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Freedom of Thinking in the Terms of Virtualization of the Technological Environment

Libertad de pensamiento en términos de virtualización del entorno tecnológico

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with determining the specificity of the representation of the phenomenon of freedom in the mind of the subject when interacts with objects of virtual reality. On the basis of phenomenological research, the author claims that the essential characteristic of the representation of the phenomenon of freedom in the mind, when interacting with virtual reality, is the intention to superiority, not only over natural and spiritual laws but over principles of categorical thinking. A person, when interacting with virtual reality, represents freedom as a value setting expressing the desire for superiority over the existing social loges.

Keywords: Category; freedom; phenomenon; virtual reality.

RESUMEN

El artículo trata de determinar la especificidad de la representación del fenómeno de la libertad en la mente del sujeto cuando interactúan administradores con objetos de la realidad virtual. Sobre la base de la investigación fenomenológica, el autor afirma que la característica esencial de la representación del fenómeno de la libertad en la mente, al interactuar con la realidad virtual, es la intención de la superioridad, no sólo sobre las leyes naturales y espirituales, sino sobre los principios del pensamiento categórico. Una persona, al interactuar con la realidad virtual, representa la libertad como un valor que expresa el deseo de superioridad sobre los loges sociales existentes.

Palabras Clave: categoría; libertad; fenómeno; realidad virtual.

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INTRODUCTION

What is freedom? There are plenty of answers to this question. Some philosophers argue that only in a creative impulse a person is able to feel the touch of higher divine freedom (Berdyayev, 1989). Others believe that observing moral norms solely from a sense of duty is a truly free act (Kant, 1994). Often freedom is viewed as merely an illusion of the mind, arising from ignorance of all the causes of the events that are happening. For example, according to some supporters of this position, a person thinks that he acts freely, while he is being pushed to a certain action by circumstances that are formed from an infinite number of reasons (Spinoza, 2015). There is a widespread position that through freedom a person truly becomes a man, choosing life goals and the meaning of his being, that is, freedom is the choice of the life path by man (Sartre, 2000).

We listed only some of the philosophical interpretations of the phenomenon of freedom, but they are enough to see the whole ambiguity of understanding this phenomenon. Each of the existing concepts is backed by weighty arguments, and without worrying about reflections, a philosopher can choose any of them, for the reasoning of each is quite equivalent. It may seem that the single phenomenon of freedom does not exist at all, and this term refers to completely different phenomena of the social and spiritual life of a person. Perhaps it is. However, along with humanism, human rights, and democracy, freedom in a modern civilized society is a key value, a guide to the vital aspirations of most people. Therefore, the study of this phenomenon is the most important task of philosophy and science. We will assume that the variety of ways to define freedom comes from the fact that in each individual situation, in different conditions or in different systems of mental and social relations, freedom acquires its specific features.

At the present stage of the development of civilization, a new form of being of a person called virtual reality is coming into being. In this regard, it becomes particularly relevant to study those transformations that undergo fundamental human values, including freedom, under the influence of new living conditions. We propose to consider specific features of the phenomenon of freedom in the space of virtual reality. The most appropriate method for achieving this goal is the ontological and historical phenomenology that allows us to discover the historical genesis of the phenomenon of virtual freedom.

The goal of the study is to determine the specific features of the representation of the phenomenon of freedom in the mind of a subject when interacting with virtual objects, which makes it possible to evaluate some transformations of the social values of a person in the conditions of virtual reality in the modern society.

PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

In order to identify specific features of the phenomenon of freedom in a virtual environment, it is necessary to determine what the phenomenon of virtuality is.

What is virtual reality? This question causes considerable difficulties, both among ordinary people and philosophers. This is due to the historical youth of the problem of identifying virtual phenomena, there is no common opinion about when a person first encountered virtuality. The time of the emergence of virtual phenomena, according to various studies, is calculated from the period of the birth of the human psyche until the creation of the first computer.

