PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE CONCEPT OF «SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT»: UNCONVENTIONAL MEANINGS FOR THE POST-SOVIET POLITICAL AND LEGAL SPACE[5]

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Summary

The article contains an experience of philosophical reflection undertaken by the author in relation to the concept of «sustainable development», which is one of the most conventional concepts in modern science. The philosophical interpretation of this concept allowed to establish a number of unconventional meanings that are especially relevant for the post-soviet political and legal space.

Key words: *sustainable development, philosophical reflection, unconventional meaning, post-Soviet political and legal space.*

Conventional meanings of scientific concepts and prospects for their philosophical rethinking.

The terminology of modern science is an extremely broad and diverse range of commonly used (universal) and specialized terms used to designate an even broader range of scientific concepts, the meaning of which (especially in the field of social and humanitarian sciences) is very often the subject of

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scientific discussions. A frequent result of such discussions in the history of the development of various areas of scientific knowledge has been the approval by the scientific community of certain conventional meanings, with which the corresponding scientific concepts and the terms denoting them have begun to be firmly associated.

The role of this kind of «conventions» regarding the concepts and terms accepted in the scientific community attracted the keen attention of scientists and philosophers in the 1960s and 1970s, giving particular impetus to the development of the concept of conventionalism in the works of Karl Popper [1], Rudolf Carnap [2], Willard Quine [3] and other scientists and philosophers who not only showed interest in the conventionalist ideas expressed much earlier by Henri Poincaré and Pierre Duhem, but also made their own contribution to the development of this concept, which considered all scientific concepts as the result of agreements reached between scientists.

However, even beyond the narrow framework of conventionalism in scientific thought and in the philosophy of science of the 20th century, one can find many ideas of other scientific schools and philosophical trends (including hermeneutics, existentialism and pragmatism), which in one way or another recognized the conditionally true nature of human knowledge. This circumstance allows us to see in the conventional nature of scientific concepts not just an idea-hypothesis that requires verification, but rather a repeatedly and comprehensively verified and proven fact.

How are conventional meanings assigned to scientific concepts and terms? Probably, the search for the internal logic of this process will never lose its relevance for the philosophy of science. However, without trying to discern some general patterns in this process, but considering it as a set of relatively independent empirically observed facts in the development of different areas of scientific knowledge, we believe it is necessary to analyze each such fact of the «birth» of a conventional meaning in the context of the history of the formation of a specific scientific concept, since each such «history» is in many ways unique.

However, while recognizing that scientific concepts that receive approval from a significant part of the scientific community are conventional in nature, we cannot help but pay attention to the position of «hostage» in which these concepts inevitably find themselves. Indeed, the meaning of these scientific concepts is limited by the framework of the «convention» adopted in relation to them. On the one hand, this makes the «conventional» scientific concept «recognizable» and allows for understanding between participants in scientific discussions. On the other hand, this sooner or later gives rise to criticism of conventional meanings, which always make a concession in favor of the «convention», to a greater or lesser extent retreating from the search for truth…

But it is probably precisely in these moments of «crisis» or a protracted period of «deceptive fullness of acquired conventional meaning» that the objective connection between science and philosophical reflection is revealed, the role of which as a driving force in the development of science was actually written about by A. Einstein [4] and the authors of many other outstanding scientific discoveries. Ultimately, it can be said that «love of wisdom» is always one step ahead and therefore philosophical reflection allows us to look beyond the framework of conventional meanings of scientific concepts and find something new beyond their «borders»…

The conventional meaning of the concept of «sustainable development».

The concept of «sustainable development» is one of the rather striking examples of a scientific concept with an established conventional meaning in modern science. The history of its formation gradually unfolded in the second half of the twentieth century and led to the formulation in 1987 of a definition that can be considered the «quintessence» of the conventional meaning designated by the term «sustainable development». This definition spoke of sustainable development as of *development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*, and to this day this formulation expresses the most conventional meaning associated with the phrase «sustainable development» not only in scientific, but also in broad public and political circles.

