Abstract:
The paper tries to demonstrate how a hermeneutic critique of scientism raises important issues not only about the dialogue between (post)analytical and Continental philosophers but also about a third way of philosophizing that gets rid of traditional dilemmas and stubborn dividing lines inherited from the “two cultures” paradigm. In outlining a conception of hermeneutic realism, the paper elaborates on a distinction between ontic and ontological forms of realism. An ontic form specifies a certain range of entities whose existence is reified as something “given”, as presence-at-hand. An ontological form of realism is realism about the reality that is ready-to-hand within the “readable technologies” of interrelated practices. The paper argues that the ontological forms of realism provide opportunities for combating scientism philosophically, while advocating a cognitive autonomy of science based upon the interpretative openness of scientific research.

Key words: Scientism, Hermeneutic Realism, Hermeneutic Fore-Structure, Situated Transcendence.

I.

There are many ways in which one can draw an essential demarcation between Continental and analytic kinds of philosophizing. There is also a genuine proliferation of forms of cooperation and exchange between them promoted by works like Richard Rorty’s *The Mirror of Nature* and Robert Brandom’s *Making It Explicit*. It seems that mutual reinforcement and mutual compensation of deficiencies have become distinctive features of the dialogue between analytical and Continental philosophers. At those points at which the disagreement seems insurmountable successful peace treaties have been concluded. The political map of the contemporary philosophizing looks as if settled. Only the topic of scientism remains perhaps the source of troubles and discontent.

To be sure, for many historical reasons cooperation in handling this topic is impossible. Amazingly enough, however, the peace treaty looks also chimerical. Not because the parties are not willing to conclude such a treaty. To pass a sentence on the worldview and ideology of scientism or, on the contrary, to vindicate (at least some of) the values of scientism is (in both cases) a duty of philosophy. Yet one can find neither in the programs of Continental philosophy nor in the versions of (post)analytical philosophy a viable conception about how the values of scientism are related to scientific rationality and to science’s cognitive autonomy. Instead, a dilemma that is deadly wrong puts down roots: Either one goes on to reject any form of scientism, whereby one will walk away from the search for science’s unique status in culture, and will plea for a “democratization” of scientific research; or one goes on to subscribe to scientism, thereby claiming that foundationalism, representationalism, and objectivism unveil the “essence of science”, and are requisites for defending science’s cognitive autonomy. The dilemma gets overcome if one succeeds in demonstrating that because of its interpretative openness that is at odds with foundationalism, representationalism, and objectivism, scientific research enjoys cognitive autonomy, and protects itself from an external control that results in a compelled “democratization of science”. On the claim I am going to advocate in the remainder, one would be not able to address the topic of scientism philosophically, without overcoming the dilemma in the way being indicated.

It deserves mentioning that at the height of the science wars (the period 1994-2001) both types of philosophers were rather marginal figures in the debates. They either expressed their sorrow for the continuous politicization of philosophical controversies, or remained participants in the wars without really provocative positions. The first case is illustrated by a symptomatic reaction to Sokal’s hoax at the biannual meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association held in November 1996. Philosophers like Arthur Fine and Philip Kitcher stressed that the
hox hampered the productive dialogue between epistemologists, on the one hand, and social constructivists and cultural relativists, on the other. The infamous participation of Continental philosophers in Sokal affair exemplifies at the same time the willingness of these philosophers to guard only their own status as “postmodern intellectuals”. In fact, the leading protagonists in Sokal affair were physicists (like Steven Weinberg), exponents of cultural studies (and critics of this enterprise like Roger Kimball), literary critics (like Stanley Fish), columnists (like Martin Gardner, Katha Pollitt and Janny Scott), social theorists (like Ruth Rosen)… They all were able to draw political consequences from the hoax, and to spell out value attitudes (not towards the ethos of autonomous scientific research – this was not at issue at all, but) towards scientism.

