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## The essence of social epistemology

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### Abstract

The relevance of the presented research is explained by the fact that in the conditions of the modern "knowledge society" a new interpretation of the classical epistemological subjects is required based on the formation of a new paradigm of knowledge. Social epistemology appears as a program of modern non-classical epistemology. In this regard, the purpose of the study is to study the essence of social epistemology. Analyzing the phenomenon of social epistemology, it was possible to reveal that social epistemology is a philosophical and interdisciplinary teaching about cognition aimed at studying knowledge in a sociocultural context. As a discipline, social epistemology, which arose in the second half of the 20th century, develops new approaches to the study of the phenomenon of knowledge. Nowadays, two competing approaches have emerged: classical, involving the study of social practices in terms of their impact on the process of acquiring true knowledge and non-classical, focusing on the study of social determination and the social-historical relativity of beliefs of any kind not paying attention to their truth and rationality. However, modern foreign and domestic researchers do not accept the dichotomy of "rational" - "social" and propose to overview the program of social epistemology and integrate these two aspects.

*Keywords:* Social epistemology, classical epistemology, non-classical epistemology, knowledge, belief, "rational", "social", "knowledge society", theory of knowledge.

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### 1. Introduction

In the modern "knowledge society" as a new stage of social dynamics, following the information society, a new paradigm of knowledge is being formed. From the sphere of being, existence, knowledge is transformed into the sphere of action [2], being considered not only as the most important resource of the modern (innovative) economy, requiring the productive and effective use of knowledge by as many individuals and enterprises as possible, but also as the organizing principle of the whole society. In the 70-80s of the 20th century this caused the scholars to rethink the trends of the traditional theory of knowledge, especially classical epistemology whose origins were laid down in Plato's dialogues, and the design of the theory-cognitive subjects took place in the 17th century [8]. Classical epistemology "was engaged in the search for reliable grounds that make it possible to treat the cognitive result as knowledge" [3]. As a result, a new "coordinate system" arose - social epistemology, where scientific knowledge became inseparable from the world of human activity and communication.

### 2. Discussion

Alvin Goldman, an American philosopher and one of the most famous representatives of western social epistemology, defines social epistemology as the study of the social aspect of knowledge. Frederic Schmitt, another well-known theoretician of this trend, notes that "social epistemology is a conceptual and normative study of relevance to the knowledge of social relations, roles, interests and institutions," which should not be

reduced to the sociology of knowledge, that is "an empirical study of the totality of social conditions or causes Knowledge" [9].

It is obvious, that social epistemology as a philosophical and interdisciplinary teaching about knowledge aimed at the study of knowledge in a sociocultural context did not arise from scratch, but emerged as a result of the synthesis of several philosophical and specially scientific concepts. German and British researchers study the social determinants of the cognitive process. The first, undoubtedly, goes back to the ideas of the German philosopher and economist, Karl Marx, who, analyzing ideology, commodity fetishism, spiritual and practically-spiritual production, comes to the conclusion that "the sphere of the spirit does not soar in the air, but rests on the soil of social-cultural activity and communication of people of a certain historical epoch" [4]. The second tradition relates to the ideas of the Enlightenment. The Scottish philosopher, Thomas Reid, opposed to skepticism, proclaiming an exclusive hope in his own mind. He was convinced that human "reason, as the highest critical authority, not only was the same work of Nature... as evidence of feelings, but was acquired only gradually, as a result of the prolonged use of prudent faith and... from the words of people who are authoritative for us" [1]. The thematic repertoire of social epistemology in the 20th century was greatly aided by the ideas of the American historian and philosopher, Thomas Cohn, who made "an emphasis on the historical and, therefore, on the social rootedness of scientific paradigms" and the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, who advocated the need to bind knowledge to social control systems [5]. The Ludwig Wittgenstein's ideas helped to shape the conceptual framework of social epistemology, which, considering language as an integral system, came to the conclusion that knowledge was the result of social practice. "Book science" as opposed to "journal", is among the most influential researchers associated with the origins of social epistemology. The Polish biologist, virologist, philosopher and historian, Lyudvig Flek, who as a prisoner in the Buchenwald concentration camp as a scientist-prisoner, developed and tested (against his will) on the prisoners a typhoid vaccine; he realized that "the collective nature of scientific research had a decisive influence not only on the forms and directions of the latter, but also on the actual content of ideas and theories that caused a revision of the traditional ("classical") concepts of truth and error" [7]. Later, he proved that the facts of science were based on accepted scientific thinking style community. Therefore, an epistemologist "is to pay particular attention to factors of social or social-psychological sanction: on the hierarchical structure of scientific communities, on the authorities fight, on the cultural background of the scientific research, on the ideological framework in which this study somehow fits, etc., because they are involved in shaping the style of thinking, which is refracted through the prism of "objective reality" [7]. Having established in the 70th years of 20 century as an independent philosophical discipline, social epistemology incorporated the mentioned thematic areas into a single body supplementing it with the social organization of cognitive labor and the nature of collective knowledge. The term "social epistemology" was firstly used by an American theoretician of librarianship, Dzhessi Shera, in 1970. He states that "social epistemology examines how knowledge exists in society... The focus of this discipline should be the production, development, accumulation and consumption of all forms of thinking in the context of communication and all areas of the aggregate social production" [4].

As social epistemology is a modern and relatively young branch of science, it develops new approaches to the study of the phenomenon of knowledge, and thus generates discussions.

