

ОНТОЛОГИЯ И ТЕОРИЯ ПОЗНАНИЯ / ONTOLOGY AND GNOSEOLOGY

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60797/IRJ.2024.145.119>

THE PHENOMENON OF NARRATIVE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INFORMATION SPACE:
EPISTEMOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Research article

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the study of narratives, which are primary information messages that hold a special significance in the communicative realm of society. The authors' evidence shows that narratives are crucial for the development of cultural space, as they are universal semantic patterns that form such a cultural phenomenon as 'beautiful'. Narrative is a powerful tool for revealing the social and ontological meaning of social reality phenomena in language practices, which helps people to develop thinking and perception, as well as to form new ideas within the information society. According to the authors the concept of ontological potential of narratives is of particular importance for understanding the evolution of systems and objects in their reality, allows viewing cultural objects not as static entities, but as dynamic systems of objective nature. Discourses are objective due to their composition of a set of language stable formations and semantic constructions. Research in gnosiology shows that the constructive nature of understanding the world is expressed through the ontological potential of narrative language practices of the category of beautiful. The study of narrative and discourse in the information space allows us to understand how a person forms his views and how they influence his worldview.

Keywords: narrative, discourse, information space, ontological potential.

ФЕНОМЕН НАРРАТИВА В КОНТЕКСТЕ ИНФОРМАЦИОННОГО ПРОСТРАНСТВА:
ЭПИСТЕМОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ

Научная статья

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Аннотация

Данная статья посвящена изучению нарративов – первичных информационных сообщений, имеющих особое значение в коммуникативной сфере общества. Доводы авторов показывают, что нарративы имеют решающее значение для развития культурного пространства, поскольку представляют собой универсальные смысловые закономерности, формирующие такой культурный феномен, как «красота». Нарратив является мощным инструментом раскрытия социального и онтологического смысла явлений социальной реальности в языковых практиках, помогающим людям развивать мышление и восприятие, а также формировать новые идеи в условиях информационного общества. По мнению авторов, концепция онтологического потенциала нарративов имеет особое значение для понимания эволюции систем и объектов в их реальности, позволяет рассматривать объекты культуры не как статические сущности, а как динамические системы объективной природы. Дискурсы объективны в силу своего состава из совокупности устойчивых языковых образований и смысловых конструкций. Исследования в гносеологии показывают, что конструктивность миропонимания выражается через онтологический потенциал повествовательных языковых практик категории прекрасного. Исследование нарратива и дискурса в информационном пространстве позволяет понять, как у человека формируются его взгляды и как они влияют на его мировоззрение.

Ключевые слова: нарратив, дискурс, информационное пространство, онтологический потенциал.

Introduction

In the social consciousness there is a large amount of information, which requires collection, analysis, interpretation and legitimation in the social information space. One of the key sources of such legitimation is narrative. Narrative interests scientists as an independent object of research, as a form of organization of human experience, as well as a methodological basis for social and humanitarian research [1].

Narrative is a story, tale, account, which links together events and facts, subordinating them to common logic. It is an integral component of the knowledge creation process, including the scientific knowledge. «Narration is a verbal form of dissemination of general knowledge and is aimed at solving social, psychological and communicative problems» [2]. Narrative can be used for making easy the understanding and categorization of facts, for making argumentation more convincing, as well

as for interpretation and explanation of theoretical and empirical data. It is especially relevant for the information society, because, as it will be demonstrated below, within the framework of modern information society there are the narratives, which are system-forming for legitimation of some ideas and ideologies. Narratives are ubiquitous as a mechanism for organizing human experience, local due to historically specific ways of perceiving them, have social instrumentality and pragmatic potential [3, P. 38].

The conceptual evolution of narrative has been ambiguous. In the past, narrative was considered as something static and invariable, but recently the authors have started to consider it dynamic and evolving. The increasing complexity and multiplicity of narratives predetermine a tendency to their differentiation and change of meanings, depending on their place in the developed social life.

Besides, with the development of culture and society, narratives become more and more integrated. They intersect and interact with each other, creating more complex and comprehensive ways of perception and understanding of information. In this regard, narrative becomes the main way of information management and social bonds organization.

