

VALUES AS A PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM

On the one hand, it's easy for me to speak, but on the other hand, it's difficult to do. It's easy because Aleksander Sergeyevich Zapesotsky and Abdusalam Abdulkerimovich Huseynov have already spoken before me, and I can rely on their words; and it's difficult because I don't want to repeat what was said.

What is the meaning of values? Why is this conversation important and relevant today? The Edict issued by the President of the Russian Federation on November 9, 2022, No. 809 "On Approval of the Foundations of the State Policy for Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values", which lists 17 traditional values, is not accidental: it is caused by the current situation in our country and in the world.

At present, the question of where Russia and the world as a whole should move on is relevant. In this regard, I recall one of Paul Gauguin's paintings "Where did we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?". Who are we and where are we going? It is impossible to answer this question without being supported by values, especially when they are called traditional. In fact, these are the fundamental values of human life.

But the point is that, as mentioned earlier, every value can be subject to interpretation. Values, such as freedom, justice, and others, were differently understood and interpreted at different times. What is justice? Aristotle put one meaning into this concept, believing that slavery is rightful. Other people – other meanings...

Currently, we have entered the era when unshakable values are being challenged by some people, and they even express the opinion that in the new world the values should be abandoned, because they have lost all their meaning. It is about the new geopolitical reality to be taking shape in our time. The world has entered the era of global digitalization, when many things to have always seemed self-evident

become unclear and questionable. One can give up some values, but we cannot give up other ones if we want to remain human. That's exactly what the dispute is about.

In 2020, the book "COVID2019: The Great Reboot" by Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret was published. One of the authors, Schwab, is a German economist, founder and permanent president of the World Economic Forum in Davos, the other, Malleret, is a French economist. The main idea of the book is that every cloud has a silver lining. COVID accelerated digitalization, and working online became possible.

In this regard, according to Schwab, some things can be abandoned. For example, nowadays it is now possible to control behavior, so the idea of free will and freedom of choice, which presupposes the ability to be responsible for own actions, loses its meaning in some sense. If, following the results of the data analysis of someone's behavior, it is found that the person systematically commits violations, we do not need to wait for him/her to commit another one, but should put the person in prison. In other words, people should abandon the principle of presumption of innocence, which is fundamental in law. Is he right?

According to some researchers, free will is an illusion. There is no free will, everything is determined by the past. If it is about humanism, now so-called transhumanism, suggesting going beyond humanism, has spread in the world, rejecting traditional humanism that includes free will and self-realization.

Humanistic ideas originated in the Renaissance and spread during the Enlightenment. All the great philosophers (Kant, Hegel, Marx, etc.) were humanists. Marx called his doctrine real humanism. He believed that under capitalism, there is no freedom, because a person is free only formally, but not really, being forced to get hired to someone who has the means of production – factories, plants. That is, man is an unfree creature. Marx's philosophy was a way of realizing the humanistic value of freedom. It is another matter what means were chosen for that.

The goal is defined by values. In life, every person has to answer three questions. Firstly, how (how do I set a goal? what means do I use?); secondly, why (what consequences will follow?); thirdly, why.

Abdusalam Abdulkirimovich said that there are values, in relation to which it is impossible to ask the question “why?”: these are freedom, self-realization, mutual understanding, love, etc. The value of humanism, one of the most important, is being questioned today.

Now the movement of transhumanism has emerged. Its followers are guided by seemingly good goals: a person has become so omnipotent that can do things (s)he has never done before. Some compare a person to the demiurge of the Universe. (S)he can create forms that Nature is unable to create, and (s)he can control the evolutionary process, not just public opinion. How does all this turn out? If a person is a demiurge and can do anything, then (s)he must transcend the limits of the human species. Hence the transhumanism movement, which has recently become widespread all over the world.

What is the danger of transhumanism and why shouldn't traditional humanism be abandoned?

Some believe that transhumanism continues traditional humanism. We proceed from the fact that a person is a free creature that has dignity, self-respect, and respect for other people. All this must be preserved through reasonable rationality, though to be risen to a new level. Allegedly, there are ways now when it is possible to create new opportunities for the realization of a value, preserving it. What needs to be done for this? There are two ways: you can influence the human body, the embryo, the gene system, when a person has not yet been born, and an adult's brain. At present, science already provides such opportunities, and there are cognitive studies on this theme.

I can speak about this with confidence, being the chairman of the Scientific Council of the Russian Academy of Sciences on the Methodology of Artificial Intelligence and Cognitive Research. This Council consists of artificial intelligence developers, physiologists who study the brain, as well as philosophers, psychologists, and other specialists. Most likely, in the near future, due to genetic engineering, it will be possible to give people the desired qualities. For example, we want to have cleverer and more emotional children. The idea of human improvement is not new.

