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Research Article

Cognitive Dimension of Security[1]

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Abstract. The present article is devoted to the analysis of the algocognitive culture, the new reality that humanity has already entered, but remains far from being understood. Today we can speak about dissolution of the concept of privacy: almost all actions of a person, including his daily movements, his social circle and values it shares, his correspondence and purchases are automatically observed, and completely transparent to information corporations. The problem of fake news has become insurmountable: its appearance in the information cascade is immediately converted into an event, making later investigations and refutations almost obsolete. A "cancel culture" has emerged, within which there is *a priori* no criteria for good and evil, where it has become possible to "delete" any arrays of knowledge that do not meet the requirements of the self-proclaimed "new ethics" from the information circulation, and to ostracize people associated with them. The authors compare the current state of affairs with the era of the dominance of sophists in ancient Greece, when the truth was determined depending on the situation, and finds relevant parallels. In this context, the authors formulate the concept of "cognitive vulnerability": the new reality makes it possible to control of the masses, manipulating both their consumer and political behaviour. The authors define network reality as an alternative system of socialization, where the "network" ontology and values turn out to be more competitive than real ones, and therefore *de facto* displace them. The latter becomes possible due to a kind of "splitting" of the personality, when the emotional reaction is *de facto* separated from real goal-oriented activity, and connected with virtual reality. Ruling algorithms in social networks are aimed at achieving this goal: as an example, the authors turn to the recent investigation carried out by *The Wall Street Journal* regarding Facebook: the MSI algorithm used by the latter provokes disputes and splits on every occasion. *De facto,* this leads to a situation where American information corporations are moving towards having sovereignty over the consciousness of external societies. This challenge has already been met by China, which nationalized algorithms on September 1, 2021, and handed control over them to the Communist Party. The authors analyse the steps taken by China and comes to the conclusion that, if this tactic works, China will become not only an economic, but also an ideological alternative to the United States, thereby making a bid to restore a bipolar world political system.

Keywords: algocognitive culture; cognitive security; social networks; cancel culture; post truth; colour revolutions.

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With the events in Belarus that took place in 2020, the post-Soviet space suddenly opened the door to a new reality, which until then had been something external and distant, something that could happen in political systems which are either unstable, as was the case with the Arab Spring, or suffer from significant internal rifts, as happened in Venezuela and Hong Kong. The steadily increasing level of digitalization of attempts to carry out "colour revolutions" has been largely ignored by researchers: it has been recorded, but only as an additional factor that does not have any great bearing on events. Meanwhile, the protests in Hong Kong and Belarus have shown that quantity has already transformed into a new, quite independent quality, with digitalization becoming a new factor of vulnerability affecting even quite stable political systems.

Indeed, the new reality crept up slowly and imperceptibly, in no hurry to demonstrate its power. What we saw did not make us happy. It turned out that digitalization was first and foremost a digitization of social technologies, which added a precise and targeted approach to their arsenal, largely eliminating any notion of the humane. In the new reality, it is possible to control the minds, attitudes and ideas of a statistically significant fraction of society, in the literal sense of the word, when step-by-step commands sent to smartphones are performed by the crowd in real time. Such control does not lose its effectiveness if it is exercised from the outside, being placed beyond the physical reach of such power. Finally, the "digital mass" – a totality of individuals controlled by their smartphones – is capable of demonstrating a previously unthinkable combination of the qualities of stable and short-lived social formations, maintaining for months a split between the irrational emotionality of the crowd and the cynical rationality of an external leadership center (Koktysh, 2021: 91–110).

The unfolding future has two dimensions.

The first is the technical dimension – the globalization of networks and the steadily increasing role of smartphones, which have generated the phenomenon of an algocognitive culture in which algorithms, facilitating everyday life, thereby steadily take it under their soft control and begin to determine an increasing number of actions and behaviours. At the same time, targeted communication continues even if individuals are united in a crowd, which is what keeps it emotionally charged as a key condition for staying in a split state, when the function of rational reflection is delegated to the external centre. The efforts of the Belarusian authorities to counteract such external influence in the autumn of 2020 were only partly effective: slowing down mobile internet speeds, and even blocking it entirely, temporarily made it more difficult to coordinate the protests, but failed to stop them. This was not enough to restore the authorities' monopoly over agenda-setting, and the "mental ferment" continued for several months.

There is also a substantive dimension, in which a large mass of individuals can succumb to external influence, *de facto* accepting the externally imposed system of ideological and value coordinates without any significant attempt to critically revise them: let us call this the phenomenon of cognitive vulnerability. In Belarus, for example, both the channel for coordinating the protests – the Telegram messenger structured

for imperative top-down communication with minimal discussion – and the genre of protests chosen by the organizers, which turned them into a one-strike tool, played a part. It programmed both the explosive growth in the number of protesters at the first stage, and the inevitable loss of meaningful perspective of the protests afterwards. The active use of game and quest elements became such a genre: a significant part of the protesters found themselves inside a fascinating game with a carnival setting and a sense of non-reality, omnipotence, impunity, and, at the same time, loss of meaning. After a couple of weeks, it became obvious that the task of evolving the protests in a meaningful way would be impossible to achieve. Thereafter, the protests evolved into a gradually fading and pointless "game for sake of playing a game." The Belarusian authorities sensed that moment and, showing restraint, allowed their emotions to cool down, after which they gradually regained control. The limitations we have identified do not cancel out the main question about the newly discovered possibility of a cognitive impact on a particular society from the outside, including through the creation of a digital crowd at the right point in time and space.

Has cognitive vulnerability become an intrinsic characteristic of societies today? And will it continue to increase? To what extent do algorithms program our perception of a reality that is not directly related to use – primarily political and cultural reality? As we begin to consider these questions, let us dwell on the methodological aspects of our study.

It is logical to first question the validity of the term "algocognitive culture," which is already common in English-language discourse (Lavelock, 2019), but sounds at the very least unfamiliar to Russians. In other words, can we talk about the systemic influence of network reality on shaping the picture of the world and the values of a statistically significant part of any modern society? The authors believe that the answer should be positive. The successful experience of the Barack Obama administration in practical modeling of the cognitive system (Sergeev et al., 2011) has convincingly demonstrated that the key role in shaping the cognitive system of an individual is played by his or her social environment, primarily the social network: it becomes the reference source with which an individual relates his or her ideas about the world, values and goals. Combining the ideas of several Western founders of cognitive science, in particular Nathan Leites, Robert Abelson, Robert Axelrod, Christer Johnsson, G. Matthew Bonham and Michael Shapiro (Leites, 1951; Abelson, 1987; Axelrod, 1976; Jonsson, 1982; Bonham, Shapiro, 1977), with the theory of metaphor of George Lakoff (Lakoff, 2004) and applying them to the analysis of the network subject made it possible to build a relevant model that provided good analytical and predictive results. An important outcome of the aforementioned study was the discovery of integrators – coinciding meanings and interpretations that make the network a network.

