

Features Of Argumentation In The Social And Human Sciences: A Comparative Analysis Of Western And Eastern Philosophers

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ABSTRACT

The requirement for the argumentativeness of knowledge is usually referred to as the principle of sufficient reason (justification), first formulated by the German philosopher and mathematician G. W. Leibniz. The article analyzes the specific features of logical justification in the social sciences. The views of both Western and Eastern philosophers are compared; a comparative analysis is carried out of their theories, the correlation between value and logical categories, and the methods of cognition in the exact and natural sciences as well as in the humanities and socio-economic disciplines. It is substantiated that argumentation in social cognition is influenced by factors such as ideology, political and evaluative attitudes, and national customs and traditions. The author concludes that methods of incomplete induction and traducive (analogical) inferences are used to a greater extent in social cognition; consequently, the hypothetical character of argumentation is at a higher level, and the humanistic ideal of scientificity differs from that of the natural sciences.

Keywords: - Argumentation, proof, refutation, logical justification, evaluative attitudes, hypothetical character.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of the logical justification of scientific propositions has interested philosophers since Aristotle. Subsequently, the theory of proof was developed by the great Central Asian philosophers and logicians Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Abu Ali Ibn Sina, Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, and others. According to al-Farabi, the aim and essence of logical analysis is inference, which is of two kinds: from the general to the particular (deduction) and from the particular to the general (induction). Al-Farabi identifies the structure of the syllogism, the rules of its construction, and its types: demonstrative, presumed, erroneous, persuasive, and imaginative.

There are rules common to all kinds of syllogisms, as well as rules specific to particular types. Errors may lead to taking the particular for the general, a simple proposition for a syllogistic conclusion, and an unproven thesis for a proof. Al-Farabi distinguishes apodictic judgments from rhetorical ones. Moreover, whereas in Aristotle they constitute the foundation of argumentation, al-Farabi raises the problem of the differing logical foundations (grounds) of scientific and non-scientific knowledge (for example, religious). Thus, al-Farabi poses the question of the existence of different degrees and types of logical justification in different domains of knowledge—an innovation

in logical theory and one that is very important for this article.

In the modern period, the problem of logical argumentation did not go unnoticed: R. Descartes and I. Newton identified argumentation with strict mathematical proof. The logical-epistemological problems of social-humanitarian cognition began to be intensively discussed from the second half of the nineteenth century in connection with the rapid development of experimental psychology, political economy, history, ethnology, literary studies, art studies, and other fields of the humanities. Since these fields did not fit into the positivist model of scientific knowledge—which recognized as reliable only those disciplines built on the model of experimental-mathematical natural science and strict proof—the urgent problem arose of comprehending the specific features of cognition in the social and human sciences. Philosophical trends such as the philosophy of life, Neo-Kantianism, hermeneutics, and structuralism made a significant contribution to solving this problem. They highlighted for investigation such issues as the relationship between object and subject, the specific features of research methodology, the elucidation of the humanitarian standard of scientificity, and others.

METHODS

comparative analysis, systems analysis, structural-functional approach, hypothetico-deductive method.

One of the first approaches to defining the subject of humanistic cognition was proposed by the philosophy of life. Since life is a process, it is impossible to encompass it in its entirety; cognition has access only to certain stable forms of life, namely the “objectifications of life,” by which Dilthey meant the state, morality, the course of historical events, the creation of works of art, etc. This tradition in understanding social development is further developed by E. Betti, a representative of modern hermeneutics. From his point of view, the subject of humanistic inquiry is the product of the human spirit; therefore, the object of the humanities already contains within itself the active principle of the subject who creates this object. V. Windelband, H. Rickert, M. Weber, P. Ricoeur, and especially M. Scheler, assign to spiritual categories the ethical, aesthetic, and creative modalities; they insist on the fundamental role of the directly intuitive apprehension and meaningful experiencing of values, whose basis lies in “moral education and real moral behavior.” It is appropriate here to speak of the functions of

value categories: they do not create a “space” of possible rational meanings but rather a system of “vertical axes,” where concrete humanistic images and meanings interact on the basis of value oppositions (good–bad, beautiful–ugly, free–servile, just–unjust, etc.). Value categories possess a distinctly expressed specificity in comparison with logical categories. If the great mathematicians and physicists of the early modern period—René Descartes and Isaac Newton—affirmed the absoluteness of mathematical proofs, then, for the sake of fairness, it should be noted that mathematicians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries sometimes refrain from speaking of the absoluteness of logical and mathematical constructions: “...in the correctness of logic and mathematics, just as in the correctness of Maxwell’s equations, we believe because, from observations, we are convinced of the reliability of certain logical consequences to which they lead... but mathematics... is [also] not without weaknesses and shortcomings.” [1]

