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**Epistemic coercion and epistemic necessity in scientific cognition:  
a philosophical analysis**

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**Abstract.** The article includes a presentation and analysis of the discussions on epistemic coercion in the journal “Epistemology and Philosophy of Science” (Vol. 61, No. 3) in 2024. On this basis, the main philosophical and epistemological features of epistemic coercion were investigated. First, the views of a number of philosophers on the concept of “epistemic coercion” of the American philosopher Steve Turner are briefly outlined. On this basis, the different positions of the philosophers participating in the discussion are explained. Specific examples are selected from their ideas. The problem is analyzed against the background of different approaches. As a result, a comparison of different positions regarding the philosophical meaning of epistemic obligation allows us to draw a number of general conclusions. The article puts forward the thesis that the meaning of the concept of “epistemic obligation” in the understanding of S. Turner carries a certain paradox. This paradox is associated with the need to carry out scientific creativity regardless of the individual and within the framework of certain a priori conditions in each historical period. That is, the creative personality in all cases is naturally influenced by factors that depend on the nature of a specific individual, social and collective coexistence. This is how any situation of awareness arises. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to speak of “epistemic necessity” rather than “epistemic compulsion” in light of modern scientific demands. This is the main thesis of the paper. The studies of P. Feyerabend and S. Fuller, within the framework of social epistemology and the epistemology of cognitive distribution, occupy a special place in the scientific basis of the study. It is the interplay of cognitive, social, political and scientific-organisational aspects that constitutes the scientific and theoretical basis of the whole article under a common epistemological “umbrella”. To achieve the scientific goal set in the article, an interdisciplinary approach was used. At this time, such methodological principles as intersubjectivity, synergetic formation and dissemination of knowledge were applied. In accordance with these methodological principles, the method of synergetic integration was used.

**Keywords:** distribution of knowledge; social epistemology; scientific knowledge; intersubjectivity; disinformation; scientific expertise; freedom of scientific creativity; cognitive environment; epistemic damage

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**Эпистемическое принуждение и эпистемическая необходимость  
в научном познании: философский анализ**

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**Аннотация.** Статья включает презентацию и анализ дискуссий об эпистемическом принуждении в журнале «Эпистемология и философия науки» (т. 61, № 3) в 2024 году. На этой основе были исследованы основные философские и эпистемологические особенности эпистемического принуждения. Сначала кратко изложены взгляды ряда философов на концепцию «эпистемического принуждения» американского философа Стива Тёрнера. На этой основе объясняются разные позиции философов, участвующих в дискуссии. Приводятся конкретные примеры, предложенные философами для иллюстрации своих идей. Проблема анализируется на фоне разных подходов. Сравнение различных позиций относительно философского значения эпистемического обязательства позволяет сделать ряд общих выводов. В статье выдвигается следующий тезис: значение понятия «эпистемическое обязательство» в понимании С. Тёрнера несет в себе определенный парадокс, связанный с необходимостью осуществления научного творчества независимо от личности и в рамках определенных априорных условий в каждый исторический период. То есть творческая личность во всех случаях естественным образом находится под влиянием факторов, которые зависят от характера конкретного индивидуального, социального и коллективного сосуществования. Так возникает любая ситуация осознания. Поэтому разговор об «эпистемической необходимости», а не об «эпистемическом принуждении» сам по себе представляется более адекватным в свете современных научных требований. Это основной тезис статьи. В научной базе исследования особое место занимают работы П. Фейерабенда и С. Фуллера в рамках социальной эпистемологии и эпистемологии когнитивного распределения. Именно взаимодействие когнитивных, социальных, политических и научно-организационных аспектов составляет научно-теоретическую основу статьи в целом под общим гносеологическим «зонтиком». Для достижения научной цели, поставленной в статье, использован междисциплинарный подход. Были применены такие методологические принципы, как интерсубъектность, синергетическое формирование и распространение познания. В соответствии с этими методологическими принципами был использован метод синергетической интеграции.

