

The Humanisation of the Surrounding World and the Technisation of Humans
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The Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective (SERRC) recently addressed several interesting topics — often in connection with Steve Fuller’s ideas. To my mind, the most important topics are: The main features of social epistemology; A new relationship between human thinking and the surrounding world; The individual mind and its embodiment in a group; The significance of the material body (natural or artificial) for thinking; Human rights for animals; and, The Extended Mind Thesis (EMT). All these topics are interdependent, one cannot be considered without referring to the others. Their discussion has two sides, empirical and theoretical. First, let’s look at the theoretical side.

Extending the Human Mind

One way to discuss the question regarding the specificity of the human mind, in the framework of social epistemology, may be the Extended Mind Thesis (EMT). The key point of Georg Theiner, a supporter of EMT, “is to accept or discover that cognition is not just ‘all inside the head’. The EMT explores ways that cognition is extended beyond the individual brain/mind or body and this serves to overcome the classical Cartesian dualism between mind and matter, subjective and objective, the *res extensa* and the *res cogitans*”.¹ For supporters of EMT the objective world is not only the natural world, but also the social world. EMT scholars study the relations of individual human minds and the thinking of human collectives among scientists and humanitarians, philosophers and sociologists and so on. Of course, they are also interested in the link between the brain and thinking. The focus of their reasoning is to show that borders among the participants in such kinds of interactions are disappearing. The idea of borders is important in social epistemology, but Fuller poses differently the problem of extending the human mind.

For Fuller, it is important to understand if it is possible to spread the human mind to creatures that do not have the ability to think like human beings. We can extend Fuller’s reasoning. Can we understand every thing as if it was created and as if it has an author? In classical science, for instance, each theory has a creator. But to understand a theory we do not need to know the name of its author. However, in the arts, it is often enough to say: “This is Picasso.” For many, given the author, the nature of the work is now clear. Naming the author says something important about the content. In the current context of social epistemology is thinking closer to art than to contemporary science? Recent science is oriented much more to the author than to the object of study.

This way of thinking asks us to look carefully at the things around us as having authors who created them and with whom we may communicate. When we look at a painting by Picasso, we communicate with him as we consider the details of his work. The same occurs with the creatures to which Fuller refers. We know in advance that we cannot talk with a monkey. To teach a monkey our language is problematic to say the least. But we can understand the idea of its creation as a unique and autonomous entity with its own

¹ Extended Knowledge and the Extended Mind. Interview Report Precis, Gregory Sandstrom, European Humanities University and Lithuanian Research Council. SERRC, 2014. Vol. 3, No. 2, 35.

properties and rights. We do not need to make a monkey similar to a human. On the contrary, we should understand the a monkey's features in helping to develop its existing capacities.

The Possibility of the Mind's Existence Outside the Human Body

Another of Fuller's important ideas regards the possibility of the mind's existence outside the human body. This question is posed in relation to the construction of thinking machines that occupy space in the artificial world that we created and that surrounds us. People must change their way of thinking in the process of adapting to this new world. The human body gets technological enhancements; science interferes in the structure of human genome. As for thinking machines, they master the human mind. At the same time, the "body" of the machine is a technical construction. Is it possible for human thinking to exist without a biological body? Perhaps we are witnessing two parallel processes? Perhaps scientists will invent a material that replaces biological tissues with inorganic machine parts? In this case the difference between machine and human will disappear. Humans will not exist so much as biological creatures. Machines will not exist so much as technical constructions. As a result, there is no problem. I do not want to say if this outcome is good or bad — maybe it's inevitable?

Fuller's main idea, as I understand it, seems important and interesting. He takes the position that people create the surrounding artificial world as a thinking world. The ability to think is introduced in the environment and we should learn to communicate with the inhabitants of this world whose most important feature, Fuller proposes, is the absence of a biological body. Indeed, modern technology combines both material and spiritual features suggesting that everything in nature and society can think with greater or lesser success. Fuller says: "... in any case, one thing for sure is that the secret to what makes us 'human' is not going to be found in our biology..."²

A Comment on Empirical Considerations

Fuller's analysis of the issues discussed at Yale, and his own conference presentation, helped me understand the main directions in the study of human-animal relations and the notion of humanity. Despite the variety of positions taken at the conference, I would like to draw attention not to the speakers' differences, but to their similarities. All of speakers talked about human rights — about whether we can grant them to some of the most cognitively developed animals. The conference participants assumed, absent serious discussion, that it would be a great benefit to animals to have human rights. But is this really so?

