

CRITIQUE OF CULTURAL SCIENCES: ERNST CASSIRER AND SYMBOLIC MONISM

Critique des sciences de la culture: Ernst Cassirer et le monisme symbolique

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Abstract: The main goal of the paper is to show that Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms may be viewed as a culmination of efforts of those thinkers who at the turn of the 19th and 20th century were a part of the so called anti-positivist movement. The paper focuses fore and foremost on those philosophers who in their attempts of grounding and defining *Geisteswissenschaften* were following the initial idea of Immanuel Kant’s transcendental philosophy. Cassirer’s symbolical monism is presented as an attempt of identifying that “original need of human mind”, an attempt which ultimately paved way for determining and establishing a distinctively different type of reflection than the one found in natural sciences, despite all the multifariousness of seemingly unreconcilable results arrived at by different thinkers. The author argues that Cassirer’s conception – unlike those found in the works of Droysen, Dilthey, Rickert or Windelband – strives to ground *Geisteswissenschaften*’s conditions of possibility not on the Kantian concept of determining judgment, but on a concept of reflective judgment, i.e., not on the Kantian concept of the scheme, but on concept of symbol which in turn makes it possible to establish a methodological and symbolic-cultural unity of both natural sciences and humanities.

Keywords: Cassirer; *Geisteswissenschaften*; symbolic forms; power of judgement; anti-positivism.

Résumé: L’objectif principal de l’article est de montrer que la philosophie des formes symboliques de Cassirer peut être considérée comme l’aboutissement des efforts de ces penseurs qui, au tournant du 19^e et du 20^e siècle, faisaient partie du soi-disant mouvement anti-positiviste. L’article se concentre avant tout sur les philosophes qui, dans leurs tentatives d’ancrage et de définition des *Geisteswissenschaften*, suivaient l’idée initiale de la philosophie transcendantale d’Emmanuel Kant. Le monisme symbolique de Cassirer est présenté comme une tentative d’identifier ce « besoin originel de l’esprit humain », une tentative qui a finalement ouvert la voie à la détermination et à l’établissement d’un type de réflexion distinctement différent de celui que l’on trouve dans les sciences naturelles, malgré toute la multiplicité des résultats, apparemment inconciliables, obtenus par différents penseurs. L’auteur argumente que la conception de Cassirer – contrairement à celles trouvées dans les travaux de Droysen, Dilthey, Rickert ou Windelband – s’efforce de fonder les conditions de possibilité de *Geisteswissenschaften* non pas sur le concept kantien de jugement déterminant, mais sur un concept de jugement réflexif, c’est-à-dire non sur le concept kantien du schème, mais sur le concept de symbole qui à son tour permet d’établir une unité méthodologique et symbolique-culturelle, à la fois des sciences naturelles et des sciences humaines.

Mots clés: Cassirer; *Geisteswissenschaften*; formes symboliques; faculté de juger; antipositivisme.

1. Introduction

In the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century an anti-naturalistic breakthrough occurred, inspired mainly by opposition, on the one hand, towards radical

positivism and, on the other hand, towards speculative Hegelian understanding of history. That breakthrough was revealed in a variety of ways. It is often identified with the philosophers who are called today the philosophers of life, despite the fact that thinkers from different schools, with different orientations, who, each in their own way, opposed the dictates of scientism, contributed to it. That opposition was sometimes more, and sometimes less constructive – it was expressed by Romantic poets, or philosophers such as, for example Friedrich Nietzsche, loudly claiming the autonomy of forms of thinking other than mathematical-natural ones. However, the attempts to sanction such autonomy were undertaken mostly by the representatives of Ranke's historical school (including such persons as Droysen or Burckhardt), by thinkers such as Dilthey, by Windelband and Rickert, associated with the Baden Neo-Kantian school (and by Weber, who owed a lot to those two), or by the representatives of the Marburg Neo-Kantian school, especially by Ernst Cassirer. The latter is the most prominent character in this article, whose main thesis is a conviction that Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms constitutes the culmination of the above-mentioned efforts. The selection of those efforts, presented below, is arbitrary, and they are not presented in detail. They are connected, first and foremost, by more or less justified references to Kant and his critical philosophy, and thus to the conditions resulting from the structure of human cognition, which make it possible to apply the proposed solutions.

