

The Problem of the Subject in Constructivist Philosophical Models: the Principles of Forming a Typology

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Abstract

This article is aimed at studying the succession and interinfluence of constructivist philosophical models in accordance with their historical traditions and the problem of the subject. The authors have defined three constructivist philosophical models: constructivist hylomorphism, constructivist eidetics and constructivist hermeneutics. The basic constructs of constructivist hylomorphism are *a priori* forms of consciousness which serve as preconditions of subjectivity. The foundation of constructivist eidetics is formed by the phenomena of consciousness which subjectify the world. Constructivist hermeneutics is based upon the means of communication which condition intersubjectivity.

Keywords: philosophy, subject, epistemology, cognition, constructivism, philosophism, typology, hylomorphism, eidetics, hermeneutics.

Introduction

The authors of this article try to solve two research problems: to throw light on the problem of the subject from the viewpoint of constructive philosophy and to present a draft typology of constructive philosophism. The authors believe that the above-mentioned problems are closely connected.

There are many theories that can refer to constructivism. These models are hard to classify since they have been formed at the junction of several scientific fields. I.T. Kasavin distinguishes two groups of constructive concepts: naturalistic and culture-based constructivism (Kasavin, 2008). In his opinion, radical constructivism relates to the naturalistic one, while culture-based constructivism is a part of the methodological one. N.M. Smirnova writes about two types of constructivism: moderate and radical (Constructivism in epistemology and anthropological studies, 2008). In her opinion, the take on ontology (realism vs nominalism) is a distinguishing factor. A.M. Ulanovskiy thinks that constructivism falls into three movements: proper constructivism, radical constructivism and social constructivism (Ulanovskiy, 2009). Other constructive theories are set apart and hard to be classified due to their interdisciplinary nature (Knyazeva, 2006).

The authors do not find the existing classification satisfactory since they lack the common basis and completeness. The review of major constructive theories and their critical analysis has been mentioned in discussions and articles of modern Russian philosophers who published their works in the leading philosophical journals ("The problems of philosophy"; "Epistemology & the philosophy of science"; "Constructivism in epistemology and anthropological studies, 2008"; "Discussing the articles on constructivism, 2009") and the scientific collection of the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences ("Constructivism in epistemology, 2008"; "The

constructivist approach in epistemology and anthropological studies, 2009"). These works serve as the starting point for this research, and they lay the foundation for forming the typology of constructivist models regarding their development and interinfluence.

Methods

The authors of this article do not make it their point to enumerate all the constructivist theories existing in philosophy. In their opinion, it is more significant to reveal the succession and interinfluence of these theories, and to deeply analyse the most distinctive of them in relation to traditional philosophical problems. This research mainly focuses on the problem of the subject and its specific interpretations provided by constructivism. In this article the authors reveal key constructs which form constructivist theories and serve as conceptual links. These constructs are called the "constructivist philosophical models" and are used as guides for building the draft typology of constructivism.

Results

The typology developed by the authors is built over three basic principles of philosophism: hylomorphism, eidetics and hermeneutics. The terms and basic characteristics of these methods were taken from G.B. Gutner's scientific work "Hylomorphism, eidetics and communicative practice" (Gutner, 2009). The authors are convinced that this classification of philosophical methods enables them to define the epistemological constructs that serve as their foundation. As a result, it gives an opportunity to track the genesis, interinfluence and succession of constructivist theories as it is exemplified by the problem of the subject. Thus, a new typology has a solid foundation and does not come into clashes with the existing eclectic classifications.

From the viewpoint of classical epistemology, the subject is some absolute givenness, and everything that belongs to the "outer" world raise doubts. Years later this unilateral position ceased to be "clear and apparent" as it had been to R. Descartes. The subject can be regarded as the entity, opposed and isolated from the outer world, from the perspective of its epistemological activity and not its exiting. Due to its mere existing, the subject has versatile relations with the real world and possesses the system of relations with other subjects. Therefore, the variety of subjectivity appears: for example, psychological relation – (I) Individual; social relation – (he, she they) Other; axiological relation – (you, we) Person. In this regard, classical epistemological theory becomes the thing of the past and brand new problems arise: "how to define (find) the subject in absolute givenness of the world and society, and how to explain the genesis of individual consciousness due to this givenness?"; "how to explain the possibility of self-analysis?"; "how can the subject feel the state of their own consciousness?"; "if the perception of the world is done through organs of senses, then what "organs" are used to perceive facts of consciousness?"; "who is the perceiving subject in this case?".

