

Problems of Gender and the Posthuman in Russian Philosophical and Sociological Thought

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Abstract: The author provides an analysis of approaches to the problems of gender and the posthuman in Russian philosophical and sociological literature. According to the author, the main feature of the appearance of this type of research is connected both with fundamental changes in Russian society and the development of humanitarian sciences, that's why it's necessary to study this problematic field from social and philosophical points of view. The article offers to distinguish five stages of formation and development of this problematic field in Russia. Although such a division is rather relative, it permits to understand better the originality of problems which have been decided in different periods of the development of Russian gender and posthuman research. It's proved the idea that the posthuman concept has emerged in Russian science in relation with the final stage of gender research which is closely connected with the entry of Russian society into the epoch of extensive informatization and globalization. The article examines the ideas of Russian cosmism popular among Russian representatives of hard and natural sciences, doctors, IT specialists who support and widespread the posthuman ideas in the country. According to the author, one of the main dangers of the modern society is losing personal originality by man, disappearing distinctions between male and female. Nanotechnologies are analyzed as a bright example of this statement. It becomes clear that problems of gender are neglected with such an approach and they are paid less and less attention. The posthuman ideas are directed to existence beyond the humanism, i.e. human body turns out to be beyond personality and its gender. So, the article offers the concept of creating something like a "post-humanistic" gender. [Naira Danielyan. **Problems of Gender and the Posthuman in Russian Philosophical and Sociological Thought.** *Life Sci J* 2014;11(9):759-765]. (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 115

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1. Introduction

An analysis of approaches to the problems of gender and the posthuman in Russian philosophical and sociological literature is connected both with fundamental changes in Russian society and the development of humanitarian sciences, that's why it's necessary to study this problematic field from social and philosophical points of view. The interconnection between problems of gender and the posthuman is becoming clear while analyzing the complete reorganization of public and economic relations in the country, women's position and their status in the society, appearance of the independent feminist movement, significant changes in the field of social sciences owing to the evolution of new alternative theoretical concepts and schools. Moreover, the promotion of philosophers and researchers' works directed to spreading the gender education in Russian universities (and explanation of some post-humanism ideas in technological ones), writing a great number of works and author's courses have been taking place for the last decade.

It is considered that gender research began to develop in Russia in late 1980s - early 1990s because of the appearance of the first feminist groups and women's independent organizations. At the same

time the first publications and translations of articles devoted to gender problems took place. The article "How we decided a female issue" by A. Posadskaya and others in the journal "Communist" (Moscow 1989) symbolized a new direction in science and public female movement in Russia which some time later was called "a new era in Russian feminism" by British publishers of the book "Women in Russia" (London, New York 1994).

2. Material and Discussion

2.1 Five Stages of Gender Researches in Russia

It's reasonable to distinguish five stages of formation and development of this scientific direction in Russia. Although such a division is rather relative, it permits to understand better the originality of problems which have been decided in different periods of the development of Russian gender research. It's necessary to note that the posthuman concept has emerged in our science rather recently and can be considered only in relation with the final stage of gender research in this country.

The first stage was the period of introduction of a new scientific paradigm which lasted from late 1980s to 1992. Its basic tasks had more organizational and educational character than a

research one. Difficulties owing to the introduction of new terminology, concepts and approaches connected with the gender subject area and its methodology into Russian science and public institutions were the most complex challenges of that period.

The second stage is possible to be characterized as a period of institutionalization of Russian gender research which began its active development in 1993-1995. It was the time of growth in the number of gender centers and their official registration. Besides, this period is remarkable by the preparation of the philosophical community to the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing that influenced the Russian conferences and seminars' discussions significantly. They were mainly devoted to social and political, but not scientific subject area.

The third stage is connected with the consolidation of scientists and lecturers on Russian gender research in 1996-1998. This period coincided with so-called "mirror stage" of Russian gender research which was accompanied by arising such issues as self-identification and reflexive comprehension of the national experience, necessity of working out Russian gender discourse, its theory and methodology based upon national features.

The fourth stage of Russian gender research development began in 1999 and has finished lately. The main feature of that period was the activity of philosophers and researchers' work directed to a wide spreading of gender education in Russian universities, writing a great number of works and author's courses. As an illustration we should point here out some works of Russian philosophers and sociologists: O.A. Voronina (Moscow 2004), I.S. Klyotsina (S.-Petersburg 1998), T.V. Bendas (S.-Petersburg 2006), O.V. Ryabov (Ivanovo 1999), O.M. Zdravomyslova (Moscow 2003), "Gender Issues in Modern Russia Based on Formal Statistics (The World Bank document)" (Moscow 2006).

