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INTRODUCTION

Abstract

The term “cognitivism”, which is key for this book, has been borrowed from metaethics. However, it is used here in a broader meaning: what we have in view is a special methodological approach, according to which mind (spirit, mentality) as a whole and in all its species may be reduced to belief, knowledge and cognition. This approach is manifested, in particular, in the use of epistemological concepts (such as the truth, experience, empirical data, theory, etc.) for the formulation and resolution of value (ethical, aesthetic, legal, etc.) problems. Sharing a generally anti-cognitivist position, the author at the same time views cognitivism not simply as a ‘mistake’ in the interpretation of mind, but as a paradigmatic methodological principle deeply implanted in the sphere of the philosophy and the humanities.

Keywords

anti-psychologism, cognitivism, emotivism, epistemology, ethics, humanities, intention, mental philosophy, metaethics, non-cognitivism (necognitivism), philosophy of mind, psychologism, scientism, value-cognitive eclecticism

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LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

1. The Essence of the “Cognitivist Fallacy”

If it is generally admissible to assess specific results of philosophical quest and reflection in terms of “achievement”, “discovery”, etc., in the recent philosophy one should, in my view, attribute to such results the detection, explication and critical analysis of the *cognitivist fallacy* deeply engrained in the entire history of the philosophical and humanities’ thought and in many ways defining its character. The essence of this fallacy consists in the use of *epistemological* categories and schemes for describing and explaining *all*, including *non-cognitive* phenomena of *mind* (spirit, consciousness, mentality).

What is meant here is not some private methodological deviation typical of a particular philosophical trend or historical period. Even the most cursory overview of the history of philosophical thought under this angle allows one to note that epistemology has always had a clearly expressed tendency towards the expansion of its subject field – down to the inclusion within its borders of all the “inward life” of man; in this extreme case the spiritual activity of the subject was generally defined as “cognition”, ideal products of this activity as “belief” or “knowledge”, externally material actions and their results as the realisation and objectivation of knowledge, etc. It was a major display of this spontaneous methodological tendency that the founders, defenders and propagators of *value doctrines* – ideologists, moralists, preachers, theologians, fiction writers, etc. – has been building and interpreting their own activity mostly as a cognitive (and teaching) activity, as the search (and proclamation) of the *truth*; that is to say, the problems of *value* were being posed and resolved along the same models and by the same methods as the problems of cognition. It was this tendency dominant in the humanities that was revealed and subjected to criticism by *non-cognitivists* representing various philosophical schools of the twentieth century (mostly of the analytical type) – although similar critical ideas were sporadically, without synthesis and far-reaching conclusions, expressed even before, as early as antiquity.

2. On the Terms “Cognitivism” and “Non-Cognitivism”

These terms do not belong to the traditional vocabulary of philosophy and science, they have come into use a relatively short time ago, though they are used to denote not only modern but also old-established concepts (those that had not been explicated earlier and had no specific name). In the present-day specialised literature the *cognitive* is more often associated with the *rational* (in the broad sense of the word) and denotes either the appropriate *object of study* (i.e. the rational part of consciousness, mind, mentality), or the appropriate *approach to the study* of consciousness (i.e. the formal, structural, functional and other “rational” *methods* of cognition used by the *cognitive sciences*). The word “cognitivism” is used as a designation and at the same time as a characteristic (usually negative) of those *concepts* in which the role and place of the “cognitive” (in reality, rational) component of mind are exaggerated, as are the designation and characteristic of the *approaches* within which the “cognitive” (rational scientific) methods of study of consciousness are conceived as an absolute. The cognitivism thus understood is opposed by various forms of irrationalism, anti-scientism, organicism, and post-modernism¹.

However, the term under examination in this article, as seen from the above description of the “cognitivist fallacy”, is used in a different meaning: cognitivism here designates a concept

reducing *mind (consciousness etc) to belief or knowledge*, i.e. treating all components of mind (including emotional-volitional and value-intentional ones) as cognitive phenomena. Roughly such a sense is attributed to this term in the metaethical literatureⁱⁱ. This definition accords better with its etymology (for the Latin *cognitio* does not comprise *ratio* as an obligatory element), therefore “cognitivism” in this version is not overlapped by “rationalism”, “scientism”, and so forth. It is not only “scientific rationalists”, but also metaphysical philosophers and pure specialists in the humanities who are far from natural-science methodology that can be cognitivists. The fact that any theory belongs to cognitivism is determined, as has already been said, by the reduction of the “mental” to the “cognitive” produced by it; the specific forms of producing such a reduction are very diverse.