In philosophy, a position is widespread, according to which the starting point of the emergence of virtual reality is the emergence of the ability of the human psyche to generate so-called subsistence objects. Subsistence objects are imaginary objects possessing the qualities of real ones, whose existence is considered by the human psyche as potentially possible (Meinong A.) (Lindenfeld, 1980). For example, such a thing as the "golden mountain" is composed of the qualities of two real objects, a mountain and gold, although it does not exist in reality, but is potentially possible (Dugin, 2009).

A similar position is held by J. Baudrillard in his theory of simulacra. He argues that, over time, the socio-psychological space of modern civilization is increasingly saturated with simulative forms of existence. A

simulacrum is a copy without the original. By its characteristics, the simulacrum is similar to subsistence objects, but it has its own representative force, that is, its own nature independent of the psyche. An example of a simulacrum is a photograph, which, after being edited by special programs, loses its connection with the original. That is, the edited photo turns into a simulacrum at the moment when the subject becomes indifferent to the question of the reality of what is depicted on it, it does not matter for him that it is not an original, but a modified copy (Baudrillard, 2015). However, in the concept of J. Baudrillard, this term implies a much broader class of processes related not only to virtual reality but also to politics, art, interpersonal relationships, etc. and reflecting the tendency to increase the simulative forms of human behaviour in the modern society of postmodernity.

Considering the psychological aspect of virtual reality, one can refer to the developments of N.A. Nosov. He understands virtual reality as some ability of the human psyche to assert imaginary worlds as real, and supplement them with perceived reality (Nosov, 2000). In his work "Virtual Psychology" N.A. Nosov considers virtuality as an integral part of the human psyche. The psychological approach demonstrates one of the fundamental problems of identifying a virtual phenomenon, the problem of distinguishing its subject-object status. Any object of reality appears exclusively in the form of a phenomenon reflected in the human psyche, its presentation is inevitably influenced by its forms and patterns, so it is extremely problematic to clearly distinguish the mental subjective image of a virtual object and its objective characteristics.

Many researchers are trying to solve the problem of searching for subjective (mental) and objective features of virtual reality in the socio-cultural space. (Bataeva, 2011; Muratova, 2014; Reshenin, 2013; Sterledeva, 2011; Khazieva and Clyushina, 2014). For example, R.V. Leushkin believes that "modern understanding of a virtual object identifies such a characteristic of it as incompleteness of existence. This is the fundamental difference between a virtual object and a real one, which is informationally, logically, and empirically complete" (Leushkin, 2014). But the question arises: what is meant by the incompleteness of existence? To what extent and in what capacity should the object be incomplete in order to be considered virtual? The author, using the constructivist and mathematical approach, proposes to refer to virtual objects those that equally possibly exist and do not exist.

Thus, the degree of incompleteness in the method proposed by R.V. Leushkin is determined exclusively mathematically. But if we return to the psychological approach, the imaginary object is recognized as existing in one form or another. For the subject's mind, any imaginary object is endowed with the completeness of existence.

The difficulty of demarcating virtual reality is beyond doubt. Some researchers generally refuse to search for clear boundaries between the real and virtual world. Thus, D.V. Vorobyov and A.A. Sirotkina simply state that "... we exist not so much in the real world as in the world of mental constructs, that is, our own mental constructs, substituting, or, most likely, having already substituted reality for themselves" (Vorobiev and Sirotkina, 2008). It can be concluded from this that there are still no clear criteria for identifying virtual reality and distinguishing it from other forms of being. In this situation, it becomes difficult to identify specific semantic characteristics that the phenomenon of freedom acquires for a person when entering a relationship with virtual reality.

These difficulties, in our opinion, are due to the fact that not its own intrinsic attributes of virtuality are subjected to the research, but features that distinguish it from reality. Therefore, such a phrase as virtual reality can often have a contradictory meaning. In the newest philosophical encyclopaedia, it is defined that "virtuality (from Latin *virtualis* - possible) is an object or state that does not really exist, but can arise under certain conditions" (Stepin, 2010). That is, the basic quality of virtuality is the potentiality of existence, while the real can be called what actually exists. Consequently, one can understand virtual reality as a being that exists simultaneously potentially and actually. In our opinion, attempts to find distinctive, and not essential, features of virtuality lead to a complexity in understanding this phenomenon.

