PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS OF 20TH CENTURY: OBJECTIVITY AND SUBJECTIVITY OF HISTORICAL COGNITION

Abstract. This paper covers the problems caused by the postmodern situation in historical knowledge, in which the very concept of historical truth has become blurred. The article presents the view that postmodernism, denying the existence of historical laws prejudices the existence of historical science. The story itself is breaking apart into the sum of facts. The purpose of the article is to find possible approaches to overcome the crisis in historical science, caused by the dissemination of postmodern approaches. It seems that the leading approach to the study of this problem is the principles of philosophical hermeneutics that uncover the process of cognition through the understanding of historical laws coming from Ricouer’s and Dilthey’s ideas. The materials of the article can be useful for application in specific historical studies and the process of teaching students.

Keywords: philosophy, philosophical hermeneutics, historical cognition, the objectivity of historical research, the subjectivity of historical research, historical truth.

1. INTRODUCTION

What is historical truth and objectivity in history? This problem was usually dealt with by philosophy. In the second half of the 20th century, in the field of historical knowledge in the West, there appeared the desire to digress from philosophy as the foundation of historical theories. The intention to depart from the search for theoretical foundations in favor of empirical research became dominant. Due to the representation by certain French historians in the scientific community in the second half of the twentieth century, a negative attitude was assigned to the philosophy of history as a backbone of the organization of historical reconstructions. Lucien Febvre considered “philosophizing” to be a grave “crime” for a professional historian (Febvre, 1953). The book by the French philosopher P. Ricoeur “Time and Story” became a detailed answer to such estimate of the role of philosophy in historical knowledge from the standpoint of phenomenological hermeneutics and analytical philosophy (Ricoeur, 1991). He showed the connection between time, social practice and the way history is written (Ricoeur, 1981). Ricoeur repeatedly referred to the work by German historian Kosellek who managed to apply the principles of philosophical hermeneutics to the study of social history, having proved the connection between social practice and ways of reconstructing the past (Koselleck, 1989). Their ideas that all historical study takes theoretical views as a basis, which allow one way or another to explain the present, has developed in historical knowledge called “pragmatic turn” (Weinfurter, 2006).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Ricoeur started with the thesis that any retrospective question is asked by a man who lives and acts at a certain time. Such researcher cannot turn his back upon society and be at impartial cognizing, one way or another he will think in terms of the categories inherent in his time and express the interests of a particular social group. Knowledge, first of all, is formed as a social experience and disseminated through language. Language, in its turn, exists as a tool for communication between people and each subject should communicate with the others using the language they understand, otherwise they will not be able to carry out joint actions. Hence, each time is featured by its own forms of knowledge, which reproduce the field of experience and the horizon of expectations of a particular group of people or the whole of society, are inherent. The horizon of expectations of people in different situations depends on the historical form of social experience, which is determined by time and circumstances, therefore one cannot treat the change of society only by exposing social determinisms. It is necessary to consider the subjective reality as a result of activity of the individual in the society and his ideas, that are based on this, about the days to come. This approach allows us to comprehend the significance of the subject or actor within the historical process.

According to the ideas of Paul Ricoeur, time and narrative are interconnected. It is necessary to realize the idea of the past with regard to the three components: story-time-action. Man can understand time through narration (Ricoeur, 1991). Dissemination of social experience is realized through language, it mirrors the system of values and the way of thinking acquired in the course of the historical development of this or that human society. Language is transformed together with the very society. Thus, the language is always constrained with the process of joint practice.

People approbate the cognitive forms they have formed on effectiveness, putting various explanatory models in practice. Therefore, there is a stable need to rethink social experience. Thus, historical cognition is not just a search for social determinisms, but also a process associated with the need for a constant projecting of social development. Ricoeur connected historical knowledge with a narrative about him. The historiography of historical thought shows a constant change of paradigms, which adapt each time to the goals and objectives of each particular society at the appropriate stage of its development. Ricoeur argued that the understanding of the text shows mainly the connection of the text with the reader, which occurs through the correlation between explanation and understanding for a particular situation. “The fundamental projects that we create rely on the stories we tell” (Ricoeur, 1981).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The starting point for the article was the works by P. Ricoeur, R. Koselleck, R. Aron, L. Febvre. The article is based on the methodology of the philosophical hermeneutics of the twentieth century, which does not contradict the theory of Marxism in asserting that any scientific constructions in the social and human sciences
depend on ideological models that dominated within certain historical periods. The authors believe that the application of the principles of historicism to the development of historical science in indissoluble links with the development of public consciousness remains the only antidote to the ideology of postmodernism, which in principle denies the possibility of a scientific explanation of the historical process.

