

UTILITARIANISM OF CLAUDE ADRIAN HELVETIUS AS ONE OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL ORIGINS OF URBANISM

*UTILITARISMO DE CLAUDE ADRIAN HELVETIUS COMO UNO DE LOS ORÍGENES
FILOSÓFICOS DEL URBANISMO*

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FILOSÓFICAS DO URBANISMO*

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ABSTRACT

The article reveals the connection between the ideas of the Enlightenment and the modern direction of scientific knowledge, urban studies. Urban studies as a concept of the social development of the city has, among other things, the understanding of interest in the interpretation of Helvetius. He thinks that interest is the driving force of society, the nature of which he considers from the standpoint of sensationalism and utilitarianism. Urban studies solve the problems of interaction between a person and a city, which are based on the philosophical problem of interaction between the individual and the general. The purpose of the work is to trace in the ethics of Helvetius the combination of reasonable egoism and the principles of public benefit; the irremovability of natural prerequisites in man preserves the individual in society, and the irremovability of contractual principles makes it necessary to observe the public interest. The article determines that the recognition of the right to personal interest is a great merit of Helvetius and one of the philosophical foundations of urban studies.

Key words: Helvetius. city. interest. Enlightenment. urban studies.

RESUMEN

El artículo revela la conexión entre las ideas de la Ilustración y la dirección moderna del conocimiento científico, los estudios urbanos. Los estudios urbanos como concepto del desarrollo social de la ciudad tienen, entre otras cosas, la comprensión de interés en la interpretación de Helvetius. Piensa que el interés es la fuerza motriz de la sociedad, cuya naturaleza considera desde el punto de vista del sensacionalismo y el utilitarismo. Los estudios urbanos resuelven los problemas de interacción entre una persona y una ciudad, los cuales se basan en el problema filosófico de la interacción entre el individuo y lo general. El propósito del trabajo es rastrear en la ética de Helvetius la combinación del egoísmo razonable y los principios del beneficio público; la inamovibilidad de los prerequisites naturales en el hombre preserva al individuo en la sociedad, y la inamovibilidad de los principios contractuales hace necesario observar el interés público. El artículo determina que

el reconocimiento del derecho al interés personal es un gran mérito de Helvetius y uno de los fundamentos filosóficos de los estudios urbanos.

Palabras clave: Helvetius. ciudad. interés. Ilustración. estudios urbanos.

RESUMO

O artigo revela a conexão entre as ideias do Iluminismo e a direção moderna do conhecimento científico, os estudos urbanos. Os estudos urbanos como conceito de desenvolvimento social da cidade têm, entre outras coisas, o entendimento de interesse na interpretação de Helvetius. Ele pensa que o interesse é a força motriz da sociedade, cuja natureza ele considera do ponto de vista do sensacionalismo e do utilitarismo. Os estudos urbanos resolvem os problemas de interação entre uma pessoa e uma cidade, que se baseiam no problema filosófico da interação entre o indivíduo e o geral. O objetivo do trabalho é traçar na ética de Helvetius a combinação do egoísmo razoável e os princípios do benefício público; a inamovibilidade dos pré-requisitos naturais no homem preserva o indivíduo na sociedade, e a inamovibilidade dos princípios contratuais torna necessário observar o interesse público. O artigo determina que o reconhecimento do direito ao interesse pessoal é um grande mérito de Helvetius e um dos fundamentos filosóficos dos estudos urbanos.

Palavras-chave: Helvetius. cidade. interesse. Iluminismo. estudos urbanos.

Introduction

Urban studies are a new branch of knowledge comes from the Latin “urbanus” (urban) and is associated with the study of urban communities and systems. Urban studies arose as an attempt to solve the problems of large cities, which were associated with the deterioration of the living conditions of an individual. It combines the achievements of the humanities, social and technical sciences. The main concepts of its study are connected with the sphere of humanitarian knowledge, the concepts of sociality and social space. An important methodological setting is that the city is seen as an open self-organizing system. A modern city as a complex multi-level system must take into account the interests of all its subjects. These problems cannot be solved without addressing the individual, his needs and interests. Urban studies acquired its modern form in the 1990s, but the ideas that influenced its formation originated in the Enlightenment.

