

Emilia A. Tajsin

THEORY OF COGNITION

Introduzione e rondo capriccioso

CULTURAL
DIMENSIONS

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Emilia A. Tajsin

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Introduzione e rondo capriccioso

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Emilia A. Tajsin

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To the honoured memory of my parents

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Positivism and existentialism, with their numerous derivatives, became the main philosophical trends of the end XIX – beginning of the XXI centuries. They coexist in unity due to their shared origin, neo-Kantian in itself, and at the same time they are contradictory as “philosophy of science” and “philosophy of life”. The drama of their relationship determined the physiognomy of decades “after the linguistic turn” no less than the well-known contradiction of Marxist doctrine and the opponents of this doctrine. The cultural and ideological background of the unfolding drama should be qualified as postmodernism, followed by the extrusion and displacement of philosophical scientific classical theory of knowledge, which leads to an underestimation or the loss of a significant number of functions of philosophy, primarily cognitive, as well as reflective-critical.

The path of cognition cannot be traversed or even be started without the almost innate belief in the *knowability* of the phenomena and laws of reality. Without this initial faith our only destiny would have been skepticism. This book’s author aims to offer a new theory of knowledge, which would allow for advances of recent decades, while remaining true to many classical principles. It is based on the postulate of the unity of the doctrine of being, ontology, and doctrine of knowledge, gnoseology which is general theory of knowledge, and, coincidentally, of that which is their subject.

This treatise introduces the new theory of cognition called existential materialism.

Presentation of the theory requires linearity. Paying tribute to the tradition, it starts with ontology, but in a special way – the ontology called “existential”, non-objectivist, in which the knower is present not “out of” the subject’s being, as a nature explorer, and not parallel to it, like a mirror, but in the immanent manner. The knowing agent finds oneself in the situation of here-and-now-being-consciousness, “*Da-bewußt-sein*”. The theory presented is a philosophical inquiry into the “here-and-now-being-consciousness” – as the only real premise of cognition theory adequate to human being.

Perhaps this megalithic concept is the subject of future philosophy. The author believes that existential materialism is not just one of the logically possible trends of philosophical thought, but a natural, necessary and substantial direction in relation to all others: “normal” philosophizing.

In this treatise, then, not only the specifics of (ideal) image are explained, but also the characteristic features of what is reflected in this image, the object of which reflection is interacting with a person. This principle is correlated with the fundamental *gnoseological syntagma* – reasoning of highest valence concerning the absolute and relative nature of knowledge.

Moreover, not only is the problem on the issue of the dyad “subject – object” as the basic structure of the cognitive relation solved, but also the triad of “subject – language – object” is demonstrated, including the basic means of knowledge into this scheme. The new gnoseology is founded, too, on the factual basis of general scientific knowledge (semiotics) and data of special disciplines (linguistics, logic, literature, geography, mathematics).

The result is an offered solution of the fundamental question of any cognition theory – the problem of localization, the nature and essence of *truth*. The book includes four essays framed into one treatise. This publication introduces the first one: The Basic Syntagma.

The publication is intended for readers who are deeply interested in philosophy.

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INTRODUCTION

*Real courage belongs to the one
who, though feeling fear
before reaching the possible, knows that
only he can achieve the possible,
who desires the impossible.*

Karl Jaspers. *Spiritual situation of time*

The last third of the XXth century, as well as the first decade of the XXIst, were marked in European culture by a kind of revenge of the humanities in relation to natural science and non-scientific worldview in relation to the scientific one. This revenge was, or seems, a bit immature. It would have been in the order of things if the sequence of achieving perfection, *ακμή*, *akmé*, by the most important sciences and their dominant position related to such importance, which position could be expressed in composing a picture of the world adequate to their principles, indicated by their style of thinking with the central explanatory abstraction, their main criteria of truth, and so on, had corresponded to the development and unfolding of the world itself, in which human being, the crown of life and “paragon of all the animals”, appears historically. It might have been first the flowering of classical and non-classical physics, then chemistry and biology somewhere in parallel with geology, geography, and medicine. Having mastered the outer things, consciousness could refer in a timely manner to itself as an object. The apparent simplicity of this “transparent to itself” object often attracted philosophers. This would have caused the flourishing of psychology. Only after that would have arisen a natural right to develop the “sciences of the spirit”, namely, the humanities including philosophy, philology, history, theory of art and sciences treating of society, because the latter are dealing with the most complex forms of being. In fact, everything turned out differently.

Already in this mismatch we can see two arguments sufficient to prove, on the one hand, the unity of foundations of being and knowledge, since apart from this unity a mismatch not only loses any sense, but is in any case impossible, and on the other, to discuss the difference between these basics.