As to the legitimacy of the very borrowing of the word “cognitivism” (with its clearly expressed scientific analytical colouring) from metaethics and its application in a wider philosophical context (not restricted to metaethical problems alone), one may adduce the following argument in favour of this nominative operation: the reductionist principle we are speaking about, although it has a long history, was explicated and named only in the twentieth century; the use of classical vocabulary in the process (with word meanings established over the centuries) does not allow the said principle to be identified unambiguously among other, “related” approaches; therefore the introduction of the new term, “cognitivism”, and its retrospective application to the philosophical legacy may, in my view, be considered quite justified.

3. The Confrontation of Cognitivism and Non-Cognitivismⁱⁱⁱ

Contemporary non-cognitivism is not some kind of a closely-knit philosophical position or conception, it is rather a certain quantity of diversified methodological assumptions specifying the common thesis that *mind (consciousness, spiritual life, mentality, psyche, ideal, etc.) is not reduced to belief, knowledge and cognition*, i.e. includes non-cognitive elements as well. In itself this thesis is simple and obvious, and nearly everyone within whose range of attention it falls easily agrees with it. There is no need, for example, in special proof that some realities of mind – the will, fits of passion, impulses, needs, etc. – are not “belief” or “knowledge” (in the broad sense of the words), i.e. are not “images” or “models” of something (or, anyway, they cannot be wholly reduced to their cognitive components, if these exist at all). However, the statement on the non-cognitive status of other, more complex mental phenomena, that is, the *value* forms of mind (i.e. moral, legal, aesthetic, political and other doctrines and judgements) no longer look as indisputable and had been the subject of a lively philosophical polemic for several decades (from the 1920s through to the 1960s). The non-cognitivists argued that value judgements are organically linked to those affective-conative phenomena of mentality, whose non-cognitiveness is generally recognised, and therefore value judgements are *non-referent*, they cannot be true or false. The cognitivists asserted the traditional idea that, evaluations, norms, ideals, and so on, belong to the corps of knowledge and can consequently be checked for truth or falsity. However, the subject of cognitivist interpretation was actually not any kind of assessments and norms, but only those that are expressed in an objective impersonal form – moral, aesthetic and some other. Contrary to utilitarian assessments, pragmatic prescriptions, technological recipes, and so on (behind which clearly stand particular interests, propensities, and other “non-cognitive” manifestations of spiritual life), moral (and some other) judgements about the “good”, “proper”, “perfect”, “lofty”, etc., can easily be interpreted as true or false ascertainties of the actual “state of affairs”. Therefore it is precisely in ethics, aesthetics and in other fields of philosophical thought and the humanities, where the question of “objective” values is posed in

one way or the other, that cognitivism occupies especially strong positions. But non-cognitivism does not make an exception for moral, “supreme” or any other values, believing that any value judgement is non-cognitive, as what stands behind it is a particular “human relation” or subjective intention, without which this judgement, is, properly speaking, not a “value judgement”. True, a non-cognitivist may admit that a moral intention qualitatively differs from the utilitarian one. However, in this case as well, moral assessments and norms do not acquire a cognitive status, since the said differentiation is effected inside the non-cognitive (affective-will) sphere of mind.

The non-cognitivists (belonging to neopositivist schools) searched for confirmation of their theoretical position largely along the path of logic-linguistic analysis of value texts and statements, while the cognitivists more often resorted to a moralistic argument: if, they said, one is to accept the idea of non-cognitiveness of value judgements, we shall lose the ability to distinguish between the *real* and *imaginary* values, good and evil, right and wrong, etc., and find ourselves defenceless before moral relativism, nihilism and so on.

4. The Paradigmality of Cognitivism

In recent decades, discussions concerning the cognitive or non-cognitive nature of values have gradually come to naught, and, judging by the fact that the cognitivist approach now, as before, dominates research in the humanities, as well as in the psychology and philosophy of mind,^{iv} one might seemingly reach a conclusion that the above-mentioned moralistic argument has outweighed the theoretical proofs to the contrary. However, the matter is apparently different: value cognitivism is dominant not at all because it is based on some articulated arguments; most of its supporters do not even suspect that they are “cognitivists” and that there is a different, alternative point of view. The initiative in posing and discussing the problem belonged to the non-cognitivist analysts, and when their argumentation was exhausted without meeting either serious objections or broad support on the part of other philosophers, the polemic died a natural death or rather took on a languid character, having shifted to the periphery of the philosophers’ interests.