The diverse participants in the science wars shifted the accent (and reversed some traditional political positions) in Charles Snow’s “two cultures” paradigm. This paradigm was reevaluated (and thus, rehabilitated). (Is not the dividing line between the analytical and the Continental philosophy to a great extent only a subspecies of the growing hiatus between the scientists’ culture and the “intellectuals’ culture”?) The depressing feeling still remains that the philosophers missed a historical opportunity to demonstrate the possibilities for a dialogue between the two cultures. The pity is not that the philosophers were not able to articulate pro- or anti-scientistic values and arguments in pondering over the role of scientists and “intellectuals” in the contemporary societies. This is not their job. This is a job of those who are directly involved in public debates. Genuine philosophical arguments cannot take place in such debates that belong rather to what Hei- degger calls “the publicness of the they”. What one expects from philosophy is to address the problem of whether scientism is the meta-scientific position appointed to legitimate the unique nature of science. The aftermath of the science wars suggests that for the moment it is idle to expect reliable solutions of this problem from (Continental or analytical) philosophy. Now, in pushing aside this pessimistic recapitulation, let me turn to the very problem.

I shall begin with what by now seems to be a standard view of scientism. I refer in this regard to writings of Richard Rorty who defined this view in a most succinct way. Rorty remains at the same time the most influential antagonist to scientism. According to him, the kernel of scientism is the idea that natural science has a distinctive method, one that makes it a better paradigm of rationality than other intellectual enterprises like historiography or jurisprudence. In granting natural science with epistemological and metaphysical privileges, the proponents of scientism believe that scientific knowledge is the only source that gives us essences and necessities. In Rorty’s view, those who support scientism think that pragmatist, conventionalist and instrumentalist philosophies of science and of language are dangerously irrational in declaring that all distinctions between necessities and contingencies are artifacts that change as our choice of description changes. The weak point of scientism is seen in “the inference from the fact that a certain descriptive vocabulary enables us to predict and utilize the causal powers of objects to the claim that this vocabulary offers a better understanding of those objects than any other.”

In my view, Rorty suggests a minimal basis for pondering over scientism. At the same time, his recommendation to get rid of scientism by giving up the attempts to preserve a certain picture of the relation between scientific language and the entities of the (non-human) physical world provoke critical reactions from both analytical and Continental philosophers against this too simplistic neo-pragmatist

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1 Two significant exceptions have to be mentioned. I have in mind the positions of Patrick Heelan and Babette Babich who reveal the potential of hermeneutic philosophy to cope with the predicament of the science wars. More generally, it is the American Continental philosophy which seems to me most successful in avoiding traditional dilemmas when dealing with the issue of scientism. It is not by accident that the roots of hermeneutic realism are in traditions of the American Continental Philosophy – the traditions in which the meeting of analytic and Continental ideas is most authentic and fruitful. Not to forget also, that in these traditions there is a growing tendency of a productive reception of American pragmatism, which makes the interchange between the two types of philosophizing more flexible.


3 Richard Rorty, “Being That Can Be Understood Is Language”, in: Bruce Krajewski (ed.), Gadamer’s Repercussions. Reconsidering philosophical Hermeneutics, University of California Press 2004, p. 22. Some authors add to this minimalist definition of scientism an axiological moment. Thus, Steve Fuller holds that in “its simplest form scientism is the doctrine that science can justify value commitments.” (Steve Fuller, The Philosophy of Science and Technology Studies, Routledge 2006, p. 122.)

4 Richard Rorty, op. cit., p. 27.
approach.

If one assumes that scientific research is an interpretative undertaking, then one has good reasons to address the topic of scientism from a hermeneutic point of view. From this viewpoint, scientism is an ideology in the classical sense of “false or distorted consciousness”. For reasons that will become clear later, the viewpoint I am speaking about might be dubbed “hermeneutic realism”. The hermeneutic realist supports the claim that scientism is a false attitude towards both the philosophical identity of scientific research and the cultural-historical role science plays in modernity. No doubt, scientism is a hidden (and sometimes official) confession of many practitioners of scientific research. Yet among the working scientists there are several attitudes that combat scientism or are at least incompatible with it. Scientism is an ideological attitude distinguished by the idea that the more objective scientific knowledge is the more successful science becomes as a means for instrumental-technical control. Based on this consciousness, scientific research gets guided by the standards of instrumental rationality. Yet, in contrast to Habermas and many other representatives of the Continental thought, the hermeneutic realist does not admit that scientific research is doomed to be tied to these standards solely, thereby lacking the opportunity to gain an identity alternative to that of scientism. Consequently, scientism as attitude, ethos and professional ideology is only a historically conditioned state of affairs.