The "objectification" of the network, that is, its emancipation from the individual and transformation into an entity (albeit a virtual one) that is external to the individual, amplifies this given reality many times over. The role of the mediator in communication between the individual and the network is played by algorithms that, while sim-

plifying communication and making it more comfortable, at the same time structure it, thereby also contributing to the shaping of the individual's worldview, values, and goals. Algorithms do not emerge by themselves, they are created by social networks, which, as a commercial project, are focused primarily on their own effectiveness – which predetermines the set of integrators embedded in the algorithms. The basic cognitive integrator publicly proclaims the idea of freedom: the user of networks indeed gains the freedom of instant communication with anyone, regardless of distance, time of day, weather and a host of other material factors. On the other hand, for the social networks themselves, this freedom has the highest commercial efficiency: mediation has become a very profitable business, while the social networks themselves are free. This serves as an empirical basis for the tentative conclusion that algocognitive culture has become a realized phenomenon that must be reckoned with.

Challenges of the Algocognitive Culture

The priority of mediator profitability explains the fact that the rapid expansion of algorithms into the social sphere has been accompanied by a gradual but steady transformation of online reality into a degrading Akerlof's "market for lemons" from live journals to Facebook, Twitter and TikTok, with the underlying message becoming more marketable and therefore more widespread and, as a result, increasingly shorter and less meaningful with each iteration. But there are two sides to the coin here: the market is a two-way road, and it is almost impossible to draw a line between pandering to the tastes and demands of the audience and cultivating those tastes and demands. A joint study conducted by Cambridge University and New York University convincingly confirmed that networks serve to fuel divisions and deepen the polarization of society (Rathje, Bavel, Linden, 2021). In particular, an analysis of 2.7 million tweets and Facebook posts showed that direct attacks on an opponent because of his or her political views are far more likely to be reposted than a simple expression of emotion or moral indignation. According to Karelov, in the new online reality, which has dramatically expanded its presence in everyday life due to the COVID-19 pandemic, social status is not about money and power but about the number of likes and followers.[2] It is not a balanced and restrained position that wins the sympathy of the latter, but a radical stance, when the discussion of any problem results in the irreconcilable conflict of the opponents. A good illustration of this process is the split described by Jonathan Swift in his *Gulliver's Travels* over which end to crack an egg: on a rounded big end or a pointed little end. In the end, there emerged two radical parties – the Big-Endians

[2] Karelov S. 2021. On Big Changes in Societies, States, and Individuals. And Why We Must be Ready for More Changes. In *Yandex Zen*. 28 June. Available at: https://zen.yandex.ru/media/the_world_is_not_easy/o-bolshih-peremenah-v-obscestvah-gosudarstvah-i-lichnostiah-60d8bde0c9d05740d85f35e0 (accessed: 04.10.2021).

and the Little-Endians. But there was no third, moderate party that, say, would suggest cracking an egg in the middle – despite the fact that, from a culinary perspective, rather than an abstract discussion, the third way seems to be the most appropriate.

The situation is all the more serious as the networks have solved the problem of connecting the virtual dimension to reality by finding a way to convert virtual capital into real capital: the number of subscribers easily converts to money, influence and power, a principle that works whether it is a blogger, an idol of the youth or a politician. They have gone from the status of mediator to that of moderator, so it is logical to assume the emergence of a parallel reality of the virtual ecosystem, which can have at least as much impact on the latter as real life, as exemplified by Meta (formerly Facebook), a corporation recently banned in Russia. If in reality it takes effort, knowledge, and skills to gain social status, in the virtual ecosystem, all that is needed is the ability to regularly create hype. Consequently, the virtual ecosystem is necessarily perceived by its inhabitants as an ideal tool for enhancing one's status in the quickest possible way and in the violation of the standard rules – by hacking reality. The virtuality of what is happening and indeed its gamification easily nullifies the Kantian moral imperative inherent in reality.

Having spotted this effect of social networks, network corporations immediately saw its potential as a marketing tool and set about strengthening it dramatically. This is evidenced, in particular, by an investigation published by the US newspaper *The Wall Street Journal.* Internal Facebook documents obtained by the journalists showed that its management was aware that the Instagram platform, which it had acquired in 2012, creates an inferiority complex in one in every three teenage girls,[3] but this circumstance had no effect on the further formation of content. The market rationales here are obvious: an audience weighed down by a complex of any kind feels the need to get rid of these hang-ups, and is thus far more giving from the point of view of marketing than an unburdened audience, with American teenagers alone spending 50% more time on Instagram than on Facebook, visiting it four and a half times more often. In December 2017, a number of changes were made to Facebook's algorithms, first of all to the algorithm for displaying its most visited product, the news feed. It was based on the concept of MSI (meaningful social interactions), according to which a "like" is rated at 1 point, a "dislike" 5 points, and a repost 15 or 30 points, depending on the presence or absence of a meaningful comment added to the repost.[4]

[3] Wells G., Horwitz J., Seetharaman D. 2021. The Facebook Files. Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls, Company Documents Show. *The Wall Street Journal.* 14 September. Available at: https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739?mod=trending_now_news_1 (accessed: 04.10.2021).

[4] Hagey K., Horwitz J. 2021. The Facebook Files. Facebook Tried to Make Its Platform a Healthier Place. It Got Angrier Instead. *The Wall Street Journal.* 15 September. Available at: https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-algorithm-change-zuckerberg- 11631654215?mod=series_facebookfiles (accessed: 04.10.2021).

