STRATEGIC-EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL-SOCIAL THEORY: AN INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The authors evaluate the search for the foundations of social theories within the framework of two projects, firstly, an ontological turn, and secondly, possible combination of methodological individualism and methodological institutionalism. The criticism of the two mentioned projects is made from the standpoint of the theory of conceptual transduction, headed by the principle of theoretical representation, according to which all scientific positions are presentations of scientific theories. It turns out that, contrary to the supporters of the ontological project, there is no need to isolate ontology from scientific theory, and it is present in the theory as a doctrine of subjects. The most meaningful characteristic of individuals and social groups is contained, again, not in the ontological project, but the theory of conceptual transduction. Individuals represent individual theories, and social groups represent group theories. Consideration of group theories from the standpoint of the individual should be complemented by an analysis of individual theories from the standpoint of groups. Accordingly, mutual complementarity also takes place in the case of a combination of methodological individualism and methodological institutionalism. Thus, the genuine foundations of the social sciences are the principle of theoretical representation and the methodology of conceptual transductions. The developed conception is used to characterize the nature of social psychology and social pedagogy. In the first case, an interdisciplinary connection of a certain scientific theory with sociology and psychology is realized, in the second with sociology and pedagogy.

Keywords: Individual, Group, Methodology, Theoretical Representation, Pedagogy, Ontology.

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of highlighting the foundations of social theories, in particular sociological and economic conceptions, hardly anyone doubts. However, they are rarely considered systematically. In this regard, it is difficult to present them. It is even more difficult to show how the foundations of a theory are presented in its depth. Nevertheless, in recent years, the search for the foundations of social theories has intensified significantly thanks to two projects. These are, first, a renewed focus on ontology (Epstein, 2016; Lauer, 2019); second, performances on behalf of methodological individualism and methodological holism (Heath, 2015; Zahle, 2016). As for our position, it differs in many respects from those previously described. It includes: 1) the principle of theoretical representation, and 2) the methodology of conceptual transduction, in which the concepts of principles, laws, and variables are governed by the methods of deduction, adduction, induction, and abduction. (Kanke, 2014) The article is devoted to the comparison of the mentioned strategic lines of understanding the nature of social theories, mainly based on the material of sociology. In this regard, decisive importance is attached, above all, to the foundations of social knowledge and the transition from them to other concepts of theories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Until the emergence and strengthening of the positions of positivism, critical rationalism, and analytical philosophy, the understanding of the nature of the sciences was extremely superficial. As the philosophy of science developed, the understanding of the nature of sciences became more and more refined. Of course, there were many unexpected conclusions. Perhaps the main one consisted of a fundamentally updated understanding of the status of theory. This circumstance forced, first, to revise significantly the status of scientific theory. Theory is not something lightweight and ghostly. There is nothing more profound than a genuine scientific theory. All scientific positions are representations of scientific theories. This is the content of the principle of theoretical representation. Unfortunately, many philosophers did not dare to revise substantially the status of the theory. They are well aware that facts and other phenomena are theory-laden but at the same time, they do not burden themselves with the conclusion about the primary relevance of the principle of theoretical representation. This, in our opinion, a half-hearted position is fraught with relapses of positivist errors, namely, attempts to find such a beginning of science that would be non-theoretical. Is the ontological turn one such attempt? Lauer (2019) having considered the main positions of the authoritative supporters of the thesis about the special importance of ontology, summarizes them quite reasonably as follows. *"Ontology contributes to the success of science (success in explanation and/or prediction) because answering ontological questions can contribute to empirical success, i.e., successful predictions and/or explanations"*. In science, it is not enough just to declare a thesis; its truth must be proven. Not finding the appropriate evidence from the supporters of the thesis *"Ontology Matters!"* Lauer (2019) offers his own version of clarifying its content. It consists in the fact that different meanings of the existential quantifier known from logic (*"∃"*) are considered. In this regard, a realistic and pragmatic view comes into Lauer's (2019) field of vision. He considers only a pragmatic view to be consistent.

