research practice meets political practice. During discussions about social issues those who are engaged in politics do not separate *discrepancies of judgments that can be removed through empirical verification* from discrepancies that have their source in differences of incompatible political programs, practical directives, and criteria of valuation. They tend to present a conflict over political programs as a contention over theoretical principles; and, they hide political arguments behind the authority of science. The illusion that an insoluble conflict they are involved in is a theoretical controversy can

<sup>1</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, pp. 212–213.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, pp. 216–217.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. Goćkowski, *Wolność i odpowiedzialność ...*, pp. 163–179. Ossowski's remarks referring to the possibility of overcoming controversies apparently insoluble are close to comments of Roman Ingarden on the conditions of earnest, fair, and honest intellectual discussion that is a means of cooperation and the communal achieving of truth. During such a discussion opinions are mutually controlled, supplemented, and improved. Cf. R. Ingarden, *O dyskusji owocnej słów kilka [Few Words about a Profitable Discussion]* in: *Książeczka o człowieku [An Essay on Man]*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1972, pp. 185–190.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 222, p. 232.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 231.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 234.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 234.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 232.

<sup>9</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 224.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, pp. 205–207, pp. 211–214, pp. 216–217.

have a *paralysing influence on the development of some scientific disciplines*. His example is a situation (long gone, I hope) when *the thesis about the class or the party related nature of truth replaced sociological studies of the influence of the social conditions and ideology of scientists on their scientific research*<sup>1</sup>. This remark about dangers threatening sociology allows me to conclude my presentation by revealing a notion of science embedded in Ossowski's considerations on diversity of opinions and controversies in science.

## Conclusion

In my opinion, Ossowski's position is a tempered scientism. I consciously cast away a standard phrase moderate scientism since it is usually referred to a version of scientism modified under the influence of philosophical, speculative criticism and arguments<sup>2</sup>. Whereas Ossowski tempers his scientism in result of empirical and sociological arguments.

Science is, for Ossowski, a rational–empirical enterprise. It is rational since scientific conflicts can be solved conclusively, sooner or later, with the help of relativizing moves that reveal aspects considered, positions actually taken, tacit assumptions, incommensurable comparisons, etc. If relativization does not help to settle a conflict, incompatible accounts may be accepted as parallel views because reality is multidimensional and scientific research is multidirectional. These are the reasons why any scientific discipline is – and should be, accordingly to Ossowski – a plurality of equal perspectives rather than one dominant perspective that attempts to destroy other conceptual frameworks and explanations on behalf of the ultimate truth. Science is empirical since in any conflict scientists refer – and should refer – to empirical data. For Ossowski, in science there are no doctrinal claims that could allow scientists to ignore reality appearing in empirical studies. Science is a form of creation directed by a *desire to enrich knowledge about the world*<sup>3</sup>, and not a form of standing guard over a doctrine. What constrains scientists is the world to be studied, not inherited intellectual traditions, received theories, or political arguments.

What distinguishes Ossowski's reflection on science from philosophy of science is – in short – the lack of the form–content separation. Ossowski is not interested in epistemological, logical, or methodological form of science (of its knowledge, procedures, etc.); he concentrates on real science. He does not look for logical standards of classification or methodological principles of abstraction, but for prejudices and traditions influencing the practice of discriminating and integrating objects. When he talks about insolubility of scientific controversies he does not analyze the logical sense of insolubility, but practical conditions that decide whether conflicting opinions

<sup>1</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that such arguments cannot refer to real science. Cf. J. Woleński, *Umiarkowana (poprawiona?) obrona scjentyzmu [Moderate (improved?) Defence of Scientism]* in: *Racjonalność, nauka, społeczeństwo [Rationality, Science, Society]*, (ed.) H. Kozakiewicz, E. Mokrzycki, M. J. Siemek, PWN, Warszawa 1989, pp. 188–212.

<sup>3</sup> S. Ossowski, *O osobliwościach nauk społecznych*, p. 214.

can be empirically tested. When he reflects on scientific controversies he does not search for their logical structure or linguistic patterns, but shows that the basis of conflicts lie in the attitudes of scientists: dogmatism, rendering their own position absolute, pursuing monistic explanations, etc. He does not avoid appealing to non-intellectual motives, prejudices, existing interpretational traditions, and even – how awful – to expressive and impressive functions of scientific knowledge. Finally, when he separates scientific disciplines his criterion is not their methodological particularity nor the level of their maturity, but the reality which they study and the social function of their results.

Ossowski's acceptance of the multidimensionality of social reality and of theoretical pluralism makes his conception akin to postmodernist thought in Zygmunt Bauman's sense. And this is – in my opinion – its most actual value.