

Dossier

Ludwik Fleck's Theory of Thought Styles and Thought Collectives: Translations and Receptions

Introduction¹

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Ludwik Fleck (1896–1961) developed his theory of thought styles and thought collectives⁴ eighty years ago. It describes the origins and condensation of knowledge (including scientific knowledge) in a framework of thought collectives and the “circulation of thoughts” [*Denkverkehr/krażenie myśli*] within and among them. The combination of sociological, historical and psychological approaches to (scientific) knowledge was groundbreaking in those times and Fleck is often considered to be one of the first proto-constructivist thinkers.

By reconstructing the origins of a microbiological fact (the first reliable testing method for syphilis following the *Wassermann* reaction) at the beginning of the 20th century, Fleck showed that scientific knowledge does not simply derive from spontaneous discoveries or a single pure genius mind. According to Fleck, scientific facts emerge in a constant process of circulating and interchanging thoughts between various collectives. Collectives are carriers of thought styles, and one individual is always a member of several collectives; this makes the circulation of thoughts (i.e. a mutual interaction of different styles) possible even within one individual. Fleck's sociological and historical perspective is closely linked to his experiences, practices and socialization as microbiologist (Sady, 2012).

With his book *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache* (Fleck, 1935), Ludwik Fleck inspired many scholars to reflect epistemologically on the production of scientific knowledge in terms of social circumstances. The first responses to Fleck's book were published in the 1930s (Schnelle, 1986, pp. 456f.), and the monograph also served as one of Thomas Kuhn's inspirations for his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn, 1962). Today, bibliographies of the reception of Fleck's ideas in Polish (Jarnicki, 2015b), German (Lang, 2016b) and English (Jarnicki, 2015a)⁵ consist of hundreds of entries but the history of the receptions themselves has rarely been an object of consideration (Ginev, 2015a, 2015b; Rivadulla, 1990).

Fleck's book was translated first into English (Fleck, 1979), following which it was reissued in German (Fleck, 1980), then later translated into Italian (Fleck, 1983b), Polish (Fleck, 1986b), Spanish (Fleck, 1986a), Swedish (Fleck, 1997), Russian (Флек, 1999), French (Fleck, 2005) and Brazilian Portuguese (Fleck, 2010). Fleck's theoretical legacy, however, is not limited to his German-language book, since he also wrote several papers in Polish, most of which were then translated into German (Fleck, 1983a, 2011), English (Löwy, 1990; Schnelle & Cohen, 1986) and Italian (Fleck, 2009). None of these editions, however, can be called “critical”, nor are there any critical editions even in the original German and Polish languages. Nevertheless, it is a peculiarity of Fleck's legacy that one integral theory was formulated more or less simultaneously (1934-1936) in two languages, Polish and German⁶. This was the inspiration behind the

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⁴ For biographical information see Leszczyńska (2009) and a book written by the journalist Allen (2014).

⁵ For updated versions of these bibliographies see: www.ludwikfleck.pl.

⁶ For list of his theoretical writings and bilingual character of this legacy see Jarnicki (2016).

project titled *A philological analysis of Ludwik Fleck's philosophical writings and their translations in Polish, German and English*,⁷ which included the organization of a conference on *Ludwik Fleck's theory of thought styles and thought collectives – translations and receptions* (Lang, 2016a). This issue is continuation of this work, since we are of the opinion that Fleck remains an underexploited source of inspiration and authority for those who are interested in any kind of metascience, including, but not restricted to, philosophers, historians and sociologists of science.

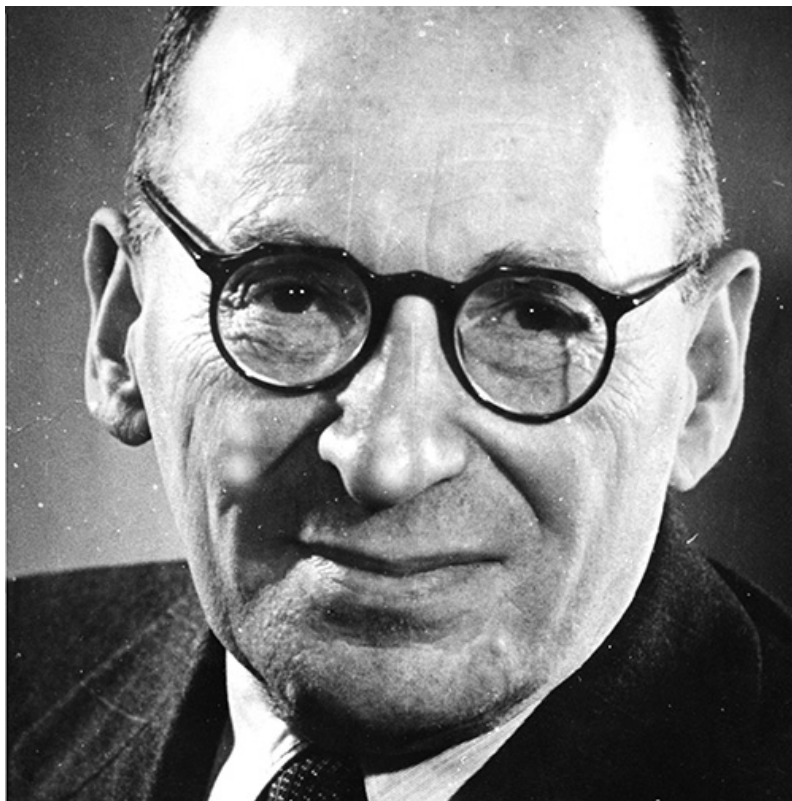
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⁷ The project is presented in Jarnicki (2015c), see also www.ludwikfleck.pl



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