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«ЧЕРНЫЙ ЛЕБЕДЬ» Н. Н.ТАЛЕБА ЧЕРЕЗ ПРИЗМУ ОСТРОУМИЯ

Аннотация. В статье решается исследовательская задача, заключающаяся в выявлении приемов остроумия, доступных в когнитивно-аффективной аргументации точки зрения американского писателя и философа Нассима Николаса Талеба, реализованной им в монографии «Черный лебедь: влияние невероятного» (2007). Известна книга постановкой проблем невозможности расчета риска последовательности наступления редких событий и их прогнозирования. Такой тип событий имеет значительные последствия и получил в науке название «черный лебедь». Материалом исследования выступил текст указанной монографии Н. Н. Талеба, а методом – контент-анализ содержания текста. Научная новизна настоящей публикации состоит в выявлении приемов остроумия с целью аргументации постановки проблемы «черных лебедей» посредством дискуссии с традиционными трудами теоретиков и практиков в области неопределенности. Кроме того, новым является авторский подход к анализу аргументации в письменных (и устных) текстах на основе когнитивно-аффективного подхода в изучении приемов остроумия. Контент-анализ юмора в монографии Н. Н. Талеба «Черный лебедь: влияние невероятного» позволяет авторам статьи говорить о когнитивно-аффективном влиянии на читателей, основанном на технике остроумия. Приемы остроумия являются основой когнитивно-аффективной аргументации точки зрения Н. Н. Талеба в указанной монографии.

Ключевые слова: Нассим Николас Талеб, «черный лебедь», техники остроумия, абсурд, ирония, парадокс, аргументация.

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«THE BLACK SWAN» BY N. N. TALEB THROUGH THE PRISM OF WIT

Abstract. The problem to be solved in the study. What techniques of wit are available in the cognitive-affective argumentation of his point of view N. N. Taleb in his monograph «Black Swan», reflecting the formulation of the problem of Black Swans as the impossibility of calculating the risk of a sequence of rare events and predicting their occurrence? Research method and materials. Content analysis of the monograph by N. N. Taleb. The scientific novelty of the research lies in identifying the techniques of wit with the aim of arguing the formulation of the problem of «Black Swans» in a discussion with the traditional works of theorists and practitioners in the field of uncertainty. The novelty of the authors' approach lies in the approach to the analysis of argumentation in written texts (however, in oral ones too) on the basis of a cognitive-affective approach to the study of method of wit. The content analysis of humor in the monograph «The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable» by Nassim Nicholas Taleb allows us to talk about the cognitive-affective influence on readers based on those The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable wit techniques. The method of wit are the basis for the cognitive-affective argumentation of the point of view of N. N. Taleb in the monograph «Black Swan», reflecting the formulation of the problem of Black Swans as the impossibility of calculating the risk of a sequence of rare events and predicting their occurrence.

Keywords. Taleb Nassim Nicholas, Black Swan, witty techniques, absurdity, irony, paradox, argumentation

Introduction

The discernment of the mind is the conscience of wit.

Jean Paul (Johann Paul Friedrich Richter) (1763–1825)

He took the pseudonym from admiration for Jean-Jacques

Rousseau

Everybody wants to be informed honestly, impartially, truthfully — in total accordance with his views.

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936)

Everybody wants to be informed honestly, impartially, truthfully – in total accordance with his views.

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874–1936)

The solution to the Black Swan problem is the inability to calculate the risk of a sequence of rare events and predict their occurrence.

«Antifragility» N. N. Taleb. 2012

The urgency of the problem of using wit to discuss issues involving the presence of different (often di-

rectly opposite) points of view is high. Wit reinforces the transition from inference to reasoning; forms the ability to formulate clear decisions based on fuzzy, loose, incomplete and undefined knowledge. This can be seen in the argumentation of N.N. Taleb in the process of substantiating a new approach in science comprehending the problem of uncertainty (the influence of the incredible), expressed by the author as the metaphor «Black Swans» [12].

Let us turn to the understanding of the term «wit». So Aristotle says that «wit is insolence, educated.» Emphasizing the cognitive basis of the concept of «wit», Aristotle says that «wit is audacity that is educated.»

