UDC 34

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ON THE NATURE OF 'TRUTH' – OR THE PROBLEMS OF THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

> 'Hindu philosophy aims for the liberation of men; the Greek – except for Pürrhon, Epicuros some other thinkers that can not be categorized – is disappointing: it does not Want anything else but … *the truth.*' (E. M. Cioran)

1. Proem

Since Socrates and later, on Descartes[1] philosophy (solely enough to refer to Cartesius's 'Cogito ergo sum'), the epistemological attitude of Western philosophy or the 'spirit of rationalism' combines cognition with the act of occupation, undeniably representing a measure of arrogant character. However, the approach that rejects that the categories of cognition and interpretation are the basis and fundamental framework of occupancy, namely, the occupancy of the world by mankind[2] is even less viable. In a simpler reading we may explain, that the method and opportunity of the acquisition of our knowledge, or our

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[1] René Descartes, Renatus Cartesius by his Latin name (La Haye (today Descartes), Touraine, France, 16.03.1596. – Stockholm, Sweden, 01.02.1650), French philosopher, naturalist and mathematician. He was the leader of the anthropologist turning point of modern philosophy, and also, he was one of the founders of analytical geometry.

[2] Compare to Sándor Nagy, Schopenhauer, a clear-viewer pessimist, in: Schopenhauer, Arthur: The word as will and representation. Osiris Publishing, Budapest, 2007

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conclusions based upon the realized cognizance, and the history of our comprehensive approaches to understand the phenomenon of the world are our history and the history of the human spirit at the same time. The method or intention[3] that makes the relation of man as a rational entity and the phenomenal world narrative and receptible also generates a perspective and outlines the frames of reflections.

So, how should we relate to our and the world's metaphysical network system, how and what measures may assist us in exploring the methods and 'profits' of exploiting knowledge?

2. Approaches

In the words of Ágnes Heller[4], 'the 'advancement' of philosophy lays in the activity itself', and this recognition might be a compass or benchmark in our later analysis. Apart from a few exceptions, philosophy or by a less appealing term 'credo' has never made anyone rich, thus, it is brighter than daylight, such activity is traditionally 'nothing but rewarding'. What's the use, what sense does it make then? At a certain point of her research, Heller refers to the statistics of György Klein, professor of genetics, according to whom, taking the entire mankind as the representative basis of his research, only one out of two-hundred and fifty thousand coituses result in one successful conception of a child. It begs the question, at least an argumental analogy: if so, what is the use of the rest? Obviously, the simile is too far-fetched, as 'we may live without the pleasure of thinking as the majority of people actually do so, but, to quote our forefathers, 'such life is not a good one'.[5] 'The aim of philosophical analysis is to get an insight into the issues of knowledge, truth, reason, reality, meaning, mind and

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[3] Intention – will, aim, motive (Latin)
[4] Heller, 2016
[5] See the same source

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values.'[6] Although special perspective choices of literature and arts aim to narrate these issues, they seem to have failed to provide any complex or and direct explanations, however, it is beyond doubt that the truth experience gained through aesthetic acquaintance is not otherwise accessible[7] for people (Gadamer). There is only one exceptional science, namely *"philosophos"*[8], as in, philosophy, practiced by 'wisdom lovers'', pursuing direct exploration of these issues, says Grayling[9]. The so called truth theories of philosophy are the results of surveys objecting to explore what we may call true, on what subject and under what circumstances. The issue, the meaning and criteria of the truth are not the only one of the philosophy's problems, but it is literally the fundamental dilemma of philosophy, as in philosophy, according to its own self-definition, is willing to be the true knowledge (epistemé), querying its own possibilities and fundaments when exploring the truth. Probably, the prior and most important aspect of approaching the issue of the truth is defining what we deem to be true and to what phenomenon we use the phrase 'true' as an adjective.

