

Neo-Kantianism and Specificity of "Sciences of the Spirit"*

Sergei Nizhnikov

Department of History of Philosophy
Peoples' Friendship University of Russia
Faculty of Social and Humanitarian Sciences
Moscow, Russia
E-mail: nizhnikovs@mail.ru

Tuyet Le Thi

Department of Fundamental Studies
HCM City Open University
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
E-mail: tuyet.lth@ou.edu.vn

Abstract—The article analyzes the fundamental difference between the “sciences of nature” and the “sciences of the spirit” revealed in Neo-Kantianism both in the subject and in the method. Whereas the “sciences of nature” tend to cognize the truth, the “sciences of the spirit” are meant to comprehend and create values; while the former use mathematics as the universal method of cognition, the latter apply hermeneutics as the art of comprehending other spiritual worlds. The complexity of the sciences of the spirit, their experimental non-verifiability, evaluativity, and moral concern are highlighted. The concept of freedom which appears in social and humanitarian knowledge and the presence of which makes both the behavior of a creative personality and the development of society unpredictable is particularly distinguished.

Keywords—Neo-Kantianism; hermeneutics; sciences of nature; sciences of the spirit; values; freedom

I. INTRODUCTION

The three currents within the Neo-Kantian thought, the three ways of interpreting Kantian philosophy can be distinguished: 1) physiological; 2) transcendental logical (the Marburg School); 3) transcendental psychological (the Baden school). A special role in the interpretation of Kantian philosophy belongs to the founder of Marburg Neo-Kantianism Hermann Cohen [1]. As to the Baden school, its representatives proceed from the psychological attitude rather than from the logical one when interpreting Kant. It is oriented not at the logical structures of reason, but at the experience, the sphere of phenomena (in the Kantian sense). Cognition develops as an experience-based psychological movement of consciousness, i.e. as an inductive activity of thought. It is always a generalization of experience-based data.

The question is how the existence of universal and necessary truths is possible, whereas experience is always finite and conditional, and universal and necessary truths (of ethics and mathematics) are infinite, unconditional, and inaccessible to experience. According to the Baden school representatives, it is possible if we regard not an objective

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truth, but values – certain target ideas that direct cognition and give meaning to it – as an object of universal knowledge. Values are outside this world, but all the things of this world have their meaning in the light of values. Values are ideals rather than ideas; they reflect nothing, hence, the concept of truth cannot be applied to them. They just mean, give meaning and significance to everything else than values themselves. Value and truth are in different planes. Truth is reflected in finite concepts and is therefore always finite. Only goals, motives, and ideals of cognition, which are personified in values, are infinite. In other words, values are some kind of an ideal model of existence which is outside experience and shapes the basis, meaning, and purpose of our entire experience. Hence the objective and purpose of philosophy: it is the doctrine of values, i.e. of imaginary entities regulating and directing the real cognitive and life process.

A special merit of the Baden school is the justification of the methodology of scientific research. No universal method can or should exist in science. The sciences themselves resist methodological unification. All sciences are divided into two categories according to the Baden school representatives: the sciences of nature (natural science) and the science of culture (humanitarian knowledge).

II. SCIENCES OF “NATURE” AND “SPIRIT”

The Baden school Neo-Kantianism determines that all the sciences are divided into two essential types: natural sciences — sciences of nature, and humanities — “sciences of the spirit”, i.e. of man and human society (Wilhelm Windenband, 1848-1915, Heinrich Rickert, 1863-1936). For instance, the first one notices, “...Experience-based sciences seek in the cognition of the real world either the general, in the form of the law of nature, or the individual, in its historically conditioned form... Sciences examine, on the one hand, the unchanging form of real events, on the other hand, their unique, individual content... Some of them are sciences of laws; others are sciences of events...” [2].

In the first case, Windelband speaks of the nomothetic method (from the Ancient Greek νόμος — law + stem θε- — to presume, to establish), in the second one, he means the ideographic one (ἴδιος — specific, γράφω — to trace, to

draw, to write), “having historical and social reality as its object” [3]. Rickert mentions them as the generalizing and individualizing methods accordingly [4].

This division is fundamental, for the above sciences have qualitatively different subjects; therefore, methods of their cognition must also differ. Meanwhile, this division does not mean opposition, as all sciences must closely interact with each other. Nevertheless, while the “sciences of nature” strive to cognize the truth, the “sciences of the spirit” aim to realize and create values. E. Cassirer argues that the “sciences of culture teach us to clarify symbols to unravel the content hidden in them, and make the life from which they originally arose visible again” [5].

