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Pandemic Panic in Information Space: the Fact and its Ladennes

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Abstract: The article presents the author's reflections on information-ladennes of facts. It demonstrates parallels between presenting facts and the theory interpreting the facts through the example of science, history of the 21st century and the fact of pandemic. The terrorist attack in the United States on September 11th, 2001 and the current panic attack demonstrate that the minds of people are zombified by human-generated mass media and the Internet.

Keywords: *fact ladennes; interpreting theory; positivism and post-positivism; pandemic; terrorism.*

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Introduction

During the peak of the pandemic chaos, importance of reliable information is obvious. To consider the relation between the fact and the theory we suggest considering the current situation in the global information space. There are two approaches in history of philosophic thought: positivism and post-positivism. Positivism approach was founded by Auguste Comte. His main work is "*The Course of Positive Philosophy*" (Comte A. 1869; Kont O. 1899-1900). Representatives of post-positivism are K. Popper, Th. Kuhn, Paul Karl Feyerabend, etc. Positivists believed that the sources of knowledge were empirical facts. Post-positivists thought that empirical facts were based on theory, therefore the fact was considered as theory-laden. In history and methodology of natural sciences, interpretation of facts is less common that in human sciences and much less than in everyday life. However, smooth operators have become more skilled in falsifying information about scientific facts and using it to create panic and chaos in the society. This is the trend we can observe now with respect to the fact of the coronavirus or Covid-19 epidemic. The object of this research will be specific scientific and historical facts and their manipulative interpretations.

1. Fact ladennes formula

In physics, for instance, the fact of fall of a physical body was explained by Aristotle, Galileo Galilei, Newton, Einstein. These scientists gave absolutely different interpretations to the invariant fact. The invariant fact, or it may be called the apparent fact, or artifact, or an event-related part of the fact always remain the same. Physical bodies felt before, during and after Aristotle's period of life, they fall today, i.e. nothing in the invariant part of the fact changes. It is known from the history of science that Galileo Galilei refuted Aristotle's theory that heavier objects fell faster than lighter objects. Drake Stillman (1995) described experiments performed by Galilei in his book "*Galileo at work*". He rejected not the fact of object falling, but its interpreting theory. So, let's speak about the second part of the fact.

The second part of the fact is its interpretation. Interpretation of the fact changed in history and methodology of science. This is supported by origination of new theories in history of physics and other sciences.

The following scheme may be proposed for the scientific fact: **m + P = m(P),** where m – is the invariant part of the fact, event-related part, P – the property of comprehensibility and interpretability of the fact. When

describing an event-related part of a fact using experimental theories the scientist supposes that the fact can be theory-laden. Only a comprehended fact may be called a fact, and if it is interpreted using a scientific theory it becomes a scientific fact.

2. Historical event ladennes

There is a generally known fact in world history of the 21st century which happened on September 11, 2001 and has become a pivotal moment in history of mankind in combating worldwide terrorism. The fact of the attacks of the Pentagon and the World Trade Center Twin Towers in the United States by members of the terrorist group al-Qaeda led by Osama bin Laden was interpreted for the entire world as an invasion, attack against America, and act of terrorism. All civilized world perceived it as a common tragedy. However this fact had a different meaning for its organizers: liberation, horrification, revenge. It should be noted that the official version gave rise to many questions and different public responses from the Americans, too. *"It is arguable that the WTC Towers collapse model corresponds to the collapse model as a result of airliner crash and fire. It is stated that the collapse of the towers looks more like controlled demolition"* (Bazant & Verdure 2007). Also, it was stated that the official version ignores numerous witnesses' statements about explosions in the WTC Towers. There was a hypothesis that US government officials were aware of the forthcoming attacks and took no measures to prevent them. There were other assumptions, that the attacks were planned and performed not by al-Qaeda but by US intelligence agencies (Lieber & Weisberg, 2002; Lieber, 2005). The owner of the Twin Towers had insured them a few weeks before the 11th of September 2001, and insurance against terrorist attacks was specified as a separate clause (Hirschkorn 2004; "Acts of terrorism", 2020).

It was our intention to point out through this fact to two things:

1. The fact has different interpretations, i.e. it is laden and overladen with information.

2. The information, depending on its meaning, influences minds of people, and mass media often manipulate our minds.

It is relevant to review these relations and identify modern trends in the development of knowledge, relation between the facts and theory, to identify the relation between the fact and theory and the impact of the relation on people.