Scholars enumerate four primary characteristics of the subject: firstly, the subject is a motivated (purposeful and goal-achieving) being; secondly, the subject is engaged in self-reflection, possesses its own image; thirdly, the subject is a free being; fourthly, the subject is a developing being as it exists in changing and unpredictable environment (Problems of subjects in postnonclassical science, 2007). The subject was firstly analysed as a bearer of activity, consciousness and perception in modern philosophy. Earlier it had been regarded as some featureless metaphysical basis of the objective reality. In modern European philosophy, only G. Hegel and his successors supported the idea of the absolute subject, i.e. they considered the individual subject to be a transitive, yet crucial stage for reaching the absolute spirit. On the

whole, all the problems connected with the subject and its understanding were identical to the problems connected with the notion “I” in classical philosophy (Lektorskiy, 2009). Most philosophers were absolutely convinced that the subject played a key role in epistemology, only empiricists denied its “privileged” position. When scientists distinguished empirical and transcendental knowledge, they realised that the subject also fell within this division.

From the viewpoint of constructivism, the subject never comes into direct contact with the surrounding world. Its contact becomes possible thanks to a complex system of mediation. Thus, the term “reality” derives from the subject’s creative activity, and is represented as the world of its experience and communication with similar “social and cultural constructs”. This acquisition of the reality is likely a process of its subjectification rather than objectification. Constructivist consciousness receives an ontological status, i.e. it plays the role of “the first” and “the last” instance. However, the cognitive constructs that are immanent to consciousness cannot be revealed and directly examined. They can be discovered indirectly through a cognitive process and its results. The subject-object relations are the system of the constructs that define and refer to one another. For instance, *a priori* forms of consciousness (I. Kant), the archetypes of collectively-inherited unconscious ideas (C.G. Jung), stable cognitive habits (D. Hume), scientific paradigms (T. Kuhn), social and cultural attitudes—“pre-consciousness” (M. Heidegger, H.-G. Gadamer), language structures (F. de Saussure), social and cultural signs, symbols and texts (structuralists), etc.

The genesis of cognitive constructs, the “formation” of the subject is determined by an adaptive function of perception which guarantees the adaption and survival of living beings. Thus, constructivism defines the value of perception through its sustainability, the pragmatics of language and activity which protect the subject’s interests. Cognitive constructs help to predict certain events and use experience in the future. They turn the subject’s living experience into a stable structure and. As a result, stabilise structures of the “outer” world through their mediating (Borisov, 2014).

The preconditions of subjectivity from the perspective of constructivist hylomorphism

The realisation of the “constructivist project” in philosophy should start from I. Kant’s works. This scholar adopted Aristotle’s division of matter and form to describe cognitive processes from a constructivist perspective. While Aristotle claimed that form cannot exist without matter, I. Kant’s categories cannot be applied to anything beyond sensation. These categories reveal themselves only during actions, i.e. in some synthesising subjectification act, and they are non-traceable without it.

R. Descartes’ subject is free-standing, independent (identical to its own consciousness) and isolated from the outer world and other people, therefore it cannot understand its existing. When the subject perceives itself as an existing one it turns into the object of reflection. That is how the united subject falls into two units. Scholars doubt that reflection is principally possible: “who thinks about my “I” as an existing one?”. The subject and object (the inner and outer world) should be regarded as a whole unity. When people perceive the world and come into contact with it, they do not leave the boundaries of *a priori* structures of their consciousness.

The key feature of constructivist hylomorphism is the fact that the category of consciousness determines the structure of the perceived reality (*apriorism*) but does not give a chance to apprehend the reality as an outside observer. Furthermore, ontology is always secondary if compared to the constructive ability of consciousness and cognitive process. This

type of philosophism embraces the theories that base cognitive process on either inherited or evolutionally acquired mindsets.