Wit, according to Cicero, presupposes the ability to appropriately apply ridicule (sal, salis - salt), caused by the need to give a sharp, critical assessment (cum grano salis) of a person [9, p. 109]. These types of wit are used in two main functions. The first is to achieve the favor of the audience or listener in favor of the speaker and criticism of the opponent's arguments.

Kant in his work «Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View». So in § 54 «On talents and cognitive ability» it is emphasized that «talent is a productive wit». And further, «productive wit allows you to find similarities between heterogeneous things and provides the mind with material in order to make its concepts general». G. Hegel, in his Science of Logic, approached the analysis of wit as a form of thinking, emphasizing that wit grasps a contradiction, expresses it, brings things into relation to each other, makes "the concept shine through contradiction". F. Schlegel, highlighting the creative component of humor, writes that «sharpness is an explosion of bound consciousness», that is, rational thinking, ossified in one-sided, consistent concepts. In a humorous form, the concrete, the contradictory is not just put side by side; opposites are linked in sharp contradiction, and this connection contains a hint of a deeply hidden truth hidden in the synthesis of these opposites. There are a number of definitions of wit: «true wit» (K. Helvetius), «flat humor» (G. Hegel), «low-grade humor» (K. Marx)», wit of ideas» (G. Heine) and others.

By «wit» is meant a sense of humor, which manifests itself not only in a subtle and adequate understanding of it, but also in the ability to generate humor on the basis of learned or deliberately designed methods (techniques of wit). Methods of wit in a systematized version were described by A.N. Luk [2; 3; 4]. M. V. Musiychuk made additions to the description of the structure of some techniques. There are twelve methods of wit in total – hence the name «A dozen of methods of wit» [5; 6]. Humor, in the form of wit, is reflected in a wide range of studies in various sciences. A review of a significant amount of popular science literature on humor was done in the work «Philosophical and pedagogical discourse of popular science literature on humor» [7, p. 35].

The collection of materials compiled by Lydia Mirchevskaya-Luk (2017). «Creation of sharpness, like any creative process, is associated with going beyond formal logic, with the liberation of thought from the tight framework of strict and consistent reasoning» [1, p. 317]. And we consider it necessary to cite one more quote that reinforces the placement of accents in solving the problem of reasoning based on wit. "But breaking the laws of logic is not yet wit. What is needed is a «leap», the transition of thought to a new semantic level, reflecting deeper patterns and relationships of phenomena. This is especially demonstratively manifested in such a technique as a paradox « [1, p. 315].

Let us also pay attention to the comprehensive and detailed analysis of the comic (humor, wit) done by T.V. Semenova (2014) in a theoretical and empirical study [8]. The author considers the comic as social cognition, competent communication, emotional regulation, personal self-development. Humor (wit) is considered as an effective means of forming intellectual capital, developing creativity [10, p. 11].

Main part

Formulation of the problem.

The task to be solved in the study. What methods of wit are used in the argumentation of N.N. Taleb in the monograph "Black Swan". The impossibility of calculating the risk of a sequence of rare events and predicting their occurrence is called by the author of the book "black swans".

Research method and materials

Content analysis of the monograph by N.N. Taleb [12].

The scientific novelty of the research lies in identifying the techniques of wit with the aim of arguing the formulation of the problem of «Black Swans» in a discussion with the traditional works of theorists and practitioners in the field of uncertainty.

Results

The absurdity is represented by the techniques of wit: exaggeration (hyperbole); reasoning that appears to be formally flawless (sophism); diminution (litota). Consider an example of an absurdity in the form of exaggeration.

«The writer Umberto Eco belongs to that small class of scholars who are encyclopedic, insightful, and nondull. He is the owner of a large personal library (containing thirty thousand books), and separates visitors into two categories: those who react with "Wow! Signore professore dottore Eco, what a library you have! How many of these books have you read?" and the others — a very small minority — who get the point that a private library is not an egoboosting appendage but a research tool. Read books are far less valuable than unread ones. The library should contain as much of what you do not know as your financial means, mortgage rates, and the currently tight real-estate market allow you to put there. You will accumulate more knowledge and more books as you grow older, and the growing number of unread books on the shelves will look at you menacingly. Indeed, the more you know, the larger the rows of unread books. Let us call this collection of unread books an antilibrary»¹.

The cognitive-affective basis of humor in this example is based on the statement that the broader your horizons, the more shelves of unread books you have. Taleb N.N. suggests calling this collection of unread books the anti-library.

