

France Veber and Vladimir Bartol

OLGA MARKIČ
Univerza v Ljubljani
Filozofska fakulteta
Aškerčeva 2
SI-1000 Ljubljana
olga.markic@guest.arnes.si

POVZETEK

FRANCE VEBER IN VLADIMIR BARTOL

Knjiga Franceta Vebera Filozofija je med slovenskimi intelektualci zbudila živahne razprave. V tem članku se omejim na obravnavo kritične ocene, ki jo je napisal Vladimir Bartol. Zanima me predvsem njegova diskusija o različnih metodah, ki se jih filozofi in znanstveniki poslužujejo pri razlagi duševnosti. Bartol je v svoji analizi opozoril na meje fenomenološke metode in na prispevek biološko usmerjenega eksperimentalnega raziskovanja duševnosti. Predlagam dve branji razprave: ožje, t.j. Bartolovo kritično vrednotenje Vebrove argumentacije in širše, ki se ukvarja z vprašanji različnih pristopov pri raziskovanju človekove duševnosti in z metodološkim vprašanjem krožnega sklepanja. Poskušam pokazati, da je ta diskusija med Vebrom in Bartolom aktualna tudi danes, predvsem v razpravah v sodobni filozofiji kognitivne znanosti.

Ključne besede: zavest, fenomenologija, dualizem, znanstvene metode, Veber

ABSTRACT

France Veber's book Philosophy stirred a lively debate among Slovene intellectuals. This paper concentrates on Vladimir Bartol's critical review, above all on his discussion on various methods used in the investigation of the mind. Bartol analysed the limitations of Veber's phenomenological method and pointed out the value of biologically-oriented experimental investigation. I suggest two readings of the debate: a narrow one, i.e. Bartol's critical assessment of Veber's argumentation, and a broad one, exploring different approaches to the investigation of the human mind and the role of intuitions in the fallacy of begging the question. I conclude that many aspects of Bartol-Veber discussion are again a hot topic in the contemporary philosophy of mind and cognitive science.

Key words: consciousness, phenomenology, dualism, scientific methods, Veber

Introduction

France Veber's book *Philosophy* provoked a lively debate among Slovene intellectuals. This paper concentrates on Vladimir Bartol's critical review of Veber's book. Vladimir Bartol (1903–1967) was a writer (his best known novel is *Alamut* (1938)), a journalist and later a biologist at the Research Institute of Slovene Academy of Sciences. He studied philosophy, psychology and biology and took his doctorate as Veber's student. He was interested in philosophical, psychological and empirical investigation of human mind, especially in Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. In his review Bartol analysed the limitations of Veber's phenomenological method and pointed out the value of biologically oriented experimental investigation. I suggest two readings of the debate, a narrow and a broad one. A narrow one deals with Bartol's critical assessment of Veber's argumentation. A broad one is concerned with some general remarks about different approaches to human psychology and a role of intuitions in the fallacy of begging the question. I will conclude with the observation that many aspects of Bartol-Veber discussion are again a hot topic in the contemporary philosophy of mind and cognitive science.

Bartol's critical assessment of Veber's argumentation

1. The question of methodology

Bartol begins his review with the short discussion on different methods in scientific or philosophical investigation (Bartol, 1993: 67–68). He states that life phenomena, mind included, can be observed from two different standpoints: as phenomena in themselves with particular structure (static, structural aspect) and as phenomena that are active (dynamical, functional aspect). Anatomical method corresponds to the first viewpoint and physiological method to the second one. He adds that life phenomena can also be observed from the developmental perspective (ontogenesis, phylogenesis) and as phenomena in the particular environment (biological and sociological aspects). He thinks that the essentially the same analysis can be done also in studying the mind, i.e. in psychology. The first is *introspective* (Bolzano, Brentano, Meinong, Veber) or *phenomenological* (Husserl) method is used for the description of the *a priori* structure, i.e. a kind of anatomy of the mind. He traces this method from Augustine and Descartes to Kant and contemporary philosophers of psychology. It is also used by experimental psychology (Wundt). The second, which investigates *functional* aspects of the mind is Freud's *psychoanalysis* and methods that develop from it like individual psychology (Adler) and Jung's type psychology. All three also contribute to the *developmental* psychology, as well as many other methods such as child psychology, comparative psychology, psychophysics, psychobiology, psychophysiology,