**Ключевые слова:** распределение познания; социальная эпистемология; научное знание; интерсубъективность; дезинформация; научная экспертиза; свобода научного творчества; когнитивная среда; эпистемический ущерб

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**Introduction.** In recent years, one of the issues that has been widely discussed in the philosophical understanding of scientific cognition is the concept of “epistemic coercion”. In 2024, a comprehensive discussion on this topic was opened in the journal *Epistemology & Philosophy of Science*. Epistemic coercion is analyzed within the framework of social epistemology. American philosopher Steven Turner examines the problem in the context of a cognitive situation that encompasses both “belief” and “scientific knowledge”. He argues that epistemic coercion “harms” both belief and scientific knowledge equally.

According to his conclusion, philosophers should neutralize this “harm”. He considers this duty as a natural “epistemic responsibility”. This is also because, in Turner's view, “disinformation has turned this into an institutional practice”. (Turner, 2024: 21).

Continuing his thoughts, S. Turner writes that COVID-19, even in free societies, led to “a broad pressure on knowledge both within science and in terms of expert opinions”.

This is already a very serious claim in the context of philosophical thought on scientific cognition. Because in fact it means that epistemic coercion in scientific cognition becomes a rule, a norm, not only on an individual, but also on an institutional scale. In a broader epistemological aspect, it can be attributed to the essence and nature of scientific understanding in general. S. Turner considers this natural and puts the issue as follows: epistemic coercion and resistance to it are “an integral part of science and discourse as a whole” (Turner, 2024: 21).

Finally, the American philosopher also emphasizes a factor that is highly important for the modern era in the context of epistemic coercion. He writes, “The development of digital technologies (such as the emergence of social networks) has created new epistemic possibilities and forms”. This process “necessitates a re-examination of the possibilities of resistance against the coercive

powers of new technologies” (Turner, 2024: 21).

These ideas clearly show that epistemic limitation refers to the “boundaries of understanding” created by various factors arising from both the internal standards and norms of science and the socio-cultural environment. In other words, the researcher, regardless of their will, cannot step outside, the figuratively speaking “cognitive corridor” that arises from the interaction between the internal characteristics of scientific cognition and the socio-cultural environment in two aspects. In other words, this can be called “epistemic coercion”.

One of the interesting aspects of the formulation of S. Turner's problem is related to the impact of disinformation on scientific cognition as a whole. It is important to philosophically understand that this aspect of the issue is related not only to its purely cognitive aspects, but also to the practical application of knowledge and information.

Naturally, philosophers cannot have a unanimous stance on such a serious claim. There are different approaches and positions. Their comparative analysis allows for drawing a number of conclusions that are significant for contemporary philosophy. At the same time, the formulation of the scientific problem in this way requires an appropriate methodological approach.

The article prioritizes an interdisciplinary approach for this purpose. Within this framework, the methodological principles of intersubjectivity, synergetic formation, and distributed cognition are applied.

The method of synergetic integration is used according to the chosen methodology.

**The Scientific-Theoretical and Methodological Basis of the Article.** The study is based on the approaches to the problem of P. Feyerabend (Feyerabend, 1978), S. Fuller (Fuller, 2018), S. Turner (Turner, 2024), B. Miller (Miller, 2024), I.T. Kasavin (Касавин, Столярова, 2024), R. Sassover (Sassover, 2024).

In the 1970s, P. Feyerabend criticized the epistemic “attempts to erase compulsion” from the history of science. He did not accept “the denial of the elements of compulsion in expertise”. His position can be briefly characterized as follows: science and expertise are fundamentally political and compulsory, and therefore it is impossible to erase them from the account (Feyerabend, 1978: 74-90).

Philosophers accept this thesis of P. Feyerabend as a prerequisite and therefore the question “if there are a priori and fundamentally binding epistemic constraints, how can political regimes and cognitive norms be optimally adapted to them in each historical period?” becomes relevant.

To answer this question, they focus on a point that is characteristic of the modern stage and emphasized by S. Fuller in the context of social epistemology. This point, as a unity of the cognitive and socio-cultural aspects of scientific knowledge in general, has a relevant impact against the background of the “post-truth stage of thinking” and the concept of “disinformation” that has become more apparent recently. S. Fuller argues that philosophers presenting themselves as seekers of truth is, to some extent, a form of “disinformation”. This is because philosophers view “truth” not as objective reality, but as a “brand”, and in this sense, they are “searching for customers for their truths”. Therefore, both “truth” and the concept created around it are inherently refutable. As a result, philosophers will always be in different positions when it comes to proving what is true and what is false (Fuller, 2018: 25).

