



Theory of Knowledge

Event and Milieu

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ABSTRACT: I consider how the notion of event is used in such important branches of twentieth-century thought as relativity, quantum mechanics, Marxist sociology and psychoanalysis. I show that in each case there is the same concept of event as of a series of communications. It is also shown that this new concept of event corresponds to traditional concepts of historical events. I analyze the difference between the concept of event and that of fact. Since a fact presupposes "an external observer" it is impossible to deal with an event without being involved in it. Since a fact presupposes its permanent logical form as a necessary condition of knowledge about it, any condition of knowledge about an event appears to be empirical itself. I show that the division between history and prehistory has the same basis as that between event and fact. The crucial question is how knowledge about an event is possible. The problem is that the concept of identity applicable to fact appears to be inapplicable to event. However, it appears possible to define an identity of event with an identity of media or "places" of communication. An open system of such "places" we call "milieu." A language is a paradigm for it. However, I suppose that unlike "the linguistic paradigm," the "paradigm of milieu" should refute the idea of the exceptional status of human language.

The notion of *event* became to play a basic role in science with such revolutionary physical theories as relativity and quantum mechanics. Today the notion of event is widely applied also in synergetic. To make clear the importance of the notion of event for sociology and psychology of 20-th century it is enough to name such a key figures of the century as Marx and Freud. The notion of social even (revolution) is essential for Marxism as well as the notion of psychological event (child's trauma) for Freud's psychoanalysis. We cannot say that the notion of event was neglected by philosophers of our century: Heidegger and Deleuze among others presented elaborated concepts of event. These concepts (which can not be analyzed here) however do not relate directly to science nor to knowledge in general. What is an event as a matter of knowledge remains beyond considerations of these authors. To answer to the question is the first purpose of this paper.

The second purpose of the paper is to elaborate a notion of *environment* or *milieu* that as it is shown below appears to be correlative to that of event. The pair event/milieu plays in our approach the similar role as the pair fact/world in the empiricist approach. I believe that the importance of the notion of environment for contemporary knowledge is obvious.

1. Event *versus* fact

Wittgenstein says that "the world is the totality of facts, not of things" (*Tractatus* 1.1). He

opposes a fact to thing for the reason that since a thing exists "in itself" a fact can not be distinguished from the *a priori* "logical form" (using Wittgenstein's term) in which it is given. Thus a fact always refers to its *a priori* conditions. Considering the way the notion of event is used in physics, Marxist sociology and psychoanalysis we notice that in all the cases an event refers not to permanent conditions of experience but to very acts of interaction between a researcher and investigated objects. Actually in relativity they call an event everything that is defined in space-time by its coordinates. Since both "event" and "fact" in physics are basic undefinable terms one can take it as a pure arbitrary convention that in relativity the word "event" is used instead of "fact". For classically it is a simple *fact* that certain body has such-and-such space coordinates in the definite moment of the time. What differs an event of relativity from fact of classical mechanics it is the way it is known: since fact of classical mechanics is observed with the unique absolute "external observer" (i.e. all empirical particular observers are to be reduced to one transcendental observer) an event of relativity is fixed with a number of particular observers (irreducible to one) who describe "the same" event differently. The representation of event in relativity depends on such an *a posteriori* (empirical) condition of observation as a speed of observer that puts an observer and what he observes in the same position that is a position of empirical thing in the world. Thus such an observation appears to be rather a *communication* (that is, using Deleuze's term, "a communication of events").

The event of interaction of particles in quantum mechanics is similar for such an interaction is not observed from outside as an interaction of bodies in Newtonian mechanics, but this is the interaction itself that is "the instrument" of "observation" of itself. For example one can not simply "see" an interaction between a photon and another particle because a photon is a "medium" of vision but not its object. Thus in the case of quantum mechanics as well as in relativity an "observation" has empirical conditions that involve an observer to the reality he observes.

The new position of "observer" in relativity and quantum mechanics obviously correlates with Marxist idea (and practice) "not only to explain the world but to change it" (Cf. *Marx ueber Feuerbach N11 // F.Engels Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der Klassischen Deutschen Philosophie; Stuttgart 1888*). It does not mean simply a necessity to complete a theory with practice. What Marx claims it is *impossibility* of social theory that is not engaged in social reality as a struggle of economical and political interests. Therefore a social event (revolution) in the Marxist sense of the word is not a practical realization of some social theory but rather a manifestation of the new social discourse.