Tradition has at its disposal at least a few terms to define specific scientific, research and cognitive activities which either do not want to submit to methodological rigor, characteristic for the so-called exact sciences, or whose subject seems to be insufficiently exact from those latter ones' point of view. Terms such as cultural sciences, social sciences, humanities, or even cultural studies and historical research, despite the fact that the range of activities which they respectively denote, or the methods of scientific practices connected with these activities are significantly distinct from each other, refer, in a way, to a common core, and certainly have a similar historical origin. It seems that this origin cannot be reconstructed with sufficient detail; it may perhaps be possible to try to indicate the pioneer application of those terms and the contexts in which they were used. However, having at one's disposal a method allowing for relating to each other different contexts of use, different cognitive situations generating such terms, and different "cultural facts", it may be possible to try and establish a "source need of the

human spirit”, which resulted in all those – often radically different and, at first glance, irreconcilable - attempts to define and sanction reflection other than mathematical-natural one. This method in itself is a consequence of Kantian transcendentalism developed by Cassirer. Therefore, though it may seem paradoxical at first, the method for “humanities” research will be defined here with the use of this method itself, as the conditions for understanding may be presented only within these conditions for understanding.

2. The problem of cultural sciences

The reference point for considerations concerning the source of cultural sciences may be the German term *Geisteswissenschaften*, which is historically regarded – mainly thanks to Wilhelm Dilthey’s research – as a classical one. The sources usually provide the information that this term appeared in the German language for the first time in the year 1849, in Schiel’s translation of the work by Mill, and was to be the equivalent of the term “*moral science*” (*moral philosophy*) (Makkreel, 1969, p. 254). That application definitely popularised the term, although it is known that it can be found, with the meaning corresponding to its present interpretation and, what is more, confronted with the term *Naturwissenschaften*, in Ernst Calinich’s work, called *Philosophische Propädeutik*¹, which had been published two years earlier.

According to Wilhelm Dilthey, the very changeability of terms which were to be used in defining a group of sciences contrasted with natural sciences, revealed the difficulties encountered when addressing this problem². The consolidated tradition of setting science and culture against each other is of great importance to every discussion, including current ones, concerning the specificity of the latter. In his work “*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*”, before addressing the title issue (the metaphysics of nature

¹ Calinich writes: “The word ‘philosophy’ was used with a double meaning. It partly denotes the sciences which do not relate – like natural sciences and mathematics – to something sensual or perceived by senses, but to the innermost being of man, to the world of spirit. In such understanding, philosophy encompasses well-known studies, such as study of soul (*Seelenlehre*), study of thought, art studies, study on morality, law studies and study on religion. And these studies are called philosophical studies. In contrast to natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*), they may be called spiritual sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*)” (Calinich, 1847, p. 1).

² “Ever since the eighteenth century, as the need arose of finding a common name for this group of sciences, they were designated as moral sciences, or as *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences), or finally as *Kulturwissenschaften* (cultural sciences). This change of names alone shows that none of them is quite adequate to what is to be designated. At this point, I merely indicate my use of the term *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences) and the way it refers to *Geist* (spirit). It is the same way in which Montesquieu spoke of the spirit of the laws, Hegel of objective spirit, and Ihering of the spirit of Roman law” (Dilthey, 2002, pp. 102-107).

was saved for another time), Immanuel Kant expresses an opinion that the ancient division of philosophy into three sciences, namely physics, ethics and logic “is perfectly suitable to the nature of the thing and one cannot improve upon it” (*GMS*, IV: 387). This division, resulting from the subject-object dichotomy, and correspondent to the famous “starry sky above and moral law within”, as well as to their inherently discursive form, is sometimes supplemented in classical philosophy (for example in Kant’s works) with aesthetics which, in turn, represents an entirely different way of making unity out of multitude, and a completely different kind of unity. However, it is in aesthetics that we can indicate the seed of the idea discussed here.