Thus one may safely say that the *anti-cognitivist* idea of the analysts (as against the *anti-metaphysical* one) affected the development of philosophical thought of the twentieth century but little, and in this it shared the fate of two other great methodological ideas, disproved by no one, but not essentially accepted by community of the humanities. I have in mind the so-called “Hume principle” – the logical interdiction of deducing the judgements of duty from the judgements of fact, and the criticism by G. E. Moore of the “naturalist fallacy” consisting in the logically incorrect construction of definitions of good in the entire classical philosophy of morals. Resistance to these conceptions was manifested not so much in their denial (for this would mean denying the universality of logical laws), as in the tacit “sabotage” of conclusions which would inevitably be reached by any unbiased researcher who looked at the works of great thinkers of the past from the standpoint of the observance of the aforesaid logical requirements by them. These presumed conclusions would have been destructive for the greater part of the philosophical legacy, for it is difficult to indicate a doctrine or theory where the above-named logical restrictions would be strictly observed. However, the philosophers’ silent resistance to logicist criticism has a grain of truth, for the established criteria of conceptuality and acceptability of constructions in the humanities do not fully meet the scientific canons: thought in the humanities is tolerant enough to illogicalities, as well as to errors of content, if they do not interfere with, much less promote, its performance of certain pragmatic, socio-ideological functions. The discovery of similar fallacies in natural-

science theory usually results in its abolition or radical reform, whereas the concepts of the humanities under the same conditions may steadily exist and develop.

The durability of the cognitivist stereotype versus analytical criticism is also conditioned by the fact that it is organically built into the historically formed system of thought in the humanities: it forms a common conceptual scheme within whose framework the other problems pertaining to this domain of mental activity are verbalized and discussed. This type of outlook (and mental practice associated with it) seems to its bearers to be completely “natural” and standing to reason, which is why it remained actually unnoticed down to the twentieth century. It is impossible to eliminate cognitivism, while leaving untouched the other – established, customary – theories and approaches in the process. Therefore even those modern philosophers who confidently distinguish, differentiate between knowledge and values *in general*, quite often mix them in dealing with *concrete, particular* questions, as they are compelled to build their reasonings in conformity with the accepted (cognitivist-oriented) concepts and schemes.

Cognitivism for the humanities is a **paradigm** in that sense (or close to it), in which this last term is used in the science of science throughout the last decades. Paradigmatic ideas and theories determine the common type of thinking within the framework of a particular academic community, ensuring mutual understanding among scholars sharing these ideas despite their possible disagreements on other questions; and consequently it is quite natural for any critical encroachment on the paradigm to be met, if not with a rebuff, then at least with passive resistance on the part of its bearers (and the humanities community is in this respect much more conservative than the natural-science one). The question of the validity or falsity of the paradigmatic conception is not crucial for it: as long as the system of knowledge and values based on such a conception is on the whole able to carry out any explanatory function or one that is in any way practically important (for society) effectively enough, nothing in itself threatens this paradigm; it remains an implicitly accepted and functioning methodological principle even in case if its theoretical inconsistency (falsity, incompleteness, one-sidedness, etc.) is discovered and convincingly proved. And only an accumulation of a significant mass of data testifying to the *undesirable consequences* of the domination of this system-building conception may serve as an impetus towards its revision. All this fully pertains to the cognitivist paradigm.

5. Value-Cognitive Eclecticism as a Consequence of the Cognitivist Fallacy

One of the major consequences of the domination of the cognitivist paradigm is the special sort of eclecticism characteristic precisely of thought of the humanities, which is expressed in the confusion and mutual substitution of two diverse contexts – the *theoretical* (or cognitive in general) and the *practical* (or value-normative) contexts. In itself the *presence* of value and cognitive elements in the reasonings of the humanities certainly does not attest to the eclecticism of the latter, just as the fact of interrelation of these elements does not attest to their identity or the possibility of mutual transformation. Value-cognitive eclecticism is manifested here first and foremost in ignoring the real distinctions between the value and cognitive constructions – distinctions both in the “nature”, the “substrate” (logical and psychological mechanisms, and so on), and the destination as part of human activity; thereby a semblance of “essential kinship” of these two types of thought in the humanities is being created and a uniform common status is ascribed to them – the cognitive one. In this pattern of views, expressions like “practical knowledge”, “normative science”, “scientific ideology”, etc., are believed to be quite correct. As a result, the humanitarian (or social) *theory*, while being engaged in the *study* of its object, is simultaneously (and *thereby*) trying

