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# Hypernomie as a Phenomenon of Modern Society *

*Vladimir Kuzmenkov* **
*Konstantin Starostenko* ***
*Iryna Soina* ****
*Alexander Chekulaev* *****

## Abstract

The purpose of the article is to clarify the essential characteristics of hypernomy as a social phenomenon. The comparative-historical, structural-functional and evaluative methods were used. Reference to the works of R. Dahrendorf, E. Gellner, K. Stenner, theorists of anomie, allowed us to identify several characteristic features of hypernomy. The first must include strict disciplinary control over the behaviour of citizens that affects bodily customs. There is another characteristic of hypernomy which is the identification of the functions of power and control over power. This is inherent not only in communist and post-communist countries, but also in traditional democracies that exert control over citizens through the Internet. The third characteristic of hypernomy is the predominance of production planning and control. Hypernomic societies impose a utilitarian understanding of good and evil, erasing traditional moral language. The fourth property of hypernomy is the ubiquitous spread of conformism, self-deception, and the cult of authoritarian personality. Two main conclusions are formulated: while hypernomics is the opposite of anomie, dialectically they complement each other and can pass from one to another.

**Keywords**: anomie; power; hypernomia; social control; conformism.

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** Department of Social and Philosophical Disciplines of the Orel Law Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia named after V.V. Lukyanov, Orel, 302027, 2, Ignatovast, Russia. ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9872-1417. Email: vakuzmenkov@gmail.com

*** The chief of the Department of general and applied politology of Orel State University named after I.S. Turgenev, Orel, 302026, 95, Komsomolskayast, Russia. ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1850-8606. Email: pilotskv@bk.ru

**** Department of Ukrainian and Foreign Languages, Kharkov State Academy of Physical Culture, Kharkov, 61058, 99Klochkovskayast, Ukraine. ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9554-999X. Email: soinairina2003@gmail.com

***** Department of general and applied politology of Orel State University named after I.S. Turgenev, Orel, 302026, 95, Komsomolskaya., Russia. ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0812-9023. Email: sascha.chekulaeff@yandex.ru

# Hipernomía como fenómeno de la sociedad moderna

## Resumen

El propósito del artículo es aclarar las características esenciales de la hipernomía como fenómeno social. Fueron utilizados los métodos comparativo-histórico, estructural-funcional y valorativo. La referencia a los trabajos de R. Dahrendorf, E. Gellner, K. Stenner, teóricos de la anomia, nos permitió identificar una serie de rasgos característicos de la hipernomía. El primero debe incluir un estricto control disciplinario sobre el comportamiento de los ciudadanos que afecte las costumbres corporales. Existe otra característica de la hipernomía que es la identificación de las funciones de poder y el control sobre el poder. Esto es inherente no solo a los países comunistas y poscomunistas, sino también a las democracias tradicionales que ejercen control sobre los ciudadanos a través de Internet. La tercera característica de la hipernomía es el predominio de la planificación y el control de la producción. Las sociedades hipernómicas imponen una comprensión utilitaria del bien y del mal, borrando el lenguaje moral tradicional. La cuarta propiedad de la hipernomía es la difusión ubicua del conformismo, el autoengaño y el culto de la personalidad autoritaria. Se formulan dos conclusiones principales: si bien la hipernomía es lo opuesto a la anomia, dialécticamente se complementan y pueden pasar de uno en otro.

**Palabras clave**: anomia; poder; hipernomía; control social; conformismo.

## Introduction

Postindustrial society, the main value of which is information and knowledge, contributes to the creation of new relations between people, including in the political sphere. Despite the fact that a strong civil society, political pluralism and the gradual erasure of class differences are usually referred to the main features of a post-industrial society, it is information (authority) and knowledge (power) that will determine the further development of a post-industrial society. Therefore, the simultaneous possession of information and knowledge opens up wide opportunities for the authorities in matters of mass control of the population, de-individualization of citizens, and destruction of traditional forms of relations. At the same time, these processes are clothed in a legal and technologically progressive form, which makes it possible to characterize them as hypernomie – a state of overcontrol, overregulation of everyday life. Hypernomie is the excessive attachment of citizens to role standards that determine the nature of their behavior in society with the application of positive and negative sanctions by the controlling state bodies. In this regard, the refusal of initiative, the strictly obligatory fulfillment of one's

social roles, and adaptation to imposed norms without manifesting a personal position are an obligatory behavioral ritual. At the same time, the phenomenon of hypernomie remains relatively poorly studied in science, therefore, in this article we will consider it in more detail.

