THE METAPHYSICS OF THE THOUGHT-ACTION (ON THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION OF THE METHODOLOGY OF G.P. SHEDROVITSKY)

ªGERMAN VLADIMIROVICH MELIKHOV

Dr. Sci. in Philosophy, Professor of Department Of Social Philosophy, Institute of Social and Philosophical Sciences and Mass Communications, Kazan Federal University, Kremlyovskaya St, 18, Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, 420008, Russia
E-mail: german.melikhov@kpfu.ru

Abstract: The article analyzes the problems of the philosophical foundations of the G.P. Shchedrovitsky's STA-methodology. Methodologists believe that their approach can be applied on top of any form of activity, which is also a philosophy. Methodology as an action over actions rises above philosophy. The author of this article uses another assumption as a basis: asserting the primacy of the method in cognition and proclaiming a commitment to the anti-metaphysical orientation, the STA-methodology, like any other field of knowledge, is based on (the above and other) axiomatic assumptions, which are the subject of philosophical reflection.

Keywords: STA-methodology, G.P. Shchedrovitsky, action, activity, the thought action, organizational management, avant-garde.

1 Introduction

The G.P. Shchedrovitsky's System Thought Action ("sistemnomysledeyatel'nostnaya") methodology (STA-methodology) is a notable phenomenon in the Russian intellectual life of the second half of the 20th century. The practice of organizational-activity games (OAG) developed on its basis, especially actively held throughout the country in the 80-90s of the 20th century, was a "breath of fresh air" for young people of that time: an atmosphere of free discussion, new names and ideas, premonitions of an imminent update that reigned in OAG, sharply contrasted with the then officialdom, which was going through hard times. The organizers of the OAG then made the only right decision - they accepted everyone to the games. Going to another city, a student, a young teacher, or just an interested person, could always count on them to find a place in the discussion room and a bed for sleeping. Not everyone who visited OAG became methodologists, but many were able to taste the freedom. OAG then became an alternative "school of thought" where those who wish received "additional education" chosen by themselves. But the systemic research methodology manifested itself not only through the practice of OAG. Among the intellectuals, the Moscow Methodological Circle (MMC) was popular, and its ideas were accepted or disputed by many famous authors of that time: A. Zinoviev (Hanson & Kirkwood (Ed.),1988), M. Mamardashvili (1986), A. Pyatigorsky (1984), D. Zilberman (Anellis, 1979) and others. It is unlikely that anyone today would challenge the position of the STA methodology in the Russian intellectual culture of the mid-end of the twentieth century. There will be disputes regarding the understanding of the details of the doctrine of the STA methodology, its relations with other domestic or foreign philosophical schools. However, this historical and philosophical issue is not the subject of our article. Our goal is somewhat different: to introduce a number of ideas that, perhaps, will serve as a background allowing us to show both the advantages of the methodology and those "places" in it that deserve a critical attitude. It should be noted that by "criticism" we do not mean the identification of "weaknesses", "weaknesses", which, if desired, can be found everywhere and any number. The task of philosophy in this case is to reflectively address the foundations, which makes us, perhaps, a little more conscious. Knowing the reasons helps someone to remain committed to the methodology, and someone - to move away from it. Neither one nor the other can be evaluated as someone's advantage or disadvantage.

2 Methods

The primary method used in this paper is the philosophical reflection which allows the objectification of someone else's ideas as a part of your own consciousness and to find the foundation of these ideas (Husserl, 1982).

3 Results and Discussion

Usually, methodology is discussed by the methodologists themselves, and this is right in the general sense. However, the methodology can also be viewed from the outside perspective, for example, from the point of philosophy. An interesting philosophical background of methodology, the philosophy of methodology. Philosophy is expected to answer questions about ultimate goals and causes. Methodology, like any theory, is based on philosophical assumptions. Let's take a look at the following statement: "Thought is needed only to advance the deed and cannot be separated from use in the deed and cannot be broadcasted" (Mamardashvili, 1986). Obviously, the foundations of thought are introduced there. A thought accompanies a deed, is identified with it as its cause, it appears in "a deed" and advances it. A philosophy in which thought is defined not by "essence" (for Aristotle essence is the limit of knowledge, a substance independent and not reducible in cognition to anything else), but "deed", is considered as a function of the actions constituting the "deed", can be called a "philosophy of action". Methodology is a product of post-metaphysical thinking, it makes sense to talk about it only in the context of a practical turn as a kind of philosophy of action.

Post-metaphysical thinking is a post-nietzschean line of thought uniting philosophers and researchers who decided to not use the category "consciousness" as the primary term in their thoughts, just as the related concepts of "essence", "subject", etc. "The practical turn" is one of the branches of the postmetaphysical thought: the desire of modern authors to designate the "actual reality" of philosophy, to tie thought to experience or to identify an "active", "performative" dimension of philosophical theory (Borisov et al., 2008).

