SERRC
Social Epistemology
Review & Reply Collective

Transhumanism in the Context of Social Epistemology

Lyudmila Markova, Russian Academy of Science

Markova Lyudmila. "Transhumanism in the Context of Social Epistemology." *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 6, no. 7 (2017): 50-53.

http://wp.me/p1Bfg0-3EQ

SERRC
Social Epistemology
Review & Reply Collective
Vol. 6, no. 7 (2017): 50-53
http://wp.me/p1Bfg0-3EQ

Robert Frodeman (2015) and Steve Fuller (2017) discuss the problem of transhumanism in the context of history. This approach to transhumanism—a subject now studied actively by many specialists—clearly shows us the focus of current investigations. A virtual world, created by humans and possessing intelligence, demands a special kind of communication. But we are not the only ones changing. Humans programmed robots to perform calculations at a speed we cannot match.

Still, we remain certain that robots will never be able to feel a sense of joy or disappointment, of love or hatred. At the same time, it is difficult to deny that robots already know how to express emotions. Often, we prefer to deal with robots—they are generally polite and answer our questions quickly and clearly.

Even though we are unable to produce particular operations at a certain speed, we still use the results of the robots' work. But the senses remain inaccessible to robots. Yet, they have learned many of the ways humans make their feelings known to others. A common ground is forming among humans and robots. People use techniques for communication with one another and with artificial intellects based on the laws of the virtual world, and artificial intellects use signs of human feelings—which are only signs and nothing more.

As we debate transhumanism as something that either awaits us, or does not, in the future we fail to consider the serious transformations of our current lives. To some extent, we are already trans-humanoids with artificial parts of our body, with the ability to change our genome, with cyber technology, with digital communication and so on. We do not consider these changes as radically transforming our future selves and our current selves. We do not notice to what extent we differ already from our children and, consequently, from the next generation.

Until recently, we relied first on our knowledge of the laws of the material world. We studied nature and our artificial world was material. Now, we study our thinking and our artificial world is not simply material—it can think and it can understand us. Its materiality, then, is of a different type. The situation in society is quite another and, in order to live in it, we have to change ourselves. Perhaps we have not noticed that the process of our becoming transhumanoids has already begun?

We have a philosophical basis for the discussions about transhumanism. It is social epistemology, where some borders disappear and others appear. Steve Fuller frequently refers to the topic of transhumanism in the context of social epistemology.

"Sociality" in Social Epistemology: The Turn in Thinking

As we speak of both the technization of humans and humanization of machines, the border between humans and technology becomes less visible. In social epistemology, the sense of "social" is important for understanding this turn in thinking during the last century. You can

find without difficulty (long before the emergence of social epistemology) the adoption of phrases such as the "social" history of science, the "social" organization of scientific institutes, the "social" character of the scientific (and not only scientific) knowledge, "social" character of the work of a scientist and so on. People created science and everything associated with it is connected to our world in one way or another.

Nobody denies the existence of these relations. The problem resides in their interpretation. Even if you want to see the advantage of your position in striving to eliminate traces of the scientists' work and conditions under which the results were obtained, you have to know what you want to eliminate and why. In social epistemology, on the contrary, sociality remains in scientific knowledge. Still, serious problems follow as a result.

It is important to understand that anything we study acquires human features because we introduce them into it. We comprehend nature (in the broadest sense of this word) not as something opposed, or even hostile, to people. We deal with a thinking world. For example, we want to have a house that protects us from rain and cold. It is enough to know physical characteristics of materials in order to build such a house. But now we can have a "smart" house. This house alerts you when you return home in the evening that there is no kefir in the fridge and the cat needs food you must buy. You like your new car, but you want to have a navigator. We now have driverless cars. And drones are widely used for military and economic purposes. I have listed just a very few cases when robots help us in our daily lives. We are built into this world and we are accustomed to it.

Still, electronics can complicate and hinder our lives. For instance, you drive the most recent Mercedes model. Your car automatically brakes if you follow too closely and your steering wheel turns in an unexpected way. At the same time, if you drive an old car without any electronic equipment, you feel in control of the situation. The behavior of the machine depends entirely on your actions.

Classical and Non-Classical Logic

Thinking in the context of social epistemology is plugged into empirical reality. This fact is considered usually as an abandonment of logic. But this is not so. The fact is that classical logic has exhausted itself. A new logic, radically different from the classical one, is just emerging. What is the difference?

David Hume, one of the founders of the classical philosophy, wrote about the British and French. They are different people, of course, but philosophically they have a common feature—they are humans. Take another example. You are talking to the same person in different situations. In the office, this person is not the same as they are at home or in the street. As a rule, it is not important to you that you deal every time with the same person, this is obvious without any justification. The person is interesting from the point of view of their characteristics as a member of work team or as a family member. Every person manifests themselves in a specific way in a concrete situation. And this fact is taken into account in a new type of logic. This logic is rooted in specific frameworks.

