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Social Rationality: the Problem of Definitions

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This paper observes the problem of definitions of social rationality. The author applies the postnonclassical sociological approach to the analysis of social rationality. The sociological approach is critically necessary insofar as rationality is a social phenomenon, and any rationalizing activity acts as an activity of the social subjects. Postnonclassical approach is being employed in this research in connection with the fact that it claims the dialectical unity of the cognizer and the object of knowledge and thereby enables us to overcome the conflict of existing versions of rationality, absolutizing its epistemological or ontological aspects. This point of view allowed the author to assert that an essential feature of rationality is reflective design (logicization) of objects of reality – the unity of logicization as means of cognitive reflection, accessible to person, and logicized item as an object of cognitive reflection. Meanwhile logicization is defined as the use of logical tools, regardless of the presence in this application certain logic errors (this feature distinguishes logicized from logical). Guided by these theoretical grounds, the author formulates the definition of social rationality in the broad and narrow senses. In the broad sense, social rationality is a set of reflexive content of social reality, in the narrow sense social rationality is displayed as any reflective act (its process and outcome) of an individual or a group subject of social action, carried out by using verbal means of communication.

Keywords: rationality, social rationality, postnonclassical approach, logicization, reflexivity.

Introduction.

The current state of social rationality

In the modern social sciences there exists theoretical pluralism with regard to the ambit of “rationality”. This, together with the known advantages, creates a methodological problem raised by the existence of different theoretical approaches applying to the conflicting versions of rationality. In connection with this the urgent task is to construct a theory of rationality capable of integrating different approaches into its understanding and to create

a space for communication, setting the ratio of complementarity between them. The need for a conception of unified rationality has been pointed out by many authors, offering various options for solving this problem (Avtonomova, 1995; Fedotova, 1999; Shvyrev, 2003; Asatryan, 2007; et al.).

The following methods of interpreting the values of rationality are mostly used in scientific literature: as logically reasoned, acknowledged, expressing the logical relationship between aims and means (Weber, 1990; Pareto, 2008);

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as designed, conformed to law content of the reality (Mudragey, 2002; Fenvesh, 2010); as an effective basis, determined as an ability to select actions, means and structures to achieve the goal (Hungarov, 1995; Nikiforov, 1999; Genov, 2007).

Also, there is no single concept of social rationality. Social rationality is discussed as a type of rationality, which expresses a set of standards of social and group behavior, serving goals socially significant for this society (Rakitov, 1982); as a concept denoting cognitive, social and transforming activity of individuals and groups; as the way of functioning of social systems, expressed in their structural logic and their ability to self-refer and self-regulate (Sivirinov, 2003). Along with this, many authors consider rationality as a characteristic of human social behavior, discussing it in the terms of decision theory (Indina and Morosanova, 2009; Grandori, 2010), theory of rational choice (Segre, 2008; Kazachkov, 2008; Elster, 2009; Best, 2009; Mehlkop and Graeff, 2010), game theory (Back and Flache, 2008; Weesie et al., 2009) and model of frame selection (Kroneberg et al., 2010). Also, several authors examine cognitive rationality as the problem of contacts in the systems of social action, which is related to the interpretation of the social actors of knowledge and behavior (Stone, 2009; Gintis, 2010). Several authors, using the term “social rationality” do not give its definition which generates a plurality of its meanings (Rodionova and Bolotova, 2010).

Meanings of rationality listed above do not exhaust all its possible interpretations. However, already mentioned meanings are materially different from each other, which leads to the impossibility of applying them in the study of social objects through the prism of opposition “rational – irrational”. So, logization of connection between the objectives and means of activity does not inevitably entail a high degree of effectiveness of the latter. On the contrary, the effectiveness of

the mentioned connection is not necessarily the subject of reflection and can exist as unformed and random content. Adherence to standards of activity as the embodiment of rationality does not constitute the need for an effective way to achieve the goal. On the contrary, going beyond the standards of rationality (an irrational action) may be more effective than following those. Finally, the conformity to law of a particular social phenomenon or an action is not necessarily the subject of logization and may not have the articulation in the reflexive field of an actor. Thus, irrational can be rational, and vice versa. In this regard, the conclusion that marks the current state of rationality is the thesis by I.T. Kasavin, made more than fifteen years ago, that “perhaps, the only, generally recognized conclusion about the problem of rationality is the recognition of its debatable state” (Kasavin, 1995, p. 187).

