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Ideological Illusions and Their Cognitive Sources

Dumitru Bortun^{a,*}^a*Ph.D. Associate Professor National School of Political and Administrative Sciences SNSPA – Bucharest*

Abstract

In my paper I am dealing with an area less approached in the philosophy of culture: the crepuscular area where cognitive mechanisms intertwine with symbolic mechanisms, and in which knowledge and semiosis are intermingled. As I believe, the differences emphasized by the cultural studies focus only on the values and symbols, on the behavioral models and rituals; but what I intend to emphasize is that the real cultural differences target first and foremost the perception of the world and the meaning of life.

In this paper I shall deal with five sources of cultural and ideological illusions – the technique of issue rising; the cultural paradigm; the ideological referential; the form of life; the life horizon. In my view, these very sources of illusion generate pictures of the world based on which individuals, professional groups and social classes, peoples and civilizations render the world and human life meaningful. When we talk of cognitive devices by means of which billions of men and women give a meaning to their own life, the distinctions between illusion and reality seems to become irrelevant...

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1. Introduction

The connection between the inter-individual and intercultural communication becomes obvious if we understand culture as Chombart de Lauwe defines it: “a series of models, of guiding images, and of representations which the members of a society refer to in their actions, their work, and their social relations.” (Chombart de Lauwe, 1970, pp. 14-21). From this standpoint, any individual appears as a carrier of a culture (subcultures, sub-subcultures, and so on) and the inter-individual communication – as an intercultural one. Therefore, the enhancement of the barriers

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +4-021-318-0881; fax: +4-021-311-7148; mobile: +4-0727-351-043
E-mail address: dumitru.bortun@comunicare.ro

encountered in the intercultural communication called in question the possibility of communication *in general*, the authenticity of *any* communication.

These barriers focus on any act of communication, including the professional one: both the professional international communication (where the differences between *national* cultures come to the fore) and the *inter-professional* communication – between architects and engineers, between managers and accountants or between journalists and public relations experts (where the differences between the *professional* cultures and subcultures step into the picture). Moreover, the researches performed by Geert Hofstede led to the unprecedented valorization of the *organizational* cultures and of the report between them and national cultures (Hofstede, 1996).

The theme of the differences between illusion and reality, between opinion and knowledge, between experience and knowledge crossed the entire history of European philosophy. In fact, gnoseology stems from Plato's cave, that is, the moment in which a philosopher has systematically dealt for the first time with the difference between truth and error. However, cultural barriers are not only communicational obstacles but also 'epistemological obstacles' in the meaning rendered by Gaston Bachelard (Bachelard, 1934, pp. 39-183), which cumbers the epistemic subject's access to an objective reality being *out there* and unaffected by his/her cognitive approaches¹. The ones who first seized the impact of cultural studies on epistemology, Kuhn and Feyerabend, wondered whether we could still talk with rational legitimacy of a primary and fundamental reality which is not a construction of the epistemic subject. Raymond Boudon pins these parents of constructivist epistemology against the wall and calls them – pejoratively, of course – 'anthropologists of science', disqualifying them as epistemologists. They are liable for the abolition of the 'objective reality', as it has been thought by modern philosophy: 'the notion according to which there is a reality *out there* is a mere illusion: 'the facts are what the scholars consider to be facts' (Boudon, Bouvier, and Chazel, 1997).

Here I am dealing exactly with this area where cognitive mechanisms intertwine with symbolic mechanisms.

2. Techniques of issue rising

In her book *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942), Susanne K. Langer reaches the conclusion that each and every symbolic system is connected to a certain mental structure through which individuals understand the world. If things were like that, it would mean that we may talk of an eternal and inevitable *paranoia of human communities*. That we may talk of intercultural communication as of an *exchange of illusions*. Finally, that man's world is a realm of moving sands in which there is no oasis of certainty and in which any effort to save yourself from drowning sinks you even deeper. In other words, the efforts of reaching the truth fail in its relativization; the Romanian poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga (1895-1961) would put it: "and what's not comprehended / becomes even more incomprehensible" – see poem "I do not crush the world's corolla of wonders", in the volume *Poems of the Light*, 1919 (Blaga, 1972). In comparison to such an image, Quine's metaphor in *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* (Quine, 1974), who saw knowledge as a ship that cannot be anchored in any harbor for "capital repairs" and if we want to rebuild it, we must do it while staying afloat in it, offers us a comfortable landscape in which we are still able to float and to advance.

From Langer's perspective, an epoch is characterized through a certain way of rising issues – more precisely through a certain "technique" people use in order to formulate questions regarding the world they live in. And this "technique" *limits* and *decides* the ways in which answers are supplied – in other words, it pre-determines the production way of the enunciations, namely, of ideas, ideologies, and conceptions concerning the world. The enunciations are always rising awareness; the questions to which they answer – very rarely; and the issues formulation "technique" – almost never raise awareness (at least not by the average man).

Oral communication is performed on the field of enunciation, and the communication accidents are often settled (or at least people try to settle them) at this level. Ordinary interlocutors very rarely end up tackling the nature of the

¹ Research in cognitive psychology and sociology of knowledge, in linguistics, anthropology or semiotics have called into question a long time ago the existence of some "stable and independent data" in relation to interpretation (see, for instance Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956; Chazel, 1987; Deconchy, 1989; Boudon, 1992; Boudon, 1997). But in this paper we are not dealing with the *interpretation* of such already perceived reality, but with the *perception* of reality itself.

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