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PREJUDICE AS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PROBLEM: FROM THE STANDPOINT OF “RATIONAL ECLECTICISM”

Ildar Gabdullin (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) Orenburg State University, 13, Pobeda Ave, Orenburg, 460018, Russia
post@mail.osu.ru, 8(35-32)77-67-70

Abstract

The author of the article attempts to consider the well-known term and problems behind it in philosophical-linguistic, philosophical-hermeneutical, psychological and social-cognitive aspects of studying prejudice as a phenomenon of consciousness. In accordance with this task, the author choose the research method which covered a wide range of methods, each of which covered a local area of research, for the combination of which the methodological principle was used under the conditional name of “rational eclecticism”. This allowed not only combining ideas contained in relatively local scientific fields, such as neurophysiology, ethology, social psychology, but also attracting the results of special philosophical concepts, and turning to artistic and literary genres. In this regard the main idea is that the phenomenon of prejudice contains not only negative emotional and affective connotation, but can also be used as an effective tool for counteracting undesirable phenomena in specific social cognitive and other discourses. Hence, a parallel is drawn up with the philosophical-hermeneutic interpretation of the concept of prejudice, where it appears as the element of an important and ontologically determined process of understanding in the form of pre-understanding, despite the fact that prejudice form was mainly considered in the philosophical-historical, philosophical linguistic and moral-aesthetic contexts. The main result, which can be used in the solution of specific cognitive, ideological and behavioral problems, is the understanding of the phenomenon of prejudice, where an *unbiased* attitude should be formed towards the very prejudice. Thus it would mean actual freedom from the prejudice as a *phenomenon*.

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1. Introduction

Like for many researchers engaged in the study of this problem, the research interest was stimulated by the classic works of the socio-philosophical and socio-psychological orientation of such authors as Allport (1954) and Adorno (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), who opened a specialized and fairly extensive area of scientific activity, which provided general theoretical principles and specifically empirical research methods.

The fact that prejudice is not only a psychological or socio-cognitive problem is proved by the philosophical-hermeneutic project of Gadamer (1988), in which the attempt to rehabilitate prejudice in a detailed examination of the problem of the hermeneutic circle in the understanding was made and which is considered not in the theoretical and cognitive, but in the ontological context.

An additional motivating factor that prompted the author to investigate exactly this phenomenon was also certain ambivalence in his understanding, which is found in fiction and journalistic literature of various genres. Here are the most characteristic of them: "...a person tends to indulge in superstition, despite all kinds of contempt for prejudice" (Pushkin, 1978, p. 84); "Prejudice! He is a piece of old truth. The temple fell; and the descendant of his tongue did not divine the ruins" (Baratynsky, 2008, p. 25); "Prejudice transforms human dignity into his habit, and not into a series of unrelated actions" (Burke, 1987, p. 64).

2. Problem Statement

In the opinion of authoritative researchers, who substantively and thoroughly dealt with the phenomenon of prejudice, it refers to this type of problem, according to which everyone has a theory, but no one has a clear answer (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1982). Usually this is also an undesirable, "uncomfortable" problem. However, if we take into account that consciousness itself is a "difficult problem" (Chalmers, 1995), this is only one of many, although it occupies a special place. Since the time of Francis Bacon, prejudice has been classified as a natural consequence of deviation, a shift in consciousness, described by such a phenomenon as "the idols of the mind", which also attracts the attention of modern authors (Jalobeanu, 2013). Prejudice was related to the side effect of the sensually-emotional and, as a result, unconscious influence, which the mind should minimize or overcome. In general, due to the tradition of the Enlightenment, the so-called "transcendental" attitude towards this kind of manifestation of consciousness prevailed, including superstitions, remnants, negative stereotypes and prejudice, and in this regard, prejudice acquired an increasingly collective meaning with pronounced negative connotation. Nevertheless, the research on "deep psychology" smoothed this position to some extent, noting that prejudice, although a "by-product", is the result of the "power" and potential forces that are necessary changes in the course of human development, which are supported by internal affective forces (Freud, 2018).

3. Research Questions

Prejudice as a phenomenon of consciousness is interpreted in scientific or other discourses as a kind of "inferiority" of consciousness under adverse, abnormal circumstances. This fact finds its expression in the use of the word "prejudice" in some languages. Thus, for example, in the USA Constitution: "nothing

in this Constitution shall be so construed as to prejudice any claims...” (Constitution of the United States of America, 2007, par. 69) Prejudice means damage when translated into Russian. In the German language, some contexts presuppose the interpretation of prejudice as a special judicial term to denote damage expressed by the same word - “das Vorurteil” (Jankowitz, 1975). And in French, the word *biais*, meaning trick, mistake, systematic error is used, sometimes with a minor change - bias, also in the sense of prejudice, along with *préjugé* as the main, more often used term. In the Russian language, already in the XIX, the word prejudice acquired a meaning of not “real”, but as “artificially prepared” for the purposes of cognition, at the same time acquiring the meaning of what was justly and legally in that time, but what turns out to be “Unfair with the new turn of our thoughts” (Potebnja, 1990, p. 87).

