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Wissenschaftsphilosophie — Wissenssoziologie — Biologie



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At the beginning of the academic year, I listed two aims in my statement.

The first was the continuation of my previous work on the problems of the rationality of the evolution of scientific knowledge. More specifically, I wanted to study those contemporary philosophical conceptions which, opposed to the philosophical absolutism as well as to the cultural and sociological relativism, look for the biological foundations of human rationality and treat human knowledge (including science and morality) as an instrument for the biological adaptation of the human species.

Though I hope to write a book on this topic in the future, during my stay in Berlin I intended to do extended reading rather than writing. And that is what I mainly did. The colloquia in the Kolleg and some seminars in the Freie Universität and especially many private discussions with fellows helped me enormously to better understand and formulate the problems I was interested in.

Preliminary conclusions of this research seem to show that the "biological turn" does not and cannot offer the solution for the philosophical problems it was looking for, no matter how interesting and illuminating contemporary biological research concerning the biological determination of knowledge production is. First of all, from the radical absolutist point of view the search for biological foundations of knowledge (and morality) cannot be seen as avoiding relativism but rather as a replacement of the socio-cultural relativism by a biological one. This conclusion concerns Popperian "Darwinian epistemology" as well as sociobiology, Piaget's genetical epistemology or the philosophical conclusions drawn by contemporary neurophysiological research. Secondly, and that seems

the main point, no matter how we liberalize the absolutist point of view in philosophy, no biological knowledge can explain the different ways in which the biologically determined cognitive abilities function in different cultural contexts. Recent developments in the radical program of socio-biology seem to prove this thesis. In so far as biological reductionism in itself cannot explain the variety of human cultures and in order to explain the development of human knowledge, some kind of socio-cultural relativism seems to be unavoidable.

The second project I intended to start during my stay in Berlin concerning the analysis of deformations in the evolution of science resulting from its involvement in politics under different political conditions has been postponed. The reason was that when taking part in many colloquia and seminars on sociology and the history of science organized by the "Culture of Science" group in the Kolleg, I often had the feeling, that I disagreed with some speakers on the crucial issue concerning the impact of the local cultural context on the content of knowledge produced in that context. In fact, neither the proponents of the strong sociological program nor the social constructivists take into account the fact that the circumstances of knowledge production cannot explain its universalization. Since these problems relate directly to the philosophical questions which are at the heart of my main project I could not pass them by. As a result I wrote two papers in which I tried to present my position.

The first ("Ideals of Science and Evolution of Knowledge") was presented at a Seminar organized commonly by the Kolleg and the Technische Universität in February. In this paper I tried to show how the ideals of knowledge commonly accepted by the scientific community at a given time can mediate the impact of historical and cultural circumstances in which cognition takes place and at the same time explain its universalization.

The second paper ("Philosophy of Science and Sociology of Knowledge: Knowledge Production and Knowledge Universalization") I read at my Colloquium in June. (The text is reproduced in this Jahrbuch.)

Two extended discussions provoked by my papers on that subject stimulated me to work on problems which I had not intended to undertake before coming to the Kolleg. And I am sure that I would not have started working on them if I had not had the good fortune to come here and have the possibility to meet the people I met.

I also do not want to fail to mention that I was in Germany for the first time for an extended period, and that my stay in Berlin gave me an excellent opportunity not only for advancing my professional work but also for enlarging my knowledge of the country, of its life and culture.