The fifth stage is connected with the entry of Russian society into the epoch of extensive informatization and globalization, i.e. its integration into the global information society. Its main danger is losing personal originality by man, disappearing distinctions between male and female. Common technologies worldwide form a "common" man who tries to achieve even more unity with the artificial world and its technologies. Thus, an unavoidable question is: is there "male" and "female" outside "human"? In an attempt to answer this question there appeared Russian posthuman movement in 2003 that considered itself as "a new era of humanism development, the scientific view of the world which representatives are sure a modern human isn't the top of the evolution, but the very beginning of it". The founders of this movement are such Russian

researchers as D.A. Ryazanov, I.V. Vishev, A.N. Gordeev, I.V. Artyuhov. Russian posthuman movement holds a monthly interdisciplinary seminar devoted to post- and transhuman issues and problems of scientific immortalism. They have been a subdivision of Russian philosophical society since 2005. It's interesting to note the posthuman ideas in Russia are the most popular among representatives of hard and natural sciences, doctors, IT specialists. They also follow the ideas of Russian cosmism that, on the one hand, propagates a human desire for regular self-improvement, his unity with space, higher matters, on the other hand, this spirituality should be reached by material means. Problems of gender are neglected with such an approach and they are paid less and less attention.

2.2 Russian Cosmists and the Posthuman Concept

Let's consider the final stage more detailed. It would be more rational to begin with some influential ideas of such Russian cosmists as N.F. Fedorov (Moscow 1982), P.A. Florensky (Moscow 1990), K.E. Tsiolkovsky (Moscow 2001), V.I. Vernadsky (Moscow 1977). It's very difficult to give an exact definition to this direction in Russian philosophical thought as there are different directions in it (natural scientific, literature, artistic, religious, philosophical), which are united by the idea of integral vision of the world like an organism with interconnected and mutually influencing parts. All cosmists had a common opinion on the following items:

1. Man is internally connected with space and nature. This connection is organic.
2. Mankind is united as a planetary community.
3. It is necessary to state a new human attitude to nature based on the unity of consciousness and action (inner and outer aspects). This attitude can't stay meditative as with time man understands not only his deep dependence on space, but he influences it more and more. Such his invasion requires an integral vision of the world.
4. The result of the above is the idea of co-evolution which is so popular nowadays. Rational nature regulation, joint and coordinated transformation of nature and mankind by people suppose a human refusal from anthropocentrism for the sake of antropocosmism. Its ideas together with cultural centrism, i.e. the priority of cultural and spiritual values over material ones, and the idea of general unity of mankind and space should become factors of a routine consciousness in the near future. Thus, according to cosmists, cooperation of man and nature should become the basis of the society in ecological and social aspects, i.e. their co-evolution will take place.

From post-humanistic point of view, it means the appearance of a universal human being capable to evolve together with nature without doing any harm to it. For instance, Russian cosmist N.F. Fedorov called for searching a “common cause” to control “powers of blind nature” (Moscow 1982). The special significance of his ideas could be found in his appeal to unite all the mankind by labor and mind to overcome the death by nature “regulation”. Thus, the philosopher calls people to live neither selfish nor unselfish, but with everyone and for everyone. He believes it’s necessary to overcome “non-affinity” to nature after having studied the connection of human spirit and space through regulation and resurrection.

This approach considers man as a collaborator with nature who has a patient and responsible attitude to his surrounding. Thus, it sounds like a call to the revolution in human consciousness in vital and practical spheres of man’s life due to the appearance of new values. They are completely interpreted in the works of the Russian cosmists. For example, they say about the importance of asceticism stressing the priority of spiritual values in the social life. According to them, in spite of the significance of people’s material interests, they should be supported by such eternal values as kindness, love, historic memory. They believe all parts of our life are interconnected, but spiritual and moral guidelines are the only true way in it. They consider a posthuman formed due to the rapid development of new technologies as a creative and free personality, responsible for the whole universe. It is the creative work that opens the limitless human nature and his superior mission.

It’s also necessary to point out the importance of conciliarism, general unity, God-manhood, developed in works of Russian philosophers. They grounded the idea that the mankind was united and its future was connected with overcoming its isolation and autonomy. They considered a possible posthuman as a “world personality”, appearing as a result of free dialogue of the international culture and possessing some universal moral ideas. These thoughts are becoming especially topical nowadays from the position of the latest technological achievements, e.g. nanotechnologies, for the formation of the posthuman concept and its influence on the future of our civilization and the preservation of gender relationships.

