

Summary

The path that Maria Ossowska travelled can be synthesised in the title of this book, *Ethic and Morality*. The sociology of morality, initially conceived as a branch of the science of morality, has today become a fully autonomous sociological discipline. In this book, we have traced a certain process in which reflection on “ethical man” gradually evolved into reflection on “moral man”. It was the Polish scholar Maria Ossowska who provided the stimulus for establishing and developing a sociology of morality, creatively elaborating on Durkheim’s conception of the physics of customs, which was advanced by Lévy-Bruhl as a project for the science of customs. She joined the global current of sociological reflection by formulating a programme for the science of morality.

Fully aware of the dangers, entanglements, and pitfalls present in the tradition of research on ethical issues, Ossowska adopted the postulate of the objective study of the phenomena of moral life. By applying the methodological achievements of sociology, she identified objectivity as one of the chief directives of the programme for researching morality. Control of the researcher’s personal predilections, the pursuit of knowledge while refraining from judging the phenomena being studied, became the overriding research directive. The sociology of morality thereby maintained the characteristic set of features of the scientific frame of reference, coalescing into a scientific canon of conduct. This was a consequence of choice, primarily dictated by Ossowska’s neo-positivist grounding in classic scientific discourse, which took into account the tradition of research into issues within the scope of morality. She strived to maintain the neo-positivistic paradigm of this science, usually avoiding – but sometimes not revealing – being guided by values that she had a preference for. To put it in the most general terms, her findings concern the issues of moral phenomena in philosophical-historical and social terms. The inclusion of these issues,

which she elaborated and developed in her research, is already widely regarded as expressing fulfilment of the requirement for claims within the scope of the sociology of morality to be organised in the form of scientific theory. Today, the sociology of morality is recognised worldwide, mainly thanks to the academic works of Maria Ossowska and Zygmunt Bauman, while the sociological field of moral issues has lived to see the compilation of a lexicon in Poland (Mariański 2015b).²

The ontological approach to studying morality as a social phenomenon allows Maria Ossowska's proposed understanding of morality to be situated in an area close to Durkheim's conception. The negative outcome of efforts to define the object of research in the sociology of morality became her main inspiration for further exploration. Studies conducted led to tangible results in the form of a conclusion asserting the possibility of practising the sociology of morality despite the absence of a specified object of research. Analysis of the scope of the concept of morality led Maria Ossowska to the conclusion that setting borders to this concept has a moral dimension, just as the choice of judges for the bench influences the operative part of a verdict. She realised that on every occasion, the choices made meant having to accept limitations, but they are necessary due to the nature of the issues being addressed.

By referring to the concept of ethos as a research tool and a new cognitive category, Ossowska proposed a practical solution to the difficulties in studying moral phenomena. As a term referring to groups, ethos contained values of a non-moral character upon which moral values are derivatively superimposed. The concept of ethos underwent a gradual revolution in Maria Ossowska's works. As a concept broader than morality, ethos was something she understood as: (1) a type of morality constituting a defined set of virtues (e.g. bourgeois); (2) an hierarchy of moral values constituting an integral part of a values system – its main core; (3) a role model, in which moral values constitute an object of imitation within a given social group. It was Maria Ossowska's firm belief that ethos, as a term fundamental to the sociology of culture, should relate to groups, which is why she referred to observable, recurring and established behaviours of group members. The scope of ethos embraced the area of non-ethical inquiry, opening up the possibility of making findings and then conducting analyses of the specifics of moral phenomena. In Ossowska's intention, the concept of ethos created

² In a textbook on the sociology of morality published in the United States (Hitlin, Vaisey 2010), Gabriel Abend highlighted Maria Ossowska's contribution to establishing the social determinants of morality (Mariański 2015a, p. 11).

the possibility for resolving difficulties related to the separation of moral judgment and moral norm. The introduction of ethos, understood as a role model, was connected to the derivative nature of moral judgments, thereby enabling the determination of a hierarchy of values cherished and pursued in a given group.

In sociological reflection on the specifics of moral issues, the above assertions are of utmost importance. They provide justified grounds for far-reaching caution, even scepticism, prompting the resignation from and sometimes rejection of in-depth descriptions and analyses of models postulated and propagated as reality consciously created through the deliberate actions of propaganda-forming institutions. Interpreting Ossowska's message, role models identified in the social reality, and present in the form of manufactured and disseminated social behaviours, should not be treated on a par with the conscious creations of models conforming to the guidelines of ideological or philosophical assumptions, and as such having a limited and, in their essence, a kind of "artificial" and derivative character, because that would threaten conceptual chaos, blurring the main features of the image of social reality found and described, leading one down the blind alley of negligent cognition and false knowledge. Treating the role model as understood by Ossowska on a par with the role model conceptions resulting from their authors' deliberate elaboration, we often risk falling into the trap of proliferation. It was precisely such dangers that Ossowska wanted to avoid when constructing her programme of the science of morality, free from the influences, prejudices and personal convictions of the researcher.

The fully-formed conception of ethos entails the disclosure of criteria for distinguishing the concept of morality. Ossowska's pro-social orientation has become apparent here. The divisions distinguished in morality referred to the principles of the "hygiene of coexistence" in society, and to the perfectionist current in morality, commanding one to respect one's own and others' dignity. Such a way of framing morality, referring to a catalogue of pro-societal and ornamental virtues (soft and hard), demonstrates a strong connection with Dupréel's concept. Maria Ossowska sought the specificity of moral behaviours in social relationships. In her explorations, morality appears to be an effect of the social nature of humans, although she would most likely deny such an assertion. She presented a position in her works refuting the possibility of determining the essence of human nature, although there is a distinct lean towards the social character of moral issues.

