

RATIONALITY AND MORALITY OF “ECONOMIC IMPERIALISM”

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Abstract

The “economic imperialism” phenomenon inevitably affects the formation process of methodological diversity of contemporary political philosophy. The article is an attempt to understand, whether the economic imperialism is able to help political philosophy to better understand the peculiarities of political entity. Political philosophy regards the intellectual claims of economic imperialists as intellectual moments of societal production and reproduction - with all its structures based on oppression, inequality and violence. All this creates premises for its ideological critic. Exercising this function, political philosophy is realizing it in the logic of “critical theory”. This is a critique of forms and conditions of domination in a society, held at the level of cultural and theoretical apparatus. Therefore, a consequent political philosophy is always a status-quo critique, an oppositional thought - a thought in opposition to the prevailing ideas about the essence of the political entity.

Key words: methodology, "economic imperialism", interdisciplinarity, rationalism, morality, critical theory

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Today “crisis of scientific rationality” refers to a transformation process in the field of scientific thinking and methods of scientific activity. The appropriate use of that concept requires an allocation of the major aspects of the object which philosophy calls "scientific rationality" - if only because there are other types of rationality, rather than scientific. For the methodology of political and philosophical knowledge, which, one way or another is relevant for the scientific work and its results, the problem of their interaction is not so obvious and harmless. A usual understanding of scientific rationality implies a certain way a scientist thinks and differs significantly from the way of thinking the people are aware of in their daily experience. Question regarding relationship between scientific and “unscientific” in the constitution of knowledge refers to a broader expansion of the problem between science and philosophy, and to an analysis of ideological layers in science and its sources. It proposes another reading of history of science: moments usually regarded as “insignificant”, being excluded from history without hesitation (i.e. Newton’s alchemy or Kepler’s astrological reflections) now become an object of a serious epistemological study. Nevertheless, the thesis that scientific rationality either represents a special case or an “extension” in our human consciousness of a universal rationality inherent the world in-itself, or this very rationality is the product of the “secondary” education, a subjective replica of an objective rationality - explicitly or not constitutes an a-priori of a methodological study.

This common methodological setting shows us how vital European philosophical tradition is with its most consequent delegate: Hegel. The thesis, nevertheless doesn't exclude the possibility of existence of the various forms of an absolute Ratio. Along with an “objective rationality”, the adherents of this tradition acknowledged the existence of a “subjective” one, i.e. a human reason capable of mistake in his search for the “objective truth”. It should be said, that in the long run this search looked quite optimistic. This possibility of the human mind to err concerned mainly the content of knowledge and didn't affect its “form”, its logical foundations. However, another trend appeared, which detected a variety of rational structures that constituted the fundament of the universe in its ontological constructions. What has been assumed here was a possibility of existence either of a flexible logical organization of an “objective reason” that could be adequate to a variety of “objective” rational structures or a possibility of its own evolution that could overcome the gap between subjectivity and different forms of objective rationality. Husserl’s argument looks very convincing for this case - he defends the thesis that science developed itself at the basis of ancient

European culture, as well as the fact that such a development would be impossible in another cultural environment. Therefore, science before becoming a “world science” was the fruit and an organic part of European culture. The development of science, the success of its practical applicability made it to an essential component of the “Western” culture. The standards of scientific thinking from the perspective of the western society appeared as an ideal of human thought in general. As a result, scientific rationality has been identified with the “pure reason” with the thinking “as such”, in the same way as the object-world of a human beings has been regarded as genuine.

The modern time culture molds itself as a rational one. It is a monolithic culture of a single reason and voice. Only the reason knows the reality of the world, it possesses the truth or at least leads the way to it. Hereof the dominant role of the enlighteners as well as the case of their arrogance. It should be emphasized that the liberal-democratic project of modernity has its roots precisely here. Political and economic modernization, social network, political participation or civil activity - all is being determined by that project. Its impressive achievements have inevitably created a temptation to extrapolate the very methodology of "economic rationality" to the other fields of social life. The failures of modernization as well, are often being explained as the results of the inability or unwillingness of using this practice. Sure of its universality, the methodology of economic knowledge is acquiring an imperialist direction.