The other swear-word often used as an objection against philosophy, besides its 'uselessness' is its 'abstract' character. Let's give credit to critics, what is 'abstract' afterall? What is it that philosophy seems to disregard? – asks Heller. The (false) commonplace clichés and their endless iterations for sure, and so far, critics might be well founded. Philosophy explains the world at least as much as it creates something new, adding perpetual opportunity of changing perspectives to problem-focused thinking. It is a frame and method at the same time, a flexible background for both to the acquisition of any and all kind of

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[6] Grayling, 1997

[7] 'Understanding the texts of such great thinkers we may recognize the truth otherwise beyond our reach, we mustb also admit, that it might contradict to the standards of research and progress, the scales of science. The experience of arts is similar, … we experience truth through art that we could not otherwise pursue – this construes the philosophical significance of art, that finds its way to set off against all reason. So, beyond the experiences of philosophy the experience of arts expressly warrants scientific consciousness to acknowledge its boundaries.' in: Gadamer, 2003

[8] Greek adjective: 'wisdom-lover', noun: 'friend of wit'; (philo – friend, sophos – wise, wisdom, wit)

[9] See the same source

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knowledge and to the critics of such knowledge, on the other hand as well. The belief in the truth-comprehensive abilities of the human mind is based in our almost intuitive conviction, that the human brain, or more properly, we might say consciousness, is functionally predestined to receive and recognize the truth about things, actually, 'this is what it has been created for'. This confidence is wavering, first, due to the scepsis arising alongside with thinking, when we are confronted with the fact that ideas so obvious and clear to some are obscure to other individuals. Thus, the recognition of the so-called truth is rather dubious. We should understand, that the problems related to the origins of cognition can be accounted for its dual nature. Such duplicacy is the only imaginable characteristic of the system's operation. Namely, someone who recognizes something, and something that is recognised by the individual during the process of cognition. The essential frame of the reflection is the cognitive process, whereas the subjective and the object are jointly present. To put it simply, the cognitive subjective reaches out to the subject of cognition during the cognitive action, as it were lifting it to his consciousness, while the object leaves its own surroundings and overreaches to the dimension of consciousness. We might refer to this duplex 'movement' as the transcendental character of cognition, as its inherent part thereto. To sum it all, the starting point of the two-thousand and five-hundred year old so-called Western philosophy is also the recognition of both the birth of metaphysics and the operation of the consciousness. In the course of the cognitive process, the cognitive individual adopts the subject of the action into his consciousness, and creates an image of it. This content-awareness is knowledge itself, existing in accordance with the consciousness of the individual, as his inseparable part thereto.

This calls for the theory known as the *Verweyen-concept* on the operation of the cognitive mind: - undoubtedly quite difficult to explain - *Hansjürgen*

Verweyen[10] approaches the definition of the final intellect on the grounds of the fundamental structure of the cognitive brain. Such fundamental structure derives from the fact that the mind is unavoidably fitted into the structure of the subjectum - objectum duo. Perception is always the understanding of something by an individual, inseparably bounded to the parallel insight knowledge of the person of the cognizance. Second of all, the apprehensive individual's pursue solely focuses on the unity during the process of perception. Even if we sense perfect confusion, we shall perceive and identify it as it were some form of unity. We define it as chaos, as the unified definition of confusion. Reason can not possibly function otherwise than through the category of integrity. Similarly, it is also inevitable, that the individual shall confront himself with the prevailing subject of the cognitive process, thus creating duplexity.'[11]

This is the essential position of the epistemology criticism, and if we can accept Socrates's standpoint[12], that can also be considered as the knowledge-criticism origo of the two-thousand and five-hundred years old tradition of the European philosophy, we seem to have good odds to prepare for further explorations; first of all, to the past…

3. The Epistemological Problem[13] or What We May Know About Knowledge

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[10] Hansjürgen Werveyen, (1936 -) German philosopher, professor of theology, his work mainly effects the areas of fundamentology and Fichte's cognition theories. Guest professor to many universities like Essen, Indiana, Freiburg, etc.

[11] Müller, 2005

[12] Namely, we only know, that we do not know anything … writes Warburton: 'Experiences related to Socrates might have been rather awkward: the ancient thinker liked to push against to boundaries of his friend's cognition, and he was likely to doubt those assumptions they based their lives upon. He considered every conversation that ended in his partner's recognition of how little did he know as a success – a much better result than if someone would think that he'd understood something, when it did not actually happen.', in: Warburton, 2014

[13] Epistemology – 'Epistemé, (Greek = knowledge): knowledge differentiated from the sensual and experimental cognition in Aristotle's logic…', in: Rathmann, 1996

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We use the term epistemology abstracted from Greek terms (episteme = 'knowledge, idea' + 'logos' = 'theory, doctrine', actually a neologism) to define the science searching and exploring the schemes, conditions and boundaries of cognition. According to our best knowledge, it was Aristotle, who first used the term in his logic, to define general, theoretical knowledge making a distinction between sensational and experimental (empirical) cognizance that can be acquired by the rational through empirical learnings, that is consequently universal, accessible for all cognitive consciousness as part of the inherently necessary knowledge. Aristotle used different terms for knowledge or cognition, later referred by other Greek philosophers only partially, moreover, with quite different attributions.[14] He used the expression *techné* to describe the practice and method-oriented knowledge that defines the ability to create and to bring something to existence, and he described 'shrewdness', the cleverness based on the recognition determining our practical decisions that is always of experimental nature with the word *pronesis* (Nicomachean Ethics).

