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«Social epistemology by David Bloor: origins and philosophical meaning»

Summary

The nowadays non-classic epistemology expands significantly the range of phenomena covered by the term of “knowledge”. In the mid 70-ties philosopher David Bloor, sociologist Barry Barnes and historian Steven Shapin in the University of Edinburg introduced a new approach in sociology of scientific knowledge called “strong program”. While doing so, they broadened the sphere of sociology to embrace analysis of scientific knowledge. The personalia of D. Bloor, one of the founders of social epistemology, takes central place of this book. His works evoked a ready response and sharp polemics abroad, to say nothing of his role of a pathfinder in social epistemology who reviewed in a new way the notions of knowledge, sociality and their interrelation. Among the Russian researchers who analyzed his ideas may be named I. Kasavine, H. Mamchur, L. Markova, L. Mikeshina. Another reason to choose Bloor as a core figure is demonstrativeness of evolution of his views towards social constructivism.

Based on scrutiny of modern Anglophone researchers, whose conceptions may be classed with socio-constructivist ones (D. Bloor, B. Barnes, B. Latour and S. Woolgar, K. Knorr-Cetina, H. Longino), are four principles to be marked out as underlying the comprehension of social aspect of knowledge:

- 1) The principle of incommensurability of different knowledge systems. It was firstly used by T. Kuhn (1962) who argued that as the followers of different paradigms (model theories of perception and explanation of scientific facts) speak different languages and live in different worlds they loose potential to communicate each other on rational basis.
- 2) The principle of inalienability of the “social”. According to it there is no “pure science” whose theory and practice could develop free from social impact.
- 3) The principle of locality (“locality claim”) (D. Bloor, B. Barnes etc.) claims that any system of knowledge (scientific theories for instance) are relevant only for the place and moment of its emergence, for the local community that produced it.
- 4) The principle of underdetermination. By underdetermination here is assumed a phenomenon of empirical equivalence of semantically different theories. This principle as Bloor understands it asserts that when appealing to simple influence of an object one cannot explain the difference of perception of this object by the difference of preceptors: our reality descriptions indispensably include parameters determined by social factors.

The present scrutiny discloses philosophical meaning of emergence of such trend as social constructivism in sociology of scientific knowledge. It involves such notions as knowledge, sociality and also their evolution as the works of D. Bloor demonstrate. Among preconditions of Bloor's discourse about sociality of knowledge are the two eternal philosophical problems: one is dealing with existence, ontological status of external world, the other – with existence and ontological status of the internal one.

In that book the attempt is made to view social constructivism as “double *epoche*”, which “surrounds by parentheses” facts of external and internal world – and it makes philosophical and methodological sense of its own.