A predictable result of this change was an increase in conflict, and with it an increase in traffic and marketization: the wider the dissemination of the post, the more people become involved in the dispute, which turns into a rapidly growing virtual funnel: arguments in favour of one position or another lead to long comments and buttons other than likes, which leads to more and more new people seeing the post in their newsfeeds. Fake news, inflammatory posts and direct attacks on competitors have become a more effective tool for promoting the interests of any entity, including political parties, than positive and political posts.[5] In the context of the primacy of marketization, it is not surprising that Facebook, with the knowledge of its administration, has made the widest use of shadow and criminal structures for obviously criminal business in third countries, from human trafficking to drug trafficking.[6]

What is remarkable is that social networks have revealed, or created, another phenomenon of virtuality – the possibility of splitting the emotional from the rational. At this stage, moderators discovered their abilities as creators of an alternate reality. The point is that in the network dimension, emotions retain their full power and significance, despite the fact that experiencing them is tied to a fictitious reality with an alternative logic of stimuli, incentives and rewards, that is, with alternative systems of values and worldview coordinates. This alternative turns out to be more attractive and competitive than reality, because network reality, *first*, can provide a minimum level of frustration and suffering (if, following the Nietzschean interpretation of the Upanishads, we understand the latter as the time interval between the appearance of desire and its satisfaction) and, *second*, the programmatically acceptable possibility of a positive result and the emotional reward associated with it in ten cases out of ten, which does not happen in real life. In other words, in an alternative ecosystem, any participant is guaranteed a more satisfying and vibrant emotional life than in the real world; this means that both the values supported by virtuality and the worldview frame of reference will become more competitive and convincing. This splitting, or parallel existence in two dimensions, inevitably leads to their comparison and to growing frustration, and consequently to the need to get rid of it, which, in general, is not difficult: algorithms, creating complexes and needs, immediately offer an easy way to overcome them based on a new iteration of the same cognitive integrator of release – either by copying actions that bring success in the network, or by purchasing those symbols that are attributes of network status, or by both. Of course, these practices, and with them attitudes, will be automatically transferred to real life as well. So, we can see the emergence of an alternative system of socialization, more powerful than the traditional one, and controlled by algorithms, that is, by network corporations, but not by states.

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Scheck J.,Purnell N., Horwitz J. 2021. The Facebook Files. Facebook Employees Flag Drug Cartels and Human Traffickers. The Company's Response Is Weak, Documents Show. *The Wall Street Journal*. 16 September. Available at: https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-drug-cartels-human-traffickers-response-is-weak-documents-11631812953?mod=series_facebookfiles (accessed: 06.10.2021).

The action of algorithms can be compared to the effect of drugs, which frees emotional satisfaction from the connection with rational activity, turning it into an intrinsically valuable and self-sufficient act, the achievement of which gradually begins to take over the whole life of the drug-addict. In this context, the high number of school shootings, formerly exclusive to the United States as the leader of digitalization, but now spreading beyond it, can logically be explained as revenge on reality for the fact that its system of status distribution is strikingly inconsistent with the virtual one, and the merits gained in virtuality do not convert into real status. Perhaps even more problematic is the situation when they do convert and such figures as Danya Milokhin or Morgenstern are promoted by serious corporations to the role of idols for young people. From a business point of view, it makes sense: the transformation of a person without education or other merits into an idol stimulates the desire to repeat their success, for which, in theory, it is enough to take out a consumer loan for the initial promotion. In terms of damage to social capital, the loss from the appearance of such idols is hard to calculate.

As we can see, the algorithms-inspired liberation from the complexes they produce through consumption qualitatively changes the notion of rationality and reasonableness. Max Horkheimer pointed out in this regard that rationalism is possible solely as an assessment of alternatives to achieving the goal: "It is essentially concerned with means and ends, with the adequacy of procedures for purposes more or less taken for granted and supposedly self-explanatory. It attaches little importance to the question whether the purposes as such are reasonable" (Horkheimer, 2011: 8–9). The implicit goal of consumption logically leads to a qualitative reevaluation of culture, which serves as a value system of coordinates, according to which the external world is arranged for the individual. As we have already noted, the replacement by algorithms of the act of comprehension with the act of possession in a new, virtual (and therefore doubly illusory) dimension leads to the next iteration of simplifying the axiological perception of reality, simplifying and flattening it, levelling even the symbols to simpler and more accessible ones. The direct consequence of this process is not only a mass decrease in human quality,[7] but also the atomization of societies: consumption is individual, and therefore everyone solves this problem on their own. In this context, it is appropriate to quote Horkheimer again: "The intellectual imperialism of the abstract principle of self-interest – the core of the official ideology of liberalism – indicated the growing schism between this ideology and social conditions within the industrialized nations. Once the cleavage becomes fixed in the public mind, no effective rational principle of social cohesion remains (…) Probability or, better, calculability replaces truth, and the historical process that in society tends to make of truth an empty phrase…" (Horkheimer, 2011: 26–27, 54).

[7] The degradation of human quality should be understood as the degradation of cognitive abilities and the blurring of the system of ethical coordinates, the degradation of culture, since the latter exists only in the minds of its bearers.

We must admit that algorithms have qualitatively deepened this problem: we are no longer talking about atomization, but about the splitting of atoms, that is, of the human personality that turns into a consumer unit frustrated by reality. The possibilities offered by individualized communication with the provision of a metered personal virtual reward can only be compared to the practice of selling indulgences by the Catholic Church on the eve of Protestantism: leveling the absolution procedure down to the affordable act of acquiring a symbol, in an economic sense they represented a product with near-zero multiplication value, whereby the quantity of the product would be entirely determined by the number of consumers, with the complete physical impossibility for the consumer to make a claim against the seller (Koktysh, 2016a). In this case, it was only a matter of time before the algorithms would try to take direct control of the human personality they were splitting: the sustainability of any market depends on managing customer loyalty. If the algorithm for overcoming frustration by acquiring symbols of success and status is fairly easy to market, then until a certain moment there was no clear solution for marketing the second algorithm that leads to virtual success, namely, the imitation of idols. Yet a solution was found here as well.

The question of whether an individual frustrated by reality is willing to delegate his or her sovereignty to algorithms and seek further "liberation" in them has received positive experimental confirmation. Sergei Karelov reported the sensational results of a five-year PEACH (PErsonality coACH) experiment by the Universities of Zurich, St. Gallen, Brandeis, Illinois, and ETH Zurich.[8] The possibility of deliberately and rapidly changing the personality characteristics of individuals on a mass scale, up to the realization of the most daring eugenic fantasies of creating new breeds of people, has been proven. The experiment involved developing a mobile app that included: 1) a bot that simulates a chat conversation with a coach; 2) a digital diary of progress towards individual goals for self-reflection and progress monitoring; and 3) a system of monitoring and guiding reminders. The program was adapted to different psychological types. As a result, in three months the personality traits of the subjects changed beyond recognition, which was confirmed not only by the self-assessment of the 1523 volunteers who took part in the study, but also by the external assessment of their relatives, friends and partners (Stieger, Flückiger, Rüegger et al., 2021).

