Contemporary social conflict: socio-philosophical analysis of approaches

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Abstract. The paper investigates the essence of social conflict through the lens of social philosophy. In this regard, the authors outlined the main approaches to the study of this phenomenon. Traditional and contemporary views on the essence of social conflict were distinguished. The purpose of the study was to describe approaches to the study of the essence of social conflicts, typologies formed on their basis, and the dynamics of social conflicts that determine the self-development of a social system. A conceptual analysis of methodological approaches and the elements of a comparative analysis were employed as a methodological tool for studying social conflict. The research tasks triggered the search for answers to outstanding questions. As a result, the essence of social conflict was determined through the lens of social philosophy by identifying and comparing the main scientific approaches. A typology of social conflicts was compiled, and a universal structure and dynamics of the development was determined. The conceptual analysis revealed the complex systemic nature of the social conflict, which requires further methodological research.

Keywords: social system, social conflict, typology of social conflict, structure of social conflict, dynamics of social conflict, conceptual analysis, systemic approach

1 Introduction

The genesis of conflict theory stems from ancient philosophies. Plato and Aristotle believed that a person is part of a wider whole, that is, society; therefore, the social principle inherent in him implies mutual understanding and cooperation. At the same time, the tendency to enmity, hatred and violence was not excluded. According to Aristotle, this was due to the inequality of people, their vices and dissimilarity of characters. The ancient Chinese scholars were concerned about the problem of conflicts. In philosophical treatises, Confucius argued that conflicts are caused by the inequality and dissimilarity of people, their vices: stubbornness, flattery, deceit, greed, rhetoric, selfishness, etc.

The founders of sociology, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer and others, made their contribution to development of the theory of conflict. In the first half of the 19th century, the first attempts were made to justify the role of conflict in sociological theory, which was facilitated by the work of the English sociologist Herbert Spencer ‘Fundamentals of Sociology’. H. Spencer emphasized the universality of the phenomenon of conflict. H. Spencer sees conflict as a normal social phenomenon. A scientific approach to the analysis of conflicts appeared only in the second half of the 19th century. At that time, conflicts were put forward in a number of subjects of special study. These ideas were accepted and developed by such representatives of the social sciences as Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, and Karl Marx. In the 20th century, the German researcher Ralf Dahrendorf and his American colleague Lewis Koser contributed to the study of the problems of social conflicts. For R. Dahrendorf, conflict is the natural state of society, and its absence is an abnormal state. L. Koser provided a deep justification for the positive role of conflict interaction in the life of society [1].

2 Problem statement

2.1 Research questions

The nature of social conflicts is diverse and extensive. Consider some examples that will reveal the general problems of social conflict, its universal nature, regardless of the object and subject of the conflict.

In ‘Economic and social impacts of conflict: cross-country analysis’, the authors consider social conflicts within or between countries that affect the national economic and social development, which requires effective mechanisms to counter the regressive consequences of conflicts. The question posed is: What is the relationship between social conflict and various types of social development outcomes: economic growth, life expectancy and education level [2].

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network analysis” analyze how in the process of reaching consensus (CRP) to achieve asymmetric trust relationships between decision makers (DM), how can differences in DM opinions exacerbate intra-group conflicts? This article explores an approach to consensus building based on minimal social conflicts under budget constraints to mitigate them. To this end, a method for measuring social conflicts based on the similarity of opinions and the degree of asymmetric trust has been developed to build a network of conflicts between DMs. The DM weights are then obtained by analyzing the contention network structure. To achieve consensus, a social consensus model of minimal conflict with a budget constraint (MCCMBC) is built [3].

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In another article “Social network analysis-based conflict relationship investigation and conflict degree-based reaching consensus process for large scale decision making (LSDM) scenario such as public participation events? Decision makers (DMs) at LSDM events represent different preferences of interests, resulting in different relationships being created between them. In LSDM scenarios, conflict relationships, which are a type of negative relationship between DMs, have the most negative impact on reaching consensus. This article presents a Collision Relationship Investigation Process (S-CRIP) based on social network analysis to detect conflict relationships between DMs for LSDM events that uses sparse representation. The proposed S-CRIP can not only explore conflict relations between DMs, but can also recognize two types of social conflict relations according to their characteristics. These three processes constitute an LSDM model based on S-CRIP and CD-CRIP, which is suitable for any numerical representation [5].

