

# ON CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES FROM LINGUO-PSYCHO-PHILOSOPHICAL POINT OF VIEW

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## 1. Introduction

The most important of the characteristics that constitute the core of the essence of human beings are as follows: 1) *language usage*, 2) *logical thought* – represented by the understanding (*Verstand*, or the capacity for simple judging) and the reason (*Vernunft*, or the capacity for generalization and conclusion) – and 3) the adaptive changes made to the environment, aiming to benefit humanity as a whole and its members, which is being conducted via the means of capacities 1) and 2), which on its own leads to the paradoxical statement of George Bernard Shaw: “*The reasonable man adapts himself to the world. The unreasonable man persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. All progress, therefore, depends upon the unreasonable man*”. This indicates the astonishing, but generally unacceptable by most people, very close relationship between insanity and creativity, between consciousness and unconsciousness, uniqueness and generalization, intuition and reflection.

The process itself, of adapting the world to the needs of man, represented mostly by the mental reflection *per se*, by which it is established and on which it is founded, is exceptionally intriguing, but in the current paper we are going to be concerned only with one of its aspects, namely the *conceptual schemes* (systems of connected concepts) as mental representations constituting the reasoning, thinking or reflection, if you want, processes themselves, as well as their attributes, as their most profound basis:

“*Now it is quite clear that there must be some third thing, which on the one side is homogeneous with the category, and with the phenomenon on the other, and so makes the application of the former to the latter possible. This mediating representation must be pure (without any empirical content), and yet must on the one side be intellectual, on the other sensuous. Such a representation is the transcendental schema*” – here Kant is speaking of a schema of the concept itself, but this notion could be applied without any difficulties to the

conceptual scheme in so far as the latter is composed of concepts and nothing more. Only one thing should be respected, namely Hegel's *Aufhebung* that leads to new qualitatively entities.

A definition of the term concept can be the following: a concept is a mental representation of something, external to the mind as such, to the extent that this representation contains the main features of the object in question, without which this object will cease to exist, in so far as those essential features give "*the possibility of reducing a theme visually to a skeleton of essential dynamic features, none of which is a tangible part of the actual object*" so that it, in this way, avoids the "*assumption that the mind's account of a thing is identical with all or with some of the thing's objective properties*", Arnheim (1971). Therefore, a distinction exists between 1) the mental grasp of an object and 2) the physical nature of the object itself – we will focus more on this distinction later.

Regarding the schematism itself in general, Kant writes in the first *Critique*:

*"Now this representation of a general procedure of the imagination to present its image to a conception, I call the schema of this conception ... in truth, it is not images of objects, but schemata, which lie at the foundation of our pure sensuous conceptions"* and furthermore, however, as it is extremely difficult to give an adequate description of the mental representations and their schematic systematicity, "*this schematism of our understanding in regard to phenomena and their mere form, is an art, hidden in the depths of the human soul, whose true modes of action we shall only with difficulty discover and unveil*".

Therefore, our main thesis will be a transformation of the statement: "*words are the substance of thoughts, and thoughts, from the simplest through the most profound, are the equivalent of talking to oneself*". We would like to transform this statement as follows: not words, but *concepts* and *conceptual schemes* are the building blocks of thought because when words enter the mind, they undergo transformation and are translated into the language of the mind, which is different from the perceptual image data of the world, but is derived from it.

But here a reciprocal influence between them is observed to occur – the mind is furnished by perceptions, but perceptions are influenced by the mind, e.g. the so-called *linguistic relativity* appears, in so far as the mind influences the perception via the language. The linguistic relativity is in our opinion *falsely* understood and interpreted by most of the scientists, as long as they search for objectively measurable dependency

between languages and human perceptions of the world. In our opinion, what is essential is that we are seeing in the world only what we know and what we have words for, in order to interpret it linguistically (which constitutes our belief system or worldview *per se*) – and that is the essence of the *linguistic relativity*, or the “*we only see what we know*” phenomenon, as Goethe once said.