Pandora's Box has thus been opened: cognitive vulnerability has become a reality. It is only a matter of time until we see the emergence of mobile apps that promote the development of "leadership skills" and "personal growth" and automate various psychological training sessions. The possibility of directly reprogramming significant segments of external societies presents an irresistible temptation for corporations to take the task of winning consumer loyalty to a new level of efficiency while dramatically reducing advertising costs. Equally tempting are the new prospects for major

[8] Karelov S. The Little Known Interesting. Available at: https://t.me/theworldisnoteasy (accessed: 07.10.2021).

geopolitical players: the ability to control one's electorate and exert a targeted influence on others brings global politics into a qualitatively new dimension. In essence, we are talking about creating an algorithm for cognitive sabotage anywhere in the world.

At the first stage, the most vulnerable to the new algorithms will be a limited part of society – the most dissatisfied, those who feel frustrated and deprived by reality. Since such people form the most active and mobilizable part of society, the threat of external manipulation should not be underestimated. The Belarusian protests mentioned at the beginning of this article turned out to be so protracted precisely because there was a relatively small nucleus, which was controlled mainly by a single channel on the Telegram social network. Meanwhile, theoretically, the new algorithms can multiply any protest activity, as the emotional cooling of the protesting crowd can be blocked by updating the "firmware."

Algocognitive Sophism

The British futurologist and visionary James Lovelock has coined the term "novacene" for the coming age, suggesting that its main driving force will be the technological mastery of the pattern of organization of matter and energy that we call information (Lovelock, 2019). The new era is fundamentally different from much of what we are used to. In this context, Sergei Karelov speaks of a "triple cultural fracture," that is, the emergence of a "culture of oversight," a "culture of post-truth," and a "cancel culture."[9] Among other things, the concept of privacy disappears in the new reality, and a person becomes transparent to a much greater extent than he or she probably realizes: smartphones make it possible, and easy, to track a person's movements and communications (including correspondence and intimate relationships), establish who their friends are and, based on this, determine the person's worldview and identify their preferences and interests based on e-commerce data.[10]

The post-truth culture blurs the line between truth and falsehood due to the obvious difficulty of verifying what is fake. The criteria of truth are blurred, the vast majority of users perceive the flow of information superficially, only picking out certain symbols from the general noise, and these symbols only acquire meaning because of the number of times they are repeated. So-called "cancel culture," or the new ethics stemming from the culture of post-truth, allows us to ostracize those who, "according to the activists of this culture, have crossed the line delineated by the activists themselves; such 'going out of bounds' is interpreted as a violation of the moral and ethical standards of society or the unspoken dogmas of science."[11] The most famous examples

[9] Karelov S. Triple Culture Fracture. The Case of a 4400% Increase in Girls Aspiring to Become Men. Available at: https://sergey-57776.medium.com (accessed: 07.11.2021).
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

of the influence of cancel culture are Harvey Weinstein, Roman Polanski and Kevin Spacey, and it has become a mass phenomenon in the US university environment. In its mild form, the ostracism of the new times is manifested in the informational isolation of an elected public figure, and in its radical form in their deletion from the digital media environment, as happened, for example, with the accounts of former President Donald Trump.

Science has become a predictable victim of the new ethics: research that questions the proclaimed mainstream values has been crossed out and declared unscientific. For example, the renowned evolutionary biologist Jerry Coyne pointed to the egregious case of the *Science-Based Medicine* magazine website deleting a review by Harriet Hall, a well-known physician and one of its five editors, of Abigail Shrier's book *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Shrier, 2021), which reported a whopping 4400% increase in the number of girls in the United Kingdom who wished to have a sex change in the ten years from 2008 to 2018.[12] The review was deemed too complimentary, and was replaced by three negative reviews written by "advocates of gender affirmation,"[13] accusing the author of transphobia and insufficient substantiation of her work.

If the transparency of everyday human life is an immanent characteristic of the new era and this reality is to be lived with, then the existence of the "post-truth" and "cancel" cultures depends on who creates the algorithms and what goals they are meant to achieve. In the Western digital culture, we are witnessing the return, under a new name, of well-known archaic processes. In the doctrine of the relativity of good and evil, with their coordinates determined by information flows and the possibility of changing them arbitrarily, we can recognize the principle of man as the measure of all things, which was formulated by Protagoras and which is fundamental to sophistry. Plato, through Protagoras, also described, put in modern terms, the basic principles of information management, which can be reduced to a simple and seemingly harmless substitution of names. For example, Protagoras, in a dialogue of the same name, generates the following logical construct: "As there are two things, let us call them by two names – first, good and evil (…) a man does evil knowing that he does evil. But someone will ask, Why? Because he is overcome, is the first answer. And by what is he overcome? the inquirer will proceed to ask. And we shall no longer be able to reply, 'by pleasure'; for the name of pleasure has been exchanged for that of good" (Plato, 1990: 468).

How fair is our analogy? Are societies affected by algorithms (Wagner, Strohmaier, Olteanu et al., 2021) close in quality to the society of Ancient Athens? Indeed, in the heyday of sophistry, we find almost all the signs of a "post-truth culture," in which

[12] Coyne J. 2021. Ex-Editor of Science-Based Medicine Chews the Site's Tuchas for its Treatment of Abigail Shrier's Book. 26 September. Available at: https://whyevolutionistrue.com/2021/09/26/ex-editor-of-science-based-medicine-chews-the-sites-tuchas-for-its-treatment-of-abigail-shriers-book/ (accessed: 11.11.2021).

[13] Ibid.

truth is drowned under a pile of subjective – and not at all disinterested – interpretations, where the key cognitive integrator is the liberation of the individual from the norms and rules that constrain him. Alexei Losev says in this respect: "The subjectivism of the sophists, generally speaking, cannot be disputed: if one perceives something, then it exists; and what someone else perceives exists too (…) Gorgias in general undertook to both praise and deprecate any thing regardless of its objective properties; and on this basis he believed that 'the art of persuasion is much higher than all the arts, since it makes all men its slaves by free will and not by compulsion,' so that the speaker can speak about all things in the best way" (Losev, 2000: 18–19). Actually, the methodological basis of sophistry is the very splitting of word and essence, signifier and signified, word and thing, about which Paul-Michel Foucault wrote: the signifier acquires an independent existence and begins to redefine the signified (Foucault, 1994: 79). And to redefine it quite arbitrarily, refuting everything and leaving no stone unturned from the signified based on the intentional logical substitutions, classified as "paralogisms, not refutations" by Aristotle, who devoted 34 chapters of his work to the analysis of the sophists' logic (Aristotle, 1978a: 535).

