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What's the future of the agrarian question? Is its universalism being consolidated and the field of reception widened today?

Reflections on the book by St. Kowalczyk and R. Sobiecki,
The agrarian question in economic theory.
From peasant agriculture to sustainable agriculture

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A discourse on the agrarian question is developing in the community of agricultural economists in Poland. After a unique monograph (Zegar, 2018) and a discussion about it (Czyzewski A., 2019), as well as a monograph (Matuszczak, 2020) and reviews of this work (Kowalczyk, 2021 and Zegar, 2022), another monograph has been published (Kowalczyk & Sobiecki, 2021), which we consider a work of outstanding theoretical and cognitive value. We claim this for two reasons. First, it is a work that, for the first time, presents a fully comprehensive and periodic history of thought devoted to the agrarian question in classical terms and, against the background of Polish economic thought of the 20th century, it expands this presentation to include the conditions of globalisation affecting agriculture. Second, the presentation of this vademecum of the problem is related to the development of the theory of agricultural economics as a sub-discipline of economics, particularly regarding the issue of marginal conditions of agricultural production, agricultural employment and the problem of food self-sufficiency. A kind of summary of these presentations is the anticipation of the future of the agrarian question, considering modern knowledge of the evolution of its sources and their consequences as well as the differences in defining the problem, given its different manifestations and the requirements of sustainable development. We consider this approach to be original and innovative, even as the aim is very ambitious and challenging to achieve. The authors wrote the monograph with the knowledge that the agrarian issue has accompanied the development of agriculture since its dawn and occurred naturally throughout history.

Originally, the agrarian issue had a strictly systemic dimension related to the income depreciation of peasants (farmers), mainly due to system-determined property relations. Only in the first half of the 19th century did the situation change with the First Industrial Revolution. Industry, which was nascent at the time, needed hands to work, and capitalism needed labour, agricultural raw materials and a market economy. This created the need to change production relations in agriculture and the countryside and to integrate farms into the commodity–money economy. It is necessary to agree with the authors' thesis, repeated by A. Runowich (1979), that the emerging developmental distance between agriculture and industry at that time was the primordial source of the agrarian question in modern economics. Agriculture in the era of the original accumulation of capital followed different paths to the capitalist system. The authors point to the English, French, Prussian and settler-colonial routes, which differed in the social position ascribed to the peasant in the production relations of the time (Kowalczyk & Sobiecki, 2021). Indeed, these routes determined the sharpness of the manifestations of economic exploitation and thus the agrarian question.

Technical and social progress in non-agricultural sectors, however, did not find widespread application in agriculture, so the distance from the non-agricultural environment, instead of being reduced, rose. Attempts to resolve the escalating conflict took two forms. The first was the socialisation of agriculture (Marx, 1959; 1963) through the socialisation of land, the transformation of peasant farms into collective and state forms and the change of peasants into agricultural workers. The second form was the industrialisation of agriculture, as pointed out by Kautsky (1958) and Lenin (1900), among others. It is to the authors' credit, however, to show that these were not the only ways to solve the agrarian question at the time. An alternative solution was pointed out, for example, by Tchayanov (1966), who was fundamentally opposed to the proletarianisation of the peasantry. He focused on the development of family farms, emphasising the social and economic role of the farmer's family.

History has proven that attempts to socialise or industrialise agriculture have not solved the problem of the economic and social depreciation of farms and villages. Nevertheless, the struggles of the researchers of the agrarian question of the time presented in work arouse the reader's appreciation for the broad and in-depth presentation of the central problem in a way that, today, we can say is classical. The educational importance of this monograph is its undeniable value in this regard. It is written in such a way that, by the ends of the early chapters, the reader expects further exploration by the authors and a presentation of the possible ways to eliminate the negative manifestations of the agrarian issue. In this, the reader is not disappointed. It is apropos to quote here the remarkably apt motto of the dissertation, in which, following Zdzisław Ludkiewicz, the authors write: 'In each period, different issues make up the content of the agrarian question.'