The object of our research is society, the subject is hypernomie as a state of society. The purpose of the article is to highlight the essential features of hypernomie as a social phenomenon.

The study of hypernomie refers to the phenomenon of political power. Power is usually understood as the ability to have a determining influence on the activities and behavior of other people through authority, law, and violence. Unfortunately, a situation often arises when the rulers, endowed with power, do not properly care about the welfare of their citizens, the political elite is busy with issues of personal enrichment and tries to maintain its influence over society. In this case, when solving internal problems, the main support of the existing government is the coercive organs, which are entrusted with the functions of intimidation and control. Having lost its weight, the authorities are trying to compensate for their influence over society by developing a new effective mechanism, which is total control over all spheres of public life. All this is facilitated by the disunity of society, the underdevelopment of its civil institutions, leading to the suppression of individual consciousness by the power and the imposition of certain forms of behavior. Thus, the issue of hypernomie is associated with the essence of power and its transformations in modern times.

In general, in the article we will consider the theoretical and methodological prerequisites for the study of hypernomie, its modern characteristics and some debatable issues. In the conclusion, findings and guidelines for further research will be formulated. Our work should be considered a description of general issues related to hypernomie.

## 1. Theoretical framework. Methodology

The theoretical and methodological basis of the research is, first, the study of hypernomie in the works of the sociologist and political scientist R. Dahrendorf; secondly, studies of right-wing authoritarianism and nationalism, first of all, by T. Adorno, E. Gellner, K. Stenner; thirdly, a number of works on the theory of anomie and deviantology.

The appeal to anomie is not accidental: as we will show below, anomie (a state of normlessness, lawlessness, loss of normative-value coordinates) is often a consequence of hypernomie in the preceding period of social development. The study of hypernomie allows us to understand the features of the development of an individual in a post-industrial society, including

the tendency to deviations. Many publications are devoted to the study of the emergence of anomie during the transformation and modernization of hypernomic societies, including in the aspects of the growth of the terrorist threat, the rise of theft, murder and corruption (Galtung, 1996; Zhao, 2015; Messner *et al.*, 2017; He and Messner, 2020).

Three methods were used. The comparative historical approach allowed us to examine hypernomie from a historical perspective. The structural-functional method was used to determine the elements of the social structure that contribute to the formation of hypernomie. Value analysis revealed the dynamics of norms and values in a hypernomical society.

## 2. Results and discussion

The concept of "hypernomie" was introduced by the Anglo-American political scientist and sociologist R. Dahrendorf in his work "Letter to a Polish friend" (Dahrendorf, 1994). In it, he notes that hypernomie for a short time contributed to the flourishing of communist regimes, but in post-communist societies it was replaced by anomie (lack of norms and their mismatch). However, hypernomie cannot be regarded as the exclusive domain of communist countries, as we will show below.

Communist societies rely on strict discipline, including in everyday life. The political space is built with the help of technologies of power oriented towards control over the human body: obligatory subbotniks, marches and demonstrations, passing the norms of physical training, military field training, etc. When detailing the technologies for the implementation of political power in the USSR, one should list the social technologies of localization (passport regime, registration, "invisible queues" for housing), technologies for manipulating scarcity (housing, food, cultural values, educational opportunities), indoctrination technologies (ideology and propaganda), isolation technologies (restrictions on travel abroad, closed cities, prisons and psychiatric hospitals for dissidents) and confiscation technologies (conscription) (Korolev, 2008). Other communist regimes add their own characteristics. In modern China, for example, this is also the birth rate (no more than two children per family) and even the compulsory communication with relatives, and in the DPRK – a ban on living in cities for "disloyal" and food corruption.

The classical analysis of disciplinary institutions was given by the French philosopher M. Foucault, singling out as the most important schools, the army, a psychiatric hospital, and a prison (Foucault, 2018); he believed, however, that the communist reality was not much different from the reality of Western societies (with the exception that party discipline still existed under communism). Thus, political dominance takes on the features of biopolitics.