On an epistemological level, Maria Ossowska's conception of the sociology of morality shows numerous links with Weber's sociology. One could say that she is inspired by it. This is most evident in her first work on the

sociology of morality, in which Ossowska referred to the concept of ethos, adopting Weber's ideal type to frame moral phenomena as phenomena of a specific type. In her work *Moralność mieszczańska* (Ossowska 1985a), she frequently described the phenomena she was analysing as being "of a certain type in the Weberian sense". In the evolution of her scientific work, this allowed Maria Ossowska to distinguish between aristocratic and bourgeois morality. There are also traces here of inspiration from Veblen's work, which consequently became an expression of a particular research strategy. This strategy was used for analysing moral phenomena in contemporary societies. At the same time, Ossowska expanded her research, enriching it with reflection on the morality of social groups differing in terms of culture. Thus, the sociology of morality is not merely an eclectic collection of issues connected with ethical reflection. Apart from the analysis of specific types of morality, it is above all the result of creative effort in codification. The regularities identified in the sociology of morality are of a general nature, enhanced by a specific variable that occurs as either dependent or independent. The anthropological accents in Maria Ossowska's works are most visible in the area of methodology. Using a functional method, she analysed moral norms and the behaviours they applied to. Presumably, the evolutionistic functionalism present in Maria Ossowska's studies of moral phenomena is – alongside her interest in cultural anthropology – an effect of the influence of Durkheim's and Malinowski's views. There is a certain feature in Ossowska's works that is noticeable here: a combination of a methodological regime, prescribing a strict course of research, and a fleeting, sometimes ephemeral and multiform sphere of values manifested in various ways in the life of the societies analysed. The transition to the world of anthropology allowed Maria Ossowska, as it were, to "pass into another sphere". From the cold, ordered, necessary and consequently overwhelming world governed by the laws of logic, she was crossing into a world full of unexpected situations, differences and colours of human behaviour, sometimes totally different from the rest. One might say that Ossowska was thereby able to spread the wings of her creative imagination and venture into a land of fascinating research inquiry, rich in conclusions, freed from the tight corset of the methodological regime.

Yet, Ossowska did not feel thus exempted from the demands of scientific procedure. On the contrary, alongside the main methodological directives of functionalism, her scientific technique demonstrated a similarity to the research style of Ranulf, whom she valued for his integrity in research proceedings. One could see that she had similar methodological preferences. Ossowska would often withdraw from the option of obtaining even indirect

research when the results would not allow it. She valued Ranulf for the objectivism of his research, for his detailed verification of hypotheses, and his scepticism when assessing the validity of conclusions. The same trait of integrity in her research, expressed in her caution against accepting easy conclusions too hastily, is present in all of her works.

The character of the sociology of morality designed by Maria Ossowska is such that it initiates further deliberation. It is oriented towards defining a certain whole, and it opens the way for continuation. Ossowska was well aware of the danger of errors she was exposed to during her research. She expressed this in numerous suggestions that her hypotheses should be verified and her research ideas subjected to detailed analysis. In this sense, her research efforts, organising, classifying and verifying moral phenomena, constitute a successful attempt towards creating a sociological sub-discipline. Her conviction that the interdisciplinary development of research in the social sciences was necessary found a well-established position. This is further supported by the multifaceted nature of her competencies and outlook regarding the research object. The mutual control of methods, their coupling, and the comparability of the results are undeniable qualities of disciplines thus formed – among which the sociology of morality is listed. Its emergence may be treated as an expression of the “natural” need for development in the social sciences.

The question arises as to what one should attribute opinions that Maria Ossowska’s works constitute a kind of levelling of the ground beneath the construction of a new science (Kotarbiński 1949), or the accusation of *docta ignorantia* in the matter of moral aspects of social phenomena (Jankowski 1963). A distinctive feature of Maria Ossowska’s work was her inclination to challenge the theories she analysed. The hypothesis that, apart from the methodological directives of functionalism, she referred to Popper’s method of falsifying scientific theories without actually revealing it, needs to be verified. An attempt to compare Ossowska’s concept with Petrażycki’s views, using an arbitrary definition of morality, also seems an interesting task. For Petrażycki, the basis for a definition of the concept of morality was a psychological criterion, which Maria Ossowska considered insufficient. Interesting attempts to define this concept, undertaken in contemporary sociology, use precisely this criterion (Kiciński 1989).

Maria Ossowska’s concept of the sociology of morality continues to inspire many contemporary researchers. Her creative scientific oeuvre is cultivated by a group of her students and continuators, and her theoretical findings have been applied in, among others, the sociology of science, law, and the countryside, as well as in anthropology and ethnology, in descriptive

studies of morality, and in other disciplines of the broadly conceived humanities. Despite this, her works have not yet been fully explored for their research potential. There is still room for further exploration and in-depth analysis of Ossowska's deliberations. The use of her proposals for addressing problematic issues in the research areas of sociology, anthropology, ethnography, and research methods, therefore, seems interesting. Some of them are being developed by contemporary sociologists of morality, and for example quantitative methods – which Ossowska tended to avoid – are used by Kiciński and Mariański.

These inspirations have not been fully utilised to date. Little is known of the hypothetical theoretical consequences of a possible paradigm shift in research on morality. Maria Ossowska's thesis on the increasing dissemination of moral norms due to the global standardisation of moral norms and behaviours would undergo verification. It may then turn out that the sociology of morality is enriched with new research issues, and acquires an autotelic sense, addressing values imbued with features of universality and durability. However, in the study of moral issues, current findings are moving in a different direction. One can rather observe the spreading of immoral behaviours, treated as evil undergoing globalisation, while at the same time there are indications of the impossibility of coming up with solutions that enable effective counteraction against the adverse consequences of manifestations of evil in an unstable world (Bauman 2006a).