Why did the scientific community's «convention» associated with the concept of sustainable development receive this particular formulation? To understand this, it is necessary to analyze in more depth the theoretical prerequisites and the main stages in the history of the formation of «sustainable development» as a scientific concept.

The theoretical prerequisites for the formation of the conventional concept of sustainable development are the ideas of physicists, chemists and other scientists and philosophers of the late 19th – early 20th centuries, orienting humanity towards rational development in harmony with nature [5, 6]. At the same time, there is no doubt that ideas «consonant» with this thought can be found in a much earlier history of philosophical and scientific thought. However, as it seems to us, it was the ideas that sounded at the peak of the industrial stage of development of technogenic civilization that were ultimately able to «awaken» the keen interest of the scientific community in the search for new concepts. In this regard, the question naturally arises: why did this stage in the development of human civilization put the search for this kind of meaning on the «agenda»? The answer is quite obvious if we delve deeper into the features of the industrial and post-industrial stages of the development of modern technogenic civilization that fell in the 20th century.

Analyzing the works devoted to the technogenic civilization, we can find that almost all of them raise the question of its fate and the future that awaits it [7]. And this circumstance does not seem accidental to us, since the rapid depletion of non-renewable natural resources, which is characteristic of modern technogenic civilization, accompanied by overexploitation of renewable resources, exceeding the possibilities of their restoration, makes obvious not only the growing environmental problems of humanity, but also entails a whole complex of economic and social problems associated with the limited capabilities of the natural environment to satisfy the growing resource demands of the population of the Earth.

In the second half of the 20th century, science gained the ability to model the future development of technogenic civilization using computer technology along with mathematical methods. The model developed in 1972 under the

leadership of Dennis Meadows was called «The Limits to Growth» and was described in a report of the same name [8] prepared for the Club of Rome. The conclusions of scientists contained in this report called into question the well-being of the current and future generations of humanity and drew the attention of the scientific community to a whole range of environmental, social and economic problems of a global nature that require the efforts of all humanity to overcome them. These same problems were also pointed out by the authors of the next report prepared for the Club of Rome in 1974 under the leadership of Mihajlo Mesarovic and Eduard Pestel and called «Mankind at the Turning Point» [9]. This report significantly expanded the forecasts of the first Limits to Growth model, which attracted the attention of the entire world community to the need for international cooperation to solve the global problems facing humanity and pushed the international community to take the first organizational and legal steps in this direction.

The subsequent discussion of global environmental, social and economic problems of modern civilization went far beyond the scope of scientific discourse and began to be carried out primarily under the auspices of the United Nations. The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), created under the United Nations in 1983, published its report in 1987 entitled «Our Common Future» [10], in which the conventional understanding of «sustainable development» was formulated as a concept denoting a strategy proposed for the joint solution of socio-economic development problems with the problems caused by the need to solve global environmental problems. Following this, a number of important documents were adopted at the international level, including «Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development» [11], where the concept of «sustainable development» continued to be refined, but generally retained the conventional meaning that was first formulated in 1987.

Thus, the conventional meaning of the concept of «sustainable development» was formed at the intersection of three basic semantic connotations, referring us to a whole complex of environmental, economic and social problems of modern technogenic civilization. However, carefully analyzing the history of the development of the conventional concept of sustainable development not

only in scientific research, but also in the texts of international documents, one can discover a fairly clear tendency towards constant clarification and actual expansion of the range of connotations associated with it, including legal and political aspects concerning the implementation of human rights and democratization of political institutions. This circumstance leads us to the conclusion that the content of the concept of «sustainable development» conceals a much deeper meaning than that limited by its conventional interpretation.

An experience of philosophical reflection in the interpretation of the concept of «sustainable development».

In attempting to establish the non-conventional meanings of the concept of «sustainable development» (or, at least, «not focused» in its conventional context, which has noticeably expanded in recent years), it seems necessary, first of all, to abstract from the «tail» of the context of socio-economic and environmental problems associated with its conventional meaning. *Abstracting from this conventional context, we gain the opportunity to search for the meaning of «sustainable development» not as a «comprehensive solution to the global problems of humanity», but as an abstract that is, not correlated with any specific sphere of existence «development process», possessing the characteristic of «sustainability» as its most pronounced distinctive feature.* It is precisely this level of abstraction that allows us to transfer the discourse on sustainable development from modern areas of scientific knowledge, which use this term to solve their narrow problems, to the space of *categorical thinking* [12, 13], capable of philosophical reflection.

