



Culture and civilization in the thought of Francis Mirek and its connection with Margaret S. Archer's theory

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1. Introduction

Francis Mirek is known especially for his pioneering book in the sociology of the parish from 1928 *The Social Elements of the Roman Catholic Parish*¹. The time when Fr. Francis Mirek was living and started his work as a sociologist was marked by the efforts of different researchers to put the proper boundaries to the sociology and then to work out its identity and specificity towards the others social disciplines. In the twenties and thirties of 20th century, the beginning of the process of institutionalization of the discipline already took place: by creating in some countries the chairs of sociology, by state's recognition of the discipline and adopting it in the academic programs, by creating the sociological reviews or by organizing sociological societies and congresses. The development of the sociological theories and schools was just after an important change. Hitherto prevailing two big schools: positivist one with A. Comte, H. Spencer and sociological one of E. Durkheim were challenged by a strengthening humanistic school, especially developing in Germany with such thinkers as F. Tönnies, L. Wiese or M. Weber. This emerging school undermined the achievements of two existing ones in rejecting simplified universal vision of society and in determining its goal in a special vision of society. In Poland, the humanistic traits of sociology were underlined by the sociological school in

¹ Franciszek Mirek, *Elementy społeczne parafii rzymskokatolickiej. Wstęp do socjologii parafii* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Fiszer i Majewski, 1928).

Poznan of prof. Florian Znaniecki who created a system called *culturalism*² in which he demonstrated the importance of culture especially in shaping one's view of the world and the way of thinking, and in organizing human affairs. He is known especially for his large concept of value (as the most general category of the description of reality) and for the concept of a special index – humanistic coefficient. One of the first disciples of this school and of prof. Znaniecki was Fr. Francis Mirek

2. Disciple and critic of the sociological school of Florian Znaniecki

Francis Mirek, the disciple of Florian Znanieckiego, was the first Associate Professor of sociology in Poland³. His works, especially in the first period, are fully consistent with the principal premises of the F. Znaniecki's school. Generally, during all his life Francis Mirek was identifying himself with this school and the humanistic attitude in sociology although gradually he was introducing some original thoughts differing him from his academic Master. He demonstrated also some weak points of his theory.

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The principal premises of the school transmitted by F. Mirek are: 1) the science of sociology is a special, humanistic, nomothetic science, formulating its rights on the model of the exact sciences; 2) cultural world includes the heterogenetic laws, therefore it is a false thesis of the sociologism and some social psychologists talking about society as a whole, with a collective soul, etc.; 3) not only must study of social phenomena take into account the position of an outside observer, but awareness of the actors – acting subjects, so individuals and groups and their representatives; 4) sociological study can apply only to certain strictly defined and separate “systems” (the so-called “closed systems”), which Znaniecki divided into social actions, social individuals, social relations, and finally social groups; 5) the search for causal laws is only possible within the “closed systems”⁴.

The “closed systems” are completely different and there is no logical consistency between them at the large scale, especially taking into account

² Cf. Elzbieta Hałas, *Towards the World Culture Society: Florian Znaniecki's Culturalism* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2000).

³ On the basis of his book *Metoda socjologiczna. Przyczynek na podstawie analizy krytycznej metod Tarde'a i Durkheima* from 1930.

⁴ Franciszek Mirek, „Socjologia w Polsce (Wiek XIX i XX)”. *Przegląd Powszechny*, 47, t. 187 (1930): 168; idem. *Zarys socjologii* (Lublin: KUL, 1948), 61-62.

the systems from all over the world⁵. The conclusion was that there is no possibility to compare these systems at any level. This is one of assumptions criticized by F. Mirek: he agreed that all culture is different and must be analysed separately but on the other hand, he recognised the possibility of some universal cultural consistency, so these systems are not completely isolated and there are some interactions, some interplay between them.

However, it is difficult to say that in the M. S. Archer's notion of cultural conflation Znaniecki represented the downwards one⁶, he is closer rather to the central conflation⁷. He assumed that cultural and social domains interact with one another, but limited it to these closed units, "closed systems".