It has been realized that comprehending man and society by methods of natural science is impossible. Natural science can study only the objective world, whereas man and society are subjective. Objectification of a subject is its destruction. Anatomy can only study a dead body, not a living person. Natural science is based on cognition of cause and effect laws that determine all nature, yet man craves for willfulness, according to Dostoevsky. As it has been already said, in the natural science knowledge, the object is discovered in advance, it is subject to empirical observation, whereas in the humanitarian one, it is a problem, as it is constituted in the process of human self-cognition and cognition of society.

“Why do philosophers talk so much about the notion of their science, instead of developing other problems they are entitled to study, like other scientists? Even in determining the subject of their science, they still have not reached an agreement! <...> In other sciences, the subject to be researched almost never provokes any doubt ... Philosophy, however, while wishing to regard the whole world as the subject of its study, is in a completely different position. <...> ...old issues which used to belong to its sphere are gradually taken away from philosophy, while on the other hand, the developing concept of the world constantly generates new problems it has to consider. This is why the question of the subject of philosophy emerges every time” [6].

One can probably reap a harvest of criticism from the representatives of natural scientific knowledge by daring to say that the subject of the “sciences of the spirit”, especially that of philosophy, is extremely complex, i.e. its complexity differs from that of the subject of natural sciences qualitatively. This is due primarily to the phenomenon of freedom and the fact that man cannot withdraw from either society or his own self. In the sciences of the spirit, cognition on the subject-and-object basis is impossible, unlike in natural sciences, because man himself is the subject and object. He has a subject and an object aspect. His body can be regarded as an object aspect. His spirit, his consciousness can be regarded as the subject one.

The social sciences and the humanities virtually cannot be studied impartially, completely objectively, because in this case, evaluative judgments can always be present. Even cold and rational reason, according to H. Rickert, “is value recognition at every step it takes in cognition by its most intimate essence”. Moreover, “our knowledge ultimately

rests upon our intellectual conscience”. Therefore, the “theory of knowledge goes beyond itself and leads us to where the starting point of any philosophy is, that is, exactly to the concept of an absolute value...” [7]. In his opinion, philosophy generally transforms into the science of values, which he, nevertheless, deprives of their ontological status, following the Kantian tradition of destruction of any metaphysics. Leo Strauss also believes, with respect to socio-political knowledge, that “It is impossible to study social phenomena, i.e., all important social phenomena, without making value judgments.... it is impossible to understand thought or action or work without evaluating it” [8].

For natural scientific knowledge, morality is something external, superimposed, it often even contradicts scientific aspirations by prohibiting experiments on humans and animals, cloning, etc. In the humanities and social sciences, on the contrary, morality is an essential characteristic of cognition. Without assessing man from the moral point of view, we cannot claim that we have cognized him. While the scientist’s objective in natural scientific cognition is to reach maximum abstraction from the object of study, thus achieving an impartial point of view which excludes emotion, the sphere of the humanities, on the contrary, requires internal comprehension of an object of study, growing into its role, understanding it, for it is a living and conscious being – society can be also referred to in such a manner. Therefore, humanitarian knowledge developed its own methodology of cognition which turned into an entire philosophical trend in the 20th century. This is hermeneutics, which was initially defined as a method of interpreting texts, and which is currently regarded as an art of comprehending another subject, another self, other spiritual worlds represented by man or society.

Let us consider the following: if an astrophysicist studies the Sun, does he need to grow into its role or understand it? He does not have to: according to modern science, it is not a living being. But if we study, for instance, the ancient Greek society, can we cognize it by learning only the external parameters of its existence: chronology, population, geography, etc.? Of course we cannot do that: to cope with this task, one has to comprehend the world view of an ancient Greek, understand his problems and joys, transform into a Greek, feel the sea coast and the constant threat from the East, the need to struggle for democracy in the polis, etc. In other words, one needs to hermeneutically fathom the object of studies when cognition and explanation transform to understanding. According to Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), “we explain nature, [whereas] we understand psychic life” [9], he was the first to introduce the concept of the “sciences of the spirit” (Introduction to the Human Sciences, 1880). However, Dilthey tried to methodologically combine English positivism and German idealism, which is practically impossible.

We can cognize another man only by taking his place; from this point of view, methodology of the sciences of the spirit is akin to the art of dramatic identification. Therefore, according to H.-G. Gadamer, “Fruitfulness of cognition inherent in the sciences of the spirit seems more akin to an

artist's intuition than to the methodological spirit of research" [10].