Perhaps the close connection of the investigated phenomenon with the usage of this term and semantic interpretations in various contexts and the problem of prejudice caused a significant interest in philosophical-hermeneutic concepts. First of all, the hermeneutical project of Gadamer (1988) and detailed analysis from these positions of the concept of pre-understanding are meant in this context. Although in fairness it is necessary to note that the term pre-understanding was introduced in the existential-phenomenological discourse of Heidegger (2003), for which understanding was a form of primary entity of the world, a man and the basis of our attitude to the world. Prejudice in the hermeneutic field has a special role in the answer to the main critical question of hermeneutics arising here: “How to distinguish the true prejudices by which we understand, from the false, by virtue of which we are wrong” (Gadamer, 1988, p. 409).

According to the most recent research in the field of neurophysiology, psychology, evolutionary epistemology, ethology, the problem of prejudice appears in a rather new form, changing in the research focus and priorities. It is about changing the balance of social and natural factors in the origin and functioning of prejudice. Sometimes this opposition is put in a discussion form, where the researchers try to answer such a fundamental question as: Does person have certain predispositions due to human genetics, or is prejudice the result of primarily sociocultural pressure?

The fact is that in modern social psychology, prejudice is largely determined through the attitude of a person to another person based on his intra-group and inter-group interactions.

At the same time, prejudice is also a certain connection between the sensory signal and the inborn behavioral response, that is, the adaptation mechanism is involved here. This fact applies to behavior and emotions that help navigate social sphere, rooted in neuronal networks of brain. These facts make us turn not only to the well-known provisions of social psychology, but also to the results of research in the field of sociobiology and evolutionary epistemology. First of all, it is necessary to connect the prejudice with the so-called inborn predispositions or epigenetic rules.

The thesis that such predispositions contribute to the natural adaptation of organisms to living conditions, strengthening and making their survival stable, once was even called the “postulate of evolutionary epistemology” (Wuketits, 2012). The studies on the comparative description of the behavior of animals and humans confirm it. Thus, using the term superstition to characterize certain behavioral characteristics of both an animal and a person, the situation of obtaining a positive random result after performing a particular action is described, which may create the impression that increased possibility that the result will occur, although there are no rational, naturally determined and objective grounds for such a

preference (“superstition”). As an explanation, it is assumed that even if there is no causal connection between the action and the result, such superstitions can be preserved if an agent ceases to study the consequences of alternative actions, because too much can be lost if the connection turns out to be valid (Abbott & Sherratt, 2011).

Due to the fact that persistent rejection of prejudice is formed in public expression of it, but at the same time this phenomenon has objectively determined factors of their reproduction, it can be stated that prejudice causes the greatest difficulties as social problems in manifesting them in a hidden, unconscious form. In special reviews devoted to the study of the problems of prejudice, the task of overcoming the negative consequences of such prejudices is called a priority. It is noted at the same time that the elimination of the subtle forms of prejudice may be more difficult in global terms than the elimination of extreme forms of prejudice. Not only because they are more common, but also because they stem from the natural thought process, have less definite outlines and are often beyond the awareness of the very people who have these prejudices. In this regard, new term is used - Homo Stereotypus, in which a person appears as an animal predisposed to prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination, but at the same time he has the ability to overcome these prejudices if he has a motive to do it (Plous, 2003).

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to call for rethinking and reflecting on both the very nature of prejudice and the role that it actually plays. The author quite sincerely believes that a rather multifaceted, multidimensional problem, which is essentially a problem of prejudice, requires the use of a certain share of rationally constructed, that is, “healthy” eclecticism. The purpose of this approach is not to contrast the positions, but to focus attention on the irreducible relative significance of each of the identified research aspects of the study and the ontological dimensions of the phenomenon behind it.

5. Research Methods

Allport (1964) using the term “eclecticism” in his time proceeded from the recognition that human behavior can be caused by many factors acting individually or jointly. According to this author, eclecticism is the advice to follow historically-oriented moderation; systematic eclecticism aims to achieve moderation through the principle of inclusiveness (Allport, 1964). The main idea of this principle is connected with the search for such a theoretical system that will “accept the truth wherever it is found” and which supposes the “totality of human experience”, which allows human nature being fully appreciated (Allport, 2002).

In this regard, the approach to the investigated problems used in this article, conventionally designated as “rational eclecticism”, is only a certain interpretation of the already known methodological guidelines. First of all, it means a systematic approach. Within the framework of a common evolutionary-epistemological methodology, an analogy is used between highly organized epistemic systems, such as science, and epistemic activity at a pre-rational, i.e., rational, level that is not a coincidence, but is based on isomorphic principles common to all levels of organization (Wuketits, 2012).