In this way, we see only a fraction from the world and, furthermore, we are imposing our own expectations and linguistic interpretations on our perceptions, refusing to see the world except through the eyes of the reason and language, as the child does before acquiring the latter, for example. This is an evident double distortion of the image of the world – on the one hand *perceptual*, on the other hand – *linguistic*.

It is largely accepted that the science of concepts is thought to belong to linguistics or even to psychology, but in our opinion its origins are deeply rooted in philosophy (as the mother of all sciences) and that is the reason why our essay will be more philosophically oriented rather than linguistically, or if you prefer – a *linguo-psychological* approach will be used.

However, it should be noted that words (i.e. the *signifiés* and the *signifiants*) also are registered in the mind as images, sounds and all other sensorial modalities, and that is the reason why they could also appear in thought as such mental representations, but the pure thinking, abstraction and generalization is based on nothing but concepts:

“*An overready perception of sharp mental images is antagonistic to the acquirement of habits of highly-generalized and abstract thought, especially when the steps of reasoning are carried on by words as symbols*” and furthermore – “*sensory experience ... is not necessary conscious ... it is not always consciously remembered*”, Arnheim (1971).

The train of thought is represented by the so-called *conceptual schemes*, which are composed in such a way that they are almost invisible (in so far as Aristotle said that without a (re)presentation, intellectual activity is impossible) to the thinking subject, so “*in principle any subject can be thought and meant completely and distinctly without any help of imagery ... there is “non-sensuous content” ... the more effective the thinking process is at any moment, the more likely is imageless thought to be detected*”, Arnheim (1971), because of the higher degree of abstraction from the perceptual data from which they, the concepts, are derived:

*“The emotion (as a building substance of thought) is invisible not because it is absent, but indeed because it is the form – the mold in which the intellectual contents are poured ... but we notice only the content and do not see which emotion’s mold it is ... emotion is the determining teleonomic tendency of cognition”*, writes Timev (1992).

The schemes are represented as a film-like serial mental representation of highly information-saturated frames which are perceived simultaneously, so the speed of thought is much faster than the so-called *visual thinking*. In this mental representation we could not even distinguish and cognize a single separate element of this complex unification: *“since mental images can be restricted to what the mind summons actively and selectively, their complements are often ‘amodal’, that is, perceived as present but not visible”*, Arnheim (1971).

However, if we want to do this, we should demand from the brain that it project to us the images and inject us with the emotions of the concept or the whole series of concepts, i.e. the conceptual scheme, from which they were derived in the first place, which is often impossible and highly restricted, cut off, hence of little informativeness in comparison with the thought consisting of simultaneous integration of several concepts, i.e. the schema.

However, if we receive this simulation by the brain in some way or another, we will realize that the *cause-effect relation* also exists in the mind and what Nikola Tesla described is actually true, namely that: *“every thought I conceived was suggested by an external impression. Not only this, but all my actions were prompted in a similar way. In the course of time it became perfectly evident to me that I was merely an automation endowed with power of movement responding to the stimuli of the sense organs and thinking and acting accordingly”*, Tesla (2007).

This view of the illusory nature of free will is also defended by Spinoza in his *Ethics*: *“There is no mind absolute or free will, but the mind is determined for willing this or that by a cause which is determined in its turn by another cause, and this one again by another, and so on to infinity ... the mind is a fixed and determined mode of thinking, and therefore cannot be the free cause of its actions, or it cannot have the absolute faculty of willing and unwilling; but for willing this or that it must be determined by a cause which is determined by another, and this again by another”*.

In fact, emotions play not a supplementary role in regard to the thought but a rather essential one in so far as: “*not a single intellectual figure can reach our perception without emotional envelope and it loses its organic whole and decomposes itself in a chaos in the same way the cell de-structures and its protoplasm spills without its membrane supporting it in as an independent being*” so that “*every knowledge and cognition cannot acquire the form of an idea if it does not possess its own emotion, a carrier and its emotional form-frame (often these two emotions are one and the same)*”, Timev (1992) writes.

