УДК 165:316.7

AN OPINION AS A STRUCTURE ELEMENT OF THE EPISTEMIC CLIMATE OF KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

Golubinskaya A.V.

The research offers to turn attention to the idea of the opinion society not as a systematic social-philosophical theory but as a concept to reveal the correlation of information and knowledge in the contemporary conditions; or to highlight the difference between how the course of events was imagined to be in theories, and how things really are. The article aims to describe the opinion as an essential part of current knowledge climate which affects most spheres of society. The author explains the revealed properties of opinion and knowledge relation as the consequences of establishment of the cultural and normative paradigm of transparency.

Keywords: opinion, opinion society, knowledge society, information society, transparent society, transparent information.

МНЕНИЕ КАК СТРУКТУРНЫЙ ЭЛЕМЕНТ ЭПИСТЕМИЧЕСКОГО КЛИМАТА ОБЩЕСТВА ЗНАНИЙ

Голубинская А.В.

В исследовании предлагается уделить внимание идее общества мнений не как системной социально-философской теории, но как понятию, раскрывающему соотношение информации и знания в современных условиях, а также выделить разницу между предполагаемым в теориях ходом событий и тем, как действительно обстоят дела. Целью статьи является описание мнения как сущностного элемента современного познавательного климата, который влияет на многие сферы современного общества. В результате автор предлагает понимать описанную связь знания и мнения как следствие установления культурной и нормативной парадигмы прозрачности.

Ключевые слова: мнение, общество мнений, общество знаний, информационное общество, прозрачное общества, прозрачная информация.

The reported research was funded by Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR) according to the research project No 18-311-00061.

Information is not equal to knowledge, but it is inextricably linked with the process of making knowledge, if not more. Russian political scientist Yuri Klyuev notes: "The myriad mass of media messages cannot form a complete individual knowledge, the differentiation of news; the diversity of their choice makes it difficult to consciously master the reality. Broadcasting production, endlessly multiplying entertainment, tabloids, crime programs, and popular music videos, dispels the audience attention and forms the individual's fragmentary consciousness. Information, from which the semantic, evaluative, moral, and moral characteristics of the described phenomenon, fact, event are excluded, undermines the foundations of human planetary existence as a rational being, endowed with the abilities of consciousness, thinking and speech" [3, c. 194]. However, is it possible today to mark information flows as neutral, devoid of evaluation and internal morality? Yuri Klyuev is one of the few who uses the term "society of opinions" about the modern society as a heterogeneous community of many communities according to the participants' social status and unstable according to models and psychology of communication.

Epistemological explication of opinion is uncertain. "To know" is often equals to "to have justified belief that something is true" [6, p. 128], but the epistemic situation "to have an opinion" as the concept of modern theory is disputable. The problem of justification of opinion attracts attention of modern analytic epistemology and the current state of the theory of knowledge requires the analysis of different kind of beliefs: how to relate an opinion with a knowledge, is the existing knowledge theory enough to describe opinion as the epistemic condition of a person or as a propositional attitude. Presumably, an opinion is the form of belief with the lower sense of certitude. In this context, the society of opinions is not even a scientific concept, but an allegory, which appeared in discussions about the problem of the relationship between information and knowledge in the conditions of modernity. This

allegory is not needed in order to offer a comprehensive description of the interrelations and laws of modern society, like “information society” or “knowledge society”, but rather to emphasize one of the important characteristics that become visible only if the mentioned concepts are applied to reality. In other words, the idea of the society of opinions lays the difference between the course of events assumed in the theories and how things really are.

The aim of daily behavior of a modern society subject in the information environment can be hardly called as the search for objective truth; it is more probable, that these subjects are consciously or unconsciously directed at wandering among various kinds of opinion mediators. Some of these mediators, let's call them primary, were originally created for publicizing of opinions (talk shows, reality shows, blogs, forums). Others can disseminate opinions under the guise of facts and among facts, and they include not only news services, but also academic publications, educational platforms, and other sources positioning themselves as the mediators of knowledge.

The idea of the opinion society is related to the way the information revolution has shaken the system of the expert evaluation of information. The non-formal establishment of “equality” between opinion and knowledge was considered permissible when it was the opinion of an expert. Epistemology provides measurements of what distinguishes knowledge from opinion, and both concepts seem to have different definitions for the traditional and for the virtual-informational contexts [6]. The reason is prominent: in virtual information environment an opinion keeps acting like information occasion even after the subject rejected it, the authentication of its source is difficult, so the technologies shapes or reshapes the way opinion exists [9]. In such an information environment, where a professional and an amateur have an equal chance of being heard, the source of information ceases to be the primary criterion for its assessment. The attempts to find the source of a statement in a virtual-information environment often turn into a transition from one link to another, and each of the steps may slightly or significantly distort the message (in the manner of playing a “broken phone”). If you begin to unravel such

informational tangles, then curious cases are discovered where formative knowledge statements get into the news from student course works or regular users' comments on other news. Thus, the final information, therefore, does not have one source, but a kind of "hyper-source", though in some cases it has no relation with expert opinion. There are at least two possible interpretation of the connections:

– Opinion society is the result of admitting the equality between the truth and the expert evaluation of the information.