Nanke Verloo in his work ‘Social-spatial narrative: framework to analyze the democratic opportunity of conflict’ poses a question: Can conflicts create opportunities for strengthening urban democracy, when, where and how? The author proposes a structure of ‘socio-spatial narrative’ (SSN) to analyze the problem. Conflicts increasingly challenge the ability to run the city. Social conflicts are not only problematic, but also reveal active citizenship and engagement. Agonistic theories argue that authorities must be engaged in competition in order to improve democracy, but this concept rarely becomes material within the framework of analysis. In this paper, the SSN structure analyzes the social geography and political significance of street urban conflicts. The author shows how citizenship micropolitics interacts with street-level political practices [6].

Thus, the proposed review of various social conflicts, in which the research questions can be fundamentally different, raises research questions of a socio-philosophical nature: What unites these examples? What is the nature of social conflict? Is there a universal concept of social conflict and a conflict-based structure? What are the dynamics of social conflict?

2.2 Research methodology

To resolve research issues, it is necessary to analyze methodological approaches that exist in social philosophy and sociology, and to compare traditional and contemporary approaches. A conceptual analysis with elements of a comparative analysis was chosen as a methodological research tool.

In social philosophy, the methodology of conceptual analysis involves: 1) structuring, 2) reconstruction, and 3) construction of concepts. Structuring includes isolation of the constituent elements of the studied concept, its characteristics and properties. Reconstruction includes rearrangement of the elements and their arrangement in a logical order. Concept construction includes choosing a definition or definitions on clear, transparent grounds.

3 Results and discussion

It is necessary to define the content embedded in the concept of conflict. A.Ya. Antsupov gives the definition of the concept of conflict in the Dictionary of the Conflictologist [7, 8]: ‘The word conflict comes from the Latin conflictus (collision) and denotes a conflict of forces, sides, opinions and interests of people that cause certain actions’.

Well-known researchers F.I. Sharkov and V.I. Speransky define the concept of conflict as ‘a confrontation between two or more parties that are interconnected, but pursuing their own goals. Conflicts can arise wherever there is development in animate and inanimate nature, and the term ‘conflict’ is used in the analysis of biological, physical and social phenomena. Conflict is the process of development and resolution of the inconsistency of goals, states, relations and actions of people and communities determined by objective and subjective reasons. Conflict is a manifestation of relationships between people, an individual and a social group, and between different groups’ [9].

According to A.G. Zdravomyslov, ‘conflict is a form of relationships between potential or actual subjects of social action due to opposing values and norms, interests and needs’ [10].
The socio-philosophical study of the nature of the conflict shows that a conflict can be defined as overt or covert confrontation, in which the parties seek to seize limited resources claimed by other party. Different researchers attribute money, power, prestige, authority, spiritual and cultural values, views and ideas to these resources, but the essence of the conflict as a struggle for resources remains unchanged. From a socio-philosophical point of view, the conflict is an objective need, which should not be contended. Yet, it is important to be aware of its nature and turn it to advantage. Moreover, it is necessary to know how to manage the conflict (Social conflict).

