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TYPOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN HISTORICAL SCIENCES*

Our discussion will be dedicated to the historical sciences viewed in a
broad context, taken to include the history of politics, the history of
economy, the history of culture, the history of morality, history of art,
etc. Do these sciences use typological concepts? Many representatives of
particular historical disciplines argue that they do. Moreover, they stress
that the typological concepts are indispensable tools of these sciences,
which would not be able to perform their tasks without them. The
following are examples of concepts which are usually considered as
typological: the feudal system, the capitalist system, the manorial-serf
economy, the rent the economy, burgher morality, family based on an
institutional pattern, friendship-based family, Baroque architecture, the
naturalistic novel.

Those who favor of the idea of an indispensable character of
typological concepts point to the following circumstances:

(i) The ordinary concepts are “rigid”: objects either fall into their
range or they do not. However, the reality is of a different nature,
properties of objects are gradual, and the transitions between the
state of having and not having a certain property are continuous,
which prohibits any sharp delimitation, save for the cases in which
we decide to introduce artificial borders. By contrast, typological
concepts, owing to their “elasticity,” can be predicated on objects
which possess definitional properties to a greater or lesser degree,
on the condition that they satisfactorily resemble the type.
(ii) Due to the above-described properties, the typological
concepts allow comparisons among the objects with respect to the
intensity of the possessed by them properties. They allow
introducing order into the chaos of manifold phenomena which the

* The lecture was delivered in the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences

In: K. Brzechczyn (ed.), Idealization XIII: Modeling in History (Poznań Studies in the
Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities, vol. 97), pp. 109-120. Amsterdam/New
researcher encounters, and to systematize it. In particular, typological concepts allow researchers to present evolutionary series of the investigated phenomena. The historian F. List, for example, identifies the evolutionary sequence of the economic structure of the country, assuming as the criterion changes in the professional structure of the population. In this case, development proceeds from the hunting-shepherding stage (one extreme) through agricultural and agricultural-industrial stages to the agricultural-industrial-commercial stage (the other extreme).\(^1\) (iii) While comparing specific phenomena with the type we can notice differences that occur between them, and develop explanatory hypotheses. By this token, we may gain fuller understanding of the phenomena under study.

Let us ask ourselves whether the characterization of the typological concepts and their functions in science that is sketched above is relevant. In order to answer this, must inevitably introduce certain auxiliary notions from the fields of logic and the methodology of science. We will also use insights from the general theory of measurement.

First of all, we shall draw a distinction between classificatory concepts and comparative concepts.\(^2\) Here are a few examples of concepts of the first kind: the historian, man, the serf, the musical work, intelligent, red, sour. The logical structure of classificatory concepts can be depicted with the use of the propositional function \(P_x\). Predicate \(P\) denotes a property which is attributed to an object \(x\). The range of the concept \(P\) is a set of all objects which satisfy the function \(P_x\). If, for example, the function \(P_x\) is interpreted in the following way: \(x\) is a realistic novel, then the range of the concept \(P\) will be a set of realistic novels. A classificatory concept divides the set of the examined phenomena into two subsets: those which have property \(P\) and those which do not.

The logical structure and function of comparative concepts is of a different nature. More intelligent, more medieval in style, more rational, more explicitly naturalistic, more feudal: these are just a few examples of such notions. In effect, the comparative concept is an entity which is composed of two parts, one of which states the precedence criteria while the other supplies equality criteria in a specified respect. However, only the first component of that entity is mentioned in colloquial speech.

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1. The example was taken from the book by Kula (1963), p. 181.