In fact, algocognitive culture allows one to create a far more vivid reality than the verbal theatre of the sophists, who, incidentally, were well aware that their art was the art of deception. In this connection, it seems appropriate to give some more eloquent quotations from Gorgias: "In tragedy and in painting, he who deceives better than anyone else, creating a semblance of truth, is superior. The art of the actor deceives the audience, though they know that it is a deception; actors say one thing and think another; they enter and leave the stage the same and at the same time different" (Losev, 2000: 44). The influence of the word is great, but the influence of networked information culture is immeasurably deeper, affecting most of the senses that evoke emotion – this includes text, audiovisual information, and the possibility of instantaneous feedback from the interlocutor. The management of emotions is becoming a critical factor in socialization, as Herbert Marshall McLuhan warned: "… our human senses, of which all media are extensions, are also fixed charges on our personal energies, and that they also configure the awareness and experience of each one of us…" (McLuhan, 2003: 26). Network communication, in McLuhan's classification, refers to "hot media," that is, those that primarily affect emotions, which "extends one single sense in 'high definition'" (McLuhan, 2003: 27). This complicates the cognitive processing of incoming information – "Intensity or high definition engenders specialism and fragmentation in living as in entertainment, which explains why any intense experience must be 'forgotten,' 'censored,' and reduced to a very cool state before it can be 'learned' or assimilated" (McLuhan, 2003: 29). In the case of algocognitive culture, there is no cognitive pause at all.

According to McLuhan, the absence of the transition to a "cold" state of reflection and awareness leads to "narcosis or numbing": critical processing of the flow of information becomes impossible due to its constant intensity. McLuhan illustrates this thesis with the famous myth of the young Narcissus, who mistook his reflection for another person: "This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until

he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. The nymph Echo tried to win his love with fragments of his own speech, but in vain. He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system. Now the point of this myth is the fact that men at once become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves" (McLuhan, 2003: 50). Any means of communication, "as an extension and expediter of the sense life, any medium at once affects the entire field of the senses (so that) the beholding of idols, or the use of technology, conforms men to them. It is this continuous inward acceptance of our own technology in the course of our daily use of it that places us in the role of Narcissus, consisting in subconsciously perceiving these images of ourselves and becoming numb before them. It is this continuous embrace of our own technology in daily use that puts us in the Narcissus role of subliminal awareness and numbness in relation to these images of ourselves. By continuously embracing technologies, we relate ourselves to them as servo-mechanisms. That is why we must, to use them at all, serve these objects, these extensions of ourselves, as gods or minor religions" (McLuhan, 2003: 55–56).

Importantly, with all their love for their art, "an extraordinary thirst to experience and feel more and more new sensations, to explore life in all the diversity of its constituent phenomena, to enjoy the present, to burrow into the past and to strive for the future with an extraordinary acuteness of sensations" (Losev, 2000: 26), the sophists were pursuing quite pragmatic goals. The emergence of the Athenian merchant class during the rapid growth of overseas trade created a demand for its self-awareness, and thus for the intellectual school that determined and provided for its growing ambitions. It was sophistry that took on the role of such a school, the main function of which was the reassessment of values: the values of society, preserved since the previous agricultural era, were replaced by the values of the individual, who easily found loopholes to justify the priority of his own interests. In mastering the main art of the sophists, that of dispute, for which their disciples mainly paid, it is difficult not to see the mastery of bargaining skills and the ability to put one's profit above everything in any situation, which, given the actual exclusion of the criterion of conscience from argumentation, in fact becomes possible always and everywhere. Aristotle, ironic about the path-breaking ethical relativism of the sophists, cited their eloquent thesis that blurred the boundaries of good and evil: "Things the knowledge of which is good, are good things to learn, aren't they?' 'Yes.' 'The knowledge, however, of evil is good: therefore evil is a good thing to know.' 'Yes. But, you see, evil is both evil and a thing-to-learn, so that evil is an evil-thing-to-learn, although the knowledge of evils is good'" (Aristotle, 1978a: 573).

Along with the training of merchants, the sophists transformed the domestic market by the very fact of their popularity. "The emancipation of vital instincts, the justification of everything human, from its greatest forms to the smallest, often even domestic and commonplace weaknesses of man" (Losev, 2000: 55), in essence, created a consumer who valued his or her weaknesses and was willing to pay to indulge and satisfy them. "According to Antiphontus, nature is liberty, and law is violence; and according to Cal-

licles, free nature, consisting in a complete licentiousness of passions, finds in law only its unnatural tyrant, and by laws men defend themselves against men of greater power. For Thrasymachus, justice is also something beneficial to the strongest. In Plato, Hippias explicitly says that the law, being the tyrant of men, often 'exerts violence against nature.' Antiphontus, of all the sophists, wrote the most detailed speculation on the antagonism between naturally acting nature and violent, unnaturally acting law. Critias extended this antagonism to the theory of the origin of religion as a result of the need to intimidate immoral people, and he was most probably a true godless man, of which a rather detailed record has been preserved" (Losev, 2000: 24, 18–19).

The ontological dead-end of sophistry came soon enough: with the individual placed in the centre of the worldview, no generalizations are possible; absolutely everything becomes relative. The sophists recognized this. In particular, Protagoras' thesis about the nature of matter is essentially a declaration of agnosticism. "… matter is in flux and that as it flows additions are continuously made, replacing the effluvia; and that the senses are restructured and altered depending on the age and the other structural features of our bodies (…) the explanations of all appearances are founded on matter, as matter in itself is capable of being in all respects such as it appears to anyone. And (…) people apprehend different things at different times depending on the different conditions they are in. For the person who is in a natural condition apprehends those features of matter that can appear to people who are in a natural condition, while those who are in an unnatural condition apprehend what can appear to people in an unnatural condition" (Losev, 2000: 19).

In view of the above, it is not surprising that the sophists "blurred" natural philosophy to the point of absurdity without creating anything of their own in return: "For if everything is only one continuous fluidity, then, in view of the absolute novelty of each arising moment, no generalization can be made in this becoming being, from which relativism and even nihilism followed naturally" (Losev, 2000: 21–22). Mythology was being blurred even faster: the only consistent position was "preaching arbitrary and any mythological constructions, the sophists could deny mythology as much as they wanted, criticize it, laugh at it and deny its objective reality" (Losev, 2000: 52).