The opposition of subject and object is the fundamental principle of gnoseology or the general theory of knowledge – its basic assumption. In

this it recognizes the subject not as an impersonal absolute or a substance supporting and carrying its predicates, but takes the subject, especially after German classical dialectic, to be the *agent* of knowledge, via gnoseology, to be *personalized consciousness*. In this regard it does not matter whether it does so as transcendental or empirical, individual or social, human or superhuman.

The term “gnoseology” is now rarely used. Instead, modern authors settle on the term “epistemology”. As a result of the expansion of the term “epistemology,” the latter nearly replaced the classical term. However, this cannot be considered correct because, in its origin, epistemology was the theory of *scientific* knowledge, and there are a great many other forms of knowledge such as artistic and expressive, everyday knowledge, religious, intuitive and even mystic knowledge, though these are not recognized by any realistically-minded scientist. Contemporary Greek philosophers explain that by epistemology they no longer mean philosophy of Science but Science of knowledge. Others assert that gnoseology deals with the problems of genesis, production, and progression of knowledge, whereas epistemology is about methods and forms of scientific knowledge that never leave the boundaries of logic. At any rate, it can be stated that the “epistemology” of the recent past became closely associated with the positivistic tradition exemplified by analytic philosophy, philosophy of science, philosophy of language, and the like. Here we shall make use of both terms whenever we find it proper.

Once having accepted the counterposition of the knower and the known, the observer and the observed, and only after that, of the ignorant and the uncognizable, of *material* and *ideal* taken as synonyms to opposition of physical and mental, the theory of knowledge inevitably transforms or even forms, generates an ontology. Having recognized this epistemological division of being to nature and consciousness, or alternatively to the chaos of primordial matter and the active spirit ordering it, namely, logos, consciousness, the subject, the idea of the Absolute, many philosophers define themselves as materialists or idealists, and in this materialists usually replace ontology by cosmology or natural philosophy.

On its part, this division again and again makes other philosophers look for opportunities to establish a metaphysical principle of original unity of these opposites. This, for example, Aristotle himself postulated. The foundation of metaphysics so understood lies within the unity of the doctrine of being, ontology, and doctrine of cognition, theory of knowledge.

It should also be noted how surprisingly deep is the link, not discerned with a cursory glance, of metaphysical disciplines like gnoseology, logic, ontology with ethics and axiology. Actually, all sages were confirming the

nobility of Logos and the rationality of ethics from the beginning of philosophizing, and even in its subsequent development. These include specifically Heraclitus, Democritus, Aristotle, Epicurus, Arcesilaus; Sextus Empiricus; all medieval philosophers; John Locke; Benedict Spinoza; Immanuel Kant; Ludwig Wittgenstein; Jürgen Habermas, Umberto Eco, as well as other more or less contemporary philosophers, old and new. Christoph Sigwart, a prominent philosopher and logician of the beginning of XXth century wrote in his famous “*Logik*”:

“Die Besinnung über die Ziele unseres Wollens vollendet sich in der Aufstellung eines höchsten Zwecks, der eine einzelnen Handlungen in sich fasst, und der Einsicht, dass derselbe unbedingt gewollt werden soll”.¹

Author’s translation: reflection on the goals of our desires is accomplished by the establishing the aim of a highest order, which embraces all separate actions in itself, and the realization of which should be absolutely intended.

Knowledge is the first and best of human abilities, an indispensable companion and the condition of morality. “...Those who are interested in meta-ethics should adopt...that moral norms reduce to norms of reason and rationality”.² In essence, all metaphysical disciplines are akin in their search for universal foundations.

And this great word, essence, which, like many other categories including truth itself, turned into introductory words, lead-ins, or parenthesis, is our main subject of philosophical interest.

The most famous fundamental question of philosophy arises if we take the fundamental principle of cognitive relationship as absolutely inevitable. In fact, how can we, while remaining consistent, deny the distinction of two kinds of reality? But if we step back in determination to find an even more deep and profound level of query, it will be the problem of essence.

Defining essence namely as an essence, an entity, not a physical object or an idea, a certain *triton genos*, we start from and then get distracted from delineation of the sensory and the intelligible, counting out the important distinction of material and ideal in this respect. We accept that the essence

¹ Sigwart, Christoph. *Logik. Zweiter Band. Die Methodenlehre*. Tübingen, 1878. Verlag der H. Laupp’schen Buchhandlung. *Einleitung*. § 61. S. 6. Library of the University of Toronto.

² Michael Smith. *Meta-ethics* // *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 9; first published in 2005.

of material things is material ($\approx bora$), the essence of ideal things is ideal ($\approx rhizome$), but in any case it is something supersensible, as supersensual are being “in itself”, matter “in itself” and person “in itself”, because all these are abstractions from *singularia*.