At the categorical level of insight into the essence of the concept of sustainable development, we are left «one on one» with the combination of two basic meaning-forming philosophical categories, at the «intersection» of which non-conventional meanings of this concept can be found. These categories are «development», indicating the basic quality of the process designated by this concept, and «sustainability», indicating the basic distinctive feature of the said process.

Turning to the basic semantic connotations of the philosophical category of «development», reflected in philosophical literature and encyclopedic sources, among the most widespread among them it is necessary to highlight: «irreversible, directed and lawful change of matter and consciousness», «emergence of a new qualitative state of an object – its composition and structure», «interrelated process of quantitative and qualitative changes», «transition from lower to higher forms», «transition from simple to complex» [14, p. 22-45]. Analyzing these semantic connotations, one can notice that the category of «development» is either directly defined as a process of change, or, although it is not literally defined as «change», it actually presupposes change, since the «emergence of a new» qualitative state of any object, as well as the «transitions» associated with the category of development (from lower to higher forms or from simple to complex) mean nothing other than a «change» in the state of the object.

Within the framework of the philosophical discourse on development, it also seems necessary to raise the question of whether all the phenomena around us are, in principle, capable of development? After all, it should be understood that not every «change» that is a manifestation of *dynamics* (to which, in principle, both living and inanimate phenomena are capable) means «development». And at this stage of philosophical reflection, it is necessary to turn to those meanings of the category «development» that are inherent in it as the central category of dialectics, in the context of which all other phenomena are considered. Let us turn to one of the most beautiful descriptions of «development» as a dialectical category, which was given more than two hundred years ago by the great German dialectician Hegel in his «Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit» (1807), where he compared development with the transformation of a bud into a blossom and the subsequent transformation of the blossom into a fruit: «The bud disappears when the blossom breaks through, and we might say that the former is refuted by the latter; in the same way when the fruit comes, the blossom may be explained to be a false form of the plant's existence, for the fruit appears as its true nature in place of the blossom. The ceaseless activity of their own inherent nature makes these stages moments of an organic unity, where they not merely do not contradict one another, but where one is as necessary as the other; and constitutes thereby the life of the whole» [15].

In the article «On the applicability of the concept of development to changes in living and inanimate nature» [16], doctor of philosophy M.I. Nenashev draws attention to the fact that such a classical philosophical interpretation of development contradicts the fact of the expansion of the Universe, according to which the previous state of the Universe is not replaced by a more complex one, on the basis of which he concludes that the dialectical interpretation of development is inapplicable to the description of changes in phenomena of inanimate nature.

In this regard, in modern philosophical discourse, a distinction is made between the dynamics of organic and inorganic processes, in the context of which a discussion sometimes develops about the nature of social processes, including everything that happens in the legal and political life of society. Can we, in the context of this discussion, talk about the possibility of the «development» of social phenomena in the sense in which «development» can be interpreted in relation to the phenomena of living nature? Considering the uniqueness of the «human factor» that is decisive for social phenomena, it seems necessary to draw attention to the impossibility of a complete analogy between changes in social phenomena and the development of organic systems. But unlike the categorical negative opinions that exist on the issue of the compatibility of the category of development with the description of changes in inanimate nature, the category of «development» is nevertheless recognized both at the level of philosophical generalizations and at the level of various social sciences as applicable to the description of changes in social phenomena. However, the lack of a complete analogy between the development of natural phenomena and the development of social phenomena complicates the philosophical interpretation of the category of «development» in a social context and identifies various forms in which the development of cultural, economic, legal, political and other processes of social nature can occur. In addition to the evolutionary and revolutionary forms of development, these can also be progressive and regressive forms. In addition, the interest of modern researchers is attracted by the distinction between imitative and innovative development. In this regard, *in the context of philosophical discourse on social phenomena, the category of «development» indicates the possibility of different*

«paths of development», the specification of which objectively requires some additional clarifying characteristics. However, how justified can we consider the category of «sustainable» as such a characteristic?