To investigate the typology of social conflicts, it is necessary to define social conflicts. Numerous researchers, who have studied this problem, define the concept of ‘social conflict’. Table 1 presents a number of traditional definitions of the essence of social conflict.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Definitions of social conflict</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R. Dahrendorf</td>
<td>Social conflict is a variety of conflicts of different intensity between groups, in which the class struggle is one of the types of confrontation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Koser</td>
<td>Social conflict is a process that can ‘function’ to preserve the social organism under certain conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Giddens</td>
<td>Social conflict is a real struggle between people or groups of people, regardless of the struggle origin, its methods and means mobilized by each of the parties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Simmel</td>
<td>Social conflict is a form of discord, and a force capable of socializing, unifying the conflicting parties, and helping to stabilize society and move humanity forward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Spencer</td>
<td>Social conflict as a manifestation of natural selection and general struggle for survival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Sorokin</td>
<td>Social conflict is an integral part of social life, which destroys the amorphousness and homogeneity in society, and a source of change, tension and confrontation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from the table, the general idea characteristic of the classical approach is the understanding that social conflict is the result of the development of social contradictions, expressed in the confrontation of various social groups. Thus, a social conflict is an open confrontation, a clash of two or more subjects of social interaction, the causes of which are incompatible needs, interests and values. Let us turn to modern interpretations of social conflict. So, Antsupov A.Ya. defines social conflict as the highest stage in the development of contradictions in relations between people, social groups, and society as a whole, which is characterized by a clash of opposing interests, goals, and positions of subjects of interaction. Conflicts can be hidden or overt, but they are always based on a lack of agreement between two or more parties [8]. At the same time, V. A. Svetlov notes that social conflict is the most acute way of developing and completing significant contradictions that arise in the process of social interaction, which consists in the opposition of subjects and is accompanied by their experience of negative emotions towards each other [11].

As can be seen from the definitions, modern interpretations of social conflict are not much different from the classical view, but there are fundamental differences in understanding the nature of social conflict. In the traditional interpretation, social conflict was seen as “evil”, as something destructive and negative. In modern science, social conflict is not always “evil”. Moreover, conflict can be a source of motivation, development and creative breakthrough, that is, it can have a positive connotation. Not all forms of social conflict are “beneficial” to society, but only those that are functional and constructive.

The modern theory of conflict management makes it possible to effectively resolve social conflicts, contributing to the non-linear equilibrium of the social system. Hence, there are two paradigmatic approaches to the interpretation of modern society – a consensus society in which social conflict exists as one of the forms of social interaction along with competition, adaptation, assimilation, and its nature is temporary, transient; a conflict society in which social conflict is an expression of the aspirations of individuals and social groups for power, status change, income redistribution, reassessment of values, the conflict is immanent in society, contributes to its development. Social conflict is based on subjective-objective contradictions. However, not every contradiction develops into a conflict.

The concept of contradiction in its content is broader than the concept of conflict. Social contradictions are the main determining factors of social development. They “penetrate” all spheres of social relations and, for the most part, do not develop into a conflict. In order for the objectively existing contradictions to transform into a social conflict, it is necessary that the subjects of interaction realize that this or that contradiction is an obstacle to achieving their vital goals and interests. According to K. Boulding, the conflict arises when the “matured” contradictions are recognized by the parties as incompatible and each of the parties seeks to seize a position that excludes the intentions of the other side. Therefore, conflict contradictions are subjective-objective in nature [12].

The typology of social conflicts helps to classify conflicts according to their participants. It should be noted that according to their internal content, social conflicts are also divided into rational and emotional. Rational conflicts can be attributed to the rational sphere. Participants in rational conflicts do not move to the personal level and do not form in their minds the image of the enemy. The characteristic features of this conflict are, first of all, respect for the opponent, recognition of some rightness behind him. This type of conflict is not sharp, protracted, painful, because both sides are striving for the same goal – to improve relations. The conflict is resolved as soon as the parties come to an agreement. However, in the course of conflict interactions, aggression and hostile attitudes of its participants are often transferred from the cause of the conflict to the individual. In this case, the initial cause of the conflict
may be forgotten, and the participants may act out of personal hostility. This is an emotional conflict. As soon as an emotional conflict appears in the minds of the participants in the conflict, negative stereotypes appear. It is impossible to predict the development of emotional conflict, and in most cases they are uncontrollable. With the advent of new people in the situation, most often such a conflict is resolved.

But there are cases when some conflicts (for example, national, religious) can convey an emotional mood to neutral participants. In this case, the conflict may continue for a longer time [8]. A typology of conflicts is necessary to understand the essential causes of their occurrence. All types of conflicts have their own specific causes and therefore require special methods of resolution or prevention. Let's consider the typologies of conflicts on the example of domestic scientists investigating the problem of conflict. According to E.A. Utkin, there are four main types of conflicts: intrapersonal, interpersonal, between an individual and a group, intergroup [13]. Intrapersonal conflict. In this type of conflict, the participants are not people, but various psychological factors of the inner world of the individual, which may seem incompatible, for example, ideals, motives, values, feelings, needs, etc. One of the most common forms of intrapersonal conflict is a role conflict, where conflicting demands are made on one person about what the result of his work should be. Interpersonal conflict.

