

Specific Character and Functional Potential of Social and Humanitarian Cognition Methods

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Abstract: This article is aimed to demonstrate specific character of socio-humanitarian methods of cognition. The author emphasizes their modified character, their dependence on the researcher who specializes on society and the researcher who specializes on humanitarian sciences, their target orientation. The whole range of methods of social and humanitarian cognition available is viewed. More emphasis is made on hermeneutics and synergetic methods of research. Basic functional features of methods of social and humanitarian cognition are investigated. The author gives proofs of their significance because they are directed to understanding of the unique, individual and unmatched in the society.

Key words: Method • Social and humanitarian cognition • Essence • Specific character • Functional features/potential

INTRODUCTION

The problem of unique character and potential of methods of socio-humanitarian cognition are widely discussed in Russian and international socio-philosophic literature. In Russian science of philosophy these problems are investigated first of all in the works of such philosophers as V.P. Kokhanovsky [1], V.S. Stepin [2], A.V. Turkulets [3] and others. In their works the essence of methods of social-humanitarian cognition is shown to some extent, it is described how they differ from natural science methods of cognition, specific character of some particular methods of social cognition is shown, their development in the nearest future is described. For example in Kokhanovsky's work it is emphasized that at present time while deepening and updating already available methods of social-humanitarian cognition a scientist in the same time should seek for new methodological approaches and means not giving one of them (or several of them) absolute priority. [1, page 304]. In foreign philosophy these problems were considered in the works of such gurus as P. Zeiger [4], K. Popper [5], R. Merton [6], S. Grof [7], Gadamer H.G. [8], W. Weidlich [9], A. Sayer, J. Elster, G. Hodgson, M. Weber [10]. In these works big difference of the above mentioned methods from the methods of natural science cognition is shown, the basic method of socio-humanitarian cognition chosen by authors is ideographic method, for every

specific social science they take special appropriate method (for sociology, psychology, politology etc.), analyze potential of such methods as synergetic, hermeneutics, structural-functional and comparative methods. For example in the work of P. Zeiger it is mentioned that attempts to use methods of natural sciences in social sciences do not always bring positive result, so new special methods for social sciences must be found [4].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the same time in the works of these philosophers specific character of modern methods of social-humanitarian cognition, their positive and negative sides, their functional potential of development in the context of integration of natural and socio-humanitarian sciences are analyzed insufficiently. Such status-quo will not enable modern socio-humanitarian sciences to solve the tasks set by world community. Besides that without deep understanding of essence and unique character of social-humanitarian cognition methods it is not possible to define the specific profile of socio-humanitarian research, rules of approach to the object of research, character of interpretation of the knowledge obtained, procedure of cognition, logic of extension of knowledge etc. Here we take these aspects of the problem in detail.

For analysis of the above mentioned problems we used the following main methods of research: analysis, synthesis, comparison, elevation from abstract to specific, synergetic method. By use of these methods the following ideas were formed: methods of social-humanitarian cognition are some ways which direct and regulate cognition activity of a sociologist. In comparison with natural science methods of cognition they have its own specific character and particular characteristics. First of all in social-humanitarian cognition ideographic method of research rather than nomothetic one is used which is directed not to cognition of fundamental laws of surrounding existence but to cognition of unique, unmatched, special phenomena in the society. This method is intended for cognition of separate social facts that constantly change and develop. Besides that ideographic method is the one that takes into consideration influence on social-humanitarian cognition made by values of researcher-sociologist (or values of researcher-humanitarian). Specific character of methods of social-humanitarian cognition is conditioned first of all by the object of investigation (social-humanitarian cognition is intended for study of society which is the most complex reality of surrounding existence) and secondly by the tasks of research (to know and interpret reality the unique, special and unmatched in social reality.) It reveals itself in the following.

Methods of social-humanitarian cognition depend to a great extent on particular researcher-sociologist and researcher-humanitarian. Every subject of social-humanitarian cognition chooses such methods of research that will correlate with his object of research, with his slope to some ideology, his scientific school, system of communication, conventions as well as with the aims he is striving for (self-expression, fame, money, power, career). Besides that such a choice is influenced by social mandate from society.

Methods of social-humanitarian cognition are characterized as specially modified. It reveals itself in the following: general scientific methods of cognition (observation, experiment, comparison, measurement, analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, historical, logical, idealization, formalization, systematic, complex and other methods) are used in social-humanitarian cognition in changed and complicated form. For example observation in social-humanitarian cognition is used in the form of included observation, experiment - in the form of social experiment, forming experiment; idealization - in the form of reproduction and reconstruction of some social phenomenon in its perfect state etc. As

Kokhanovsky writes, in the sphere of socio-humanitarian research (if it is scientific) all philosophic and scientific methods and principles can and must be used" but they "must be specified, modified taking into consideration the specific character of the object of social cognition (society, culture, personality), its particularities and aims of research"[1, page 260].