The social and humanistic branches of knowledge study the products of human creativity and historical activity; therefore, in the literal sense, the subject of cognition is the subject. In the social and human sciences, the formula of cognition “subject–object” is transformed into the formula “subject–subject.” The philosophy of life also singled out and examined another specific feature of the subject matter of humanistic research—its individual character. Historical events, works of art, science, etc. are interesting in their uniqueness, and not only as the manifestation of a general law. It is obvious that in the human sciences the knowing subject deals primarily with texts. Therefore, hermeneutics considers the text as the immediate subject of investigation in the social and human sciences. In polemics with W. Dilthey, M. Weber holds that the subject of the social and human sciences is social action. A similar position is taken by P. Ricoeur. By bringing into the fold of the social sciences linguistics, history, sociology, psychology, jurisprudence, and others, P. Ricoeur sees in social action both the initial object of research and its structural component. On the other hand, social action can be presented as a text, and the methodology of hermeneutic interpretation can be employed in order to understand what social action is. Thus, according to P. Ricoeur, a reciprocal continuum is established in interpretation within social-humanitarian research.

Another aspect of the problem of the specificity of

the humanities is the question of the properties of the subject of cognition in these disciplines. As early as W. Dilthey, attention was drawn to the fact that in the natural sciences the subject of cognition is reduced to the knowing mind. Whereas work in the field of social and human knowledge requires from a person not only the performance of formal-logical operations, but also emotional “involvement.” Therefore, the subject of cognition here is not only the cognitive-intellectual capacity, but the whole human being. In the philosophical hermeneutics of M. Heidegger and G. Gadamer, the question is raised about the historical character of the subject of cognition. Hermeneutics considers as the subject of cognition not simply the whole person, but a person of a particular historical epoch, who bears within himself all its basic scientific traditions as well as its delusions. [2]

In contrast to hermeneutics and the philosophy of life, structuralism does not attempt to present the subject of cognition as an individual person with all his inherent individual traits. From the point of view of N. Mulud, cognitive activity is not a process dependent on the will, desire, and individual characteristics of the cognizing subject. [3] The direction of a person’s thought is set by unconscious structures reminiscent of I. Kant’s a priori forms. Structures, understood as paradigms of individual activity, nullify the individual cognitive efforts of the human being. Through the mouth of the subject of cognition, unconscious structures speak, whereas conscious goals and motives are only an appearance.

Each of the disciplines in the social and human cycle has its own methods of cognition. Nevertheless, “a system of methods is distinguished that has an interdisciplinary character with respect to the humanities and social disciplines.” Thus, the system-structural method is one of the most effective modern ways of studying complex socio-cultural systems. Within this method, the phenomenon under analysis is considered as a set of elements (subsystems), the interconnected study of which makes it possible to present its integral characteristics. The specificity of applying this method to the study of socio-cultural phenomena consists in the fact that the involvement of the subject and his attitudes exert a greater influence on identifying the interconnections of subsystems within the system and on determining the integrated interrelations and relationships between the elements of the whole than is the case in natural-scientific

research. It is regarded as a general form of other methods of cognition of social-human processes (for example, the genetic or comparative method). The method has demonstrated its effectiveness in linguistics, history, ethnography, and other fields. The genetic method consists in the sequential disclosure of the characteristics of the phenomenon under study in dynamics, which makes it possible to achieve the greatest degree of substantiation in the socio-cultural phenomena being examined. When applying this method, the phenomenon is considered in its development—that is, from identifying its origins to its contemporary characteristics. This presupposes the use of substantial factual material, the interpretation of which is connected with the transition from the study of the singular and the particular to the establishment of the most generalized characteristics. The difficulty of implementing the method lies in the fact that large volumes of factual material require overcoming descriptiveness and empiricism. The effectiveness of the method consists in the possibility of moving from empirical descriptiveness to theoretical integrity in the cognitive process.

