Ethically responsible Global Sociology: conceptual framing of a new vision

PAVEL SOROKIN

Department of General Sociology, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Myasnitskaya Ulitsa 20, Moscow 101000, Russia
E-mail psorokin@hse.ru

This paper begins by outlining the two-sided 'ethical challenge' that international sociology faces in the 21st century. First, formulating the ethical stance of a sociologist towards the subject of disciplinary inquiry and the potentially involved social groups. Second, elaborating the adequate research tools for studying the ethical dimension of globalizing social reality. We conduct a critical analysis of the current literature on these issues from the Global Sociology perspective. We show that the 'value-involved' Global Sociology is the only possible mode of successful and appealing international disciplinary practice. However, existing 'value-involved' approaches are Eurocentric by nature and lack sensitivity to the ethically diverse global social reality. We propose the conceptual framing of 'Ethically Responsible Global Sociology' as a new vision of our discipline in the global world.

Keywords: Global Sociology, globalization, ethics in sociology, value-involved sociology

INTRODUCTION

The questions, relating to moral assessment of the social world, have always been a disturbing matter for sociology. However, the 21st century, marked with increasing globalization, reproduces these problems in the new context, shaping the 'ethical challenge' for our discipline, comprised of the two interconnected issues.

The first issue refers to formulating the ethical stance of a sociologist towards the subject of disciplinary inquiry and the potentially involved social groups (see Burawoy 2005; Gorski 2013; Black 2013). Does a sociologist have a right as a professional to express value judgments? Can he or she participate in the promotion of the particular social changes? Even though the latter question attracts a greater attention of contemporary professional community (see, for example, Burawoy 2005 and the relating debates), the first one is no less important. For inferring what ought to be from what is, or claiming the present as natural and inevitable and therefore 'good', or viewing progress as though it possessed the inherent value – is just one step away from engaging in relevant practical action. That is precisely what one of the founders of sociology, Max Weber, claimed strongly against in his essay "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality'" (1949) (see more in Burawoy 2012).

The second issue refers to methodological difficulties in studying the ethical aspects of social world, implying, primarily, the moral factors affecting social action (see Campbell 2014). On the one hand, the famous American sociologist, John Meyer, argues for the central role of ethical imperatives (such as 'environment', 'human rights' or 'progress' (Meyer 2010)) for the development of contemporary 'World Society'. On the other hand, the proponents of classical or 'old' institutionalism (Stinchcombe 1997) address ethical dimension as guided by individual rationality and self-interest. However, there are those who claim that values are nothing more than 'social construction', a contingent result of history and power, lacking any objective or rational foundation (Hitlin, Vaisey 2010). This diversity of theoretical views results in the polyphony of methodological approaches, applied in contemporary social science for analyzing values, motives, aspirations and even emotions (Stets, Turner 2014).

In the 21st century, when different moral visions increasingly intertwine both in the professional sociological community and in the world it inhabits, the problem of the ethical stance of a sociologist becomes unprecedentedly complicated and, simultaneously, the very subject of sociological inquiry grows highly complex.

Current literature generally addresses the outlined 'ethical issues' in sociology from within the concrete local (national) disciplinary tradition or focuses on the 'sociology in general' (which usually implies Anglo-Saxon sociology) (Black 2013; Gorski 2013). In the present paper, we apply a different approach, analyzing the formulated 'ethical challenge' from the Global Sociology perspective.

'ETHICAL CHALLENGE' FROM THE GLOBAL SOCIOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

The notion 'Global Sociology' is becoming increasingly popular in the academic literature (Bhambra 2013). In the present paper, we develop the definition suggested earlier (Sorokin 2016a) by highlighting its three major objectives: 1) enhancing the integration processes within sociology (open and equal cooperation between various local sociological communities in a global context); 2) strengthening the integration between sociology and society (increasing the appeal of sociology for various social groups and agents in the local, national and global fields); 3) assistance in building the integrated, peaceful and prosperous global society (increasing sociology's contribution regarding the most pressing social problems at the local, national and global levels).