The problem of logical structure of cultural sciences, including the particular character of its main concepts against the background of the whole logic, was addressed relatively late. The French encyclopaedists were practically the first to point out, consciously, the separateness and specific character of sciences of spirit/mind (*sciences morales*) and social sciences (*sciences sociales*). The ideal of science was still defined mainly by the mathematical and natural models. Also the Kantian *Critique of Practical Reason*, where at least one of the aims was to consolidate the major principles of science in general, did not go beyond that ideal, refusing to regard as scientific any judgements other than “universally valid and apodictically certain” ones.

Cultural science (*Kulturwissenschaft*) was not provided with the same kind of transcendental justification as natural science (*Naturwissenschaft*). This dichotomous division of sciences, which is still functioning, took on various forms in the works of philosophers who were pondering the structure and semantics of human knowledge, hence it is difficult to perform an unambiguous and precise reconstruction of the source of this division. Generally, there are two attempts at presenting reality, which appear most often in the works of philosophy classics, namely mechanical and theological, where it is recognised respectively as nature and history or spirit. The simplification of the first one is called naturalistic in literature, whereas the second one is referred to as humanistic or historical. Here there appears a place for the “third way” - a synthesis of the above two, which might indicate the conditions of their possibility.

This original dichotomy could be justified, as it usually has been done, by the dissimilarity of the subject or methods of sciences understood in such a way. Setting aside the logical possibility of distinctiveness and irreconcilability of both, we still have two

ways at our disposal, namely logical predominance of the concept of culture over the concept of nature, as well as logical predominance of the concept of nature over the concept of culture. These two different ways do not have to imply complete distinctiveness and irreconcilability of areas ruled by entirely different principles. On the contrary, the history of the problem of cognition provides evidence of continuous attempts to squeeze the former into the latter or to control the latter by the former.

Despite the fact that since the 17th, or even 16th century, i.e. the Renaissance period, it has been possible to talk, like Dilthey, about the “natural system of sciences of the spirit” (See: Dilthey, 1914, pp. 90-245), it would be difficult to categorise, unambiguously, the research conducted by, for example, Herder or Wilhelm von Humboldt, as belonging to any particular area of knowledge. Mathematised sciences were at that time the ideal of science – the triumphs of naturalists and mathematicians sanctified that way of practising science as the only right and truly effective one. That tendency, crowned with the Kantian *Critique of Pure Reason*, which somehow used the methods of natural sciences to examine the possibilities of metaphysics as science, also resulted in attempts to push the issues which are today referred to as humanistic ones onto the track of mathematical method. The effectiveness of that method, combined with the conviction that it is necessary and possible to establish a uniform principle of the world, which was already present in ancient times, resulted in probably the most consistent attempt to methodologically link geometry and ethics, which we can find in the works of Benedict Spinoza. Spinoza’s methodological monism, presented in his *Ethica, ordine geometrico demonstrata* (1677) is dictated by metaphysical considerations. The ultimate metaphysical questions lead necessarily to ethics, so if the unity of the world is to remain safe, there must be a connection between these two areas. This connection is made in accordance with a geometrical (mathematical) model.

In turn, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was of the opinion that cognition based on a geometrical model, where everything can be put down to laws, is clear, whether that characterised by such a degree of complexity which does not allow for encompassing detailed phenomena in laws, is “an obscure, intuitive” cognition, where we can recognise regularities, but are unable to ascribe concrete laws to them. Such a difference, using the language of later tradition, would be the difference between discursive and intuitive

cognition. Obscure cognition would concern the diversity of sensations which, however, could also be subjected to some kinds of knowledge. Leibniz writes:

Each soul knows the infinite, knows all, but confusedly. As in walking on the sea-shore and hearing the great noise which it makes, I hear the individual sound of each wave, of which the total sound is composed, but without distinguishing them; so our confused perceptions are the result of the impressions which the whole universe makes upon us. (Leibniz, 1890, p. 215)

Aesthetics, founded by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (Baumgarten, 1750) with regard to that differentiation of two degrees of cognitive clarity, would be based on such cognition. Baumgarten's *gnoseologia inferior* was, however, only a subset, which does not have autonomy in relation to *gnoseologia superior*, based on a logical-geometrical model. Therefore the difference here would be only quantitative and would concern the degree of complexity of examined objects or phenomena. Clear knowledge, thanks to the development of methods and tools, would "steal" individual areas or phenomena from obscure cognition, squeezing them into conceptual frames.