We believe that virtual reality is one of the forms of reality that by technical means has acquired an independent being embodied in an objective form. Virtual reality is an environment consisting of virtual objects that have special qualities that distinguish them from objects of reality.

An object as a phenomenon arises as a result of the process of objectification, that is, the transfer of abilities and qualities to a thing, through which it becomes part of the socio-cultural being of a person. At the same time, the object acquires stable qualities, it starts to influence the behaviour of a person, that is, each specific object, when interacting with it, requires a certain treatment, otherwise this interaction cannot arise. The surrounding objects require certain skills from a person, thus influencing his behaviour. That is, a person, changing the surrounding things by his activities, changes himself, because of which a system of human-object-human relations arises. Thus, each object introduces its own specific meaning of freedom. For example, if a person interacts with a subject such as a car, then within the framework of this interaction, freedom acquires additional meaning and is understood as freedom of movement. Such a specific meaning of freedom is due to the purpose of a particular object.

There is no doubt that virtual reality is part of technological progress. However, it also presupposes specific forms of interaction with the person, while the principles and laws by which the virtual reality functions differ from those principles and laws by which the technical means that create it operate. Therefore, considering it as a unique object environment that interacts with a person will allow us to reveal new meanings generated by this interaction. The sense core of the phenomenon of freedom will become accessible to research only after the specific purpose of the class of virtual objects as a whole is determined, for what these objects exist.

Moreover, although the virtual object functions according to its principles and laws, we affirm that it represents a new class of technical objects that has arisen by a natural evolutionary path, the result of a specific technical thinking that originated in the framework of European culture. Therefore, the comprehension of the specific meaning of freedom that it acquires in virtual reality, is necessary to begin by considering a more general specificity of this phenomenon within the framework of interaction with the objects of technology in general.

PHENOMENOLOGY OF FREEDOM IN TECHNICAL THINKING

Let us consider the nature of the technical phenomenon. The development of modern civilization is inextricably linked to the development of technology. The term technology comes from the ancient Greek τέχνη (techne) – art. The term had a very broad meaning, with its help any creative activity, both artistic and handicraft, aimed at creating something, as well as the object itself, which arose as a result of this activity, was designated.

One of the first representatives of the philosophy of technology, P.K. Engelmeyer generally considered technology to be the only instrument of social progress (Engelmeyer, 2010). But the origins of this progress lie in the specific form of thinking that originated at the dawn of European civilization.

More radical views were held by M. Heidegger who stated that technology is not a simple instrument of progress or a form of thought, it is a special form of human existence. Turning to the sources of the original archaic meaning of "techne" (τέχνη), M. Heidegger concludes that "... technology is not a simple tool. Technology is a kind of unveiling a secret... It is an area of withdrawal from the secret, a realization of the truth" (Heidegger, 1993). At first glance, for a contemporary person accustomed to using all the benefits of civilization and technological progress as a means of satisfying his needs, such a statement seems strange and incomprehensible. But in this case, we are not talking about the object as such, but about a special kind of relation of a person to the object in the process of its creation or interaction, which determined the aspect of being, called by the ancient Greeks as "techne." This relationship determines the specificity of technical

thinking embodied in the image of the creator of the demiurge, and the direction of technological progress to create the perfect objective being of people.

Let us consider the specifics of the form of demiurgic thinking which was determined by the existence of technology and originated at the origins of European civilization, in ancient Greece. Demiurgic thinking in ancient Greece for a long time was of a secondary nature, but subsequently, the influence of such a way of thinking became more significant. This tendency was especially strong during the heyday of the Athenian school of philosophy, the most famous of which were Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The main deity for these philosophers, embodying universal wisdom, is the Demiurge, that is, the maker, the artisan. Art as "techne" becomes a means of person's ascent over ordinary thought, to the sources of divine wisdom. In the dialogues of Plato, whose main hero is often his teacher Socrates, the nature of the craftsman's wisdom is comprehensively considered. So, for example, in the dialogue of Alcibiades II, Plato's Socrates concludes that the highest wisdom is not in the skill itself, not in being skilled in a concrete matter, but in knowing how to best apply one's art, that is, the wisdom of an artisan is the knowledge of the highest good (Loseva and Asmus, 2006). Plato, in his dialogues, tries to consider the fundamental questions of philosophy from the point of view of the artisan and concludes that the meaning of a person's life lies in the best way of its organization, that is, life itself is regarded as the art ("techne") that a person creates. It is with this ability to create their life in the best possible way that the ancient Greek philosophers connected the meaning of freedom.