The concept of the humanistic coefficient formulated by Znaniecki first in his *Introduction to sociology* from 1922⁸, stresses the importance of the perception and consciousness of particular individuals; it shows their experience of the social facts. F. Mirek was referring to this concept very often, thereby at the beginning in his works neglecting the historical processes linked with culture and civilization, neglecting the observation of the social facts. The first longer statements on the issue of culture and civilization F. Mirek formulated after the book of Znaniecki from 1934.

If he criticized some of the assumptions of Znaniecki, in the case of the book dedicated to the issues of culture and civilization *Contemporary People and the Civilization of the Future* from 1934⁹, F. Mirek gave a very harsh assessment. He described it and the included postulates as utopia modelled on Thomas More's book or Plato's *Republic*. He doubted the possibility of such a change of the world as a result of the technic and education as it was postulated by Znaniecki. Znaniecki treated civilization as something linked with a specific nation and culture, so for him it was a reality not larger than the culture¹⁰. From that moment on, in a kind of response to Znaniecki, but also to other sociologists working on that issue, F. Mirek created his theory of culture together with linked civilization, and the relation with one another.

⁵ Cf. Margaret S. Archer, *Culture and agency. The place of culture in social theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4.

⁶ Ibidem, 25-45.

⁷ Ibidem, 72-96.

⁸ Florian Znaniecki, *Wstęp do socjologii* (Poznań: Gebethner and Wolff, 1922).

⁹ Id, *Ludzie terażniejsi a cywilizacja przyszłości* (Warszawa: Książnica-Atlas, 1934).

¹⁰ Mirek, *Zarys socjologii*, 194-198.

3. Culture and its relation to social and individual domains

The most important works of Francis Mirek with the analysis of that question are *Social contacts and the theory of culture* published as an academic course book in 1936¹¹ and *The outline of sociology*, the first university textbook for sociology in Poland after the World War II, from 1948. The latter text used many considerations already included in the former one, however it does not contain some important for our analysis parts. In *The outline of sociology* he did not consider either the question of the genesis of culture or his criticism concerning the materialistic approach to culture in Marks' works (most probably it could not be published anyway), as well as other issues included in the book from before the World War II.

Analysing different definitions of culture F. Mirek found out that the issue is inextricably linked with the question of assessment and evaluation. That is why in his definitions he underlines that the culture is created in order to give people better and happier life. First, his shortest definition: "culture is the visible shape of a pleasant life and coexistence of specific peoples" and then a bit longer: "culture is the harmonized set of signs or set of sign systems and at the same time of the social contacts tools similarly, in a given time, understood, accepted and evaluated by a group of people, allowing (enabling) them a pleasant life and coexistence"¹².

What is the place of culture in his social theory?¹³ Over the time F. Mirek was modifying a bit his scheme, but finally he distinguished five parts of sociology: social contacts, social actions, social relations, social groups, and social changes¹⁴. He took into account the possibility to place the treaty on culture together with social groups, reckoning that generally the culture is the output of the group, but he decided to join it with the social contacts treaty considering the culture first of all as a fundamental set of tools for them. The quality of culture determines the occurrence of social contacts, relations and even the constitution of a group. That is why he placed it in the first part of his sociology¹⁵.

In his considerations concerning the culture, F. Mirek criticised other authors but also was drawing some ideas from them as, for example, from Pitirim Sorokin to whom he refers quite often. However F. Mirek's theory appeared before the most important works of Sorokin in this domain: *Social*

¹¹ Id, *Styczności społeczne i teoria kultury* (Kraków: Sekcja Wydawnicza Koła Uczniów i Absolwentów Szkoły Nauk Politycznych, 1936).

¹² Id, *Zarys socjologii*, 198.

¹³ Cf. Archer, *Culture and agency. The place of culture in social theory*.

¹⁴ Mirek. *Zarys socjologii*, 85-87.