It should be emphasized, that the increase of economic imperialist “aggressiveness” coincides with the year 2008, i.e. with the outbreak of global economic crisis. The crisis was a hard challenge to both economic theory and practice. This all in spite of the excitement concerning New Institutional Economics (NIE), and its achievements, pointed out by three Nobel prize laureates: Ronald Coase (1991), Douglass North (1993), Elinor Ostrom and Oliver E. Williamson (2009). But the achievements of that program do not provide the necessary methodological diversity, which could fairly reflect the essence of the problems that the modern world is facing now. Through the deficiencies of that diversity (that go beyond an instantaneous economic theory) one could explain some of the problems of contemporary social theory. And while the phenomenon of “economic imperialism” significantly affects the constitution of methodology specific to political philosophy, it will be eminent to understand, whether economic imperialism is able to assist political philosophy to better understand the specifics of political reality.

Simply put, the essence of economic imperialism could be expressed as a distribution and extrapolation of economic methodology for the research and study of mechanisms traditionally attributed to the field of other social sciences. This expansion of economic methodology to the other fields of social knowledge involves a strict compliance with the following principles of a neoclassical approach: (a). the principle of methodological individualism, where individual is the only subject capable of rational action; (b). analysis of human behavior, subordinated to the formula of “homo economicus”, which presupposes the rational movement towards the increase of individual utility in a given coordinate system; (c). teleological functions of an individual and her personal preferences are being regarded as relatively constant in time and free from both social environment and fluctuations of external bounds; (d). identification of personal choices and preferences is being simulated in terms of market relations: it is assumed that all social interactions and activities of human beings can be described in the analogue terms of mutually beneficial exchange, as well as the relationships of compensation for the transfer of economic benefits; (e). an analysis of different kinds of market interactions presupposes a study of problems analogue to those in the neoclassical economic theory, i.e. problems concerning existence and ways of achievement of a market equilibrium in terms of stability and efficiency.

“Economic imperialism” is a very heterogeneous movement, associated with names like G.Becker, J.Buchanan, G.Tullock as well as with R.Coase, D.North, E. Williamson and other representatives of the New Institutional Economics. There are different approaches that try to understand this phenomenon. It is difficult to question the expediency of the approach, which defines economic imperialism as a tendency of applying economic methods in the analysis of the

issues specific to the other social sciences (Guriev, 2008. pp. 134-135). This kind of approach allows economists to study other fields with their own methods. At the same time, economic methods are used as well by the representatives of other sciences (about a half of political science academics in the leading universities work in so called “rational choice paradigm” (Guriev, 2008. p. 135)). The transfer of scientific methodology to the other fields of social sciences (“it is economic imperialism, that is responsible for the verification and falsification theories in social sciences”) makes economic imperialism to a “prerequisite for the development of social sciences” (Guriev, 2008. p. 141). It is a natural process to a certain extent, because social knowledge confronted “imperialism” coming from other sciences as well.

Problems begin, when the thesis regarding economic imperialism as a sine qua non condition for the development of human knowledge appears insufficient. According to K. Yanovskiy, the economy should become a framework discipline, “co-ordinating interdisciplinary research with the participation of political scientists, sociologists, psychologists and lawyers” (c.f. Yanovskiy, 2009, p. 125). Please note that philosophy is not present in the picture. His following argumentation is quite remarkable as well. Economic science should play the role of a framework discipline because in the economic scientific community, in contrast to the other scientific communities, there are noticeably lesser numbers of the carriers of leftist ideas, i.e. more people are responsible, fewer tend towards an explanation from a moral perspective and there are still people who tend to question the universality of suffrage (c.f. Yanovskiy, 2009. pp. 125, 126. 135-136).

