

The aim of the project is to present the racial issues in Polish thought as from the end of the 18th century till 1918 – insights into its cultural, social and political backgrounds, and determining its role in perception of interpersonal relations. In the past the term "race" was used freely. It appeared interchangeably with such terms as strain, tribe, generation, people, nation. The size of the semantic range of the term resulted from the fact that it was treated as a spacious descriptive category serving to demonstrate differences between human communities. The objective of the project is to define the term "race" and to indicate the contexts that had an impact on its use, and therefore to answer the question about its biological and cultural meaning. The Polish literature (journals and books of various character) should be analysed with regard to references to biblical tradition explaining the beginnings of humanity, myths and stereotypes, which helped understand the reality and explain the past, as well as the division into physical and mental races, and inquiries about relations between body and spirit. The objective of the undertaken research is also the reconstruction of the attitude towards the Enlightenment discussions on monogenism and poligenism of peoples, starting from the Romantic perception of the role of Roman, Germanic and Slavic races, and further to the evolutionist theories, and to the scientifically accepted beliefs about the hierarchisation of races. The objective of the project is also to investigate the reception of the West European literature on the discussed subject. This reception was accompanied by cognitive objectives and aspirations to popularise scientific achievements. The above subject matter will be presented in compliance with the state of knowledge of that time, which placed a white man at the top of the ladder of evolution and simultaneously rejected the equal status and the equal rights of cultures. The centre of the research interest will be the knowledge popularised in the social circulation. The scientific works will serve only as a secondary material.

The planned studies and the results of the project in the form of a monograph prepared for publication should convince about the cognitive value of the history of discussions about the race. They will be used to obtain new knowledge of the ways of understanding the human diversity, they will enable to analyse the phenomena which had the considerable impact on the shaping of Polish thought in this field. This work will enrich the humanities in such research disciplines as history, history of anthropology, ethnography, ethnology, psychology and sociology, and it will be a point of reference for further research. The realisation of the project will help resolve ambiguities in the approach to the category of "race" which cause the incomprehension of it, and therefore the distortion of the picture of its functioning in the Polish literature. The analysis of the subject matter, not undertaken earlier in such a broad chronological range, will enable to construct the image of knowledge about man of that time, to present views on their origin and to reconstruct the specific perception of the role of the Polish nation on the background of other communities. The reconstruction of views proclaimed at that time will also help notice the transformations of opinions on the human diversity. In the scientific literature there is no historical presentation analysing the meaning of the term "race", and the realities and contexts accompanying its usage. A lack of arrangements in this respect is the cause of erroneous interpretations, which are based on the assumption that wherever the term "race" was used in descriptions, we are dealing with the racist views. The consideration of the history of knowledge about human nature in the context of the race issues, and the anthropological-cultural approach to history should favour the reconstruction of the system of terms which were used to explain the human development, the surrounding reality, and to show the perspective of the future. Although the research will be devoted to penetrating the past, due to everlasting disputes against a background of ethnic, national and civilisation issues they will remain topical and will contribute to explanation of the roots of phenomena occurring at present.