¹⁵ Ibidem, 86.

and *Cultural Dynamics* from 1937-1941 (four volumes)¹⁶ and *Society, Culture and Personality. Their Structure and Dynamics* from 1947¹⁷. F. Mirek gives an interesting formulation very similar to the integrated troika or trinity of Sorokin¹⁸. First of all, the disciple of Znaniecki distinguishes three types of culture: material, personal and social one. After analysing different theories, he states that the dispute about the causal relations between them is already lasting for a long time. The three positions presented by him could be compared to the three types of cultural conflation discussed by M. Archer¹⁹. The first stance mainly related to materialism and Marxism underlines the prevailing character of material culture (upwards conflation). These considerations and the critics of Marxism could be published only in the text from 1936²⁰. In 1948 we can find only some veiled allusions to this system. The second one, linked to the world of ideas and rationalism producing logical consistency of culture, corresponds to the downwards conflation²¹. And finally, the third stance connected to the social structure – the central conflation – which actually he does not develop more extensively (in the theory of M. Archer it signifies the interaction of the Cultural system and the Socio-Cultural level which does not allow however to indicate the source of cultural changes).

Then, F. Mirek taking into consideration the relations between the different types of culture and their genesis states that *homo faber*, *homo sapiens* and *homo socialis* are the three faces of the same reality. Through these expressions the same reality is highlighted from three different sides²². However, he adds: these three terms have the same pre-term (prefix) *homo*. It means for him, that every culture, never mind how we call it: material, personal or social, is essentially humanistic²³. In the book *Social contacts* he wrote more on this question: the culture with all its content influences the thinking of the individuals, but taking it genetically, social culture is the

¹⁶ Pitirim Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (Cincinnati: American Book Company, 1937-1941).

¹⁷ Id, *Society, Culture and Personality. Their Structure and Dynamics. A System of General Sociology* (New York-London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947).

¹⁸ Ibidem; Cf. Jerzy Szacki, *Historia myśli socjologicznej* (Warszawa: PWN 2011), 721-725.

¹⁹ Archer, *Culture and agency. The place of culture in social theory*.

²⁰ Mirek, *Styczności społeczne i teoria kultury*, 78-86.

²¹ Ibidem, 86-94.

²² Id, *Zarys socjologii*, 181.

²³ Ibidem, 182.

consequence of the individual thinking of the persons²⁴. He completed this account with a corroboration that the person is immersed in the culture and that one builds himself and his relations on that basis.

Saying that the thinking is at the basis of the culture F. Mirek underlines that it does not mean only the human reason and the world of ideas or even not particularly this. Conversely, he pointed out first of all the human agency directed by one's aspirations, desires and emotions linked to the values, thereby united also with relations to other persons²⁵. Here, we could refer to the fundamental human concerns described by M. Archer²⁶. F. Mirek points the specific powers and properties of a man that makes him the source of all social and cultural changes. These are not "blind powers" of instinct but are united with the consciousness of the person²⁷. Although sociology does not value, it is related to valuation – the process that occurs in the consciousness of the analysed social subjects. The culture is intrinsically linked to the values and there is no culture without valuation. The priority in generating the culture have the emotions linked to the values and the will²⁸.

Moreover, Francis Mirek describes also the process of development of culture and the socio-cultural interaction which leads to the formation of a new social structure on the one hand, and on the other, to further development of culture. Using Archerian terms, this morphogenetic process allows better integration of the cultural system and the socio-cultural domain. In all social and cultural changes he sees the special place for human agency. The individual person is the source of the social dynamics. It is thanks to the properties belonging to his nature that the person is the first source of the social changes²⁹. His work on social dynamics from 1935 is very important at his time even if it was only an academic course book³⁰. "Saying that the man is the source of social changes, we should actually – thinking logically and precisely – tell that this world is composed at least of two persons, accomplishing a social act. Because a social act can be initiated at least by an individual, so we can discern a causal link between the initiation

²⁴ Id, *Styczności społeczne i teoria kultury*, 88-89.

²⁵ Ibidem, 92-94.

²⁶ Cf. Margaret S. Archer, *Being human: the Problem of Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁷ Franciszek Mirek, *Czynniki dynamiczne życia społecznego* (Kraków: Sekcja Wydawnicza Koła Uczniów i Absolwentów Szkoły Nauk Politycznych, 1935), 11-13.