E. Goldman, being one of the most famous representatives of Western social epistemology, adheres to the traditional understanding of classical epistemology in truth and reliable investigation. Replacing the habitual accent on the object in which the positive content of knowledge was perceived to be more modern, he focuses on the study of social practices in terms of their impact on the process of acquiring knowledge [9]. In this connection, he suggests conducting, according to his own definition, a "veristic" (true) assessment of not only beliefs and knowledge, but also social practices by studying how this or that practice contributes to the formation of each the subject of true, value beliefs (individualistic approach). This approach, according to E. Goldman, makes it possible to analyze not only relevant but also potential practices from the point of view of their contribution to true knowledge.

The classical approach of E. Goldman with his striving for truth and epistemic rationality in the study of knowledge in the social context argues with another non-classical (radical or social constructivist) approach, expressed in the "strong program" of D. Bloor and B. Barnes, anthropological and ethnographic research K. Knorr-Cetin, discursive analysis of B. Latour, S. Vulgar and other currents [9].

The non-classical approach of social epistemology "focuses on the social determination and social-historical relativity of beliefs of any kind, considering such determination and relativity incompatible with "absolutized" concepts of truth and rationality torn from the social-historical and cultural context" [5].

Representatives of the Edinburgh School of Sociology, David Bloor and Barry Barnes, in their concept of a "strong program" ("strict sociology") note that cognitive sociology should become a "true theory of

knowledge". The researchers put forward the following principles of sociology, with which it should be guided in the study of knowledge:

- Causal principle - "sociology must deal with the causal explanation of knowledge";
- Equivalence principle - "sociology must explain all kinds of knowledge, remaining indifferent to its truth or falsity, rationality or irrationality";
- Principle of symmetry - "sociological explanation must reduce true and false, rational or irrational knowledge to the same type of cause";
- Principle of reflexivity - "the sociology of knowledge must be applied to itself as well as to other systems of knowledge" [6].

D. Bloor, singling out the social (supra-personal) component of knowledge, ascribes to it a valuable quality and understands it as a pledge of rationality and objectivity (here his concept comes into the most rigid confrontation with the ideas of E. Goldman). According to his inference, the social cannot be not objective. However, the "private" beliefs inherent in a single individual are automatically deprived of this status and are not the knowledge under which D. Bloor understands "the beliefs that real people hold in their real life" [6]. However, Plato stresses that knowledge "cannot be a generally accepted opinion, as it can be a common misconception" [8].

E. Goldman calls D. Bloor's theory of beliefs a doxology and believes that it cannot be identified with epistemology. The latter, from the point of view of E. Goldman, should be a theory of knowledge in the traditional sense, without confusing beliefs, that are not valuable in themselves, with true knowledge. At the same time, the American philosopher stresses that for modern epistemology it is very important to take into account the social roots of beliefs in order to establish their reliability determining which of them are true and which are false, not based, as D. Bloor, only on the opinion of society.

The American thinker, Helen Longino, tries to stop academic wars, both within the social epistemology between classical and non-classical approaches, and outside, between the philosophers of science, who believe that knowledge should be studied solely as a product of cognitive processes and sociologists of science inclined to assert that numerous non-cognitive factors influence on what and how scientists are studying. H. Longino assures that the problem of the controversy that has been going on for more than a quarter of a century is that cognitive rationality and socialite are dichotomized, and researchers try to prove that a concept is dominant and excluding the other. In this regard, H. Longino develops his own report on scientific knowledge, combining "rational" and "social" and proves that today a modern epistemology that studies the entire spectrum of cognitive processes needs to take into account the social interactions of researchers, as these social bonds ensure the achievement of a solid, rationally based knowledge. At the same time, H. Longino, referring to the works of Steve Vulgar, a professor at the business school "Saïd" in Oxford and Bruno Latour, the French philosopher and sociologist of science, emphasizes that science is "social in a different sense than it is defined in the strong program of theorists. Science is social in the sense of involving social interactions. The theorists (B. Latour, S. Vulgar) conclude, that it is impossible to distinguish purely cognitive and social or aggravated by interests bases of hypotheses [9, 11]. Confirmation of this can be found in B. Latour's book "Science in Action", in which the author tells about the team of Tom West from the corporation "Data General" that created the minicomputer "Eagle" (later renamed "Eclipse"), using revolutionary technical decisions, which have allowed to make the new model of the computer popular among users. However, in order to help engineers to develop and solve technical problems, the project manager, T. West, had to establish social ties at the initial stages of work: "please not only people from the software department, but also employees of production, marketing, those who write technical documentation, designers and, of course, shareholders and buyers" [10]. Thus, the success of the project was provided through not only the achievement of rational knowledge and its implementation in a successfully working and sought-after technical model on the market, but also building reliable social interactions, that allowed the project to be brought to its logical conclusion.

### **3. Conclusion**

The approach to social epistemology, proposed by H. Longino, seems to us to be the most acceptable. Many domestic researchers occupy the same position also. In particular, the Russian philosopher, Vladislav Lectorsky, admits that he is a supporter of the development of non-classical epistemology, which takes into account "modern social, cultural and scientific reality", and does not deny "classical philosophical subjects in the understanding of knowledge" [8]. In this regard, V. Lectorsky denies the program of the Edinburgh school, which eliminates the asymmetry between knowledge and error and regards knowledge as a "social construct," the product of interaction between cognitive collectives, where "activity... and competition between are determined not by search for truth, but by aspiration to gain power and access to financial resources" [8].

According to the researcher, this "renewal" of epistemology is a rejection of epistemology. Another domestic philosopher, Ilya Kasavin, emphasizes that social epistemology "must be built on new grounds understanding it as the removal of the antithesis of classical and non-classical approaches" [4]. According to the researcher, social epistemology should become a post-nonclassical theory of cognition, which, on the one hand, will retain the role of philosophy, on the other hand, will recognize the importance of interdisciplinary interaction, trying to solve modern controversies and to integrate competing methodological approaches.

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