The presentation of Polish economic thought on the agrarian question during the first half of the 20th century contains some interesting opinions of the researchers of the time. Conservative and landowner organisations emphasised the 'food function of the countryside' and opposition to parceling it out. The peasants proclaimed the slogan: 'land for the peasant', and socialists presented the issue of socialising land, particularly with regard to so-called 'dead hand property', e.g. German estates, etc. (Wojtas, 1983). The history of agrarian thought ties the agricultural question in this period to the breakthroughs in production brought about by technological advances, which were seen as the driving factors behind the changes in the tools used in agriculture and the methods of cultivating the land. These caused a leap in productivity in crop and livestock production, resulting in an increase in the food supply under conditions of specialisation (Krzywicki, 1967). Advances in transportation were accompanied by a decline in the demand for agricul-

tural labour and the growing rural overpopulation. These led to migrations to developing cities and the depopulation of rural areas. The evolution in agriculture was towards market production and gradual concentration of the area for and the methods of production.

With regard to Poland (the Second Republic), there was an additional, extremely important problem of unifying the various legal systems as a remnant of the three partitions, which were so different in terms of agricultural and rural development. The negative effects of the dissimilarities created by the partitioners, and legal solutions, complicated the answers to the agrarian question of the time. The efforts to document the positions and views of the causes and consequences of the agricultural question in Polish agrarian thought at the beginning of the Second Republic should be appreciated. They show, on the one hand, the diversity and economic and legal conditions of the essence of the problem, and, on the other hand, the strong political and ideological anchoring of the expressing researchers. Impressive is the presentation of the views of more than a dozen scholars and publicists of the period, proposing many solutions to the agrarian question as they saw it, from the socialisation of land and the liquidation of individual farms to subjecting agriculture to processes of capitalisation by concentrating potential and production. It is in this area that the many solutions to the agrarian question were presented. These included nationalising land (Limanowski, 1919), recognising the problem as a common pathological condition, calling it malaise in agriculture (Ludkiewicz, 1932), pointing out the possible natural advantages of small farms over large ones (Grabski Wł., 1930) and developing small farms (Grabski St., 1938; Miłkowski, 1934), or recognising the agrarian question as part of the social question (Bujak, 2014), the need to industrialise agriculture (Lutosławski, 1919), treating capitalism as an opportunity and challenge for agriculture (Bronikowski, 1934), and abandoning the parcelling out of landed estates (Studnicki, 1927).

The authors' presentation of diagnoses and treatments raises reflections for the reader. First, the authors are to be applauded for such a complete, multifaceted, historically organised source search, proving the vitality of agrarian thought of the time in cognitive, economic and sociopolitical aspects. Second, it should be noted that, more than a century ago, the agricultural question was the subject of lively discussions, polemics and often different assumptions and concepts for its solution. The views presented make it, as St. Kowalczyk (2021) writes, an 'immortal' problem, emphasising the many variants of solutions, assuming different rates and extents of the socialisation or industrialisation of agriculture, as well as its support under state interventionism, especially for small farms. These lines of thought contain a wide variety of theoretical assumptions, which focus on several problems, includ-

ing the attitude towards land ownership, the area structure of farms, the relationship between agriculture and industry, the adequacy of social solutions, and the role of the market and capital in resolving the agrarian question. A legitimate issue at this point is whether the historical aspect presented in the monograph is necessary, or does it distract the reader's attention, focusing more on the relationship with economic theory than the history of agrarian thought? In our opinion, this approach meets with full approval – *History Magistra vitae*, in this case, of what matters. The interpretations presented to convince us of the vitality of the title problem, its importance and the need for further scientific inquiry that considers the dynamics of progress and time.