A deep analysis of the motives of human activity was undertaken in the Enlightenment (Cassirer, 2004). Enlighteners criticized the dominant worldview and proposed a new one that would break with clericalism and force people to think about the relation between freedom and power, responsibility, and well-being. All these questions were raised at a new level and worked out in the scientific discoveries of that time (Shevtsov, 2022). Helvetius undertook one of the most significant studies on the nature of human abilities. In his treatise “Essays on the Mind”, he argued that the most important prerequisite for the formation of mental faculties is the possession of developed senses. Helvetius, as a follower of D. Locke, denied that a person has innate ideas and applied the principle of sensationalism to social phenomena. According to Helvetius, all people are endowed with the right mind. The source of the delusion of the mind is passions, ignorance of facts or a misunderstanding of words. False judgments are the result of random causes. “... To judge, as I have already proved, is in essence, only to feel” (Helvetius, 2022). The principle of sensationalism was claimed by K. Lynch in the 1960s. In his book “The Image of the City” he opposes the utilitarian construction of the average type and directs his attention to the solution of the psychological and social needs of various segments of the population. He focuses on the form of perception of the urban environment through a survey of residents. Citizens in interviews described an imaginary walk through the city, and Lynch received an image of the city in a mass representation based on feelings (Lynch, 1960). It can be concluded that the theory of cognitive perception of the urban environment is based on the empirical sensationalism of Helvetius.

Theoretical basis

Utility theory is at the heart of utilitarian ethics. Helvetius generalized the utilitarian ideas of Hobbes and Locke, according to which sensations that arise under the influence of the external world on the senses are the source of ideas, and ethical concepts and feelings are the result of experience (Dlugach, 2008). This point of view was too radical even for enlighteners. D. Diderot criticized Helvetius for reducing knowledge to sensations. He believed that Helvetius was confusing condition and cause. Feelings are a condition, not a cause of actions. Diderot was against the reduction of all moral acts of the individual to selfish interest and physical sensuality. He believed that the sense of justice is rooted in the very nature of man (Sementkovsky, 2013).

Helvetius came to the conclusion that the world is ruled not by the opinions of people, but by their interests. Interests are the driving force behind the social life of people, cause and measure of all human actions. “If the physical world is subject to the law of motion, then the spiritual world is no less subject to the law of interest” (Helvetius, 2022). Interests, according to Helvetius, are the benefits that people strive for and that almost every person is looking for. However, the benefits cannot be reduced to physical bases only.

Pleasure and pain induce people to certain thoughts and actions. The utilitarian idea of interest as the engine of human actions is the basis of the philosophy of Helvetius (Grekhnev, 2016). Interest determines the behavior of an individual and an entire nation. Helvetius considers society as a collection of individuals who are guided by their own interests. But this does not mean that Helvetius does not see the general interest. On the contrary, it singles out the private interests of individual communities and the interests of society as a whole. These interests correspond to different kinds of ideas and fields of activity. The general interests are more: trade, politics, war, legislation, science, and art. Another kind of ideas and interests is associated with the subjective individual aspirations of people who are not of interest to society in general. Helvetius is faced with a serious philosophical and social problem of the interaction of the part and the whole, the individual and the society (Motorina & Sytnik, 2019). For Helvetius, everything rests on private interest, all the phenomena of human existence are interpreted from these positions. However, personal material interest not only separates, but also binds people; the principle of reasonable selfishness makes it necessary to observe the interests of other people, without taking into account which, it becomes impossible to satisfy one's own. Many positive personal qualities such as honesty, love and friendship are built on selfishness and are not disinterested. In others, we hope to find support for ourselves and pursue our personal interest. Interest, according to Helvetius, governs all our judgments, including moral ones. People consider moral actions that are personally useful to them. Communities and large communities behave in the same way.