I have suggested that the pragmatic view might characterize the priority differently in terms of the instrumental value of ontological assumptions for social scientific theorizing without a corresponding commitment to realism. Also, I have suggested that we might plausibly interpret ontological choice in the social sciences in pragmatic terms (Lauer, 2019). Alternatively, one

might adopt the view that traditional social ontology may only be incidentally useful (sometimes, perhaps heuristically) to social science, but then it is unclear why one needs principled arguments for its priority and/or contributions to social science rather than case driven arguments that operationalize ontological frameworks for use in research contexts (Lauer, 2019). As you can see, Lauer (2019) is perplexed about attempts to assert the primacy of social ontology in relation to scientific methodology. Ultimately, he concludes, *"social ontology may be prior to social scientific methodology, but perhaps not social ontology as traditionally construed"* (Lauer, 2019). In our opinion, it is highly indicative that Lauer did not find grounds for asserting the independent significance of ontology in relation to scientific methodology. However, the scientific means chosen by him, namely, the variability of the logical quantifier of existence and pragmatic views, do not seem to us sufficiently solid. The fact is that these tools themselves require consistent scientific interpretation. Considering the status of social ontology, one should very accurately determine the scientific foundations of social theories. As already noted, we believe that this is, first, the principle of theoretical representation and the methodology of conceptual transduction. When one turns to social ontology, then, attention is directed not to objects, but to subjects, for example, individuals and groups that figure in theory by means of principles, laws, and variables. Insofar as subjects are present in the theory, so far as it contains ontology. There is no need to look for it outside of theory. The most advanced theories testify to what really exists. It immediately becomes clear that social ontology is a representation of a theory through subjects. By the way, a methodology is also a representation of theory, but not through subjects, but methods. All representations of the theory express the same content. In this context, there are no major and minor views. Proponents of the ontological approach argue that ontology facilitates the implementation of explanations and predictions. In fact, it is an equal participant in all theoretical events: both predictions, and the production of facts, and their processing, and the renewal of principles and laws, and the formation of the most developed theories. Proponents of the ontological turn in the social sciences are generally experienced, researchers. Why, despite the erroneousness of the thesis about the priority of ontology, do they give it fundamental importance? It is difficult to give an unambiguous answer to this question. However, there is no reason to exclude it from the discussion. Let us turn in connection with the question posed to the position of Searle (2010). He is known as almost the main enthusiast of the ontological turn in the social sciences (Searle, 2010). However, his position is not as categorical as it is usually presented. When Searle (2010) was asked to express the relationship between ontology and epistemology in relation to law, he expressed his position as follows. I am sure you are aware this constitutes a very complex set of issues. But, to put it very crudely, any ontology only works if you had a set of procedures for deciding how to apply the ontology. That means you have got to have an epistemology to enable the ontology to work. You have got to have some way of deciding *"is this law constitutional?"* or *"is this agreement a contract?"* The epistemology in necessary to verify the validity and the legitimacy of ontology. I think there is not enough debate on the relationship ontology-epistemology in legal scholarship and, according to me, this is a field definitely worth exploring. Legal scholarship should focus more on the dynamic that links ontology and epistemology in law (Condello & Searle, 2017). Searle (2010) notes the need for careful consideration of the relationship between ontology and epistemology. He does not intend to oppose them to each other, or to exaggerate the significance of ontology. Why this ratio is not properly considered both by him and by other researchers? Let us suggest that the main difficulty faced by researchers is an insufficiently clear understanding of the foundations of the social sciences. In many works, they are not even named. In our opinion, this

is primarily the principle of theoretical representation and the methodology of conceptual transduction. In studies devoted to the ontological turn, no significant alternative is seen to them. Epstein (2016) seeks not only to substantiate the need for an ontological turn in sociology, but also to show its relevance in relation to the characterization of the nature of social groups, which, as you know, is not an easy matter. Epstein's (2016) desire to go beyond unsubstantiated declarative reasoning, but to use fundamental ideas to solve complex problems, is certainly commendable. Epstein (2016) unfolds his line of reasoning as follows. The question of the possibility and necessity of distinguishing between causal and ontological explanations is considered. It is noted that they accompany each other. Nevertheless, something else is more essential, their nature is fundamentally different. With this in mind, the possibility and necessity of purely ontological explanations are proclaimed. However, how to implement them? All familiar scientific explanations are often built based on methodological individualism. For Epstein (2016), individualism is unacceptable. Epstein (2016) sees a way out of the problem situation in the metaphysics of two projects.