So, narrative plays an important role in our life, and its evolution still goes on. Understanding the nature of narrative will help us to gain greater insight into the world around us, and the cultural analysis will help us to understand, how different narratives shape personalities and the society in general.

Research methods and principles

However, not all narratives belong to the category of knowledge, which deals with scientific cognition, or to be more precise, has the potential of knowledge objectivity. Some of them can be prone to errors, prepossession or inadequacy in data interpretation. So, it is necessary to distinguish between the scientific and non-scientific narratives and objectively evaluate their epistemological and ontological statuses, which, in their turn, implicitly depend on social legitimation.

On this basis, at evaluating the epistemological status of narrative in the social consciousness, the following core principles should be taken into account.

Firstly, narrative is one of the tools of scientific knowledge formation. The study of scientific knowledge and its legitimation takes place through systematization and writing history. Each scientific theory has its own historical interpretation, which can include restrictions, contradictions, different approaches or open questions. Narratives, which are consumed by our culture, can bring uncertainty and doubts into the formation of socially legitimized knowledge.

Secondly, heritage and traditions in science are often reflected in the narratives, which have been represented since the earliest times. This heritage becomes a primary factor, which can result in sticking in out-of-date theories and methods, while the new, more significant scientific narratives go unnoticed.

Thirdly, narratives can have various hierarchy levels, which can be useful or harmful for social cognition, i.e. for acquiring by a certain society the sets of skills and knowledge, necessary for its functioning. The most effective narratives are those, which are substantiated by deep processing and logical validation, as well as by independent verification, which would allow obtaining new scientific findings.

As a result, narratives have an epistemological status, based on a whole range of scientific rules, principles and practices, which are used in the formation and legitimation of scientific knowledge. The scientific narrative is a necessary element in the process of scientific knowledge creation and its transformation into the form, understandable for the general public.

Thus, the most evident demonstration of the process and of all the dimensions of social-epistemological legitimation of knowledge is the historical knowledge. Within the framework of information society, it has several times undergone restructuring in accordance with the requirements of time. The epistemology of the narrative philosophy of history is, in fact, a special variant of skepticism, and in its most radical, deconstructive version, it is a variant of solipsism. The cause of adoption of skeptical theses in historical knowledge is the specific character of historical knowledge (polysemy of concepts, inapproachability of the past, the great influence of ideological imperatives, difficulty of verification of modal-time perceptions etc.). These theses are based on denying such a category as «historical reality» by narrativist researchers.

The reductive character of narrative philosophy of history is well illustrated in the works by G. White, who created the entity of the narrative philosophy of history [4, P. 93]. White, in fact, created another version of speculative philosophy of history. The peculiarity of his conception should be considered as an attempt to reduce history to a literary genre. The logical-deductive and ideological components of historical narrative directly depend on a prefigurative act, which is of prognostic character and cannot be subject to rational criticism. The past itself, in his opinion, is inaccessible to human cognition and is given to a historian only in the interpreted form.

This, in its turn, generates a «prison of frame», as a historian finds himself shut in a «cage» of a «linguistic protocol», created by him. Narrativism finds the way out of this situation, addressing to irrationalism. So, denying an object inevitably results in deconstruction of a subject. Historical knowledge turns into just a language game, entirely devoid of any objective basis and having nothing to do with the subject. Narrativism, eliminating the scientific rationality, thereby destroys the basis for any possible criticism of it, creating a barrier of impervious hypotheses. The basis of narrativism is formed by several fundamental provisions:

- 1) understanding cognition as a search for indubitableness, which is a heritage of essentialism in historical cognition;
- 2) positive and relational understanding of such categories as «historical reality», «truth» and «historical fact»;
- 3) contraposition of relativism and foundationalism.

Rather an ambiguous and, for certain reasons, «dangerous» result of narrativism is that, by denying difference between speculative forms of philosophy of history, relativizing cognition and denying verifiability of historical conceptions, narrativism removes the protective barriers, aimed to prevent the penetration of pseudoscientific ideas into historical research, facilitates obscurantism and favors the new, more authoritative and more fundamentalistic ideas. In this context, narrativism is a sort of intellectual immunodeficiency virus. In a broader context, it can be applied to post-modernism as a whole.