Consider an example of an absurdity in the form of exaggeration (hyperbole).

«The situation can get a little more tragic—the world is more nonlinear than we think, and than scientists would like to think. ...

Take the relationship between pleasure and drinking water. If you are in a state of painful thirst, then a bottle of water increases your well-being significantly. More water means more pleasure. But what if I gave you a cistern of water? Clearly your well-being becomes rapidly insensitive to further quantities. As a matter of fact, if I gave you the choice between a bottle or a cistern you would prefer the bottle—so your enjoyment declines with additional quantities». The fact that the world is no longer linear than we used to think Taleb N.N. proves, also on the basis of method wit, absurdity in the form of exaggeration. Justifying, a bottle of water to quench your thirst is more satisfying than a cistern of water. Another technique of the absurd is reasoning that seems formally flawless (sophism). Consider the following example, which contains arguments about the author's career development.

«He didn't even have to be alive for them—death is often a good career move for an author».3

The comic of the situation is achieved by the assertion that the author does not have to be among the living for career growth. The reasoning is based on the reception of wit absurdity in the form of sophism.

The situation in the following example describes the size of the library of a Munich art historian.

«One evening I found myself at a cocktail party in Munich at the apartment of a former art historian who had more art books in its library than I thought existed».⁴

The argument for the enormous size of the art historian's library is achieved by the ingenuity of «absurd» in the form of a reduction. It is realized by comparing the number of books in a particular library and books in the aggregate around the world.

Consider the technique of wit nonsense. Among other issues, Taleb N.N. discusses why we manage to calmly drink coffee.

«I've had plenty of cups of coffee in my life (it's my principal addiction). I have never seen a cup jump two feet from my desk, nor has coffee spilled spontaneously on this manuscript without intervention (even in Russia). Indeed, it will take more than a mild coffee addiction to witness such an event; it would require more lifetimes than is perhaps conceivable—the odds are so small, one in so many zeroes, that it would be impossible for me to write them down in my free time».⁵

The argumentation of the rarity of the event that cups of coffee will bounce is presented by the author in the form of chances equal to one, after such a number of zeros that all the free time of N. N. Taleb is not enough to write them. The comic situation is based on the ingenuity of «nonsense» in the form of meaningless detailing.

An important part of the life of any author is correspondence with publishers.

Correspondence of authors of works with publishers is an important part in the life of any author.

¹ Taleb N.N. The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable. New York: Random House, 2007. P. 35.

² Ibidem, p. 137.

³ Ibidem, pp. 67–68.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 186.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 308.

N. N. Taleb with humor comprehends this process on the example of the works of a lady (who received wide recognition in the distant future). The publishers' responses are highly sophisticated. Let us consider these examples through the prism of humor set forth by N. N. Taleb.

«She received enough attention to get the courtesy of rejection letters and occasional insulting comments instead of the far more insulting and demeaning silence. Publishers were confused by her manuscript. She could not even answer their first question: "Is this fiction or nonfiction?" Nor could she respond to the "Who is this book written for?" on the publishers' book proposal forms. She was told, "You need to understand who your audience is" and "amateurs write for themselves, professionals write for others." She was also told to conform to a precise genre because "bookstores do not like to be confused and need to know where to place a book on the shelves." One editor protectively added, "This, my dear friend, will only sell ten copies, including those bought by your ex-husbands and family members"»⁶.

The reasoning using humor in this example is based on the "false reinforcement" wit in the form of absolutizing false opposition.

Remembering Casanova as the author of a twelve-volume encyclopedia, N.N. Taleb gives a characterization of the French language.

«Casanova, while known for his seductions, viewed himself as some sort of a scholar. He aimed at literary fame with his twelve-volume History of My Life, written in bad (charmingly bad) French»⁷.

This example implements the «false amplification» wit trick in the form moving the semantic center to illogical clarification: «... bad (charmingly bad) French».

In an example that continues to argue for the discussion of the need to revise the beliefs, Taleb N.N. refers to the image of a turkey, fattened for Thanksgiving.

«The chapter has another exact presentation of what became later known as "Hume's problem"»⁸.

The comic effect is based on the ingenuity of «mixing styles or» combining plans «in the form of a contrast between the theme and the form of presentation. So the everyday «turkey problem» is combined with the philosophical «Hume problem».