Based on S. Fuller's approach, philosophers characterize “post-truth” as a “strong difference between the visible and reality”. Since this contradiction can never be fully resolved, they ultimately present the image as reality. The main issue in philosophy is related to the search for an answer to the question, “Does the frequent change or stabilization of these images lead to ‘truth’?”. Therefore, “post-truth” is a phenomenon that expresses the widespread nature of the boundaries of substantiated truth. It is precisely

in this context that S. Fuller compares the relationship between politics and science (Лисанюк, Перова, 2020: 225).

S. Turner, based on the emphasized positions of P. Feyerabend and S. Fuller, approaches the issue in the context presented in the introduction. B. Miller, on the other hand, focuses more on the sources of the expert's ability to epistemically compel others. Specifically, in times of crisis, granting experts exclusive rights to determine the truth constitutes a specific epistemic compulsion (Miller, 2024: 70).

I.T. Kasavin, on the other hand, approaches epistemic coercion in a broader perspective – in the context of the scientific community's search for internal and external freedom. His main thesis is that the modern scientific community, striving for autonomy in creativity, constantly “hesitates between responsibility in the face of social challenges”. In this dynamic, science is formed and the search for scientific truth continues endlessly (Касавин, Столярова, 2024: 7-19).

R. Sassover, on the other hand, looks at the problem more from a socio-political perspective. In his approach, “a contradiction arises between the power of politicians and the desire for freedom of individuals”. This determines the main content of epistemic coercion. It is interesting that R. Sassover prefers to follow the recommendations of state experts when resolving this contradiction (Sassover, 2024: 39).

Thus, the theoretical basis of the scientific problem investigated in the article is the interaction of cognitive, social, political and scientific organizational aspects. The methodological basis of research in this direction is such methodological principles as intersubjectivity, synergistic formation and distribution of cognition, which have their own content and functions.

Inter-subjectivity implies that the interaction of cognitive subjects is an absolute condition for the philosophical understanding of epistemic constraint.

The principle of synergistic formation reflects the self-organizing nature of the process as a whole.

Finally, knowledge distribution refers to the way in which knowledge is actually distributed among different subjects (these can be research groups and creative teams) belonging to the cognitive and socio-cultural sphere.

In the understanding of complex systems, this rule is primarily demonstrated. In the article, this rule itself is also considered as an epistemic constraint.

For this form of philosophical understanding of the issue, the synergistic integration method is preferred, as it allows for the formation of a unified logical picture of the propositions.

**Research results and discussion.** The discussion over epistemic coercion is based on the content of the concept of “scientific truth”. Because it is assumed that in the conditions of epistemic coercion, it is impossible in principle to speak of objective scientific truth. In all cases, it will be debatable whether scientific knowledge is objectively true or not. In S. Turner's approach, he even discusses the inevitable harm to scientific knowledge. He supports this by referencing P. Feyerabend's thesis, which asserts that, in general, human scientific activity in society is inevitably influenced by political, cultural, and other factors. At the current stage, the formation of scientific knowledge has become a more complex and contradictory process.

S. Turner believes that this is due to the institutionalization of disinformation. The boundaries of this problem have significantly changed as a result of events that have occurred in recent years. Among these, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a large number of false information and disinformation emerged. Despite all this being explained by some security argument, its main essence is “interference in changing the cognitive environment”. That is, forces outside the scientific community, under various pretexts (for example, ensuring “cognitive security”, etc.), put pressure on the objective formation

of knowledge, in a way “extinguishing” it. This has increased even more in the era of digitalization (Turner, 2024: 24).

As a result of all these changes, according to S. Turner, the overall picture is that, alongside the political conditions that always affect the outcome of scientific activity, the influence of the virtual information network has also strengthened in the digital environment. With this, the boundaries of epistemic necessity have expanded further, and the methods of influence have increased.