It was M. Heidegger who pointed to the dual nature of the way in which technical progress is taking place. He argued that technology is a way of realizing the truth, but the very concept of truth was ambiguous to him. He distinguishes the truth as *veritas* ("veritas") and the truth as *ἀλήθεια* ("aletheia"). "Aletheia" (ἀλήθεια) is a process of revealing the being of things in existence, its hidden meaning. "Veritas" (*veritas*) is the truth giving superiority over something, this is the truth of power. In either case, the truth revealed to a person in the being of technology leads him along the path of liberation, but in different ways. The technology in ancient Greece was a special form of the spiritual and physical being of a person.

Undoubtedly, the modern understanding of the phenomenon of technology differs from the original ancient Greek meaning. Nevertheless, a number of thinkers who were at the source of the modern philosophy of technology considered the Ancient Greek way of understanding the existence of technology as a special form of human being, which determines the principles of his spiritual and physical reality closest to the truth. (Berdyaev, 1989; Dessauer, 1927; Marx and Engels, 1959; Heidegger, 1993). But for today there is no unequivocal opinion on the role and sense of freedom in the reality created by technological progress. Some philosophers-technologists believe that the motive for the liberation of a person is the key to the development of technology in modern civilization (Ortega y Gasset, 2002; Engelmeyer, 2010). Other thinkers argue that technology enslaves a person, taking away his freedom and turning him into a one-dimensional being. (Adorno, 2012; Marcuse, 2002). There is also the opinion that technology can both enslave a person, and lead him, with the right attitude, to a more perfect and free form of existence (Aron, 2010; Mumford, 1991; Ellul, 1986). One way or another, the question of the meaning of freedom, which it acquires in the interaction of a person and technology, is a key one in modern philosophy.

In our opinion, the question is not whether technology leads a person to liberation, but in what path of liberation modern technical thinking chooses, what kind of freedom modern technology offers a person. As J. Ellul, one of the most outstanding philosophers of the twentieth century, noted - the degree of development of technology begins to be determined by its rational efficiency ³⁰. If we are talking about the utilitarian effectiveness of technology, then, of course, technology is considered solely as a means to achieve goals. However, if technology remains only a means for modern society, if a person tries in his activity only to master it and the world through it, then undoubtedly, he can see the way of his liberation only in superiority over nature, only in the power that technology gives him. K. Jaspers, an existentialist, held a similar view. He was one of those who emphasized that the superiority given by technology is embodied in the form of power. That

is, superiority does not involve destruction, superiority means, on the one hand, a way out of submission, and on the other, gaining control over the reality that is surpassed.

PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE OBJECT OF TECHNOLOGY (τέχνη)

The reality of the object is determined by the principles by which it exists and functions, within the framework of these principles it acquires its meaning. For example, a work of art acquires real meaning only in the sphere of spiritual, value, moral, or aesthetic principles. It does not matter whether this art object denies these laws or embodies it, it loses its reality, its being, precisely as an object of art, at the moment when the above principles cease to determine the form of its being. Art paves the way for a person to perfection, to the good through ethical and aesthetic superiority over ordinary biological life. Art directs a person's spirit into an endless journey to higher ideals or throws it into the abyss of boundless chaos. In either case, through the object of art, a person tries to go beyond the ordinary life and rise above it; in this the phenomenological core and the very meaning of his freedom reveal themselves.

The object of technology acquires meaning and form within the framework of laws discovered by the scientific form of cognition and the scientific paradigm determines its reality, its meaning. The object of technology as well as the object of art is aimed at overcoming the boundaries of individual nature and human life (bios), and not in the ethical, but in the physiological aspect. The object of technology is designed to make a person faster, smarter, stronger than he is by nature. However, ultimately, it is not just about physiological, but about the physical superiority of a person, the liberation of his body, his "fusus" (φύσις), from his own natural laws. That is, if we say that natural science laws determine the reality of the object of technology, then the phenomenology of freedom in technical thinking acquires meaning in superiority over the natural science laws of nature. The meaning of freedom in modern technical thinking is an intention to superiority over natural science laws.

