

# *Communicative Vectors in the History of Philosophy*

Lebedev S.P.

Institute of Philosophy  
 Saint Petersburg State University  
 Saint Petersburg, Russia  
 lebedevsrg@rambler.ru

**Abstract**—The article examines two communication vectors exist in philosophy, one of them is focused on the studied subject area, and the other is aimed at transmitting the results of knowledge to society. On the example of ancient Greek natural philosophy and sophistry, two differently oriented types of philosophizing are analyzed. In terms of the identified typology, a brief description of modern philosophy is given.

**Keywords**—communication, truth, opinion, philosophy, society, sophistry.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is essential for any society, and in fact, no society can exist without communication. Actually, it is communication that cooperates the amount of separated individuals into a unit [1]. In the broadest sense, the communication itself means some interaction acquisition or construction of community, unit. [2]. Depending on the type of activity, the expression of unity may be tangible objects (when communication occurs with their help), but there may be no tangible ideas (in case of transmitting intellectual information). Communication is possible not only between people, but also between a person and an inanimate object (for example, a computer), and even between inanimate objects (inside cybernetic systems) [3]. Philosophy, like other forms of knowledge, is a multidirectional activity. On the one hand, it tries to establish unity with a certain subject area. This unity can be intellectual and even deeper, requiring the participation of not only the intellect, but of the whole person, including his faith, will, emotional sphere, etc. On the other hand, philosophy is more or less oriented towards the dissemination in society of information obtained in cognition. Sooner or later, any concept turns into a teaching, which means that it is already oriented towards entering society and mastering public consciousness. Each of the noted communication vectors of establishing unity is present in philosophy, but not to the same degree inherent in it at different its development stages. The dominance of one or another of them significantly changes the face of philosophizing and philosophy itself, leads to the transformation of the value system, tasks of knowledge, its basic tools, and in some cases can lead to a crisis.

## II. PURPOSES OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this article is a comparative analysis of the influence on the philosophy of its two communicative vectors. To achieve this goal it is necessary to solve the following objectives:

1. To analyze the communicative component of ancient Greek natural philosophy.
2. To describe the communicative orientation of sophistry.
3. To compare the place and role of both communicative vectors in every indicated philosophy area.
4. To define the historical boundaries of different philosophy types.

The solution of these objectives involves the implementation of a lot of methods, primarily methods of comparative and structural-typological analysis, which allow concretizing and generalizing the subject area indicated in the title. Since the subject of the study is the formation within the historical-philosophical process of certain laws of knowledge, the method of historical and logical unity is used. This method correlates with the assumption that the representatives of the earlier stages of the philosophy existence created a certain “matrices” of the thoughts functioning, which potential was not revealed in the corresponding historical epoch and which formed the basis of the thinking of future philosophers’ generations. The logical and other meanings of these matrix-paradigms appear in the thinking of a later time.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Philosophy, as any other form of social consciousness, is not free from social communication. It should be noted that at its different development stages and the social development, it did not have the same level of the dependence on it. In social terms, the first philosophies were, so to say, not communicative, or, at least, poorly communicative. The reason for this is rooted in the minds of the ancient Greek natural philosophers, their reality were divided into two not equal in status and value levels. One of them is superficial, composed of things that only seem to be existing, but which actually exist as much as not exist. This level has an insignificant value and is not worthy to pay philosopher attention to. It was this level of untrue things that combine and made adapted to it the everyday consciousness of most people. The philosophers called this level the opinion (doxa) [4]. Another level is deep, it is hidden from the ordinary consciousness by the imaginary side of reality. This level is occupied by what truly exists, as well, as actually not exists — eternal, unchanging, sacred. The first philosophers consciousness was concentrated at this true level of the world structure, it was they who considered it valuable and worthy of

striving for it. Their fundamental cognitive and life purpose was to go beyond the imaginary, overcome its impact on man and enter the real domain, and unites with it by reasoning about it, also existentially, vital, the very soul [5]. In this striving towards the eternal and the true (because it exists, and not seems) consisted an emerging communicative vector, different from the social one.

The way to escape the ordinary consciousness and the imaginary layer of reality is hard and thorny, not everyone is capable of overcoming it. It was necessary to surmount the imaginary layer of reality not only by reasoning, but by restructuring the whole physical life, by changing its entire structure, beginning with food and social circle and ending with the whole way of life. This required significant self-restraint and self-isolation. Philosophy was seen as an individual work, destiny for single individuals. The translation of the philosopher's views into the broad strata of the population was not only not supposed, but even excluded. Philosophizing was not a public, but a deeply individual activity, demanding the abandonment of the usual benefits for most people and stimulating a certain degree of austerity.