– Opinion society may be a result of disordering the expert system.

An interesting observation in the structures of some news agencies can be made now: in order not to miss interesting news, even if it is not possible to establish its authenticity, the practice of "popular news" has appeared in the information services. The reference to the "author" of the news usually signed "resident", "driver", "manager" by and large does not bear any information in itself, but the status of the news removes any responsibility for the information contained in it. But the most important thing is that such "popular news" can achieve the desired effect even in the absence of news as such.

Kevin Folta noted that in the emerging society of opinions the main tool for making knowledge is the skill "sink into the soul", that is, to create and reproduce emotional narratives. This property is easily seen in the activities of those who distribute disinformation, induce social panic, fraud, but not those who are engaged in science, and as a result there is a crisis in the ability of society to produce an adequate average opinion. As an example of this, Kevin Folta cites the stir concerning GMOs: scientists and specialists in agriculture should give reliable knowledge about GMOs, but for some reason they are little involved in public conversations, while someone else sympathetically changes people's thoughts and feelings [5, p. 2]. Indeed, scientists are actively involved in public discussions when the problem is brewing to a certain extent and becomes a problem for the scientists themselves. However, at this stage, peace negotiations are usually replaced by bitter disputes.

Following the Kevin Folta's logic, the current problems with the adoption of scientific knowledge in society are the fault of the scientists themselves, who did not

provide the formation of correct ideas about the results of their research in time. In the society of opinions there is practically no time left for such actions, because its main imperative is to take a position as soon as possible, without hesitation, to take a position, and give an assessment on each occasion that has arisen. So, the rumors and gossip inherent in personal conversations becomes the machine for the interpretations production for claiming the information accuracy. As a result of such haste, there appear streams of poorly-thought conclusions, which, despite everything, have gained support and an "army" ready to defend opinion in front of the skeptic.

The opposite suggestion is that the connection between these concepts is somewhat different, and the difference in reading is related to the place that opinion itself occupies in the intellectual history of society. In our opinion, the society of opinions is not just a society where each subject has an opinion (which can characterize any epoch anyway), but where the opinion becomes sufficient and isolated, that is, it ceases to have relations with other degrees of information reliability assessment. Opinion and knowledge coexisted from time immemorial. What has changed with the advent of the information society? Traditionally it was believed that one reliable knowledge about the world is possible, and an opinion claiming to be called knowledge had to fight for existence. The Copernican model could not coexist with the Ptolemaic one, but had to completely occupy its "throne". Even the New Age is not characterized by the division of knowledge into scientific and parascientific [1], probably just from the fact that new knowledge either came to replace each other, or opened up territories free of explanations. The emergence of quantum mechanics, on the contrary, did not lead to the abandonment of Newtonian theory, but became an example of the fact that the scientific explanation is not always unique and universal, and next to the dominant beliefs, one more such "throne" can be erected, and the "lands" can be divided. At the level of everyday thinking, this model turned out to be very comfortable: conflicting knowledge can form an overall picture of the world, if we do not compare them with each other, but give them separate territories.

An example of such thinking is given in the work by Patricia S. Churchland. She writes: “As a physician, my mother sought to give a scientific or close to scientific explanation, but at the same time being a Christian, she accepted a religious explanation of those questions that science has not yet been able to answer” [4, p. 26]. Obviously, such a segmentation should be controversial, because religious and scientific forms of knowledge of the world differ in the very basics. But why do we need to compare the basics?

The fact that such a question can be raised is cause for concern in advance of some tangible consequences. In the example given by Patricia S. Churchland, this is not about everyday misconceptions inherent in the narrow-minded thinking, like the misconceptions that the sun is yellow, but about “thinking over” the scientists' findings in those areas where knowledge is not enough to publish the findings. On the one hand, the desire to search for explanations of what is happening, perhaps, is one of the most important characteristics of meaningful human activity. However, in the scale of the information society, a kind of thinking-out culture is being formed, the results of which can sometimes not contradict scientific facts, which in fact, is commonly called opinion, and all this together, like patchwork, becomes a single canvas of the world.

The society of opinions is not the best platform for scientific knowledge production. Firstly, since there are serious obstacles for knowledge to go beyond the expert community. Secondly, overcoming these obstacles displaces the space of scientific fantasy and compels the scientist to abandon creative activity in favor of activities to refute the conclusions that have no prerequisites, that is, to fight with imaginary pests. However, the harm from their adoption by the population is not imaginable at all, for example, when it involves human health issues or the ability of the population to adequately assess social changes in general.

However, the society of opinions is not a local phenomenon of one of the communities. So, for example, Springer, one of the largest scientific publishing houses, cites a generalized experience about works entitled “How can we 'change reality'?”, where under “change reality” there can be “prosperity”, “move from

traditional farms to bio farms", "to increase the demand for exotic mushrooms", etc., but, regardless of the topic, the content of the works can hardly be called a study, rather – a subjective reflection. Publishers rightly point out that such works do not provide knowledge, do not give answers to globally significant questions and generally do not give anything except the author's opinion, which is not necessarily false, but also not necessarily applicable to reality, and more often even without trying to correlate the theory with reality [8]. Probably, it is precisely the absence of a setting for correlating information, which can and should be compared logically and is a key characteristic of the society of opinions.