However, this kind of reduction is not methodologically different from the one which we associate with the opposite stream of philosophy. A similar reduction was performed at the end of the 18th century by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling who, opposing the subordination of spirit to nature (i. e. aesthetics to logic) was trying, in turn, to subordinate nature to spirit (so, in a way, logic to aesthetics). In such approach, nature is accessible only through spirit, which forms it in an arbitrary way. The Romantic vision of freedom in presenting the world and creating its images with which we may try to "solve" the riddle of nature is again, it seems, an attempt to indicate the primacy of one way of perceiving reality – this time a way which cannot be encompassed in laws³. The objection to which both the above examples are exposed, is connected not so much with validity or invalidity of the method of presentation, as with the conviction that the adopted criterion of presentation is sole and universal.

Schellingian approach which, by simplifying, might be called a humanistic one, and Leibniz-Baumgarten approach, which we may define as a naturalistic one, constitute two basic ways of defining the status of cultural sciences. In history there was rarely a

³ „What we call nature – he writes in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* – is a poem lying secluded in a wondrous and mysterious script” (Schelling, 2014, p. 223).

demand to follow the first course. More often the “humanistic” sciences were requested to become a part of the paradigm of natural sciences, verified and frequently regarded as absolutely effective, i. e. to follow the course defined by Leibniz. The effort to manage the area of knowledge which was to be encompassed in the scheme suitable for natural sciences sometimes took on the form of common determinism, justified by the necessity to ensure the unity of knowledge principles.

In such approach “spiritual” forces somehow affect, in each case, the “physical” forces and vice-versa, fully defining them. Feelings, thoughts, wishes and desires constitute forces with rights equal to those of physical forces. The latter belong to “strong determinism” of the world, which can potentially be embraced by “Laplace’s demon”. This demon, knowing the original position of all the particles, as well as the laws governing their movement, is able to reconstruct their former position and predict the future one. Emotional reactions and stirrings caused by certain events can be foreseen in the same way as the movement of billiard balls, when knowing how the action of one ball is translated into reaction of the other ones. An excerpt from one of the works of Otto Liebmann, a neo-Kantian philosopher, is a good illustration of theoretical attitude and hopes connected with the postulate of pervasive determinism from the mid- 19th century.

Whether it concerns the movement of celestial bodies and atoms, or the movement of market prices and listing of securities, the reconstruction of the order of geological revolutions and transformations of our planet or the prehistory of Rome described in Livius’ tales, the question about human characters, decisions and actions or the sea currents and meteorological phenomena, in each case rational science, in contrast to childish superstitions is based on a fundamental assumption that, within the spheres of real coming into existence, inaccessible to our observation, there is a strict causal link, which exactly corresponds to the one which we discover in sporadically conducted experiments. However, the difficult problem, namely how this basic scientific conviction may be reconciled with moral freedom of will and logical freedom of thought, is transcendental and, in our epistemological analysis, may be completely ignored, regardless of the way in which we will be trying to solve this problem. [...] ‘Not to believe in miracles’ and ‘to believe in strong regularity of all coming into existence, without allowing for any exceptions’, i. e. have absolutely no doubts about the necessary, objective and common binding power of the causality principle – both these expressions are either interchangeable or synonymous. (Liebmann, 1884, pp. 87)

From the above excerpt emerges the idea of science, based on the postulate of fatalism, and defining as scientific only these things which refer to the causality principle or the

principle of purpose – but understood in the way characteristic for exact sciences, where it is possible, at least ideally, to designate certain determination of phenomena or processes. The concept of process itself would be understood here only as a physical process or in the manner of a physical process, where physical dependencies would be a model for spiritual dependencies. In this light everything that cannot be included in the above scheme is categorised as a “miracle” and, as such, definitively excluded from the area of science.