II.

At this point, I have to introduce a minimalist portrait of hermeneutic realism. For the analytical philosophers, who are involved in the realism-instrumentalism debate the word “realism” in philosophy usually carries with it a commitment to a certain range of entities which is usually specified. Yet the very specification of entities of a given kind would imply the adherence to an essentialist position – there is a class of (mathematical, linguistic, physical, social, cultural or whatever) entities whose existence is reified as something “given”, as presence-at-hand. Metaphysical realism, scientific realism, structural realism, and even Hacking’s “entity realism” and Putnam’s “internal realism” cannot avoid the pitfall of essentialist reification, when asserting the existence of an “external reality out there”, of mathematical structures, or of “empirical content”.

Is it possible to have a philosophical position of realism without essentialism? *Prima facie* hermeneutic realism is the affirmative answer to that question. In breaking in a radical manner with the “myth of the Given”, the hermeneutic realist holds that there is no “access” to reality but through the interrelatedness of practices. By implication, the reality investigated by science is the reality that is ready-to-hand within the interrelatedness of scientific practices. This view, however, does not imply that the reality is constructed by scientific practices. Putting scientific practices first is not a kind of constructivism. It means rather that meaning of reality is disclosed by these practices. On the existentialist tenet of hermeneutic realism, there is no reality without meaning. Hermeneutic realism is realism about the reality-with-meaning disclosed by practices.

In a broader context, hermeneutic realism is a family of post-metaphysical doctrines whose common denominator is the conviction that (pace Rorty) the place vacated by (foundationalist and representationalist) epistemology should be occupied by hermeneutics. In supporting this thesis, hermeneutic realism opens an avenue to new forms of dialogue between (post)analytic and Continental traditions of philosophizing. There is no objective reality that precedes the reality of being-in-the-world. Before having the “world out there” as opposed to (and represented by) mind (the human cognitive abilities), human beings are always already in the world of practices. Even the contemplation of “the world as objective reality” is a practice *sui generis* that is embedded in a configuration with other (cognitive and non-cognitive) practices. In another formulation, the ways of being in a practical world precedes the world as represented (or cognitively constructed) by mentality. Furthermore, the subject-object relation comes always into being within configurations of practices. Human agents might construct objective knowledge because of their involvement in “work-worlds”. Moreover, “representing the world” or “constructing objective knowledge about the world” are actually sophisticated arrangements of various practices that cannot be isolated from the rest of the world of practices.

Starting out from the ways of being in the world of practices prevents one from an initial hypostatization of a dualism between the epistemic subject and the objective world (and the dualism of conceptual
framework and empirical content). The involvement in the world of practices is an interpretative mode of being in the world. Human beings are interpreting themselves in accordance with the possibilities they can appropriate and actualize in this involvement. In so doing, they are also interpreting the world of practices within the horizon of possibilities they have at their disposal. Being in the world of practices amounts to interpreting the world (and one’s involvement in it) as a world projected upon possibilities that are engendered by the very interrelatedness of practices. On hermeneutic realism, the “horizon of understanding the world” (as a prerequisite for having an objective knowledge about the world) is tantamount to the “world as a horizon of understanding”. Thus, the hermeneutic circularity is to be ascribed not only to interpretation as a particular cognitive procedure, but first and foremost to the being of human existence as being in the world of practices.

