

EDITORIAL

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Robert K. Merton and the Russian Sociology of Science

The 100th anniversary of Robert Merton's birth was celebrated in July 2010. He was one of the leading sociologists of the 20th century. In honor of this event, **the Center for Sociology of Science and Science Studies, Institute for the History of Science and Technology named after Sergey I. Vavilov, St Petersburg Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences** together with **the Research Committee on the Sociology of Science and Technology RC23 of the International Sociological Association** prepared a special issue of the journal "Sociology of Science and Technology". It was not only this date that made us look at Robert Merton, but also the fact that his name was so closely connected with emergence and legitimization of the academic subfield sociology of science. Merton was one of the founders and the first president of RC23. One should not neglect the fact that Russian sociology of science started to actively absorb Merton's ideas in the 1960s and that many of the Soviet scientific elite maintained friendly and professional contacts with this eminent scholar. Merton became an important personality for Soviet sociology.

Robert Merton's main biographical facts are available in standard textbooks. His upbringing and professional formation were connected with the Russian empire: his father was an immigrant from Ukraine. He was born Meyer Schkolnick and only later he changed his name to Merton:

And so, just as Ehrich Weiss, the son of Rabbi Mayer Samuel Weiss had become Harry Houdini, naming himself after the celebrated French magician, Robert Houdin, the 14-year-old Meyer R. Schkolnick fleetingly became Robert K. Merlin, after the far more celebrated magician of Arthurian legend. Merlin, in turn, soon became Merton when my mentor Hop gently observed that Merlin was a bit hackneyed. By the time I arrived at Temple College, my close friends were more often than not calling me Bob Merton and I did not discourage them. I rather liked the sound of it, no doubt because it seemed "more American" back then in the 1920s. With the warm consent of my devoted Americanizing

Professor S. Kugel
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Dear Professor Kugel,

I have just returned from a short stay in Norway and England to find your kind note of August 8th waiting for me. I am glad to learn that "The Matthew Effect" is to be translated into Russian. I shall be glad to continue sending you reprints along with the enclosures if you will let me know which ones you have received. (I failed to keep a record of those sent to you previously.)

So, too, I'll be glad to send future works for possible translation into Russian.

In the meantime, very best collegial regards to you and your colleagues with the hope that things will be for the better in this time of enormous social change.

Sincerely,

Robert K. Merton

R. Merton's letter to Professor S. A. Kugel

mother — she attended night school far more religiously than the synagogue — and the bland agreement of my rather uninterested father, this was followed by the legal transformation of my name some 65 years ago¹.

He started his sociological career under the guidance of George E. Simpson. An encounter with Pitirim A. Sorokin decided largely his fate: R. K. Merton worked as a research assistant to Sorokin at Harvard. These are his recollections from a biographical lecture delivered on April 28, 1994 at the annual meeting of the American Council of Learned Societies:

Taking his assistant in hand, George Simpson also saw to it that I would see and hear key figures at an annual meeting of the American Sociological Society. There I met Pitirim Alexandrovich Sorokin, the founding chairman of the Department of Sociology then being tardily established at Harvard. That too proved to be a consequential encounter. For I would surely not have dared apply for graduate study at Harvard had Sorokin not encouraged me to do so. After all, my college advisers had warned me that Temple was still not fully accredited. To which I replied, rather ineptly, that it was the scholar Sorokin, not the institution Harvard, that mattered most to me. For, as a rather arrogant undergraduate, I had brought myself to believe — not entirely without

¹A Life of Learning by Robert K. Merton. Charles Homer Haskins Lecture for 1994 // ACLS Occasional paper. № 25. URL: http://www.acls.org/Publications/OP/Haskins/1994_RobertK-Merton.pdf

foundation — that I knew just about everything American sociology had to offer in the late 1920s, although I had to confess to having only peripheral knowledge of the older and, to me, more evocative European traditions of sociological thought. Sorokin had recently published his *Contemporary Sociological Theories*, a wideranging, contentious overview of, in the main, European sociology, and plainly he was the teacher I was looking for. Moreover, it was evident that Sorokin was not your ordinary academic sociologist. Imprisoned three times by czarists and then three times by the Bolsheviks, he had been secretary to Alexandr Kerensky, the Socialist Revolutionary Prime Minister of Russia, and had had a death sentence commuted into exile by the normally unsparing Lenin. That too was bound to matter to me since, like many another Temple College student during the Great Depression, I was a dedicated socialist. In the event, I did nervously apply to Harvard, did receive a scholarship there, and soon found myself embarked on a new phase in a life of learning¹.

He taught at Harvard until 1938. He joined the academic guards of Columbia University in 1941 and sustained his relationship with it until his last years.