In such a situation humanities would not be in any way different from natural sciences; all science disciplines would be expected to apply, ultimately, a common method, while the results would possibly differ from each other, depending on the complexity of individual cases. Such an idea is characteristic for the most extreme positivist approaches. We would not only be able to predict the movement of planets or chemical reactions, but also to define human characters, like Hippolyte Taine attempted to do, or to explain the appearance of trends in art based on the analysis of landscape or, in general, of natural conditions in which individual nations or authors happened to be living⁴. Following that, man, being a creator of culture, is fully determined by natural conditions, hence there is no place for freedom, and all his actions are defined by laws of nature. However, such reductionism is unacceptable and had to meet with strong opposition, known in history as the “anti-naturalist breakthrough”.

Such differentiation between the ways of justifying cultural sciences corresponds, in fact, to the degree of emphasis put, in each individual case, on one of the sides of object-subject contraposition. The division between realism and idealism is, contrary to established traditions, distorted by identifying determinism with realism, and freedom or, in fact, full discretion, with idealism. To simplify things, the scheme of division could depend on an answer to the question whether culture is the product of nature or vice versa and, what follows, whether the method employed in natural sciences should be superior and also rule the “spirit” or is it the spirit that has priority over nature – are the *Geisteswissenschaften* an area of *Naturwissenschaften*, or is it perhaps the other way around. Kant was asked to provide an answer to that question.

⁴ “No matter if the facts be physical or moral, they all have their causes; there is a cause for ambition, for courage, for truth, as there is for digestion, for muscular movement, for animal heat. Vice and virtue are products, like vitriol and sugar; and every complex phenomenon has its springs from other more simple phenomena on which it hangs. Let us then seek the simple phenomena for moral qualities, as we seek them for physical qualities” (Taine, 1891, p. 6).

3. Kant and the critique of cultural sciences

Kant, and particularly his works concerning the conditions of possibilities of experience understood as scientific experience, were commonly referred to in the 19th century, although the number of factions in Neo-Kantian movement shows that there was no consensus in interpreting thoughts of the philosopher from Königsberg. The situation was similar with regard to the attempts to refer to Kantian critique with the aim of justifying historical sciences. What is obvious, such attempts meant that the critique had to be extended beyond researching the conditions of possibilities of mathematical natural sciences.

The best known, and probably the most frequently quoted attempt to consolidate cultural sciences, which draws, or at least declares that it draws, from Kantian heritage, is the one made by Baden Neo-Kantian philosophers, led by Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert. However, also other pioneers of humanities methodology referred to Kant in their efforts to autonomise and justify a type of reflection other than the mathematical-natural one. One of them was Droysen who, in the year 1858, and therefore earlier than Dilthey, in his *Outlines of the Principles of History* requested “such Kant who would, carefully and critically, examine not so much the historical materials, as the theoretical and practical attitudes towards history and within its sphere” (Droysen, 1843). These words include a postulate for “critique of historical reason”, the postulate to examine the “conditions of possibilities of historical sciences”, which was formulated more precisely by Dilthey in his work *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, published in 1883 (See: Dilthey, 1883, p. 141).

Dilthey’s achievements in that area are invaluable; he is regarded as a philosophy classic and a precursor of modern reflection on culture. However, it is impossible not to notice defects and shortcomings in his work, when it comes to fulfilling the declaration of conducting the “critique of historical reason”, made in *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, mentioned above, that task was performed only in part. We have to admit that Ernst Cassirer was right when he wrote that Dilthey

succumbed to the charm of positivism and psychologism which, in his approach, was to be eliminated and conquered. Instead of undertaking a new, ‘objective’ construction, he started from the concept of ‘survival’ and tried to base spiritual sciences on the ‘psychology of

spirit' (*geisteswissenschaftlichen Psychologie*) founded on that concept. (Cassirer, 2005, pp. 110-111)