If we consider a subject-and-subject relationship instead of a subject-and-object one, cognition here is not achieved through a monologue here (the subject is active, and the object is passive), but through a dialogue, when both parties behave in an active manner.

"Exact sciences are a monological form of knowledge... Only a mute thing is opposed to it... But the subject as such cannot be perceived and studied as a thing... therefore; it can be cognized only dialogically" [11].

Therefore, if we aspire to cognize, which means to understand the other in this case, communication is the best way to do that. If we collect medical certificates regarding a certain person, how can they help us in the aspect of cognition? We will consider merely the physiological processes in the human body. But we are not interested in them at all; the spiritual qualities of a person, such as the ability to love and to be compassionate, to lend a helping hand at difficult times are much more important. We choose friends without consulting their health record. Indeed, we only cognize what we love. Hatred suppresses knowledge. It has been well said that to understand is to forgive; hence the commandment, "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged". Love, therefore, is the highest kind of spiritual, hermeneutic knowledge. Besides, only love gives meaning to any knowledge, orientates it towards good.

III. PHENOMENON OF FREEDOM

Another phenomenon distinguishes social and humanitarian sciences from the natural ones, makes their subject almost incognizable. This is freedom which enters the world due to a personality capable of breaking the chains of natural necessity. Only man can behave "not the way he is supposed to"; self-will and, consequently, good and evil, are only available to him, with all the resulting consequences. There is no freedom in the physical and biological world; it can only exist in the social one.

Freedom is the cardinal notion of philosophy, a condition of the possibility of the presence of morality, personal and social existence. The entire history of philosophy is the unfolding of this concept. The world, according to the natural scientific point of view, is completely determined. The ancient Greek philosopher Democritus was the first to formulate this idea, regarding occasion as people's invention. In fact, without a personality, the world is an absolute necessity; atoms move in space only in the way they should: due to the energy of collisions, falling, gravitation, attraction and repulsion, etc. They form vortices from which the entire Universe and its inexorable laws are born. These laws are incompatible with freedom, which means that human personality cannot be deduced from them. Religion and theology solve this problem by affirming the divine Personality, and Immanuel Kant regards freedom as an unconditional principle; he does not deduce it, yet considers it to be inherent in man and postulates it this way. In any case, freedom is a fact of both public and personal life. Freedom, its development, as well as the existence of

humanism, is a criterion of social progress. The real meaning of progress is not in the development of technology, but in the triumph of freedom of personality in society. This triumph should be actual, social, and not merely legal.

At the same time, true freedom is impossible without responsibility and self-restraint. Spinoza, Leibniz, Schelling, and other New European thinkers defined freedom as a "conscious necessity". J.-P. Sartre, on the contrary, regarded it as an "overcome necessity". He writes about his comrades in France and himself, "Never were we freer than under the German occupation", stressing that in extreme conditions, true freedom is manifested most deeply as man's responsibility for his own choice. According to Sartre, freedom comes from our future to the present and the past, when man makes his choice, creates his "project". It turns out that the future determines the present. Man is always free, therefore responsible.

Freedom is an extremely profound and fundamental concept of social philosophy, which teaches us to distinguish between the "freedom from" and the "freedom for". The first one is permissiveness, arbitrariness, and anarchy. Society and man can be free only upon condition of the state of law and a democratic regime, and a personality is free only upon condition of observance of moral standards and laws.

Freedom invades human existence due to the "truth of the heart" (spiritual value), which does not always coincide with objective truth. Dostoevsky writes that, if science could ever prove that there was no resurrection of Christ, he would still believe in it, because faith is based on the needs of the human heart, on believing in the triumph of good rather than on a scientific fact. He sees the resurrection of Christ as such a symbol, a very real event, without belief in which, there is no reason for good in the world. European culture and civilization emerged only because they had this faith. If we withdraw it, Europe will immediately collapse. This faith as the truth of the heart was dearer to Dostoevsky than any objective truths, because they are not the force that saves man from violence and brutal life. This can only be done through compassion and love, which Dostoevsky calls the most important law of human life. According to J. Maritain, "Europe without faith is nothing... Europe is faith." [12] Scientific truth does not warm man's soul, but the truth of the heart gives meaning to his life. According to N. Berdyaev, the truth of the heart is the Last Judgment coming at the end of history. He believes that history only becomes meaningful through its completion and judgment from the point of view of good and evil. Without eschatology, history turns into a bad infinity which destroys any meaning.