2.3 Nanotechnologies and Gender Relations

Let’s give further the definition to post-humanism and clarify its role in forming gender relations. Web-site of Russian posthuman movement defines this direction as “public movement and system of views based on the comprehension of scientific achievements and perspectives” and

“rational and cultural movement confirming the possibility and the desirability of fundamental changes in a human position due to achievements of human mind by means of technologies directed to the elimination of aging processes and the significant improvement of man’s mental, physical and psychological processes” (<http://www.transhumanism-russia.ru>).

This definition means that post-humanism is substantially based on the achievements of nanotechnologies. Some of them will be examined here.

Nanotechnological approach supposes the activity of human mind in perception at all levels as it becomes possible to manipulate not only by individual atoms and molecules, but to create models of animate nature. This opportunity opens unlimited perspectives for individual and collective creative work.

Generality of nanotechnologies indicates on forming a separate discipline – philosophy of technology that acquires an independent meaning. Their concept is widely analyzed and examined in works of such Russian philosophers as V.G. Gorohov (Moscow 2008), V.I. Balabanov, V.I. Beklemyshev, A.A. Abramyan (Moscow 2007) and others. These scientists believe that in contrast with the past technologies, new ones are able to lead to negative results due to accessible mechanisms of matter control at the nano-level and absence of its properties reflection. Such specific features of nanotechnologies as the matter control at atomic and molecular levels allow considering them rather independent and capable to be taken as the beginning of philosophical reflection in which the traditional understanding of the technology doesn’t reflect its problems. Does the meaning of technology change for human life when emerging nanotechnologies? There is a reason to say without exaggerating the importance of nanotechnologies that the changes connected with them are more significant than the previous ones. Being a result of penetration into principles of nature’s vital activity they provide a transforming influence on meaning of life, not only its form.

Developing and introducing nanotechnologies lead to the appearance of a new socio-cultural reality that brings up new ethic issues being closely connected with the realization of possible projects such as, for instance, complete description of thinking processes and perception of the reality by human brain; slowdown of aging processes; opportunity of human organism rejuvenation; development of brain/brain or brain/computer interfaces; creation of robots and other devices possessing at least partial individuality; etc. Along with ethical problems originating from the realization of the above projects, the ethical principles that many

people follow nowadays will be transformed. Development and penetration of nanotechnologies will provoke a cultural effect related to the intensification of some ethical values and the devaluation of others. All these processes affect the appearance of a modified posthuman without any difference in gender approach.

The main reason of the final conclusion is that neurointerface accessibility on the basis of nanotechnologies leads to the unification of man and machine on the qualitatively new level and it doesn't matter if this process concerns male or female. It can change the level of virtualization of human mind and social relations. Penetration of virtual technologies into human sensuality will create the situation of hybrid reality which obliterates distinctions between man and woman's virtual personality and his/her physical localization in body. However, the virtual world of social networks leads to egocentrism and person's preoccupation by himself and his thoughts, because the result of it can be the loss of relationships between man and the reality that is losing traditional gender relations to a large degree. That's why the conversation about changes of the spatial conception concerning physical margin of interpersonal communication and identification may take place. This change will involve reconsideration of human presence in the communication environment if it should be treated both real and virtual simultaneously. Such an approach means a completely new phenomenon of human existence (the margin mentioned exists rather clearly nowadays).

Thus, socio-cultural perspectives of the nanotechnological development include:

- appearing a new life style;
- stemming a phenomenon of "secularized eternity" in public consciousness stipulated by a significant increase of life expectancy;
- changing the meaning of human life in a substantial way as man will be able to feel himself like a creator of natural and social worlds.

According to the position of nanotechnologies, the cognition process is accompanied by creative and constructive human activity leading to the effects that can reveal themselves, for instance, in the modification of human sensitivity level by means of significant transformation of its physical capabilities. In turn, it should lead to nonreversible consequences. That's why the philosophical reflection of social and cultural results of the nanotechnological development is becoming more and more topical. To prevent the global ecologic catastrophe, there is a real necessity to bring out peculiarities of these technologies and to analyze their impact on the social reality. On the basis of the above analysis, it becomes clear that

nanotechnologies show themselves in three aspects: as technologies of practical activity, psychotechnologies and social technologies.