From the point of view of critical philosophy such attempt is qualified as psychologism; it is therefore one of the most serious mistakes in philosophical interpretation, stigmatised, for example, by Hermann Cohen or Edmund Husserl. According to Kant's teaching – if we wanted to trust Dilthey's intention to emulate the philosopher from Königsberg – sciences can be consolidated by searching for logical conditions of the possibilities of objective cognition. As Cassirer writes above, finding such an "objective" "logic of spiritual sciences" is to break the hegemony of natural sciences. Nevertheless, undertaking the research on the structure of historical cognition is, in itself, regarded as Dilthey's indisputable achievement and a breakthrough in the understanding of philosophical cognition. Dilthey provided a stimulus for systematic research on the structure of spiritual activity of man, and made an attempt to conduct its "inherent critique", not relying on an external "metaphysical" model. However, first and foremost, he sharply contrasts "spiritual sciences" with "natural sciences". Secondly, he establishes a kind of psychology as the basic and only method to be applied in that research. Although Dilthey manages to avoid the reef of metaphysics, he is run aground in the shallows of psychologism.

In the Baden school mentioned above, there appeared a distinction between nomothetic and idiographic sciences (Windelband, 1894, p. 12). which is as famous, as it is controversial, as well as Rickert's philosophy of values, on which he based his division of sciences into natural and cultural ones. However, these findings present, as it seems, a solution which was already archaic at the time of its appearance, and which it is impossible to defend. Windelband's division of sciences constitutes, in his opinion, continuation of Kant's basic thought, which he defines as methodical consideration of the basis of sciences and an attempt to free them from the rule of metaphysics. Windelband's distinction responds to the postulate of methodical distinguishing between both spheres of cognition, without attempting, like in the examples mentioned above, to squeeze one into the other, appointing one of them as the manager and lawmaker. Windelband wants to treat both natural sciences and cultural sciences equally, as moments of knowledge. Each of them follows their own way. This continuation of critical thought seems, however, to be completely arbitrary and unjustified, as this division is an artificial one

and does not correspond to the degree of complexity of the sciences. To define the difference between sciences by delegating some of them to establish general laws and the other ones to determine specific character of what is unique, is to follow into footsteps of Alexander the Great who, instead of struggling to untie the Gordian knot, decided to cut it in half. The internal structure of learning mind is thus disturbed, and its subtle weave is torn by force. This is also the opinion of Cassirer, who has already been quoted above. He formulates such an allegation against Rickert, who

separates the universals of natural science by a sharp cut from the individual phenomena of history. But he immediately finds himself obliged to concede that science itself, in its concrete work, by no means follows the precepts of the logician, but constantly thwarts them. The boundaries that theory is obliged to draw are again and again blurred by this work; instead of clearly separate extremes we find for the most part only mixed and transitional forms. Problems crop up in natural science that can only be treated by the conceptual methods of history. On the other hand, nothing prevents us from applying the science of nature to historical objects. Every scientific concept is in fact at once universal and particular: its task is being to produce the synthesis of the two. (Cassirer, 2000, p. 37)

Cassirer refers here to Rickert's attempt to develop his concept by introducing the differentiation "*Sein – Sollen*", i. e. "being – duty", where the approach to and presentation of a given historical fact, in contrast to natural facts, may be performed only by relating it to a system of universal values. However, the consistent Kantian criticism would make it necessary to define the conditions of possibilities of such a system. Rickert does not do it and thus fails to avoid the dangers connected with metaphysical-dogmatic approach. Firstly, the process of separating the sciences and reflecting their specific character is performed with the use of an arbitrary criterion, imposed from outside and "transcendent" in relation to the diversity which is being arranged. Secondly, Rickert's attempt to make the rigid frames of such a division more flexible has to relate to a "transcendent" reference system.

Dilthey is devoured by the Scylla of psychologism, whereas the philosophers from Baden are eaten up by the Charybdis of metaphysics. All the above-mentioned attempts seem to be unsatisfactory, as none of them gives autonomy to the discussed kind of reflection. Basing cultural sciences on psychology or on history means that their specific

character is not fully taken into consideration, and that they are constrained by methodology imposed from outside.

