

Israel Bar-Yehuda Idalovichi. *Symbolic Forms as the Metaphysical Groundwork for the Organon of the Cultural Sciences*. Vols. 1 & 2. Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2014. 450 pp. £54.99 GBP (Hardcover ISBN 9781443859066); 510 pp. £54.99 GBP (Hardcover ISBN 9781443859127).

This wide-ranging study may be seen as a type of encyclopedic text. In the prologue, the author tells us that his objective is to create a new organon of the cultural sciences, which should eventually lead one to a state of universal knowledge, one that is concordant with the state of knowledge of the liberal arts or the ancient *enkýklios paideía*.

Despite many centuries of criticism and frequent predictions of its demise, metaphysics continues to attract adherents and defenders, critics and apologists, many of whom have returned in recent years to classical philosophical works. Israel Bar-Yehuda Idalovichi's project is a thought-provoking attempt to shape a philosophical apparatus, by which it will be possible to establish a unified theory of all cultural domains. Up to the 20th century, most of the attempts to establish a 'theory of everything'—by which it may be possible to explain the entire universe, God and human beings—were made in the realm of philosophy. In the 20th century, after the powerful successes of modern physics, the 'theory of everything' found its way into theoretical physics. Such a modern 'theory of everything' is based on the hypothesis that all known physical phenomena in nature can be explained and demonstrated via mathematical equations. In fact, the field of physics has successfully achieved a large part of this objective by combining quantum mechanics and general relativity.

The 'theory of everything' in our times seems to stimulate the revival of the old dream of a universal system or theory which might include and account for everything, such as Leibniz's vision, a theory that to this very day continues to beguile philosophers. The author seeks to prove that it is possible to create a new metaphysical system that will comprise all existing theories, principles and laws by means of an all-encompassing new metaphysical apparatus—the new organon of the cultural sciences. Another main purpose of this study is to restore philosophy to its classical status as queen of the sciences, by means of this metaphysical apparatus. It is explicitly proposed by the author that this apparatus may serve as the common foundation upon which the domains of science, humanities and arts may all be integrated. This is a bold effort to prove that the power of metaphysics is still alive and well, and that it is therefore possible to generate a universal theory and system linking all fields of knowledge and all cultural domains.

Guided by the perpetual attempt to realize the classical ideal of philosophy by creating a comprehensive metaphysical apparatus, which will both stimulate and restore the authority of philosophy as the science of sciences, the author locates himself in the center of Western tradition and thought—namely, within the everlasting logos. Thus, he believes, it will be possible to comprehend and illuminate all of culture, the universe, as well as human existence and thought. All these goals would eventually be fulfilled by means of a universal metaphysical tool: the organon of the cultural sciences. Historically, a number of treatises on reasoning, which were systematically grouped together by Aristotle's pupils, were called *Organon*—i.e., instruments of science. Francis Bacon, in the 16th century, formulated the principles of science in his *New Organon*. Bacon's *New Organon* generates new directions for interpreting nature, to such an extent that many philosophers and scientists presuppose that it marks the true beginning of modern philosophy and science. However, the classical organon has changed dramatically in form and content throughout history and

the intellectual milieu surrounding its production have also varied. Thus, the aspiration to a utopian vision concerning an apparatus that may cope with complete knowledge and that is also universally accessible is still very much alive.

The idea of creating a new organon comprising the domains of science, humanities and arts while basing itself on symbolic forms is the original idea of the author. Following Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, which tries to shape the whole of culture into a vast network of ideas of human knowledge, Idalovichi goes one step further by amalgamating all methods and systems of culture under one roof—namely, the organon of the cultural sciences, based on symbolic forms. It follows that the organon shaped by Israel Idalovichi is fundamentally different from those in the past. Given that every form of a symbolic reality is a crystallization of a particular cultural science, one cannot use the same methods of symbolization for all cultural sciences. This means that every symbolic form retains a unique character, because it fits such a particular cultural science. Hence, it is the task of the organon to adjust an adequate method for every cultural science, with some requiring more than one method. Such a metaphysical organon makes use of analytical, logical-mathematical, critical-dialectical, and speculative methods, according to the various domains of the numerous cultural sciences. The broad objectives of the organon are based on systematic and ordered principles, as well as on comprehensive, creative and imaginative ideas. The author emphasizes that the organon should fulfill the universal quest of finding a superdisciplinary or transdisciplinary method, which could stand as a common denominator and amalgamate all ideas and theories of empirical sciences, humanities and arts.