P. A. Sorokin's role in R. Merton's intellectual development is well known. It is also known that the famous pupil felt deep respect and veneration for his not less distinguished mentor. In the 1920s to 1930s he was interested in Soviet science. A German woman scholar provides evidence that he had read, in translation, works by Bukharin, Hessen and Rainov. «I asked him to explain me what works in the Soviet period of development of the sociology of science (Bukharin, Hessen, Rainov) he knew and whether some forms of communication existed. His answer was very kind: "As it happens, I never met or corresponded with any of them." And further: "I knew Bukharin's Historical Materialism in its English translation, of course, and his later introductory essay to "Science at the Crossroads (1932). Checking my reference to B in my 1945 "paradigm for the sociology of knowledge" I find myself referring to "the questionable thesis" "only proletarian [social] science has valid insight into certain aspects of social reality." And of course, like my colleagues, I was disturbed — rather, outraged — by his execution after Stalin's notorious purge trials"»².

Robert Merton's impact on the formation of Soviet and post-Soviet sociology in Russia was great. It would not be an exaggeration to call Merton the key personality for Russian sociology in the second half of the 20th century. Beginning from the 1960s, Soviet sociologists started to intensively explore Merton's writings. Soviet sociology came to vigorously use structural functionalism as an explanatory theory, despite Marx' dominant concept that had been pre-determined ideologically.

Books by the American sociologist were read in English; they were brought into Russia from professional trips abroad, handed over in typewritten copies, and gradually Merton's works came to be translated and published in the USSR.

When preparing this issue the editors' principal task was to show R. K. Merton's ties with Soviet/Russian sociology that found their expression not only in the theoretical explanation of his ideas by Russian sociologists, but also in networks of personal communications, those informal friendly contacts that had been established between classic American sociology and Russian scholars.

¹A Life of Learning by Robert K. Merton...

²See the present issue of Journal: *Winkler R.-L.* Short Notes of the Sociologist of Science from the Former German Democratic Republic.



From left to right: N. V. Novikov, A. G. Zdravomyslov, G. V. Osipov, E. V. Osipova, R. Merton at the Sixth World Congress of Sociology in Évian, 1966¹

In 1961 as a member of the American sociologists' delegation, R. Merton came to the USSR, delivered a lecture at the Philosophy Department of Leningrad University². At the Sixth World Congress of Sociology in Évian the Soviet sociologists had meetings and discussions with R. Merton³.

At different times R. Merton sustained close professional relationship with Russian sociologists: Yu. A. Zamoshkin, N. V. Motroshilova, A. G. Zdravomyslov, E. Z. Mirskaya, S. A. Kugel, N. E. Pokrovsky which found expression in regular and long-standing correspondence, exchange of books, articles and other materials⁴.

¹ The photo copy presented by E. A. Zdravomyslova (from Prof. A. G. Zdravomyslov's archive).

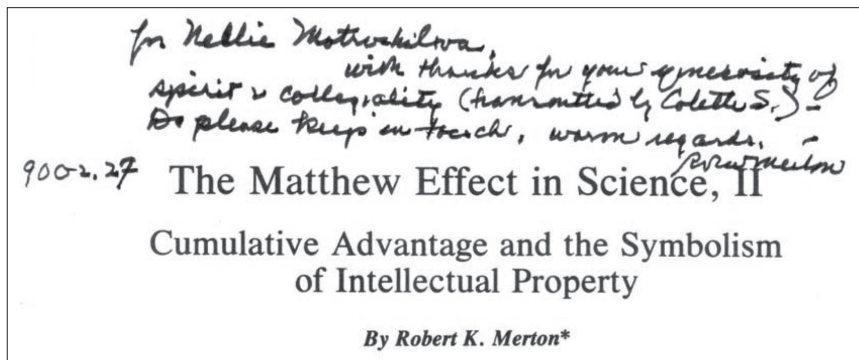
A. G. Zdravomyslov's description of the meeting R. Merton: "I met Merton for the second time at the Sixth World Congress of Sociology in Évian, 1966. T. Parsons and R. Merton invited G.V. Osipov and his wife, as well as N.V. Novikov and me for a dinner to a Swiss restaurant at the shore of Lake Geneva. I handed over this photo to the Community of professional sociologists. I met Merton for the third time in 1994, at his home in New York".

