
THEORY AND HISTORY OF CULTURE

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EPISTEMOLOGY OF CULTURE AS AN AREA OF RESEARCH

SUMMARY. Epistemology of culture is a prospective area of current philosophical research. This paper presents various concepts: culture-centrism (Y.V. Larin), socio-cultural analysis (E.N. Yarkova), modern times and inter-civilization age (A.V. Pavlov).

The author reviews ideological and methodological foundations of scientific study of culture, types of scientific rationality, horizons and prospects of human existence. It substantiates a generating role of the notion of culture in a current scientific worldview. The basic principles of ontological comprehension of culture as an exceptionally complex and contradictory reality are formulated in the article.

The importance of development of methods of socio-cultural analysis is stated. A role of culture as a conceptual basis for social being is defined. The main principles and procedures of the methodology of socio-cultural analysis are presented. A necessity to develop a disciplinary matrix of research in culture as a semantic and axiological ground of social being is substantiated.

The article raises the problem of the necessity of study of modern Russian culture and its future perspectives. It is noted that the analysis of modern environment is vital for bringing up essential issues of social life. A scheme of objectives of the current research is described.

KEY WORDS. Scientific and educational strategy, culture, society, socio-cultural analysis, conceptual basis, modern times, inter-civilization age.

Epistemology of culture is an area of cognitive activity born by philosophical reflection of worldview-methodological basis of the scientific study of culture. This article presents this trend and is devoted to the cognitive mapping of culture-centrism (Y.V. Larin) and the concepts of socio-cultural analysis (E.N. Yarkova), modernity and inter-civilizational age (A.V. Pavlov).

Explication of culture-centrism. With its growth culture is moving to the forestage of human history and is becoming the universal basis of man's existence in the world. Phenomena and processes common to the modern epoch make the task of its understand-

ing not only actual but strongly necessary, especially against the background of such events as social revolutions and disturbances, world and local wars, threat of nucleus apocalypses and global ecological disaster, dominancy and failure of totalitarian regimes, terrorism, structural and financial crises, devaluation of traditional forms of family and marriage, extinction of millions of people of hunger and diseases, paroxysms of barbarism and the utmost forms of vandalism and many other things.

What do these phenomena and processes present — inherent attributes of culture or distortions of the human nature which have practically nothing to do with culture? What is it itself in this case: Pandora's box or powerful Panacea? Is culture rooted in man's nature in the form of a possibility or at least a hint, or is it only an impermanent, ephemeral phenomenon of an optional character, some kind of "addition"? What are its own forms of existence and mechanisms of reproduction? What are its sources, possibilities, trends, threats and prospects? What are at last the initial principles of its existential comprehension? This is an incomplete list of problems which, in spite of extensive research literature, has not got a definitive and precise determination. It is quite significant that the notion of culture has more than a thousand definitions.

Any research strategy deprived of reflection of its worldview-methodological foundations is extremely vulnerable and, as a rule, is exposed to different speculative conjectures and divinations, while adequate forms of understanding of the studied phenomena and processes are to make their own way through the thickness of these inverted forms.

"Culture, according to K. Marx's absolutely non-idyllic remark, is developing spontaneously [...] if it leaves a desert after itself" [1;45]. Thus, in order to study culture, an absolutely verified approach is needed; its conceptual foundations should be extremely clear and thoroughly elaborated. The point at issue is not that culture is an answer to this or that challenge of modernity, but that, first of all, culture itself becomes this challenge, an answer to which modern humankind has a chance to give only in the accomplished future or, in other words, in the period of post-modernity.

In scientific-cognitive or epistemological projection of human existence, three types of scientific rationality are clearly defined: the rationality tracing its trajectory "from elimination of explanation of everything that does not relate to the object (classics); to understanding of relatedness of the object's explained characteristics to peculiarities of means and operations of the activity (non-classics); to understanding of axiological-objective orientations of the scientific activity subject in their relatedness to social targets and values (post-non-classics)" [2;15]. Each of them is characterized by a specific reflection, by their own ideals and norms of perception, its configuration and constituents. In the light of this, if "the culture phenomenon" is really "moving to the center, to the focus of human existence" [3;261], it is quite logical to conclude that it is not the typical rationality of the nature-centrism of the 18th — first half of the 19th centuries or the socio-centrism's non-classic rationality that has not replaced it and evidently got exhausted of its heuristic potential by the end of the previous century, but post-non-classic rationality can be comprehended as a worldview-methodological foundation of a modern, culture-centrist picture of the world as a complex, open and self-developing system.