What may be wrong with programming “good” traits? A person will be more intelligent and resilient, will eat and sleep less, but run and think faster at the same time.

But when we start speculating on the matters, everything turns out to be not so simple. We are studying how our gene system and our brain work, and have already known a lot, but are still very far from fully comprehending it. Interfering with the processes determined by the Nature, without knowing the complex relationships within these processes, is very dangerous. In particular, this is evidenced by human attempts to “conquer” the Nature, which have led to a large number of environmental problems, and in some places – to real disasters. Starting to “improve” a person, we can get the opposite result, giving rise to an evil and callous creature.

But even if we exclude this risk, there is another danger. It is clear that in the modern world, only wealthy people can afford this kind of manipulation with a person, which will eventually result in the emergence of two castes. One caste, the “improved”, will be “overdeveloped”, the rest of humanity will remain “underdeveloped”. Is the society likely to be organized on a fair basis? Of course not, that is, another crucial value will be violated.

Let’s assume that we know how to influence the human brain and genome, and are sure that no “surprises” will arise. But the question is what can be considered “better” and what – “worse”? From the medical viewpoint, we have a norm – a healthy body, in which all organs and systems function without problems. Here, achievements can be assessed in a more reasoned manner. For example, being supported by modern technologies, people with disabilities will compensate for their lost abilities to some extent. So, there is a case when the paralyzed person has learned to type on a computer. This is a remarkable achievement, and developing this area must continue, no doubt about it. But why is it better to think fast than slow? Perhaps, it’s not about speed, but about the matter a person is thinking of, the ideas to be ruminated. Having studied how neurons in the brain interact with each other, you will not change the content of your thoughts, since it is formed not in the brain, but

somewhere outside it, and the brain only conceive it. So, I would find it difficult to conclude what is better in this case and what is worse.

The emotional component of personality also raises questions. Sometimes emotions help you make decisions, but often, on the contrary, they impede. Besides, as Abdusalam Abdulkerimovich said, comprehending the importance and value of a particular quality varies from culture to culture. There are cultures where the open display of emotions is considered indecent, where you will not be approved if you speak loudly and gesticulate expressively. In other cultures, on the contrary, a person keeping a low profile may be called secretive and insincere. So this is a difficult question: it is necessary to take into account both the culture formed in the society, and the psychology of relationships in this social environment, the balance between emotions and other areas of mental life.

The first-type transhumanists' fantasies are unlimited. They offer not only to change the quality of a person's life, but also to prolong it, ideally indefinitely. In their opinion, the best way is "transplanting" a person's consciousness into someone else's body. This theme is popular to be discussed nowadays. Transhumanists believe that personality is something to be recorded in the brain, therefore, one needs to look for an opportunity to read this information and move it to another medium – to another person's brain, or even better – to a digital device, because another person's body is also not eternal, and a digital medium can store information almost indefinitely. Are you willing to live forever, but digitally? In Russia, the Association of Futurologists, which predicts that digital human immortality will have been achieved by 2050, has even been established.

Yes, people have always dreamed of immortality, though in different ways. For example, Christian religions teach that the human soul is immortal. But in this case it is about bodily immortality. Imagine that this dream has come true. And here the question arises: if you lose your body, will the new being, biological or digital, to whom your consciousness will be transplanted be you or someone else?

A person's self-image is associated with his/her life – memories, experiences of events to happen to him/her, values, desires, etc. Being recorded somewhere, all

this assumes that I am in the body I have been in until now, and it is exactly in this form that I have interacted with others. When I lose my body and become a different biological or even digital subject, will I be the same person as before? No, the personal identity will disappear, and the creature will be different.

Franz Kafka has a story called “Transformation”. One day, a man wakes up in the morning and discovers that he has turned into an insect looking like a cockroach. Friends and relatives, who have no feelings for him except disgust, turn away from the man. Kafka describes his experiences in a naturalistic way, and they are terrible. One cannot get away from this: the body is inseparable from the consciousness, it’s involved in what one considers his/her personality.

Let’s imagine that “digital immortality” has become possible. A person is sure for living forever and not growing old: what will be his/her value system? In this case, the main values of our life seem to me to lose all their meaning. The pursuit of procreation will disappear, which will result in neither children nor old people in the society, since everyone is young and full of energy. The need for taking care of the weak disappears as unnecessary. You cannot risk your life to commit courageous acts in the name of a higher goal: what goals can there be if everyone’s life is endless? Compassion, courage, empathy, love – what is it all for? In my opinion, this prospect does not make happy anyone, especially considering that it is impossible to get out of this hell. Besides, in this hell, your life will be controlled by super-intelligent machines.