Our approach implies a critical consideration of the strategies that current literature proposes to shaping the ethical stance of a sociologist and to analyzing the ethical aspects of social world from the perspective of the three outlined objectives of Global Sociology.

Given the described conceptual framework and the existing literature, we build our analysis on the basic distinction between 'value-involved' and 'value-free' approaches to sociology (Black 2013; Gorski 2013). On the one hand, we analyze two different initiatives of 'value-involved' sociology: the famous 'Public Sociology' of Burawoy (2005) and the alternative (in our view, no less worthy of attention) 'Ethical Naturalism' of Gorski (2013). On the other hand, we address the contrasting proposals for the so-called 'value-free' sociology (Black 2013; Turner 2013).

Drawing on the results of our analysis, we propose a conceptual framing for a new vision of a global disciplinary project – 'Ethically Responsible Global Sociology'.

BURAWOY'S 'PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY' AS AN ETHICAL PROJECT: PERSPECTIVES AND PROBLEMS IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

Burawoy (2005) calls sociologists to support democratic transformations all around the globe against the domination of unjust state politics and increasing marketization (Burawoy 2005, 2009, 2014). As has been demonstrated earlier in literature (Sorokin 2016a, 2016b, 2017), Burawoy offered an attractive and promising vision of the discipline by pointing to the organic connections between sociology and civil society all over the globe.

However, from the viewpoint of the outlined first objective of Global Sociology (integration between sociologists), Burawoy overlooks the fact that sociological communities, practicing the traditional mode of politically disengaged 'Professional Sociology', may oppose those having inclination towards the ideologically saturated 'Public Sociology'. The signs of such antagonisms are vivid in the current international debates (see, for example, the recent calls for various 'alternative projects' like 'Connected Sociologies' (Bhambra 2014)). The strong underlying political agenda hampers the perspectives of Burawoy's project (as well as the prospects of other possible visions of politically engaged sociology) as the platform for fruitful intra-disciplinary cooperation in a global field.

Consideration of 'Public Sociology' regarding the second outlined objective of Global Sociology (integration between the discipline and society) also raises concerns. On the one hand, Burawoy's project successfully attracts attention of discriminated social groups by the call for engaging in various civil society initiatives (see Sorokin 2015, 2016a). On the other hand, this public engagement bears a distinct protest orientation, focusing on struggling with the powerful agents of the market and the state. This disciplinary vision does not imply a balanced and harmonious convergence with non-academic world, but rather confronts a significant part of society, becoming the radicalized political agenda pretending to be the 'inconvenient truth' (Burawoy 2014: 153).

From the viewpoint of the Global Sociology's third objective (assistance in building the integrated, peaceful and prosperous global society), Burawoy's 'Public Sociology' also can hardly be considered the best solution, as it permits the so-called 'non-orthodox' methods, which imply direct violation of the law (Bello 2014). The same problem is typical for other projects of activist or 'partisan' sociology becoming rather popular in the current international debates (Sorokin 2016a).

Burawoy also gives a little attention to the second aspect of the global 'ethical challenge' (the problem of methods for studying the 'ethical' dimension in social world). He suggests the 'ready-made' universal scheme of global marketization, which has little sensitivity towards the concrete ethical contexts and the relating specifics, which may be crucial for comprehending the particular issue (see Alasuutari 2015).

Burawoy's vision of sociology as a discipline, which for a long time was distant from the political world and now, in the 21st century, has to 'go public' in response to global marketization, may be valid for Western Europe or USA. However, this interpretation certainly does not refer to many other locations (see, for example, the case of Russia (Sorokin 2015) and Mexico (Zavala Pelayo 2015)). Perhaps, this is where the hidden Eurocentrism of Burawoy's initiative shows itself: originating from the intellectual tradition of Western socialism, 'Public Sociology' takes it for granted that the 'emancipation' political agenda of the global (Western) capitalism' opponents has universal validity.

GORSKI'S 'ETHICAL NATURALISM' FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF GLOBAL SOCIOLOGY: PROSPECTS AND LIMITATIONS

Gorski's conception (2013) instigated active discussions in the academy, including those comparing his 'Ethical Naturalism' and Burawoy's 'Public Sociology' (Turner 2013; Campbell 2014).