It's possible to suppose that multi-disciplinary communities that don't take traditional gender relations into account will start to perform a special part and they will be united not by a narrow community of qualification directions, but the unity of research and constructive interests. New type gender relations that could be called as "post-humanistic" gender might emerge on their basis.

2.4 Influence of Network Society

Even today, when we live in network society to a large degree, it's possible to state that social networks and virtual reality brought with new modern technologies lead to man's egocentrism, because he begins concentrating on his personality and thoughts more and more losing the connection with real world. Eventually, we can see that nowadays gender relations also acquire virtual character more and more as it becomes enough to switch on your computer, surf the Internet and find any sexual partner you like. Man can introduce himself as a monster or a super guy and it doesn't matter what he is in the reality. That's why spatial ideas of physical borders of communication and identification are being changed. The reason is man's presence in the communication environment being cognized as virtual and real simultaneously, but it's an absolutely new phenomenon of human existence. Let's consider this problem on the example of social constructivism.

K.J. Gergen proclaimed "metatheoretical perspectives" (New York 1982) which mean knowledge isn't a reflection of the objective world, but it should be considered as "interchange artifacts" (New York 1985). His position is known as social constructivism and has influence psychology most of all. If man uses such a perspective, all things and categories (not only them) should be analyzed from the position of their social construction by psychological science. He provides the following examples: a man tells about social constructions of a person, his emotions, memory, himself, society.

There is a position in Russian philosophical literature stated by R.S. Karpinskaya, I.K. Liseev and A.P. Ogurtsov that "mixed" concepts "demonstrating transitions from philosophical thinking about nature to generalizing judgments about human nature, and vice versa" (Moscow 1995, p.94) mainly appear in natural sciences (they mention synergy, sociobiology, biopolitics, etc.). The authors introduce the term "biocentrism" (Moscow 1995, p.98) expressing the tendency of unification of natural and humanitarian "cultures" with the category of life as a crossing point. From the position of social constructivism it

means that there appear some models of the “mixed” reality. They use the concept “group” for its description. As a result, the basic ideas of Russian representatives of social constructivism can be formed the following way:

1. What man takes to be experience of the world does not in itself dictate the terms by which the world is understood. What man takes to be knowledge of the world is not a product of induction, or of the building and testing of general hypotheses.

2. The terms in which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people.

3. The degree to which a given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vicissitudes of social processes (e.g., communication, negotiation, conflict, rhetoric).

4. Forms of negotiated understanding are of critical significance in social life, as they are integrally connected with many other activities in which people are engaged.

It becomes clear from the above that social constructivism is opposed to the interpretation of knowledge as a product of perception and rational thinking of cognoscitive subject. It is the position that makes this concept different from the ideas of other constructivism representatives. Its followers believe people don't construct the world in their individual consciousness, but it is a result of their joint activity, e.g., conversations, different social practices.

2.5 Posthuman Stage of Mankind Development

Pointing out the importance of other theories for understanding the human nature, social constructivism criticizes them for recognizing superiority of one reality “constructs” over others. According to it, everything we consider to be existing, real, valuable, beautiful, correct, worthy of scientific and spiritual comprehension is constructed by means of language in the process of communication with other people. Different world constructions are connected with the perception what exists and what is valuable in different ethnic, professional, scientific and religious communities. It becomes clear that the research of this direction is turned to understanding the ways of objective knowledge achievement, studying literary and rhetoric techniques of explanation, describing ideological and value importance of the self-evident, defining a range of changeability of human senses in different cultures. Thus, social constructivism leads to the appearance of the network society model, closely connected with the up-to-date interpretation of the posthuman as it was demonstrated the above. Let's try to prove it.

From the posthuman point of view, the social character of such a technology as the Internet isn't universal and homogenous. It's determined by logics of the technologies laid into its foundation and depends on social relations and conditions which appear to support definite technological developments while supposing the negation of other possibilities. It can't be considered as completely artificial and unnatural. Moreover, it helps to ignore or reject many natural barriers which otherwise would limit the communication process among people including gender communication.

Thus, technologies can't be developed and used in vacuum therefore a significant portion of the social effect of the given technology is connected with its application by a person or a group of people in a definite social situation. It means taking into consideration a number of political, economical and social aspects in which the network technology is applied. There appears some construction, “the virtual reality”, and man isn't able to overcome its limitations. According to modern Russian philosopher A.P. Ogurtsov, man lives in “an imaginary sign system establishing fictitious connections among people and substituting the real world with its problems and difficulties by itself” (Samara 2006, p.21). This concept is becoming one of the most actual nowadays.