URL: http://www.unlv.edu/centers/cdclv/archives/Interviews/zdravomyslov_06b.html

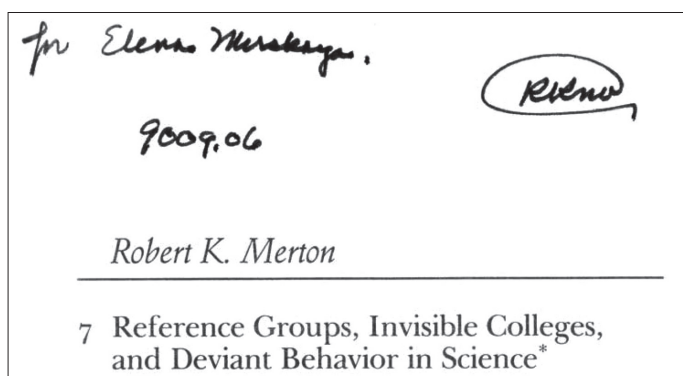
² A. G. Zdravomyslov: «Sociology as creed of life» // International Biography and History of Russian Sociology Projects feature interviews and autobiographical materials collected from scholars who participated in the intellectual movements spurred by the Nikita Khrushchev's liberalization campaign. The materials are posted as they become available, in the language of the original, with the translations planned for the future. Dr. Boris Doktorov, Dmitri Shalin are editing the projects. URL: http://www.unlv.edu/centers/cdclv/archives/Interviews/zdravomyslov_06b.html

³ See the present issue: *Yadov V. A.* How Galina Andreeva and I got into public discussion with Robert Merton; *Kon I. S.* Remembering Robert Merton.

⁴ Professional sociologists' community. URL: www.sociolog.net/inmemoriam.html



R. Merton's commemorative inscription to Professor N. V. Motroshilova



R. Merton's commemorative inscription to Professor E. Z. Mirskaya

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the whole 1960s generation of Russian sociologists were brought up “on Merton”.

No doubt, R. Merton remains a well-respected personality both in Russian and global sociologist communities. The interest in his activity does not weaken. It is not easy to encompass all works that have been published after the great sociologist's death that are related somehow to his legacy. One of *the Social Studies of Science*¹ issues was dedicated to R. Merton which included a comprehensive bibliography of the American sociologist. Robert Merton's archive, handed over in 2006 by H. Zuckerman to the library of Columbia University, is a rich vein for scholars of intellectual history and social life in the 20th century². In 2010 Craig Calhoun, the President of the Social Science Research Council, gathering together twelve major sociologists, published the new book “Robert K. Merton: Sociology of Science and Sociology as Science”³.

¹ *Social Studies of Science*. December 2004; 34 (6). URL: <http://sss.sagepub.com/content/34/6/toc>

² Papers of Robert K. Merton, Pioneer in American Sociology. Donated to Columbia's Rare Book & Manuscript Library in Columbia University Libraries. URL: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/>

³ Robert K. Merton: *Sociology of Science and Sociology as Science* (2010) / ed. by Craig Calhoun. Columbia University Press/SSRC. URL: <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/978-0-231-15112-2/robert-k-merton>

R. Merton's name is connected with many directions in sociological research, but first of all it became the eponym for sociology of science, because the phrase the "Mertonian sociology of science" became widely accepted by the scientific community. That crucial role the American sociologist played in the institutionalization of this sociological field should be especially highlighted. In 1966, R. Merton became founder, organizer and the first President of The Research Committee on the Sociology of Science and Technology RC23 (International Sociological Association) until 1974. Merton's activity at this post was in many ways decisive for theoretical and institutional development of the sociology of science worldwide.

Russian sociology has been re-entering the global sociologists' community slowly and not without difficulties. Sociologists take part in international sociology events: congresses, conferences, projects, as well as in organizations. Working in the RC23 of the International Sociological Association is an important part of this process. Among Russian sociologists, a special honor on this Committee was conferred in different years to members of the Leningrad/St. Petersburg sociological school, who were selected as Board Members of RC23: S. A. Kugel and N. A. Asheulova. These two scholars have now been consecutively directors of the Center for Sociology of Science and Science Studies Institute for the History of Science and Technology named after Sergey I. Vavilov, St. Petersburg Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences.

The editors hope that this issue will supplement the image of this distinguished sociologist that the scientific community has already created. Diversity of research perspectives and theoretical approaches of this issue's contributors will enable a comprehensive picture of how R. Merton's ideas have been assimilated in the Soviet-Russian sociology of science. We are sincerely grateful to all colleagues who participated in the publication of this issue and to those who helped prepare it.

The editors thank Pavel Petrovich Krotov, (PhD, Philosophy, University of Wisconsin), curator of Pitirim Sorokin's family heritage, for possibility of publishing the original letters¹.

¹ The original letters are kept in The Pitirim A. Sorokin Collection, the Special Collections Department at the University of Saskatchewan Library, Canada:

3 Campus Drive

University of Saskatchewan

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Canada S7N 5A4

URL: <http://library2.usask.ca/sorokin/Credits>