Thus, the first-type transhumanism claims to preserve human values by transforming the body and the brain, but eventually leads to their loss, to the rejection of humanism. The second-type transhumanism pursues other goals. It claims that a person behaved like a chauvinist towards the rest of the world. There is wildlife – plants and animals, there is an artificially created world of technology, and people tried to subordinate all this to their interests, bringing the situation to the ecological crisis. So, according to transhumanists, plants, animals, and machines have the same rights as humans. This may seem nonsense, but with the development of AI technologies, questions to be previously unthinkable have arisen. For example,

modern lawyers are discussing worldwide the legal personality of so-called electronic persons. Smart machines can give advice to various specialists, including judges, and this has certain consequences. Can the machines be the object of censure, punishment, stimulation? And in an Arab country, the marriage between the man with the female robot was officially legalized. How do you feel about this?

You see, legal personality presupposes, first of all, responsibility. When making a decision about an action, a person is free to choose, but (s)he is aware of his/her responsibility for the consequences. And what actions can plants, which even the word “behavior” cannot be applied to, commit? How can you give them rights, equating them with a person? Animals, unlike plants, are characterized by behavior, but we cannot consider any “acts” in relation to them either, because an act is a morally responsible step of a subject endowed with consciousness. If you do something unconsciously, say, while under hypnosis, the one who hypnotized you will be responsible.

And here, too, there is a problem of values. Each of us has an own value system, but these values are not unique: we have learnt them. In this regard, there is a certain paradox. In the modern world, the importance of personality and individuality is said to have increased unprecedentedly. It would seem that this is the case: just look at social networks, and we will see that everyone expresses own opinion. But what’s really going on? The personal uniqueness is not related to the fact that one person is not like another. Yes, we are all different – by nature, by upbringing, and by our life history. But that’s not where the personal reveals itself. After all, who do we call a great person? Someone who embodies some universal meaning, who implements in his/her work what is important for a large number of people, for the country or even for humanity. It turns out that the wider the circle of those who are affected by this person’s activities, the greater we consider him/her to be. And in social networks, pseudo-persons are mostly active, which moreover often hide behind nicknames, or even are bots.

Thus, transhumanism is, in fact, the rejection of humanism, leading to human degradation; not the ascent to a higher stage of development, but the descent into the darkness of inhumanity.

At last, proponents of the third-type transhumanism express absolutely unacceptable ideas, to my mind. They assume that humanity is involved in the process of global evolution. Once there was no Universe, then, as cosmologists believe, it arose and began developing. Atoms appeared, followed by molecules, various elements, and then life began. In the process of the evolution of different forms of life, a human being appeared. But why do we believe that the modern human being is the highest stage of evolution? No, this is just an intermediate stage, and the next step is super-intelligent machines, which many of us has already begun fearing. From these transhumanists' perspective, humans will soon be subordinated to the machines as a more highly developed culture, and then humanity is doomed to degradation.

These reasonings are not some strange people's figment of imagination. No, quite reputable scientists state this, writing serious articles.

Why do such thoughts arise? Humanity has entered the next phase of technological progress, and, of course, we cannot abandon benefits of the modern civilization. Vyacheslav Semenovitch Stepin wrote about two types of civilization – technogenic and traditional, and about the humanity's ability to rise to a higher level of civilization – anthropogenic. But so far, there are no signs that we are moving beyond the limits of the technogenic civilization. Technologization is growing rapidly, and it cannot be abandoned, because due to technology we get impressive results in various fields – economy, medicine, industry, etc. One “thinker” has even formulated the thesis about the possibility to solve any problem by technological methods.

Meanwhile, modern technologization can also have negative consequences, so it must be controlled. And the danger is not in naturally subjugating humans by super-intelligence. In regard to these predictions, it is necessary to distinguish between two concepts: “forecast” and “project”. The fact is that man lives within the

nature, obeying its laws. These laws do not depend on us, but we act within their framework, inventing new forms and rising to the next stage of development in our activities. For implementing any project, we select the appropriate means: to achieve the goals, we must make this and that. The project assumes a forecast: having done this, we will get such results. But sometimes people pass for their projects as forecasts, and one of these projects is the displacement of man by super-intelligence.