Gorski applies an interdisciplinary approach, combining philosophy and sociology, which allows him to reconsider the role of ethics in the debates about prospects and limitations of social science. Gorski agrees with Burawoy in the principal question about the necessity of social science to engage morally with the acute problems and concerns of the society (2013). However, he does not encourage the direct participation of a sociologist in the social movements. Gorski suggests that the ethical stance of a scholar might be derived not from the current political agenda but from the broad intellectual heritage of humanity.

Aristotelian philosophy lies in the core of 'Ethical Naturalism' concentrating on the notion 'eudaimonia' ('happiness', 'well-being', 'flourishing'): 'Ethical naturalism presumes that human beings "flourish" under certain conditions and falter under others' (Gorski 2013: 543). This means that the focus of sociological research should be expanded to include 'moral facts… containing discoverable truths about the good life and the good society' (Gorski 2013: 543). Thus, Gorski breaks from the mainstream 'positivist' vision of sociology as a 'hard' science.

However, the first objective of Global Sociology (enhancing the integration processes in the global professional community) would not be easy to achieve within the 'Ethical Naturalism' conceptual framework. It bases upon the Aristotelian worldview – an interesting, but in many respects sophisticated and specific product of Western civilization (Russel 2013). Indeed, seemingly obvious and universal, 'moral facts' are always grounded in the scholar's intuition and largely depend upon the concrete social and cultural context.

The perspectives for strengthening the integration between sociology and society in a global context by promoting 'Ethical Naturalism' are also questionable, in our view. The global world is highly diverse in the existing readings of 'happiness' (Etzioni 2011). Under these circumstances, a constructive collaboration between sociology and society, driven by the quest for 'moral facts', would be problematic even in the Western world alone.

Regarding the Global Sociology's third outlined objective (assistance in building the integrated, peaceful and prosperous global society), Gorski takes a cautious stance, arguing that sociologists are not competent enough to engage in policymaking (2013: 550–551). However, he proposes the 'capability approach' by Sen (2001) as a possible tool for measuring the level of 'eudaimonia' empirically. In our opinion, this may not be a suitable solution for the global world due to the cultural roots of Amartia Sen's ideas in the Western 'liberal-individualist' intellectual tradition (see more in Dean 2009).

The second aspect of the 'ethical challenge' (elaborating the adequate research tools in response to increasing complexity in the ethical dimension of global social world) is given a limited attention in the Gorski's scheme, which reduces the analysis of the 'ethical', primarily, to the search for the universal 'moral facts'. However, the declared principle of 'open-mindedness' and strong inter-disciplinary orientation, arguably, makes 'Ethical Naturalism' more responding to the ethical complexity of global world comparing to Burawoy's 'Public Sociology' with its more radical ideological framework.

Do the limitations of 'Public Sociology' and 'Ethical Naturalism' mean that Global Sociology should not be 'value-involved'? This is what several respectful scholars like Turner (2013) and Black (2013) would suggest, arguing for the so-called 'value-free' sociology.

'VALUE-INVOLVED' SOCIOLOGY AS THE ONLY POSSIBLE MODE OF SUCCESSFUL GLOBAL SOCIOLOGY

Burawoy claims that in many countries outside the western world, 'Public Sociology', implying a morally engaged interaction with various groups beyond the academy concerning the acute social problems, is the only successful mode of disciplinary practice (2005: 282). The institutional power of academic science in these countries is often very limited (largely due to continuing inequalities in the international disciplinary field (see Sorokin 2016a)), making public appeal vital for a sociologist.

Hence, in terms of the first outlined Global Sociology's objective (integration between various local and national disciplinary traditions), an extensive and inclusive international collaboration is impossible basing on the 'value-free' understanding of the discipline. Dominating professional communities have to accept the 'peripheral' sociological cultures, as they appear to be: oriented on extra-academic communication and implying a distinct ethical stance.