The final pessimism of the sophists is also logical in this context: the world of sensual experience, elevated to the rank of an absolute value, closes in on itself, losing the meaning of its own existence, after which (and by virtue of which) it also devalues itself. If at the beginning of his journey, Antiphon declared that "the real good for man is his victory over himself," by the end, he had fallen into pessimism: "Life is like, so to speak, a one-day imprisonment in a prison, and the duration of life is like (one) day. As soon as we see the light of day again, we pass it on to the next generations (…) Any life, even the most enviable one, according to men, deserves the charge that there is nothing particularly significant, nothing great or high in it, but everything is insignificant, weak, short-lived, and involving great suffering. Life cannot be rearranged like a move in a game of checkers" (Losev, 2000: 25). Losev assessed sophistry as the heyday of decadence, understanding the latter as an attempt to "translate everything and eve-

rything into the language of sensual sensations" (Losev, 2000: 27). Although the sophists had the substantial support of the elites and relied on a steady market demand, the struggle that Socrates, Plato and Aristotle waged against them was relatively easy to succeed: after all, the sophists exhausted themselves rather quickly. At the same time, they had previously eroded every sphere of Athenian society without exception and called everything into question, producing in return nothing but a hymn to sensual liberation from everything and everything. Modern trends can be seen in the latter. For example, when discussing beauty, Critius argued that "the most beautiful form in male beings is feminine, but in female beings, on the contrary, it is masculine" (Losev, 2000: 30). Athenian society could not fail to detect the growing effect of de-socialization that threatened it, so the struggle against the sophists led by the three generations of great philosophers who replaced the sophistic chaos with a streamlined system of "systematically processed general judgments" (Losev, 2000: 35), where the existence of the singular is derived from generic notions, produced meaningful allies. As a result, Aristotle's final verdict on the Sophists – "Now for some people it is better worth while to seem to be wise, than to be wise without seeming to be (for the art of the sophist is the semblance of wisdom without the reality, and the sophist is one who makes money from an apparent but unreal wisdom); for them, then, it is clearly essential also to seem to accomplish the task of a wise man rather than to accomplish it without seeming to do so" (Aristotle, 1978a: 53) – was received with relief by Athenian society.

Interestingly, in the same era, the legal practice of ostracism provides us with a second offspring of the algocognitive culture, namely, cancel culture, or the new ethics. In digital form, ostracism affects the most famous and influential people standing in the way of the fickle ideological mainstream in exactly the same fashion, and is no less lethal to the reputation of the condemned than it was in the old days. It is remarkable that the practice of ostracism itself was possible due to the coexistence within the Athenian democracy of two cults – the chthonic and the Olympian: organized into pantheons, both were ruled by multiple gods with overlapping jurisdictions (Sergeyev, 2013: 84–92). The first (chthonic) was meant for common folk, and its driving force was the wrath of the elemental gods: daily life was subordinated to maintaining ritual purity in order to avoid their wrath. The second, which emerged with the flowering of the merchant class, provided jurisdiction to the oligarchic merchant elites and was governed by the grace of the new Olympian gods (Harrison, 1913: 37–43). The normative corpus of the former was stagnant and rigid, while the latter evolved rapidly, constantly redefining values in line with the situation, which in fact initially created a niche for the sophists, who specialized in redefining the coordinates of good and evil. The sentence of ostracism in Ancient Greece, however, was only possible within the norms of the chthonic pantheon: the Olympian pantheon presupposed a minimum of blameworthy offences. Since its victims were members of the elites, and often intellectuals, we can assume that it was primarily a matter of settling scores: anyone who did not fit into the mainstream, and especially those who opposed the elite, were dumped at the mercy of the mobs.

Within today's algocognitive culture, the US global information corporations form the mainstream: they are the customers, and it is in their interest that algorithms are created, developed and improved. If the integration of algorithms into an individual's daily life increases the degree of freedom – not freedom in general, though, but mainly freedom of choice for consumers – then corporations enjoy an increase in sales and the consolidation of consumer loyalty. As we know, there are two ways to boost sales in a situation of oversupply. The first expands the market by extending the metaphor of marketability to areas that were not previously marketable, i.e., marketization. The second allows any market to be turned into a mass market by adding a social component to the product, whereby a person, by purchasing the said product, receives something more – a symbol of status, of belonging to a prestigious stratum, the imitation of which is the norm in his circle. In both cases, however, it is the social structures and norms, i.e., the power and dominant values, that stand in the way of the mainstream, which also became an obstacle to the expansion of the sophists.

This obstacle is quite significant. Both modes of market expansion erode the foundations of being, since the inclusion of a new "non-commodity" value in commodity circulation is very likely to lead to the Akerlofian transformation of the newly emerged market into a degrading one (Akerlof, 1994: 95¬–104). For example, the expansion of the metaphor of marketability to social goods does not usually lead to an improvement in their quality, as it creates a conflict of professional motivations. For example, a doctor providing a service becomes interested both in the patient's recovery and in his or her becoming a regular client, which in practice often translates into an operational compromise with speculative diagnoses being made in the process (Sergeyev, 2009) and the imposition of additional, at best useless, services (Taleb, 2014: 82). A similar conflict also arises in the field of education – the permanent client effect is possible with teaching short-term knowledge that quickly becomes obsolete instead of fundamental knowledge, which creates space for the Western concept of *lifelong learning*. The resulting distortions in both of these areas can only be counterbalanced by the regulatory role of the state, which eventually has to bear the costs of setting and maintaining standards. Giving a commodity additional symbolic characteristics can lead to the degradation of the already symbolic capital: the difficult process of comprehending something complex is replaced by the simple act of visiting, contemplating or buying,[14] which inevitably leads to its emasculation and simplification, at least in the mind of the perceiver. A counterfeit market emerges, which – because of its far greater availability – is far more profitable and successful than the market for originals.

[14] An anecdotal illustration of this is an episode from the personal experience of one of the authors: a successful American colleague asked at the last minute if it would be possible to get tickets to a ballet performance at the Bolshoi Theatre. He happily drank champagne in the buffet, fell asleep during the performance, and lounged through most of it. When the author asked what he was doing, the American answered: "We live in a small town, but everyone's heard of the Bolshoi. So, when I tell them that I've been to the Bolshoi, that'll be more than enough."

In this respect, the uncompromising thrust of cancel culture is understandable: the demolition of former symbols, often physical, opens up new, previously unthinkable high-margin markets whose expected rate of return creates a pressure differential between the "market element" and the segments of social reality to be marketized. However, the new markets immediately begin to degrade, triggering the process described by Nassim Nicholas Taleb as the "socialization of losses and privatization of gains" (Taleb, 2007). At the same time, the fluid system of coordinates created by the post-truth culture allows us to put almost any obstacle in the way. If pre-Socratic reality proceeded from a multitude of existent ontologies equal to the number of recognized gods, with the consequent possibility of value pluralism, then algocognitive culture can produce idols itself, together with the ontologies and values they affirm. For this, algorithms are sufficient – the network behaviour of *algorithmically infused societies* (Wagner, Strohmaier et al., 2021) is often compared to an anthill, where the number of likes and reposts plays the role of sugar, which determines the routes of the ant trails.