Point.

Postnonclassical approach to the problem of social rationality

To solve the stated problem, in our opinion, it should be approached from a sociological point of view, with the application of the postnonclassical approach to the analysis of social reality. We will explain this position. As it is well-known, the features of the classic scientific approach are abstraction from the cognizer in the aggregate of their cognitive abilities and means and the opposition of subject and object of cognition (the position of ideal (absolute) observer). The principle of opposition of the cognizer and the object of cognition is asserted by Weber, who follows G. Rickert and posits it as the basis of all the knowledge (Gaidenko, 1991). Without belittling the heuristic value of this principle per se, we note that in the process of cognition of the social phenomena which social rationality belongs to, its use is associated with significant difficulties. The latter is due to the fact that the

cognizer, using rational means of cognition (thought), always has social distinctions. They are expressed, on the one hand, by the subject's applying the sign system (language), constitutive of thoughts and consciousness, on the other hand – by the aggregate of value orientations of subject and cultural meanings, creating orientation of their cognitive activity. Both the first and the second are possible only in the social space. Thus, the cognizer, dealing with social reality, is an integral part of this very reality. In this regard, the ideal (absolute) observer, as the cognizer of social reality, is an ideal model, which has no place in the actual practice of knowledge. As N.M. Smirnova has rightly pointed out, this model ignores the inclusion of a subject “in the structure of the life-world”, a subject's lack of freedom “from the premises caused by their position in a social group” (Smirnova, 1999, p. 208-209). Consequently, the absolute position of an observer is the point of observation outside social reality. Given the above-noted social conditioning of the cognizer, the existence of such a point of observation is impossible. Thus, any observation of a social object is a participant's observation. This thesis was extensively discussed in sociology even 40 years ago in the light of the principle of complementarity in the process of cognizing social objects. According to the conclusions made by Ya. S. Alekseev and Ph. M. Borodkin, “the object of study now is not the very reality, which existence is independent of the observer, but the system consisting of an object (in the classical sense) and the conditions of observation, by which we mean the set of measurement procedures, including methods and tools of measurement, as well as the actual observer (researcher), who is connected with the observed system” (Alexeyev and Borodkin, 1970, p. 41).

Non-classical scientific approach involves taking into account the cognitive activity of the

subject as a factor influencing the achievement of knowledge and its outcome. Finally, postnonclassical science is characterized by the inclusion of the cognizer in a scientific picture of the studied reality, in consideration of influencing the nature of attained knowledge not only the cognitive components of cognitive activity of the subject, but also the key determinants of subject's activity – needs, values, goals (Trufanov, 2010).

Thus, in both the non-classical and postnonclassical approaches the participation of the cognizer in the object of knowledge is actively postulated. The subject constitutes the object by its cognitive actions, applied means of knowledge, and value orientations. As a result the cognizer and the object of knowledge display complementarity, integrity, ontological continuity, so that their separation is possible only at the theoretical level. Consequently, the cognizer must be included in the sphere of scientific analysis. Focusing on this theoretical starting point, we used the term “postnonclassical approach” as a generic concept for the concepts of “non-classical approach” and “postnonclassical approach”.

Taking into consideration these key points we define our approach as the postnonclassical approach, which includes the cognizer in the area of scientific analysis on the basis of the principle of complementarity (Turchenko, 2003; Nemirovsky, 2005). Such an approach, as it will be shown later, is necessary to solve the problem of social rationality, as well as to construct a unified theory of rationality capable of integrating different approaches in its understanding.

Example.

