

The Concept of Culture from a Logical and Epistemological Perspective

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Abstract

The concept of culture refers to many states of meaning. Among these, the most common ones are those that are related to institutional phenomena. Institutional phenomena express different lifestyles. Each lifestyle has its specific structure. This structure is based on special rules deriving from social use and tradition. Special rules make the epistemological and logical aspects of the life different and unique. In this respect, the boundaries of knowledge in a certain lifestyle are determined by the scope of that specific lifestyle; the possibility of knowledge depends on participation in this lifestyle; the source of knowledge is the tradition on which the relevant lifestyle relies, and the criterion of knowledge is coherence. Besides, each lifestyle has its unique and special logical structure. When this logical structure is considered as a parallel logic that observes all the rules of the general logic, then the expressions and inferences that are based on it seem to be consistent and valid.

Keywords: culture, logic, epistemology, consistency, validity

1. Introduction

There are around 200 definitions in relation to the term culture (Kuçuradi, 2009: 53). Which of these definitions should we take into consideration while talking about culture? Are the contexts determinant in this topic? If the contexts are determinant, can we mention a general concept of culture or not? Is it possible to include all the discourses about culture under a single extension or not? In order to be able to answer these questions, we need to see whether we can determine the general content of the word culture or not. For this purpose, it would be appropriate to have a look at the origins of this word and the meanings attributed to it throughout the history.

Culture is derived from “cultura” in Latin language. Cultura means “cultivation, farming, agriculture; (mental, spiritual) training, education; (personal) showing respect” (Kabağağaç –Alova, 1995: 143). During the period of the Romans, this word was used for the man-made things as opposed to the natural: it referred to the plants, crops that did not grow in the nature by themselves, but were cultivated by humans. Also in the period of the Romans, this word meant training and education of humans (Özlem, 2008: 153). Based on these meanings, the concept of culture was firstly used by E. B. Tylor in 1871 as a technical term expressing a reaction against the belief in universal and linear progress ignoring the differences (O’Hear, 1998: 64). Such use of the term became widespread and then it started to be defined as “all of the material and immaterial products socially transmitted from one generation to another by the human society; the total of symbolic and learnt products or features” (Cevizci, 2010b: 320). This is what we observe at this point: The word culture –if we take J. R. Searle’s brute facts and institutional facts (Searle, 1969: 50-51) as a basis – refers to diverse institutions in line with the above definition. It means that the extension of the concept of culture covers such institutions as art, religion, economy, etc. In this sense, the intention of this term is made up of unique lifestyles based on certain institutional phenomena. Now we will try to evaluate this concept in epistemological and logical aspects by taking its intention into consideration.

2. The Concept of Culture from an Epistemological Perspective

Approaching the concept of culture from an epistemological perspective means evaluating it in terms of the fundamental problems of epistemology. The fundamental problems that are focused on in epistemology are the possibility of knowledge, source of knowledge, criterion of knowledge and boundaries of knowledge.

2.1 The Concept of Culture in Terms of the Possibility of Knowledge

In the history of philosophy, there have been two approaches towards the possibility of knowledge: skepticism and dogmatism. According to skepticism, the human being cannot know the reality that is independent from himself, because his faculties are not sufficient enough to know the reality. Therefore, each individual says something different about a certain object. So, there is no objective explanation accepted by everybody in relation to a certain object (Goldman, 1986: 28-41; Potter, 1994: 15-31). However, according to dogmatism, the human being can know the reality that is independent of himself. The individual does not even need to question the possibility of knowledge (Çüçen, 2012: 56) because it is not the possibility of knowledge but the other problems about the knowledge that actually needs to be discussed.

Considering the concept of culture within the framework of the possibility of knowledge, we can say: Since the intention of the concept of culture is constituted by certain lifestyles, accepting the existence of the lifestyles – even if we do not participate in them – is a dogmatic behavior. And rejecting or only partially accepting them is a skeptical behavior. After this ontological stage, it can be also possible from an epistemological perspective to accept or reject the knowledge that are proposed on the basis of these lifestyles. In order to analyze a certain lifestyle in terms of other epistemological problems, we must firstly behave pragmatically with regard to the epistemological structure in this lifestyle.

2.2 The Concept of Culture in Terms of the Source of Knowledge

In the history of philosophy, there have been four main approaches in relation to the source of knowledge: rationalism, empiricism, criticism and intuitionism. According to rationalism, the source of knowledge is the reason. A rational knowledge is a priori and analytic. (Tunalı, 2010: 46-55) Empiricism regards experience as the source of knowledge. All the knowledge comes from experience. Therefore, knowledge is a posteriori and synthetic (Cevizci, 2010a: 72-74). According to criticism, the source of knowledge is both reason and experience. The perceptions coming from the experience are processed in the a priori categories of the reason and transformed into knowledge (Gündoğan, 2010: 98-102). According to intuitionism, the source of knowledge is intuition. Intuition is the acquisition of the knowledge directly and as a whole, but not in pieces (Audi, 2002: 72).

