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# SPONTANEOUS REGIMENS AND COMPENSATORY MECHANISMS IN RUSSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### Abstract

Institutional regulation of socially significant processes in the modern, rapidly changing reality does not always meet the interests and capabilities of the already existing practice of social development. In the face of such disagreement, sustainable forms of activity, relationships, and relations emerge spontaneously to align practice and regulatory requirements. Understanding of the nature and specifics of randomly occurring regimens can provide for management optimization. The article considers and analyzes spontaneously emerging stable forms of activity and relations within the currently reformed system of higher education in Russia. These spontaneous regimens are considered as an adaptive response of the self-organizing, culturally specific system to hyper-regulation, bureaucracy, and uncertainty in terms of values and meaning of the reforms. Considering education as the process of extended reproduction of cultural being of the person, the authors of the article argue that it is necessary to take into account the cultural congruence of the educational process (especially in the conditions of globalization) and suggest the indicators of pedagogical culture of society. This allows putting forward a number of hypotheses about the specific nature of spontaneous regimens in the Russian higher education. Having found contradictions of the strategy and the implementation of institutional regulation to the interests and capabilities of the real development of higher education system in Russia, the authors come up with a number of ideas on the adjustment of management of higher school reform. This adjustment should be aimed at rational and axiological optimization of modernization ideology.

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Keywords: Self-organizing system, higher education, spontaneous regimens, indicators of pedagogical culture.

# 1. Introduction

The issues and processes related to the reformation of higher education in Russia are among the most topical for philosophical, sociological, pedagogical research and discussions during the last two decades. This is understandable: higher education is the most important source of social capital in modern societies, as Fukuyama (2004) convincingly demonstrated in his studies. The growth of the number of publications on request "Higher education in Russia" registered on the portal elibrary.ru (Scientific Electronic Library) is indicative, e.g. in 2005–2006, 551 articles were published on this topic, and in 2015–2016, there were already 3625 articles. The authors of these publications ponder on the reform policy and change in the essential characteristics of the higher education system, which is already giving fruit.

At the same time, there are three main strands in approaching the essence of education, successfully designated by the professor of Kuban State University, Doctor of Sociology, the member of the Russian Academy of Social Sciences, Khagurov (2017) in an interview to the correspondent form an information agency Krasnaya Vesna:

(1) Higher education is regarded as a social value, so it must be accessible, free of charge and meet the needs of the society as a whole;

(2) Education is a personal value and should be as individualized as possible to meet the needs of the individual;

(3) Higher education should be included in market relations, as they are considered by the proponents of the reforms as the universal social relations. According to such views, education must obey the objective laws of market operation and development (Khagurov, 2017).

The first and second approaches reflect the asymptotes in the dialectic of social development. Possessing the dual individual-collective nature, a person enshrines in culture (in the form of norms, values, and ideals) balance of these opposites acceptable in the actual historical conditions (Bazhutina, 1995). In education, on the one hand, this balance is reproduced; on the other, the prerequisites for its transformation are created as well. Such dialectic finds itself in the history of pedagogy and development of educational systems. The third approach hypostatizes one of the parameters of the process of education due to the peculiarities of the modern economy oriented society.

The insufficiency of each individual approach is obvious, and the idea of their effective correlation seems to be lacking in the developers of the reform strategy, nor in those who are implementing the reform. It is not accidental that the negative attitude to the reforms in the public consciousness and in the subjects of the educational process significantly prevails. The authors of this research believe that the problems of strategy and practice of education development should be considered, being guided by such methodology of system approach as synergy of social processes. We view higher education as a system with self-organization capabilities within the hierarchy of parent systems "education system as a whole" and "socio-cultural community as a system".

#### 2. Problem Statement

From the point of view of system theory, the main problem of higher education development in Russia lies in a discrepancy and often in a contradiction of the already existing principles of structuring and

development of the higher education system to its artificial modernization. This situation makes the system unstable and leads to its destruction. In the system of higher education, as capable of self-organization (this is a characteristic feature of all social systems), there can arise the new elements and relations that allow the system as a whole and its elements to adapt to the changes occurring under the reform pressure (adaptation refers to the dual adjustment/change process). The system is transformed in accordance with its capabilities, striving to preserve the relative integrity. Randomly occurring regimens significantly affect the processes and results of the reform in both positive and negative ways. Therefore, the study of their systemic nature is necessary to properly manage the modernization process.