Approaching the present day, the views on the agrarian question of such world economic giants as W. Lewis (1954), T. Schultz (1964), and J. Stiglitz (1987) were presented and juxtaposed with those of contemporary Polish researchers. This chapter of the monography of Kowalczyk and Sobiecki was treated as a combined periodical and theoretical strand, and it serves to embed the reader's perception in both aspects. Thus, W. A. Lewis (1979, Nobel laureate in economics) brings a new perspective on the agrarian question. According to him, its roots are in the disproportionate dynamics of the development of industry and agriculture. Moreover, the lack of symbiosis and the parallel development of agriculture and industry lies at the root of the income disparity between employment in agriculture and industry. An overpopulated countryside and historically inherited agriculture cannot secure parity income for farmers, and the growing demand for food, because of industrial development, is exploited through the appropriation of the value produced in agriculture by the owners of capital and, today, by multinational corporations. It is worth noting here that it is no longer a matter of capturing the benefits of land or absolute annuity, as preached by the founders of early economic theory (Smith, 2015). Rather, it is about income inequality related to profit distribution. In this sense, the market determinants of the opening of the price scissors of items purchased and disposed of by farmers, which are otherwise a consequence of differences in labour productivity in industry and agriculture, condemn farmers to an income disparity that cannot be overcome without outside intervention (here, the state).

On the other hand, T. Schultz (also 1979 Nobel laureate in economics), starting from the famous hypothesis that 'agriculture is productive but poor', emphasises the rationality of the peasant economy, determining its vitality and its ability to modernise and adapt to new economic and social relations, but on the condition that knowledge and capital are treated equally. Accepting the economic mechanism of the emergence of income disparities in peasant farms, he points to the need for innovation and pro-development meas-

ures to increase capital stock and sustain the viability of peasant farms. While accepting the existence of the agrarian issue as a fact, J. Stiglitz focuses on identifying the rationale and means of state intervention to minimise its effects (Stiglitz, 1987). He recognises that the imperfection and unreliability of market mechanisms are the cause of economic disparities in agriculture, and he points to the need to correct them through adequate agricultural policy. This includes alleviating the incompleteness of agricultural markets in relation to other sectors of the economy. It goes to, among other things, insurance in agriculture and the availability of credit, stimulation of large infrastructure investments (such as irrigation), dissemination of the positive effects of various innovations, ensuring the availability of full information treated as a public good, or activity in socially acceptable income redistribution. He emphasises the need for properly identifying specific situations to minimise the risk of misguided or even harmful interventions.

An undeniable value of this monograph is the in-depth source search of foreign and domestic writings on the agrarian question. Referring to the opinions of Polish researchers of the second half of the twentieth century, it should be emphasised that the political and constitutional dimensions of the agrarian question were more stressed often at first rather than the economic one. Later this changed. The importance of aligning agricultural labour resources with the potential of arable land was presented, emphasising the need for an accumulation contribution. For instance, Tepicht (1963) notes that the financing of industrialisation by agriculture (e.g., the drain of economic surplus from agriculture to primary accumulation outside agriculture) accounted for about one-fifth of agriculture's pure output in the 1950s. The agrarian issue ceased to be exclusively a problem of peasants (farmers) and became an economy-wide problem.

It is interesting that already in 1966, H. Cholaj, defining the agrarian question in socio-class and economic aspects, considered it an important part of economic theory. He noted the special functions of agriculture as a provider of public goods and activities to preserve the environment. He saw the solution to the agrarian question in the abolition of urban-rural differences, in accordance with the utopian, as we know it today, theory of the socialisation of agriculture. To assess the title problem comprehensively, the monograph also presents the views of other Polish authors, such as Pohorille (1966), Ignar (1968), Galaj (1973), Runowicz (1979) and Strużek (1968). They emphasise that the agrarian issue in the period 1950–1990 manifested itself in Poland mainly in the form of the dwarfing of farms and overcrowding. This entailed deep income deprivation of the agricultural population, and it became a permanent element of economics and economic reality (Kowalczyk & Sobiecki, 2021, p. 98).