We can see the attention to specific sociality in the formation of social epistemology. It is necessary to understand, in Fuller's opinion, why scientists receive different results when

SERRC
Social Epistemology
Review & Reply Collective
Vol. 6, no. 7 (2017): 50-53
http://wp.me/p1Bfg0-3EQ

they generally have the same set of books, the same knowledge, and the same conditions of work. Fuller pays attention to what surrounds the scientist here and now and not in the past. The history and the process of scientific knowledge development is understood by us with our logical means. As a result, they inevitably become some part of our present.

The notion of space becomes more important than the notion of time. Gilles Deleuze wrote about this in his logic. Robert Frodeman identifies his approach as "field philosophy". This name identifies features of our current thinking. Russian philosopher Merab Mamardashvilly thought that in order to understand emerging scientific knowledge it is necessary that it be considered outside the "arrow of time".

The former connection between the past and future, in order to deduce a new result from previous knowledge. is not suitable. In the last century, dialog became more widespread. Its logical justification in science was given in the scientific revolution of the beginning of 20th century physics. For us, it is important to notice that quantum mechanics replaced classical physics on the front lines of the development of science. But classical physics was not destroyed and its proponents continue to work and give society useful results. This feature of the non-classical scientific logic is noteworthy: it does not declare its predecessor as not scientific, as not having the ability to decide corresponding problems. Moreover, this new logic needs its predecessor and dialogical communication with it. In the course of this dialog both sides change, trying to improve their positions in the same when two people talk.

That is why I do not agree with Justin Cruickshank (2015) when he writes that Karl Popper's idea of a fallibilism is connected in some way with dialog. For Popper, the main aim is to criticize and, in the end, to destroy to falsify a theory, in order replace it with a new theory. As a result, dialog becomes impossible because for it we need to have at least two interlocutors or theories. For Popper, an ideal situation is when we deal with one person, a winner. In Russia, the topic of dialog was studied by Mikhail Bakhtin and Vladimir Bibler.

Context

Dialog is one of the forms of communication between different events in the history. If we consider, as an ideal, all studied events from the point of view of their common characteristics, we then deal with one person and we have nobody for dialog. The differing conditions of a scientist's, or any other person's, work is not taken into consideration. We have classical thinking—one subject, one object, one logic.

As I understand Ilya Kasavin (2017), he does not investigate the construction of Kara-Kum Canal as an inference from the Peter the Great's plan. A connection exists between these two projects. Yet, each of them is considered as unique, as having its own context. So, it is not correct to ask Kasavin: "What traces and records were left of the project imagined by Peter the Great, how were they interpreted and reinterpreted over the course of hundreds the years, and how, if at all, did they influence Stalin's project?" (Bakhurst and Sismondo, 2017). The "arrow of time" as a coherent chain of events from Peter the Great to Stalin

exists. But it is not important in the frame of non-classical thinking to study first, and in all detail, this chain for the understanding the situation with the construction of Kara-Kum Canal.

The same may be said about the emergence of transhumanism as a scientific area. It is created in the context that is formed from the outside world by choosing those elements which would be able to help us to comprehend some problem. One of the most important features of the context is the presence of both ideal elements (the past scientific knowledge, for instance), and the material elements in world existing around us. Context, as a whole, is the beginning of a new result when we think, and it is not surprising that we have a notion of transhumanism containing the ability of thinking and material carrier of a thought. Robotics corresponds to this understanding of transhumanism and that helps us to see the border between human and robot as less defined.

Conclusion

We see the current signs of human transformation which were seemingly impossible just a few decades ago. Even those who are against such changes do not object to them when they seek medical help or when they have the opportunity to facilitate their everyday life. In many cases, then, radical changes go against our will and we do not protest against them.

We are creating our artificial world on the basis of the knowledge not only of the material world, but also of our thinking. We put this knowledge into the surrounding world in the process of investigation, and we cannot imagine it without the ability to think. The world is becoming able to think, to understand us, to answer our questions.

As our thinking becomes different, we notice its turn. It is directed not at nature, at the world around us, but at humans. At the same time, nature acquires certain human characteristics. This turn is the basis of many serious problems connected initially with notions of the truth and objectivity of scientific knowledge. But these problems are not the topic of this comment.

Contact details: markova.lyudmila2013@yandex.ru

References

Bakhurst, David and Sergio Sismondo. "Commentary on Ilya Kasavin's 'Towards a Social Philosophy of Science: Russian Prospects'." *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 6, no. 4 (2017): 20-23.

Cruickshank, Justin. "Anti-Authority: Comparing Popper and Rorty on the Dialogic Development of Beliefs and Practices." *Social Epistemology* 29, no. 1 (2015): 73-94.

Frodeman, Robert. "Anti-Fuller: Transhumanism and the Proactionary Imperative." *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 4, no. 4 (2015): 38-43.

Fuller, Steve. "Twelve Questions on Transhumanism's Place in the Western Philosophical Tradition." *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective,* 19 April 2017. http://wp.me/p1Bfg0-3yl.

Kasavin, Ilya. "Towards a Social Philosophy of Science: Russian Prospects." *Social Epistemology* 31, no. 1 (2017): 1-15.