Anchoring and grounding: these are the two fundamental aspects to the building of the social world. Correspondingly, social ontology consists of two distinct projects. The grounding project is the inquiry into the conditions for social facts to obtain. What facts in the world are metaphysically sufficient reasons—that is, grounds—for social facts of some kind? The anchoring project is the inquiry into what puts those conditions in place. What sets up the grounding conditions for social facts, to be what they are? (Epstein, 2016). Guided by grounding and anchoring projects, Epstein (2017) discusses the nature of social groups. In this regard, four of their profiles are considered, additional in relation to each other. The construction profile *"characterizes how groups of as given kind are built out of their members"* (Epstein, 2017). The extra essentials profile *"characterizes other essential properties of groups of as given kind, in addition to their construction features"*. The anchor profile *"gives the facts that answer the question, why does a group of as given kind have the properties it does?"* The accident profile *"gives salient accidental properties of groups of as given kind, which can be equally or more important to understanding what groups are, and to classifying them or developing typologies"*. In our opinion, Epstein's (2017) conception has significant drawbacks. The main one is that he does not essentially consider the nature of social theory, in particular, its principles, laws and variables, methods, and stages. The content of a scientific theory is emasculated to the limit and is reduced to short mentions of scientific and causal explanations. Otherwise, it would be possible to establish that scientific theory provides comprehensive information about subjects, i.e., about ontology. Considering the nature of social groups, Epstein (2017) never ceases to refer to facts, in particular, essential and insignificant, necessary and accidental. Facts flooded everything, behind them there are no laws, no principles, and no methods of deduction, adduction, induction, and abduction. Essentially, Epstein (2017) abandons the philosophy of science, replacing it with a metaphysical story. In our opinion, he, like many other authors, does not take into account that the social sciences have reached refined stages of development. The selection of their conceptual meanings has become a difficult task, which implies an indispensable appeal to the philosophy of science. Epstein, as the reviewers of his book rightly point out, does not show how his grounding project contributes to the further development of the already existing sociology, the models implemented in it (Iorio & Herfeld, 2018). How should we view the nature of social groups as well as individuals? Is it enough, for example, to assert that a social group consists of individuals who interact with one another, share similar characteristics, and collectively have a sense of unity? Is it enough to consider the interaction of

its members, their mutual dependence, common goals, unity and belonging to the same structure as the characteristic features of a group? Our answer to the last two questions is negative. The point is that they are formulated in a form that is indifferent to the nature of social theories. Their connection with the foundations of the social sciences, namely, with the principle of theoretical representation and cycles of conceptual transduction, is not clearly visible. As result the concepts used, in particular, goals and unity do not have the necessary clarity. In accordance with the content of the principle of theoretical representation, when characterizing the nature of subjects, one should first pay attention to theories. Each individual implements some theories. What the theories of the individual are, such he is himself. With varying degrees of awareness, the individual implements cycles of conceptual transduction. There are no individuals, who would not expect their future in accordance with the principles of their theory, who would not commit acts and, after evaluating them, would not revise their principles. Of course, each individual implements many theories. He acts as the unity and diversity of the theories he personifies. Of course, individuals interact with each other. This interaction results in their mutual agreement as well as disagreement with each other. The intersections of theories form the points of agreement of the subjects with each other. The points of intersection of individual theories form a group theory. Just as individuals are subjects of individual theories, groups are subjects of group theories. A group is a collection of people who represent the same group theory. Examples of group theories are the constitutions of states and the moral codes of various organizations. Once established, group theories become a force in their own right. Individuals have to reckon with this circumstance, improving individual theories. A somewhat unexpected circumstance is revealed. In their quest for completeness of knowledge, researchers have to periodically change the direction of analysis, moving in turn, a) from individual theories to group conceptions and b) from group conceptions to individual theories. We are talking about peculiar cycles of conceptual transduction. In these cycles, there is neither primary nor secondary. When considering the ratio of individuals and groups, some authors consider individuals as the determining factor (Bratman 2014; Kirk, 2015), while others, on the contrary, and give a clear preference for groups (Bacharach, 2006; Tuomela, 2013). In our opinion, these two approaches should not be opposed to each other. They are part of the same whole. The foregoing allows us to assess the often-discussed opposition of methodological individualism and methodological holism. These two concepts are given numerous, largely contradictory definitions (Heath, 2015; Zahle, 2016). We will limit ourselves to considering the relationship between methodological individualism and methodological institutionalism. In this case, it is taken into account that in the social sciences, on behalf of methodological holism, it is usually methodological institutionalism that is considered. According to Schumpeter's (1954) position, social individualism is that *"all social phenomena resolve themselves into decisions and actions of individuals that need not or cannot be further analyzed in terms of super-individual factors"* (Schumpeter, 1954). Social institutionalism is that all social phenomena are formed solely due not to an individual, but super-individual factors. Institutions are organizations that shape, stabilize, and direct the social behavior and actions of individuals, groups, and communities through super-individual factors, in particular, rules of behavior. According to our observations, the greatest difficulties are caused by the definition of the subject of institutional theories. It is obvious that the subjects of individual theories are individuals. However, who is the subject of group, in particular, institutional theories? If again individuals, then there seems to be a contradiction, the subjects of fundamentally different theories do not differ from each other. This impression is misleading. In the case of individual theories, the subjects of each of them are one or another individual person.