# 3. Research Questions

- **3.1.** It is necessary to understand what the discrepancy/contradiction of existing principles of structuring and development of higher education system in Russia to the artificially initiated modernization is. The solution for this issue allows speculating about the nature of spontaneous regimens appearing in the system as compensatory mechanisms. To achieve this, it is necessary to compare:
  - the foundations of management of the higher education reform in Russia and
  - the foundations of existing principles of structuring and development of higher education system.
- **3.2.** It is important to understand what spontaneous regimens occur in the higher education system and why. What socio-cultural value can these spontaneous regimens have? This will allow identifying and analyzing randomly occurring sustainable forms of activity and relations in the higher education system.

# 4. Purpose of the Study

- **4.1.** To develop theoretical grounds for understanding the nature of spontaneous regimens and compensatory mechanisms in the reformed system of higher education.
- **4.2.** To draw conclusions that are important for making administrative decisions in higher education modernization in Russia.

# 5. Research Methods

### 5.1. As a theoretical and methodological base of research are used:

- the conception of synergetics of social processes (Knyazeva & Kurdjumov, 2002; Lepskij, 2014; Razumovsky, 1999);
- philosophical anthropological conception, viewing a dynamic equilibrium of individualcollective activity within a certain cultural model of development as the essential characteristic of human being (Bazhutina, 1995);

- findings of cross-cultural studies (Matsumoto, 2008; Hofstede, 2011), as well as of the national culture studies as a basic factor of organizational behavior by Hofstede (2011).
- **5.2.** The study uses theoretical methods: critical analysis, comparative analysis, content analysis, hypothetico-deductive method, dialectical method.
- 5.3. Empirical base of research includes:
  - real processes of interaction among the subjects of the educational process in a higher education institution;
  - publications and posts by subjects of the educational process in social networks and on various forums, as well as their interviews;
  - regulatory framework for the reforms in higher education.

### 6. Findings

# 6.1. comparing the foundations of management of the higher education reform in Russia and the existing principles of structuring and development of higher education system

To resolve the issue 3.1. we have addressed the regulatory framework of the process of Russian education reform and compared the declared goals and values with the actual, found in their realization (with help of content-analysis of scientific publications on the subject, the posts and comments published by the subjects of educational process in social networks, on various forums, as well as the interviews).

Federal Law N 273-FL of 29.12.2012 On Education in the Russian Federation was made being drawn on the Law of the Russian Federation N 3266-1 of 10.07.1992 On Education, in which, in accordance with the socio-economic changes in society initiated and conducted by the proponents of the liberaldemocratic policy, the relevant liberal and democratic values were proclaimed as the main values and priorities in the field of educational policy. These new priorities and values for the country are declared, in particular, in Article 2 of the Law of the Russian Federation On Education entitled Principles of state policy in the field of education: the widest possible freedom of the individual in all spheres of public life; the primacy of the individual over the collective, expressed in the right of the trainee to the widest range of forms and methods of education and upbringing; legal and political equality, understood as equality of opportunity, because all human beings are born equally free; tolerance and pluralism; belief in the progress and power of the human mind. The same values are again reflected in the Federal Law N 273-FL of 29.12.2012. Thus, according to the Article 3 Basic principles of state policy and legal regulation of relations in the sphere of education and Article 2 defining the basic concepts used in the Federal Law, education is carried out primarily in the interests of the person aiming at his/her professional development, and meeting his/her of educational needs and interests. The interests of society and the state are not even taken into account. The latter are as though deprived of subjectivity and, therefore, have no right to demand from the individual the fulfillment of his civic duties in the sphere of education. However, it is evident that the formation of a professional community is a socially significant process. Therefore, the regulatory framework should balance the interests of the individual and society in this process, but at the level of the basic principles, we do not find the evidence of that.