For example, according to studies conducted in 2022, social networks have a greater impact on teenage girls. Their ability to resist is more limited compared to boys. Boys can distance themselves from social networks (as a virtual information space) by engaging in sports. However, girls, due to their habits, tend to fall under the influence of virtual realities, and as a result, their “cognitive environment” is distorted (Twenge, Haidt, Lozano, Cummins, 2022: 2-9; Turner, 2024: 36-37).

All of this ultimately makes epistemic necessity even more relevant, and the need to resist this situation in the name of scientific knowledge arises.

However, it is not entirely clear philosophically who will form this “resistance” and how. If we are talking about total control and information influence, then this is, first of all, a seriously developed and is a system with specific purposes. In what ways can the scientific community influence a highly systematic and complex process, the purpose of which is clear only to the “clients”? If the political regime stands behind them, the situation becomes even more complicated. It seems that it is under the influence of such moments that philosophers try to understand the problem philosophically from various aspects.

Boaz Miller emphasizes one aspect of S. Turner's approach. He writes that S. Turner discusses various forms of epistemic coercion. The key point here is to identify the source of epistemic coercion. B. Miller, further concretizing his approach, argues that epistemic coercion in the digital environment

is even stronger in crisis situations and in this capacity actually turns into an “epistemic Leviathan”. The state stands at the source of this and implements it through experts. B. Miller writes: “Experts have given the state the right to take away the freedom of its citizens. They strengthen this with the authority and objectivity of science. In return, the state has granted experts the right to determine the truth and has ensured its enforcement” (Miller, 2024: 71).

In this way, B. Miller puts forward the idea that in the modern stage, epistemic coercion primarily stems from the state-expert relationship in critical stages, likening it to a “dragon”.

I.T. Kasavin and O.E. Stolyarova approach the problem in a broader philosophical context. This approach also encompasses S. Turner's position. Because I.T. Kasavin and O.E. Stolyarova view epistemic coercion as a component of scientific epistemology in general, in the interaction between the freedom and responsibility of researchers. They approach science in a synthesis of two aspects. First, science is a phenomenon that, as a responsible rational choice, “bears responsibility for supporting stability and order”. Second, science is a “field of freedom” in which the search for new knowledge, the creation and discovery of new possibilities for theoretical and practical activity are of the highest value. Therefore, in science, there has always been a search for a “balance between the internal order of scientific research and the external orientation towards order” (Касавин, Столярова, 2024: 7-8). In this sense, the authors explain U. Beck's idea that “science is a constructor of prohibitions” (Bek, 2000; Касавин, Столярова, 2024: 8).

However, I.T. Kasavin and O.E. Stolyarova are convinced that, against the backdrop of epistemic coercion, modern scientific cognition opens up new opportunities for research freedom. Among the signs of this, they point to the concepts of “distributed” and “postnormal” science. Overall, “science, as a leading social

institution, shows society the path to creativity and freedom” (Касавин, Столярова, 2024: 19).

R. Sassover transforms the issue in the discussion by focusing on the nature of the relationship between the authority of the scientific community and the independence of individuals. According to his conclusion, it is more appropriate to approach epistemic coercion in the modern stage within this context. In this prism, R. Sassover writes that S. Turner draws conclusions “with intuitive feelings” without sufficient justification. He also states that S. Turner's term “epistemic autonomy” is a “myth” (Sassover, 2024: 40).

In reality, the issue matter is about the balance between individual freedom and state responsibility in modern societies. There may be certain differences between different countries. However, in no case can an individual act completely freely, because he is a citizen of the state. Therefore, at all times “the individual must be limited by the social, political, moral, epistemological boundaries within which he exists” (Sassover, 2024: 49).

Against this background, it is more accurate to speak of “collective research” (J. Dewey) (Brown, 2021: 210-212).

Thus, the discussions conducted show that epistemic coercion is relevant for modern philosophy and epistemology, and the process of its reflection continues. The different approaches of philosophers indicate that, in addition to the complexity of the problem, it is more related to modern socio-cultural and spiritual dynamics. In this regard, we can talk about an increasingly intensive philosophical understanding of epistemic coercion. In the highlighted context, it is possible to draw several conclusions.