4. Cassirer's symbolic monism

Ernst Cassirer, the author of *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* also followed in Kant's footsteps and was trying to solve those problems also by drawing on the works of the above-mentioned philosophers. In his opinion none of the proposals described above succeeded in "establishing the direction of the *intention*, which is characteristic for cultural sciences and underpins them. Therefore their particular object is always exposed to the risk of being mixed with other ones and of entering into their area" (Cassirer, 1999, p. 153). In accordance with Cassirer's interpretation of Kantian philosophy this intention is to constitute the condition of possibilities of the objective character of cultural sciences⁵. The aims which Cassirer tries to achieve are similar to those pursued by Windelband and Dilthey, although the theory of culture developed by him is, in his opinion, a fully consistent expansion upon the basic assumptions of critical philosophy. Just like Windelband and Dilthey, Cassirer understands the necessity to separate, methodically, various areas of cognition. However, he examines their internal form, not external references. The division of these sciences is performed "in compliance with the natural arrangement of their members"; therefore he wants to take into consideration the specific character of the organised objects which, thanks to such an approach, are able to organise themselves. The inherent structure of individual fields of cognition cannot be put down to a psychological examination. Cultural sciences, *Geisteswissenschaften* or humanities – no matter what we call them – develop a specific method, a specific way of linking the elements of reality, which is neither purely mathematical, nor purely psychological, neither individual, nor general, neither idiographic, nor nomothetic. Dilthey's explanations and understanding may constitute different methods, but cannot define different sciences. As Cassirer writes, the aim of cultural science "is not the universality of laws; but neither is it the individuality of facts and phenomena. In contrast to both, it sets up an ideal of knowledge of its own" (Cassirer, 2000, p. 76). The different

⁵ Cassirer's symbolic forms were addressed by me in detail, *inter alia*, in the work titled *Phenomenology of symbolic forms* (Parszutowicz, 2013).

methods characteristic for individual fields of human knowledge results from the complexity of human spirit.

It seems that the foundations of Cassirer's theory of symbolism may be found in the Kantian distinction between scheme and symbol, which makes it possible to explain his characteristic unification of humanistic and exact sciences. The principal modification of Immanuel Kant's teaching, performed by Cassirer, may be interpreted not only as an extension of the critique of reason to the area of culture, but as supplementing Kantian mechanisms of determining power of judgement with mechanisms of reflexive power. The former ones condition the objectiveness of phenomena, and it is only the latter ones that differentiate that objectiveness, making its "meaning" possible. The critique of reason which, in Kant's works, resulted in deduction of pure principles of intellect which, in turn, are to constitute the conditions of possibilities of natural sciences, perceives these principles as the conditions of possibilities of scientific knowledge in general. The categories of intellect, such as quantity, quality, modality and relation, as well as the forms of perception, such as space and time, are supposed to determine the common importance and arbitrary certainty. The Kantian forms of perception and categories of intellect would constitute a set of such non-reducible "qualities" of links between the elements of experience. However, this set is characteristic only for one modality which, with regard to the entirety of culture, is rather limited and narrow – namely the modality of mathematised natural sciences in its Galilean-Newtonian version⁶. They appear in an almost pure state in the so-called "exact science", which is based on the determining power of judgement and is the clearest exemplification of one of Cassirer's three symbolic functions – the function of pure meaning. These functions – of pure meaning, presentation and expression, constitute the basis for the system of various modalities of objectiveness, which Cassirer calls "symbolic forms". Exact sciences are located at one end of this scale; the remaining forms, such as, for example, language, myth, history or technology are various combinations of these three functions.

⁶ "Myth and scientific knowledge, the logical and the aesthetic consciousness, are examples of such diverse modalities. Occasionally concepts of the same name, but by no means of the same meaning, meet us in these different fields. The conceptual relation, which we generally call 'cause' and 'effect' is not lacking to mythical thought, but here its meaning is specifically distinct from the meaning that it receives in scientific, and in particular, in mathematical and physical thought" (Cassirer, 1923, p. 450).

