

# Beyond Classical Metaphysics: How To Consider the New Ontology of Man

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## ABSTRACT

The article's objective is to present the author's understanding of the evolving role of man in the new reality of rapid technology development. It is suggested that in the context of an increasing influence that high technologies (Hi-Tech) have on society and culture, arises the need for a new conception of the changes in the human ontology. The present article discusses the concepts of High-Ed (high educational technologies), Hi-Tech, and Hi-Hume (high humanitarian technologies) in their interrelation and intersection. In the context of technocratization of society, education and culture should be human-oriented and related to humanism as never before.

**Keywords:** Philosophy of education, Philosophy of man, Knowledge, Technologies, New ontology, Values.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The first philosophy (Greek: πρώτη φιλοσοφία, Latin: philosophia prima) is the concept that was introduced by Aristotle and covered the "first" or fundamental principles. It is related to the later concept of *metaphysics* and is close to *ontology*, the subject of which is "being as being". [1] According to Aristotle, the first philosophy is the discipline about the causes and beginnings of existence and knowledge and what an actual being is. Thus, metaphysics is considered a branch of philosophy focusing on the issues of ontology (what is being?) and epistemology (how do we know?).

Having started with Aristotle, metaphysics continued maturing, and the classical period of its development ended when *Critique of Pure Reason* by I. Kant, the revolutionary book in epistemology, was published [2]. Kant's *Copernican Revolution* in philosophy assumed that objects must conform to our cognition, i.e., some fundamental characteristics of objects of cognition depend on human cognitive abilities. We perceive the world only as it seems to us, which is not an accurate reflection of what it really is. Therefore, according to the German philosopher, the way objects are

perceived changed, and so did the idea of the ontological status of objects.

The cognizing subject tends to attribute various characteristics to the object of cognition. Further, these traits are perceived to be descriptive of the object itself, whereas, in fact, they are not. They are instead the result of the co-creative activity of the *subject*. Different a priori categories of the subject allow constructing reality as we know it. "Reality is not a perception, but a conception." Thus, a case can be made of a special perception of the nature of knowledge. As it transcends disciplines, the common questions "what can I know?", "what should I do?" and "what can I hope for?" are reduced to "what is the man?". That is, the problem of man is interdisciplinary and goes beyond the scope of classical philosophical anthropology.

At the moment, interdisciplinary studies are mainly regarded as the issues of research practice and introduction of results into a cognitive system. The latter implies academics' collaboration when jointly studying various aspects of the same object and their contribution to a new knowledge with the results obtained. The modern state of the problem of man indicates that people are becoming a significant scarce resource, also in an economic

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sense, for which reason effective economic development is directly related to the development of human capital. Therefore, in the current situation, a new integral interdisciplinary perspective on man's problem is required.

## **2. INTERDISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNOLOGIES**

It is a well-known fact that interdisciplinary approach has become a consistent trend at the current stage of scientific research development. The progress of knowledge society as a social model with its values and problems of social equity and education requires an assessment of the role of science in economy. Thus, the primary objective of knowledge production is providing valuable and accessible outcomes for society and all its members. That type of society as a model requires a new integral comprehension of man. It is integrally understood as a "<...> society of linguistic and cultural diversity, whereas the innovation segment grows, the differences in science and technology, economy and culture are perceived and synthesized. This goes in line with increased fragmentation of society and division of its spheres"[3]. Thus, the functions of science are changing, as knowledge is becoming a decisive factor in social development, and its social functions are coming to the forefront. "In the current situation, science is not only to provide reliable knowledge for society but also to contribute to solving social problems by means of production of new knowledge. Increasing integration of science into the social context and the requirement for its practical relevance reflect the changes in the social function of science" [4]. V.G. Gorokhov, the renowned Russian specialist in the philosophy of science and technology, has concluded "<...> about the convergence of the academic and technological course of knowledge, due to which a new science emerges that is involved in the processes of making socially important decisions" [5].

Meanwhile, it is essential to highlight that this trend is significant not so much for fundamental sciences as it is for applied ones, which relates to the development of high technologies (Hi-Tech), in particular. The concept of high technologies appeared and has been widely used since the end of the 1950s. Up until now, Hi-Tech does not have a clear, unambiguous definition. However, it can still be said that high technologies are associated with research intensity and versatility and have a broad

scope of application. They are based on the direct use of interdisciplinary research results and achievements in biology, chemistry, physics, and informatics. Therefore, specific related terms are used, for example, bio and medical technologies, nanotechnology, information, and telecommunication technologies, etc. Furthermore, Hi-tech includes industrial and social technologies, such as news dissemination, advertising, various services, and cooperative education technologies.

One of the attributes of Hi-Tech is the non-participation of people. In other words, the less humans are involved in the technological process, the higher the technology is. However, one must never forget N.A. Berdyaev's warning on the danger of the power of technology over man, when the former becomes an end in itself, not a means to that. In his famous article *Man and Machine (The Problem of Sociology and Metaphysics of Technology)* published in 1933, Berdyaev shifted the focus of his attention to a person, to the process of his consciousness changing under the influence of technological progress, to the crisis of a human and society caused by rapid technology development and predominance of technocratic thinking. The emergence of machines is considered a manifestation of traditional humanism and its values, but further, a metamorphosis of man's subordination to technology occurs. This results not only in changing the structure of society but also in restructuring human consciousness, which acquires its new qualities. It is not without a reason that Berdyaev's article starts as follows: "It would not be an exaggeration to say that the question of technology has become the question of the destiny of a human being and culture" [6].