From the viewpoint of the Global Sociology's second objective (strengthening the integration between sociology and society), a 'value-involved' approach also appears beneficial. Arguably, the 'value-free' and 'neutral' observations of social reality are not what extra-academic audiences seek most to obtain, but rather the ethically grounded interpretations of the problems that people face in everyday life. As French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, put it: 'people hardly ever talk about the social world in order to say what it is, but almost always to say what it ought to be' (1993 [1984]: 22). It means that to become more appealing to the society, a sociologist cannot rely only upon the strength of a 'pure fact', assuming that it has universal validity independently to the tastes and preferences of various publics. It is vitally important to refer to the needs and troubles of the concrete people in the concrete situation (see Bourdieu 2000).

A largely similar argument refers to the third Global Sociology's objective (building the integrated, peaceful and prosperous global society): 'value-involved' sociology has simply no alternative, because improving the world is already an ethically saturated goal.

However, our critical analysis of the two distinctly different approaches to the 'value-involved' social science demonstrates that neither politically engaged conceptions, like that of Burawoy, nor philosophically reasoned frameworks akin to Gorski's are sufficient for building truly and properly Global Sociology. Both visions are Eurocentric as they suggest the universal appealing of the limited sets of inherently Western political values or 'moral facts'.

In light of these limitations, we propose the vision of 'Ethically Responsible Global Sociology', rooted in the 'Integralism' conception of American and Russian sociologist Pitirim Sorokin.

SOROKIN'S 'INTEGRALISM' AND 'ETHICALLY RESPONSIBLE GLOBAL SOCIOLOGY'

'Integralism' outlines the core 'inseparable' phenomena that sociological research should focus on – personality, society, and culture (Sorokin 1947: 63–64). 'Goodness', inferring mutually beneficial social interactions or 'Solidarity', is the ultimate research interest for Sorokin (1947). He suggests integrity between different disciplinary modes of sociology, including not only research activities but also elaborating and implementing relevant policy solutions (1947, 1948).

In our view, Pitirim Sorokin's approach is advantageous in comparison with the projects of Burawoy and Gorski in two essential aspects. First, it promotes a deeply solidarity-oriented

sociological practice (which is highly relevant in the face of the current global challenges, such as terrorism). Second, it suggests the ethical dimension of culture as one of the core subject matters in sociological research. Utilizing these ideas, we elaborate further the vision of 'Ethically Responsible Global Sociology'.

Our essential claim is that sociology should be 'ethically responsible'. Despite widespread various 'codes of ethics' and 'ethical standards', accepted by professional communities in sociology, the term 'ethics' itself acquires a little attention by mainstream sociologists who tend to see it as something self-evident. For instance, the 'Code of Ethics' of ASA (2011) (American Sociological Association), a document on 32 pages, does not offer any definition of 'ethics' at all.

We understand 'ethics' not in a highly theoretical or philosophical manner suggested by Gorski (2013), but as the capacity to consider moral values and direct actions in terms of such values (Churchill 1999). The notion 'responsibility' also has a long history of development in philosophy (see, for example, Feinberg 1970). We address it more sociologically, which implies a stronger reference to the social practice and common sense. For instance, the well-known Merriam-Webster dictionary defines 'responsibility' as, first, 'the state of being the person who caused something to happen', and, second, 'a duty or task that you are required or expected to do' (2014). Hence, a sociologist's 'ethical responsibility' implies the necessity to carefully consider the moral values operating in every situation, that he or she faces in the professional practice, in terms of the consequences that any action or inaction by him or her may have for all the potentially involved social groups and individual actors. Further, we develop our understanding of 'ethical responsibility' in regard to Global Sociology by outlining two principal elements of 'Ethically Responsible Global Sociology'.

SOLIDARITY-ORIENTED SOCIOLOGICAL COMMUNICATION

The increasingly intensive inter-cultural communications in the global world require not a monologue of a single 'universally true' moral doctrine but the constructive and tolerant multifocal discussions between various ethical visions, implying strong 'dialogic consciousness' (Aleksandravičius 2016). Responding to this challenge, we propose the solidarity-oriented ethical stance of a sociologist as the basic principle of professional interaction with non-academic world. It implies deliberate efforts by sociologists to support a peaceful, meaningful and mutually respectful dialogue within and between the interacting social groups at the local, national and global levels.