When analyzing the basic semantic connotations of the concept of «stability» in an extremely general context, it is necessary to pay attention to the frequently repeated ones: «constancy, staying in one state, despite the influence of the environment», «the property of a body, system or structure to maintain the initial state corresponding to some influence», «the ability of a system to maintain the intended mode of operation, despite the disturbances affecting it» [17]. At the same time, in purely philosophical definitions of the concept of stability, one can find an indication that the opposite of the state described by this concept is «change».

At this stage of the categorical analysis, we come across a paradoxical combination and alignment in the concept of «sustainable development» of semantic connotations of the category «sustainability» with the opposite semantic connotations of the category «development». The discovery of such paradoxes is often considered an indicator of the achieved philosophical level of comprehension of the essence of the subject [18]. However, given the dependence of the interpretation of the category «development» on the nature of the phenomenon that is in a state of development that we have established, we must divide further discussion of sustainable development into reflections on the sustainable development of natural phenomena and reflections on the sustainable development of social phenomena.

By characterizing the development of natural phenomena as sustainable, we are actually talking about evolution, which is usually defined as a process of gradual, directed and irreversible changes, and we can also consider the concept of sustainable development as a concept that is opposed to any deviant or pathological conditions that can affect the parameters of sustainability in the development of natural phenomena.

If we start talking about the sustainable development of social phenomena, we should be prepared for a much longer and more ambiguous discussion, since, as has already been said above, there are different possible paths of

development of social phenomena. Having started this discussion, we would first have to decide whether the characteristic of «sustainability» is applicable to individual forms (paths) of development. Since, as has already been shown using the example of the evolutionary form of development of living nature phenomena, such a form has features that are attributive to a sustainable state, it seems acceptable to transfer this conclusion by analogy to the evolutionary path of development of social phenomena. The admissibility of such an analogy is confirmed, in particular, by the works of academician A.D. Ursul, who develops an evolutionary approach to the main problems of global development, combining reasoning about evolutionism with the concept of «sustainable development» [19].

However, with regard to the revolutionary form of development, one should seriously consider to what extent such a path of development can be compatible with the concept of «sustainable development»? Reflecting on this question, it is necessary to take into account that «sustainability» excludes any sharp leaps and «radical upheavals», that is, total transformations, with which the revolutionary path of development is inextricably linked. Any revolution leads not only to the loss of stability of the existing system, but to the destruction of the previous system and cannot provide any guarantees that the formation of a new system will be consistent and will not turn into a series of disparate and contradictory attempts to build something qualitatively «new» in the conditions of the simultaneous abolition of the previously existing «old». However, we believe that, given the specificity of social matter, conditioned by the influence of the human factor, its development in principle in one way or another combines the evolutionary path with the revolutionary one, excluding development in any «pure» form. Does this mean that the concept of «sustainable development» is in principle inapplicable to the description of the development of social phenomena or is it applicable only to the description of its idealized states? Is it possible to talk about the formation of specific laws of sustainability at the level of social matter? This question seems open to us...

In addition to the above experience of philosophical reflection in the interpretation of the concept of sustainable development, we should also point out the possibility of other ways of philosophical search for its unconventional

meanings. In particular, it is possible to point out the possibility of discovering unconventional meanings of the concept of sustainable development using the principle of thinking «from the opposite». This technique involves an indirect search for the meaning of the sought concept through the analysis of a concept that is opposite to it in meaning. However, taking into account that the concept of interest to us is formed at the «intersection» of two basic categories «development» and «sustainability», going «from the opposite», we can propose to analyze various opposite concepts depending on which of the two categories will be emphasized. For example, if we emphasize the opposition on the category of «sustainability», then we should pay attention to the concept of «unsustainable development». If we focus on the category of «development», we can compare the concept we are considering with the concept of «stagnation», which reveals the non-identity of the «stability» of sustainable development with the state of «stagnancy». If we try to select a concept that is simultaneously opposite to both the category of «stability» and the category of «development», we can analyze the desired concept in the context of the concept of «regression», which presupposes not just «absence of development», characteristic of «stagnation», but «movement in the opposite direction to development».