Modern Western society also has a hypernomical character in relation to human corporeality. The difference is that control is clothed in softer features and is implemented, as a rule, not directly by the state, but by private structures, nevertheless, associated with the government. Typical examples of hypernomie in the field of bodily control are transhumanism, neuropharmaceuticals, cosmetology, and plastic surgery. One can even speak of "posthuman showcase corporeality" as the demonstrativeness of body modifications and orientation towards sensory perception (Barichko, 2010: 101). Often, modern bodily practices (tattoos, piercings, surgical deformations of one's own body (scarring, tunneling, replacing bones with artificial alloys, etc.) subordinate biological nature to the cult of social prestige. The fact of their extreme prevalence in the modern world is also confirmed by medical practitioners (Shepherd, 2019).

Other examples are biohaking – the improvement of the human body with the help of biomedical procedures, including direct intervention in the work of the body and the CRISPR / cas9 – widely known and, unfortunately, scandalous technology of the human genome modifications that could potentially divide humanity into the people of a different nature and therefore biologically and socially unequal.

Concentration on caring for health means devaluation of caring for the soul and mind, that is, eternal life (salvation) in heaven is replaced by a pleasant life on earth. This kind of human perception reflects the process of cultural primitivization. Sports propaganda, the reclame of cosmetics, the widespread introduction of drugs and other things contribute to the oblivion of the spiritual and the perception of the bodily as intrinsic value in isolation from the higher reality. The unrestricted exploitation of corporeality testifies to the transformation of the body into a symbol, into an object of consumption, i.e., to the enslavement of man by the mass media (Baudrillard, 2000). Moreover, these biotechnological practices can become constituents of new social relations. It is no coincidence that F. Fukuyama, in his work "Our Posthuman Future" (Fukuyama, 2004), speaks of a change in society and culture as a whole if the biological nature of man changes.

Another feature of hypernomical societies is the identification of the functions of power and control over power. If in a democratic society power and control functions are separated, in a society of an authoritarian kind they continue each other. The best indicator is the status of the prosecutor's office. If in a democratic country it is usually a civil structure, then in an authoritarian country its representatives usually wear shoulder straps and are thus actually subordinate to the executive branch.

The purpose of identifying power and control functions is the formation of "power over power", endowing certain people or structures with exclusive authority. Examples from the communist past and present: the General

Secretaries and the Politburo itself of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Communist Party of China, the General Secretary and the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, etc. Many post-communist states (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, etc.) retained this function of "power over power", most often in the hands of the country's president.

It is impossible, however, to draw in this aspect rigid boundaries between democratic and authoritarian countries, since the former are also subject to the erosion of fundamental principles. One-sided presentation of the racial issue and open terror of dissent, legal humiliation of indigenous Europeans before migrants, excessive emphasis on sexual issues, scandalous elections in the United States in 2020 and much more symbolize the onset of a kind of time of "controlled democracy". It is associated with the removal of a number of issues outside the scope of public discussion, which means the introduction of ideological control and the imposition of sanctions on freedom of thought. If the Soviet society left citizens the freedom of "kitchen conversations", then during the period of "electronic democracy" this freedom is increasingly taken away due to the influence of the media. The story of the Telegram service, which refused to transfer the keys to decrypt messages to the Russian special services, as well as the scandal with the Facebook social network, which used the personal data of users to form targeted advertising and transfer this data to the governments of various states, became widely known.

The very activity of a person on the Internet in general and on social networks in particular is hypernomical: on the one hand, every citizen has the right to anonymity, on the other hand, it cannot but be public in the space of mass interactions. Internet companies have the right to form the rules of human activity, but the question is their humanity and morality. It also raises the issue of memory and its use. If human memory tends to forget and is always limited by personal experience, then digital memory is potentially eternal and accessible to many. As noted by the Russian academician V.A. Lektorsky:

> In principle, digital memory of you can be stored forever. You stop being the owner of information about your life and its owner. Your personal space turns out to be hacked, as it were, and you become the subject of control by other people (Lektorsky, 2020: 17).