Main results

As Somerset Maugham wrote in his book «The Art of Fiction»: «Telling stories is intrinsic to a human; the origin of stories dates back to the dawn of time, when a hunter, sitting at the fire in a cave, entertained his fellow hunters with fantastic stories, which he had heard before in similar circumstances» [5, P. 301]. Undoubtedly, a person, throughout their life, as well as the mankind throughout its history, selects a number of events from their experience and resorts to narration for a definite purpose: to influence the senses and thoughts of those, who perceives this discourse. In this case such discourse is based on the narrative. In a situation of intercultural communication, it is necessary to turn to narrative discourse as a form of social action, determined by values and social norms, conventions and social practices, limited and influenced by specific institutional structures in society and real historical processes [6].

M.M. Bakhtin claims that any discourse is dialog-oriented, and that, consequently, the selection of linguistic means is performed under a greater or lesser influence of an addressee [7]. And though a narration is a unidirectional monologic discourse, the situation of narration implies the presence of an addressee (actual or implicit). A storyteller has an effect on a listener, performing the function of a narrator.

The understanding of how narrativeness and discourses influence our comprehension of beauty can be helpful for development of a more open and dynamic communication between different cultures and social groups. Studying the gnoseology of the beautiful allows us to get a better understanding of the importance of narrativeness and discourses in creating our concepts of beauty. Through respecting the individual perception of beauty and understanding our cultural and linguistic dependence in this sphere, we can better connect with other cultures and social groups, in order to create a more respectful and dynamic identity.

Studying the gnoseology of the beautiful can also be helpful for increasing the level of critical thinking in the society. Different narratives and discourses about beauty, created in the mass media, not always can be consistent with reality. They can distort our sensitivity to beauty, by setting incorrect ideals and standards. The gnoseology of the beautiful provides us with tools for critical analysis and evaluation of our concepts of beauty, which in its turn can help us to develop a healthy and open attitude to beauty.

Another important area, studied in the gnoseology of the beautiful, deals with emotional aspects of perceiving beauty. The scientific research indicates that beauty has a profound effect on our emotional state. It can nourish good feelings, such as joy and admiration, and contribute to our wellbeing and satisfaction with life. Studying the emotional perception of the properties of beauty can be useful for a better understanding of how we interact with the world around us and how we can use beauty in our lives to improve our well-being. Beauty is understood here as a positive emotion, a kind of feeling of pleasure, including aesthetic pleasure.

In general, studying gnoseology of the beautiful is important for the better understanding of our concepts of beauty and aesthetic appeal, as well as for developing respect for various perception of beauty in different cultures and social groups. Besides, the knowledge about beauty as an emotional power can help us to build a happier, healthier and satisfying life.

As an example we can take the well-known research in the sphere of anthropology of beauty, carried out in different cultures and on different continents. One of such studies was carried out by an American anthropologist Shirley Xisco, in which she describes how the beauty is perceived by young women in Nicaragua. Xisco discovered that in Nicaragua women are considered beautiful, if they have ample curves, while unstable weight or thinness can cause embarrassment and resentment in women [8].

The other research works, such as the work by a French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, studied the interrelation between social stereotypes and perception of beauty. Bourdieu suggested a concept of cultural capital, which refers to social stereotypes and norms, which influence our perception of aesthetics. «Bourdieu claimed that our perception of beauty is formed in accordance with the cultural capital, which determines what is considered beautiful and aesthetically appealing in a certain society» [8, P. 124]. The third example deals with the work by an American sociologist Howard Becker, who described connection between recognition of aesthetic values and the privileged social positions. Becker wrote that art and beauty are the basic mechanisms for maintaining social distance and separating elite groups from the society. He demonstrated how certain art forms become generally accepted in social elite groups and inaccessible for mass consumption.