Apart from the difficulties of the philosophical destiny, there was also a factor that intensified the delimitation vertically (to truth, to the eternal and immortal) and horizontally (socially) oriented communicative vectors. The fact is that the opinion was identified in accordance with the majority, and therefore it was projected onto society through socially oriented communications; truth was considered to be available only to the chosen one. The communication with imaginary reality and imaginary consciousness was necessary to be broke to get a chance to realize the true successfully. Self-isolation from society was understood as a necessary condition for overcoming the power of the imaginary. Heraclitus led a secluded life, the Pythagoreans, however, lived communally, but their communities were closed to outsiders [6]. With such principles, the presence of followers was not mandatory, although it was not excluded. Philosophers were not search for them, if there were some, it was only because they came themselves, and usually in an extremely small amount. It seems that the early Greek philosophers had no concern for the preservation and reproduction of their knowledge. However, the books were written, but, as we can see from the ancient Greek philosophy history, they were not kept for a long time. Apparently, content of these books had not any matter to the consciousness of general population. The philosophers themselves were interested, if you will, only in a vertically oriented communication vector — their mental-physical relation to the divine origin; and, so to say, the horizontal communication vector — the attitude of the philosopher to people (to the “crowd”) — had no any significance either for the philosopher or for the “crowd”. Regarding the crowd, they addressed smiles and mockery to the philosophers, and they, on their turn, awarded the crowd with contempt [7].

The appearance of the Elean type abstract thinking provoked a crisis of natural philosophy, which led to the emergence of sophistry [8]. This is a fundamentally different kind of philosophy, with different goals and objectives, with different priorities and communication preferences, and with a

completely different role for these preferences []. Sophists had lost their faith in the values of natural philosophy (this was due to its crisis), but first of all they'd lost faith in the truth and authenticity of thinking (mainly, of course, abstract). The conflict between sensory perception and the abstract thinking discovered by the Elean philosophers was resolved by the sophists in favor of sensuality. In the conflict between truth and opinion they had taken the side of opinion. The overwhelming majority of them saw truth and authenticity guarantee in sensations, and not in thinking. What was considered by ancient Greek natural philosophers as opinion (immediate sensory experiences, sensations) was accepted by the sophists as truth — that was the position of the Protagoras's sophistry founder, and the overwhelming majority of his supporters adhered to the same views. What was considered by natural philosophers as true (“subtle knowledge” of the senior physicists and abstract thinking of the younger physicists), was interpreted by Sophists as opinion, as an illusion. The attitude of the sophists to the opinion and truth has changed to the exact opposite of natural philosophers characteristic.

Lack of confidence in thinking led to the depreciation of its products by the sophists. From their point of view, only nature, which opens to sensory perception, is truly exists, and everything, created by thinking and founded on sensations, is only art (i.e. something unreal, illusory, optional). Sophists considered as artificial everything, which appearance was possible only by thinking, and not only by abstract thinking. First of all, it was about fundamental religious and philosophical positions. Sophists doubted the idea of the existence of gods and of something divine in general, arguing that the gods were not given sensations to the man, and the thinking that created them was not credible (to a greater extent it was characteristic of younger sophists). They ceased to trust the philosophical cornerstone thesis about the existence of something one that underlies everything, guided by similar arguments. Both the ideas about the gods and the assumption of a truly “one” were considered by them as an error in the functioning of thinking. Thinking, as sophists believe, creates objects which do not correspond anything in the reality (in sensory experience). Sophists did not see anything genuine in legal and moral norms, in ideas of justice, in language — they considered all this to be artificial. Everything artificially created by various nations are different (language, customs, moral and legal norms, ideas about gods), but the natural is the same for everyone. These spheres were deprived of the sacral character and authority, previously praised by religion and tradition. Sophists themselves violated social norms and insistently pleaded others to ignore it, regarding them as artificial superstructures created by people for personal gain.

The sphere that lay beyond the imaginary reality and that collects the most important meanings for the natural philosophers, was no longer interesting for the sophists. Having made a choice in favor of sensory perception and to the detriment of abstract thinking, the sophists were imprisoned in the imaginary reality sphere (according to the classification of natural philosophers). Distancing themselves from the problems of natural philosophy and its way of

thinking, the sophists end up in the same group with the “crowd”, with the majority.

Of course, the values created by thought or with its help, have ceased to be a goal for the sophists. They did not strive for unity with the divine origin; all their thoughts were exclusively external and rather utilitarian. They did not see the possibility of the existence of theoretical philosophy, since they denied the truth and authenticity. They believed, only practical wisdom remained to be justified, as aimed at achieving the values produced, above all, sensuality. Among the goals connected with sensations, pleasures, and mostly physical, turned out to be worthy of aspiration. A sage, according to sophists, is one who is in pleasure and knows how to avoid suffering. This is the essence of a happy life for them. Philosophers, from their point of view (sophists who considered themselves wise, distinguished themselves from philosophers who gravitate to wisdom), directed their efforts towards the attainment of false, imaginary goals.