The apotheosis of hypernomie on the Internet is the so-called "cancel culture". This is "a special form of behavior of Internet users who begin to massively boycott or express their contempt for some public figure who has spoken out on a sensitive and controversial issue not in a popular fashion" (Trufanova, 2021: 31). The fate of D. Trump's Twitter page is a vivid example of the "annihilation of existence" of a user in public discourse. For the average person, this culture can cost an unfair loss of reputation, job, family conflicts and health problems. Let us emphasize that Soviet society,

often demonized on the same Internet, at least left a person a chance for public repentance and the preservation of common life benefits. Modern hypernomie is becoming more and more dehumanized.

Another feature of hypernomie is the dominance of plan, control, and regulation of production. In the USSR, that was reflected in the classical principles-slogans "Five-year plan in four years", "Overfulfill the plan", "Catch up and overtake America", etc. Modernity offers new forms of the plan. Leaving aside the DPRK Songbun system, let us turn to the "social rating" model officially introduced in China in 2016.

According to the Chinese rating system, all actions of a person are assessed by adding or subtracting points to the originally assigned indicator of 1000 points. The rating is changed electronically, regardless of the will of the person. Absolutely everything affects the rating: attitude to the authorities, communication with relatives, credit history, even the cleanliness of the place of residence. Interestingly, a decrease in the rating automatically "pulls into a funnel" of unreliability: a low-rated person cannot buy tickets for a plane or train, cannot work in a prestigious position, other people will not want to communicate with him (this leads to a decrease in their points), it sharply decreases chances of getting quality medical and educational services or even a fair trial. In fact, this is a system of social exclusion and alienation of people from the blessings of life, providing for unquestioning loyalty. At the same time, power claims to differentiate between good and evil as fundamental ethical categories: good is behavior that meets the criterion of politically established utility and expediency, evil is all alternative. The requirement to "do the right thing" and "understand rightly" becomes the basis of social morality.

The very existence of a "social rating" does not allow us to talk about moral and immoral in our usual sense. Traditional moral language is inadequate to describe the moral state of such a society. As Russian researchers note:

> The archaizing mechanism of palliative resolution of conflicts and contradictions begins to consist in the fact that different social groups cease to be compared with each other in the same normative space. Some citizens are becoming more and more unequal to others, which cannot receive a convincing moral justification... (Martyanov *et al.*, 2016: 65).

Thus, the "plan" becomes an end in itself and acquires an internal logic that dictates indifference to everything that is not related to its conduct. The very system of "social rating" speaks of the close attention of the Chinese authorities to absolutely everything except human life. It is institutionalized indifference based on technical and technological dominance. The myth of "e-democracy" cannot be realized without all-encompassing technological progress.

In the middle of the last century, the German philosopher R. Guardini accurately noted the changed role of technology in modern society and its place in maintaining power:

> Technique ultimately has nothing to do with either benefit or well-being, it is about power; about power in the broadest sense of the word. The bearer of such power is trying to lay his hand on the primary elements of nature and human existence. This means the boundless possibilities of construction, but also destruction, especially where it comes to a human being, which is far from being so firm and reliable in itself, as is usually believed. So, there is an undeniable danger, immeasurably growing because it is trying to impose its own authority and power – not someone specific, but an anonymous "state" (Guardini, 1990: 144).

This opens up prospects for qualitatively new totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. Their technical basis is the Internet of Things, which allows total control of all human actions. It is no coincidence that some scientists, such as the Canadian sociologist V. Mosco, talk about:"the emergence of a new type of panopticon – an impersonal controlling structure" (Kravchenko, 2019: 30).

Finally, we note one more feature of hypernomie – the widest spread of collectivism and conformism, idealization of obedience, self-sacrifice for the sake of the group, rejection of private property and personal independence. Therefore, in a "hypernomical society" there is a cult of violence and coercion, and much attention is paid to historical events associated with the use of force, and historical revisionism is often spread. Communist societies, again, are not alone: for example, the events in the United States in 2020 clearly illustrate the validity of this thesis, and above all, for democratic societies. To survive in such conditions, an individual needs to educate and develop the following negative qualities: conformism, opportunism, acceptability of corruption, deception, pretense, and doublethink.

British anthropologist E. Gellner reveals this feature in more detail. First, he wrote about the USSR as follows (although his thought is valid not only in relation to the USSR):

> Social control presupposes the purposeful drawing of practically all members of society into the mud of hypocrisy and demagoguery, both moral and economic. Everyone had to express support for the persecution of dissidents, recite sacred truths, and participate in illegal economic activities. And since everyone was somehow guilty – before morality or before the law – the likelihood of moral rebellion turned out to be extremely low… (Gellner, 2004: 155).