We also use the expression of *gnoseology* (gnosis = knowledge + theory) describe epistemology. '*Gnoseology* is the science area describing, exploring and analysing the laws of human cognition in philosophy. The central category of gnoseology is the cognitive subjectum, and its objective surroundings subject to cognition, in other words, the objective reality. Its essential question: can the world be known? Every reputable philosophic theories must answer this question.'[15]

Cognition theory (epistemology) aims to define one of the most important, if not the most significant analytical areas of philosophy, exploring the methods

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[14] For example, in Platon thinking, the words of epistémé (knowledge), phronesis (smartness) and Sophia (wisdom) were practically used with the same content, as fundaments of good decisions, the basis of good life, that may lead us to eudaimonia, in other words to happiness, whereas knowledge drives the motives of the spirit. Therefore, virtue (areté) is knowledge itself.

[15] Rathmann, 1996

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of cognitions, thus, basically it deals with the fundaments of sciences. It aims to identify knowledge and define the safest ways of its acquisition. Both the subjective factors (the cognitive individual) and the objective aspects (the object of cognition - the reality, the outside world and its events independent from the consciousness of the individual) are part of the theme. Its prior question seeks for the answer how can we obtain a fundament to which all our knowledge and apprehension can built upon. It there any solid fundament of the human world and of the knowledge describing itself that is doubtless and certain, thus, in other words, are there any cognitive evidences? We may call this the dilemma of the epistemological fundament. The simplest possible question: what can know *for sure*?

Generally, we may divide the positive answers to this question to two groups. The first one can characterised by the statement according to which certain experiences and cognitions do exist, and they are the fundaments of all our other knowledge, thus basically, of our entire system of knowledge. We may see this as a contentual – structural or hierarchical approach, stating that some of these learnings are scaled as fundamental knowledge due to their content, and serve as a structural fundament of our entire system of knowledge. The answers of the other group have a common character that they give fundamental attributions to some cognitions on a functional, and not a contentual basis. The issue whether we consider such learnings fundamental cognitions or not depends solely on their rule in the cognitive process. We might refer these context-based functional responses, or 'notes' that stand at the ending points of the verification process (M. Schlick).

According to a definition created in France, at the end of the sixties of the last century two-thousand and three hundred years past Aristotle's logic, the idea of the episteme can be principally described as a *composition scheme*, upon which the everyday, general and scientifically processed specific knowledge of a

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given era is arranged in a structurally recognisable pattern (Foucault). Accordingly, we may first recognise the 'knowledge-narrative' nature of episteme, and its scope of range linked to and predestined by historical eras, establishing some kind of collective cognitive embeddedness or determination. It is all about exploring and defining the relation of knowledge and order, notwithstanding to the recognition that the units and the composition structure define the interconnection possibilities between the individual and the object of the cognition. In other words, reflexion, as the essential fundament of the cognition process can not be functionally departed from the framework system of the microstructure of scientific theories. Different forms of knowledge and the theory structures of sciences shape the archaeology of Foucault's episteme, more simply put, they form the system in which sciences can have their effects upon several different organizing principles. According to this archaeological or architectural approach Foucault's *episteme*, this *a priori*[16] existing world phenomenon embedded in historical perspective is suitable to function as a scientific and socio-cultural reference-frame representing the problems, questions and happenings of the given historical era, as a general epistemological disposition. Actually, it is the episteme that allows the articulation of the scientific and social questions within a certain narrative environment or within a given culture, if you like. In the course of the archaeological analysis of the epistemé, sciences always reveal the 'epistemological configuration'[17] by which they were created, says Foucault. 'Practically, archaeology has two major tasks related to them [i.e. knowledge]: first, to define the method of configuration within the episteme where they are routed; it must also be explored how radically their configuration is different

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[16] a priori (Latin = former, literally, from the former) knowledge or justification that is independent from, nor it is confuted, neither is proved by experience; Kant describes the definitions arising solely from reason and rationality as a priori. in: Rathmann, 1996
[17] Foucault (2000)

