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Parameters of Disbelief



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Scope of interest: History and theory of cognition, logic and linguistics.

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The paper attempts to promote the idea that scientific or scholarly disbelief has no quantitative measure (limits). It is a stage of the method concerning research and expression. Scientific or scholarly disbelief is a precondition for a critical way of thinking, for tolerance toward people in different opinions, and for overcoming dogmatism and relativity. (Author)

Under the logic-epistemological complexity and peculiarity (indefiniteness, probability, alternativity) of the transitional period in the development of theoretical cognition, there cannot exist any criteria determining the selection of theories unilaterally. The freedom to state original ideas combines naturally with the freedom to subject them to disbelief, check-up, control and criticism using scientific ways and means. On the other hand, though all scientific statements could be subjected to disbelief and criticism, it is not always the rule (to say the least) that it would be a substantiated disbelief or a valid criticism.

The experiment to define the parameters of cognition would have been incomplete if the following questions were not answered: what is the optimal measure of reasonable disbelief in scientific or scholarly research? Can there be some general criterion as to the "permissible" amount of disbelief?

With no aspiration to give a complete and total solution to this difficult problem - the problem of disbelief - which should rightly be given particular logical-theoretical, linguistic and semantic treatment, we suggest some specifying considerations. In transitional times, when old values are falling apart, while new ones have not been constructed as yet, when it is necessary to re-evaluate the

values of cognition and social convention, it is disbelief that becomes very much topical and popular. Disbelief has diverse forms - sceptical and nihilistic, productive and dialectical.

Contrasting the two major guiding lines in interpreting disbelief (Socrates, Descartes, Hegel - antique sceptics, Nietzsche) we are trying to treat disbelief on the basis of being conscious of the contradiction. Exchange of thoughts, opinions and critical acquisition of knowledge cannot do without disbelieving. Among the lines of the positive kind of scepticism, criticism can give vent of the disbelief trying the sufficiency of the primary probability (confirmability) of a hypothesis. Disbelief is permanently present in the process of selecting and analysing facts, constructing a hypothesis and in bringing a theory to an end. Disbelief presupposes not only a conscious attitude of the subject to the object, but also a conscious attitude of the subject to itself. Disbelief is a condition for tolerance among people of different opinions, a condition for overcoming dogmatism and relativity. It is a stage of the method concerning research and expression. Scientific disbelief has no "quantitative measure" (limits), it can and must be treated as "open" only in the framework of the method and philosophy/Weltanschauung of the scientist. It is the nature of the method that defines the limits of disbelief.

That is why we focused our attention on the connections between disbelief and negation, more precisely the role of negation within disbelief. Following Hegel we relate the characteristics of dialectic negation to so-called scientific, constructive, productive disbelief. Disbelief is seen as a constantly reproducing/reproducible/surmounted or overcome stage of cognition, as one of the means on the way to the end - mastering objective truth.