N.N. Taleb writes about the inevitability of the process of revising beliefs in some situations. For example, in the story about the turkey.

«Consider a turkey that is fed every day. Every single feeding will firm up the bird's belief that it is the general rule of life to be fed every day by friendly members of the human race "looking out for its best interests," as a politician would say. On the afternoon of the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, something unexpected will happen to the turkey. It will incur a revision of belief»⁹.

This quote uses the method wit t in the form the smile of the augurs (a sign of the tacit understanding of the initiates and ridicule of the uninitiated). The smile of the augurs belongs to the friendly representatives of the human race, who understand the inevitability of Thanksgiving. Strengthening the cognitive-affective impact of the technique of wit is achieved by "taking care of its welfare," as a politician would say.

Consider an example about war and peace.

«The war was not continuous: there were periods of fighting interrupted by "permanent" solutions» 10. Consider an example of the connection between a skeptic empiricist and a limousine.

«When people at cocktail parties asked me what I did for a living, I was tempted to answer, "I am a skeptical empiricist and a flâneur-reader, someone committed to getting very deep into an idea," but I made things simple by saying that I was a limousine driver»¹¹.

In this example, the method of wit is self-irony in the form of a pretty pretense.

The ironic argumentation of the position, "if you didn't see it, then it wasn't" is presented in the next fragment.

«Assume I told you that I had evidence that the football player O. J. Simpson (who was accused of killing his wife in the 1990s) was not a criminal. Look, the other day I had breakfast with him and he didn't kill anybody. I am serious, I did not see him kill a single person. Wouldn't that confirm his innocence? If I said such a thing you would certainly call a shrink, an ambulance, or perhaps even the police, since you might think that I spent too much time in trading rooms or in cafés thinking about this Black Swan topic, and that my logic may represent such an immediate danger to society that I myself need to be locked up immediate-

⁶ Taleb N. N., 2007, pp. 60–61.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 165.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 85.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 80.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 45.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 68.

ly» 12 .

The technique of wit «irony» is realized in the form of the verbalization of the silence. The author (N. N. Taleb) first reveals his arguments with the words: «I had breakfast with him (football player OJ Simpson) and he did not kill anyone. This is followed by the verbalization of the silence: «If I had blabbed it, you would probably have called psychiatrists ...»

Cognitive-affective reasoning based on wit in this example is related to mathematicians.

«In his day, Poincaré was thought to be the king of mathematics and science, except of course by a few narrow-minded mathematicians like Charles Hermite who considered him too intuitive, too intellectual, or too "hand-waving." When mathematicians say "handwaving," disparagingly, about someone's work, it means that the person has: a) insight, b) realism, c) something to say, and it means that d) he is right because that's what critics say when they can't find anything more negative"

The irony is realized in the form of a malicious mockery (diasirms). N.N. Taleb, highlighting the category of narrow-minded mathematicians on the example of Charles Hermite. The argumentation is realized by irony over the characterization of Poincaré as too intellectual and trusting intuition, too "gesticulating". «Yes, yes, because they talk about "gestures" when there are no more worthy arguments», - says N.N. Taleb

«Since I was questioning their entire business, it was understandable that I drew all manner of insults: "obsessive," "commercial," "philosophical," "essayist," "idle man of leisure," "repetitive," "practitioner" (this is an insult in academia), "academic" (this is an insult in business)»¹⁴. The method of wit «irony» in the form of pretty pretense is implemented in this example.

The method of wit "irony in the form of pretty pretense is used by N.N. Taleb often enough. Two more examples.

«If you ever took a (dull) statistics class in college, did not understand much of what the professor was excited about, and wondered what "standard deviation" meant, there is nothing to worry about. The notion of standard deviation is meaningless outside of Mediocristan. Clearly it would have been more beneficial, and certainly more entertaining, to have taken classes in the neurobiology of aesthetics or postcolonial African dance, and this is easy to see empirically»¹⁵.

Polemising about the concept of «average» (as a measured value) N. N. Taleb refers to the concept of «average person».