In the case of institutional theories, their subjects are the aggregates of individuals, i.e., communities, not individual members. It turns out that the cognitive abilities of the same people are such that they are able to represent different types of theories. If these abilities did not extend to institutional theories, it would indeed be impossible to define the subjects of these theories. However, the actual situation is fundamentally different. Another controversial issue concerns the relationship between individual and institutional theories. Institutional theory can be imposed on individuals as some kind of external force, for example, on behalf of the state or other authority. In this case, the interaction of individual and institutional theories results in a chain of collisions and shocks. A fundamentally different situation takes place if the institutional theory appears because of the intersection of individual theories. In this case, the progress of knowledge is achieved in a natural way, without the shocks mentioned above. In fairness, it should be noted that the authors of institutional theories, as a rule, do not trace the organic connection of these theories with a certain array of individual theories. In this case, institutional theories are considered a product of intellectual insight. Thus, methodological individualism and methodological institutionalism are two scientific methods. Kirdina (2015) has shown quite convincingly that methodological individualism and institutionalism complement each other (Kirdina, 2015). Paying special attention to this fact, she at the same time makes the following reservation. However, there are, as yet, no satisfactory and internally not-contradictory *"synthetic"* methodological schemes, on the basis of which it would be possible *"to develop useful social theory for researchers working"*. Rather we could assume a long period of coexistence of the considered principles as complementary, allowing the growth of knowledge within the different systems, which are not reducible to each other (Kirdina, 2015). Our position differs in many respects from that of Kirdina (2015). First, we consider methodological individualism and constitutionalism as not principles but methods. Second, we believe that the potential of these methods is realized through conceptual cycles, each of which contains two stages, the transition from methodological individualism to institutionalism and from it to individualism. Third, we do not believe that the two methods under consideration are of primary theoretical importance. This meaning is inherent in the principle of theoretical representation and the methodology of conceptual transductions. The methods of methodological individualism and institutionalism are in the depths of scientific knowledge. Fourthly, unlike (Kirdina, 2015), we believe that consistent methodological systems exist, being nothing more than conceptual transduction methodologies. Fifth, in the social sciences, methodological individualism and institutionalism are relevant to all scientific research, not just interdisciplinary research. The foundations of the social sciences discussed above allow a deeper understanding of the nature of their various interdisciplinary relations. In this respect, the situation with social psychology and social pedagogy is very indicative. Psychology deals with the characteristics of the group and individual theories. It is far from always taken into account that any scientific theory, be it, for example, a medical, economic, or political conception, has not only a logical, mathematical, philosophical, and linguistic but also a psychological dimension. The content of a scientific theory becomes impoverished if its psychological relativity is not taken into account, the fact that it is realized in the group and individual theories with their characteristic features. It is essential that in this case group and individual theories should be considered intertwined with each other. Social psychology should not be equated with the psychology of social groups of people. The adjective *"social"* refers to sociology. The term *"social psychology"* means that some conceptions, for example, a technical or economic are regarded in the context of their interdisciplinary connections, firstly, with sociology, and secondly, with psychology. Social