This kind of “productivity” of economic thought in the field of political science is not specific to Yanovskiy alone. For G. Becker, a Nobel Prize laureate whom Yanovskiy rightly calls an “economic first-imperialist”, the essence of economic imperialism consists in applicability of economic approach to every type of human behavior, including political one (see Becker, 2003. p. 35). Becker sees economic approach core in the “assumption concerning the maximization of behavior, market equilibrium and stable preferences” (Becker, 2003, p. 321). Concerning democracy, Becker defines it as a “free competition for political privileges between pressure groups (c.f. Becker, 2003. p.380). The structure of the complexity of these groups depends, following Becker, on a free distribution of individuals, determined by such characteristics as their professional and occupational affiliation, income, residence, age, etc. The goal of each pressure group is to use political influence to improve the welfare of its members. Competition between pressure groups provides, according to the same Becker, a “balanced structure” of political privileges (c.f. Becker, 2003. p. 356).

An argumentative dispute regarding methodological claims of economic imperialism from the standpoint of the classical political theory provided M. Urnov (see “Экономический империализм” глазами политолога // *Общественные науки и современность*, 2009, № 4).

Methodological ambitions of “economic imperialism” are problematic from the perspective of political philosophy. “Economic imperialism” fails to grasp the fundamental feature of political ontology. That means, that political entities do not exist as “objective facts” and are not independent of perception, relation and their treatment by people. It would be even more erroneous to say that their political “nature” is caused by their affiliation with a particular sphere of social life called political, that is objectively given to us - with all the mechanisms and functions - along with the fields of economy, culture, private life, etc. On the contrary - political entities become political as such due to the fact of their empowerment with a political meaning that are in a certain way directed through human actions. Politics is a specific type of practical and spiritual activity of human beings that creates specific objects or entities that could be called political. It defines borders and structure of the very field of social life where politics can be actualized. The specifics of that practical-spiritual activity are caused by the fact, that politics deals with human conflicts and interactions, mainly those that affect the “general conditions” of their collective life. Such conflicts do not allow a simple “rational” resolution due to an argumentative persuasion and voluntary acceptance of a now obvious “truth” by all fully equal sides of that conflict. This is precisely the difference between “economic” and “political” problems. If it would be possible to reduce political problems to

scientific ones, then politics (maybe “eventually”) would be useless. Visions of such reducibility, in our view, are the very fuel for the methodological orientations of economic imperialism. The acknowledgement, that political problems are irreducible to “scientific” ones (technical, administrative, moral) makes power and violence a grounding factor of the realization of power; they become key categories of political philosophy. In these circumstances politics as such and not just some specific type of it, acquires an emancipative meaning. Violence, being a key category of political philosophy is of course not the same as “physical coercion”. Violence understood as the actual application of physical coercion is an indicator of an ineffective, immature and even, according to N.Luhmann, “disappearing” power.

All this doesn't mean that “political rationality” should be ignored and that politics can be regarded as an “irrational” process par excellence. Contrary to that position, reason and rationality are key categories for political philosophy as well. In the end, all political subjects operate or tend to act strategically, i.e. in accordance to the logic of maximization and optimization of its reflected interests. Ignoring this logic we may find ourselves captive in the field of a misshapen understanding of politics. Political realism however, is not synonymous to political or economic cynicism that would reduce the whole of the political to the game of strategic interests. The reality that economic imperialists ignore is that moral responsibility can influence our actions and perfectly “inscribes” itself in the routine of political and economic life and is able, although in reduced proportions, to “correct” it. That's the reason why the primary task of political philosophy is to reveal the forms and different participatory methods of ethical (i.e. not only instrumental) reason in the implementation of different kinds of policies. In the absence of such a disclosure one cannot achieve a genuine political realism that would differ from cynicism. After all the point is, as Hegel puts it “the necessity is the same as Being” (G.W.F.Hegel, 1977. p.339). Only in this way, the concept of Being is able to constitute the subject of political philosophy, the very fact ignored by the methodology of economic imperialism. It should be specified that “necessity” is a concrete will and not an empty dream about a neutral observer reflecting on the phenomena of reality. Reality therefore is the relation between social forces, even if the tradition tends to reflect this reality as an appearance of a “natural order of thing”. This very reality excludes any representative determination of politics coming from a field outside of its bounds, i.e. from Providence to the “imperatives of economic interaction”. Politics is the “first reality” of social human life. The methodology of economic imperialism ignores specific historical conditions that constitute that reality.