The main victim of both approaches, as with the sophists, is culture and science: active government intervention through standard-setting in these spheres is always problematic and involves the costs that the government prefers not to take on. One thing that typically escapes attention is something that José Ortega y Gasset has already pointed out (Ortega y Gasset, 2002): it is culture and art, whether elite or mass, that produce the meanings of life that are relevant to society and that generate models to follow. Mass cognitive blindness grows as a result of culture and art falling to algorithms (Ward, 2021): knowledge is being replaced by information, with people increasingly relying on information from the internet as their "own knowledge," while the output of such information can be changed almost instantaneously, as in George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*. At the same time, the confidence of the masses – if not in their knowledge as such, then in their awareness – grows proportionately, thus generating "false areas of competence," known as the Dunning–Kruger metacognitive distortion (Kruger, Dunning, 1999), when even the masses perceive complex reality as simple and understandable. Actually, in this context, cancel culture is nothing more than the next iteration of polling, where after culture, its object is now politics: the masses, not the elites, easily demonstrate their readiness to engage in the active promotion of the understanding (offered to them from the outside) of the only correct knowledge, as we saw in a series of "colour revolutions," both successful and unsuccessful.

It is difficult to quantify the damage that cancel culture has caused to science. Fear of overstepping boundaries breeds conformism, which, coupled with the logic of algorithms for indexing scientific publications, leads to the emasculation of its cognitive function. In particular, a recent study of an array of 90 million scientific articles on 241 scientific topics, with 1.8 billion citations, unexpectedly – from the perspective of science industry administration – showed an almost complete standstill in cognitive progress: quantity does not translate into quality (Chu, Evans, 2021).

China: A Digital Cultural Revolution

The political recognition of the seriousness of the digital threat is evidenced by the dramatic shift in China's digital policy initiated in 2021, dubbed the "new cultural revolution." There is a certain symbolism in this; last year marked the 55th anniversary of the cultural revolution launched by Mao Zedong. The changes announced are no less profound: in essence, they are the nationalization of algorithms. From now on, algocognitive culture in China is controlled and directed by the Communist Party and must serve the national interest.

Specifically, on August 27, 2021, the State Internet Information Office issued the Internet Information Service Algorithmic Recommendation Management Provisions,[15] which gave the national cybersecurity and informatization department the authority to oversee and monitor compliance with the national algorithm recommendation service, and service providers "shall abide by laws and regulations, observe social morality and ethics, abide by commercial ethics and professional ethics, and respect the principles of fairness and justice, openness and transparency, science and reason, and sincerity and trustworthiness (…) uphold mainstream value orientations, optimize algorithmic recommendation service mechanisms, vigorously disseminate positive energy, and advance the use of algorithms upwards and in the direction of good."[16] The new online ethics involve combating fake news, banning content that threatens public order, and protecting minors. Teenagers must not be induced to follow the recommendations of algorithms, pushed into bad habits, or encouraged to imitate unsafe behaviour and violate social ethics, amd they must not be exposed to information that could affect their physical and mental health.

The decisions were popularized by an article that appeared the day after the ruling on a personal WeChat blog by Li Guangman, the hitherto little-known former editor-in-chief of a small newspaper,[17] and was reprinted by various state media outlets, including the websites of the *People's Daily* and Xinhua News Agency. Its author called for a *return to the original intentions of the Communist Party of China, to the essence of socialism, from a group of capitals to the masses of people, and a transformation of the capital-oriented model into a people-oriented one.* The people are called "the chief organ of this change, and those who would hinder the realization of this change toward the people will be discarded."[18] On September 2, the broadcasting authorities unveiled a new strategy that consists of restricting TV programmes and reality shows that cultivate youth idols, setting the right standards of beauty, and banishing transgender

[15] Cyberspace Administration of China. Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission. 2021. 27 August. Available at: http://www.cac.gov.cn/2021-08/27/c_1631652502874117.htm (accessed: 11.11.2021).
[16] Ibid.
[17] Akopov P. 2021. China Begins "Transformation of Capitalism": And It Has a Major Ally. *RIA Novosti.* 09 October. Available at: https://ria.ru/20210910/kitay-1749414761.html (accessed: 17.11.2021).
[18] Ibid.

(read: effeminate) men. Show business was urged to "consciously reject vulgarity and tastelessness, and to consciously rebuff decadent ideas of worship of money, hedonism, and extreme individualism."[19]

The significance of this shift cannot be overstated. It is not merely a partisan barrier against Big Pharma, the main lobbyist for transgender culture, but a radical change in the dominant idea: from a reliance on the idea of individual freedom, which until now has driven China's economy by maximizing consumption, the country is returning to the idea of social justice. Society acquires legal personality in this context: unlike the idea of freedom, which is always individual, the idea of justice is always supraindividual: one cannot be fair in and of himself; justice, as Aristotle pointed out, is always the measure of a particular situation of social interaction. In this regard, it is the ethical control of omnipotent algorithms, that is, the alternative system of socialization, that seems to be the most critical and the most far-sighted solution. It is not a question of nationalizing the digital oligarchs, whose mission, in the alarmist assessment of the *Financial Times,* is now to hand their billions over to the Communist Party,[20] but to establish an ethical framework useful to society by which the state will limit the activities of these companies. And they took the message: as early as September 11, all major Chinese platforms, including the messenger services WeChat and Weibo, the video hosting site Tencent Video, the news aggregator Jinri Toutiao, and Douyin (known as TikTok outside China), said they were ready to comply with the new rules, pledged to impose self-discipline, refrain from using data and traffic as their main guide, and promote positive values to create a clean and honest online culture.[21]

China was not the first to catch on when it came to the rules of the new era, where digital sovereignty is central to state sovereignty: after the US information corporations "banned" then-President of the United States Donald Trump from their platforms, the question of where sovereignty is and who has it became a burning issue for all states that have advanced down the road of digitalization. The failed attempts at colour revolutions in Hong Kong in 2019–2020, where China directly confronted the omnipotence of algorithms, and the events in Belarus helped raise awareness of its relevance. Yet it was China that first formulated – and very clearly – the state policy of the digital age, decisively equating the networked information culture with the critical infrastructure on the protection of which the resilience of the entire system depends. In this regard, the concluding statement of Li Guangman's article is telling: "… if we still have to rely on the big capitalists as the main force against imperialism and he-

[19] Ibid.

[20] *Financial Times.* 2021. Jack Ma and the Chinese Tech Titans' Mission to Give Away Billions. 19 October. Available at: https:// www.ft.com/content/c89594c1-1d85-4dda-9e67-55c775bd6c9a (accessed: 14.11.2021).