Considering the intention of the concept of culture, we can make the following observation about the source of knowledge: The source of the knowledge about a certain lifestyle is not reason, experience or intuition, but it is the tradition on which the relevant lifestyle is based.

2.3 The Concept of Culture in Terms of the Criterion of Knowledge

In the history of philosophy, the most focused theories regarding the criterion of knowledge are the coherence theory of truth and the correspondence theory of truth. Coherence is the consistency of an expression regarding a certain piece of knowledge with the other knowledge within a certain system (Dauer, 2004: 96). Correspondence is the conformity of an expression regarding a piece of knowledge to a situation or phenomenon within a phenomenal space (Çüçen, 2005: 107-108). Since the lifestyles refer not only to the phenomenal things but also to the institutional things, the criterion for them is not correspondence, but coherence. In this respect, if a certain piece of knowledge does not contrast with the basic expressions within a certain lifestyle and is coherent with them, then it is coherent within that lifestyle. If it contrasts, then it is not coherent within that lifestyle.

2.4 The Concept of Culture in Terms of the Boundaries of Knowledge

Idealism and realism are the main approaches regarding the boundaries of knowledge in the history of philosophy. Idealism defends that the boundaries of knowledge are drawn by the idea. Idealism can be divided into immanent idealism and transcendental idealism. According to immanent idealism, the subject knows only the contents within his own mind. He cannot reach the knowledge beyond that. According to transcendental idealism, the subject uses the a priori categories of the mind to process what he perceives in the external world through his senses and then transforms them into knowledge. However, he only reaches the knowledge of the phenomenon. He cannot acquire the knowledge of the *numen* which is the thing-in-itself (*ding an sich*) (Ajdukiewicz, 2010: 59-69). According to realism, the subject can know the external world that is independent from him. His knowledge is unlimited, because the knowledge of the person enlarges as the area of reality enlarges (Timuçin, 2004: 228-229). In accordance with this information regarding the boundaries of the knowledge, we can say the following: The boundaries of the knowledge about a certain lifestyle correspond to the boundaries of the relevant lifestyle; as the boundaries enlarge, the boundaries of the knowledge also enlarge; as the boundaries get narrow, the boundaries of the knowledge also get narrow.

3. The Concept of Culture from a Logical Perspective

Logic is the art of expressing our ideas properly, without making a mistake. What is essential in this art is the propositions and the inferences. In modern logic, propositions and inferences can be symbolized and tested. Such tests can be made for validity, consistency or equivalence (Çüçen, 2011: 105-150). For example, the proposition “Ahmet is hardworking and smart” can be symbolized as “ $p \wedge q$ ”. When this proposition is tested through the methods which are used in the modern logic such as the truth table or analytic tableau, it seems to be consistent. Similarly, the propositions “If Zeynep does not study, she cannot pass the exam” and “Zeynep studies and passes the exam” can be symbolized as “ $\sim p \rightarrow \sim q$ ” and “ $p \wedge q$ ”. These propositions are also coherent with each other when they are tested through the methods of truth table or analytic schedule. Furthermore, the inference “Mehmet is either talented or hardworking. Mehmet is not talented. Then, Mehmet is hardworking.” can be symbolized as “ $p \vee q, \sim p \therefore q$ ”. This inference is valid when it is tested through the truth table or analytic tableau.

We can try to analyze the expressions in various lifestyles in terms of the methods of the modern logic and apply all the rules of modern logic to these expressions. For example, we can analyze the expression “If you have respect for your ancestors, you do not upset your elders.” with the following approach: We can symbolize this expression as “ $p \rightarrow \sim q$ ”. Testing this symbolic expression through the truth table or analytic tableau will show that it is consistent. Similarly, we can discuss a rule of etiquette which is quite common in Turkish and Muslim societies: the rule of not crossing legs in front of the elders. Based on the expression “Those who cross their legs in front of their elders are disrespectful to them”, we can make the inference “Those who cross their legs in front of their elders are disrespectful to them. Cezmi crossed his legs in front of his elders. Therefore, Cezmi was disrespectful to them.” We can symbolize this inference as “ $\forall x (Ax \rightarrow \sim Sx), Ac \therefore \sim Sc$ ” within the framework of the quantification logic. Testing this inference through the methods in the modern logic will show that it is valid.

4. Conclusion

As mentioned in the above paragraphs, when the concept of culture is addressed in its most common form, its extension covers art, morals, religion, economy, etc. The intention of this extension is formed by diverse lifestyles. Each different lifestyle has its specific epistemological structure. In this respect, the possibility of knowledge depends on the acceptance of such epistemological structure; the source is tradition; the criterion is consistency, and the boundaries are determined by the scope of this structure.

The expressions that have an epistemological structure can be also analyzed from a logical perspective. In such analysis, when the discourses in diverse lifestyles are considered as a parallel logic that observes all the rules of the general logic, the expressions in them are observed to be consistent and the inferences seem to be valid.

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