Such evolutionists as K. Lorentz and G. Folmer regard I. Kant's a priori forms of consciousness as "inherited working hypotheses" which went through evolutional selection, i.e. adaptation (Follmer, 1998). These adaptive inherited structures of consciousness correlate only with the reality that guarantees the survival of a living being. H. Maturana and F. Varela believe that inherited structures of consciousness are characterised by "operational completeness", therefore cognitive processes seem to be predetermined by their peculiar organisation and functioning of a living (autopoietic) system (Maturana, & Varela, 2001). Autopoietic systems are capable of providing their own descriptions and working with them as independent formations, however they cannot exceed the boundaries of their perception spheres and compare the image of the reality with the existing one ("self-reference").

K. Lorentz's evolutionary epistemology presents a new take on I. Kant's beliefs about a priori forms of consciousness. The scholar criticises I. Kant's statement that forms of consciousness are relatively independent from nature. In his "Kant's concept a priori in the framework of modern biology" K. Lorentz people and animals form inherited knowledge in the course of their evolution, that is why a priori principles of consciousness are closely connected with the laws of nature (Lorentz, 1997). The categories and forms of intuitive consciousness developed as the result of the adaptation of living beings to their environment in the process of phylogenesis, therefore a priori forms of consciousness occurred a posteriori during the evolution of Homo sapiens.

K. Lorentz claims that living beings have the "inherited starting mechanism" – a physiological instrument to filter stimulants. This inherited starting mechanism launches instinctive movements and species-specific motor activities which are preprogrammed in the genome. The inherited mechanism hidden in the genome can perceive and analyse useful information that is vital for survival. However, it cannot easily adapt to rapid changes of its environment. The inherited mechanism do not depend on education and serve as ready-made adaptive structures, the so-called closed programme.

Besides the closed programme determined by the human genome and influencing perception, there is also an open programme which reflects the process itself. Its launch can be explained by the subject's ability to acquire and store information about the world which is not included into inherited cognitive structures (in the genome). Clearly, the open programme is built upon genetic data and possesses restricted autonomy. Any act of teaching is a kind of an open programme that works when a living being gets influenced by its environment and choose the best possible scenario from a wide range of those. Perhaps this characteristic of "openness" enables the rise of subjectivity, the transformation of a living system from the storage of genetic information into the subject of perception.

The models of adaptation, "operational completeness" and self-reference are mostly typical of the radical constructivist concepts. The subject of perception plays an active role. This observer has a certain mindset, theories, hypotheses and beliefs, and influences the character of the phenomena under study.

The basic function of knowledge formed in the course of evolution is to guarantee the survival of living beings. The knowledge that does not conform to the reality causes the death of a living being and decreases its adaptive skills because it reveals its inadequacy sooner or later. The reality can set the boundaries of acceptability as it eliminates the ideas and theories that are not

proved by experience. It is known that natural selection is not aimed at choosing the fittest, strongest and the most “authentic” species. It causes both a creative and destructive effect. Thus, knowledge is deemed useful and life-sustaining if it determines the stability of the empirical world, gives an opportunity to make predictions, prevent certain events or let them happen in the future. Knowledge somehow controls events and helps the subject to adapt to the changing conditions of its environment. The knowledge that cannot fulfill this task is considered to be ambiguous, unreliable and useless. Thus, radical constructivism sees the value of knowledge in its ability to create cognitive constructions which are formed due to permanent contact with environment and correlate with the future conditions. It systematises life experience and guarantees the survival of a living being regardless of its hierarchical status.

The inherited mechanism, or the closed programme, is a ready-made adaptive structure which can perceive and analyse the information necessary for survival. They precede experience and serve as the preconditions of subjectivity. For instance, there are C.G. Jung's archetypes (collectively-inherited unconscious ideas) or Levi-Strauss' universal structures of consciousness (the determinants of human behaviour and the bases for representing the outer world and cultural reality). In these constructivist theories universal structures are *a priori* laid in unconsciousness.

In contrast to Kant's *a priori* forms of consciousness, archetypes are non-abstract and emotionally charged. These inherited programmes influence behavioural reactions, perception, consciousness, imagination, organise individual experience and form subjectivity. In fact, archetypes are *a priori* forms of generic experience which signalise that individuals should undertake certain action. They embrace instincts typical of all living beings and specific reactions towards the phenomena of the outer and inner world (Jung, 2009).