Hermeneutic realism opposes all views that admit the following clauses: (a) the credentials of all truth claims must be checked by a foundational theory of knowledge; (b) the objective reality is organized into distinct objects, and the distinctness of each of them is prior to the constitution of meaning; (c) the mind of man is isolated from the world in a manner that enables it to represent the world through images, ideas, concepts and categories; (d) there is an invariant and universal semantic core in mind that contains series of meanings related to the basic structure of objective reality. Roughly speaking, hermeneutic realism is a kind of realism that gets rid of Cartesian dualism, epistemic representationalism, foundationalism, and cognitive (including linguistic-semantic) essentialism. It is a common place for those who subscribe to a certain version of hermeneutic philosophy that the world is not out there, and mind is always within the world. Hermeneutic realism is opposed above all to metaphysical realism and by implication to scientific realism. Metaphysical realism is criticized for the uncritical postulation of ontic primacy of the dualism between mind and mind-independent objective reality over the totality of being in the “work-world” of practices. The hermeneutic realist raises the critical question of whether mind does not belong to reality. Since most metaphysical realists are inclined to argue that mind is a part of objective reality, the hermeneutic realist, on the other hand, would focus their criticism on the predicament concerning the reconciliation of the following two doctrines: (a) objective reality is independent of mind; and (b) mind is part of this reality.

As a specific mode of “practical being in the world”, scientific research is predicated on a dynamics of changing configurations of routine practices of constructing instruments, designing and repeating experiments, preparing reports on observations, applying formal techniques for a graphical description, constructing systems of differential equations, calibrating instruments, controlling experimental systems, measuring control parameters of experimental systems, constructing various kinds of models, devising thought experiments, creating computer simulations, and so on. The routine reproduction of configurations of such practices constitutes the normal scientific everydayness of a certain research domain. It is the interrelatedness of practices of inquiry that projects an open horizon of possibilities for the research process. Such a horizon is always already transcendent with respect to the possibilities that get actualized in each particular situation of this process.

As a mode of being-in-the-world, scientific research projects its being of interrelated practices upon possibilities. There is an ongoing appropriation of these possibilities in normal science. Through this appropriation an ongoing articulation of a domain’s objects comes into being. The ongoing actualization of possibilities and the concomitant articulation of a domain of research objects are characterized by anticipations, expectations and orientations assigned to the community which carries out the research process. The possibilities projected by a normal scientific interrelatedness of practices are not to be confused with the possibilities stemming from a mental activity planning such a behavior, thereby providing an algorithm of how to choose and appropriate possibilities. Like the routine practices of research, the possibilities upon which the research process is projected do not have an autonomous reality sui generis. Any suggestion of a pure presence of possibilities projected before the practitioners of scientific research would rehabilitate essentialism in a new form. The existential possibilities of articulating a world are not independent of the ways of their actualization.

More specifically, the projection of possibilities by configurations of scientific practices is always entangled with choosing, appropriating, and actualizing them. In stating that the articulation of meaningful objects comes into being through an ongoing interpretative appropriation of possibilities, one assumes that the configurations of practices are predicated on an intrinsic interpretative potentiality. This
potentiality is due to the fact that all scientific practices serve the function of readable technologies in scientific research. Within the range of the cognitive outcomes of implementing such technologies are reports on observations or experiments, diagrams, comparative tables of measurements, analytical techniques for selecting control parameters in investigating dynamic behaviour, systems of equations, etc. To be sure, these outcomes are always semantically integrated in larger theoretical frameworks. Yet all situational outcomes as well as the very process of their semantic (trans-situational) integration (by means of a theoretical framework) are fore-structured by the interrelatedness of practices.

From the standpoint of hermeneutic realism, the critique of scientism must be carried out as an internal critique of the nexus of epistemological objectivity and instrumental theory of rationality in scientific research. This is a critique that leads to disentangling science from the destiny informed by the rationality of the instrumental control over what gets objectified in the research process. There is a Heideggerian moment, but also an anti-Heideggerian component involved in this critique. Hermeneutic realism allows one to undo the way in which Heidegger ties down in a crucial fashion the postulate of the ontological priority of modern technology over modern science with the claim about modern science’s instrumental rationality. Heidegger’s way of conjugating both statements (in the celebrated essay “The Question Concerning Technology”) is continuous with the form of mathematical essentialism, which paradoxically enough characterizes the existential conception of science in Being and Time. (A domain of scientific research is disclosed by a mathematical projection of nature.) To say that hidden behind modern physics is the spirit of technological enframing amounts to claiming that the only destiny (in Heidegger’s sense) of modern science is to serve the instrumental rationality in conquering Nature. In opposing this view, the hermeneutic realist emphasizes that modern natural science can be the herald of Ge-stell if and only if it is governed exclusively by the standards of that kind of objectivism-essentialism which necessarily puts into play the rationality of instrumental control. The constellation of mathematical essentialism, epistemological objectivism, and technological enframing (the “constellation of scientism”) does not exhaust – so the argument of hermeneutic realism goes – the leeway of possibilities within which scientific research is free to orient itself.