Therefore, Timev concludes, emotions are the form of our thoughts and of our cognition. According to him, in fact, “*it is ridiculous to console ourselves that we could ever possess an unbiased reflection and abstract, even objective, cognition. EVERY COGNITION IS EMOCIOFORM*”.

There are some accounts of nativism regarding the concepts, but for us it is more convincing that concepts are derived via the experience of man – the so-called empiric point of view (e.g. Prinz, 2004). What could be innate, hence available a priori, could be the cognitive apparatus of the human being (e.g. the categories of understanding (*Verstand*) according to Kant). Similar view is that these categories could be achieved and deduced through the *transcendental-eidetic reduction* of phenomena of Husserl, leading to the contemplation of essences or the *Wesensschau*.

This could be put in the words of Spinoza – the perception (for him *imaginatio*) involves both the natures of the object perceived and the perceiving subject, but in so far as the subject is perceiving through the affections of the body and its particular nature, it could be said that it does not adapt itself to the objects, but they adapt to it, i.e. they phenomenalyze themselves to it or the subject sees them to the extent that it is naturally capable of allowing them to phenomenalyze to it, i.e. *our nature dominates over the object's one* – which is a statement that Kant also defends in the first *Critique*:

“*Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them a priori, by means of concepts, have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge*”.

However, the construction of concepts from life experience is facing the serious problem of the *sensorial distortion*, i.e. that senses do not provide adequate data about the

external objects, which are known as *noumena*, or the nature (essence) of these external objects as such remains unknown. Thus when we acquire knowledge of something external to us, in fact we are learning more about our own nature rather than about the nature of the object in question (Spinoza, Kant). Some (e.g. Kant) consider the *noumena* as unknowable entities (agnosticism).

In order to demonstrate and defend the statement about the *noumena* and their unknowable features, we only need to turn our focus to biology – we have a rich multitude of different senses that are adapted to the external objective reality in such a way that every sense or sensor plays the role of mechanism that permits the particular organism to deal with the environment and to preserve its existence as long as possible (reproduction is a kind of evolved means for continuous existence of a particular species and of individual traits (genes)).

But this in no way means that these sensors or senses are providing objective reflection of the actual objective reality of the universe in so far as their evolution is mostly driven by unconscious instinct and the secret plan of nature herself (the Schopenhauer's *will* or the Bergson's *élan vital*) and their purpose lies in the reflective mechanism, but every reflection is subjective and the latter is the element that could never be eliminated, thus the objective reality will remain forever hidden for every single subject in so far as he is such an entity. The objective reality and objective knowledge is available to all objects, but exchanged at the price of lack of consciousness at all.

To summarize, first we constructed the hypothesis that words and the objects to which they refer are translated in the mind into concepts and the latter are unified in connected systems called *conceptual schemata* that express the features of all building elements, but also give rise to the emerging of something qualitatively new (the triad of Hegel – thesis, antithesis and synthesis – and also the so-called *Aufhebung*), and second, we directed the attention to the fact that sensorial representations are not objective at all, i.e. there is a distortion present and that our perception depends more on our own nature than on the object's nature.

From this we can conclude the following: taking into consideration the diversity among people, the contents of their conceptual schemes as well as of their single concepts, which differ in relation and in proportion to the differences in their cognitive

apparatus – in different people various brain centers processing particular sensorial information are developed to different degrees – so that people will see and put emphasis on different things in the world, besides the distortion that is common to all of us. *In truth, no one will ever be able to give a complete list of the contents of a particular concept due to the subjective element of our nature.*

Hence every conceptual scheme present in every single mind will be some kind of *partial reflection* in relation to the objectivity, the reality itself – there are no two people with the same contents of a given concept present in their mind – so that sharing the knowledge does not include in itself a confirmation from the other person in so far as he is not able to reach the full degree of the feature in question, because he possesses different resources (reasoning power, imagination richness, memory vividness, cetera).

The *absolute* ambiguity in linguistic statements is unavoidable; the *partial* one is avoidable only when the ambiguity and its meaning are understood in *almost the same way* by two individuals that share a high degree of similarity of their natures, e.g. conceptual apparatus similarity or brain waves similarity.

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