This allows clarifying the differences between political philosophy and other, including economy, theoretical sciences. If morality, as an annex to politics is being pushed towards the area of ethical assessment, then this very area becomes external to the politics as such. It is impossible, being inside to deduce moral assessments and requirements using the logic of politics. It is also impossible to show real political mechanisms by which such assessments and requirements could necessarily become a part of a “real life”. With the other words - the price that one should be ready to pay would be a “de-politisation” of political philosophy. To remain political, political philosophy should overcome its influences coming from moral philosophy and approach an ethical necessity from its specific perspective, i.e. it should pose the question how it functions (or why not) in politics. Exactly this kind of approach comes to replace traditional questions of moral philosophy regarding the rightfulness of moral evaluation of politics or the question of its existence in reference to the norms of morality. This fact determines polemics of political philosophy in relation to the scientific forms of social knowledge. This attitude extends beyond academic discussions. It means that political philosophy perceives methodological claims of economic imperialists not as self-sufficient phenomena of an isolated sphere of an academic life, but as necessary, and in this case, intellectual moments of production and reproduction of society with all specific structures of inequality, oppression and violence. The identification of mechanisms of participation regarding theory of production and reproduction of a society presupposes their ideological criticism. It is a criticism of the forms of their existence, viz. “pure knowledge” or “pure theory”. Exercising this

function, political philosophy realizes itself in the logic of “critical theory”. It is a critique of forms and conditions of domination in a society, navigated at the level of their cultural and theoretical apparatus. That’s the reason why a consequent political philosophy is inevitably a status quo critique, i.e. a thought in opposition, in opposition to dominance of existing concepts that try to reflect the essence of political ontology.

The insistence of critique in political philosophy means, that it deliberately tries to occupy the place of those social forces whose resistance to the already existing institutions and cultural phenomena allows identifying them as institutions and cultural phenomena of dominance. Political philosophy is an attempt of articulation of social forces’ consciousness and at the same time an ideology critique of economic imperialism’ Universalists claims. Such criticism makes transparent the very historical and political context and allows us to pose the problem of transition from its alleged universality towards the peculiarities of “perspectives” of the contending social forces. The oppressed appear as representatives of such forces as well - this is the reality. Accordingly, the accuracy of truth (as in a given historical situation) is mediated through suffering, and it becomes political through the struggle with the thing that causes this very suffering.

This is the cause of a different political perspective. Following Hegel, “particular” is usually too small when compared with the general (das Allgemeine): individuals are being sacrificed and condemned to death. The idea pays tribute to the being and impermanence not from itself but from the passions of individuals (see Hegel, 1977, p.32). Historical truth of suffering and struggle means rejection of any “idea” which forces the others to pay for its own existence - the “idea” presupposes that this fact in no way undermines the feasibility of its existence. Contemporary oppositional movement refutes its claim to universality and reduces it to the particular, namely to the perspective of those in power. The perspective of the oppressed is as well a particular one, but it includes the moment of the general. This moment constitutes itself in the relation to the oppression, regarded by the oppositional movement as unnecessary. This is why in each specific situation political philosophy should unveil the essence, boundaries and perspectives of overcoming of this status quo. The implementation of methodological potential of political philosophy is only possible under the condition of preservation and search for conditions of methodological diversity of modern social science without any “imperialist” ambitions of any of its representatives. Perhaps it would be appropriate to remind the carriers of such ambitions an aphorism, attributed to Hegel: “Mathematics is an exact science, because mathematics is a skinny science”.

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