Regarding the nature, the one lives in pleasure and avoids suffering, who is physically stronger. Only such a creature can be happy. The weak, on the contrary, is deeply unhappy. The strong is also right: the one who is stronger is right and there can be no rightness on the side of the physically weak. In nature, to be the happiest, you need to be the strongest. And they understood justice as something that benefits the strong [9].

The sophist yearns for the happiness, i.e. for the life of permanent pleasure and escaping from suffering better than others, and means that he must be the strongest. But physical strength is not everything person needs to be happy, because society is orders in a different way than nature. One person, even if he is the strongest one, cannot surpass the combined power of many people by his own. Strength is usually takes side of community. And this means that person, in order to achieve his own goals, had to learn how control and bend the communities of people. He must be able to accumulate the power of community and incline it in a direction that is favorable to him.

Political, social and philosophical experience suggests that there is a power in society overwhelming the physical strength. This power is contained in the logo, in representations created by thought. The majority appreciates artificial values (meaningless, for sophistically). The sophist living in society has to be mindful of this point and be able to use it to his own interests (for the sake of gaining power and permanent pleasure). To seize the community of people and their combined power, sophist need to seize their ideas, ideals, moods, aspirations, values and rebuild them in accordance with his benefits. It is significant that the sophists no longer needed a philosophy that was complex in execution and completely incomprehensible to the majority, and thus it was impossible to capture the community with it. They prudently appealed to an eloquence, which became their main discipline, since the magnificence of speech evokes sympathy even from those who are not really good at one or another of the issues discussed.

A person will begin to do something consciously only when he understands what is required of him, and when it

meets his interests. A sophist who wants to use the power of a certain social community needs to become comprehensible to this community, bring his ideas closer to the ideas of the imagining “crowd”, downgraded his interests to the level of the average statistical interest of the social group. Not coincidentally, Plato blamed the sophists for the fact that their activities are akin to the cooking art, that they please the crowd. Their wisdom consisted (and still consists) in pleasing the crowd by offering what the crowd wants to see and hear, and, receiving in return her disposition, use her strength to achieve sophist’s own selfish goals.

Sophists firmly settled in the imaginary layer of reality, they are looking for ways to organize and head it. Keep the leading positions in the competitive struggle with similar ones (same sophists) is possible only while presenting more and more radical values to the crowd, freeing the person from “artificial” illusions and releasing the animal forces that are being held back by these “illusions”.

The “vertical” communication vector, which was the basis of the physical (natural-philosophical) way of thinking and life, clearly, has lost any sense for the sophists. But the vector of “horizontal” communication, which brings the philosopher closer to the “crowd” and downgraded his thinking to the level of opinion, acquires a fundamental status for them. For sophistry it appears to be crucial, creating the sophistry itself. Sophists accept the rules and norms of the functioning of society. Power, honor, fame, wealth, and so on, everything that is meaningless for natural philosophers, take on significance for sophists. In attempts to influence society, the sophists themselves became dependent on it and on the conventions providing it existence. Moreover, they occupied a niche of extremely aggressive competitive confrontation in society. Consequently, sophistry produced the dialogical form of philosophizing, as opposed to monologue-poetic in natural philosophy. A sophist must always have an enemy, by humiliation of which he would rise. And it does not matter at all whether the victory will be achieved by fair means or by cunning. The most important thing is made the public believe this victory was fair and stunning. The sophistry is fundamentally public; it is focused on translating the victory of the “sage” over his opponent to as many people as possible. For the sophist, publicity and demonstrativeness of his victory are essential. The sophist’s superiority over anyone is meaningless if it was accomplished without spectators. Victory, fixed by spectator sympathies, is the goal of sophistic dialogue. And, of course, the sophist must have disciples, at least followers, which was not at all necessary for the natural philosopher. The disciples are evidence of the high social status of the sophist, moreover the source of the satisfaction of his ambitions and the increase of his material well-being.

Sophists appeared in a society, bringing wisdom to the masses and diversifying means of social communication, which, however, were not always decent (meaning sophisms and methods of psychological pressure on the interlocutor). In a certain sense, this process is inevitable and positive. But this process devalued wisdom. “Horizontal” communications provide mutual intertwining of ideas, forming something similar to a two-way street. Wisdom not only enlightens opinion, but also has a powerful effect on the part of it,

capable of depriving wisdom of its core and dissolving it in itself (this was evidenced in Ancient Greece, and happens nowadays: routine, everyday becomes an object of consideration in modern philosophical communities philosophical in them only one form) [10]. Sophistry turns out to be a profaning philosophy, a philosophy of casual consciousness, a philosophizing everyday consciousness. Apparently, Aristotle fairly considered the sophistry as an imaginary philosophy, and not real [11].