²⁸ Id, *Styczności społeczne i teoria kultury*, 93.103-104.

²⁹ Id, *Czynniki dynamiczne życia społecznego*, 11.

³⁰ Cf. ibidem.

of an act and the man as an individual”³¹. Constantly, he emphasizes the interdependence and interconnection of different dimensions: personal, social and cultural. Every voluntary human action is connected with consciousness although consciousness does not exhaust our „I”. The human reality is more complicated³². The culture plays a very important role in shaping our individual “I” and social “we”.

4. Six (or seven) differences between culture and civilisation

In his considerations on culture and civilisation, F. Mirek analysed the thought of **many different thinkers** like: Marcel Mauss, Wilhelm Humboldt, Oswald Spengler, Alfred Weber, and also mentioned above Pitirim Sorokin or Florian Znaniecki. One of his liked thinkers was Leopold Wiese even if on that issue, he did not write a lot.

Quoting different definitions and conceptions, the disciple of Znaniecki states that there is and it will be still, for a long time, a fundamental chaos in defining culture, civilization and the relation between them. He enumerates three reasons for that: a) these notions are still not properly fixed and in the case of civilisation still relatively new; b) the both terms always and everywhere bring to mind some evaluations, despite the search for objectivity; then we have a collision of values and the need of the hierarchy of values, which often poses great problems; c) in different languages we could see different receptions of these terms – sometimes one is more important, sometimes another³³.

Taking into consideration these reservations and the different definitions and conceptions linked with these notions, F. Mirek decided to present the main distinctions between them. He did not assume some single definitions; otherwise the considerations would be slightly artificial, determined by his assumptions. Meanwhile he tried to define some boundary conditions for these notions despite the abovementioned difficulties. He listed six major differences, the last of which can be divided into two³⁴.

- a. The first states that culture concerns a person or a group, while civilisation concerns always a group and the group occupying a large territory. Thus we can speak about the Peter’s culture but not about John’s civilisation;

³¹ Ibidem, 12.

³² Ibidem, 15.

³³ Mirek, *Styczności społeczne i teoria kultury*, 117-118; id, *Zarys socjologii*, 203-204.

³⁴ Id, *Styczności społeczne i teoria kultury*, 118-119; id, *Zarys socjologii*, 205-206.

- b. From the first difference we might deduce logically the second one: in culture there are present or even prevail the specific evaluations (values), proper only to a given group or subgroup, whereas in civilisation there are some evaluations (values) which are common for more than one separate social group. One enumerates the Christian civilisation which includes not only Catholic but also Protestant nations, while the Catholic culture is proper only in reference to some Christian countries. In these cases we are able to make the opposition at different levels: the culture of an individual to the civilisation of the group to which he belongs, the culture of one group to the civilisation of larger number of groups or to the culture of a different group;
- c. Furthermore, it results that culture is always closer, more familiar to a person or to a group than civilisation which seems to be distant and more alien; and that the culture is in time perspective before the civilisation. In other words, there is no civilisation without culture;
- d. In the next difference F. Mirek states that not every civilisation is consistent with any culture and vice versa. Moreover, there could also be two cultures or two civilisations that are contradictory or opposing each other and exist together only thanks to an external coercion, for example of the state. F. Mirek gives here the example of opposition: the so-called universal human civilisation and the national culture and the example of consistency: Christian civilisation and different national cultures;
- e. The fifth difference between culture and civilization F. Mirek places in the fact that the culture is more diversified and differentiated, while the civilisation – including the common values of a larger number of social subjects – is simplified or striving for simplification of the views and the norms.
- f. The last distinguished difference could be actually divided in two. The culture is, as with most of the values, ahistorical, spontaneous and irrational, whereas civilisation is shaping itself in historical time on logically justified grounds, the advantage of values that contains are rationalised. The image of civilisation is close in this point to Alferd Weber's concept of rationalisation of culture, which he himself adopted from his brother.

