Problem of Polarity of Human Experience in Conditions of Electronic Virtual Reality

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Abstract: The article analyzes the problem of possible completeness of human experience on the basis of concepts of “hard” world, “soft” world. The perspectives of development of human potential in conditions and on the basis of electronic virtual reality (EVR) are revealed. The new understanding of human essence in the aspect of “soft” and “hard” worlds is offered. The philosophical ideas of optimal decision of the problem of new type of human freedom - freedom of a man in EVR are suggested. The author’s conception may be used in construction of concrete methods in such spheres of human activity as psychology, pedagogics, medicine. This conception may be especially interesting for psychologists and psychiatrists.

Key words: Experience · Electronic virtual reality · “Hard” world · “Soft” world · Human freedom · Dream

INTRODUCTION

The concept “human experience” is one of the most commonly used in theoretical activities, but at the same time evidently not well enough elaborated [1, p. 4]. H.G. Gadamer remarked on this occasion: “However paradoxical it may seem, the concept of experience seems to me one of the most obscure we have” [2, p. 341]. There are many definitions of experience. As a working one we will use the following: “Experience in the first instance is the whole complex of everything what happens with a man in his life and what he is aware of…” [3, p. 321]. Human experience as a sum of acquired knowledge has different levels, aspects, slants, facets etc. The concept “experienced man” means first of all that a man have mastered his knowledge on practice and hence he not only knows, but can apply it, transforming world and himself. But here the humanity meets several problems. First, human life is limited by a short period of time while the world of human knowledge is boundless. Then second, human experience includes not only positive experience, connected with good, truth, beauty etc. but also negative one, which is connected with evil, delusion, deformity etc. Thus spiritual experience is diverse since it can contain not only heroic experience, but also cowardice, betrayal etc. One`s experience may be the experience of sublime and beautiful as well as the experience of base and deformed. These are different facets of one and the same human experience. As the popular wisdom says: don’t condemn anybody until you were on his place. Therefore the third problem of completeness of spiritual experience appears from the junction of the first two and sounds like that: what type of experience is necessary for a man to become wise and gain the highest level of spirituality - merely the experience of positive, heroic, sublime etc. or the experience of cowardice and betrayal etc. must also be added?

May a man, having only positive experience, be one-sided experienced and hence not enough experienced? What extent of completeness of experience must get, for example, a doctor, a school teacher, kindergarten nursery-school teacher, social worker, public prosecutor, surgeon, psychologist etc.?

In the course of considered problem we distinguish the next methodological aspects. First, moral experience supposes division into two great spheres: moral and immoral. Certainly, between them there are some transitional forms, but these two poles appear to be some kind of attractors, that is points, attracting events and forming eventual integrities. Second, knowledge, forming the experience, is built according to the scheme: from ignorance to knowledge, from knowledge incomplete and inexact to knowledge complete and exact. For example, the
majority of so called “serial” killers have become killers not at once, but in definite for each individual time as a result of accumulation by them of specific negative experience, while for some period they remained mentally responsible people. XXI century gave the humanity such opportunities for broadening of experience, which in previous centuries were only a dream. First of all it is related to electronic virtual reality (EVR) - the phenomenon, which appeared relatively recently, at the end of XX century and still didn’t get enough development. EVR is a principally new invention which has nothing analogous in the history of humanity and which gives an opportunity to put and reveal in a new way the problem of completeness of experience of each concrete individual and experience common to humanity as a whole. In spite of the fact that not much time have passed since the appearance of this new type of reality, even now the great perspectives in using of this type of reality opening before the humanity are visible [4, 5]. Though even that what we have now forces us to consider the positive and negative aspects of EVR in reference to the development of individual and society as a whole. At the same time with new opportunities in knowledge, rest, amusement etc. EVR sometimes contributes to development of human negative qualities, such as aggression, swindle etc. [6, 7] As yet at present initial stage of development of EVR it is possible, though in some cases with difficulties, to prevent the manifestations of antihuman destructive activities of EVR users. But it is logical to propose that with growing of capacity of EVR the power of negative human manifestations, destructively influencing the user himself and other people and both realities - natural and artificial, will also increase. Unfortunately, though the actuality of this problem is rapidly increasing, in scientific world the problem of completeness of human experience is not set in it’s full scope. The existing recommendations of psychologists, teachers, psychiatrists, sociologists and even philosophers, based on rather numerous investigations of separate aspects of negative manifestations of human activities in EVR (for example, virtual aggression, internet-dependence etc.) have low practical efficiency because of superficial and partial understanding of the problem. The value of such works consists in accumulation and primary analysis of concrete data, in stating of questions, but not in cardinal decision of the problem. That’s why it is necessary just now to reveal the fundamental basis of the problem of completeness of human experience, which will permit to create an integrated and optimal strategy of it’s decision and to elaborate on the basis of this strategy the really effective concrete psychological, pedagogical and psychiatric methods, which will help to expand human experience in optimal and humanistic way.