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from the severely known sciences. Such configuration attributed to them should not be seen as a negative phenomenon, it is no hindrance or inside incapacity that closes the gates of scientific shape in front of us. In Together with their unique shapes they form a different configuration of knowledge besides sciences, moreover, on the same archaeological grounds.'[18]

4. What is the truth? (What makes justified beliefs justified?)

Philosophers are interested in two question structures related to the so-called *truth*. The first one is the meaning of the term 'truth', while the second one is the condition structure of this term, thus, the definition of criteria for which a statement can be deemed as 'true'. In other words, the specification of the parameters upon which the true and/or false nature of a statement can unequivocally be determined. It is a common-sense phenomenon of philosophy that most thinkers did not differentiate between the two questions. Answering one of them made them believe that they have found the other half of the truth as well. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to merge them into one another. The semantic conditions of the truth does not necessarily (or at least not evidently or implicitly) coincide with the system of criteria, upon which a statement is proved to be true or false. Truth as a semantic unity, as the meaning of the word does not entirely cover the idea that we identify as truth, however, the system of conditions or frames necessary for the emergence of truth can not entirely be identified with it either. The answer given to one of the questions does not answer the other problem, even if – as introduced later on – most philosophers did not differentiate between the answers. This is how the meaning of the truth (or at least, the attribution) has seemingly wrapped on the position of criteria, upon which the given term can be decided to be true or false. However, there

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[18] See at the same place

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were others who consciously differentiated between the two issues. Amongst them, F. C. S. Schiller thought that the evaluating term of 'truth' means something like 'good, if we thinks so', nevertheless, with the most commendable pragmatism, he suggested to focus on the usefulness of all criteria of the truth. So the truth, as a semantic term is consistent with the statement of 'it is good if we think this way', however, on must first examine the (criteria of) usefulness of a statement to decide whether it is true or not.

The two best known theories of epistemology are the correspondence theory of truth and the coherence theory of the truth. Understanding either of them is quite a challenge, however, we should attempt to introduce them. Within the narrowest interpretation frame the correspondence of truth claim that true beliefs and true statements correspond to the actual *facts* (what we may accept as facts is of course, subject to another – absolutely righteous – argument, but just for now, let's take the state of affairs for facts). Coherence theory of the truth regards truth as coherence with the complexity of some specified set of *statements* or propositions, equivalent to the pressure of truth as a system, moreover, to the totality of the judgements created on the vision of reality. Actually, it is some sort of special reality-interpretation. The main ammunition of the critics of the coherency (identification) theory is that the coherence of some truth-statement together with the totality of our accepted convictions can not represent the true nature of the statement and the truth-criteria of the same statement simultaneously. Undoubtedly, coherence as the criteria of the truth is a rather obvious and plausible supposition, however, it does not reveal much about the truth. If a statement is coherent with our previously adopted ideas, it might be a good enough reason to accept it as true (on the grounds of being identical as it 'fits into our picture of the world'). This reason might be well founded, but unlikely to be sufficient enough.

Criticism of the correspondence theory of the truth is lot more difficult to understand and to explain. To state that truth is equivalent to the general correspondence with facts seems to be a shameless cliche on the one hand, furthermore, it does not bring any new information to the system. Moreover, the explanation of the key terms 'fact' and 'correspondence' is challenged by irresolvable hindrances. Let us see an example on the issue. We can not deny the fact (thus truthfulness of the statement) that mermaids do not exist. Nevertheless, we may accept, that the above statement itself may fill the dogmatic frames of 'fact'. In other words, the statement is both formally and substantially correspondent to what we call a 'fact'. It is both true and a fact at the same time. There is no contradiction so far. However, it is rather difficult to define the status of the 'fact' that mermaids do not exist, and to figure the correspondence (relation) between this fact and the statement. This approach, namely the correspondence theory is more of a metaphoric attempt than a real theory.

Those not quite circumspect pragmatist thinkers who chose to define truth with the statement of 'it is useful to believe that…' could not avoid the logical gap pointed out by Schiller. Being rather aware, Schiller suggests to refer to usefulness as a truth–criteria, not in the sense of 'it would be nice, it this or that was so', thus we must accept it as if it were true, stating that human behaviour systems and their inside definitions are the principal arguments of the world, assisting to the better understanding of the world and easier navigation in it. They are certain patterns, assisting the cognitive processing of the schemes. So if we see the definitions as correspondence, we must realise that separation of the questions *'are they appropriate?'* or *'do they fit their role?'* is completely useless…

Finally, to somehow dissolve the severity of the examples of philosophy history and scientific epistemology, let us think about a bit longer, a much lighter, nevertheless, at least as edifying and scary parable through a story by professor Péter Popper. He explores, how people relate to the nature of truth. Whether we can identify with the characters or not depends on our self-consciousness, sincerity, and our ultimate inner rules.