Humans have the right to kill and to eat animals. We do it all the time. This right is necessary for us to live. In what way can we grant the same right to animals? Do we allow animals (e.g. tigers, piranhas or crocodiles) to kill and eat us when they are hungry? We also hunt for recreation. Perhaps, then, we have in mind contending only with clever enough animals. But who will define the level of animals' mentality clearly enough to

² "Crediting People: An Exchange." SERRC – January 16, 2014.

understand what is forbidden to them? Do we have the right to prohibit animals from acting? Can we be sure that animals will not use their knowledge to violate our rights?

As I see it, animals do not need most of our rights. But they have their own rights that we must take into consideration. I believe that it is impossible to spread human laws into the animal world. What is good for us is unacceptable for them. Here, I disagree with Fuller who says: “In any case, given our emerging sense of what constitutes a good life for ourselves, why not try to extend that across nature?”³ It is desirable to create conditions for animals in zoos similar to those in which they live in the wild, but not conditions similar to those in which we live in our flats. Wild animals have the right to preserve their natural habitat on the globe that is their home no less than ours. Pets, of course, are closer to a person, but their rights also cannot be the same as the human rights. If we want to see wild animals live well, we should take care to preserve their environment as much as possible in its most suitable form.

Without doubt, modern civilization reduces the area where wild nature is preserved and the changes are not in a favorable direction for the animals. People can compensate, to some extent, for the damage that their livelihood brings to animals. But, in so doing, we have to think first about the specific rights of animals and not about human rights. Human rights should not be considered desirable for all animals.

Social and Political Relations Among Humans

We can draw a parallel with the current state of affairs in the social world of people. We talk a great deal about the process of globalization. Indeed, the current conditions of our civilization, primarily means of communication, brings people closer to one other. Increasingly strong ties appear among different countries and cultures. But, at the same time, we are witnessing a stormy burst of national cultures, religions and traditions that seek to establish themselves as autonomous and having the right to independent existence. It is impossible to ignore that not just the good aspects of the past are revived. Hostility, strife and religious wars — the desire to spread one’s own cultural, religious and political values, if not to the whole world, then to the nearest neighbors — often form the context of international relations.

Life in western countries is more comfortable than for people in the east. It is not difficult to understand the desire to make all humans happy given the conditions of western democracy. But what is good for some people, is not good for others. Apparently, we need to develop a web of communication that would unite all its elements and preserve their individuality and autonomy. A policy of multiculturalism that encourages cultural coexistence and equal rights leads to both a culture in place, and a culture recently arrived, adopting a new form of existence. As a result, cultures lose their specificity.

I believe each nation should have place where people live constantly and which is their home. Outside their home, people are guests and obligated to obey local laws and customs.

³ Steve Fuller “Personhood Beyond the Human: Reflections on an Important Conference.” SERRC Vol. 3, No. 2, 11.

When we enter the world of animals, we are their guests. We are obliged to take into consideration their norms of life. Whether we want to or not, our activity inevitably changes the living conditions of wild animals. If an animal fell into a difficult situation, and we want to help, we must know the peculiarities of the animal's behavior. The biological features an animal's body do not play a serious role.

As for people, I completely agree with Fuller that our natural biological makeup is not a foundation of humanity. While not the foundation, it is necessary for our thinking. Physiological processes in the brain are not a thought, but they are necessary for the birth of a thought, if nothing else. Overcoming this boundary is not easy to explain. Perhaps it is disappearing?

Human Environment as a Thinking World

People organize the surrounding world as their house and do it with the help of their mind. Traces of human thinking remain in its results whether we like it or not. In classical science, we try to remove these traces and study the created world as if it exists absolutely independently of us. But now, on the contrary, we try to find these traces and reproduce them in machines. The surrounding world changes. If we want to live in it comfortably, we have to study its structure and create possible ways to communicate with all its inhabitants. Fuller considers this issue and offers relevant topics for discussion.

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