Definitions of social rationality

Analysis of the above interpretations of rationality on the grounds of the theoretical points of postnonclassical approach shows that the conflict of definitions of rationality is created by distinguishing of epistemological and ontological

aspects of rationality. Thus, the interpretation of rationality in the epistemological aspect claims cognitive criterion of rationality, characterizing cognitive, interpretational, social and transforming activity of the social subjects. The interpretation of rationality in the ontological aspect sets it as an objective property of reality, conformity to law, a way of self-reference and self-regulation of social systems. Therefore, complementarity of different definitions of rationality can be established by admitting the mergence of epistemological and ontological aspects of rationality. It is known that the traditional gap between ontology and epistemology has been overcome in dialectic (there cannot be any “pure ontological” or “pure epistemological” characteristics) (Bazhenov, 1976) and in social theory (in social life there are no natural facts – any fact is included in the horizon of interpretation) (Zinchenko, 2003). Thus, an inextricable link between the subject and the object of knowledge is postulated, when the subject is an integral part of the object. In this regard, seeking the invariant content of rationality, V.G. Fedotova points out the methodological principle of his study, which establishes the unity of cognitive and social criteria of rationality (Fedotova, 1999).

Thus, the definition of rationality must take into account mergence, the unity of method and content of the rationalization on the basis of their ontological continuity. The attempts to implement this principle in the existing definition of rationality, as a rule, narrow object at the expense of absolutization of partial contents of cognitive rationality (Lipsky, 1997; Shvyrev, 2003; et al.). Thus, V.S. Shvyrev discusses reflexive control as an essential trait of rationality (Shvyrev, 2003). Such a sign of rationality, in the opinion of the author, are “special efforts of the consciousness of the subject to analyze of proportionality of the subject’s position and subject’s real situation, suggesting an independent outline of the “perfect

plan” of actions, which is orientated on the real situation” (Shvyrev, 2003, p. 42-43). This analysis of proportionality is the point of reflexive control, aiming at the correlation of the “perfect plan” of actions and very actions as the act being actually carried out. Thus, the outline of consciousness be should realized, the activity of the subject should be defined as rational or otherwise – as irrational. Rationality in this sense describes the subjects’ active attitude to the world, their freedom to choose behavior alternatives, which is opposed to “any kind of automatism of external determination, when the subject performs a passive recipient of affecting their mentality forces (automatism of instinctive immediate reaction, habit, stamp, actions implemented under the influence of tradition and authority, etc.)” (Shvyrev, 2003, p. 45).

Such a conception of rationality, in our opinion, is very narrow. It is doubtful whether the reduction of the author of the manifold manifestations of rationality to the outline of “perfect plan” of actions and correlation it with reality is error-free. It is unclear why this content of consciousness is chosen as a criterion of rationality, why reflexive practice of different intentionality must be assigned to the field of irrational.

Following the logic of V.S. Shvyrev, the answer to this question must be that the discussed content of rationality has been chosen as its criterion on the grounds that it constitutes the subject as an autonomous author. This author has the freedom of choice of the behavioral patterns, resisting the external determination of the latter. Thereby rationalization in this sense implies “the possibility of presenting a problem situation from the outside, modeling it as a whole in a perfect plan, objectification of subject’s own position as a result of this modeling – it is the famous thesis of “the separation of the subject from the world” – and designing options of motion within the model

of the problem situation” (Shvyrev, 2003, p. 45). But it is quite clear that such a separation from the world assumes the position of the ideal (absolute) observer, the impossibility of which we have indicated above.

Thus, the criterion of rationality, set by V.S. Shvyrev, is an attempt to implement the principle of mergence of epistemological and ontological aspects of rationality by integrating in the concept of “rationality” both cognitive (making an ideal plan of actions), and “really practical” (actions correspond to an ideal plan) activity of the subject. However, as it was shown, such an attempt narrows the variety of manifestations of rationality at the expense of absolutization of its particular contents. Trying to ignore the specific content of the experience and knowledge with a goal to find an invariant component of rationality, the author, in fact, posits the specific content of consciousness as a marker of rationality.