Not to adopt the fundamental principle of gnoseology because it is too strong an assumption, for in single *Universum*, the ideal is not opposed to the material, both being equally there, is, of course, feasible. But the very existence of the *onto-logy* implies explicitly the distinction of being and knowledge about it, that is, the very dramatic, world duality, the separate existence of object and subject. At the same time, I believe, we can consider them as if they were communicating vessels-- “more objectivity = more (*and not less!*) subjectivity”. On a less strong assumption all classical physics is based, to deny the probative value and benefit of which no one would be so foolish. And yet, in physics, nothing is left of *body* but the abstractions of mass and velocity.

From our point of view, the main assumption of the classical gnoseology is not that the subject and object are recognized *as existing* and *form the opposition*, but the fact that the *subject* is regularly considered to be *consciousness*, or reason, and not the knower, the human being, although the latter role of an active *agent* is time and again declared.

However, if we prevent the aforementioned assumption of use, if we do not distract from the fact that it is not consciousness, or the mind, or the brain, which is thinking, but the *human person*, then a gnoseologist will continually have to look back to physics since the person has a physical body, and as such is in resonance with absolutely everything, to human and animal physiology, namely the physiology of the brain, primarily, e.g., the role of serotonin or reticular formation, and therefore to chemistry, e.g., the role of a set of enzymes that allows converting one molecule of glucose to two pyruvate molecules which are basic organic reactions that support life, to psychology due to instincts and motives, and to sociology dealing with social organization and activities, and so on. In such circumstances, gnoseology cannot avoid reproaches in vulgar materialism and “discourse overloaded by extraneous material”.

Another option to return corporeality and “humanity” to the subject is a common contemporary substitution of the classical theory of knowledge by the neoKantian theory of “understanding”.

This book, however, is dedicated to rewriting, or maybe a new transcription, of the theory of knowledge. Of course, the author is aware of the existence of a broad coincidence of knowledge and understanding, truth and meaning, explanation and interpretation. And sure, we cannot but know that there is a serious “dis-incidence”, dissimilation that exists between them.

The aim of this work is to construct an up-to-date, rationalist, materialist, non-Kantian theory of knowledge, with the necessary clarification of the use of classical concepts and calling in the elements contemporary special sciences to renew classics³.

Studies in this classical direction can be perceived only as a reading by a commentator. Indeed, the current state of philosophical thought is such that the greatest success is expected of ethics and aesthetics, of “culturology”, known in the West as the theory of culture or also cultural studies, from philosophical anthropology, theological philosophy, to a certain extent still of logic and methodology of science with this latter being essentially an epistemological discipline, provided that the latter agrees to correct its problematics by typing “socio-cultural settings” and getting rid of charges of “subjectlessness” [“mechanical objectiveness”] or, to sum up, of what today is called the “Lockean paradigm” in Russian philosophy. Against this background, traditional gnoseology looks somewhat archaic with its commitment to “eternal questions” and claim to “system-building”.

Philosophical society at the end of the XXth century was marked by an almost complete lack of research in general gnoseology and the retreat of rationally oriented areas, finding, evidently, that they have lost perspective to date, as opposed to epistemology and philosophy of science, or perhaps simply showed no zest necessary in the age of postmodernism. In the same way logical positivism, called “neopositivism” in Russia, had no interest in the 1970s. It is still possible to characterize the studies in cognition theory of the twentieth century in the West. In Europe, for example, namely in Belgium and Italy, metaphysical studies are conducted in a religious manner, and non-religious philosophizing has a strong bias to the sociological concept of “daily occurrence”. Wittgensteiniana is still rolling along. Post-structuralism in France and Germany ceased to be perceived as the most contemporary paradigm, but instead, after the fall of the “big narratives”, it became strongly politicized as shown by Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Jacques Deleuze, Felix Guattari, S. Kaufman, H. Blumenberg. Now we can speak not only about post-structuralism, but also about the “postfunctionalism” of Louis Jean Calvet and Claude Azhezh. There are also ways and means to develop and improve epistemology

³ I happen to be not the only anti-Kantianist in the world. According to <https://gorky.media/context/tendentsii-2016-spekulyativnyj-realizm/> (Stas Naranovich), 10 years ago a book “*Après la finitude. Essai sur la nécessité de la contingence*” was published opposing Kantianism under the chosen name “speculative materialism”. Its author was Paris philosopher Quentin Meillassoux. A whole group of authors has joined this movement since then, Graham Harman (USA-Cairo, Egypt) and Ray Brassier among them. An umbrella concept “speculative realism” is coined by the latter for this trend.