Therefore exact sciences constitute a “province”⁷ of cultural sciences, i. e. theoretical principles of learning about any objectified products of human spirit. They are a certain specific example of the general system of culture, whose binding rules would constitute a certain example of the concept of form. “The sciences which establish principles attributed by us to individual disciplines of history are not ‘sciences based on laws’, but ‘sciences based on form’. They do not research general causes, but general structures (forms)” (Cassirer, 2004a, p. 160). Cassirer has in mind the structures of understanding, which include, but not exclusively, the structures of explanation in conceptual terms⁸. Here, as we can see, Cassirer is following into the footsteps of Dilthey, but is searching for the principles of this understanding referring to objective conditions of the possibility of knowledge. He is clearly heading towards hermeneutics, and so he calls the theory of knowledge in general⁹.

The structures of understanding, sought after in Cassirer’s concept, are not determining, but reflexive in their character. The forms linking phenomena and processes have the character of symbolic forms. The differentiation between determining power of judgement (*Urteilkraft*) (i. e. subsuming under concepts) and reflexive power (i. e. building ideas) is perfectly visible in the above-mentioned Kantian differentiation between scheme and symbol. Reflectivity of judgement power is, in Kant’s opinion, a spontaneous ability of mind to derive ideas from the object of direct perception, based on transferring reflection on one object onto another object. The schematism defining “exact” sciences, consists in subsuming phenomena under the rules of reason (*KrV*, B176-187]), whereas symbolism can be defined as transferring reflection on one object onto another object (*KU*, V: 351-353). The principles of determining power of judgement are characteristic only for the “pure form” of scientific meaning, which we can find in natural

⁷ “The entire sphere of ‘exact’ concepts, which I have clearly identified and am trying to present in detail, is only a specific kind of province in the region of theoretical meaning – and also the latter, the area of specifically theoretical ‘sense’ does not constitute the entirety of sense in general, but has to be contrasted with other forms of ‘giving sense’, compared with them and assessed against them, to ensure proper understanding and to allow for its being presented and recognised in its specificity” (Cassirer, 2004b, p. 83).

⁸ “Instead of investigating only the general premises of scientific cognition of the world – as we read in the first volume of *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* – it would also have to differentiate the various fundamental forms of man’s ‘understanding’ of the world and apprehend each one of them as sharply as possible in its specific direction and characteristic spiritual form” (Cassirer, 1955, p. 69).

⁹ “Theory of knowledge is, practically, nothing else than hermeneutics of cognition” (Cassirer, 1995, p. 165).

sciences or in mathematics. Symbolic hypotyposis encompasses the forms of nuancing this meaning and transferring it onto other fields of reflection.

5. Conclusion

The expressions and concepts characteristic for sciences in general are perceived by imagination as a specific symbol for reflection. None of symbolic forms reflects reality, but each of them symbolises it. Every possible science is a science about spirit, because every symbol is a product of spirit. The division of sciences into humanistic and exact ones, into *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften*, is artificial, because art and natural sciences, history and linguistics, study of myths and religion, technology and law, economics and quantum physics are humanistic in that they do not exist outside the human world. All these ways of presenting reality are the forms of its objectivisation, presented with the use of symbols, characteristic only for each of them alone¹⁰. Each of these ways is a symbolic form. Hence this kind of approach, this kind of symbolic monism, owing a great deal to earlier efforts, unites what was, at least with regard to methodology, unjustifiably separated¹¹.

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¹⁰ The common source of physics and art is shown in an interesting way by, for example, Chevelley, 1997.

¹¹ Such attempts to unify sciences, which include "exact sciences" in the group of "humanistic sciences" are, of course, also present in later philosophical tradition referring to Kant, to a great extent through Cassirer. More or less direct references and inspirations can be found, for example, in the works of Susanne Langer (Langer, 1954), Karl-Otto Apel (e.g. Apel, 1979), Nelson Goodman (e.g. Goodman, 1978), Pierre Bourdieu (see the works from the volume *Zur Soziologie der symbolischen Formen*, (Bourdieu, 1970), Bruno Latour (e.g. Latour, 2005), Gilbert Durand (e.g. Durand, 1964), Hans-Jörg Rheinberger (e.g. Rheinberger, 2015), Odo Marquard (e.g. Marquard, 2000). With regard to connection between the two latter ones and Cassirer's concept, see, for example Czerniak, 2017.

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