The critique of scientism suggested by hermeneutic realism is in many respects a strong alternative to the anti-scientism that dominates in the Continental philosophy. Roughly speaking, the hermeneutic realist displays discontent with the mainstream form of anti-scientism, in which the attitude of scientism is directly derived from constitutive characteristics of the epistemic rationality of science. The hermeneutic realist strongly opposes the linkage of the critique of scientism with the search for a political control over scientific research that threatens science’s cognitive autonomy. This linkage is typically supported by the champions of social epistemology and other branches of social-philosophical constructivism about the nature of scientific research. The plea for anti-scientism turns here into an appeal for demolishing the autonomy of scientific research in the name of a radicalization of democratic process. On the critical agenda of social epistemology, society has to control not only the utilization of the outcome, but the very process of scientific research as well. Only in this way one might say farewell to scientism. In opposing the ideology of scientism, the hermeneutic realist defends the cognitive autonomy of science in terms of the interpretative openness of scientific research. Furthermore, the hermeneutic realist argues that scientific research has intrinsic resources to overcome the externally imposed identity of science as an enterprise being guided by instrumental rationality.

III.

In order to sharpen the profile of the critique of scientism I am aiming at, let me address in this section two other celebrated kinds of such a critique. They are suggested respectively by the strong program of cognitive sociology and the feminist standpoint epistemology. I am choosing these two programs since they bring into being the extreme poles in approaching the issue of whether normative epistemology is a reliable framework of criticizing scientism. The main philosophical doctrines taking issue with scientism are oscillating between the pole

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of total rejection of normative epistemology and the pole of looking for maximally strong epistemic norms and standards of epistemic objectivity. At stake in my further considerations will be the question of whether hermeneutic realism may shift the paradigm of criticizing scientism, thereby offering an alternative that is located somewhere in-between the two extreme poles.

(a) The critique from the viewpoint of a strong program (based upon the symmetry principle) goes as follows. If one ignores the symmetry principle in approaching scientific rationality, one would be committed to a defense of scientism. In explaining only the “deviations” from the rational scientific behavior in terms of social causes, and thereby assuming that the established scientific beliefs do not have social causes, one is idolizing a mysterious (empirically unexplainable) cognitive specificity of science. The violation of the symmetry principle privileges tacitly science as a cognitive institution that is independent of the causal-dynamic factors of social life. Following the strategy of violation, one assumes that this institution is endowed by the ability to be a jury of all decision making in problem situations caused by identifiable social factors. Consequently, there is a perfect defense of scientism.

The first step in rebutting scientism by applying the symmetry principle must be the deconstruction of all types of a rational reconstruction of science based on normative epistemology. The symmetry principle requires a radical deflation of normative epistemology in favor of empirical (sociological) theories. Scientism is combated by a kind of “sociologizing epistemology” (as a subspecies of naturalizing epistemology). However, there is a significant flaw in the constructivist version of the symmetry principle, to which James Brown draws the attention. He makes the observation that if this version is confined to the requirement that same types of explanation should be given for true and false beliefs, then the version would be quite tenable. Yet there are no grounds whatsoever to extend the principle “to requiring the same types of explanation for rational and irrational beliefs.” This flaw makes the strongly constructivist version of the symmetry principle an ineffective tool in opposing scientism. More generally, the prize one has to pay for overcoming scientism by applying consequently the symmetry principle is the universalizing of a kind of naturalism. The intrinsic debates in the cognitive sociology of science show that the sociological way of naturalizing epistemology makes the so called “issue of reflexivity” an irresolvable problem. Furthermore one is to ask the question of whether naturalism (regardless of its sort) is not only a particular dimension of scientism.