3. Pandemic attack of minds

Today, the pandemic can be considered as another challenge to the global community. It is possible that the COVID-19 pandemic is a new type of terrorism. If the number of victims of the largest act of terrorism in the USA was 2977 plus 24 missing people ("Terroristicheskiye akty 11 sentyabrya 2001 goda", 2020), the impact of the pandemic 2020 cannot be yet estimated, but it is already clear that the number may be hundreds of times higher.

The measures taken by the United States after the terrorists attack were astonishing. "For the first time in history, all nonemergency civilian aircraft in the United States and Canada were immediately grounded, stranding tens of thousands of passengers across the world" (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2002). The economic, political, ecological, social, and religious consequences were colossal. Despite the fact that the entire world was emotionally involved into the tragedy, the pandemic 2020 may have more devastating effect. This is not only about the potential great loss of people, there will be an incomparably more severe crisis in economics, politics and other spheres. The only sphere to benefit from that is ecology. Satellite images show that out planet's atmosphere gets cleaner ("Coronavirus lockdown leading", 2020).

We think that the important thing is the information fact of infection with the coronavirus and its consequence: a panic attack of humankind (m). This attack was largely created artificially through mass media and the Internet by people who interpreted the fact in various ways (m(P)). Our analysis of the Facebook information flows identified the following trends: first, there are numerous posts about the number of people infected with Coronavirus in the world, individual states and Ukrainian cities placed everywhere; second, there are numerous contradictory posts by medical and non-medical professions as to what people should or shouldn't do (to go out or to stay home, to seek or not to seek medical advice, to wear or not to wear facemasks, etc.); third, posts – addresses of healthcare providers and volunteers calling for assistance in providing everybody with everything. The fifth category of posts includes posts of entrepreneurs who make vain attempts to sell something. There is another, the sixth, category of posts: birthday greetings and cooking recipes. We can see that people's minds are overloaded with negative information. This trend was observed in the Ukraine in the beginning of March. During the last month the Ukrainian population has split: while some people are panic-stricken, others deny the

coronavirus's danger. The panic is created through fake information about the fact of COVID-19 pandemics not only in the Ukraine. A Polish internet-portal ("Coronavirus fake news", 2020), for instance, has made a digest of 40 such fake news (m+(P)). Where $P = P_1 + P_2 + \ldots + P_{40}$.

The Polish internet-portal states that such fact overloading is driven by some people's desire to make a quick buck from the panic. It is our opinion that the theory-ladennes of the fact supported with unreliable information has resulted in loss of interest in news among the Ukrainian people, in ignoring the facts of infection in the world and in the Ukraine, in particular. This is evidenced by the people's behavior. The Ukrainians do not comply with the quarantine requirements and expose each other to additional risk of being infected with the coronavirus. The infection rate was 293 people on April 15, 270 people on April 14, and 93 people on April 13 ("Coronavirus in Ukraine", 2020). The COVID-19 peak is expected in late April, as many people still return to the Ukraine from other states who often ignore and violate the self-isolation requirements despite the fines. Many people visit churches on Christian events, stores and markets without keeping their social distance or other measures.

We would like to note a Facebook post we came across a few days ago. That was "*How to cope with the coronavirus*" post by Michael Laitman (2020), the cabbalist. He looks at the current developments with a philosophical understanding of fear and its sources. The author recommends reconsidering the existing human relations - we must help each other. The virus shows that we are in negative relations with the environment and other people; we should immediately change these relations to achieve harmony with other people and the environment. That is the author's message to people. This is another interpretation of the event-related part of the fact (P_1), but with a positive meaning. Professor Knut Wittkowski (USA) gives an interpretation with a different message (Wittkowski, 2020). April 3, 2020, he stated in his interview that if there had been no quarantine, the epidemic would have been over. He stated that quarantine will contribute to the rise in mortality, since it delays the development of herd immunity, and social distancing just increases the period of the epidemics (P_2).

Conclusion

Modern crises are associated not only with a specific event. To a greater extent, they are associated with the interpretation of the event. The fact (m(P)) and its theoretical interpretation (P) were objects of interest in the methodology of science in past centuries. Today we have to reanalyze

the importance of interpretation of any facts of scientific, historical, and common nature. Today, people have more technical means to share information. Not every fact contains true and unbiased information about the event. The pandemic demonstrates us not our unpreparedness for fighting it, but our unpreparedness for fighting the panic spread by journalists and bloggers. The impact of the information load ($(m(P+P_n))$ is skyrocketing and people's minds can't withstand the psychological attack. We will still have long to recover our thoughts and general psychological state after the pandemic is over. We should understand that fact interpretations are rigorously proven in natural sciences, while historical, political and social facts are more exposed to false interpretations and have more complex ladennes.

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