The comparative method is based on analogy; the investigation proceeds from the reconstruction and comparison of preceding elements characteristic of the object’s present state. Thus, for example, comparative-historical linguistics reveals the genesis of linguistic culture. Of course, when applying this method in social and humanistic research, one should take into account the conventionality and relativity involved in identifying similarities among objects.

The typological method presupposes isolating similar aspects, characteristics, and facets in social processes, which makes it possible to reveal general tendencies (for example, M. Weber’s concept of the “ideal type,” N. Danilevsky’s “cultural-historical type,” and others). It should be borne in mind that any classification of cultural-historical phenomena is conventional. Therefore, logic textbooks speak not of classification but of typology (which is constructed according to different rules).

The socio-psychological method proceeds from the premise that a person’s social behavior is to some extent conditioned by his or her biological nature. Researchers also consider such methods as “participant observation,” “social experiment,” “idiographic method” (description of singular individual features of certain historical events),

“dialogue,” “understanding and rational intentional explanation,” “document analysis,” “surveys,” “projective methods of psychology,” “testing,” and others.

In sociology, another method singled out is “self-reflection” [4]. Thus, we have examined the essence of the specificity of methodological orientations in social and human knowledge. But it is also necessary to consider the question of the level of theoretical substantiation in the social and human sciences. In the natural and exact sciences, the level of argumentation is in adequate accordance with formal-logical proof. In humanistic and social knowledge, in view of their particular characteristics and research methods, the level of argumentation corresponds to the degree of hypotheticity of social-humanitarian knowledge. Conceptions of the hypothesis as a general scientific category are well known. Unfortunately, it must be acknowledged that in the established system of relations between social science and society, hypotheses are assigned a place only on the lowest floors of the edifice. It happens that a subject endowed with power possesses the absolute right to pronounce ultimate truths, and the function of the social sciences is limited to propagating them. If unanimity is asserted, the sphere of discussion and polemics disappears, and thus the problem of the hypothesis in such a situation cannot arise. Yet the task set of democratizing all spheres of social life requires a transition to a new level of development of scientific debates, when the full diversity of opinions, evaluations, and theories will be considered, and thus the richness of the society’s spiritual life will flourish. Not dogmas and abstract schemes, but living debates, a clash of opinions, discussions—this is what moves social science forward. And any postulation of new theories presupposes the advancement of hypotheses as a necessary stage in their establishment and development. Therefore, the recognition of hypothetical knowledge in social science and social practice is a necessary condition for the development of science. In this situation, science faces the task of identifying the specific features of applying the hypothesis in the social sciences, since it is the hypothesis that is the nodal point of the increment of knowledge, the movement from ignorance to knowledge. The role of the hypothesis in the development of natural-scientific knowledge has been well studied in the scholarly literature, whereas insufficient attention has been paid to studying its role in social cognition. In the scholarly

literature on this issue, a number of specific features are usually singled out as inherent in social cognition and distinguishing it from the natural sciences.

As noted above, what primarily distinguishes social cognition is the inclusion, within the subject matter of the social sciences, of the human being as a thinking creature—the inclusion of consciousness, subjectivity, the ideal; that is, the humanistic character of social cognition. This is the determining factor that entails other features of social cognition—its ideological nature, bias, value-ladenness, dependence on the level of development of social practice, dialogical character, the personal character of cognition, and many other distinctive traits. And here the existing extreme viewpoints on this issue are dangerous: the scientistic one, which reduces social cognition to the natural-scientific, and the anthropologicist one, which posits an insurmountable barrier between them. To some extent, the specific features of social cognition are present in the natural sciences as well, but there it is possible to abstract from their influence. In social cognition this is impossible.