The philosopher transfers morality to a plane dominated by the concept of public and personal benefit, their interaction and interdependence. Interest also dominates in the sphere of intellectual culture (Krotov, 2015). Everyone is inclined to accept the idea that meets his passions and seems useful to him. Sympathy is caused by views close to our own. Here Helvetius acts as a psychologist, analyzing the motives in choosing a field of activity. The impartial striving for truth among prominent philosophers is caused by “enlightened pride”, a completely personal quality. Another kind of interest encourages a person to accept only the ideas that correspond to his own ones, in order to maintain his inflated self-esteem. So, any small lawyer puts his petitions with the works of outstanding minds. Here Helvetius traces the instinctive hatred of mediocrity for talent and attraction of intelligent people to each other. Communicating with each other, prompted by vanity and laziness, people think about themselves, trying to see their reflection in the interlocutor (Potapov, 2011). Helvetius gives many examples when superficial secular people try to present themselves as significant for society, without being such. Being a supporter of the ideas of the Enlightenment, the philosopher notes that very few people have the opportunity to receive a serious education, since the pursuit of science requires a person to have an in-depth mind, concentration, attention to a clearly defined subject area and concentration of all efforts (Piletsky, 2012). Intellectual progress is very slow and has very few supporters, only among scientists and young people. Edward Glaser, in “The Triumph of the City”, examines the reasons why people move

to the modern city (Glazer, 2014). Cities fulfill fundamental human needs for communication, learning and modern knowledge production. Since the period of Enlightenment, education and knowledge have become truly valuable and have received the status of backbone elements in society.

Helvetius believed that a person is driven by interest and personal gain. We observe this phenomenon in many aspects of human life and society as a whole. Urban planning and urban studies are no exception: a large “mirror” of the reflection of the activities of society and its components responsible for the human environment is the city. Urban space has become an object of study for various sciences: economics, sociology, philosophy, etc. The socio-cultural space of the city can be considered as a system of social relations, where the concepts of values, symbols and meanings are combined. It fills people's lives with special value orientations aimed at the implementation of life plans and strategies (Margaryan, 2021). In all urban planning stages of the development of urban studies, in particular large cities, is observed in the connection of “people have power and citizens.”

Helvetius considered the problem of the interaction of the particular and the general in public life in various historical and political situations. So, luxury in society can be seen as a harm and a benefit. The luxury of a private person “should be called excess in relation to the position occupied by this person in the state” (Helvetius, 2022). However, for society as a whole, luxury as an influx of money that can be used for development can be useful. “Only money makes it possible to maintain a lot of troops, make supplies, fill arsenals, enter into and maintain alliances with powerful states ...” (Helvetius, 2022) Thus, luxury is not harmful: it is only harmful as a result of too uneven distribution of wealth between citizens.

In general, the city as a product of human activity fully reflects “individual” and “general” is synthesized into large urban development policies, imprinted in the history of large cities. Most often, such policies bear the names of certain creators and reflect the stages of development of certain problems of urban studies and history in general. For example, urban planning work carried out in Paris during the Second Empire (third quarter of the 19th century) on behalf of Napoleon III under the leadership of Baron Haussmann (prefect of the Seine Department) was called the “Ottomanization” of Paris and largely determined the modern look of the city. The redevelopment not only led to an improvement in the infrastructure of the French capital, but also gave rise to many imitations in other cities of the world. In 2007, the idea of Greater Paris was put forward as a new comprehensive plan for the development of the capital region. The idea involves the development of the Paris agglomeration and the development of the regions closest to Paris, including the development of the transport network.

Helvetius extended his doctrine of interest to the behavior of small and large human groups, to entire nations. He showed the difference between class interests and the interests of the whole society. How to combine personal interest with the public one? Through a correct understanding of the benefits. An egoist must become an altruist for his own good. The principle of utility must convince the individual of the need to combine his own interest with the interest of others. Helvetius distinguishes between right and wrong understood selfishness. Here he is under the influence of the Epicureans, in particular Lucretius Carus (“On the Nature of Things”) (Lucretius, 2022). Momentary enjoyment must give way to a sober understanding of reality. The correct is not the imaginary, but the real benefit of the individual, since the criterion of goodness, the criterion of morality can be not a narrowly selfish interest but coinciding with the public interest. “... The word virtue should be understood only as a striving for universal happiness, that, consequently, the object of virtue is a public good and that the actions prescribed by it are the means to achieve this goal” (Helvetius, 2022). Actions pursuing the benefits of an individual or individual communities to the detriment of the interests of society are defined by Helvetius as immoral. If everything that is beneficial to an individual is considered moral, then there will be as many virtues as there are people, which will lead to the rejection of ethics.