to resolve *value* collisions, i.e. assumes *practical* functions, “teaching how to live”; on the other hand, practical philosophy and those disciplines of the humanities, which are precisely intended for the “production” of value orientations and appropriate influence on human consciousness, mistakenly engage in the description and explanation of the realities of human life and in “enlightening” activity (the transfer of “information”). Such a mutual substitution of functions results in the reduction of both the explanatory efficiency of the humanitarian theory and the practical efficiency of the “applied” humanities.

6. The Prospects of Constructive Non-Cognitivism

The philosophic-analytical (originally neo-positivist) criticism of cognitivism has passed almost unnoticed largely because its object was only the idea, taken separately, on the entirely cognitive nature of value utterances. Having proved that this idea is incorrect and that value utterances cannot be either true or false (i.e. are not “scientifically meaningful”), the non-cognitivists have considered their task fulfilled. However, for the philosophical mentality of the humanities such “formalistic” calculations carry very little weight, therefore a non-cognitivist wishing to make his position more convincing must derive arguments not only from the logical analysis of language, but also from the “empirical” sciences on mind, first and foremost from psychology, general and social (although the efficiency of these arguments has limits as well).

The first step towards *overcoming* cognitivism and its consequences is to *distinguish* between value and cognitive elements in the works of classical and contemporary humanities. It is not easy to solve this task, for in real texts the above elements seldom appear as logically (and grammatically) transparent language structures and lexical units with a clearly expressed “informative” or – accordingly – “normative” meaning; these texts are mostly syncretic in this respect, so their authors themselves were far from always able (if they set themselves such an aim) to draw an exact dividing line between their own explanatory theory and their value position.

A substantial analytical work to distinguish these two contexts in moral philosophy has been done by the British and American metaethicists representing emotivist and prescriptivist schools; however, their efforts failed to reduce to any great extent the influence of cognitivism in ethics, – partly due to the already mentioned features of the humanities’ mentality, unreceptive to “formalistic” criticism, partly due to the methodological limitation of metaethics itself. The majority of other analytical philosophers, distinguishing beliefs (or knowledge) and values in one way or the other, used this dichotomy not for elucidating the internal structure of the humanities (for the purpose of eliminating the cognitivist fallacy), but basically in order to differentiate between *science* and the *humanities*. The point of view prevailing in the science of science is that value judgements are alien to scientific knowledge, therefore the *humanities* do not possess the status of *science*; true, in the process an exception is often made for those social disciplines in the humanities (history, sociology, psychology), which altogether meet general scientific criteria (including the “value neutrality” of knowledge they produce), though they have some specific distinctions from natural sciences. One may say that the *positive* interest in the humanities on the part of the philosophy of science is directed basically towards these few disciplines that have proved their scientific validity; whereas the greater part of this extensive sphere of mental activity remains without the science-of-science “custody” and is left at the mercy of pre-, extra- and antiscientific “methodology” comprising, along with sound judgements of common sense, also plenty of

prejudices, illogicalities and erroneous stereotypes (among which we find spontaneous cognitivism and value-cognitive eclecticism). Such scientific neglect of the problems of the “unscientific” humanities, as well as the antiscientific exaltation of the said methodological defects of the humanities’ thought into the rank of its original merits, have common sources: this is, first of all, scientocentrism (both in the positive and the negative sense of this word) typical of the philosophical and mass consciousness of the last one and a half centuries; second, an abstract understanding of the humanities as some methodologically homogeneous and integral entity. Through the prism of these approaches, the “value-coloured” disciplines of the humanities (ethics, aesthetics, pedagogics, and so forth) are seen as something entirely “unscientific”, or, on the contrary, appear as independent sciences (standing in a row with the others or occupying a special position). In either case the value-cognitive eclecticism of the humanities remains unnoticed. For this eclecticism to become apparent, a careful analysis of the structure of the humanities’ thought is necessary, performed from the positions of non-cognitivism, and a revelation of the real methods of reasoning of philosophers and scholars in the humanities, hidden from a superficial view. Only in such a way is it possible to discover the radical duality of the humanities, owing to which it defies an unequivocal qualification either as a “science” (or knowledge in general), or as a “non-science”.