After 1990, the agrarian issue took a different character and direction. Once again, the consequence of the inadequacy – or failure – of agriculture to keep up with the general trends of development (not so much with the development of the capitalist system, but with the processes of globalisation of the economy) was revealed. An interesting statement emerges: ‘the partner of the state in solving the problems of the agrarian question has changed. The national capitalist has been replaced by a global corporation’. This means a certain unification of the problem, but its typically national and regional features do not disappear. In a convincing, logical lecture, it is argued that the field of reception of the agrarian question under the conditions of globalisation of the economy is significantly increasing. The authors present the problem in the context of the functioning of the single European market and the assumptions of the EU Common Agricultural Policy. They reduce the concept of the globalisation of agriculture to the narrative of the issue of allocative openness in the field of agricultural activity. In essence, this means the possibility of transferring agricultural production from economically inferior places to better-developed places, which primarily entails the practical possibility of acquiring land in any quantity from anywhere in the world.

Openness in agriculture, understood in this way, however, leads to unlimited competitiveness of farms in their various locations, as well as the subordination of producers of agricultural raw materials to transnational corporations that process agricultural raw materials, not just food. However, the relationship between suppliers and buyers of agricultural raw materials (products) is changing towards a monopsony (a few buyers, many sellers). It is to the author’s credit that they originally presented agricultural markets through the globalisation of agriculture. They point out that this means privileges for a few operators in the agricultural sector and the subordination of numerous suppliers to multinational corporations. The globalisation of agriculture tends to stimulate higher-factor productivity in agriculture, mechanisms that promote the growth of production and labour productivity. However, this does not automatically mean an increase in prices and incomes. On the contrary, under conditions of increased price competitiveness and subordination to corporations, the incomes of primary producers do not necessarily increase at all, in fact, they relatively decline, and the industrialisation of manufacturing processes usually violates the well-being of the natural environment.

A very interesting and correct statement is that the globalisation of agriculture has had an impact on changing attitudes towards the marginal conditions of agricultural production. The dependence of agriculture on globalisation processes is exceptionally high due to the immobility of the land. While capital flows freely from less efficient allocations to more efficient ones, the

movement of land resources from one country to another, because of economic conditions, is not possible. As a result, the globalisation of agriculture means that the price of agricultural products is determined by marginal conditions, i.e. the worst of those necessary for agricultural development in a particular country, rather than average conditions, as is the case with non-agricultural production. Thus, the globalisation of agriculture is changing perceptions of the marginal conditions of the agricultural output, moving it from the national space to an area across national borders. Domestic production becomes challenged, as those who produce products under less than marginal conditions simply do not sell their products, resulting in the abandonment of production.

Another consequence of the globalisation of agriculture, leading to an increase in labour productivity and a decrease in prices, is a reduction in demand for labour, but also for land. Agricultural activity is determined by the return on capital and not by the imperative of production, not to mention other non-productive functions of agriculture. The authors rightly emphasise that the globalisation of agriculture, as a microeconomic process, does not recognise its non-economic functions. Rather, it forces the reduction of production costs, including labour costs, leading to increased unemployment. Instead, the structure of the distribution of added value is changing. Competitive players get richer, while weaker players decline or are marginalised. Thus, opening the market under the conditions of globalisation of agriculture supports the strongest actors, leading to income polarisation, both on a subjective and a national basis. This makes the contemporary problem of the agrarian question vital.

Yet another aspect of the agrarian question that occurs under conditions of agricultural globalisation is the problem of food self-sufficiency. Whether food comes from domestic or foreign producers becomes a matter of indifference since a country may not produce foodstuffs at all if it is more expensive to do so there than in other countries. On the other hand, by developing a certain branch specialisation, a country can achieve competitiveness and, by selling its results, finance the expenses necessary for food purchases. Thus, the globalisation of agriculture only partially solves the problems of the agrarian question for those actors (selected producers) for whom the opening of the economy across national borders brings net income effects. For the majority, however, it becomes a source of additional problems that are economical, social and ecological in nature. The theoretical and analytical study, presented in the form of a monograph, culminates in divagations on the future of the agrarian issue. This part of the dissertation is particularly interesting, first, because of the unambiguous position of the authors themselves

on the title issue, and second, because of the diversification of other views and positions.