[21] *Reuters*. 2021. Chinese Content Platforms Pledge Self-Discipline – Industry Group. 09 November. Available at: : https:// www.reuters.com/world/china/chinese-content-platforms-pledge-self-discipline-industry-group-2021-09-11/

gemony, or if we still cooperate with the American 'mass entertainment' industry, our young people will lose their strong and courageous energy and we will collapse like the Soviet Union, even before we are really attacked."[22]

One might reasonably ask how the consistent and undivided dominance of the idea of freedom, the realm of freedom proclaimed by Francis Fukuyama with the collapse of the Soviet Union, which, *having fully satisfied the thirst for recognition, ended history* (Fukuyama, 2015: 224), resulted in a state of anthills where the intellect of the free individual is replaced by instincts of collective behaviour. If, following Slavoj Žižek, we understand freedom as an event, a one-time act of freeing something from something that hinders it (Žižek, 2008: 31–34), and if we connect this consideration with the emancipating social subject, we will find that most of the historical acts of freedom were the liberation of the symbolic figure of the merchant, in his commercial, industrial or financial capacity, from the restrictions of other social institutions – institutions of power and institutions of influence, implemented through laws, religion, morality and ideology. For example, the liberation of Holland from the Spanish Empire was simultaneously a liberation from Catholic morality and from the idea of society as a legitimate political subject; in Protestantism, it was replaced by an aggregate of individuals, which together reduced the costs of colonial expansion for Holland (Arrighi, 2006: 181–201). In England, King Henry VIII's *Great Affair* was actually the beginning of the rejection of Catholicism, which freed up funds for investment in the Navy, and the English Revolution a century later relieved the merchants of the King's power; the royal power that was later restored was charged with the teleological duty of protecting the merchants and property (Koktysh, 2019: 48–65). The French Revolution was a simultaneous liberation from Catholicism, from the King, and, more significantly, from the concept of the divine origin of power. It was then that the idea of the relativity of truth in which Modernity exists was born: the French Enlighteners could not convincingly answer the question of how power, that is, the right of one man to command and the obligation of others to obey, was possible in *the new realm of reason,* since the rationality of the king and the servant would by definition be one and the same rationality, a phenomenon of the same level (Koktysh, 2016b: 6–24). As a result, the procedural form of legitimizing power that remained as the only possible option was also extrapolated to the methods of searching to justify the truth, with all the ensuing costs, when one procedure is easily countered by another.

It seems important that each one-time act of emancipation then inevitably acquired stable institutional forms, molding itself into a stable social order that those included in it believed to be more or less fair. In other words, the idea of freedom began the process of collapse, and the idea of justice completed it, creating a stable construction for the subsequent historical period. In terms of social physics, we could say that

[22] Akopov P. 2021. China Begins "Transformation of Capitalism": And It Has a Major Ally. *RIA Novosti*. 09 October. Available at: : https://ria.ru/20210910/kitay-1749414761.html (accessed: 14.11.2021).

freedom splintered the social subject, or part of it, into a molecular or even atomic state, and justice combined the scattered parts into new, stable and interconnected forms, at least on a supramolecular level (Koktysh, 2021). The latter, we should note, fully echoes Lenin's maxim: "… before we can unite, and in order that we may unite, we must first of all draw firm and definite lines of demarcation" (Lenin, 1967: 22).

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We can assume that the collapse of the Soviet Union, which represented a pole of justice in the system of international relations, was akin to the removal of carbon rods from the core of a nuclear reactor: left to itself, the idea of freedom went into an uncontrolled thermonuclear reaction, turning into a permanent process of liberation, which occurs through the release of energy when any social object is fragmented and its parts, which previously formed a single whole, are opposed to each other: from the division of states into national countries, to the separation of minorities from societies, to the splitting of families into individuals, and to the splitting of individuals into emotional and rational components that are autonomous in their behaviour. The reasonableness of this assumption is reinforced by the fact that with each new division, a new profitable market emerged. In particular, the division of a large economy into a set of smaller ones, due to the capacity of the market and the level of division of labour (Grigoryev, 2014: 181–214), turns them into technological recipients of large players, whose domestic market allows them to produce and recoup hi-tech products; the cost structure of an individual, often without investment in children, is markedly different, both quantitatively and qualitatively, from that of a household; capacious markets create minorities, such as transgender people who are lifelong consumers of pharmacological products; the sovereignty of the emotional component in the digital economy implies spontaneous – and high – costs to satisfy externally imposed needs.

In this context, China's bid to create an alternative digital pole of justice is more understandable: knocking out the post-truth culture and cancel culture of the commercial component may in fact deprive them of the energy of investment, without which their further expansion seems problematic. On the plus side, there is also the possibility of a more or less consistent system of worldview and value coordinates set by the Communist Party of China. Such a system, having been a classical "dormant power" for the past several decades, that is, one that lets daily life run its course, intervening only when something has gone wrong and something needs to be fixed, is now discovering its full might.

The path China is opening up will be attractive to states that believe their sovereignty is a fundamental value. In some respects, Russia has followed this path: for example, in December 2021, a district court in Moscow handed down fines of RUB 7.2 billion (approximately $119 million) and RUB 1.99 billion ($33 million) to Google and Meta (Facebook), respectively, for their failure to comply with the requirements imposed by the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor). Yet China's strategy, for all its clarity, is

hard to replicate, not just because of the high financial and time costs. There are some technical difficulties here, such as the fact that Europe does not have its own social networks, as well as some ideological issues: the liberal paradigm does not presuppose a foothold from which alternative rules of the game could be imposed, first and foremost, on the American information corporations. Things are somewhat better in Russia, which has its own social network that most minors use. There is also, formally speaking, a Russian messenger, Telegram. On the ideological level, there are the recent amendments to the Constitution to protect traditional values. However, the first priority is to develop a conceptual response to the challenges that have emerged – a technical solution must follow a conceptual one, not the other way around. The only conceptual alternative to algocognitive culture is to rely on the idea of justice, which, as Aristotle pointed out (Aristotle, 1978b: 72–86), can be very different: justice based on origin, wealth, equality of opportunity, or, as we know from recent history, equality of income, but always based on a supraindividual identity. As we remember from Euclidean geometry, an infinite number of lines can be drawn through a single point – in this case, "reprogramming" basic human attitudes does not seem to be an impossible task at all. But it is only possible to draw one straight line through two points – and in the case of a person who relies on a social identity that binds him to a social stratum as a basic one, it becomes problematic to "rewire" him.

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