In our opinion, in the search of the invariant criterion of rationality beyond the specific contents of consciousness, as such, we should review not the content, but the very form of activity – reflection as auto-communication of the subject. Definitely, the adopted postnonclassical approach to the problem of social rationality allows us to select the property of reflexivity (verbalization) as an invariant in the various approaches and definitions of rationality, without which these definitions no longer exist (definitions, but not the phenomena which they fix). In this case, reflexivity involves logization – the application of the logical tools (concepts, judgments, conclusions) in spite of the logic errors in such an application. The latter circumstance distinguishes logization from logic. Thus, logization is a way of existence of rationality, expressing its cognitive side (epistemological characterization of rationality). Ontological aspect of rationality is expressed in the intentionality of logization: logization always

focuses on the specific content of reality and is impossible beyond that content. The content of logization contains various objects of reality, including logization itself. This allows us to assert the social nature of rationality because of the impossibility of verbalized reflection (logization) without social reality. Thereby, the concepts of “rationality” and “social rationality” should be recognized as synonymous.

Proceeding from this understanding, *social rationality in the broadest sense should be represented as a set of reflexive content of social reality*. Reflection at this level should be understood as a cognitive self-referral of social practice – the aggregate of mutually orientated reflections of the social actors (the network reflection). This aggregate creates “its own layer” of social reality, reflecting in the cognitive tools its own being of the given reality.

In this definition, we also rely on the thesis of S.L. Frank about existence as transfinite content. According to his work, the essence of being (being is a whole, comprehensive unity) as “transfinite is that it is the unity of certainty and uncertainty – because the difference between them is a difference within the very existence (as well as any other difference)” (Frank, 2007, p. 84-85). “If we now separate mentally these logically consistent contents from what is beyond their limits and do not belong to them, then – in the face of this last element – we will have – in just such a negative definition – the irrational. This irrational should be seen as something of the substrate or *materia prima*” (Frank, 2007, p. 72). Thus, reality is the unity of issued and formless, definite and indefinite, logicalized and not. In this case, the criterion of logical focus distinguishes rational and irrational. Such a view allows us to consider the content of reflexive social reality as the unity of method and content of rationality, as mergence and interdependence of logization and logicalised.

In this broad understanding social rationality reveals features of a social fact in Durkheim's sense (Durkheim, 1990). An individual in the process of socialization is facing social rationality as a social and cultural intent, having external existence and enforcement in relation to it. These intents express rationality in the form of social norms, collective opinions, assessments and standards of behavior that have received a verbal expression, as well as in the form of knowledge, information and other products of reflexive activity of individuals and communities.

Further, since the reflexive content of social reality implies cognitive activities of subjects, *the social rationality in the narrow sense should be defined as any reflective act (its process and outcome) of individual or group subject of social action, carried out by using verbal means of communication.* In this case, a reflexive act is always the unity of logization (the way of accessible cognitive reflection) and logicized (the object of cognitive reflection). Thus, discussion of the above versions of rationality is carried out by their logization. There is no other way to make the values of rationality under discussion, but to establish and articulate the belonging of certain predicates to the concepts of items thought. Rational as effective, rational as a set, rational as appropriate in the system of values, rationality as comprehensibility of the objective of universal and other existing values of rationality are reflexive contents and are not available outside logization. Currently, our reader is in the context of such a form of social interaction, which should be defined as a form of social rationality. Here we can repeat after Searle, that "any thought, language, and therefore, the argument assumes the existence of rationality" (Searle, 2004, p. 12).

However, the above definitions of rationality are the kinds of social rationality, understood

as a set of reflexive (verbalized) contents. The basis for their allocation is in the meanings of concepts (objects, events and connections within reality, marked by the concept), the relation between them being rationalized. So, rational as a set is allocated on the basis of the logicalised relationship between the meanings of "social phenomenon", "conformity to law", "design", "order"; rational as effective involves logicalised connection between the meanings of "social action", "goal achievement", "efficiency", "means for goal achievement", etc. These kinds of social rationality are its substantial aspects and can be used to study the individual parts and contents of social reality.