All these research works demonstrate, how narrativeness and the discursive practices influence our concepts of beauty and aesthetic appeal. The research findings also indicate that these concepts are not absolute, but depend on social, cultural and linguistic environment, where they emerge. These researches also demonstrate that privileged social positions can have a strong influence on our concepts of beauty and aesthetic appeal, so, they should be taken into account at studying these concepts. This can be defined as an "ontological potential", an expression of constructing reality by means of a narrative, which, in fact, is a story about phenomena in the actual fabric of life. The background for using this notion is contained in the conception, associating a word as a descriptive definition of an object with its actual ontological existential content, which, according to W. V. O. Quine, cannot do without a person with their personal narrativeness [9]. It is the ontological potential of narrative which often allows replacing the reality with it, shaping not only the above-analyzed facts of history and phenomena of culture (such as the concept of the beautiful), but also the events of our life. Thus, for example, there are rather well-developed practices of narrativization of personal history, used in psychology nowadays. And the description of narrativeness ontological potential in linguistic usage of the category of the beautiful demonstrates that the understanding and perception of beauty is dynamic and depends on many social and cultural factors.

As a result, narrativeness is a powerful tool of revealing the social and ontological meaning of social reality phenomena in linguistic practices, which helps people to develop cogitation and perception, as well as to form new ideas within the information society. Nowadays, there is the practical application of this approach in various spheres, from philosophy to practical therapy, social media and political ideology formation, as narratives, as well as the archetypical concepts, shape and help to understand the phenomena of life and their meaning. But, unlike archetypes, narratives are mostly of socially

constructible nature, and can emerge both in the process of a certain social-cultural environment's history, and in the individual creativity of a person.

So, the ontological potential acquires a new quality and starts to belong to possibilities, which exist in actuality, but haven't manifested yet. In other words, it is an ability of an object or a system to produce new forms of existence in the informational space of the society.

The ontological potential can reveal itself at various levels of reality. For example, in physics it can belong to the properties of matter, which can manifest themselves only in specific conditions. In biology it can belong to potential abilities of an organism or a population to adapt to changing conditions of the environment. In the context of information society, it is the informational and communication environment.

The concept of ontological potential in narratology is of great importance for understanding the evolution of systems and objects in reality. It allows considering objects not as static entities, but as dynamic systems, which can change and develop in the course of time in the information context.

It is important to emphasize that the ontological potential not simply reflects possible events in future. It is connected with real possibilities, which can be realized in certain conditions. Therefore, the ontological potential of narrative is something more concrete, than dreams or ideas, as in the polycentric and polymodal space of informational reality there is the development of systems and modeling of the processes of changing.

So, ontological potential is a valuable concept for understanding the structure of reality and its ability for alteration and development. It is one of the basic concepts of ontology and belongs to possibilities, which can be realized in certain conditions.

In some of narratives, the beautiful can be evident and spectacular with a lot of descriptive elements, while in the other – it can be more ontological and obscured. The ontological potential of narrativeness in linguistic practices of the category of the beautiful, based on the gnoseology research, expresses the constructive character of understanding of the world. It allows us to understand that the ideas of beauty are created on the basis of cultural, social and individual factors, and that they depend on how they are described and perceived in various social groups.

Research shows that the description of beauty and aesthetic appeal usually consists of three main components, which describe the appearance, personality and relations between them. These components form a narrative about beauty, which can be unique for different cultures or social groups.

Moreover, research studies of gnoseology of the beautiful refer to the influence of language on our ideas of beauty. They demonstrate that the usage of certain words, associated with beauty, can deepen an impression of the general pleasantness of an object or image, as well as that different linguistic contexts can create different narratives and discourses around beauty.

The research helps us to understand that the mass culture, such as movies, television and internet, as the characteristic phenomena of the informational society, create their own narratives and discourses around, for example, beauty and aesthetic appeal, which belong to general norms and stereotypes. Narratives strive for the truths of experience, which are revealed only after interpreting the narrative in terms of the contexts that formed it and the worldviews that influenced it: "the study of real people with real life experiences in the real world takes place in narrative analysis through the interpretation of the meaning that people attach to the events that they experience [10, P. 41].

Conclusion

One of the significant conclusions of narratives gnoseology is that our culture and social surroundings play an important role in determining what we perceive and how we describe it. Narrative and discourse influence the perception of various phenomena of social reality and the world around us, which allows us to better understand and explain differences in the ideas of the beautiful, of various historical facts, which have rather a wide range of meanings in different cultures and social groups. Discourse as a certain conceptual and linguistic "value grid" is a mode of expressing narrative in this variety of "mental models".

The use of narratives and discourses to understand the information space of culture allows us to consider them as epistemological phenomena with enormous cognitive potential.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Рецензия

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Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Review

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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