Next, another document draws our attention, i.e. an Annex to the draft resolution by the Council of the Russian Union of Rectors of June 25, 2012 N 3, containing the draft Code of Professional Ethics of a faculty member. The code defines ethical directives for the higher education institutions staff in the Russian Federation, namely professors, associate and assistant professors, lecturers, scientific workers, educational and scientific supporting personnel, and administrative staff. According to this document, the professional activity of higher education institutions, firstly, is wholly subordinated to the benefits of the Russian state and society; secondly, is aimed at providing intellectual, human and cultural development of the country, and, finally, is a factor to provide for national security and the interests of the state. Modern scientific and educational activity should be considered by academic staff through the prism of the original mission of the Russian Education, i.e. "enlightenment of the people and service to the Motherland". Since higher education is a sphere that is subordinated to the interests of a wide range of state institutions, social and corporate groups, the academic staff are endowed with the hugest responsibility: their activities should meet the interest?), and also must provide for the achievement of all-national goals in intellectual, economic, technological, social and cultural fields.

It is obvious that high ethical standards for the academic staff are based on values of collectivism and civil responsibility, whereas the law On Education in the Russian Federation communicates the values of individualism, personal rights and freedoms. The ratio of these rather controversial directives is not defined but is given to the commentators of the regulatory framework. Moreover, a number of declared values, such as the right of the student to the widest range of forms and methods of education and upbringing, do not correspond to the capabilities of real educational practice. Such axiological uncertainty of this framework and the absence of its relation to the processes, which it is intended to regulate, cause chaos in the educational system at its various levels as subjects of educational process lack general ideas about its meanings, purposes, instruments, and efficiency criteria. This is the cause of dissatisfaction with the ongoing reforms and negative evaluation of the education quality by different respondents, e.g. administrative staff, academic staff, students, their parents, potential employers. (See e.g., the materials of the Round Table 2011; Donskikh, 2012; Balackij, 2014, etc.).

At the level of making specific management decisions in the field of higher education, there dominates managerialism, i.e. theory and practice of management, based on the following ideas: efficiency is a key value; management tools and practices are universal; a manager possesses expert authority and knowledge (Abramov, 2016). As a result, value-oriented landmarks acquire a pronounced economic character, i.e. qualitative characteristics are reduced to quantitative indicators, and efficiency is determined by the ratio of costs and revenues (Porshnev, 2005; Lipskaya, 2014, et al.). The key mechanism of interaction is competition, which is focused on the maximally rapid exploitation of human capital and achievement of high quantitative indicators. For example, according to the findings of the all-Russian research conducted in 2016 at the Center of Social Forecasting and Marketing by Sheregi and Kirillov (2017), there exist the "race" for survival at the universities and the labor of academic staff can be compared to that of the workers at the production line (p. 97). The complex humane process of pedagogical interaction is ignored or simply eliminated because it cannot be expressed in terms of return on investment. The conditions for long-term and responsible relations between the subjects of educational process are

disappearing (the number of students per a professor increases; the teaching load is reduced, and any pedagogical work is declared insignificant, if it does not result in the form of a formal indicator; contract terms with academic staff are shortened; criteria to evaluate the academic staff performance constantly change, etc.). All these decisions are made under the slogan of increasing the efficiency of the university and academic staff, but, in fact, this leads to a formalization of the educational process and scholarly endeavor, and even to their unconcealed imitation, and undermines the results.

At the horizontal level, where, actually, the educational process is carried out, the subject of this process should transform the chaos of the target and value directives into some meaningful activity. And since human activity is largely determined by the specificity of culture, such stable connections and relationships which allow the subjects of the educational process to act in the most acceptable for them within this culture in ways are formed in these bifurcation points. It is safe to say that the specificity of cultural methods of activity revealed in the cross-cultural research (Matsumoto, 2008; Hofstede, 2011.) is manifested in the educational process. It is *the specificity of culture that forms the basis of the existing principles of structuring and development of education in general and higher education in particular*. It is not accidental that in the papers devoted to problems of modern educational process. And in the discussions on the development of adequate global models of higher education, the need to "take into account the peculiarities of national and cultural code in its value dimension" is emphasized (Kasatkin & Silantiev, 2017, p.144).

In the national pedagogy and philosophy of education, the idea of cultural congruence is being developed in two main directions. The first assumes that culture is a set of significant achievements (by nation, people, humanity), and the task of the educational process is "to bring the child to the values of culture" (Bondarevskaja, 2014), "grasping culture" (Rozhkov, 2012). The second direction involves permanent procedurality of culture, striving to correlate the dynamics of its changes with the specifics of human nature and its social activities of daily living. In this approach, education is a way of being in which man and culture develop (Bim-Bad, 2015, et al.).