By means of symbolic forms, the various domains of culture—namely, history, science, myth, religion and so on—attain a common scientific ground and become cultural sciences. The idea that culture has to be traced in a scientific way is the result of the modern desire for progress. Every cultural science is the product of pretentious emulation, the emotional appeal of the idea of progress, as well as the desire for the satisfaction of believing oneself to be on the right path and to be advancing with the inexorable tide. The cultural sciences are not limited to the study of a particular culture, but rather to the study of many integrated wholes; they make every effort to take hold of all human domains, by means of getting to know the best that could be thought, said, and done. By utilizing every piece of knowledge, every cultural science endeavors to turn a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock of notions and habits, which we follow quite often in a routine way. Every domain of culture is systematized and acquires scientific-methodical foundations. In fact, the author takes on a very difficult task by performing an intricate process of crystallization of every domain of culture, by means of the organon he has created. Given that each domain of culture has a particular inner form and logic, it is necessary to depict and represent its specific subject matter as a symbolic form. The process of depiction, representation and realization leads to the revelation of the given potential of the symbolic form, which has its own distinctive features and facets of categorization. This process of crystallization refers to higher-order thinking that, in turn, gives birth to the various symbolic forms, which are essential expressions of all that is real, truthful and authentic in every domain of culture—namely, in every cultural science. Thus, the new organon reveals, creates and determines the symbolic forms of all cultural sciences, while being reciprocally determined by them. The author demonstrates how the entire process of shaping symbolic forms combines a systematic, specific categorization and crystallization of every domain of culture, as well as evoking and developing particular and universal forms of consciousness and knowledge.

Given that there is a multiplicity of cultural studies, and every cultural science has particular settings of reality, there is no one reality, but a multiplicity of coexisting realities. Therefore, the organon of the cultural sciences is shaped according to the Hegelian delineation that ‘das Wahre ist das Ganze’—that is, the truth is constituted by a set of truths of the existing cultural sciences and their adequate and coherent realities. The author maintains that in the organon no cultural science may subordinate or refute another cultural science just by claiming to be more ‘progressive or truthful’ since the organon is not a system shaped by any unique principle or theory. The organon is constructed as a whole, *sub specie aeternitatis* (under the aspect of eternity). Therefore, only philosophy should be regarded as a consistent description of what is universally and eternally true, without any reference to or dependence upon the mere temporal parts of reality. Thus, by striving to fashion a truly multidimensional, transdisciplinary system, as well as attaining self-knowledge and self-fulfillment, the author believes that it is possible to free ourselves from any existing or future servitude.

This study by Israel Bar-Yehuda Idalovich was carried out adhering to the idea that the understanding and study of the cultural sciences can be illuminated by means of the metaphysical organon, based on the various symbolic forms. Even if the objectives of such a wide-ranging philosophical study seem to be somewhat speculative, it still gives one hope that the organon of the cultural sciences, as a metaphysical apparatus, would expound the classical tendency to concentrate on both recollection and memory of methods previously employed, as well as to present and offer solutions to the problems of all cultural sciences over the ages. The author is convinced that such a goal can be achieved only via philosophical thought. Moreover, philosophy should be crowned as the queen of the sciences not because it is the most important or the most encyclopedic science, but because it is concerned with the metaphysical foundations, presuppositions and goals of all cultural sciences and of itself.

These two dense volumes present a worthwhile new view, which obviously stems from a comprehensive background of learning. They are written in a very dense style, which makes it difficult for the reader to penetrate and internalize every idea, theory and explanation. Illustrations and examples are therefore more than necessary. Finally, it seems to me that the author’s style is too assertive and abstract for my taste.

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