adopting the so-called “human dimensions”. One of such ways followed by western philosophers in recent time is “virtue” epistemology found in the writings of John Greco, Duncan Pritchard, and Shane Ryan. Probably it would be right to say that there sprang up recently an “epistemological”, paradigmatic gap in philosophy of language, namely the “postgenerativism” of William Labov. There are such eminent authors as Steve Fuller and Baas van der Frassen. It is worth mentioning that in the beginning of the XXIst century, the problem of truth was referred entirely to the field of philosophy of language and not to the theory of knowledge or, at least, epistemology (see *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*, 2013). One of the new trends is the so-called “speculative materialism” as expressed in the writings of Quentin Meillassoux with his “*Après la finitude. Essai sur la nécessité de la contingence*”, Paris, 2006, Graham Harman, “*The Quadruple Object*”, Washington, 2011, Ray Brassier and his book “*Nibil Unbound. Enlightenment and Extinction*”, London, 2007. The last is the author of the more common term “speculative realism”.

In Russia, the major achievements in our field of interest are committed to the logical and methodological, epistemological, scientific-philosophical spheres found in the writings of V.S. Stepin, I.T. Kassavin, V.A. Bazhanov, L.A. Mikeschina, V.I. Przhilensky and others. Some contemporary Russian authors such as A.R. Karimov adopt “virtue” epistemology or have developed different trends like social constructivism, historical epistemology in the manner of I.T. Kassavin, the “existential realism” of A.N. Fatenkov), “post-theoretical philosophy of science” of V.I. Przhilensky, or the “existential Marxism” that evolved in Novosibirsk. But it could be right to affirm that the only new characteristics of *gnoseology* of the end of the XXth – beginning of the XXIst century, after a strong bet on the traditional category of *activity*, is accentuation of the so-called “prerequisite knowledge” and activation and application of semiotic and hermeneutic ideas, the exploitation of which began in Russia only in the 1970s.

It is known that the turn to the prerequisite or “premised” or personal or “tacit” knowledge in *gnoseology* was linked with the revival of, or rather, the birth of interest shown by Soviet philosophy in Kant’s theory of knowledge. For our scholars, such interest is unusual because it had been ruled for a long time by “only the topsy-turvy delivered” Hegelian philosophy. At the same time, Hegel was quite out of date in Western Europe. The twentieth century in European epistemology was marked by almost total domination of neo- and post-neo-Kantian ideas, with both positivism and postmodernism serving as its cultural “backcloth”. To put it very briefly, the thesis of the mismatch of being and knowledge, the Kantian belief, became the basic principle for a variety of scholarly exercises that first

overturned the Aristotelian principle of the unity of being and knowledge and then itself was cancelled by the dialectic of absolute idealism.

Fulfilling Lenin's famous covenant "read Hegel materialistically", Soviet philosophers also maintained the principle of unity of the opposites, at least externally. This was well served by the natural-philosophical premise of materialistic gnoseology, according to which consciousness, or *the ideal*, does not create any special, independent kingdom and does not violate the "*Einheit*" of the world. It does not actually double the universe.

From Democritus and Epicurus, via Locke's "Essay", French enlighteners of Modernity and Feuerbach up to "Anti-Dühring" of Engels and Lenin's "Materialism and Empiriocriticism", the materialistic trend in philosophy was finding its path, and Soviet scholars followed it.

In XXth - beginning of XXIst century in Russian philosophy the classical materialistic theory of knowledge was supplemented by topics of "sociocultural conditioned knowledge" (the pioneering works by L.A. Mikeshina), new doctrines of "social epistemology" and "historical epistemology" that are not reducible to French tradition (found in works by I.T. Kassavin), "social phenomenology" (N.M. Smirnov), borrowings from postpositivism, linguistics and semiotics (Y.M. Lotman, Y.S. Stepanov, A.N. Portnov, V.V. Kim), and cultural discourse (A.V. Losev, A.Y. Gurevich). I.S. Narsky, a prominent scholar and a great expert not only in Western but also in Eastern European philosophy, which is much more difficult since the majority of Russian scientists are unfamiliar with the relevant languages, was the first to bring an axiological dimension to the theory of knowledge.

All these achievements, except direct "replacement and rethinking", are certainly interesting and important. They, in particular, give evidence that the theory of knowledge always has contextually free input and contextually bound output. The task to comprehend cognition cannot be solved on the basis of the object or even on theoretical conclusions of special sciences, since it would then be not cognition theory but the cumulating of samples, although the theory of knowledge always takes these data into account and uses them as the material for further reflection. But the moment the unconditioned cognitive theoretical system is built, through great intellectual efforts, it requires immediate recognition that its cultural and historical contexts are intersubjectively interpreted.

Or it is done by commentators, transformers, "progressors" and subverters.

The following important fact should be noted, however.

In its analysis of the process of cognition, Soviet gnoseology seemed not to go deeper than the famous fragment on dialectic in "*Philosophical*

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