Both approaches, we believe, reflect the significant in the content and functions of any culture: on the one hand, in material and ideal objects of culture the best ways of organization of activity and interaction of people in a certain community are fixed, the achievements important for community life are preserved; on the other hand, the specificity of culture being (symbolically-emblematic) allows for and initiates its subjective interpretation and creative development. Culture establishes the measure of the correlation between reproductive and creative, individual and collective in the value and meaning guidelines of activity. Therefore, cultural congruence of the educational process implies reliance on the basic values and meanings of the culture in which it is realized, both in the content of education and in the organization of the process itself. This fully applies to the higher education system.

A number of indicators can be offered to characterize the peculiarities of the pedagogical culture of a society:

- training (emphasis on knowledge transfer) vs. upbringing (emphasis on value transfer);
- individualism (emphasis on the formation of the significance of "I") vs. collectivism (emphasis on the formation of the significance of "We");

reproductivity vs. creativity.

These indicators describe the values and meaning limits of education, understood as the expanded socio-cultural anthropogenesis. The degree of distinctiveness and the ratio of these limits can be specific for different cultures. This makes it problematic to directly borrow ideas and ways to organize educational activities.

We assume that the prevalence of importance of upbringing is peculiar to the domestic pedagogical culture, higher education included (in Russia, axiological issues were always defining). With regard to indicators of reproductive and creative, we have not been able to reveal any evident long-term preferences. It is thought that this component of pedagogical culture is the most dynamic and corresponds to the demands of society to preserve or change the current. (e.g., in the Russian pedagogy of 70-90s, it is possible to trace the emergence of a number of innovative schools and technologies initiating the development of creative principal: a humanistic pedagogy centered on the individual, pedagogy of cooperation, pedagogical technologies of creative mastery of school subjects. However, the beginning of the XXI century did not introduce anything substantially new in pedagogy, despite the constant political initiatives of the reorganization of the educational process.). As for the ratio of individualism vs. collectivism, Russian pedagogy has been looking for the cherished "collegiality" that organically unites "I" and "we" on the basis of belonging to some universal values since the Slavophilism times.

It goes without saying that the assumption about the characteristic features of the national pedagogical culture requires further research and detailed arguments. But at the hypothesis level, it allows explaining, e.g., some reactions to the ideas and results of educational reforms. Thus the rejection of the Unified State Examination (despite years of implementation and improvement, there are many critical publications and negative reviews among various subjects of the educational process about this form of assessment) and protest against the reduction of pedagogical interaction are related to the deeply rooted in the Russian world-view idea of the inherent component of upbringing in any element of the educational process. While the feeling of belonging to the mission of "enlightenment of the people and service to the Motherland" (see Code of ethics) does not allow to adopt economic guidelines of modern reforms. We believe that the specificity of the national pedagogical culture will manifest itself in the formation of spontaneous regimens and compensatory mechanisms.

In different cultures, the correlation between the key mechanisms of social development – competition and cooperation, which are the result of individual and collective nature of the person, - is established in a unique way. D. Matsumoto, in particular, notes: "A number of intercultural studies indicate that cultures vary greatly in terms of their values and attitudes towards cooperation and conduct aimed at cooperation." (Matsumoto, 2008, p. 563). Accepting the thesis about cultural congruence education, we believe that the attitude towards cooperation and competition in the system of higher education is culturally predefined. Drawing from the findings of the study of national culture as a basic factor of organizational behavior, Hofstede (2011), we have put forward a number of hypotheses regarding the nature of spontaneous regimens in the reformed higher education system in Russia. Firstly, we can assume that the desire for cooperation and behavior, oriented on the value of cooperation, will be predominant (in Russia, collectivism index is high). Secondly, cooperation can take the form of a protective mechanism against the excessive pressure of the administration (in Russia, the power distance index is quite high). Thirdly,

cooperation can conserve significant for the system relations and relationships, reducing the level of uncertainty in the system (Russia scores high in uncertainty avoidance index).

# **6.2.** understanding what spontaneous regimens occur in the higher education system and why and what socio-cultural value can these spontaneous regimens have on the higher education system.