(b) The critique of scientism from the perspective of standpoint epistemology suggests with regard to the symmetry principle the opposite type of critique. The adherents to this doctrine get rid of the idea that objectivity requires value-neutrality. A standpoint epistemology is such a doctrine that recognizes cultural pluralism and historical relativism, while rejecting epistemological relativism. There is room for an epistemological advocacy of scientific objectivity, and, by implication, of science’s cognitive specificity. Since only science can provide epistemologically legitimated objective knowledge there is a dissolvable rationality of science. Reaching this conclusion does not amount to devising a prelude to a plea for scientism. The conclusion in question is rather a prerequisite of an extreme ideological attack on all scientistic tenets. Objectivity in standpoint epistemology’s scenario means a strongly normative engagement in the political re-structuring of science’s cognitive structures. Sandra Harding coins the expression of “strong objectivity” to refer to epistemologies that do not ignore the social-situatedness and the historicity of scientific knowledge in formulating optimal standards, norms, and criteria of objectivity. Strong objectivity is the doctrine which traffics with scientific accounts of the relationships between historically located and maximally objective belief. The association of objectivity with socially situated knowledge – so the argument goes – is not only an entirely possible combination, but it outlines the most reliable way to overcoming scientism. According to Harding’s conception, a scientific objectivity much stronger than the conventional one can be claimed to result from grounding research in women’s lives. Following “strong objectivity” implies a strategy of struggling with scientism on the terrain of (politically guided) normative epistemology. A great advantage of standpoint theories of scientific knowledge is the disclosed opportunity to challenge scientism with philosophical arguments. By implication, “strong objectivity” promises to address the issue of developing epistemological models of scientific rationality that are alternatives

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8 James R. Brown, op. cit., p. 129.

to the models on which scientism gets justified.

Is the “issue of reflexivity” the handicap in the strong program critique of scientism, so the “issue of reification” plays a similar role in standpoint epistemology scenario of undoing the pathologies of scientism. Combining value engagements with claims of objectivity is the shortest way to reification. What gets reified in the feminist standpoint epistemologies is the array of social-historical events, relations, and processes that inform a specific epistemic position within “women’s lives”. There is a strong objectivity that results from transforming the totality of a certain historical experience into a privileged reality of scientific research. Is the epistemic standpoint resulting from women’s lives immune against the threat of reifying consciousness (in this case, the consciousness formed and embedded within women’s lives)? In a Pickwickian sense, the basic argument the feminist standpoint epistemology directs against scientism would be that one brand of reification is better than another one. What standpoint epistemology forgets to take into consideration is the specificity of the existential openness which has to be assigned to the epistemic situatedness. Being situated within practices of a certain life-form amounts to having a being in the world projected always already upon possibilities. The situatedness can be never exempt from possibilities to transcend the present status quo of the life-form. Following this line of reasoning, the figure of the fixed situatedness (fixed by values, aims, standards, norms, criteria, etc.) should be replaced by the figure of situated transcendence. Such a replacement would have profound consequences for the critique of scientism. The focus of criticism now would be the issue of reification.

Notoriously, Axel Honneth champions the view that prior to cognition there is a “fundamental experience of intersubjective recognition”. (He believes that this experience may serve as a source of normative standards for structuring cognition.) Following this line of argument, he comes to the conclusion that reification results from the forgetfulness of the experience of intersubjective recognition. With regard to my previous comment on the situated transcendence, I would like now to extend partially and to modify partially Honneth’s view. The intersubjective recognition can take place only within a world that is in a state of an ongoing interpretative articulation. Those who are involved in such a world do not experience it as a presence-at-hand, but as something that is ready-to-hand in their practices. The more the world gets articulated, the more new possibilities of articulation come into play. This means that what is ready-to-hand within a totality of practices is at the same time always already transcending each particular stage of world’s articulation. The intersubjective recognition may only come into being when there are shared possibilities of articulating a world through shared practices. In other words, this recognition presupposes a world that transcends the intersubjectivity itself. Recognition is prior to cognition, but its priority does not mean an absolute apriority. It is always already situated within a world. There is no recognition disentangled from the situatedness within practices that make a world ready-to-hand. To be situated is to be in need of interpreting what is ready-to-hand. Thus, interpreting the world that is ready-to-hand correlates with the situatedness within-the-world, on the hand, and with the transcendence of the world, on the other. Like cognition, recognition consists of interrelated practices. Against the background of the foregoing considerations, they both (recognition and cognition) are ontologically fore-structured by interpretation.