Methods of social-humanitarian cognition form special group of methods used only in cognition of society and social acts and human behaviour. First place in this group can be given to the following:

- Analysis of documents (study of official documents, reflecting some characteristics of the object of research);
- Questionnaire (use of written questions for dedicated group of people);
- Evaluation by personal opinion of group of specialists (they are asked about the significance of some characteristics of object which provide information about it as a whole);
- Projection (construction of characteristics of some social phenomenon which it will acquire in nearest future);
- Tests (use of standardized tasks to evaluate level of development of some human features);
- Interview (a number of question is asked to specific group of people in order to learn their opinion about some social phenomenon);
- Talks face-to-face (having set target and planned beforehand conversation with respondent face-to-face);
- Biographic method (study of personal documents of a person reflecting his life and aimed to understand the reasons for his acts, his participation in some events, his attitude towards these events);
- Sociometric method (description of personal relations of people in some small groups, organizations);
- Brainstorm method (search for solution when specialists from different areas of knowledge say what they think about the ways of solution of problem);
- Method of business games (search for solution of stimulated situation taking place as a game);
- Comparative method (comparison of different social phenomena and processes to find their common and different features);
- Synergetic method (way of study of social phenomena as complex open systems suggesting fluctuation variant of their development);

- Dialectical method (taking social phenomena in their interrelation and development);
- Hermeneutics method (interpretation of different texts reflecting some social phenomenon or social process);
- Historic method (research of social phenomena in the process of their appearance, development in specific circumstances) etc.

Some other methods can also be included in this group, first of all, critical method. Its significance in separation of estimates from truth in social-humanitarian cognition was noted by K. Popper. He specially underlined that "thus the method of science is one of tentative attempts to solve our problems; by conjectures which are controlled by severe criticism it is a consciously critical development of the method of trial and error" [5, p. 66].

Methods of social-humanitarian cognition are characterized by big diversity. It means that in different socio-humanitarian sciences their own specific methods are used, for example: in sociology - structural and functional method, questionnaire; in psychology - personally-centered method, in philology - hermeneutics method, in pedagogic - person-oriented method and so on. It was much written about this - first of all by R. Merton and S. Grof. Merton proposed to use more intensively in sociological study the possibility of such a special method of study as structural and functional analysis [6]. S. Grof pointed out the necessity of use in transpersonal psychology of such a specific method as the method of holotropic therapy. He stressed that "the main objective of the techniques of experiential psychotherapy is to activate the unconscious, to unblock the energy bound in emotional and psychosomatic symptoms and to convert the stationary balance of this energy into a stream of experience. Holotropic therapy favors activation of the unconscious, which is so powerful that it results in a nonordinary state of consciousness" [7, p.166].

Methods of social-humanitarian cognition combine in them not only advantages but disadvantages as well. For example included observation often used in social-humanitarian cognition is simple and not expensive method of study, but in the same time as a result of its passive nature it will not provide for research of object in the conditions which are interested for a sociologist or a humanitarian. In its turn social experiment is an active method of research but still it can influence the natural continuation of the process concerned, distort it etc.

Different methods of social-humanitarian cognition are of different significance. Of special significance in social-humanitarian cognition are hermeneutics and synergetic methods. The first one demands, while studying the texts in which social phenomena or social processes are reflected, to take into consideration, firstly, the spiritual world of the author of the text; secondly, the context in which the author works; thirdly, the audience for which the author writes; fourthly personal features and interests of interpreter of the text (this method is used in the work of H.Gadamer [10]. Second method demands while studying social phenomena to consider them as complex open systems consisting of many elements connected to each other by special way; to provide for fluctuational variant of their development; take into consideration the whole range of factors which influence this social phenomenon; to develop alternative scenarios of development of social phenomena; to evaluate all possible risks while social phenomena are influenced in some way; to choose the most optimal and wanted way of development of social phenomenon in future (see works of V.Weidlich and M. Saprionov [11].

Methods of social-humanitarian cognition have special functional potential. First of all they provide for the procedure of organization and the direction of socio-humanitarian research; secondly the cognition and understanding of unique, individual and unmatched in the society; thirdly the comprehension of the sense of social phenomena, how they correlate with specific values; fourthly the cognition of separate social fact which is changing constantly; fifthly the mechanism of interpretation of the knowledge obtained, their logic of extension; sixthly taking into consideration the ideals and beliefs of a sociologist and humanitarian scientist; seventhly, practical and recommended nature of social-humanitarian cognition.

In present time in social-humanitarian cognition methodological revolution is expected which is stipulated, as T. Adorno writes, by necessity to study society as very complicated object of research which demands more complicated methods of research (object defines the method) [12, p.76,79].

It is important to use in social-humanitarian cognition the methods of natural science cognition (especially mathematical and static method) [12, p. 76,79], to provide combination of nomothetic and ideographic methods of scientific cognition, broaden the use of hermeneutics and synergetic methods of cognition, to develop and introduce new methods into the practice of cognition and so on.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it is important to emphasize that for full realization of all functional potential of methods of social-humanitarian cognition in future it is important to provide the following (more detailed information you will find in the works of such philosophers as S. Salzborn, E. Davidoff, J. Reinecke [10], V Stepin [2]):

- To update technology of use of methods of social-humanitarian cognition which enables to use all their functional potential in full;
- To use for cognition of some social phenomenon or process broad range of methods of research (because using the whole complex of specific methods a sociologist and humanitarian scientist will compensate for the disadvantage of one method by the advantages of another method, for example, the passivity of included observation will be overcome by making active social experiment etc.);
- To use modified and new methods of social-humanitarian cognition taking into consideration that nowadays more significance is put into interdisciplinary methods, methods of natural and social sciences get closer to each other more and more, so-called non-strict methods of knowledge are used more often, quite new methods of research is developed, for example method of "cumatoid", method of abduction, method of situational studies etc.

So the methods of social-humanitarian cognition first of all have exclusively specific character which reveals itself in their modified form, dependence on the sociologist and humanitarian, in big diversity and combination of advantages and disadvantages, secondly they become more complex and perfect (hermeneutics and synergetic methods), thirdly they have multi-functional potential - to know and understand the unique and unmatched in the society.

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