The Socrates example demonstrates that there is only one possible way to cut the link with the imagining wisdom of everyday life – by plunging into “depth”. And, although he remained in a state of “horizontal” communication, communicating with others, who thought themselves to be wise, his thought moved from the ordinary to the unusual and strange, hidden in the depth of the soul inaccessible to most. The majority rejected Socrates and his truth, prosecuting and putting him to death. Opinion fears the depth and true wisdom, tries to wrest it from itself and destroy it. Plato, comes out of the sophistic environment, reflecting on the new eidetic layer of reality revealed to him, also put himself into the speculative depth, limiting the “horizontal” communications. Examples of such non-communicative philosophical thinking are far from being isolated.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Natural philosophy and sophistry of Ancient Greek formed two characters, two models of philosophizing, which to some extent have mutually exclusive communicative vectors. Moreover, the relationship between them seems asymmetric, at least in the performance of the two philosophies considered by the thinkers. An aspiration to search for deep truth does not fully exclude socially oriented communication, although it does not make it mandatory. Writing texts without any hope to unveil them is possible for a solitary search for truth, although this is not an easy task. While completely socially oriented philosophy accepts the values of the majority and is guided by selfish motives, completely loses its focus on the search for truth.

The types of philosophizing created by the early ancient Greek thinkers were not forgotten in history, losing their relevance [12]. The most important features of both types have evolved from purely historical to logical, becoming a kind of matrix, organizing thinking, engaging in research activity [13]. Moreover, this concerns not only philosophy, but to a certain extent also science. The history of philosophy and science proves that both communications are compulsory for human research activity, and they alternate with each other. The transformation of a “horizontal”, socially oriented vector into a self-sufficient one can become unfavorable to both philosophy and science. In modern philosophical and

scientific communities, the dominance of “horizontal” communications is transformed into a fact that does not depend on the individual. The subject of philosophical search becomes not so much an individual as a community of competing individuals or even institutions [14]. To be a socially significant philosopher or scientist (to have a job and get paid), you need to be recognized in the suitable community. “Horizontal” communications and their inherent norms, expressing its structure, hierarchy, etc., dominate in every community. [15] They have their own values, such as honor, fame, ratings, quoting and, of course, funding, which corresponds these benefits. Modern philosopher and scientist, whose occupation is not just a hobby, but a job, face the challenge to integrate into these communications and occupy a decent position in the relevant community. The “horizontal” communications of philosophers and scientists associations acquire an independent life regarding philosophy and science. The suppression of the opinion and the search for truth as social institutions became insufficient for them.

#### References

- [1] P. Bivin, D. Jackson, *Pragmatics of human communication: The study of patterns, pathologies and paradoxes of interaction*. Moscow: April-Press, Publishing House EKSMO-Press, 2000.
- [2] I.H. Butler, *Latin-Russian dictionary*. Moscow: Russian language, 1976.
- [3] N. Wiener, *Cybernetics, or Control and communication in the animal and the machine*. Moscow: Soviet Radio, 1958.
- [4] H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, Band I* W. Krantz, Hrsg. Berlin-Neukölln: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1960.
- [5] S.P. Lebedev, *History of ancient philosophy. Physics. Part I*. St. Petersburg: Publishing house RHGI, 2004.
- [6] A.V. Lebedev, *Fragments of the early Greek philosophers*. Moscow: Nauka, 1989.
- [7] Diogenes of Laertes, *About the life, teachings and sayings of famous philosophers*. Moscow: Mysl, 1979.
- [8] S.P. Lebedev, *Idealism. History and logic of genesis*. St Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University and RCCH, 2008
- [9] Plato, *State*. Moscow: Mysl, 1994.
- [10] R. Harris, *The Psychology of Mass Communication*. Moscow: OLMA-PRESS, 2002.
- [11] Aristoteles, *Metaphysica*. Berolini: Reimer, 1831.
- [12] Yu. M. Romanenko, O. D. Shipunova, L. V. Mureyko, V. A. Serkova, I. B. Romanenko, “The Time Factor in Consciousness Construction”, *Indian Journal of Science and Technology*, vol 9(42), 2016.
- [13] O. D. Shipunova, “The problem of translating meaning: logos in the communication system”, *Scientific and technical statements of the St. Petersburg State Polytechnic University. Humanities and social sciences*, 2011, vol. 2, No 124, pp. 9-15.
- [14] P. Terin, *Mass communication: a study of the experience of the West* (second edition, revised and enlarged). Moscow, 2000.
- [15] O.D. Shipunova, D.I. Kuznetsov, “Communication and the Natural Social Order”, *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences MC SER Publishing, Rome-Italy*, vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 251-260, 2015.