Now, Honneth’s thesis should be modified in the following manner: Reification is forgetfulness of the situated transcendence which fore-structures in a hermeneutic fashion the production of objectifying knowledge. Reification refers to a behavior that ossifies a normative perspective as an epistemic standpoint. The critique of reification as forgetfulness of situated transcendence based upon a reflection on the hermeneutic fore-structuring of objectifying knowledge coincides with the hermeneutic critique of scientism.

**IV.**

I would like now to move to an extension of the critical task of hermeneutic realism being depicted so far. My aim will be to demonstrate that scientific research conceived of as an interpretative process is a locus of formation of a dialogical-communicative attitude towards nature. The extended task of hermeneutic realism as a critical philosophy consists in overcoming scientism in a manner that would allow one to elaborate on models of science-nature relationship beyond scientism and the objectivist reduction of nature. In saying this, I touch upon the question of the sense in which hermeneutic realism does

put forward an alternative to Habermas’ quasi-transcendental epistemology as a base of critical theorizing. On Habermas’ (and Karl-Otto Apel’s) position, we cannot have a dialogical (communicative) relation to nature. The talk about the “liberation of nature in the name of its own rights” does not make sense in the epistemology of knowledge-guiding interests as well as in the theory of communicative action. In opposing the confinement of the rational dialogue in the sphere of social interaction solely, one gets the opportunity to show that hermeneutic realism (in rehabilitating motifs of Marcuse’s project for a “new science”) involves the moment of scientific (and technological) interaction with nature.

Hermeneutic realism binds the perspective of critical theorizing not to the “question of validity” but to the “question of constitution”. Steven Vogel (who applies doctrines of Continental traditions in environmental philosophy) is right when arguing that by treating the natural sciences’ guiding interest in prediction and control of nature as determined by a mode of action that is built into the structure of the species as such, Habermas precludes the opportunity to address the issue of how interests in constituting scientific knowledge get generated in the dynamics of changing practices of research. By overlooking this issue, he acknowledges tacitly the objectivist picture of science and the positivist view about scientific rationality. This is why an interest in a dialogical partnership with nature is declared to be pointless in the realm of natural-scientific research. There is in Habermas’s philosophizing a hypostatization of a “species-wide universal interest” that is exempt from a genesis within the practical contexts of being-in-the-world (or to put it in a more Heideggerian parlance, an interest that is deprived of “existential genesis”).

Hermeneutic realism repudiates any kind of philosophy that in transcendental or quasi-transcendental manner claims that the “potential world” of natural-scientific research is constituted by a global knowledge-guiding interest. Such a philosophy – so the argument goes – hypostatizes the global interest by ignoring the real dynamics of changing configurations of practices in which domains of scientific research (and thus, the world of the natural sciences) get articulated. More specifically, Habermas’ quasi-transcendental epistemology fails to resist the “anthropological reification” of an invariant interests-

structure embedded in human action. In “deriving” all interests in having knowledge of a certain kind from the choices of possibilities within particular configurations of practices, hermeneutic realism avoids both the hypostatization of knowledge-guiding interests and the concomitant fallacy of an “anthropological reification”.

The constitution of an interest takes always place in the hermeneutic circularity of trans-subjective horizons and contingent-situational actualizations of possibilities. By the same token, it is always hermeneutically fore-structured with regard to the possibilities of reading one can appropriate by implementing the available readable technologies. A knowledge-guiding interest is neither fixed by internal (cognitive) goals, aims and values, nor determined by extra-scientific factors and demands. The former case is that of cognitive essentialism, typically illustrated by dominant doctrines in the analytical philosophy of science, while the latter epitomizes the social determinism, typically advocated by constructivist sociologists. Being situated in an open leeway of possibilities that plays the role of a hermeneutic fore-structure, a knowledge-guiding interest retains its “flexibility” within changing configurations of research practices. The formation of an interest in the constitution of scientific knowledge of a certain kind is never a finished process. It is rather a process that takes place within the ongoing interpretative circularity of projecting and appropriating possibilities of reading.