Archetypes are considered to be *a priori* since they do not have precise psychical or notional content. Unconsciousness gives only empty forms to be filled with the content of individual experience. Archetypes are being formed as the result of a problem or a crisis and work in the similar manner with I. Kant's categories. The only difference is that they form the structure of psyche and not consciousness. Every archetype has a certain scheme (form) which connects consciousness and the information obtained from both the inner and outer world.

C.G. Jung's concept of archetypes greatly influenced the development of K. Levi-Strauss' anthropology. According to K. Levi-Strauss' concept, the determination of the morphological unity of various cultural forms helps to pinpoint the universal constructs that are the preconditions of subjectivity. The diversity of languages, mythical beliefs and social relations is based upon universal structures which are conditioned by a biological nature of human beings and *a priori* implemented in unconsciousness. Structural anthropology is aimed at revealing these basic constructs. They form the initial and united matrix that systematises and classifies various manifestations of the cultural reality. The universal structures of consciousness display the way cultural practice functions and individual beliefs change. It is possible to develop the common scheme (structure) of myths and rites while reducing them to their basic elements. For example, K. Levi-Strauss studied primitive societies and find out that the tribal and Western cultures have similar characteristics of these basic elements (Levi-Strauss, 2001).

While C.G. Jung's believed that archetypes are non-operational or “pre-subjective”, i.e. they do not shape individual consciousness and reveal themselves mainly in emotional sphere. K. Levi-Strauss' universal structures of consciousness play the role of some “working hypotheses” which adapt cognitive process to unconsciousness and gives it a symbolic form.

The world subjectification from the perspective of constructivist eidetics

If constructivist hylomorphism can be figuratively called “I. Kant’s theory”, then constructivist eidetics is “G. Hegel’s concept”. Like a form, an eidos is a compulsory component of perception which defines the structure of being. However, eidos is not a method or means but rather the object of cognition. It is impossible to perceive forms while the knowledge of eidoses is vital. Perceiving an eidos calls for intellectual intuition which gives an opportunity to “behold” anything in its real form. If a form mediates the knowledge about the reality, the revealing essence (eidos) is direct and authentic knowledge of the surrounding world expressed in a term.

According to I. Kant’s hylomorphism, people come to know the world as they see it, but they do not know its true essence. In G. Hegel’s eidetics the definitions of consciousness are given an ontological status since the scholar acknowledges the equality of ideal essence of consciousness and real essence of being. Thus, eidetics overcomes I. Kant’s agnosticism in constructivism. The world is cognisable in its real form. Constructivist eidetics embraces the concepts that add an ontological status to consciousness and regards the essence (eidos) as direct, intuitive and authentic knowledge of the reality.

The key figure in constructivist eidetics is E. Husserl, whose concept goes from a “natural statement” to the cognition of the essence of phenomena and things rid of all their empirical and psychological features. Transcendental subjectivity and the world of phenomena as its part are characterised by foundational, direct and apodictical obviousness. Since consciousness is intentional it helps to overcome the gap between the subject and the object which determine one another. According to phenomenology, the self-construction of the subject is carried out with the help of “the essence discretion” and a priori synthesis (“finding the essence horizon”). When consciousness perceives various aspects of the reality, it creates relatively stable image of the outer world.

The construction of the phenomenal reality is fulfilled through human physicality – “consciousness-body” (M. Merleau-Ponty) which defines the horizon of existential space-time, individual experience and the whole world. For instance, M. Merleau-Ponty assumes that the world sensation is inevitably carried out through physicality which brings its own specific “knowledge” of the reality to the world image (Merleau-Ponty, 1999). It is impossible to judge how perfect and authentic this image of the reality is since people cannot become independent observers of their cognitive processes. A human body is so closely intertwined with the world that it is really hard to see the boundaries between the reality and personal phenomena. People can cognise the world while they still have their bodies which perceive the reality and construct it individual version, subjectivity.