Virtual reality is one of the forms of the new information technology. This new form of reality can be embodied in the form of a virtual object environment, that is, a medium consisting of system-defined, autonomous (functioning by certain principles) system entities with which the operator is able to interact.

But what does superiority mean? Superiority over something does not imply its destruction; superiority gives the power to handle this with something at the behest of the will. That is, if a person surpasses the moral standards, then he can change them or leave at will. Thus, if we agree that technological progress throughout the history of its development was aimed at superiority over natural science laws, the creation of a virtual object was a natural law of this process. A virtual object can also obey natural science laws, but this time at the behest of its creator.

However, if the objects of art surpass the aesthetic and moral laws, and the objects of technology - the laws discovered by natural sciences, then they cease to be so and cannot be identified as real in their own quality. Superiority in this case is an intention, but not a fact accomplished. Entering the relationship with the object of technology, the subject perceives this intention as freedom; the freedom given to a person by technology, is embodied in the pursuit of superiority. In this respect, the subject considers freedom as the possibility of superiority over aesthetic, moral or natural science laws. Proceeding from this logic, if we recognize that a virtual object is the next stage in the development of technological objects ("techne"), then freedom in relation to this object must be thought of in the form of superiority. But if a virtual object already surpasses aesthetic, moral and natural science boundaries as an established fact, then what is the aim of the intention for superiority, from what does the subject seek to liberate in the virtual world?

THE MEANING OF FREEDOM IN THE SPACE OF VIRTUAL OBJECTS OF TECHNOLOGY

In the Indo-European language family, the root "virt" means the event created, generated at the moment (Nosov, 2000). However, not every created, that is, passing from potency to reality, event could be designated in this way. For example, the Slavic word "verti" means "simmering," "boiling," that is, transition from a calm state to a more dynamic one. Latin "virtus" means a transition to a more superior quality. Although, a later Latin word "virtualis" can be translated as a potentiality or possibility; nevertheless, this term denotes not just possibility, but the possibility of a more powerful, dynamic, perfect, superior state. As can be seen, the original meaning of the term "virtuality" already contains an indication of the intention for superiority.

Analyzing the work of some modern authors investigating the phenomenon of virtuality, we can assume that the phenomenon of virtuality has not lost the original qualities, which were indicated by the term denoting it. For example, S.A. Gorinsky argues that "the stimulated dramatized visibility of a computer artifact proves to be akin to the "principal nonobservability" of a virtual particle in quantum physics: in both cases, the discourse of virtuality is realized in the categories of the exclusive and perfect, for in both cases the gap between a concept and existence disappears" (Gorinsky, 2014). The qualities of exclusivity and perfection are close to the original meaning inherent in the word "virtuality." They can constitute the semantic core of virtual reality, what determines the meaning of existence of a virtual object.

But what kind of superiority and over what does the virtual object give, more perfect and exclusive than what should it be? At first glance, the unique feature of a virtual object is its superiority over ethical, aesthetic and natural science laws. Virtual objects are capable of violating all the principles of reality. However, neither ethical or aesthetic, nor natural science laws determine the reality of a virtual object, a virtual object has already surpassed them and is already free from them; in relation to these factors of reality, a virtual object cannot translate an intention to liberation.

The intention to superiority, on the example of art and technology objects, is aimed at those principles and laws that determine their reality. The object of art is meaningful only in the axiological space of culture, and the object of technology - in the use of laws discovered by natural sciences. Consequently, if a virtual object is a kind of technological objects, like "techne", the intention to superiority should be directed to those factors that determine its reality. What determines the reality of a virtual object? As N.A. Nosov points out, a virtual object possesses its own space, time, substance, and can violate any physical parameters (Nosov, 2000). However, to be a part of reality, he must have at least some kind of temporality, at least some spatiality; he must act and endure, etc. Space, time, substance, action and enduring are just some of the basic categories of human thought. That is, a virtual object is identified as real based on the categories of thinking and within the framework of these categories its meaning is determined.