By getting rid of objectivism about the image of a reality-in-itself, hermeneutic realism devises an existentialist approach to knowledge-guiding interests, opposing thereby cognitive essentialism and social determinism. On the hermeneutic account of scientific research, these are interests in the interpretative constitution of various kinds of research objects. Since the constitution of objects in scientific research becomes possible through choosing, appropriating, and actualizing possibilities projected by the very interrelatedness of scientific practices, a knowledge-guiding interest is a stable tendency of choosing possibilities. In other words, regardless of how the possibilities of doing research are informed by external (economic and political) factors or by established internal cognitive values, the knowledge-guiding interest (as fore-structured by the possibilities of reading) gets generated by the intrinsic dynamics of scientific practices. Due to this intrinsic dynamics, scientific research has its own potentiality for generating dialogical attitudes towards nature,

since there is a leeway of possibilities whose choosing and actualizing leads not only to getting rid of the objectivist image of a reality-in-itself, but to constituting research objects that can be read in different contexts and horizons.

*Per definitionem*, distinctive features of a “dialogical research” (such as interactive questioning, reflexive responsibility for asking questions, recasting outcomes of research in new horizons of interaction, asking about contextual meanings displayed by the objects of research, disclosing intrinsic historicity of sedimented meanings due to the “cultural destiny” of the “natural things”, etc.) are displayed when the research objects are not entirely de-contextualized in accordance with objectivist epistemological criteria and norms, but their constitution remains open to new contexts and configurations of practices. (A requisite for an extreme de-contextualization is a sort of “mathematical reification” that consists in admitting the mathematical idealizations of objectification to be a pure presence of idealized objects independent of the dynamics of scientific practices and pre-given to the choices of possibilities for doing research and reading.) Accordingly, the openness to a re-contextualization marks off a dialogical interaction with “natural things” under investigation. Re-contextualizing the research objects provokes at the same time a kind of interpretative reflexivity, which is also a part of the dialogical research.

Hermeneutic realism is a program that tries to scrutinize science’s intrinsic potentiality for constituting research objects in a dialogical manner. In appropriating possibilities for further contextualization of the reading process, and in overcoming the reificationist objectivism that forgets the meaningful constitution of reality, one turns to a kind of *cognitive existentialism* (as opposed to cognitive essentialism and social determinism) about the nature of scientific research. On its central tenet, the choice of possibilities in scientific research is not determined by a reality that is outside (beyond or behind) the dynamics of practices with readable technologies. The possibilities for a “dialogical research” are also possibilities of de-reifying (or de-constructing) what gets objectified in scientific research. De-reifying is accomplished by re-contextualizing research objects in new configurations of practices. Put differently, within “dialogical research” the de-reification (of presumably static objects in their “pure presence”) goes hand in hand with the re-contextualization and the re-constitution of research objects. To stress once more, the dialogue consists in questioning what is under investigation in new contexts of practices characterized by new horizons of possibilities.

Being attached to “dialogical research”, a knowledge-guiding interest comes into being in a characteristic hermeneutic situation of the research process. The latter is a process oscillating between the pole of objectivist de-contextualization of what is under investigation and the pole of “dissemination” of the research objects in as many as possible configurations of scientific practices. The knowledge-guiding interests are located within the spectrum between these poles. This is why each of them is characterized by an objectivist and an interpretative-reflexive (dialogical) dimension. A characteristic hermeneutic situation in which a knowledge-guided interest is constituted should be defined by the balance between both dimensions. The more one is de-contextualizing the reading process (and the objects involved in it), the more the “dialogical dimension” gets hidden. Consequently, what is under investigation acquires the status of a reality-in-itself. By contrast, the more the interpretative-reflexive dimension gets emphasized, the more scientific research takes on the form of a dialogical process, and the more research process approaches the tenets of hermeneutic realism.

**References**


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