In order to support solidarity in the 21st century, a careful empirical analysis of values and meanings, shared by the particular addressee of sociological communication, becomes necessary. This implies unacceptability of promoting narrow and rigid ready-made political schemes or philosophical conceptions because such strategy ignores the naturally emerged ethical systems in the concrete social environments. In order to communicate with publics responsibly, a sociologist should acquire as much understanding as possible about the particular ethical context.

Literature notes that transmission and absorption of cultural values, ensuring a tolerant communication and a successful cooperation, appear highly problematic in the global world (Pruskus 2013). In light of this, a close and intensive collaboration between sociologists, originating from different ethical systems, is necessary. For instance, in conflict environments, a solidarity-oriented (though evidence-based) sociological message to the confronting groups might be an important tool in reducing social tension.

IMPROVED ANALYSIS OF ETHICAL DIMENSION IN SOCIAL LIFE

Literature continuously points to the insufficient attention by contemporary social scientists to the ethical aspects of social reality (Flyvbjerg 2001). The sociological mainstream tends to account human actions as rule-governed, while ethical examinations generally concentrate on the question of whether the particular courses of action accord with one or a series of abstract theoretically derived ethical 'principles' (Haimes, Williams 2007).

Literature suggests 'ethical reflexivity' (implying careful attention to how the social actors themselves ethically comprehend the world) as an important part of research methodology and the necessary element of a sociologist's methodological rigor (Gewirtz, Gribb 2006). In our view, this idea is especially relevant for the analysis of globalization processes requiring a cross-cultural and international cooperation between sociologists in joint 'ethically reflexive' studies. We cannot agree with Black to his well-known assumption that 'Scienticity is a curvilinear function of social distance from the subject' (Black 2000: 352), claiming that 'because human subjects in one's own society and time are especially close, ideas about these subjects are especially unscientific' (2013: 773) (see also Hammersley 2014). On the contrary, for the correct comprehension of the concrete social issue in the global world of the 21st century, the knowledge about the ethical aspects of the particular social process or phenomenon under examination becomes especially important.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper formulated and analyzed the global 'ethical challenge' that international sociology faces in the 21st century. In response to this challenge, we proposed the conceptual framing of 'Ethically Responsible Global Sociology' as a new vision of our discipline in the global world.

References

1. Alasuutari, P. 2015. "The Discursive Side of New Institutionalism", *Cultural Sociology* 9(2): 162–184.
2. Aleksandravicius, P. 2016. "The Need for Dialogic Consciousness in Postmodern Politic Society", *Philosophy. Sociology* 27(1): 14–22.
3. American Sociological Association (ASA). 2011. *ASA Code of Ethics.* Washington, DC.
4. Bello, W. 2014. "Inconvenient Truths: A Public Intellectual's Pursuit of Truth, Justice and Power", *Current Sociology* 62(2): 271–278.
5. Bhambra, G. K. 2013. "The Possibilities of, and for, Global Sociology: A Postcolonial Perspective", *Political Power and Social Theory* 24: 295–314.
6. Bhambra, G. K. 2014. *Connected Sociologies.* Bloomsbury Publishing.
7. Black, D. 2000. "Dreams of Pure Sociology", *Sociological Theory* 18: 343–367.
8. Black, D. 2013. "On the Almost Inconceivable Misunderstandings Concerning the Subject of Value Free Social Science", *The British Journal of Sociology* 64(4): 763–780.
9. Bourdieu, P. 1993. *Sociology in Question.* London: Sage Publications [first published in 1984].
10. Bourdieu, P. 2000. *Acts of Resistance: Against the New Myths of our Time.* Cambridge: Polity Press.
11. Brook, P.; Darlington, R. 2013. "Partisan, Scholarly and Active: Arguments for an Organic Public Sociology of Work", *Work, Employment & Society* 27(2): 232–243.
12. Burawoy, M. 2005. "For Public Sociology", *American Sociological Review* 70(1): 4–28.
13. Burawoy, M. 2009. "Challenges for a Global Sociology", *Contexts* 8(4): 36–41.
14. Burawoy, M. 2012. "From Max Weber to Public Sociology", in *Transnationale Vergesellschaftungen.* Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 741–755.
15. Burawoy, M. 2014. "Sociology as a Vocation: Moral Commitment and Scientific Imagination", *Current Sociology* 62(2): 279–284.