The evolution of the origins and consequences of the agrarian question was aptly and convincingly presented. The authors showed that, in its history, that question has always had a multidimensional character, encompassing both problems of agricultural productivity and issues of a political and social nature. In this sense, it has a timeless character, only the arrangement of problems, their rank and scope change. To the question of what determines the impermanence, infinity and permanence of the agrarian question, the answer is the economic and social transformation of production relations, contained in the evolution of the agrarian structure on the one hand and production relations into industrial and capitalist facilities on the other. This occurs under conditions of relatively low flexibility of agricultural labour and the immobility of land. Consequently, an income disparity emerges as a result of the relatively low armament of capital, low labour productivity and the maladjustment of changes in agriculture to its environment, which creates a distance in relation to industry. This then drains the economic surplus produced in agriculture, but it is seized for the needs of industrial and then financial capital (Czyzewski & Henisz, 2002).

Systemic discrimination against agriculture is emerging, which has been weakening under conditions of income deprivation, marginalisation of peasant farms and the depopulation of rural areas and their economic degradation. The conflict between agriculture with its non-agricultural environment manifests itself in the relations of production and development of productive forces in terms of production methods and development dynamics, increasing the distance to the non-agricultural environment (here, industry). Such a situation is permanent insofar as it is impossible to transform a peasant farm into an agricultural factory. This is because the former faces natural barriers to food demand, agricultural income and structural change, which market mechanisms alone cannot solve. Under these conditions, the agrarian question becomes, as far as its form of manifestation is concerned, an issue of labour, due to the insufficient growth of its productivity, in relation to factors achieved outside the agricultural sector. Then it is an issue of capital due to the income disparity in the agriculture–environment system, including the migration of labour from agriculture.

In the evolution of the agrarian issue, the authors also include the food issue (McMichael, 2013), the essence of which is the relationship today between highly efficient food production systems, barring the costs of environmental devastation, and the sustainability necessary for the proper functioning of biological systems. This requires less food production, but it is more expensive. The peculiarities of agriculture also include the circum-

stance that individual farms represent a different range of contacts with the market, i.e. commodity production. Nevertheless, they cannot achieve reproduction extended beyond the call in the long term. Because of all this, as St. Kowalczyk writes: '...The agrarian issue is a unique phenomenon and unprecedented in other departments and sectors of the economy and society. It can be considered a historical category because its sources do not disappear, but at most evaluated with the passage of time (...) Only its substantive sense and the understanding of the forms of its manifestation and related consequences change' (Kowalczyk, 2021). To this, we can add that the processes of marginalisation of agriculture, income deprivation and depopulation of some rural areas are continuously taking place, constantly revealing the problem under discussion (Czyżewski A., 2019).

The presented approach is not the only one. There are different ways to define the phenomenon in question. It is worth pointing out to them, emphasising that they do not concern with the phenomenon's essence but more with the forms of its manifestations. Let's try to point out what is common and different in the definitions of the agrarian issue by different researchers. Probably among the common assessments is the complexity of the problem, resulting from the mismatches of the farm to changes in the non-agricultural environment (external maladjustments). These involve both production relations (relations between people in the production process) and the level of development of the productive forces. These mismatches are also internal, relating to agriculture or the farm itself, in this case, to the peculiarities of the farm's production factors (e.g., the land factor, its lumpiness, non-transferability of crops, seasonality in relation to non-agricultural actors). In our opinion, only a soft (directional) definition of the agrarian issue is possible, not a strict formalisation, because it leaves a mark in too many areas of the economy, society, demography, etc. simultaneously. (Czyżewski A., 2019). Striving for a precise definition of the agrarian question is actually less important. Instead, it is imperative to identify the problem areas and mechanisms of phenomena that make up the issue at hand, as well as the economic and social consequences of their impact.