Finally in psychoanalysis a *recollection* of repressed traumatic events of childhood is not an observation nor introspection but an operation with patient's psychic that treats him. Traumatic events do not exist independently from communication between analyst and patient, from the chain of patient's free associations and their interpretations. The recovering of such events can not be justified by reproduction of the procedure the same way as one physical laboratory can justify results of other laboratory repeating its experiments. For after recovering of traumatic events it is impossible to return to initial conditions and to ignore that the recovering took place. I believe that the difference between facts of one's biography and events of his or her life is of great ethical importance.

The claim that an event refers to particular acts of interaction between the "observer" and the observed reality does not mean at all that it may be identified with some of these acts. It means only that in the case of event a plurality of such acts can not be reduced to general transcendental conditions of experience in general. It is an important conclusion but it is purely negative. We can make some other negative conclusions: the event is not a deep internal unity of plurality of its external representations, it is not objective nor subjective, it belongs not to purely theoretical nor to practical sphere. What was positive in our

discussion it was the understanding of event as communication or interaction. As it is shown below this idea allows to make an event an operational notion.

2. History and prehistory

The notion of event is new for science but not for knowledge in general. It always was used in history. Intuitively the difference between fact and event in history seems to be as follows: facts are routine while events are exceptional. An actual fact is routine because it is always one of possible facts, i.e. it belongs to some existent field of possibilities; an event is exceptional because it is a change of this field itself. So events are in a sense "impossible facts" that create new possibilities and new principles. Every event is destructive and "foundational" at the same time: it destroys old organization and creates a new one. Thus an event is a catastrophe. This common concept of event logically correlates with a special physical concept of event mentioned above. For event unlike fact has no permanent "transcendental conditions" and so one can not investigate in a Kantian way how events are possible. From the Kantian point of view they are impossible. To make the very conditions of experience empirical and changeable means to be open to events.

Historical event and historical fact may be distinguished more accurately. We call *history* what is reconstructed mainly not with its "natural" marks but with its earlier reconstructions; we call *prehistory* what is reconstructed with (classical) scientific experimental methods.

Unlike prehistory history refers not directly to reality but to other discourses about the reality. Historical knowledge is essentially dependent not on some general *a priori* conditions of knowledge, but on such its particular *a posteriori* empirical conditions as a number and character of survived monuments and oral evidences. That is why history tells about events. The attention to empirical conditions of knowledge that appeared in physics, social theory and psychology only in 20-th century long before existed in history. Therefore the appearance of the notion of event in different branches of knowledge mentioned above was caused by the introduction of methodology that was basically historical.

Prehistory does not tell about events but presents facts. Actually the fact that *Homo Sapiens* became to use bronze instruments about 3500 years BC is methodologically equivalent to the fact that a molecule of water consists of one atom of Oxygen and two atoms of Hydrogen: both facts presuppose some reproducible procedure of its experimental justification. I believe it is wrong to ignore a methodological gap between history and prehistory to make "history of the world" as a general narrative that would tell about historical events of our century as well as about beginnings of life on Earth simply combining historical and scientific knowledge. On the other hand I think we really need to understand times when *Homo Sapiens* did not exist *historically*. The idea to exclude from history early times when *Homo Sapiens* did not exist is anti-historical as well as an idea to base history only on one's personal memory. I suppose that such a historical approach to prehistory is possible with internal "historicist turn" in methodology of science mentioned above.

Notice, that historical approach to prehistory relativizes a difference between "natural marks" as empirical basis of science and written documents as a basis of history. It does not mean however that the Nature is treated as the total Text because understanding of "natural mark" as a sort of sign is only one aspect of the relativization. Its another aspect is understanding of written texts as material objects prepared with a certain technology and for certain purposes. "The historical approach to prehistory" appears to be the same time "the prehistorical approach to history". Thus with such an approach history and prehistory are two conceptual aspects of every consideration, but not two sequential stages of development

of the population of *Homo Sapiens*.

Is it a fact or event that I was born in 1965 in Moscow? It is an event since it is not distinguished from events of fixation of my birth in documents, of recollections and (re) telling stories about it. It may be then admitted as a proven fact with a certain social institution. It is a question of law what are necessary condition to admit an event as a fact. As well as in the case of facts of natural sciences to justify historical fact means to generalize a certain way the series of events (that is a "experimental series" in the case of natural fact and a "documentary" or "narrative series" in the case of historical fact). Notice that an admission of some event as a fact is an event itself. Thus the fact is a certain *modality* of event.