This type of conflict most often manifests itself in the struggle for resources, material values, time of use or approval. Interpersonal conflict can also manifest itself in a clash of different types of character, temperament. Sometimes people are just not able to get along with each other. Conflict between the individual and the group. In any group, formal or informal, their own norms of behavior are established, and even the nature of communication. Each member of such a group is obliged to comply with them. If the type of conflict, one can single out conflicts between a group and a person – not a member of the group, as well as intra-group conflicts – between a group and one of its members. Another common conflict of this type is the conflict between the group and the leader. Here one should distinguish between conflicts between the head and the subdivision subordinate to him, the subdivision and the head of another group, between the heads of different subdivisions. In the last two cases, the conflict can develop into an intergroup one. The most difficult such conflicts occur with an authoritarian leadership style.

Intergroup conflict. Any institution or organization consists of many formal and informal groups, between which conflicts can arise” [14]. In their work “Conflictology”, Antsupov A.Ya. and Shipilov A.I. offer their own typology of conflicts: “One of the essential features of a conflict is the nature and characteristics of the parties involved. The characteristics of the conflict depend decisively on who the conflicting parties are represented by. Based on this, the basic typology of conflicts will look like: conflicts involving a person: social (interpersonal, between an individual and a group, between small and medium social groups, between large social groups, interstate, between coalitions of states); intrapersonal (between “I want” and “I don’t want”, between “I can” and “I can’t”, between “I want and I can’t”, between “I need” and “I don’t need”, between “I want” and “I need”, between “need” and “can’t”) [8].

These authors distinguish the following types of social conflicts: 1) Interpersonal conflicts, which are clashes of interests between two individuals. 2) Conflict between small groups. An example is the struggle in the teaching staff of a secondary school between the principal’s supporters and his opponents. 3) Conflict between middle social groups. Such groups in quantitative composition occupy an intermediate position between small and large. 4) Conflict between large social groups. This conflict occurs when the number of participants exceeds several hundred people. 5) International conflicts are struggles between two states or their coalitions. 6). A conflict between a state and a group of states [8]. Also interesting is the following typology of conflicts, proposed by the representative of the sociological school, M.B. Glotov:

1. For reasons of occurrence. The reasons can be both objective and subjective.
2. According to the peculiarities of social disagreements. Such conflicts differ in the time of action and the nature of disagreements, the sphere of manifestation, etc.
3. By the impact of the conflict on others. Forms of conflicts differ in duration (short-term, medium-term, long-term), severity, scale.
4. According to the characteristics of specific participants. The conflict can be collective, inter-ethnic, etc.
5. Based on the degree of openness, hidden and open social conflicts are distinguished. Hidden conflicts do not entail external aggression in relation to the opponent and are held using indirect methods of influence. In open conflicts, there are obvious clashes – quarrels, disputes.
6. The most well-known division of conflicts into horizontal and vertical. This division occurs based on the position of the opponents. Vertical conflict happens between the boss and subordinates, horizontal – between people who are on the same level. First of all, these are labor disputes.
7. Based on the composition of the participants, they share interpersonal types of conflicts, group, organizational, political, etc. In interpersonal conflicts, confrontation takes place between people who do not belong to any social community. In group conflicts – between separate social groups. Political conflicts can arise both within society (domestic political) and at the international level (foreign political) [15].

From the point of view of the causes of conflicts, Zdravomyslov A.G. identifies three types of conflicts:

1. Conflict of goals. The situation is characterized by the fact that the parties involved in it differently see the desired state of the object in the future.
2. Conflict of views, when the parties involved differ in views, ideas and thoughts on the problem being solved.
3. Conflict of feelings, when participants have different feelings and emotions that underlie their relationship with each other as individuals. People simply irritate each other with the style of their behavior, doing business, interaction [10].