The critical approach, based on the initial assumptions of philosophical hermeneutics, allows to take a different approach to the concept of the linearity of historical development. The notion of one-line progress, which was rooted in the Christian concept of time, was found to be inconsistent with modern ideas about the development of society. The application of the retrospective method when considering this topic shows the correctness of those scholars who argue that it is the striving for diversity that is the basis of evolution.

In this case, it becomes clear that the truth is always concrete. Of course, there are recurrences in public relations and this makes it possible to construct the models of historical process. But in this case, it is necessary to recognize the role of the subjective factor, since the concordance of the goal with selected values plays a significant role in human activity. Morality becomes one of the main conditions for development, since it is the change of moral guidelines that determines the transition from one model of society to another. It is possible to identify the dominant tendency to change models of ethics and, on this basis, to create a universal history, but one must not forget the diversity of the historical process.

History, as a science, undergoes transformation in its epistemological foundations. Today it is often pointed out that in the second half of the 20th - beginning of the 21st centuries there was a deep revaluation of the essence of historical knowledge, which was called the “historiographic revolution”. Usually three stages are distinguished: objectivist - scientific; subjective - postmodern and synthesizing (Mogilnitsky, 2003). The synthesizing stage is also called “a pragmatic turn”. A pragmatic or critical turn in the development of historiography is associated with the writings of Ricouer and Kosellek, with their doctrine of historical time. From the standpoint of this doctrine, the way to overcome the crisis was seen in bridging the gap between macro and micro approaches and synthesizing the methods of typologizing and individualizing approaches (Koselleck & Zeitschichten, 2003).

German historian R. Kosellek wrote: “The awareness of time and future, which was generated from a bold combination of human will and prophecy (a mixture of rational prediction of future and expectation of a miracle, characteristic of the 18th century) passed into the philosophy of progress” (Koselleck, 1989). But the view that humanity is developing within the framework of one model of progress, ceased to be the only point of view in the 18th century. This was due to both the spread of the influence of the Atlantic civilization on the entire planet, and to the social catastrophes in Europe itself. R. Kosellek noted that such phenomenon as the Great French Revolution, cancelled out the considerations on the linear development of mankind. “From the moment of the decline of the religious point of view of the world, modern man is guided by the philosophy of history, acquiring so strong political relevance in its progressive and Marxist formulation that it has become paramount in our day” (Weinfurter, 2006).

The notion of “progress” changes its content in this case, it is not the development from the worst to the better, but the process of permanent complication of social systems. In this case, in order to determine the development trends, it is necessary to determine the horizon of expectations, which is in constant motion. The movement vector is chosen by the subjects of a historical action, but they are restricted in their choice by the system of social relations.

That is why there is a tendency to synthesize the achievements of various sciences, an increasing role in determining the trends of social development is played by a large complex programs and problem-oriented interdisciplinary researches (Stepin, 2000). “The search for new approaches is associated with a change in the concept of the essence of reality, in which the motives of people’s behavior are formed” (Lektorsky, 2001).

From this point of view, the fundamental problem for all disciplines dealing with social medium is “the problem of time”. There was a circumstance that researchers call “time reduction”. Kosellek came to the determination that modern scientific theory, along with traditional scientific approaches and logic, also applies intuition, to which the theory of scientific cognition answers by the recognition of the importance of judgments based on intuition. This turns the researchers to a new level of understanding of the interdisciplinary approach in the study of social phenomena. Now one singles out several leading signs that describe “methodological innovations”, allowing to find solutions to
emerging problems: “1) increasing of the role of interdisciplinary programs; 2) strengthening of the paradigm of integrity, awareness of the need for a comprehensive view of the world; 3) broad spreading of the ideas and methods of synergetics; 4) putting forward a new conceptual apparatus reflecting the post-nonclassical stage of the evolution of the scientific picture of the world, its uncertainty; 5) introduction into scientific research of the temporal factor and branching prognostication; 6) modification of the content of the categories of “objectivity” and “subjectivity”, reduction of the methods of natural and social sciences; 7) deepening the value of the research methods verging on the domain of non-rational comprehension of the reality” (Leshkevich, 2001).

According to the theory of R. Koselleck, one can penetrate into the essence of history only with the support of the realization of “historical temporality” (Koposov, 2012). According to the ideas of the phenomenology of famous philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, only after our having realized the synthesis of time, time turns into not an object of our knowledge, but into dimension of our being (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). The protagonist of history is time. The categories “event”, “structure”, “process”, “experience” are not simple historical categories (Koselleck & Darstellung, 1993). They become anthropological parameters of time.