The areas of research of introspective or phenomenological method are all conscious mental phenomena. In order to describe them and analyse them we must take them out of their causal relations. Veber named this method a *descriptive – analytical method* (*Analytic psychology*). The aim of it is to investigate the *a priori* structure of the object that is directly given as one's own experience that he is aware of.

Bartol's aim is to find out if Veber goes beyond the limits of his method and if yes, what are the consequences. Let us take two examples from the chapter "Razstavna pot v duševni svet".

Veber divides experiences into cognitive (umska doživetja) and instinctive (nagon-ska doživetja). Cognitive experiences are further divided into representations and

thoughts and instinctive experiences are divided into emotions and strivings. Veber thinks that instinctive experiences are dependent on cognitive experiences and infers that the same must also hold for the developmental relation. Bartol criticizes Veber's conclusion that cognitive experiences are developmentally primary to instinctive experiences (Bartol, 1993: 70). He thinks that the laws of development can be discovered only by empirical investigation and that the analysis of the structure is not enough. According to Bartol, Veber thus exceeds the scope of his method.

Bartol also questions Veber's analysis of instincts. He maintains that we can not be directly aware of the instincts but can only infer them from other circumstances. But then, he stresses, they are in need of empirical investigation. Bartol discusses different biological and psychological approaches. He thinks that Freud's psychoanalysis is a promising approach to explain instincts. However, two important instincts, i.e. sexual instinct and instinct to support oneself, are common to all living beings. This means that—in contrast to Veber—psychoanalysis regards human being as a part of nature. Bartol criticizes Veber for omitting the whole area of scientific investigation of instincts, which forces Veber to accept a primitive solution.

We can summarize this part of Bartol's critique by saying that Veber does not take into consideration empirical investigation although there are cases in which he should do so.

2. The question of the logic of the argument

In his review Bartol several times accuses Veber of arguing in vicious circle (Bartol, 1993:71–72). Let us look at the example from "Razstavna pot v duševni svet: Nadaljevanje". Here Veber asks us to imagine a young future sculptor that lives in a remote village and has never observed any sculpture. Nevertheless an instinct leads him to be an active sculptor himself. He takes this as an illustration for the non-directed instinct (*nenaperjeni gon*). Bartol points out that the example with young sculptor, first taken just as illustration, later serves as proof for the same instinct. He just postulates what should be proved and thus commits a fallacy of begging the question.

Next examples are from "Presojevalna pot v duševni svet". First, Veber asks us to imagine a worm which feels comfort (or discomfort) but can not experience joy or sadness ("higher" emotions). He uses this example latter to prove the fundamental difference between human beings and other living creatures which can not be "persons" – "spirits". Bartol argues that Veber does not give adequate proof for such a conclusion and just presupposes, appealing to our intuitions and imagination, what he should prove. The same story repeats with Veber's *a priori* assertion that all living creatures except humans are beyond correctness/incorrectness and do not have their own subjective activity. Bartol points out that there are investigations that question such statements, for example, there are results from experimental biology that even simple creatures can learn, remember and find correct solution. But Veber does not take into account such possibilities. He later uses his *a priori* considerations about animals to prove that humans have special, supernatural places and are spiritual beings and persons. Bartol concludes that Veber's theory about the special place of human being rests on the presupposition that is questionable and neglects results from natural science. The argument collapses if we undercut the presupposition.

Some general remarks

I will now suggest a broader reading of Bartol's critique of Veber's *Philosophy*. I will explore two topics: different approaches to the investigation of the human mind and a role of basic intuitions in the fallacy of begging the question.