- g. And the consequence of the sixth point is that in some cases it is easier and in some is more difficult to put into existence culture or civilisation. The latter as the reality for a larger number of subjects, being more external, is easier to impose artificially, whereas it is not possible to do it with culture. The former must grow on a personal basis. However, in other cases culture develops spontaneously, whereas the civilisation goods are accepted with difficulties and slowly, often thanks to coercion³⁵.

8. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, F. Mirek had great systematisation skills, what can be found in his works. However, apart from the systematisation concerning culture and civilisation, he presented in his treaty of culture some interesting ideas that are worth reminding. The further development of the sociological thought on the relation between culture and civilisation, like the later works of Pitirim Sorokin, works of Arnold Toynbee, Fernand Braudel, Norbert Elias and others, did not bring any decisive solution into this question but rather extended the scale of the various ideas on that. So we have to agree with F. Mirek's prediction that the chaos is still there.

The thought of Fr. Francis Mirek was not well continued and developed until our times. It resulted from two main reasons: on the one hand, during the communist time his works, especially *The outline of sociology*, were not accepted largely because of the dominant strand of Marxist sociology, which was often imposed on the academics (he himself was imprisoned by the Communists because of some false accusations); on the other hand, in these times he was not well accepted even in the environment of the Catholic University of Lublin and among Catholic social thinkers because of his principal attitude rejecting any confessional sociology. It was still the time of clarifying the subject and method of sociology and particularly in the context of an ideological confrontation with Communists and Marxists many of Catholic thinkers did not agree with him.

Nonetheless, in his works there are many interesting thoughts which are often close to the ideas of today's representatives of critical realism such as M. Archer or P. Donati. In his works he developed especially the theory of the social groups and the relationality: many articles and treaties were consecrated to this question. He described among other things the process of developing the human self in connection with the process of shaping the social „we” and their interdependence. Very important for

³⁵ Ibidem.

him was also the aspect of social dynamics leading to the social morphogenesis, which at his time was not well developed.

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Kultura i cywilizacja w myśli Franciszka Mirka i jej związek z teorią Margaret S. Archer

STRESZCZENIE

Ksiądz Franciszek Mirek znany jest przede wszystkim jako pionier socjologii życia parafialnego. Inne jego pisma i dokonania są mniej znane, a wiele z nich z obecnej perspektywy okazuje się bardzo inspirujących i zbieżnych z teoriami współczesnych socjologów. Artykuł w sposób szczególny zestawia myśl tego polskiego socjologa z teorią Margaret S. Archer w odniesieniu do koncepcji kultury. Inklinacje ucznia F. Znanięckiego do socjologii formalnej oraz dążenie do ścisłego rozgraniczania pojęć zaowocowało wyróżnieniem przez niego sześciu różnic między kulturą a cywilizacją, które to ujęcie jest wyjątkowe i godne przypomnienia, gdyż nie tylko w jego czasach, ale i współcześnie trudno jest znaleźć takie precyzyjne ustalenia u innych teoretyków kultury i cywilizacji. Najważniejsze z jego myśli na ten temat znajdują się w opracowaniach z drugiej połowy lat 30. oraz w najbardziej znaczącym jego dziele, pierwszym polskim powojennym podręczniku do socjologii, pt. *Zarys socjologii* z 1948 r.

Słowa kluczowe: Franciszek Mirek, kultura, cywilizacja, człowieczeństwo, Margaret Archer

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SUMMARY

Fr. Franciszek Mirek is known primarily as a pioneer of the sociology of parish life. His writings and achievements are less known but many of them from the present perspective prove to be very inspiring and coincide with the theories of modern sociologists. The article juxtaposes the thought of Fr. Mirek with the theory of Margaret S. Archer with reference to the concept of culture. The inclinations of the disciple of F. Znaniecki to formal sociology and striving for a strict delimitation of concepts resulted in the distinction of six differences between culture and civilization. Not only in his time but also today, it is difficult to find such precise explanations in the works of other theoreticians of culture and civilization. The most important of his thoughts on this topic are in the studies from the second half of the 1930s and in his most significant work and the first Polish post-war textbook for sociology, titled *Outline of sociology* from 1948.

Keywords: Franciszek Mirek, Culture, Civilisation, Humanity, Margaret Archer