Universal language structures are the means of subjectifying the essence of individual consciousness and the system of person’s beliefs about the reality (Saussure, 2004). The perceived reality is the combination of sign systems and cultural texts. Every language unit or sign has two sides: the signifier (the image, expression plane) and the signified (the meaning, the opinion on a real thing, the manifestation of subjectivity). The signs that express ideas neglect their meaning. Signs are rooted in traditions and are transferred from one generation to another. Thus, signs can be regarded as mental constructs which convey the meaning which is determined by traditions and culture. However, this meaning can be deciphered only by the social and cultural subject. This deciphering is, in fact, a distinctive form of the reality subjectification.

These constructivist ideas are further developed in ontological hermeneutics (H.-G. Gadamer, P. Ricceur). P. Ricceur’s model of “preferred interpretation” is the most essential for this

research (Ricceur, 2002). According to P. Ricceur, the language having a symbolic function creates the secondary cognition of the reality because its initial perception is fulfilled intuitively without the language. Thus, the language is the means of construction the “second world”. The interpretation of symbols is carried out in conformity with “the net of preferences” typical of a theoretical system or a scientific paradigm. In the process of its interpretation a sign loses its polysemy. Ontological hermeneutics deals with the subject whose existence is always interpreted. In the course of this interpretation the subject reveals numerous modes of its own dependency from its desire (archeology) to the spirit (teleology) and to the sacred (eschatology).

The synthesis of structuralism and psychoanalysis gives rise to another constructivist philosophical model, developed by J. Lacan (Lacan, 1995). Despite the opinion of most psychoanalysts his philosopher claims that the mechanism of unconsciousness can be adequately interpreted and subjectified. Unconsciousness is formalised with the help of linguistic models, therefore the “rationalisation” of spiritual life becomes possible. In fact, the revelation of “the language grammar” and “the consciousness grammar” is the interpretation and structuralisation of unconsciousness.

Like many other constructivists, J. Lacan rethinks R. Descartes’ statement *cogito ergo sum*. In his opinion, the subject is not reduced to *cogito* and should be analysed on different levels. Consciousness can justify existence with the help of speech. In this regard, speech (language) fulfills a creative symbolic function and is the initial structure in comparison with being since it is a universal source of new meanings and notions necessary for “forming” things. J. Lacan is convinced that a notion can replace its thing with the help of symbolic linguistic features. Thus, people cannot be free in physical or psychological spheres but can obtain freedom in the world of symbols realised through a language. Thanks to symbolic creativity people exceed the boundaries of the empirical world and enter the world of culture. The individual subject of classical philosophy gets its cultural doppelganger in structuralism which, in J. Lacan’s opinion, is “decentralized”, dissolved in linguistic forms and serve as the representation of cultural linguistic meanings.

Intersubjectivity from the perspective of constructivist hermeneutics

A priori forms can be regarded as means of presenting the reality and communicative norms which guarantee understanding. These norms are not so much knowledge about the reality as communicative rules which are followed by a society. Every member of communication shows the knowledge of this generally accepted form.

Like constructivist hylomorphism, constructivist hermeneutics claims that ontology is secondary. L. Wittgenstein was a key philosopher of this scientific movement who introduced authenticity systematically, i.e. he assumed that some beliefs correlated with others which are constantly divided and reproduced in the course of communication and activity (Wittgenstein, 1991). According to constructivist hermeneutics, the system of knowledge is not the object of contemplation but rather an interdependent combination of questions and answers to them, i.e. the demand established in a society to give certain answers to certain questions. Thus, constructivist hermeneutics comprises philosophical models which regard the reality as the product of social and cultural experience. The authenticity of the reality is revealed and fixed in the process of communication.

According to the models of constructivist hermeneutics, subjectivity is the result of communicative cooperation. Communication as something “subjective” is carried out in the real (objective) world with the help of certain material (objective) means (linguistic signs, gestures,

actions, etc.). This kind of objectification is, in fact, intersubjectivity. Social and cultural texts exist objectively but involve communicating subjects because only they can fill these texts with meanings, privatise these meanings and insert them into the structures of individual and collective life experience.

In conformity with the concepts of P. Berger and T. Lukman (Berger, & Lukman, 1995), intersubjectivity is the means individuals and societies use to create social phenomena which turn into cultural traditions and construct the reality. The world construction takes place due to social contacts. Most of social and cultural knowledge is obtained in the process of communication and given to individuals *a priori*. The succession of knowledge (from a society to its subject) guarantees the order of meanings. This regularity of experience is connected with a certain social and historical situation but seems natural to individuals since they accept this perspective unconditionally without fully realising it.