psychology is always related to some basic theory, for example, economic or pedagogical. A decisive feature of social psychology is that it realizes a double interdisciplinary connection. This circumstance is not always taken into account. In this case, social psychology is reduced to the psychology of social groups. Let us now turn to the status of social pedagogy. Any scientific theory has not only psychological but pedagogical relativity. This means that it must function in a form adapted to the level of education of people. The adjective *"social"* again refers to sociology. In light of the above, it is obvious that the term *"social pedagogy"* means that a certain conception, for example economic, is in interdisciplinary connections first with sociology, and secondly, with pedagogy. Thus, in the case of social psychology and social pedagogy, not single, but double interdisciplinary connections are realized.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological focus of the article is determined by our understanding of the main methodological achievements of the philosophy of the social sciences. They are contained in the methodology of conceptual transduction, according to which the mechanisms for realizing the potential of theories act as cycles of transition from one concept to another. Each cycle of conceptual transduction contains a prediction, the production of facts, the development on their basis of the concepts of laws and principles, as well as cause-and-effect relationships, and, finally, the renewal of the original principles. These four stages are realized in accordance with four methods, namely, the methods of deduction, adduction, induction, and abduction (Kanke, 2014). The innovations proposed by other authors we evaluate necessarily from the standpoint of the methodology of conceptual transduction. We, ready to adjust our views, firstly strive to reveal the superiority of the proposed innovations concerning conceptual transduction. Secondly, if this superiority is not found, then efforts are made to improve the innovations themselves. The theory is approved which is superior to its rivals, i.e., allows you to overcome their disadvantages. As a rule, this overcoming acts as a replacement for unjustified metaphysical assumptions with scientifically sound propositions. Thus, we attach decisive importance to the development of the potential of the philosophy of the social sciences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In modern social sciences, it is quite right that primary attention is paid to their foundations, i.e., some principles and methods that determine the content of theories. Determining these principles and methods is a difficult matter, so it should come as no surprise that it is often accompanied by insufficiently thought-out innovations. One of them is the ontological turn. Upon closer inspection, it turns out that it does not have a clear innovative content (Lauer, 2019). Lauer (2019) limited himself to this statement. Ourarticle shows that the principle of theoretical representation together with the methodology of conceptual transduction is a worthy alternative to the ontological turn. The ontology of social theory is nothing more than the subjective representation of a scientific theory. Epstein (2017) is developing an interesting project of the ontological approach. In accordance with it, he considers the nature of social groups. If he received significant new results, they would testify in favor of the solidity of the ontological approach. Unfortunately, his efforts did not lead to a significant update of the social sciences. Again, now in relation to the definition of the nature of social groups, we demonstrate the innovative potential of the principle of theoretical representation and the methodology of conceptual transduction. We show that in defining the nature of social groups, the theories of

individuals and communities should be at the forefront. Attempts to define this nature by means of non-theoretical arguments are unsuccessful. Methodological individualism and methodological institutionalism are also contenders for the status of foundations of social theories. Defining them in this very capacity also meets with insurmountable difficulties. Once again, we showed that the problem situation under consideration is clarified if we consider it from the standpoint of the principle of theoretical presentation and the methodology of conceptual transduction. In this regard, it turns out that the combination of methodological individualism and institutionalism forms nothing more than a cycle of conceptual transduction. Thus, in the search for the foundations of social theories, decisive priority should be given to the principle of theoretical representation and the methodology of conceptual transduction. Neither ontological turn, nor methodological individualism, nor methodological institutionalism is worthy alternatives. Of course, our results do not close the question of the foundations of the social sciences. Rather, they should be regarded as a reason for further investigation of these grounds. We have demonstrated how this can be done using the example of clarifying the nature of social psychology and social pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

The determination and further development of the foundations of social theories is associated with overcoming significant difficulties. Many authors, apparently fearing these difficulties, tend to avoid discussing their nature. They clearly misunderstand that in their modern form the social sciences certainly need a clear generalization of their achievements in the philosophy of the social sciences. Otherwise, the research does not reach scientific heights. Foundations of sciences are effective only when their cross-cutting action can be seen everywhere in the depths of theories, and their potential is sufficient for a critical discussion of the alternatives proposed in relation to them. The legality of certain grounds must be proven, and not taken on faith. We hope that from this point of view, the foundations of social theories we propose, namely, the principle of theoretical representation and the methodology of conceptual transduction, will attract the attention of readers.

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