Let me remind you the plot of the ancient play “Oedipus the King”. The king of the city of Thebes was predicted that he would die at his son’s hand, so the king frightened and decided to get rid of the baby. But due to various circumstances, events occurred and resulted in killing the king by his adult son, unaware that it was his father. Was the oracle’s forecast a prediction? Of course, not. The king could have simply forgotten about it, and then the tragedy would not have happened. But we often consider certain events to be predetermined, while they are not.

Is there a threat to humans from artificial intelligence? Yes, such a threat exists, but how real it depends on humans themselves. Nowadays, neural networks are already widely used for complex calculations, big data analysis, etc. Various sciences and fields of activity use their capabilities to make forecasts and model the future, based on the processing of available data. And generative artificial intelligence is engaged in “creative work”: it writes texts and paintings, composes music. Today’s students use neural networks for writing essays and term papers, and sometimes it is very difficult to recognize this. A neural network of this kind can be tasked with composing music in the style of Bach, and it will compose, so that even an experienced musicologist will say: this may a Bach fugue, it was just unknown until now.

Many people think that, if not now, then in the near future, artificial intelligence will completely replace human talents. But this is impossible, because everything artificial intelligence does, even generative AI, is an imitation. It works on the basis of what has already been created by a person. It can quickly analyze, compare millions and billions of texts, combine them and produce something that wasn’t there before. And yet, this is not a new creation, but a compiled one, based on

available ones. If artificial intelligence capable of analyzing big data or writing texts existed, say, in the 17th century, then there would be no need for all subsequent scientific theories and discoveries. Newton and Pascal would have had nothing to do, and the development of musical art would have stopped after Bach. It is true that artificial intelligence can produce such an imitation, which no human is capable of.

In this regard, another philosophical problem arises: the problem of authenticity and copy, imitation. Is it possible to copy something in such a way that it cannot be distinguished from the original? Previously it was impossible, but now it is possible, as many say. But the original, not the copy, is valuable.

And life should also be authentic, not imitated. We have entered the era when all this becomes a real threat.

The living world is evolving, and the picture of life on the planet Earth is changing, but this is not necessarily because some higher form of life is displacing a lower one (although this also happens). In the history of humanity, entire civilizations flourished and died. The barbarians destroyed the Roman Empire, but were they more civilized peoples and highly organized societies? Nothing like that. They had an advantage in military matters, but in all other respects they were at lower levels of development. Therefore, people should take such threats seriously and prevent them from being implemented.

All this indicates that we have entered an era when the problem of values is a problem of human survival and preservation. This is a revolutionary era. There are many new things every day, and we need to move forward. No one can avoid this, so a person is also forced to change. New forms of cognition, new sciences – it is important that we do not fall off on a steep curve in these currents and whirlpools, but preserve ourselves. It depends on a number of conditions. First, when experimenting on humans, extreme caution must be observed – not one, not the slightest step at random. Secondly, protecting fundamental human values by all means. Third, anticipating not only the immediate results of our actions, but also the long-term consequences. Abdusalam Abdulkirimovich spoke about one of the methods, which allow complying with these conditions, – asking questions, “hooking” them one after

another, “What is this for?” – “Okay, but what is this for?” – “Cool, and what is that for?”. In the end, you will “run into” the values, in relation to which the question “what for?” does not arise. These are fundamental values of life that define what a person is.

Meanwhile, a person is, on the one hand, a biological being created by Nature, and, on the other hand, a product of culture, that is, of something that does not exist in Nature. As the Romans put it, “Nature and Culture”. The former is given by Nature, the latter is what people have made themselves. And values are transmitted through Culture – religion, philosophy, art, etc. People learn them from a young age in the process of upbringing and education.

A person can rise or can degrade. Someone calls what is happening nowadays the anthropological revolution, and the other – the anthropological catastrophe. As for me, I mean the anthropological challenge that needs to be responded. Our responding to this challenge depends on whether we rise to a new level or, conversely, the downward movement – and perhaps a real catastrophe – awaits us. The problem of values is about where we are going, and in this context, the values of Russian culture become incredibly important.

Values vary from culture to culture, but there are a group of values to be common to everyone, without which a person simply cannot exist. Having abandoned them, a person will not become a posthuman or a transhuman, but will turn into a non-human, an inhuman. That is why philosophy nowadays becomes a practical discipline. Previously, few great sages were interested in it, but in the 20th century, when many sciences, including physics and mathematics, were in crisis, scientists thought about the foundations of the sciences and discovered that without philosophy, it was impossible to find answers to many questions, even in those sciences that seemingly had nothing to do with it.

In his time, Immanuel Kant formulated three great questions, “What can I know?”, “What must I do?”, “What can I hope for?”. Today, finding answers to these questions is more important than ever before.