S.M. Shurukh refers to structural conflicts related to the availability, limitation and distribution of resources; conflicts caused by the different status of participants in the educational process, their differences in rights; conflicts caused by the presence within the school community of established reference groups whose norms of behavior and interests come into sharp conflict with social norms of behavior, etc. [16]. The reason for such conflicts may be rivalry. There are three groups of conflicts that arise in different plans of development:

1) Systemic conflicts (conflicts based on contradictions that arise in the process of functioning of education as a system; they can be of an economic, organizational, political, ethnic, spiritual nature); 2) Procedural conflicts (pedagogical conflicts, which are based on contradictions that arise in the educational process); 3) Effective conflicts (arise on the basis of contradictions between the real and ideal results of the conflict) [17].

Consider the typology of conflicts according to the criteria proposed by O.Z. Mushuk: 1) According to the form of manifestation, there are non-antagonistic (reconcilable) and antagonistic conflicts. Under certain conditions, non-antagonistic conflicts can develop into irresolvable, antagonistic conflicts. 2) According to the degree of coverage, there are conflicts full and deployed, when the whole set of needs, interests and values of society is involved in it, and partial conflicts, when they are based on the contradiction of any one sphere of life (family, education, life, religion, ethnic problems). 3) According to the spheres of distribution, economic, political, socio-ethnic, religious, spiritual and ideological conflicts are distinguished. 4) Horizontal conflicts that arise within social and political structures, and vertical conflicts between leadership structures and subordinates. Specific conditions for the emergence of conflicts predetermine the forms of their development: a) latent (hidden), b) open form [18].

The types of social conflicts we have considered, as a rule, go through four stages of development in their evolution: 1) pre-conflict; 2) conflict; 3) conflict resolution; 4) post-conflict.

1. Pre-conflict stage – the stage of accumulation and aggravation of contradictions due to the divergence of interests and values of the subjects of interaction. At this stage, the conflict exists in a latent form.

2. The conflict stage is characterized by conflict behavior, actions aimed at confrontation with the intentions, goals, interests of the opposite side. The stage of conflict behavior is characterized by the maximum use of the strength of the participants in the conflict, the use of all the resources of the struggle. However, at the conflict stage, a turning point can occur if there is a "reassessment of values", change in ideas about the opponent, his goals, appearance. Then the "revaluation phase" can become the "selection phase" of a program of behavior consisting of three alternatives: 1) achieving their goals at the expense of another group – i.e. bringing the conflict to the limit; 2) reducing the level of tension due to partial concessions, which will translate the conflict into a latent form; 3) search for ways to completely resolve the conflict.

3. The third stage of the conflict – the resolution of the conflict, is carried out by changing the objective situation that gave rise to the conflict, as well as changes in the subjective image of the situation in the minds of the warring parties. The complete resolution of the conflict means its termination at the objective and subjective levels, the cardinal deconstruction of the conflict situation. With a partial resolution of the conflict, only the external conflict behavior changes, but the motives are retained, which are temporarily restrained by reasonable arguments or sanctions [8].

4. The fourth stage of the conflict is the post-conflict or post-conflict stage. The post-conflict stage can have two ways: "the first is a partial normalization of relations, characterized by feelings, understanding one’s position, self-esteem, levels of claims, attitudes towards a partner are corrected, the feeling of guilt for one’s actions in a conflict is aggravated, and the second is a complete normalization of relations, manifested by the realization parties, the importance of further constructive interaction, which is facilitated by overcoming negative attitudes, productive participation in joint activities, establishing trust" [19].

Thus, the dynamics of social conflict is an objective characteristic of the social system, the source of its self-development, the evolution of the development of the conflict under the influence of its internal and external factors.

4 Conclusions

The conceptual analysis of approaches, typologies and definitions has shown that modern social conflict is a complex phenomenon, which requires complex knowledge tools. In this regard, the primary task of the researcher is the problem of managing social conflicts. For development of the basic principles of social conflict management, the following methods can be applied: retrospective analysis of a conflict situation, participant observation method, case-study, mathematical modeling of social processes using computer technology.

The methodological problems that arise in the study of real social conflicts will be further investigated to develop a systematic approach for synthesizing the possibilities of structural-functional, system-situational and applied analysis of social conflict.

References


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