Hence, the soft, sensual largo definition of this phenomenon, treated as a coherent set of problems arising in the process of reproduction in agriculture, and having their origin in the peculiarities of agricultural production, is most accurate (Czyżewski & Kułyk, 2015). It is worthwhile at this point to cite examples of phenomena and processes that are the subject of research in science. However, at any given time, they are also underdetermined, although their effects and impact are measurable and concrete. These include the construction of D. Mendeleev's table of elements, the theory of modern climate change, and the consequences of globalisation. A broad approach to the

agrarian issue is used by many other researchers, such as Cholaj (1966), Runowicz (1979), Wilkin (1986), Podstawka (2016), Czyzewski B. (2017), Zegar (2018) and Matuszczak (2020). Of course, the breadth of coverage varies, but it is important that this does not lead to the formulation of contradictory judgments.

On the other hand, partially different among those mentioned are attempts to explain the mechanism and effects of the agrarian issue. However, the fact is that some of them are uncomfortable with adopting soft definitions of the issue. For example, J. St. Zegar (2018) argues that the lack of precision of this definition is a fundamental cause of the confusion prevailing as to the interpretation of this phenomenon. He specifies that the core of the agrarian question concerns the farm and the peasant family, and by capturing the transformation and evolution of these objects, it is necessary to look for the kernel of the agrarian question itself and base its definition on this. T. J. Byres (1991), on the other hand, defines the agrarian question very specifically as the inability to release economic factors capable of generating agricultural development as well as its environment. On the other hand, P. McMichael (1997) considers the agrarian question as a political consequence of the process of integrating agriculture into the orbit of capitalist relations, which determines the national and global dimensions of its interpretation. In turn, according to Moyo, Ihy and Herosi (2013), the determinants of the contemporary agrarian question are the level of gender equality, environmental sustainability, or regional integration.

In contrast, Kay (2015) believes that the agrarian question is created by the land ownership system concentrated in the hands of a small group of holders and the non-equivalent conditions of labour and wages in large landed estates, while according to M. Bernstein (2017), the agrarian question boils down to the issue of lack of capital, and consequently labour, caused by the industrialisation of agriculture. In conclusion, the authors of this essay are close to the position of St. Kowalczyk (2021), quoted above, that the actual problem is not that we cannot define the agrarian question unambiguously, but that we are unable to eliminate it. Currently, then, the title question remains, what next for the agricultural issue?

We start from the conviction that the agrarian question has absorbed the attention of researchers and politicians for a very long time, and in the form, we know it has been present since at least the mid-19th century. So, let us note that the essence of the mechanism of its creation remains unchanged, while the manifestations of its occurrence change. These manifestations regulate a specific nexus of phenomena and processes that determine agricultural and food production under *hic et nunc* conditions. As a historical category, the question is also subject to regionalisation, and it renews itself as

part of the evolution of the relationship of agriculture to the rest of the economy. It looks different in highly developed countries from in developing countries.

Hence one can speak of two variants of its manifestation. In the former, there is the income inefficiency of farms. This is related to the market direction operating in agriculture, which determines the need to balance its development (Czyzewski B., 2017). In the latter, there is the production inefficiency of agriculture, resulting in hunger and food crises. As the authors of the monograph rightly point out, this means that, in fact, two axes determine the contemporary variants of the agrarian question. One concerns the efficiency of the capitalist mode of production in agriculture, and the other concerns the importance of agricultural labour. Both are changing the relationship of agriculture with its environment in different ways in different regions and countries of the world. Overcoming the different manifestations of the agrarian question requires different strategies and instruments of action. These can mitigate them, but they will not definitively solve the problem. The agrarian issue will manifest itself in different regions and countries of the world due to its designations such as the commodification of labour, the flow of transnational capital, attitudes to the process of land concentration, hidden unemployment in agriculture, the positions of food corporations in farm structures, specific ecological policies and discrimination against women in local labour relations.