Categories are extremely general concepts that reflect the fundamental procedures of thinking. Therefore, their generalization under the term "category" or an attempt to give them a clear definition is incorrect; their nature is understood extremely intuitively. Aristotle tried to describe all possible categories for the first time, identifying ten of them: existence, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, possession, action, and suffering. Porphyry, in his comments to Aristotle, called the ten categories as just "these ten", emphasizing the problematic nature of their generalization by a single concept. Many categories that were identified further in philosophy, one way or another, in various aspects, are reducible to the first categories identified by Aristotle.

We can talk about categories as basic logical forms of common sense. Thus, for example: "In the philosophy of modern times, Aristotle's doctrine of categories was preserved, although the categories were called supra-predicaments, universals, praedicabilia. They were interpreted as the kinds of being and their number remained the same." F. Bacon among the incoming qualities of being, or transcendences, identifies such categories as big and small, similar and different, possible and impossible, being and non-being (Bacon, 1977). Descartes and Spinoza speak about three categories - substance, modes and relations; Leibniz -

about five general kinds – substances, quantities, qualities, actions and relations (Leibniz, 1893). However, Hobbes compiled his own table of categories, the basis of which are the categories "body" and "accidents" (among them "quantity", "quality", and "relation") and associating the categories with groupings and series of names, that is, with the results of the act of designation. Geulincx interprets categories (substance, unity, etc.) as modes of thinking. D. Hume understands the categories of substance and causality as associations rooted in habit and faith. Tetens, Lambert, and Platner view categories as the ability to think of attributing things to objects..." (Stepin, 2010).

If we follow most of the approaches to categories, there is something in common that can be distinguished. All these approaches to categories treat them as higher beings that produce reality or derivatives of ways of comprehending reality by thinking. That is, categories are perceived as stable forms of consciousness or reality that determine the logical being of the subject and, therefore, one can say that Aristotle's categories are classical categories of the common sense of reality as such. Trying to determine the fact of the reality of an object, thinking attempts, first, to discover the presence of fundamental properties in it described by categories, for example, whether an object has spatiality, temporality, substance, relations with other objects, etc.

As objects of art are intentionally aimed at superiority over spiritual boundaries, ethical and aesthetic, and objects of technology over physical boundaries, so virtual objects are aimed at liberation from logical boundaries. In this case, the meaning of freedom, translated by a virtual object, is embodied in an intention to superiority over categorical thinking. When interacting with a virtual object, the individual sees the meaning of freedom in superiority over the existing categorical logos in society.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of the phenomenon of freedom shows that virtual reality is not only a simulative but also an independent form of creative activity that has evolved through technical thinking. A free act in the space of virtual reality can be understood not only as an activity aimed at destroying the existing stable patterns of being and thinking, but also as creativity oriented towards creating new forms of social logos that surpass the old ones. This conclusion is valid not only for someone who creates a virtual reality. The virtual object itself, by its nature, guides a person to a special way of understanding freedom, as a superiority, the result of which can be both destructive and creative activity. At the same time, creative activity in a virtual environment is mainly directed to the field of categorical thinking, so the development of a virtual environment can lead both to the destruction of categorical thinking, and to the creation of a new type of logical reality that surpasses categorical thinking. The result of this process directly depends on the specificity of the value attitude to the meaning of freedom in virtual reality.

In the twentieth century, M. Heidegger argued that "the essence of modern technology lies in Gestell, or "enframing", the latter obeys the mission of disclosing the secret," and freedom, in turn, "... is the area of destiny that sends a person to one or another way of revealing the Enigma" (Heidegger, 1993). Perhaps, for virtual reality, as a field of technological progress, these words are also relevant. The freedom that a person acquires in the world of virtual objects can push him to strive to dominate reality, thereby destroying it, or can direct him along the path of revealing the secrets of his own being and creating the true logos of life. Perhaps now more than ever, Heidegger's call for a reinterpretation of the essence of technology, for the return of the original understanding of "techne" as a special form of revealing of human being and, perhaps, it is virtual reality that is a completely new stage of such revealing.

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