Obviously not every event can gain a status of fact. Nothing exceptional can be justified as fact. The unique individual experience is not the only case of event that can not gain the status of fact. Such an event as social revolution that involves thousands of people is another case. For there is no rules nor institutions to carry the procedure of the justification during a revolution. After revolution some facts concerning revolution may be justified accordingly anew established rules with anew created institution, but revolution itself may be treated only as historical event. If we restrict our history taking as valid only presentations of established historical facts but not narratives about events we would lose the major part of history. Moreover we obviously would lose the most important part of history that treats events that change our life and would have only description of routine facts that mark our everyday experience.

The crucial question is how a narrative about events *may be* valid? Particular documents and oral evidences seem to play for history the same role as particular tests and measurements play for science. It is a job of scientist to generalize an experimental data as well as it is a job of historian to generalize documentary data. Certainly an introduction into physics of the notion of event does not make it a collection of particular observations. Similarly an ability of history to narrate about events does not make it a collection of rumors. The question is *how* a narrative about event may be *knowledge*.

3. One world and common milieu

When a series of experiments justifies a fact it is assumed that *the same* fact is observed with every particular measurement. The dispersion of results of particular measurements is assumed to be an inevitable error that makes empirical knowledge only approximate. For every series of measurements it is supposed a measured "real value" that is more or less "close" to result of every particular measurement; correspondingly it is assumed that every particular measurement more or less "deviates" from the real value. It allows to *generalize* a series of measurement to postulate that it is a *fact* obtained with such-and-such an experimental *method* that a certain physical magnitude has approximately such-and-such real value.

A series of measurements in relativity or a series of narratives in history may also relate to *the same* event. Moreover every event presupposes such a series. However unlike the case of fact in the case of event the very elements of series are of the same nature as to what all the series relates: all the elements of the series are events. That is why unlike a fact an event is not distinguishable from an observation of itself. Actually all the elements of the series relate nothing but each other, the series in general relates to other series, etc. It is *one and the same* event that *is* a series of communicating events (and communicating series of events). Having no general scheme similar to classical experimental "method" nor "core" similar to "real value", a (series of) event(s) makes what Deleuze calls *rhizome* — a complex variety without any basic elements. Obviously no knowledge about event as

rhizome is possible. I believe however that a knowledge about events is possible with a new concept of identity applicable to events. Moreover I believe that without such a concept the notion of event makes no sense. An identity of event is based on invariants of communication. Aristotle calls such invariants *topoi* (that was translated as *loci communes* in Latin). Aristotle's *topos* is not *topic* as "subject matter" but rather an instrument or a medium of communication. Literally it is a *place* where a communication is possible, where an event *take place*. Extending the meaning of Aristotle's "topos" we can consider as "place" of communication every elements of language up to single word. Places of communication are common, but not general. However an identity of word or an identity of rhetorical *locus* is something that can be an element of knowledge. That is why an identity of *community*, identity of its communicative media (in particular language identity) is an identity of event as communication.

However the identity of place differs from the identity of fact. For unlike fact place of communication is not observed nor constructed from outside with some general "logical form" that makes such an observation or construction possible but it is what is "at hand" (Heidegger's *das Zuhandene*), a common medium, environment that makes a communication possible. Since a fact is observed (constructed) by "external observer" of classical physics as a part of *the world* (cf. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus 1.2*), a place of communication is "occupied" as a part of surrounding, environment or common *milieu*. A language is a paradigm for it. If however we are right that *every* event has a nature of communication the notion of *milieu of event* should be also taken much broader than human language. Physical events mentioned in relativity and quantum mechanics take place in physical milieu that is a part of common milieu as well as languages. I suppose that gravitation and quantum fields theories may be interpreted this way. Such notions as "social field" and "unconsciousness" are I believe other cases of milieu that are investigated to define what are events taking place there. Mathematical theory of catastrophes appears to be also topological. It seems that investigation of "topology of milieu" becomes a new methodology for very different branches of knowledge that use a notion of event.

Thus I think that on the next step of "linguistic turn" philosophy should refuse from the idea of special status of human language as empirical phenomenon and to extent "the linguistic paradigm" to "the paradigm of milieu". However we should be careful not to make the milieu a new totality. Unlike the world milieu is *not* a totality but *manifold*, (although generally speaking it is not a *rhizome* either).

Heidegger elaborated the notions of *Umwelt* (environment) and *Ereignis* (event) trying to understand what does it mean *to be* in the world, not just to know the world. I believe however that actually he faced the situation when the *old* idea of knowledge did not satisfy *new* existential demands (while it possibly satisfied existential demands of modern times). And we can see that it no more satisfy new *scientific* demands while such "existential" notions as *Ereignis* and *Umwelt* become useful for knowledge.

For this reason I believe that the notions of "event" and "milieu" make a new vocabulary that is relevant to contemporary knowledge and useful for our practice.

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