16.   Campbell, B. 2014. "Anti-Minotaur: The Myth of a Sociological Morality", *Society* 51(5): 443–451.
17.   Churchill, L. R. 1999. "Are We Professionals? A Critical Look at the Social Role of Bioethicists", *Daedalus* 128(4): 253–274.
18.   Dean, H. 2009. "Critiquing Capabilities: The Distractions of a Beguiling Concept", *Critical Social Policy* 29(2): 261–278.
19.   Etzioni, A. 2011. "The New Normal", *Sociological Forum* 26(4): 779–789.
20.   Feinberg, J. 1970. *Doing and Deserving: Essays in the Theory of Responsibility*. Princeton University Press.
21.   Flyvbjerg, B. 2001. *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again*. Cambridge University Press.
22.   Gewirtz, S.; Cribb, A. 2006. "What to Do About Values in Social Research: The Case for Ethical Reflexivity in the Sociology of Education", *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27(2): 141–155.
23.   Gorski, P. S. 2013. "Beyond the Fact/Value Distinction: Ethical Naturalism and the Social Sciences", *Society* 50(6): 543–553.
24.   Haimes, E.; Williams, R. 2007. "Sociology, Ethics, and the Priority of the Particular: Learning from a Case Study of Genetic Deliberations", *The British Journal of Sociology* 58(3): 457–476.
25.   Hammersley, M. 2014. "Provoking Misunderstanding: A Comment on Black's Defence of Value Free Sociology", *The British Journal of Sociology* 65(3): 492–501.
26.   Hitlin, S.; Vaisey, S. 2010. *Handbook of the Sociology of Morality*. Springer Science & Business Media.
27.   Merriam-Webster. 2004. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster.
28.   Pruskus, V. 2013. "The Concept of Culture and Enculturation Process in the Context of Intercultural Communication", *Philosophy. Sociology* 24(3): 121–130.
29.   Russell, B. 2013. *History of Western Philosophy: Collectors Edition*. Routledge.
30.   Sen, A. 2001. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford Paperbacks.
31.   Sorokin, P. 2015. "The Russian Sociological Tradition from the XIXth Century until the Present: Key Features and Possible Value for Current Discussions", *The American Sociologist* 46(3): 341–355.
32.   Sorokin, P. 2016a. "'Global Sociology' in Different Disciplinary Practices: Current Conditions, Problems and Perspectives", *Current Sociology* 64(1): 41–59.
33.   Sorokin, P. 2016b. "Vision and Mission of Sociology: Learning from the Russian Historical Experience", *The American Sociologist*, doi: 10.1007/s12108-016-9303-3.
34.   Sorokin, P. 2017. "Russian Sociological Tradition in the Context of International Discourse: Specific Features, Problems and Perspectives", *Sotsiologicheskye Issledovaniya* (1): 128–137 (in Russian).
35.   Sorokin, P. A. 1947. *Society, Culture, and Personality*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
36.   Sorokin, P. A. 1948. *The Reconstruction of Humanity*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
37.   Stets, J. E.; Turner, J. H. (eds.). 2014. *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions: Volume II*. Springer.
38.   Stinchcombe, A. L. 1997. "On the Virtues of the Old Institutionalism", *Annual Review of Sociology* 23: 1–18.
39.   Turner, S. 2013. "Sociology Rediscovering Ethics", *Society* 6(50): 602–609.
40.   Weber, M. 1949. "The Meaning of 'Ethical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics", in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, eds. E. A. Shils, H. A. Finch. New York: The Free Press, 1–47.
41.   Zavala Pelayo, E. 2015. "Nominal Openness and Epistemic Endogamy in 'Global' and 'Provincialized' Sociologies", *Sociology* 49(3): 539–555.

PAVEL SOROKIN

Globalios sociologijos atsakomybės etika: naujo požiūrio konstravimas