As a maturing scientific strategy, culture-centrism is not only destined to replace various other "centrisms", each of which in its claim for the status of generality is now

capable of reproduction and imprinting, in its own way, of a part and inner disruptiveness of the man himself and his objectivations causing a large number of problems, posing a threat not only to man's development, but to his existence in the world, but also to highlight principally new, not yet clear or transparent, but nevertheless more spacious horizons of man's self-realization as something organically integral in its sense [4]. Worldview-methodological conceptualization of the term "culture" as an initial, central and explanatory notion is just targeted for studying culture in its own clearness as an exceptionally complicated, multi-level, various, mixed, multi-optional, inner-contradictive, painful, creative process developing "regimes of aggravation" as it is called in synergetics; to explain its phenomena and common factors proceeding from culture itself, its essence, those inner contradictions and tendencies common to it; to have courage to put not only any definition of culture, but culture itself under radical methodological procedure of deconstruction as some non-definitive reality given once and for ever in the form as it is; and at last, proceeding from that, not only to reveal real sources and authentic basis of the man's being, but to forecast possible scenarios and prospects of his development.

Methodology of cultural analysis. Methodology of socio-cultural analysis is an important part of epistemology (theory and methodology of cognition) of culture.

A socio-cultural approach as a scientific theory and practice was actualized in Russian science at the end of the previous century, which was connected with a serious theoretical and methodological shift in socio-humanitarian sciences, a change of cognitive trends: from socio-centrism (within which explanatory constructions were based on socio-economic relations) to culture-centrism (within which such constructions were based on culture).

In the widest sense, the essence of socio-cultural approach in terms of society analysis is in regarding society as a unity and interdependence of culture and sociality, in seeing culture as a mental basis of social being. Aleksander Akhiezer [5] is the founder of a large-scale research program of socio-cultural analysis, the nucleus of which is the theory of socio-cultural dynamics of Russian society. Akhiezer's concept has greatly influenced Russian scientists, including the author of these lines.

Together with this, within the last decade we can observe the notion "socio-cultural approach" turning it into a frivolous phraseological unit, a literature cliché.

Such kind of devaluation cannot be explained only by the decrease of the level of scientific research. In many ways it can be explained by absence of a universal (not only Russian) and strict (including a clearly outlined system of categories, principles, research procedures) methodology of socio-cultural analysis. Methodology of socio-cultural analysis development is relevant not only in the theoretical but in the applied aspect as well. Nowadays existence of different social problems in culture is becoming more and more evident.

Let us outline the main positions of the suggested methodology of socio-cultural analysis.

The initial position is connected with the realization that social phenomena and processes are predetermined by culture. In this regard culture emerges as a motivating basis of human activity in the diversity of its forms — political, economic, artistic, and religious. Here it is necessary to specify the notion of culture. It should be said

about at least two aspects of culture consideration: phenomenal and noumenal. If in the phenomenal view culture is a world of artificial, man-made objects, then in the noumenal view it, as it would seem, is some system of senses making up the essential foundation of this world. Meaning, being part of man's experience in the form of these or those phenomena, objects, processes and the world as the whole, is the thing that distinguishes culture from nature, constitutes culture, rests at its sources and runs its development.

The most important statement of methodology of socio-cultural analysis is the definition of senses as primary elements of culture, its main structural units. Positioning of culture as a system of senses allows us to outline the sphere of senses as some specific ideal reality. Getting the status of reality, the sphere of senses becomes open for theoretical analysis, i.e. for revelation of the inner structure, explication of endogenous stimuli of development, construction of typologies. In other words, the definition of the sphere of meanings and senses as some sacred type of being gives an opportunity to simultaneously specify research objectives of the essence of human activity and to raise the level of their theoretical abstractedness. It is necessary to mention a more important moment: autonomy of the sphere of meaning as a methodological procedure at least partially removes the uncertainty of the notion "mentality", the latter being considered as some historically formed meaningful system.

Essentially methodology of socio-cultural analysis gives the researcher a definite technology of explication of meanings which make up the semantic basis of social being and it also unmasks the belief according to which culture is "a thing in itself", inconceivable for rational perception. This methodology is formed as a result of synthesis of systematic, hermeneutic, axiological and phenomenological approaches. Procedures of meaningful reduction and ideal typification are regarded as key procedures. During the process of meaningful reduction, the researcher expresses their inner significant meaningful characteristics, cutting off outer formal aspects of social phenomena. This procedure is aimed at revealing key semantemes and creating a semantic-axiological catalogue of different forms of culture: political, economic, legal, scientific, artistic and moral [6].