Methodology

The methodology of considering the problem of searching for the philosophical origins of urban studies is a complex task, reflecting the specifics of the area under study, which combines the tasks of urban

studies and philosophy. On the basis of a systematic approach, methods of socio-philosophical and social analysis are applied. Socio-philosophical and social methods are associated with the consideration of the concepts of social space, the concepts of personal identity and urban identity, the concepts of private and general interest.

The method of abstraction in the article highlights the main properties of the research problem. In particular, attention to man in the period of Enlightenment, the need for a reasonable structure of society is in tune with the basic concepts of urban studies. Helvetius' doctrine of morality is completely within the framework of the socially immanent approach. The concept of virtue is a habitual desire to do only what benefits the people with whom we live. In urban studies, the cities of the future are clean, comfortable spaces for citizens, which are managed with the active participation of residents. The city is considered as a complex multi-level system, the study of which involves an interdisciplinary approach, the combination of urban planning, philosophy, psychology and sociology.

As a result of a comparative analysis of the philosophical ideas of Helvetius and the concepts of urban studies, the article reveals the necessary data for considering the philosophical foundations of urban studies. Analysis and identification of the main aspects of the theory of interest developed by Helvetius makes it possible to find them in the fundamental concepts of urban studies.

Results

Urbanism demands the ideas of utilitarian ethics formulated in the Enlightenment. The interests of different groups of people must be realized in the public space. For the urban planner, sensations are important, based on the sense organs, with the help of which we perceive the urban environment. Application of the principle of sensationalism to the social phenomena represented by Helvetius, we find W. White, K. Lynch and J. Gahl. In their projects, they draw attention to the importance of spatial visual perception of the surrounding world, anticipating the emergence of urban visualization technology.

The need to manifest private interests in public life, in the life of the city, has become one of the main tasks of urban studies. Appeal to human nature, laid down by Helvetius, became possible in the implementation of modern urban planning projects.

Discussion

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the development of industry led to the explosive growth of cities and the decline of rural settlements. The concentration of industry led to environmental problems, and cities became unsuitable for life. There is a discussion in society about ways to solve the problems that have arisen (Curtis, 1986). One of the main directions of the decision was the idea of improving people's lives and creating comfortable conditions in the urban environment. The idea of a garden city belongs to Ebenezer Howard. In his book "Garden Cities of To-morrow", he advocated de-urbanization and limiting urban growth. Garden City is a small settlement with an agricultural suburb. The land in it is not owned by private individuals but is controlled by the municipality. In such a city, a civil society is formed that protects public areas and solves pressing problems. The population of one city is limited, but there can be many such cities, they are connected by a single center and transport arteries (Howard, 1902).

Patrick Geddes in 1915 in his work "Cities in Evolution: An Introduction to the Town Planning Movement and the Study of Cities" formulates the basics of regional planning. Geddes was influenced by Charles Darwin's ideas about evolution as the driving force behind the development of mankind (Geddes, 1915). The city for him is an instrument of evolution. When planning cities, it is necessary to take into account natural features of the territory that create complex relationships between people and the environment, determine the nature of settlements and the employment of people living in it. His ideas are at the heart of modern urban studies.

Lewis Mumford in his work “The city in History” considers the functions of the city to be the preservation of the cultural heritage of civilization. The city should be convenient for people with a diverse economic and social orientation (Mumford, 1961).

Le Corbusier in the 1920s put forward the idea of the “Radiant City” as opposed to the “Garden City”. In 1925, he presented the “Plan Voisin”, where it was proposed to demolish most of Paris and build up skyscrapers with parks and wide highways. In 1933, “Athens Charter”, written by Le Corbusier, was adopted at the International Congress of Modern Architecture, acknowledging that a tenement building was the only acceptable type of dwelling. The territory of the city should be divided into housing, industrial and recreational areas with clear boundaries. Corbusier's ideas influenced urban planning and architecture around the world, including the cities of the Soviet Union.