Being a philosophy of action, methodology considers action to be the limit of thought, the ultimate cause and goal of everything. There are many concepts of action: psychological, sociological, anthropological. However, only in methodology action is substantiated, it is considered as a universal philosophical category. The question of ultimate causes is a question of paradigmatic (serving as an ideal image, model) properties: qualities that have a unique status, for example, unconditionality or some particularly significant expediency. So the Aristotle's "Mind", the prime mover, thinking itself, is the unconditional reason for individual thinking. It is the guarantor of the pre-established harmony of thought and Cosmos, authorizing the possibility of private thought to cognize external objects. In other words, the central question of the methodology may sound like this: what should be the original, paradigmatic action, which is the condition for any action? To answer this question, we have to discuss actions that give the right to rule over all actions. First steps. Methodology - the doctrine of actions over actions. Original action, like Aristotle's prime mover, is the guarantor of pre-established harmony, connecting action and thought. Action is a haven of thought; it is structured in such a way that it always has a certain meaning. On the other hand, thought itself is structured as an action. Philosophy again finds itself as a methodology, only now we are offered to work with thoughts as actions (procedures and operations), meaning exclusively other actions. Methodology - the doctrine of thought-actions made over actions. Remaining a representative of post-metaphysical thought (abandoning the concept of "essence"), the methodology is not alien to the metaphysical way of thinking associated with the search and approval of the original action, which is thought-action. Methodology - the metaphysics of action-making.

So, we are looking for power over actions which is provided by thought-action. The doctrine of thought-action in philosophical terms is the most original part of the methodology of G.P. Shchedrovitsky. Usually, the concepts of action relied on the

metaphysics of consciousness, not action. In the sociology of understanding of M. Weber and A. Schütz, the category of action is central, but it is interpreted in the context of rationality (Weber) or limited to the world of life as a natural setting of consciousness (Schütz). The action in this case is a function of rationality or meaning. Figuratively speaking, thought here precedes "deed" and does not originate from "deed". It is not a thought-action. The concept of action in the sociology of understanding belongs to the metaphysics of consciousness or essence. Pragmatism and Marxism, by contrast, are two prominent representatives of the metaphysics of action. In pragmatism, thought finds itself in "usefulness", it originates from a deed pragmatically significant for a person. Usefulness is not a characteristic of a thing (for different people, the same things can be useful or useless). Usefulness is a relationship that is established in a particular action - free choice. In pragmatism, primordial action is understood individually - it is a free choice authorizing the functionality of anything for a particular person. Marxism proclaims the value of the collective. Original action is a "socio-historical practice", the product of the actions of many people, living and dead, the complex result of different forces and conditions, subordinate to a social project as far as possible. The action does not express "usefulness", but "socio-historical interest" - a movement towards a fair world order. An action in which public interest is presented, the work of previous generations is reproduced and the projective component is contained, changes for the better are caused, can be called "activity". The metaphysics of methodology is biased by Marxism in a twofold sense: thought-action is considered collectively and projectively (in the orientation toward the future and, therefore, towards a change in the present). Thought-action is understood as thought-activity (Shhedroviczkij, 1995): thought is determined by social, socio-historical practice; it arises from the needs of socially significant deeds and for its development.

This thesis needs to be clarified. G.P. Shchedrovitsky was never an orthodox Marxist. Like any thinker, he read any philosophical doctrine selectively, focusing on what corresponded to his concept. G.P. Shchedrovitsky believed that the world needed to be improved, but as a thinker, he believed that these changes were caused by thinking. Another characteristic feature of G.P. Shchedrovitsky was communicability. He lived in intellectual communication, saw in it a source of living meanings. Thought activity is social, it expresses the needs of socio-historical practice, but it was also perceived by G.P. Shchedrovitsky specifically - through acts and situations of communication. In the philosophy of the twentieth century, there are a number of concepts in which social is treated as communication. In the phenomenological philosophy of the early M. Bakhtin and E. Levinas, sociality was considered through the concept of the Other and was interpreted in terms of ethics and theology (Levinas). The theory of communicative action of J. Habermas had ties to ethics and politics. The theory of discourse (as a form of communication) by M. Foucault assumed a well-developed view of the historian, etc. The novelty of the G.P. Shchedrovitsky's approach consisted in the fact that in his methodology the first step - socio-historical practice (focused on thought activity) - found its refraction in the theory and practice (by its nature of communicative) of organizational management, understood totally - everything can be considered from the point of view of management. OLM (organization, leadership, management) became the "place", material and method of implementing methodology and thought activity.

4 Summary

In other words, G.P. Shchedrovitsky proposed a symbiosis of methodology and organizational management, of a methodologist and a manager, opening up the possibility of a "revolution from above". The methodologist gains organizational power, they are not just an ordinary manager, but a thinker-manager, socio-engineer and technician who develops and implements new forms of sociality. The subject of the transformation of reality and socially significant thought activity from now on is a special social group of well-trained intellectuals-managers, some sort of Knecht managers[1], who have mastered the techniques of methodological analysis. This, of course, is an elitist project, constructivist and avant-garde. The left wing of the Russian avant-garde represented by Tatlin and Rodchenko set a goal: to become artist-engineers (Xofman, 2004). Art was dissolved in industrial production, the creation of a thing replaced a combination of artistic techniques. The philosopher, like the artist, masters the skills of the engineering approach: they develop and promote the introduction of new ways of working. The thinker-methodologist, engaged in the reflection of organizational management communication, creates projects. Projects shape the activity, directing it in the right direction. Thought is no longer engaged in the construction of special objects-theories, it invades life, dissolves in "deed", lives by its needs, promotes the "deed" and cannot exist separately from it. It is significant that the traditional conceptual analysis is supplemented in the methodology by schematization, work with schemes, which is well known to engineers, a special situation analysis procedure that allows you to create holistic "ontological pictures" of a particular thought activity and operate on them.