Veber's aim is to investigate conscious mental phenomena, i.e. mental phenomena that are directly given to one's own experience. Using a descriptive-analytical method he explores the experiences that the person is aware of. He is interested in *a priori* structure of the object and not in the causal relations among them. On the other side, Bartol emphasizes the importance of empirical research and investigations of causal relations. He points out that mental phenomena are not only phenomena that we are aware of but that there are also unconscious processes, studied by psychoanalysis. Freud's approach to investigate unconsciousness can be nowadays seen as a predecessor to modern cognitive science research of unconscious mental processes which underlie cognition but are themselves not conscious.

I think that some differences between Veber's and Bartol's approach correspond to two basic pre-theoretic intuitions about consciousness, causal and phenomenal intuition. Güzeldere's thinks it is this distinction that shapes the research of consciousness in psychology, i.e. the methods with which consciousness is studied and the way problems are defined and delineated (Güzeldere, 1995: 35–36).

The causal intuition takes that "consciousness is as consciousness does". It takes the causal role consciousness has in the general economy of our mental lives as the most basic. On the other side, on the phenomenal intuition "consciousness is as consciousness seems". It takes as fundamental the way our mental lives seem ("feel") to us, i.e. the phenomenal qualities that characterize our perceptions, pains, tickles, and the rest of our states.

Güzeldere observes that these two intuitions pull in different directions and that theories built around one intuition are accused of failing to capture the other intuition. He thinks that this stems from another fundamental intuition – the *Essentialist intuition*: "If the characterization of consciousness is *essentially* causal, then it has to be *essentially* non-phenomenal and if it is *essentially* phenomenal, then it is *essentially* non-causal." (Güzeldere, 1995: 36). He, in contrast, advocates *Antidote intuition*: "What *consciousness does* qua consciousness, *cannot* be characterized in the absence of *how consciousness seems* but, more importantly, that *how consciousness seems* cannot be conceptualized in the absence of *what consciousness does* (Güzeldere, 1995, p. 36). *In principle*, I agree with Güzeldere's proposal but I think it is much more difficult to find the appropriate method *in practice*. In studying consciousness we have somehow to bridge the epistemic asymmetry. There are differences between first person and third person perspective that lead to different methods, e.g. introspection (introspectionism of Külpe and Titchener) and methods that use observations from the outside (e.g. behaviourism of Watson, modern cognitive neuroscience). Many cognitive scientists studying consciousness nowadays believe that the exclusive utilization of either first or third person methods will not provide answers to the questions of consciousness. We have to find new method and there are some attempts to combine these two perspectives. For example, neurophenomenology, which is a hybrid scientific methodology that combines neuroscience and phenomenological psychology (Varela, Shear, 1999). My sceptical question is, do they really combine two perspectives or do they just look for some phenomenological correlates. Or, to use Chalmers distinction (Chalmers, 1995), do they really tackle a hard problem?

Bartol's review reveals fundamental difference in placing a human being in nature between Veber and himself. Veber thinks that human being has a special, supernatural place that is expressed in his spirituality. Only human being is a person and can act from herself and is real substance. Veber accepts a dualistic position to the mind-body problem. The consequence is Veber's neglect of the natural sciences approach to studying human mind. In contrast, Bartol thinks that there is enough evidence that also animals, at least some of them, can have their own activity. There is continuity in nature. These differences help us to understand why Bartol accuses Veber of begging the question and arguing in a circle. Namely, what Veber takes for granted and what seems to him obvious, is for Bartol something that has to be proved. The problem is where to start and how to persuade those who do not share our basic intuitions. This is particularly difficult when we are concerned with consciousness. If someone has basic intuitions that consciousness is essentially subjective and that what she experiences or introspects is beyond any doubt, then it is very difficult to persuade her that these are just presuppositions. We can nowadays find similar debates between naturalist and dualistically inclined philosophers.

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