To resolve issue 3.2, we have turned to the study of educational environment (scientific papers, anonymous academic staff survey, content-analysis of forums and portals devoted to problems of education); it has allowed revealing spontaneous regimens emerging in this environment aimed at adaptation (adaptation refers to the dual adjustment/change process).

Substantial insufficiency and excessive formalization of the educational process in the higher school are compensated by: educational platforms (e.g., Lektorium, created in 2009 with the support of the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs Rosmolodezh, or a website on modern fundamental science and the scientists who create it, Postnauka); educational movements and their analogues (e.g., Open Chair in Novosibirsk, lecture courses at Higher School of Economy, or Open University of Siberia); seminars and workshops, initiated by people with some socially significant experience free of charge for anyone willing to learn (e.g., public lectures and workshops at the Novosibirsk State Regional Scientific Library).

These forms of educational activity are extremely diverse in content and quality, are not systematically regulated, many of them are not controlled; however, they meet various educational needs and creative initiatives in the context of cultural pluralism. It is worth mentioning that value and meaning pluralism is a good ground for the emergence and prosperity of socially dangerous and destructive impact on people's worldview as well. Appealing to esoteric, neo-pagan, psychological, etc. non-trivial forms of knowledge, the authors of pseudo-educational websites, training programmes, lectures, and seminars manipulate people, achieving their own goals. Such a consequence of modern information freedom in the randomly formed educational space requires the ability to distinguish high-quality and safe content from damaging or threatening. We believe that this is a serious challenge for the educational system, and it touches upon the upbringing (axiological) aspect of the educational process.

Spontaneously emerging forms of educational activity serve as the real market mechanisms of promotion of corresponding services and an example of both cooperation, and competition manifesting themselves in an educational environment. It is not by chance that these mechanisms begin to be actively and consciously used by many educational subjects, i.e. university educational web portals and massive open online courses are being developed, universities arrange public lectures, etc.

As spontaneously, without any artificial regulators, various student associations and clubs meeting the worldview forming needs of the younger generation are being established. As a rule, these are associations focused on the development of the value system and the formation of worldview, i.e. reading and debating clubs, philosophy and drama clubs. It is this educational component that is ignored in the modern higher education because it has no evident return on investment, not can be formalized in the accreditation indicators. Meanwhile, the demand for the worldview formation skills is very high in the multicultural society. The educators who continue to associate their professional activities with the

upbringing mission meet this demand and understand that human and social capital is formed while cooperating this way. And this is the most important function of the educational system.

A key idea in the strategy of reforming higher education in Russia is to create a competitive market for educational services. Therefore, the main mechanism of development is the competitive type of relations. The desire of the university "to get some position in the rating" and "pass accreditation", which is a symbol of success, is divorced with the real educational practice, ignores most of the actual demands of the subjects of the educational process, and often, their opportunities. In this regard, ethically contradictory and even antisocial stable relations and practices are formed. Thus, "publish or perish" imperative for the academic staff, graduate students and post-graduates led to the flourishing of the whole market of services on arranging participation in correspondence conferences with the publication of conference materials in the collections of papers registered in RSCI. The services of "fast" publication of articles in prestigious journals are widely offered. If necessary, one can also pay for the required paper review. It is not difficult to find suggestions on writing a dissertation "on a turnkey basis". The services on writing abstracts, course and diploma projects for the students are also offered. Such simulation of scientific and publication activity has not been disturbing anyone for a long time. The practice of manipulating markers of scientific success for both articles and journals publishing them emerge and become commonplace. Mutual quoting and self-quoting are intended to raise the H-index. A number of journals strongly recommend intending authors to quote the previously published articles of this journal in order to raise their impact factor. Simple procedures are developed and spread in the educational environment, allowing circumventing the system of Anti-plagiarism designed to control the level of novelty of the publication.

All these practices are widely used. We have found the ambivalent nature of their ethical assessment, as these practices counteract an excessive pressure of artificial regulators in the educational system. Participants of the educational process enter into relations of cooperation and mutual assistance in order to remain competitive in the conditions of market-driven education. Artificially induced competition creates compensatory mechanisms of cooperation in which competition is only imitated. In terms of Universalist ethics, this increase in competitiveness cannot be considered fair. For the system as a whole, such relationships are not destructive, but the quality of the system is significantly reduced: instead of successful functioning there is only imitation of successful functioning. From the standpoint of liberal ethics, each subject has the right to defend its interests, unless it infringes the interests and rights of other subjects. High ethical principles are too abstract to regulate real life.