It becomes clear the unity of cognition and creation as man's constructive activity is one of the main features for the posthuman stage in the development of mankind. There is and there can't be a clear margin between them.

The bright example here is naturalized or natural epistemology which is connected with the solution of epistemological issues while using scientific methods and theories, in particular, taken from natural science. Willard Van Orman Quine formulated the bases of this direction. So far modern Russian philosophers haven't paid enough attention to this philosophical direction. There have appeared some articles describing Quine's ideas in general. So, it's necessary to mention those of them having the direct influence on the posthuman concept. In contrast to the philosophical tradition which we can see in the classic cognition theory, the concept of natural epistemology by Quine is a branch of natural science with a psychological foundation. The “old” epistemological tradition tried to involve natural science; it was built on perception. According to Quine, “it studies a natural phenomenon, viz., physical human subject. ... We are studying how the human subject of our study posits bodies and projects his physics from his data, and we appreciate that our position in the world is just like his. Our every epistemological enterprise, therefore, and the

psychology wherein it is a component chapter, and the whole of natural science wherein psychology is a component book - all this is our own construction or projection from stimulations that we have determined for our epistemological subject” (New York, London 1969, p.82). That is, a double inclusion takes place: first, epistemology into natural science and, second, natural science into epistemology.

Nowadays the project of epistemology naturalization considering social and cultural points of view is widespread. It is described in works of such philosophers as N. Luhmann (Bern 1988, Frankfurt am Main 1984), H. Kornblith (Oxford 1992), V.A. Lektorsky (Moscow 2012). It examines the correlation between natural scientific and social scientific aspects of cognition as opposite or accompanying.

Searching answers on epistemological issues with the application of scientific methods and theories often involves the problem of circulation. These methods and theories should be capable to analyze suppositions and hypotheses and substantiate them. They should also use approaches of transcendental and metaphysical epistemology. The disciplinary differentiation between philosophy and empiric sciences lies in such opposites as fact/ importance, descriptive/ normative, synthetic/ analytic, empiric/ transcendental. The role of natural epistemology is in their unification as a whole.

3. Results

Any perception is defined by choice and classification which are formed by limitations and preferences inherited or acquired by different ways. As man can control his body on the basis of the sensor information received, even the least mediated feelings will be under influence of these shape-generating principles. It becomes obvious that the modern technologies allow the physical realization of these propositions extrapolating them to a qualitatively new level. Such leading Russian philosophers as I.U. Alekseeva, V.I. Arshinov and others write that “man will have a desire to master all processes in his body: breath, blood circulation, digestion, fertilization. He will take them under control. ...He will put a target to create a more perfected social and biological type - a posthuman” (Moscow 2013, p.18).

What will this a posthuman be? This is a question that hasn't got any definite answer nowadays. Some scientists think that the above biological transformations of human nature can lead to the creation of a monster. Russian academician V.A. Lektorsky, for instance, writes in his latest book that the emerging posthuman “will destroy the existing culture with its ideas of human abilities, the

acceptable and the unacceptable, human rights and obligations that compose the human nature” (Moscow 2012, pp.22-23). It's difficult to agree to this conclusion completely. At present the global society has already begun searching a new approach to humanism which is understood traditionally nowadays, clarifying transformations of social values and meaning of human life and the importance of traditional gender relations in the perspective of their development, studying new cultural stereotypes. This work will undoubtedly give some positive results assisting the mankind to avoid the ecological catastrophe and keeping gender relations as a basis of life continuation on Earth. Of course, the new “post-humanistic” gender relations will be transformed in comparison with the traditional ones under the influence of new technological and social factors, among which nanotechnologies and network society that have been considered in this article. But, of course, their main target should stay the same: preservation of human life on our planet.

It's possible to conclude on the basis of the analysis made that post-humanism reveals itself in three aspects:

- practical activity;
- technological achievements;
- social transformations.

Its concept is based on the ideas of constructivism significantly. It's a synthesis of different philosophical and sociological directions applied in technological practice. It becomes clear that problems of gender are considerably neglected with such an approach and they are paid less and less attention. The posthuman ideas are directed to existence beyond the humanism, i.e. human body turns out to be beyond personality. But it stays the necessity of preserving gender relations among people. So, the concept of creating something like a “post-humanistic” gender turns out to be one of the most actual nowadays.

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