Secondly, he notes that, in a paradoxical way, many hypernomic societies speak of high culture, the purification of the people's soul, the affirmation of truth, and other serious things. The general meaning of these speeches is the affirmation of unity, but in reality, these societies are internally divided.

> A society striving to become an Ummah, that is, to embody some unique truth bordering on revelation, a charismatic community that affirms truth on earth and makes virtue the main goal of its state – such a society can be atomized and in reality is atomized in the name of achieving higher goals (Gellner, 2004: 155-156).

These higher goals are illusion, painstakingly indoctrinated into the mass consciousness. However, without this disunity, there will be no higher goals, as well as vice versa. Real higher goals have already been given to the value consciousness in religious and moral rules, and there is no need to rediscover them. The sacred and the social are two interconnected, but still different spheres of society, and only with hypernomie they try to merge them together.

For this reason, a distinctive feature of hypernomical societies is the weakening of the ability of many citizens to make independent and rational judgments and a tendency to conformism. T. Adorno, B. Altemeyer, E. Fromm, K. Stenner and other researchers of right-wing authoritarianism concluded that reduced intelligence indicates adherence to ultra-conservative ideology and love of hierarchy. Right-wing authoritarianism provides simple answers to people with low abstract thinking abilities (Adorno, 2001; Altemeyer, 2006). There is some difference between right and left authoritarianism, however, according to the common belief of some contemporary authors, it is not fundamental, and conformism is inherent in both left and right authoritarians (Stenner, 2009a; Stenner, 2009b).

The psychological boundaries of authoritarian thinking are quite wide: its carriers may tend to all-encompassing conformism, turning into submission even to criminal orders. Virtually all military and political criminals were pathological conformists. As Russian psychologists write, "the conformist consciousness is automated, it lacks a sense of responsibility, there is no distinction between good and evil, a person becomes a "cog" of a machine, an automaton, ready at any moment on the command to "turn on" and blindly execute any orders, orders coming from above" (Korolenko and Donskikh, 1990: 148-149). They emphasize that both hypernomie and anomie are essentially based on widespread deviations, which in value and psychological terms brings them closer to each other.

## Conclusions

Thus, hypernomie is the opposite of anomie, however, dialectically they complement each other, they are able to pass into each other according to Hegel's law of dialectics. This happens due to the fact that overcontrol gives rise to a person who is ill-adapted to life in a free society. Hypernomie rests on fear and the imposition of a primitive worldview, which often disguises the incompetence of the social elite. Such a model of behavior is pathological, because it kills in the bud the sense of justice, any positive

initiatives, encourages skepticism, nihilism, hypocrisy, deception and self-deception – that very doublethink. On the other hand, anomie can result in the establishment of hypernomie. Typical examples are the history of any totalitarian country right before the establishment of a totalitarian regime. Chaos, crime, extreme decentralization of power and other crisis phenomena can be eliminated with strict control of the behavior of the population by the authorities.

The destruction of the hypernomic order inevitably leads to the growth of anomie, as we have already noted above. There are many reasons for this: the abolition of social institutions of moral control of society (for example, the party and its youth wing), the collapse of the centralized economy, a sharp withdrawal from deficits, a management vacuum, weakening of ideological control, and much more. Although hypernomic societies have their own strengths, they are nevertheless characterized by hypertrophy of certain traits, which eventually leads to their historical defeat. However, modern hypernomie is increasingly acquiring electronic features, which allows us to speak of the emergence of a completely new, *network hypernomie*, which inevitably encompasses any socialized person. It is likely that this opens the stage of a new totalitarianism, more resistant to all threats.

An inevitable problem of traditional hypernomieis the difficulty and cost of control and the ineffectiveness of technological and disciplinary action. On the one hand, citizens resist the right of the state to interfere in their daily existence and therefore actively double-think, that is, they behave demonstratively obediently, deep down in their hearts denying their obedience. On the other hand, overregulation slows down social progress and is increasingly becoming the subject of intra-elite power struggles. In the digital age, this is taking on unpredictable directions. Therefore, the sustainability of modern hypernomic societies is an open question and only the development of human civilization can give an answer to it.

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