“Every history we analyze is really the past, a logically formed event” ... “However, the past event logically inevitably runs ahead” (Koselleck, 1989), into the future, otherwise each history is meaningless in its own accomplishment, if it has no relations with the present and the future. The truth of history is always an accomplished truth. In the anthropological sense, it is a question of carrying over the initial experience of all participants into a secondary one – the science, which must analyze first the initial experience and its sources, to derive then from this the third object (experience) - a recognizable history.

The actor of the historical process has imagination and is able to realize the goal-setting. If one takes only the natural-science causal model as a basis, randomness appears to be the essence of the whole history, since history does not know the same reiteration as the other spheres of life. The intentions of people based on the imagination tend to be diverse. But the general social, economic, natural-geographical conditions, which historians call objective factors of historical development, set natural boundaries for the realization of human intentions. And in this case we will deal with constantly recurring connections between objects and the objects of reality. Not only they do create a framework for any situation, the way of thinking and behavior is influenced by social experience or culture. Therefore, “the historical fact, in fact, is not reduced to order: a case is the basis of history” (Koselleck, Vergangene & Semantik, 1989).

R. Koselleck, who always regarded the anthropological parameters of culture (social, personal, species), noted that a modern person having found himself in a situation of constant uncertainty of cultural benchmark, feels the need for self-determination: “to find oneself in a succession of generations”. He states: “Who asks the question about the connection between history and time, does not think” about “historical time”. “Everything has certain, own time rhythms and modes of performance inherent only in it” (Nikolis & Prigogine, 1990).

The writings by Koselleck presents history as a system in which the role of cause-effect relationships is essential. A special place in it is taken by the category “time”. The future, the present and the past are interrelated. It is not enough for history to have the facts described in chronological order. First, we always need to consider the facts into interconnection; second, we must take into account that, “the system can adapt to its environment in several different ways” (Zakirov & Kosellek, 2012). In this case, it is recognized that evolution in its basis is based on the desire for diversity, the choice of a model of development is often a matter of chance. The case is seen as one of the factors of evolution. It decides which of the possibilities will be realized in the time space. “Such interdependence of time in history occurs in connection with their anthropological characteristics” (Ricoeur, n. d).

Case determines which model will become dominant, but it is admitted that systemic cause-effect relationships work within any model. This approach presupposes the existence of philosophical views, the theory determines the choice and consistency of retrospective inquiry. In turn, the theories can be refuted by modern social practice. It is this that determines the evolution of historical knowledge itself. A researcher who claims to be objective should obey the requirements of his chosen theory, the choice of which he must justify through its effectiveness to explain the current social processes and social development. Hence, it is clear that historical cognition is a correlation between the change in the means of cognition and the research position. And here an analogy with the principles of quantum physics comes to mind: the conclusions of the researcher depend on the point of view of the researcher.
4. SUMMARY

The principles of philosophical hermeneutics, used by P. Ricoeur in the work “Time and Story”, make it possible to take a fresh look at the problem of historical description (19, 1998). Ricoeur refused to view historical time separately from the subjects of the historical process and the actors of the process of historical knowledge. History can only be told, history is always a story. Therefore, one cannot separate the story from the one who tells this story. The search for objectivity for historical knowledge is impossible without taking into account the subjectivity of the historian. In this case, the question concerns interpretation as a way of understanding on the basis of rationally conscious experience. Social experience is the basis of the historian’s subjectivity.

For Ricoeur, the answer to the question of the historian’s objectivity is obvious: “Objectivity must be taken here in a strictly epistemological sense: objective is everything that is developed, put in order and methodically interpreted by thinking, that ultimately makes it understandable. It is true for the physical and biological sciences, it is true also for history. Therefore, we expect history to find the access to the past of human societies that has such a virtue of objectivity. This does not mean that its objectivity is the same as of physics or biology: there are as many levels of objectivity as methodical approaches. Therefore, we expect that history will add a new field to the empire of objectivity changing its boundaries” [20].

5. CONCLUSION

The overcoming of postmodern approaches is connected with a historian’s switchover to the position of a pragmatic approach in choosing the criteria of scientific character. The pragmatic approach is based on the recognition of Karl Marx’s idea of practice as the main criterion of truth. It also suggests that the dominant criterion in evaluating the truth in humanitarian studies remains the relevance of the means of the goal. Historical science does not exist to describe how it really was. It is needed to solve the problems that society faces today. Hence, the principle of “recurrent questioning” (we raise questions from sources based on the theory that allows to solve modern problems) and the principle of “single causation” (history as a science makes sense only if it allows one to create a coherent, cohesive idea of the past). Based on the ideas of philosophical hermeneutics, it is possible to combine event history, research of the influence of the historian’s personality and system approach into historical research. This approach assumes that no historian can be free from the worldview of time he lives in. Only strict compliance with the rules of the theoretical model of research can avoid the danger of presentism in historical research in this case.

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REFERENCES