In December 2014, when celebrating the 250th anniversary of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, a panel discussion on the topic "Convergence as a New Stage of the Sociocultural Revolution" was held, initiated by the National Research Center "Kurchatov Institute." It is widely known that Kurchatov Institute is one of the most recognized world scientific centers, a pioneer in large-scale interdisciplinary projects in priority areas of research cooperating with the leading Russian and foreign academic institutions, centers, and universities. One of the leading scientific projects of the Institute is the NBICS research program in the field of nano-, bio-, information, cognitive, and socio-humanitarian sciences and technologies. In the article "From the Atomic Project to Convergence," the head of Kurchatov Institute, M.V. Kovalchuk, stated that

"Convergence is the next stage of interdisciplinarity, into which the merging of science is initially embedded for achieving a uniform result" [7]. This is why the panel discussion was called "Convergence as a New Stage in the Sociocultural Revolution."

It should be mentioned that understanding the essence of convergence gives rise to new issues and questions related to the perception of the ideal of knowledge, in particular. This means that we must shift from narrow disciplinarity and traditional differentiation of sciences to some new synthetic or integral knowledge model.

All of the foregoing gives rise to the polemics that philosophers carry on today. They cover trans- and interdisciplinarity issues, or in general, what M.V. Kovalchuk calls convergence. There are some nuances, but it is critical to clearly understand that the revolution identified by NBICS is related to the possible separation of scientific character and rationality. That is because when cognition or cognitive knowledge emerges, various phenomena appear that are not unambiguously rational. Not coincidentally, the traditional perception of some phenomena related to the so-called mystical knowledge (e.g., from philosophy and psychology, which laid the foundation for these disciplines) has recently come to be known as cognitive knowledge.

### **3. HIGH HUMANITARIAN TECHNOLOGIES (HI-HUME)**

In recent years, along with the term Hi-Tech, another one has been more commonly used - high humanitarian technologies (Hi-Hume). Created by analogy, the new concept does not contradict but complements it. Apparently, the introduction of this term was conditioned by the fact that "Hi-Tech" is already going beyond material production. For instance, it is spreading into the field of information and communication services.

Meanwhile, what do "high" and "high humanitarian" technologies have in common?

Firstly, it is a significant impact on society, culture, and people.

Secondly, convergence is considered a revolution because before now, this sphere had little relation to science since people's main focus was transforming nature, conquering it, and putting it in the service of man. At present, however, the new focus is on changing the nature of people themselves. Therefore, "Hi-Hume" is aimed at

understanding a person as a "post-human," which means that the question of a new ontology in the conditions of controlled human evolution can be raised.

Thirdly, Hi-Hume can be substantiated as a humanitarian and information technology for shaping public consciousness and opinion in the context of non-equal accessibility of financial and information services for the population.

Fourthly, considering that high humanitarian technologies allow morphing the human consciousness under the technologically controlled evolution of humanity, one may talk of the importance of overcoming global biological, social, and technological risks and ensuring the survival of mankind in the knowledge society.

Furthermore, fifthly, Hi-Hume can be seen as an instrument of the new phenomena like bio-power and bio-politics.

However, there arise questions, the answers to which may be somewhat debatable. The controlled human evolution is a new yet unexplored and high-risk area. In whose hands will these technologies rest? Who will be exposed to the caused transformations? In other words, it is the changing human ontology in the conditions of the NBICS revolution. This gives rise to an accurate idea that along with Homo Sapiens, the concept of a "post-human" is emerging, who will become the result of "new knowledge" and to the perception of the contribution of convergence to it.

However, we are running a risk of repeating the situation that F. Nietzsche described in *The Gay Science*, i.e., the idea that "God is dead." Therefore, we are allowed to do anything. Nietzsche spoke of the destruction of beliefs about the presence of a guarantor of human existence beyond everyday life and imparts meaning to the existence of the world.

The question is who will come into possession of these technologies and what it might lead to. Therefore, the "revolution" here includes what was previously called a revolution in the sphere of humanities. That is, technological knowledge changes the perception of the world and the worldview.

### **4. KNOWLEDGE AND VALUES. KNOWLEDGE AND GLOBALIZATION**

Now to an important aspect related to humanism – values, traditional ones in particular,

which a person possesses and is guided by. What is of the utmost importance is how values will adapt because people's consciousness and perception of the world cannot be "historically" compressed. In fact, we are facing the moving ontological constant of the traditional understanding of human nature. The new era will probably be "knowledge and technology-centered" since the revolution is for the sake of knowledge and tech per se. This poses the question of whether traditional values, ethical norms, rules, and moral strictures will apply to the new conditions.