5 Conclusions

An important philosophical and ontological category in the methodology is the categorical pair "artificial/natural". Thought activity is a centaur-like object, a combination of artificially technical, power-willed, and natural, corresponding to the nature of the object and the situation, processes. If G.P. Shchedrovitsky, the creator of the STA-methodology, was still familiar with the balance of the artificial and the natural (otherwise it is hardly possible to create something worthwhile), today, it seems, the artificial-technical relationship is more in demand. Philosophy, even if it acts as a theory, is still work. When we theorize, we do something. Since the times of F. Bacon and R. Descartes, the nature of this work, which is familiar to us, is determined by the "methodology", by various methods of organizing and organizing one's thoughts. The STA-methodology in its activity-oriented interpretation of thinking crowns this approach and at the same time overcomes it: the methodology is taken beyond the framework of philosophy striving to control its own thinking (Descartes). The STA-methodology aimed at controlling any activity (thinking, although important, is not the only human activity). In this universalist claim, the STA-methodology takes the place of "applied philosophy", offering a set of philosophical (and general scientific) tools that are subordinate to the organization of changes in the external environment of a person and the person themselves as part of this environment. Obviously, there is nothing wrong with the emancipation of methodology as one of the principles of thinking associated with "working on others" (as objects of transformation) - this is one of the types of human activity that is universally encouraged in practice today (there are many things to be discussed today). Just why not supplement this kind of activity with "work on oneself"? In fact, the use of any methodology is also a form of "work on oneself". Philosophy in this case is associated with the practice of (self-)clarification of a given position (rather than constructing the subject of study). To know what one or another philosophy/methodology does to us is sometimes extremely interesting. In this sense, deserves attention the position of the later works of M. Foucault, who in the course of the lectures "The Hermeneutics of the Subject" considered it necessary to introduce the now widely known distinction between philosophy as reflection on the conditions for comprehending the truth by the subject and spirituality by which he understood "work on oneself" in connection with the need to bring the transformations required to comprehend the truth (Fuko, 2007). There are "systems of thought", discourses or systems of activities, but there is also the opportunity to see oneself as just the author of a certain concept in which there is the assumption of one or another "system of thought". There is another thing worthier of being surprised about: *what else is there*, besides what we managed to discern before in our striving forward? Maybe once

---

[1] The master of the game, Joseph Knecht, is the main character in H. Hesse's novel "The Glass Bead Game" which at one time was popular among methodologists.

again we'll have to decide to do something with ourselves, peering intently at what is, and not what will be?

Acknowledgements

Literature:

1. Anellis, I.: The Life and Thought of David B. Zilberman. *Studies in East European Thought*, 20(2), 1979. 165-175.
2. Borisov, E., Inishev, I., & Furs, V.: *Prakticheskij povorot v postmetafizicheskoj filosofii.* 1988*.* T.1. Vil`nyus: EGU, 212 s.
3. Fuko, M.: *Germenevtika sub``ekta: Kurs lekcij, prochitanny`x v Kollezh de Frans v 1981-1982 uchebnom godu. 2007.* SPb.: Nauka,. 677 s. 2008. S. 27.
4. Hanson, P., & Kirkwood, M. (Ed.): *Alexander Zinoviev as writer and thinker: an assessment.* Macmillan Press, 207 p.
5. Husserl, E.: *Cartesian Meditations. An introduction to phenomenology.* Hague/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 157 p. P.1-3, 1982. 18-21.
6. Mamardashvili, M.: Analysis of Consciousness in the Works of Marx. *Studies in Soviet Thought*, 32, 1986. 101-120.
7. Piatigorsky, A.: *The Buddhist philosophy of thought.* Curzon Press, 1984. 224 p.
8. Shhedroviczkij, G.P.: Sxema my`sledeyatel`nosti – sistemno-strukturnoe stroenie, smy`sl i soderzhanie. Izbranny`e trudy`. M.: Shkola kul`turnoj politiki, 1995. 281-298.
9. Xofman, V.: *Osnovy` sovremennogo iskusstva.* Vvedenie v ego simvolicheskie formy. 2004. SPb.: Akademicheskij proekt, 560 s. S. 381.
10. Zinchenko, A.P.: Putevoditel` po osnovny`m ponyatiyam i sxemam metodologii Organizacii, Rukovodstva i Upravleniya: Xrestomatiya po rabotam G.P. Shhedroviczkogo. 2004. Sostav.:. M.: Delo, 208 s. S. 3.

Primary Paper Section: A

Secondary Paper Section: AA