Discussions around epistemic coercion show that there are several controversial points both in the formulation and in the explanation of this problem. On the one hand, philosophers, including S. Turner, naturally accept that the norms of science, the historical period, and the political regime influence the cognitive aspect of the scientific creativity process and the organization of scientific

activity. Overall, this has been the case throughout human history (P. Feyerabend), and even some philosophers are of the opinion that science is essentially a system of prohibitions (U. Beck).

At the same time, the philosophers engaged in the discussion accept epistemic coercion, but also speak of resistance against it. S. Turner discusses the types of this resistance. The paradox arises from here. Because if the existence of epistemic coercion in every historical period and in every cognitive situation is not dependent on the individual, then how and why should there be resistance to it?

Therefore, for example, M.S. Kochin considers such a formulation of the problem superficial. According to his position, firstly, in all cases, by controlling the people who speak and write, we can generally “control the discourse”. This means that forbidding someone to speak is not a scientific approach. In other words, epistemic coercion in scientific cognition cannot take on a specific content – it creates an endless landscape of discussion and debate. Secondly, we can control “superficial points” through the method we call “epistemic coercion”. This, in turn, means that someone, by some means, is attempting to “subjugate and mobilize” a certain cognitive process. So, on what grounds should we consider this kind of “coercion” as scientifically more objective and consistent? (Kochin, 2024: 77-79).

A number of philosophers, however, generally argue that “resistance” by “compulsion” does not have an absolute meaning. For example, epistemic resistance in one aspect gives the impression of being a type of epistemic compulsion when approached from another aspect. In this case, the three types of resistance identified by S. Turner – informational (severe restriction or complete elimination of cognitive possibilities), normalization (pre-imposition of certain cognitive taboos, “stops”, “stigmas”, cognitive idols) and legitimization – as concepts with relative semantic meaning, can perform an epistemological function depending on the

method, form and direction of the approach as a whole (Kostina, 2024: 62-67).

An epistemological comparison of the above discussions and the last two conclusions shows that, although the issue of epistemic coercion is interesting and thought-provoking, its philosophical formulation does not seem constructive. In general, it is difficult to conclude that epistemic coercion can be philosophically effective in S. Turner's presentation. Because there are many paradoxical and contradictory philosophical and scientific points here.

In our opinion, in the philosophical aspect, we can speak of “epistemic necessity” rather than “epistemic compulsion”. “Epistemic necessity” means that every process of understanding takes place within predetermined conditions. The semantic field of this concept essentially acquires its philosophical meaning in the “realm” that includes any cognitive process. If the subject falls into the state of a scientific process of understanding, he “carries” “epistemic necessity” in himself. The concept of “compulsion” means falling under the influence of factors of various nature in the course of the process (understanding). The root of being influenced by such factors cannot be determined in the specific cognitive situation. This is because what is considered “necessity” actually expresses the necessary conditions that are predetermined, independent of the subject, before the cognitive situation. In this sense, “epistemic necessity” can be intuited aprioristically, but logically understanding it within the cognitive process is not possible. That is, the subject cannot realize how the cognition is carried out within all the conditions of the situation. For this, they must transcend the temporal cognitive realm. This, however, requires the establishment of different epistemological conditions. It seems that philosophers need to create a new epistemological concept.

**Conclusion.** Several conclusions can be drawn from the discussions surrounding the philosophical-epistemological problem examined in the article.

It seems that the discussion of the issue of “epistemological coercion” in philosophy remains relevant. Philosophers are trying to achieve its philosophical understanding against the background of a large number of factors.

However, there are researchers who do not agree with the current framing of the issue. Therefore, it is also possible for the discussions to be conducted from different aspects.

The current management of the problem of “epistemic coercion” is paradoxically posed in the prism of the epistemological method and methodological conditions of modern scientific cognition, which leads to a logical purification. The solution to this paradox can be thought of as “extracting” the entire analysis to a broader and different level.

From this perspective, it is possible to formulate the thesis that the expression “epistemic necessity” proposed in the article is more adequate.

Finally, we can conclude that the concept of “epistemic coercion” is highly relevant to contemporary philosophical, epistemological, and scientific discourse. We emphasize the need for further philosophical research in this direction.

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