Globalization as an expected course of modern civilization development can be viewed from different perspectives.

Firstly, its major characteristics are strengthening of integration between different countries of the world and regions and the key spheres of society.

Second, globalization is characterized by the blurring of the strict boundaries that were previously established and delimitations within spheres of society.

Thirdly, globalization has posed a question of the need for dialogue between science and the environment, the social one in particular. Ecological problems are becoming a reality, and such issues as pollution, increasing emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, or accelerated global warming cannot be resolved without joint efforts of the world community.

Fourthly, it is not only the nature of the relationship within science that has changed but also its interconnection with education. Nowadays, the importance of applied research is growing because *innovations and technologies* are among the most commonly used words in science and popular science literature and the media. For instance, the Nobel Prize in Physics in 2018 was awarded for laser instruments (scalpel and tweezers), i.e., for the results of technological knowledge. The Humboldtian model of higher education is becoming outdated. Best universities should stick to the competence model and become centers of innovation, tuition, culture, and science.

Fifthly, globalization has resulted in the internationalization of science and education. International laboratories and centers have been established; academic exchange, joint programs for undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate students among leading universities in different countries have become regular. It is a common fact that funds

allocated for research institutions are never enough, and due to the increasing cost of research, there is no country to ensure that in all relevant areas. Thus, in the context of globalization and the development of the knowledge society, a critical form of a dialogue between science and culture is the interaction of science with such subsystems of culture as art, moral, philosophy, religion, i.e., those spheres of social life that are based on national traditions. Meanwhile, socio-cultural factors of the development of knowledge as the foundation of spirituality may be important determinants of social development. "Culture-centricity" of society should be grounded on "knowledge-centricity," both technological and spiritual.

Nevertheless, globalization has obviously not become two-way traffic. There are some problems that globalization cannot resolve; conversely, it even aggravates contradictions on the following issues: the world market and protectionism, migration and its consequences, visa restrictions as a political instrument, increasing role of the government in interstate relations and economic development, imposing a single, liberal model of social development, and violation of international law.

That being said, a question arises: who benefits from globalization? In whose interest is technology being used? After all, rich countries are becoming more prosperous, whereas poor ones remain impoverished.

## **5. GLOBALIZATION AND EDUCATION**

How has globalization contributed to education, for instance? Is the new tuition model really focused on the idea of synergistic personal development? It is essential not to forget about the risks of manipulation of public consciousness since in the modern Internet era, fake news, cultural and political stereotypes, and misconceptions are spread for the purpose of deliberate misinformation on social networks and in mass media.

An example of the impact that new technologies have on socio-cultural reality and the changes that follow is the massive shift to online secondary and higher education due to COVID-19 in 2020. In the pre-COVID period, the leading world universities published courses on various online platforms to increase the accessibility of higher education. An example of such is Coursera, founded in 2012 by

two Stanford University professors to share knowledge and skills, currently offering over 500 courses from more than a hundred universities. The courses are free, payment is only required for receiving a completion certificate. During the first year of the COVID-era, the importance and opportunities of online services were clearly acknowledged. So, how relevant is offline studying today? Do students need professors, and what do they need them for? To recall the recent past of higher education in Russia, there were so-called overview lectures delivered to extra-mural students. Education is becoming less consistent and fundamental, and overview lectures are gradually shifting online.

Another characteristic feature of the education of the future is its interdisciplinarity. Several years ago, at the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, there was a discussion about the kind of student that would be suitable for the Master's program "Engineering and Physical Technologies in the Nanoindustry." Should they be good at physics, mathematics, chemistry, or biology? Apparently, what is required is fundamental knowledge in all of these subjects. However, it is impossible to find such a student after a Bachelor's degree since there is no such training system in the educational space. For this reason, there is a demand for a completely different approach to tuition. The narrow disciplinary framework is no longer relevant. Therefore, to carry out interdisciplinary research, interdisciplinary education is required at first. Moreover, it is necessary to establish new criteria of an educated person because it is not just the total of accumulated knowledge but the set of competencies, skills, and abilities. Modernization implies creating a devoted space that provides knowledge, offers various formats (including offline, online, mixed, coaching, etc.), and focuses on achieving specific goals, not just on general development. It is all about bridging the gap between who and where one is now and who and where they would like to be. The main focus is personal development, which possibly constitutes the fundamental difference of "high education" (High-Ed). This projects a person's future and gives not only and not so much knowledge as the ability to acquire it. Thus, if education is a search for knowledge, High-Ed should be directly related to "high humanitarian technologies."

## 6. CONCLUSION

Nowadays, science is facing the question of a new conceptualization of the ontological change in the conditions of the significant influence Hi-Tech and Hi-Hume have on society and culture (including High-Ed), in the context of the rapid technological development in most areas of human life. In addition, the social status of knowledge and science as a whole requires rethinking. The question is whether it is possible to create a new ontology of man within the framework of traditional values and the global picture of the world that has formed human spirituality. In other words, it is about what will form the foundations of the new ontology of modern anthropology with its central question: what is the man?

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Nur Kirabaev, including Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, writing — original draft preparation, writing — review, and editing, resources.

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