What influence does the specificity of social cognition have on hypotheses in the socio-humanities? In the most general terms, the subjectivity inherent in social cognition increases the degree of hypotheticity of its conclusions, raising the proportion of the probable within them. Yet for all that, the very term “hypothesis” is used extremely rarely in the social sciences (in studies of the most concrete level). Does this mean that in social cognition the hypothesis does not play the role it has in natural-scientific knowledge? The fact is that from the standpoint of formal logic and the established criteria of the scientific character of knowledge, most results in the social sciences are in fact hypothetical in nature. But they function in science under other names—“idea,” “concept,” “proposition,” and sometimes even “theory.” A process occurs of veiling, of blurring the hypothetical character of the results of social cognition. The probabilistic essence of conclusions is, as it were, not displayed. Thus, despite the rather high proportion of hypotheses among the results of social cognition, the hypothetical character of these results is expressed implicitly. Probabilistic knowledge functions in the social sciences, as a rule, at a more concrete level. Probabilistic knowledge is often presented as reliable; moreover, the higher the value of a hypothesis, the stronger the tendency to present it

as reliable knowledge. The situation may be aggravated by the fact that hypotheses here may have not only scientific but also para-scientific value (for example, ideological). “Quite often, an appeal to the authoritative opinion of the author is used as the guarantee of the reliability of the knowledge produced...” [5] This state of affairs can have negative consequences. The point is that when a proposed scientific idea is postulated as a “hypothesis,” it presupposes the existence of other “hypotheses” on the given problem and the necessity of considering all other viewpoints, of discussion, of the continuation of research.

If, however, the proposition advanced is postulated as a “theory” (and a theory is a scientific truth proven and verified in practice), this may both halt discussion and stop further research, and even allow a transition from theory to implementation in social practice. And if at the stage of scientific inquiry this can still be corrected, at the stage of practical application it may lead to negative consequences. The consequences, of course, may also turn out to be positive. But in any case, they are of medium probability in their predictability. In the social sciences there exists a specific feature such as the dependence of cognition on the level of development of the object. The object of social research can be studied only at a concrete, determinate moment in time (which, of course, may be fairly extended). [6] This presupposes the presence of such a fact as the object’s containing within itself a certain sum of established constants, as well as a certain sum of variables—tendencies, possibilities, prospects. The variables may be realized, may not be realized, may change in the process of realization, negating or supplementing others. Variables may be transformed into constants and vice versa. The research, however, is limited by a definite state of the object, and the advancement of a hypothesis is limited by the object’s present state, as well as by other accompanying factors—objectively formed or imposed attitudes, a certain mentality, the level of development of social science in a given society, spiritual demands, and so on. Another specific feature—the ideological nature of social cognition—also implies objectively arising difficulties for research, since problems of tendentiousness, bias, and the “fitting” of facts to a theory or concept may arise here.

DISCUSSION

The recognition of socio-humanitarian knowledge as hypothetical from the standpoint of formal-

logical argumentation, and the corresponding assessment of the predictability of its conclusions.

RESULTS

The foregoing, taken together, poses the task of formulating the problem of the criteria of scientificity for socio-humanitarian knowledge and of the place of the hypothesis—of hypothetical knowledge—in this process. The social and human sphere of inquiry has its own specific research methods as well as distinctive features in the use of argumentation. From a formal-logical perspective, the specificity of social cognition also lies in its hypotheticity; consequently, the humanistic ideal of scientificity differs substantially from that of the natural sciences.

CONCLUSION

Argumentation takes different forms, but all of them include such components as justification and critique. Logical proof may take the form of deductive, inductive, and traductive (analogical) inferences. Depending on the form, they yield results of unequal epistemic weight. Deductive inferences and complete induction provide certain conclusions, whereas incomplete induction and traductive inferences yield only plausible ones. The exact sciences are characterized by the use of deductive reasoning (although we have seen that mathematical induction also exists and develops successfully). The natural sciences employ a combination of deductive, inductive, and traductive reasoning. In social-humanitarian cognition, argumentation has specific features—ideological coloration, value-laden character, and conjunctural (context-dependent) nature—which increases the degree of hypotheticity of its conclusions and requires the appropriate development of criteria of scientificity and an awareness of its limited capacities from the formal-logical point of view.

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