This regularity is formed by means of various social institutions. Their primary objective is to stabilise human activities. The formation of such social institutes becomes possible due to the habitualisation of different activities. The recurring activities often turn into behavioural norms which are constantly repeated at minimum expense of life energy since the subject does not have to make a choice and can predict the behaviour of other people. The knowledge of the system of typical activities (social constructs) is transferred to a new generation and is accepted as the knowledge of the objective reality which is perceived as independent by social and cultural subjects.

This “objectification” process is closely connected with reification – the full materialisation of the social reality. People do not realise that the social reality is the product of the combined creative construction of different subjects. Thus, an individual sees this reality as alienated facts and the result of the well-established order.

Legitimation is the final stage of forming social institutions. It consists in explaining the meaning of the existence that is fixed in the corresponding language. This meaning will be successfully accepted and remembered by the subject if its institutional essence gets maximally simplified to the level of stereotypes. Legitimation is adopted by a new generation in the process of socialisation. On the whole, this mechanism solidifies the institutional order. The knowledge accumulated in a society through its historical development forms the “symbolic universum” that embraces both pre-scientific and scientific knowledge.

Although people create their own social world in the course of subjectification, it is regarded as an independent formation (objectification). While forming unique models of the reality, people proceed from the potentials included in their mentality or the social environment that get revealed in everyday experience. When the subject transforms the beliefs about the surrounding society, it reconstructs itself and forms a procedural unity with the reality. Social institutions are also products of the subject's creative activity. These institutions influence people's mindset through the succession of the “typification schemes”. The social and cultural subject finds it vital for different models of the reality to correspond with each other and harmonically correlate with the dominating everyday reality (adaptation).

The meaningfulness of the intersubjective reality is explained by the immersiveness of the subject into the context of “linguistic games” (L. Wittgenstein). These linguistic games are aimed at annihilating the “traps” of natural languages through the “translation” of ambiguous sentences into more comprehensive ones from the perspective of “the net of preferences”. Since the social and cultural reality is immersed into these linguistic games the notions that refer to thingness

(including, the notion “subject”) are the sources of the so-called “utopia denotation” (R. Bart) (Bart, 1989). When they become mediated, they lose the ontological guarantee of their semantic certainty, the natural connection between the signifier and the signified. From the viewpoint of constructivist hermeneutics, all manifestations of the reality, with the subject being one of them, can be studied as social and cultural texts which are impossible to understand without breaking stereotypes, i.e. without “deconstruction” (J. Derrida) (Derrida, 1999). The reality of a social and cultural text is a “rhizome” – a decentralised system which develops in different directions in conformity with different interpretations of its meaning (Deleuze, & Guattari, 2007).

The transition to the constructivist model “reality-text” has been done on purpose. In the world of modern communication techniques such significant function of the subject as is self-identification is expressed in numerous text-messages (files). In fact, the subject get new physicality in text-messages which can simultaneously have different space-time coordinates due to advanced communicative means and therefore can lose its usual “subject centricity”. Besides, being in telecommunication networks the subject reveals its essence and expresses its life experience through certain statements and narratives. They are specific acts of interpretation which define the meanings acceptable and understandable for a certain online community, give its members an opportunity to self-identify and self-cognise themselves. Thus, V.A. Lektorskiy precisely described the modern concept of the subject as a “fragile formation which can exist only in certain cultural and historical conditions” (Lektorskiy, 2009).

Conclusion

The draft typology of constructivism presented in this article emphasises the succession and interinfluence of constructivist philosophical models regarding certain historical mindsets, traditions of philosophism in terms of such significant philosophical problem as the problem of the subject. The authors have pinpointed three constructivist philosophical models: constructivist hylomorphism, constructivist eidetics and constructivist hermeneutics. The basic constructs of constructivist hylomorphism are *a priori* forms of consciousness which serve as preconditions of subjectivity. The foundation of constructivist eidetics is formed by the phenomena of consciousness which subjectivise the world. Constructivist hermeneutics is based upon the means of communication which condition intersubjectivity.

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