A world in which freedom is absent is easily cognized, at least it is essentially cognizable, and the task is only to develop sciences and increase scientific knowledge. Kant already said in his times, "Give me matter, and I will build a world out of it", i.e. from the inherent forces of attraction and repulsion, one can deduce the development of the entire Universe, calculate it from the beginning to the end, the moments of its birth and death. We must admit that this is where scientists have already succeeded. But can they say with the same degree of certainty what will happen to society

tomorrow? They cannot, because all the eternal laws of the cosmos can be breached by the only act of a free personality. This act can be creative and constructive or destructive. The former promotes the development of personality, society, and life; the latter is destructive and suicidal, for in this case, the basis of life that gave rise to man is destroyed. Evil has no independent basis of its own or future; it can only thrive upon things created by good.

From the point of view of cognition of the development of man and his spiritual sphere, the factor of freedom complicates this issue enormously. Nothing can be calculated in advance, therefore, no forecasts are generally possible. Philosophers can only predict the development of society, but cannot guarantee that their forecasts are precise. For instance, the development of economy seems to be the easiest thing to calculate, yet politics is known to determine economic development, either slowing it down or speeding it up. Any intervention of politics in the economy can disprove all the forecasts.

The fundamental difference in the subjects of humanitarian and natural scientific knowledge leads to a difference in methods of cognition. The sciences of nature are entirely experimental. Can humanitarian knowledge develop in this way? Is it possible to set up experiments on society and man? This is absolutely unacceptable for two reasons: a humanistic one and a scientific one. Man cannot be subjected to forceful experimentation; this contradicts the principles of humanism and violates his freedom. From the scientific point of view, experimenting with a personality and society puts them in certain limited circumstances, which in itself inevitably leads to unnatural and thus distorted development or deformation. In the philosophical sciences, complete "purity" of an experiment cannot be reached. As a result, society decays or a conflict starts; violence becomes inevitable.

Whereas natural scientific cognition revealing the laws of nature tends to be based on the most general principles, humanitarian cognition intends to study every spiritual phenomenon as unique and possessing self-existence. Not only the general, but also the individual, the specific are points of interest here.

IV. CONCLUSION

On the basis of the above, one cannot conclude that natural science cognition methods, objectivity, and universality are alien to social and humanitarian cognition. They actually coexist in it, undergoing modifications under the influence of the free will of people and what they see as the value of their activities, the meaning of life, etc.

The peculiarity and complexity of the sciences of the spirit are also in the fact that the subject of cognition is included in the very object of cognition and is its integral part, therefore, cognition becomes self-cognition. We cognize man while he cognizes us. By cognizing society, for example, by discovering something new in it, we change our behavior, our reference points and goals, i.e. start behaving differently. As a result, we change, and together with our change, society itself modifies, because we are units of social

life. The more objectively we perceive society, the more exactly we act in it, following progressive development goals. Hence, social progress depends on people's knowledge of society, and, on the contrary, the more ignorant people are in society, the less intensively it develops, or it can even come to stagnation and decline, falling into violence. Thus, the cognizing subject and the object of cognition are most closely interrelated in the sciences of the spirit; they are interdependent and have a profound influence on each other.

This is not the case in natural science, where the Sun, for example, is neither colder nor hotter due to the fact that someone cognizes it. At the same time, the rate of reaction within it does not depend on our observations. By cognizing the Sun, we cognize the object and do not practice self-cognition in its immediate form. Of course, we depend on the Sun, but to a much lesser extent than on our own personality. Along with our cognition of the sciences of the spirit, we also change, develop, and improve ourselves. A developing creative personality always turns out to be larger, more profound and complex than we imagine it to be. In cognition, we are inevitably mistaken due to a lack of knowledge that is ineradicable. In the sciences of the spirit, the cognizant is always in the state of Achilles, who cannot catch up with the tortoise, no matter how slowly it moves. It is good if social scientists and philosophers understand the state of permanent incompleteness of our knowledge of society: it generates meekness, saves them from creating new utopias, and provides society and people with an alternative of development. But when the opposite happens, and human mind begins to presume that it has learned the unshakable laws of social development, trying to correct society from the height of the pride of the mind, it ultimately ends in violence and the curtailment of social development.

However, a reasonable person should not shy away from an effective attempt to improve society. At the same time, we should respect the others' freedom, be aware of the limitations of our knowledge [13], and always try to extend it, understanding that man is always a goal and can never be treated as a means. In social life, it is necessary to strive for non-violent means of changing the undesirable social situation, for reforms rather than revolution.

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