6. Findings

The use of the terms prejudice and similar terms (superstition, stereotype) and giving them a certain semantic content reveal a paradoxical situation: an established attitude to the phenomenon of prejudice, where it is conducted at a consciously rational level, reveals itself as a hidden prejudice against prejudice in general. The negative role of prejudice is clearly and unequivocally recognized, and their possible positive influence is practically ignored.

On the one hand, the occurrence of prejudice is associated with a certain violation of the “normal” human psyche; on the other hand, it is believed that prejudice is a part of the “normal” process of the internalization of group norms and values. But even where possibility of including both antipathy and sympathy expressed in words prejudice and prejudice is recognized, these words are used primarily to express negative attitudes toward the objects to which they are directed (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2004).

Certain qualities of prejudice objectively can act as positively significant if something new actually turns out to be false or harmful. Under certain conditions, the installation for overcoming prejudice may actually turn into an installation for replacing the proven truth with a “progressive” delusion (of course, the subject-bearer of such a delusion considers it as true knowledge), which may have outwardly scientific form. One of the arguments of quasi-science (for example, creationism) in its confrontation with “official” science is an appeal to expose “prejudice” from which it should be “freed”, to create a “new science” free from prejudice. This fact is evidenced, for example, by the special Resolution of the PACE, directed against the danger of creationism, in which it is urged to “firmly confront” the claims of creationism to the same scientific status as the theory of evolution (Resolution № 1580). Of course, it is possible to add to this the situation connected with the existence of the “Modern flat Earth societies”.

As a possible practical opposition of this tendency, it would be possible to propose a more efficient use of the potential that is hidden in prejudice. This refers to the maintenance of the attitude recognized as genuinely scientific, not only on the basis of strictly scientific-rational means of substantiation, but also on the basis of value-dominated attitudes of consciousness. We are talking about the promotion of scientific knowledge, and in this regard there is an acceptable cultivation of those mental states of consciousness, which, in essence, are prejudices, namely *true prejudices*. If in order to maintain a socially significant, practically necessary provision of science, which seems to be obvious only in the circle of competent specialists, but for all other people it is not clear enough, then it is quite possible to compensate for this shortcoming by strengthening the value arguments.

7. Conclusion

The author suggests interpreting the concept of prejudice as possible solutions to the problems posed in the research. Taking into account this epistemic activity of human consciousness at the rational level and the assignment of prejudice to the category of pre-understanding, the concept itself can be interpreted as a special form of pre-conceptual knowledge. This knowledge, in its turn, is considered in a wider prerequisite context of knowledge and correlates with a known category of prerequisite knowledge (Mikeshina, 2007), which also serves as analogs, for example, the concept of implicit knowledge. This interpretation is more extensively presented in several particular papers (Gabdullin, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017).

Indeed, prejudice manifests itself as primarily a negative phenomenon, but the question of the positive influence of prejudice is rarely raised, although the elucidation of the nature of this phenomenon logically suggests such a formulation of the problem. The prevalence of prejudice in cognitive and social causes does not mean that it can only cause negative consequences. Persistent rejection of any belief, held in a hidden and unconscious form, can effectively withstand the same hidden prejudice, but with the opposite “charging”. In fact, we are talking about the struggle, the competition of prejudice.

For example, some authors believe that in order to effectively combat such a phenomenon as the “pattern of cultural loyalty” to corruption, it is important not only to understand its negative impact, immoral and criminal nature, but also to neutralize the influence of this pattern, identifying and modernizing stereotypes of anti-corruption orientation (Kislov, Dorozhkin, Syuzeva, Ozhegova, & Kuznetsov, 2016). As an additional illustrative analogy, one more positive assessment of the role of some prejudice can be given: the “foolish and optimistic opinion” which one Englishman can firmly adhere, having believed to defeat three French, sometimes allows in fact defeating at least two, and “good Protestant conviction” of many devotees in the rejection of papism is a more effective immunity against papacy than all the “strong and incontrovertible arguments of Chillingworth” (Chesterfield, 2004, par. 9).

Perhaps the time has come when the process of mastering scientific knowledge should be accompanied by the transformation of this knowledge into a persistent prejudice, into such a form that will be able to more effectively withstand ever more sophisticated attempts to discredit the true value of science. In response to those who are ready to declare some of the provisions of science “outmoded prejudices” it is necessary to counterpose the reasoned thesis that even attributing any element of the cognitive process to prejudice does not necessary indicate its inferiority. In this regard, it also seems promising to use methods and ideas of philosophical hermeneutics in that part of it, where prejudice is interpreted as first of all pre-understanding, despite the conscious opposition of understanding to explanation, of “truth” to “method”.

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