The cognitive and value components of reasoning, like water and oil, never form a homogeneous substance, so that there always remains a basic possibility of analytically “identifying” them in their distinctiveness. The field of thought in the humanities is only partially blocked by humanitarian *sciences* (and humanitarian *cognition* in general); the other part of this territory belongs to *value doctrines*, which, however rationalised, conceptual and generally “science-like” they may be, essentially differ from sciences in that they directly bear in themselves a particular “vital intention” – appealing, inducing, recommending, “expressing their attitude”, and so forth. In exactly the same way as part of any humanities *discipline* taken separately one can distinguish and isolate, on the one hand, explanatory *theories* (which in themselves do not express and do not defend any value positions), and, on the other, *life doctrines* (which cannot be reduced to knowledge). Individual *conceptions* within the framework of a particular discipline, individual *problems* and even individual *statements* and *terms* can be subjected to similar dichotomic splitting up, for value-cognitive syncretism is characteristic of almost all verbalised forms of humanities’ thought. The very language of the humanities is syncretical, therefore without its “purification”, without the refinement of the traditional terminology it is impossible to get rid of the confusion of the value and cognitive contexts in the reasonings of the humanities.

Cognitivism and, accordingly, value-cognitive eclecticism in the humanities can be fully overcome if we oppose to it not the *negativist* non-cognitivism (typical of many analysts of the first half of the twentieth century), but *constructive* non-cognitivism, focused on consistent, laborious disentangling of numerous theoretical textures, paradoxes, illogicalities caused by the cognitivist fallacy, on their explication, on revealing the genuine sense hidden in them, reinterpreting the old problems and finding new, more adequate and effective formulas for them. For the philosopher convinced of the fallaciousness of cognitivism, the prosecution of such work seems to be the necessary prior condition for the realisation of any new philosophical projects in the humanities, for practically all the historically formed humanities’ problems, all the conceptual schemes of the humanities are built on a cognitivist basis.

NOTES

There is another use of the word “cognitivism” that stands a little apart: in modern psychology the theories that oppose behaviourism are quite often classed as “cognitivist”, – on the ground that they are directed towards the research of “inward” (and in *this* sense “cognitive”) mental processes and conditions, whereas the behaviour psychologists are interested only in “outward” forms of behaviour.

ⁱⁱ See, f. i., John K. Roth (ed.), “Cognitivism and Noncognitivism,” *International Encyclopedia of Ethics* (London – Chicago, 1995). On the history of the term “cognitivism” in metaethics and “cognitive sciences”, see: Ch. D. Green, “Where Did the Word ‘Cognitive’ Come From Anyway?,” *Canadian Psychology* 37 (1996): 31–39.

ⁱⁱⁱ Here I would like to draw attention to the fact that the dispute between cognitivism and non-cognitivism affects only the question of *cognitive nature of values* and has no direct relation to other problems, grouped in contemporary science-of-science literature under the common name of “*knowledge (or fact) and value*”. Numerous works devoted to these problems examine the technical and ethical norms of scientific-cognitive activity, study the influence of social values (interests) on the course and results of cognition, and analyze collisions, where the “pursuit of truth” comes into contradiction with the scholar’s “social responsibility”, etc., i.e. the issue is mostly about the value regulators of scientific cognition, not about whether value judgements are “knowledge”. The last question is usually diluted among the others and substituted by them, receiving only a semblance of a particular solution. (For example, the attempts to find out whether *value judgements can in principle be true or false*, very often smoothly flow into reasonings on *the truth as the “value” of cognition*, on its relationship with other values – the good, beauty, utility, and so forth.). Thus in order to prevent a methodological confusion it is necessary, already at the level of the statement of a problem, to distinguish clearly two alternative aspects in the formula “knowledge and value”: “value as knowledge” and “knowledge as value”. Only the first of them forms the subject of this work.

^{iv} “Cognitivism now dominates the philosophical study of emotions. Its ascendancy in this area parallels the ascendancy of cognitivism in the philosophy of mind generally” (John Deigh, “Cognitivism in the Theory of Emotions,” *Ethics* 104 (1994): 824–854. P.824).