An interesting example is given by Alexander Voin: "The Kiev House of Scientists, where I have been conducting a philosophical seminar for 4 years, turned into a club of mystics, ufologists and just acting in the name of science, where you can hear that dolmens and other Neolithic monuments were created by aliens (primitive people without modern technology could not create it). Although before that the same lecturer, by the way, an associate professor at the university, managed to report that the last dolmens were created by the aborigines 200 years ago on some islands in the Pacific Ocean, which was recorded and described by Europeans" [2, с. 242]. The experience shared by the author is an example of the fact that loyalty to information is equal to loyalty to misinformation, even within one event, one chronotope.

How can we conceptualize all the examples? Possibly, the society we live today can be explicated with the term "transparency", the meaning of which lies in the obligation of all before all to ensure the smooth circulation of information. The idea of transparency, that is, accessibility and accountability, has become not just a fetish of modernity, but a real systemic compulsion: the principle of transparency has become an imperative for institutionalized systems (transparent budget policy, transparent prices). Then transparency invaded the mechanics of everyday life through blogs, social networks, video broadcasts. But what is a transparent society, if not just a society of opinions?

In Byung-Chul Han's book "Transparent Society" the author provides an idea that massive information flows reduce the ability to make personal judgments [7]. But his conclusion can be continued: instead, it stimulates consent skills. Scientific knowledge always draws the line between what is true and what is false; in other words, knowledge always acts as an "accuser" to certain information. Truth doesn't care how many people and how much data work in its favor; the truth is characterized by the statement "everything else is a lie". Opinion, on the contrary, has a high level of loyalty to other opinions, and at the same time is highly dependent on statistical indicators. Opinion is gaining momentum with the "Like" and "Share" buttons, but if we draw such an analogy with respect to scientific knowledge born in a dispute, in doubt, then its dynamics would depend more on the "I do not like" button. It is noteworthy that in large social networks, hotbeds of opinions, there is no such option – the opinion never goes to confrontation. Moreover, in social systems that massively use network communication technologies, 'like' and 'repost' have market value and the power of determining the message priority, but never its antipode. In the language of V. Benjamin, the 'like' of an opinion, like the attention of an exhibit, determines its exposition value, which translates it into capital.

It turns out that the opinion is positive and it does not entail responsibility. It is economically measurable and communicatively expedient. The latter means that a publicly expressed opinion causes a chain reaction and controversy. The term "controversy" has come from the ancient Greek language and literally means "military action" and in controversy, like in war, the most important thing is the territory. Science does not offer one universal knowledge for describing everything at once, but transparency does not tolerate gaps and lacunae, which had just become a territory for opinions. If this is true, then the society of opinions is the society of imaginary consent.

Bibliography:

1. Дворников В.В., Иванов Ю.В. Проблема псевдонауки и квазирелигии в условиях информационного общества // Власть и общество: история

взаимоотношений: материалы Десятой региональной научной конференции (г. Воронеж, 19 марта 2016 г.) / Под общ. ред. В.Н. Глазьева. Воронеж: Истоки, 2016. С. 462-468.

2. Воин А.М. Единый метод обоснования научный теорий: монография. М.; Берлин: Директ-Медиа, 2017. 268 с.

3. Клюев Ю.В. Политический массмедиадискурс в России: феномен и концепции (2000-е годы) // Современный российский медиаполис. СПб.: С.-Петерб. гос. ун-т, филологический ф-т, 2012. 324 с.

4. Churchland P.S. Touching a nerve: Our brains, our selves. NY: WW Norton & Company, 2013. 304 p.

5. Ferguson B. Talking to a concerned public // Emerging Times. FFVA Annual Convention. 2015. Vol. 5. Issue 1. P. 2.

6. Foth M., Odendaal N., Hearn G.N. The View from Everywhere: Towards an Epistemology for Urbanites // 4th International Conference on Intellectual Capital, Knowledge Management and Organisational Learning (ICICKM). Cape Town: South Africa, 2007. P. 127-133

7. Han B.C. The transparency society. London: University Press, 2015. 72 p.

8. Kampen J.K., Tamás T. 2014. Should I Take This Seriously? A Simple Checklist for Calling Bullshit on Policy Supporting Research // Quality & Quantity. 2014. Vol. 48. No 3. P. 1213-1223.

9. McCombs, M. Setting the agenda: Mass media and public opinion. NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018. 208 p.

Data about the author:

Golubinskaya Anastasia Valerievna – junior researcher of Open Education Institute, National Research Lobachevsky State University of Nizhny Novgorod (Nizhny Novgorod, Russia).

Сведения об авторе:

Голубинская Анастасия Валерьевна – младший научный сотрудник Института открытого образования Национального исследовательского

Нижегородского государственного университета им. Н.И. Лобачевского (Нижний Новгород, Россия).

E-mail: golub@ioo.unn.ru.