Story on the victory of the truth:

„The One-headed Prince has went to the Seven-headed Dragon and said:

- Back home, at the meeting we were discussing why do you have seven heads, when we only have one! Well, what do you say?

- I was born this way – said the Dragon benevolently. – We Dragons have seven heads. – This is not an excuse – replied the Prince. – More so, it is even worse on you. Because if you had gotten these ugly seven heads of yours, we may do so ourselves. But now we are hopelessly stuck with one head forever!

- Why would you need so many heads if you think they are ugly? What's the use of jealousy?

- Hell no, I am not jealous. I am happy to have only one head.

- What is it then?

- It just bothers us even more, that you ruin public taste with your seven heads, breathing air from us.

- There is plenty of air – said the Dragon. – It is enough for both you and me.

- Only a smelly Seven-headed Dragon can speak in such demagogue manner! – said the Prince. – Really, you would not want to be such pretty one-headed creature like us? Are you segregating yourself? Or you think that you are better than us?

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- No, I don't think that I would be any better than you. Simply, I just look like this.

- And you have seven hats, too. – kept on accusing the Prince. – We only have one.

- You may buy seven hats as well. Or even seventy-seven, if you please.

- But we can not wear all seven of them at the same time. And you can

- But you don't need to, since you have only one head. Just wear a different hat every day.

- Enough of this impertinence – appalled the Prince. – However, I shall give you another chance to explain yourself. What do you use the heads for?

- See, this is exactly it! – sighed the Dragon in relief. I will tell you a secret: I see the world differently with each head.

- What? – wondered the Prince.

- That's right. The world is very-very big and complicated. It would not entirely fit into only one head of mine. So I see it from a different perspective with each head, so I can discover something new and interesting in it.

- You crook! Don't you know that there is only one truth, and it is indivisible?

- If we think of it with only one head, it is true. But you see, I, with my seven heads have discovered that there are as many truths as many viewpoints we explore things from. All of my heads know part of the truth. The seven heads together – know the whole truth.

- For example, am I good looking, bright, good and strong? – asked the Prince.

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- If I see you with this head, you are.

- And if you take the other one?

- Then, for example, you are not that strong, because there are also others who are stronger than you. Compared to them, you are most definitely weak.

- But bright?

- This third head of mine sees that although you are smart, but your know extremely little compared to what there is to know. I may even think that you are dumb.

- But am I good looking?

- Look, this head of mine sees everything from very close up. This way, you are not that pretty. For example, your skin is full of huge holes, filled with wax and hair-follicles. This fifth head of mine sees everything from afar. So far, that you look like a very tiny dot in the universe. You don't look too pretty from this view either.

- It is fantastic! But I do hope, that you see me rather good with each head!

- This sixth one – answered the Dragon squirming – has the suspicion that you are not necessarily that good. Sometime, you are vain, selfish and violent.

- And how does your seventh head sees me?

- Well, with my seventh head, I can not see at all – said the Dragon sadly. – My seventh head focuses on something else.

- That's it, no more chances, you rotter! – said the Prince firmly. – But you'll see, I will help you with a little operation!

And he cut six heads of the Dragon. He'd only kept the first one.

- So, how do you see me now?

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- Strange – said the Dragon. – Now, I can see you differently, in many ways with this one head. Bright and dull, pretty and bad looking, strong and weak, good and bad – at the same time. Most probably, this is what you are.

Then the Prince cut of the seventh head of the Dragon as well.

At that very moment, he felt that the air became clearer in the world.'[19]

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[19] POPPER (1991)

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On the nature of 'Truth' – or the problems of the theory of knowledge

The framework of this short study could barely allow the exploration of the various theories of truth or the epistemological branches of philosophy. What could be attempted is the outlining the purpose and approach of *episteme*,[20] as well as unveiling the program offered by such a critique of knowledge that provides perspectivistic grounds for criteria of truth.

Key words: critique of knowledge, epistemology, criteria of truth, cognition, perspective.

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[20] Theory of knowledge, (Greek)

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