The procedure of ideal typification is aimed at mental construction of models performing as tools of culture cognition. For construction of culture, typification as a meaningful system is regarded as a special meaningful criterion. Culture is formed during the process of interaction of man and society with nature and with the outside world. Specific features of this or that culture are defined on the basis of what attitude a society has to nature and the outer world. Attitude to the world is an original projection of those criteria that are applied in the inter-individual communication. It is possible to outline three main types of the man's and society's attitude to the outer world: "world as a condition", "world as a means" and "world as a purpose"; hence, three types of meaningful systems are distinguished: traditional, utilitarian and creative. Revelation of specific peculiarities of culture of this or that epoch or of this or that social layer is possible by reference to the given ideal types.

Thus, the main task of theoretical investigations within the frames of methodology of socio-cultural analysis is to form up a disciplinary matrix of studying culture as a semantic-axiological ground of social being.

Modernity and inter-civilization age in Russia. One of the research results in the sphere of epistemology of culture is the analysis of national culture in the aspect of modernity. Science should respond to modern problems using the fundamental concepts as methodological marks. Relying only on classicism leads to solving the already solved problems of the past, adjusting modernity to their samples. A common trap military leaders fall into is that they prepare for the war on the basis of their past experience. These words fit the humanitarian science as well, especially philosophy, when scientist using the methodology of the past, actually solve the already solved problems. Problematics can be only topical; whereas topicality itself can be of a theoretical and practical kind. If theoretical topicality can be stipulated by the historical past similar to some discrepancies in Kant's philosophy, suddenly found out by young Gilles Deleuze 200 years after Kant's death, practice needs some other methodological foundations.

Practical topicality is stipulated by modernity. Scientific problematics cannot be narrowed to exceptionally utilitarian tasks. In our opinion, this demand dictated today is nothing more than a destructive political trend. But the origin of science is connected with practical problematics, although practice should be understood in the widest sense.

All said above means that problematics should appear at the crossroads of two philosophies: classical, reflecting the succession of cultures, and the philosophy of modernity which is not yet fully developed in Russian science and education.

Approaches to modernity can be found in works by B. Kapustin [7], V. Lektorsky [8], G. Tulchinsky [9] and in works of few other scientists. Underdevelopment of modern philosophy does not give an opportunity to develop new methodological approaches responding the problematics of today.

Actual philosophy having a human meaning can only be meaningful, and such philosophy is regional: e.g.: French existentialism, American pragmatism, English and German logical positivism, etc.

Today in Russia modernity is linked with Russian turn-of-the-century period or inter-civilization age [10].

Thus, the problematic area of research is the inter-civilization period — the epoch of continuous changes, unstable social life; it is a process of forming a new order of social life which is the supreme existential problem of every man. Is it possible, nevertheless, to find something stable and definite to lean back on in this uncertainty? What is stability in the background of constant changes, how does it become the matrix of the future social condition? How does it form new types of personality and stereotypes of thinking, new relations and institutions, a new rationality and new civilization?

The analysis of this problem supposes a formulation of a number of tasks:

1. Having laid the foundation of its existential experience, it is required to describe modernity to make it clear what is being discussed.

2. It is necessary to define its ontology capable of becoming the base of the objectiveness of research. In general, objectiveness is possible only in the sectional view of ontology as a real existence; without it, it is mere fiction. Ontology of modernity is anthropological and socio-cultural, philosophy here can suggest methodological ideas of peculiar "sociology and anthropology of modernity".

3. It is necessary to analyze modernity by emphasizing its inter-civilization constituents.

4. It is necessary to design a sociological paradigm of modernity and to find the subjectivity whose dynamics fill in the gap between two epochs with some meaningful content.

5. It is necessary to work out a methodology which can become helpful in analyzing the situation at the turn of the century and modernity on the whole.

6. After this it becomes possible to define what the inter-civilization epoch is and what its subjective-existential and evolutionary aspects are.

This is the research strategy and its tactic objectives will be set in parallel with the process of research.

The role of the modernity concept in relation to social philosophy widely spread in Russia can be compared to the role of the physics of the microworld and relativistic mechanics against the background of Newton's classical mechanics. Modernity, of course, is not physical, but like quantum mechanics, it brings essential corrections into macro-concepts of social development, as it puts a peculiar "observer" — individual human subjectivity — to the foreground. More than that, the subject as a practicing observer creates not only pictures of the world but turns them into communications and institutions stabilizing social life and giving it a form of civilization.

For Russia, where both in theory and in practice within a number of centuries the social and material sides of social life not only dominated the individual-human side, but actually suppressed it, subjectivism and individualism are thought to help this neglected "dislocation". They are as abstract as any other theory. However, the proved abstraction complements but not denies other proved abstractions. Similar to this, a well-reasoned individualistic concept compliments classical social philosophy connecting to it a personal factor that have not been considered by it before. It makes possible to see social life as it really is in the eyes of the man who via his/her participation is instrumental in its development.

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