«Assuming there is something desirable in being an average man, he must have an unspecified specialty in which he would be more gifted than other people—he cannot be average in everything. A pianist would be better on average at playing the piano, but worse than the norm at, say, horseback riding. A draftsman would have better drafting skills, and so on. The notion of a man deemed average is different from that of a man who is average in everything he does. In fact, an exactly average human would have to be half male and half female. Ouételet completely missed that point»¹⁶.

Wit lies in the reception of wit «irony» in the form of a pretty pretense. The author concludes that an absolutely average person would be half male, half female.

The method of wit «irony» in the form of sarcasm was brilliantly realized by N.N. Taleb to explain the features of skeptical empiricism (neoplatonic project, as opposed to platonic). «Would ordinarily not wear suits (except to funerals). Wears dark suits, white shirts; speaks in a boring tone» ¹⁷.

Let's consider examples of argumentation based on the «metaphor» wit technique.

«I will separate the two cases as follows. The mild case: arrogance in the presence of (some) competence, and the severe case: arrogance mixed with incompetence (the empty suit)» 18 .

N. N. Taleb writes about the impossibility predict in an environment where there are many Black Swans and makes arguments based on the "comparison" wit method.

«Our inability to predict in environments subjected to the Black Swan, coupled with a general lack of the awareness of this state of affairs, means that certain professionals, while believing they are experts, are in fact not. Based on their empirical record, they do not know more about their subject matter than the general population, but they are much better at narrating – or, worse, at smoking you with complicated mathematical models. They are also more likely to wear a tie»¹⁹.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 357.

¹² Taleb N. N., 2007, p. 93.

¹³Ibidem, p. 239.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 310.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 314.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 363.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 203.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 24.

The method of wit «comparison» is implemented in the form «assessment by implicit, accidental or insignificant attribute». The author writes that some professionals who consider themselves experts cloud their brains with mathematical models and in most cases wear a tie.

Analysis of examples based on the method of wit «comparison».

«Hume was radically skeptical in the philosophical cabinet, but abandoned such ideas when it came to daily life, since he could not handle them. I am doing here the exact opposite: I am skeptical in matters that have implications for daily life. In a way, all I care about is making a decision without being the turkey.

Many middlebrows have asked me over the past twenty years, "How do you, Taleb, cross the street given your extreme riskconsciousness?" or have stated the more foolish "You are asking us to take no risks." Of course I am not advocating total risk phobia (we will see that I favor an aggressive type of risk taking): all I will be showing you in this book is how to avoid crossing the street blindfolded».²⁰

In this example, the assessment is made on an implicit, accidental or irrelevant basis.

In the following example, N.N. Taleb draws a comparison between the concepts of «watchmaker, neurosurgeon, chess player» and «uncertainty».

«To be able to focus is a great virtue if you are a watch repairman, a brain surgeon, or a chess player. But the last thing you need to do when you deal with uncertainty is to "focus" (you should tell uncertainty to focus, not us)».2

«Comparison» technique wit in the form of implicit comparison».

Convincing argumentation of the essence of events falling under the definition of «Gray Swans» and «Black Swans» was implemented by N. N. Taleb in the quoted fragment.

«A gray swan concerns modelable extreme events, a black swan is about unknown unknowns»²².

Based on the technique of wit «repetition» in the form repetition of a fragment of speech with a change in part of speech (antanoclasis).

The method of wit «pun», presented in the form of a play of meanings is presented in the following example.

«The entire statistical business confused absence of proof with proof of absence»²³.

The cognitive-affective argumentation of incompatibility is presented in the following fragment. «It was as if one could be half dead»²⁴.

Wit method «paradox» done in the form of an antinomic replacement for a phraseological function.

Conclusion

The content analysis of humor in the monograph «The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable» by Nassim Nicholas Taleb allows us to talk about the cognitive-affective influence on readers based on those The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable techniques wit.

The method of wit are the basis for the cognitive-affective argumentation of the point of view of N. N. Taleb in the monograph «Black Swan», reflecting the formulation of the problem of Black Swans as the impossibility of calculating the risk of a sequence of rare events and predicting their occurrence.

Cognitive-affective argumentation in theoretical and practical discussions is enhanced by witty techniques such as absurd, nonsense, false amplification, spurious gain, mixing styles, or «overlapping plans», hint (allusion), irony, metaphor, comparison (simile), repetition (repeat), double interpretation, paradox (antinomy).

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²² Ibidem, p. 350.

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