The authors' idea to include the food aspect of the contemporary agrarian issue, which manifests itself through the issue of food security, food sovereignty, or the massive buyout of available agricultural land (land grabbing), is to be commended. They aptly note that food markets today are integrated into global economic processes, and they are subject to the same turbulence and fluctuations as non-agricultural markets. This has a huge impact on the global redistribution of the food supply, and it determines the level of food security of many countries, as well as their food sovereignty. In this way, they oppose the neoliberal approach to agricultural production. This is because food sovereignty puts a premium on sustainable agriculture, local production and environmental protection. It also has an active role for the state, which does not go along with the message of mainstream economics. However, in some parts of the world, there is the aforementioned phenomenon of 'land grabbing, which changes the nature of the agrarian question by replacing traditional peasant agriculture with a corporate, industrial model, ignoring the impact of such practices on local social relations. It is also worth noting that the monograph also raises the issue of the positive impact on the agrarian question of the Community (EU) agricultural policy. This minimises the maladjustment of agriculture in various countries to the processes of other sec-

tors of the economy, and this is, in fact, the essence of counteracting the agrarian question.

Much attention has also been paid to the issue of sustainable agricultural development as an antidote to the agrarian question. It is worth citing at this point the rationale for this choice. Firstly, the dominant contemporary model of industrial agriculture, despite its successes in increasing the volume of food production, has not solved the most important problem of the agrarian issue, i.e. the disparity of farmers' incomes. Secondly, the market-direction mechanism that accompanies it has caused intensive, capital- and input-intensive agriculture to encounter an environmental barrier that, due to the need to preserve the well-being of food consumers' livelihoods, cannot be exceeded (Czyżewski B., 2017). At the same time, there is not only a compulsion to consume food but a demand for high quality, which in turn requires a quality environment that guarantees the production of healthful food. The only way to solve this paradox is the concept of socially sustainable agriculture, which combines three essential elements: food security, which implies adjusting the volume and growth rate of food production to the demand, maintaining a satisfactory level of income for the agricultural population and accepting environmental requirements, which means stopping the degradation of the natural environment.

If one assumes, following the authors, that the agriculture of the future will operate in these realities, then a legitimate question arises: will this be tantamount to eliminating the agrarian issue? Well, no (Czyżewski A. & Matuszczak, 2011), and for two reasons. First, according to the writers, the cause of the agrarian problem is, in fact, the immobility of the land, which makes it impossible to achieve efficiency in the Pareto sense in the input-output flows of production factors. This is the case, for example, with labour and capital. Second, the consequence is the pumping out of the economic surplus produced in agriculture to non-agricultural uses of capital. Thus, the rhetorical questions arise: Can agriculture's sustainability lead to the elimination of the agrarian question? Will it change the nature of land as an immobile factor, and will it eliminate the specificity of agricultural production? Certainly not. We find these premises convincing enough to justify the thesis of the universality and timelessness of the agrarian question. Of course, agricultural sustainability should be considered as a way to mitigate the various manifestations of the agrarian issue through properly addressed state interventionism, resulting in significantly higher transfers to agriculture. It is not without reason to point out here, among other things, the forces driving the evolution of the agrarian question in the context of the use of environmental public goods. These provide, as it were, social legitimacy for state intervention, and at the same time, through appropriate fees, improve the incomes of farmers

and rural residents more broadly (Czyżewski B. & Matuszczak, 2016). It should also be fully accepted that the dynamism of the industrial model has created significant environmental risk (Kowalczyk, 2018). This puts the question of ensuring food supply, or food security, in a new light. In this sense, this coincidence broadens the field of reception of the agrarian question.

At the same time, the question arises whether this also applies to rural areas that are not necessarily agricultural. This could give rise to the suggestion of a complementary substitution of the agrarian issue towards the rural issue (Czyżewski A. & Kryszak, 2021). However, according to the authors of the monograph under discussion, this may be more of a 'centre and periphery' problem than an agrarian issue (p. 152). Without pretending to resolve this dilemma unequivocally, it is worth noting that the depreciation of the incomes of farmers and their families, the disparity of agricultural incomes that has lasted for years (as a result of the agrarian question) undoubtedly leaves its mark on the process of rural depopulation, infrastructural backwardness, or simply the poverty of numerous rural areas, where the beneficial effect of the centre is not felt.