Thus, it is possible to say that the listed spontaneous regimens demonstrate the general decline of the ethos of national science and education. Is it worth trying to develop methods of control, punishment or invent new indicators of scientific success? It is thought that this will only entail the emergence of new mechanisms to counteract them and succeed easily. In his work Social Structure and Anomie R. K. Merton has already shown that anti-social behavior takes on a significant scale when "the system of cultural values praises, in fact above all, certain symbols of success, common to the overall population, while the social fabric of society severely restricts or completely eliminates access to the proven means of acquiring these symbols for the majority of the same population" (Merton, 2009, p. 36-37). Similar situation exists in the modern reformed system of higher education. The only difference is that the symbols of success are

proclaimed and praised not by a system of cultural values, but by an administration that determines the nature of reform.

We believe that in the modern system of higher education, the rejection of rigid vertical ordering and the search for a balance between hierarchical management structure and self-management in the educational and scientific environment, the formation of culture of trust and high ethical standards in the educational environment, the involvement of the expert community in the adoption of strategically important for reforming decisions are far more effective. It is important to note that in the educational system, not invented "top-down", and functioning within real socio-cultural changes, there is always a potential for self-transformation and self-regulation. There are always unsympathetic subjects of the process, detecting the "weaknesses" of the system, and suggesting new relations and elements that optimize system processes. In addition, equally important for the functioning and preservation of the integrity of the system are those processes that provide a mechanism of negative feedback, retain and stabilize the most significant for the existence of the system relationships. Therefore, reformation is always controversially embedded in the existing ways of activity and comprehension of education. Stable behavioral patterns, habitual forms of thought and action are not transformed instantly at the request of reformers and politicians. Spontaneous regimens are adaptive processes which, on the one hand, can detect problematic areas of functioning of the system and, on the other hand, can help to preserve its integrity, consolidating in an unregulated way the relations and elements significant for the system. Ethically ambivalent or anti-social sustainable forms of activity and relationships are, in our view, an indicator of ineffective hierarchical management.

### 7. Conclusion

- **7.1.** The system of higher education in modern Russia is destabilized by hyper-regulation (unjustified reinforcement of vertical order functions) and contradictions of value-target directives at different levels of the system. Existing system-forming relations are being destroyed and new ones are emerging as a result of the processes of the system self-organization. Random stable relations and relationships are formed, allowing for a socially significant educational system to retain its functional integrity or to compensate for a transforming impact of the modernization.
- **7.2.** It is expedient to consider peculiarities of formation of spontaneous regimens in the educational system through the prism of correlation of inherent to human nature principles of individual and collective. In various cultural and historical communities, the correlation of these principles being one of the most important world-view bases of activity, educational as well, is formed and fixed by various means of culture (values, norms, ideals, etc.).
- **7.3.** Therefore, cultural congruence of the educational process implies reliance on the basic values and meanings of the culture in which it is realized, both in the content of education and in the organization of the process itself. The indicators of pedagogical culture proposed in the work establish the value-meaning limits of education and allow explaining both the specifics of emergent spontaneous regimens and peculiarities of realization of global educational projects in specific cultural conditions.

7.4. Spontaneous regimens emerging in the modern system of higher education in Russia can be considered as an adaptive response of self-developing culturally specific system on hyper-regulation, bureaucracy, a value-meaning uncertainty of the reform process. Adjustment of institutional regulation, from our point of view, should be directed at rational and axiological optimization of an ideology of modernization. We believe that the return of the ideals of dignity, as well as scientific, teaching and student ethics to universities will be possible if the mega- and macro-regulators of the higher education system in Russia observe the principles of management dialectic, i.e. balancing the vertical of power with horizontal relationships based on the mechanisms of competition and cooperation within the professional community. Only under this condition, the professional community will be able to independently identify and offer indicators for the assessment of educational and scientific activities of universities and academic staff performance relevant for higher education as a process, result, and a social and personal value Consequently, there will be no need for the most unethical and unlawful adaptation mechanisms, and the open censure of practiced methods in the professional community and on the Internet would lead to self-purification of the system.

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