However, the implementation of the plans required the demolition of the old building in order to make room for new neighborhoods. Densely populated traditional areas were demolished in many cities, the city as a living community was destroyed, which caused protests from the public and led to new ideas in urban planning.

The development of urbanism was influenced by the economic recovery in the United States after the Second World War. The suburbs grew, the image of the American dream was formed as a country house and a car. New autobahns and multi-level interchanges were built without public transport, which had a negative impact on the environment. Jane Jacobs, in “The Death and Life of Great American Cities” in 1961, argued against the disregard of people as a subject in modern concepts of urban planning. She criticized the urban renewal projects of the 1950s, which did not take into account the interests of the people (Jacobs, 1961).

In 1980, William Whyte published the results of his project “Street life” in the journal “The Social life of small urban spaces”. The project was dedicated to the study of citizens on the streets, their interaction with the environment, favorite places and points of attraction. The author believes that with the help of observation and interviews, it is necessary to learn more about the interests of people and, based on these data, plan development. Whyte puts the interests of citizens first in urban planning (Whyte, 1980).

Jan Gehl, a well-known Danish architect, opposes the rigid modernist division of the city into spheres, for humanity in the environment. According to Gehl, the cityscape should be considered from the point of view of the 5 human senses and perceived at the speed of a pedestrian, not a driver (Gehl, 2010). Gehl believes that the city should be designed on a human scale, where the main argument is a person, his emotions, feelings of need and change.

Over the past decades, the paradigm of urban development has changed a lot: in the first place there is a person, his needs, interests and motives for his actions, and the city is viewed through the prism of human life. The rationale for such concepts is the psychology of a person, his value systems, the causes and consequences of his actions. We find all these ideas in the philosophy of the Enlightenment and in the theory of interest developed by Helvetius.

Conclusions

Modern urban planning is based on a combination of general and private interests. Non-economic phenomena associated with the development of the cultural urban environment have a formative value on the interaction of the processes of development of urban space. Such policies are formed on the basis of research, city-wide round tables and urban forums dedicated to organizing a comfortable environment in a modern city. Such studies cover all aspects of city life, problems are identified, and ways to solve them are proposed. One of the important parts is the collection of data and the study of human needs, the sociological research, is carried out, trends and problems are identified, and the “common interest” is revealed.

French enlighteners tried to reveal the principles of true ethics, which correspond to human nature. The goal of the ethics of Helvetius is a harmonious combination of the interest of the individual with the public interest. For Epicurus, this is the happiness of an isolated individual, equanimity and escaping from society. Happiness and freedom from suffering is achieved according to Epicurus by independence from the outside world. Epicurus does not make the problem of moral perfection dependent on social transformations (Epicurus, 2022). The ethics of Helvetius is connected with politics and with the improvement of the social order through legislation. “From this it follows that only we can hope to change the views of the people when the legislation is changed, and the reform of morals should begin with the reform of laws” (Helvetius, 2022). If the public good includes the good of everyone, then it is also the highest criterion of morality. Ethics here merges with politics, the science of man is included in the science of public administration, and man becomes a product of the political system. Mutual benefit was considered by Helvetius as a real means for a harmonious combination of private and common interests.

Helvetius concludes that self-interest need not be achieved at the expense of the interests of others. The interest is not vicious. Without it there is neither man nor society (Smith, 2001). If it is implemented in an unacceptable way, then this indicates the imperfection of the forms of human community. The only true ethics is that which takes into account selfishness. Without egoism, a person will be a lifeless abstraction. Relying on the egoistic nature of man, Helvetius tries to make a man an altruist and to force him, in pursuit of personal interest, to contribute to the public good (Studnikov & Matytsin, 2022). Helvetius reveals virtue as a real need of people. This is not an apology for selfishness, but the creation of conditions under which a person, striving for personal well-being, would promote the interests of society. A person in society must understand that the people around him have exactly the same feelings and needs. Justice as a virtue captures this moment and serves the purpose of observing the rights to realize these feelings and needs. This should lead to the ability to build your happiness without disturbing the happiness of other people. Personal interest was singled out as the most important principle of anthropology, due to human nature. Thus, the theory of interest developed by Helvetius is a great contribution to understanding the nature of man and society and becomes the philosophical foundation of urban studies.

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