On the sidelines of these considerations, it is worth repeating the question the authors pose: whether it is possible to imagine a world without agriculture, which would make consideration of the agrarian question pointless. The rationale for this question is a simple extrapolation of the share of agriculture in employment and creation of the gross domestic product, from which it follows that the last farmer in the world will sell his last crop in the next century (after P. C. Timmer, Kowalczyk & Sobiecki, 2021, p. 148). Of course, the declining 'relevance' of agriculture in historical development remains a puzzle, especially when one considers the growth of GDP produced in agriculture and per worker. The question can be taken as a joke since there is no doubt that agriculture is the greenest sector of the economy, a source of renewable energy, and the only activity that effectively reduces poverty and hunger under conditions of environmental sustainability and food security.

In the dissertation in question, there is also another interesting theme concerning not only policies destroying the environment, biodiversity, and overexploiting natural resources but also due to the evolution of nutrition, related to the progressive imitation of the so-called Western model of consumption. In this, the authors rightly see the unification of the consumption model and the marginalisation of regional and local food traditions and customs. This is not conducive to the diversification of food manufacturing. Many companies operate outside the global system but are close to sustainable agriculture principles. Likewise, the elongation of food supply chains should be viewed unfavourably, increasing the power of domination in rela-

tions among food chain participants, with strong competition destroying cooperation inside the chain.

Turning to a conclusion, sustainable agriculture has a chance to decelerate the unfavourable processes of globalisation, provided, however, that the necessary reforms involve international coordination or coordination of the global regulatory system and thus cancel out many manifestations of the agrarian issue. The requirements of sustainable development should be respected by the entire economy, including agriculture, along the entire value-creation chain. Thus, the agrarian issue is a problem for both agriculture and non-agricultural sectors, with the economy having trouble with agriculture, not the other way around as some would like. The economic, social and environmental sustainability of agriculture has the potential to break the overexploitation of natural resources and the environment and the promotion of climate change. For agriculture, this means applying new models of operation that are less aggressive towards natural factors such as soil, water and air and de-emphasizing capital-intensive development in favour of systems that enhance the integrity and diversity of the agricultural and environmental ecosystem. This helps ensure the economic viability of farmers and the health security and satisfaction of consumers. This does not mean, however, that sustainable agriculture will eliminate or, in some significant way, reduce the manifestation of the agrarian issue. Rather, it will be a context for its occurrence, not a remedy for its symptoms (Kowalczyk & Sobiecki, 2021). One must concede to those researchers who wrote many years ago that the agrarian issue could never be permanently resolved and only temporary solutions are possible (Runovich, 1984) since it is irresolvably tied to a given time and place. Hence, each of us perceives the problem differently, although it is always about the same thing perceived differently. It is unrealistic to expect to solve or even eliminate this phenomenon. This is because it stems from the peculiarities of agriculture, determined by the 'land factor', intrinsically, as said earlier, immobility and lumpiness, which fundamentally differs in input-output flows from the factors of labour and capital. The actuality of the agrarian question in modern economic theory will exist as long as agriculture is the primary source of raw materials used in food production and the compulsion to consume food is treated as a basic human need in the fight against hunger, satisfied by a person's right to food.

We regard the work of Professors St. Kowalczyk and R. Sobiecki as unique, stimulating the imagination, successfully combining the history of thought and evolution of the agrarian question with economic theory in the field of agricultural economics. The book is the result of the author's deep erudition and an expression of the understanding of the need for academic discourse in the face of the problem of the 'agrarian question' so vital to agricultural pol-

icy and economic practice. The book presents a history of prior thought and a vision of contemporary challenges facing agriculture and rural areas, with discreet hints to policymakers and practitioners on how to meet these challenges and mitigate the economic and social dimensions of the 'agrarian question'. There is no doubt that the authors already belong to the elite club of 'People of the Earth, among others, agreeing with Fottorino (1999) 'to produce diversely and differently, protecting crops and surrounding nature, promoting a lifestyle outside the city, offering hospitality, comforts, education, the impact of the rural environment and the necessary services for life to meet life's needs to the population that wishes to settle here.

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