The flip side of rationality is social irrational—a set of non-reflexive contents of social beyond logic of the recorded meanings. This is *materia prima*, according to S.L. Frank, which rationalization is directed on. Thus, rational and irrational components of social reality form a complex synthesis. As B.S. Sivirinov notes, "sociology should consider irrational as varying hypostasis of rational, and vice versa. In other words, sociology should take and consider the obvious functional "mergence", inseparability of rational and irrational in society" (Sivirinov, 2003, p. 10). In this way, conformity to law of particular social structures and phenomena is an irrational content as long as it is not articulated in the reflexive activities of individuals and communities. Receiving such an articulation, conformity to law becomes a rational content and begins to exist as knowledge, performing also a function of socio-cultural prediction in the intergenerational transmission of experience. The very conformity to law as the rational content is a reflective model of relations between social objects and patterns of existence of the social systems and is used to "measure" these relations in a particular social object. Also, the efficiency becomes the rational content in connection with

what is a reflective model of relations between means and results of the activity, applied to rationalize this relation in specific situations of the activity of individuals and communities. Next, we will make conclusions.

Results

1. To solve the problem of social rationality it is heuristically valuable to apply postnonclassical sociological approach. Sociological approach is necessary insofar as rationality is a social phenomenon, and any rationalizing activity is an activity of a social subject. Postnonclassical approach is necessary as long as it maintains the dialectical unity of the cognizer and the object of cognition, and thereby enables us to establish emergence of ontological and epistemological aspects of rationality. This theoretical position allows integrating different approaches in the understanding of rationality, the differences between them are related to absolutization of ontological or epistemological aspects.

2. The concepts of “rationality” and “social rationality” are synonymous and express the same content. In this case, rationality is always social, since it does not exist outside social reality. The essential feature of rationality is reflective design (logicization) of the objects of reality (the unity of logicization and logicized).

3. Social rationality in the broad sense is the aggregate of reflective contents of social reality. Reflection on this level acts as a cognitive self-

referral of social practices that creates “its own layer” of social reality, reflecting by the means of cognitive tools the very existence of given reality.

4. Social rationality in the narrow sense is any reflexive act (its process and outcome) of an individual or a group subject of social action, carried out with the help of the verbal means of communication. In this sense, the concept of social rationality characterizes the cognitive activity of social actors, which creates a set of reflexive content of social reality.

Thus, social rationality should be defined as the reflexive content of social reality that is constituted by the cognitive practices of the social actors. This approach reveals the essential feature of rationality, which is invariant in different definitions and allows combining conflicting versions of rationality within a unified theoretical model. Moreover, different versions of rationality are correlated as the forms of social rationality, understood in this way. Also, this approach allows us to refine the methodological principle of theoretical and empirical study of rationality, which establishes the unity of cognitive, social, ontological and epistemological aspects of rationality. Finally, the application of this approach would develop, on the basis of empirical reduction of rationality, the effective methods of applied study of the rationality of the social systems in its various aspects.

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Социальная рациональность: к проблеме дефиниции

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В статье обсуждается проблема дефиниции социальной рациональности. Автор применяет постнеклассический социологический подход к анализу социальной рациональности. Социологический подход необходим постольку, поскольку рациональность есть явление социальное и любая рационализирующая деятельность есть деятельность социального субъекта. Постнеклассический подход применен в связи с тем, что он утверждает диалектическое единство познающего субъекта и объекта познания и тем самым позволяет преодолеть конфликтность существующих версий рациональности, абсолютизирующих гносеологические или онтологические ее аспекты. Такая точка зрения позволила автору утверждать, что существенным признаком рациональности является рефлексивная оформленность (логизированность) объектов реальности – единство логизации как способа когнитивного отражения, доступного человеку и логизируемого как объекта когнитивного отражения. При этом логизацию автор определяет как применение логического инструментария, независимо от наличия в данном применении логических ошибок (этот признак отличает логизированное от логического). Основываясь на указанных теоретических основаниях, автор формулирует определения социальной рациональности в широком и узком смыслах. В широком смысле социальная рациональность есть совокупность рефлексивных содержаний социальной реальности; в узком – любой рефлексивный акт (его процесс и результат) индивидуального или группового субъекта социального действия, осуществляемый с помощью вербальных средств коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: социальная рациональность, рефлексивность, постнеклассический подход.