Thus, the experience of philosophical interpretation of the concept of «sustainable development» in its application to social phenomena allows us to discover quite a few unconventional meanings that can be used in the analysis of the dynamics of social matter, «woven» not only from social and economic processes, but also from processes affecting the spheres of culture, politics, religion and law.

«Sustainable development» as a basic social demand in the post-soviet political and legal space.

Surprisingly, it is precisely the paradoxically contradictory combination of the categories «development» and «sustainability» from the point of view of philosophical interpretation that is capable of characterizing those social expectations with which the population of the overwhelming majority of countries in the post-soviet political and legal space still associates their needs, which have been largely unmet since the collapse of the USSR.

The need for the post-soviet political and legal space to *develop* is objectively determined by the fact that during the years of soviet power the natural course of development of social processes was artificially limited, curtailed, and slowed down, leaving as a «legacy» to the post-soviet political and legal space the need for catch-up development of economic, political, legal, and other institutions of society.

The need for *sustainability* in the post-soviet political and legal space was primarily due to the upheavals that the countries of this region had to endure in the period following the collapse of the USSR. This period is called «transitional» because it always breaks previous ties and institutions, which is why the states that experience it inevitably enter a period of extreme instability in all spheres of society. During this period, the need for stability, or, in other words, «sustainability», becomes especially pressing.

However, it would be wrong to explain the need for stability in the post-soviet political and legal space solely by the difficulties of the transition period that immediately followed the collapse of the USSR. A more careful analysis of the state of «soviet stagnancy» is worthwhile in terms of how justified it is to link it with the stability of social institutions. After all, it cannot be denied that there is a part of the population of the post-soviet region that still feels nostalgia for the years of soviet power, believing that the «soviet stagnancy» was the embodiment of true stability and what could be called «sustainable development». Moreover, although most people who share these views in the post-soviet political and legal space are representatives of older generations, given the mechanisms of continuity inherent in social institutions, as well as the influence of political forces oriented toward this electorate, such views also resonate with a certain part of the youth.

An analysis of the specific features of the historical process of the formation of soviet statehood leads us to the conclusion that the achievement of a certain «sustainability» by the soviet system over time was the result of stabilization of the state of the soviet system through the restriction of the action of a whole complex of political institutions and legal principles traditional not only for Europe, but also for most other modern states. Among other things, the

soviet path of «quasi-sustainable development» is a path of stabilization of the state of the social system through the restriction of vital human rights not only in the political, but also in the economic, religion sphere, as well as in the private life of a person. In this regard, it is not surprising that such a «quasi-sustainable» path of development could create conditions for the necessary transformations in society only by relying on coercion mechanisms that are objectively capable of providing only a limited growth potential. This limitation is clearly demonstrated by the short-term, from the point of view of historical perspective, model of development of the soviet system, which turned out to be incapable of ensuring stability and progressive transformations in the long term. Thus, the soviet path of «quasi-sustainable development» is a path that is not actually «development», but the result of a gradual «expansion» of significantly limited opportunities in the natural dynamics of political, legal, and other institutions of society, which, if it can be called «development», is only a catch-up type of development.

Thus, in the post-soviet political and legal space, indeed, along with the pressing need for «development», which this region was deprived of for many years of soviet power, there is an accompanying need for «sustainability», which after decades of «soviet stagnancy», often unjustifiably confused with the concept of «sustainability», the countries of this region have been trying to find at least to some extent for so long and with great difficulty. At the same time, the unconventional meanings of the concept of «sustainable development» that we have established within the framework of the undertaken attempt at philosophical interpretation allow us to use it to describe the social demand of the population of most countries of the post-soviet political and legal space, which paradoxically combines these opposite categories, for many of which this demand still remains unsatisfied...

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