In decision of the considered problem the extremely important and decisiv role belongs to EVR. With the help of the principle of idealization we can forecast the development of EVR and analyze EVR in such it’s future condition, when it will reach it’s maximum developed optimal stage. The nature and the deepest essence of EVR is, on our opinion, that EVR is an artificial “soft” world, created by a man and for a man and exactly in this stage of the development of EVR it will manifest quite completely. Unprecedented earlier in the history of humanity horizons of expansion of human experience are determined by the opportunities of this invented artificial “soft” world. In the aspect of structural definition EVR is a dispositional formation which appears in the process of interaction of certain technical equipment with human consciousness. The essential and structural definitions of EVR allow to propound a philosophically substantiated hypothesis that electronic virtual reality in it’s future most developed condition will afford an opportunity to realize the generic requirement of man in freedom most completely and optimally.

Freedom is a multisaspect concept. On one hand, freedom is defined as a realized necessity and a choice corresponding to this necessity. On the other hand, freedom is understood as activity of a man according to his desires without counteraction of environment. This polarity in definitions of freedom reflects, on our opinion, the division of reality into two main types: “soft” reality and “hard” reality. “Hard” reality - is a world of nature, society and a man, where the laws are acting, which create the barriers and obstacles in case when a man tries to change them in order to fulfill his desires. The world of nature for it’s transformation demands from a man the knowledge of laws of nature, availability of means of production, some mental and physical efforts and so on. The society also is a variety of “hard” world, because it is based on the system of orders and prohibitions (restrictions). A man living in the society is recognized as it’s normal member only on condition that he obeys the existing in this society orders and prohibitions. However the submission of an individual to these social restrictions doesn’t permit him act as much as possible freely, exactly so as he would like to at the present moment of his existence, that is “here and now”. 
As known, existentialists pointed out, that a man can experience two possible types of suffering, connected with staying in the society. If a man desires to keep for himself his collective, he is forced to lose his freedom, because, staying in the collective, he cannot in certain cases act as he really wants, ignoring public rules of behaviour, norms of intercourse in certain collectives and so on. If the individual desires to keep himself, that is to be really free, to realize the whole volume and the whole completeness of his individuality, he begins to feel sanctions from the collective, in which he stays: blame, neglect and the worst - boycott. Most people, being afraid of isolation, prefer to lose themselves but to preserve the collective.

The man himself also is an element of “hard” world. Thus a man can hardly change his biological characteristics: sex, age, temperament, genotype and so on. Though the science of XXI century gives a man an opportunity to change some of his biological parameters, for example, sex, appearance, nevertheless not everyone wishing to change himself can afford it. The obstacle for him may become great financial expenditures or some rather poignant physical procedures, mental conditions, rejection by the society etc.

Human consciousness is also mainly included in the system of “hard” world, because a man can’t modify one’s intellectual facilities largely enough, as he wants, for example, to become genius, talented painter, poet or composer. He can’t change at will his sympathies and antipathies as far as “heart has a will of it’s own”. In that way man, being free by his nature, lives in the world of unfreedom that is in the “hard” world. In “hard” world the amount of human unfreedom considerably exceeds the amount of freedom he has. The characteristic of the “hard” world is that freedom of a man in one sphere of activity is always limited in the other sphere. Such rule depends on peculiarities of the substance of “hard” world as far as it consists of material-field type of matter. “That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone and is determined to act by itself alone” [8, p. 2]. This definition of freedom by B. Spinoza is ideal and hardly applied to the “hard” world. Freedom in the “hard” world more truly is described by definition of freedom as conscious necessity.

However a man possesses such a region of his inner world as a world of dream, which may be named the “soft” world. The world of a dream is a “soft” world because a man can do in it everything he wants and in a form he wants. In this world one feels himself as much as possible freely, that is he can imagine the fulfilment of any of his desires, because in this world he is simultaneously a producer and an actor, a scenario writer, a critic and a spectator.

Thus the specific character of the human essence is, on our opinion, in the fact that a man as a free being lives simultaneously in two worlds: in a “hard” world of nature, society and his consciousness and in a “soft” world of his dream. Moreover such duality of existence was always inherent to a man. Dreams, exceeding social restrictions, couldn’t as a rule be realized in practice. People submitted to such unfreedom, consoling themselves that “the world is arranged so”. From the end of XX-beginning of XXI centuries the theoretical thought more and more makes central the problem of search of new types of reality. Thus Ch. Witehead notes: “The ‘hard problem’ of consciousness demands a radical revision of our understanding of reality” [9, p. 8].

The foundations for definition of EVR as an analogue of artificial “soft” world are the following: new ontology, new anthropology, new theory of knowledge and accordingly new conditions of accumulation of life experience and new opportunities of spiritual-moral development of a man. This accounts for the fact that in EVR (because of it’s dispositionness) at a moment of it’s invention was laid an opportunity of forming of new ontological characteristics of the world in accordance with one’s desires, including human anthropology. Therefore in EVR one can create an essentially new type of environment, essentially new type of human body, essentially new type of some functions of human consciousness, essentially new type of human influence upon the world. This new artificial world may be created unlike the natural “hard” world or just the opposite, it may imitate the natural “hard” world but in more developed “soft” variant, in which a man himself chooses the environment (city, jungle, ocean and so on), the body he wants etc. The appearance of EVR is such a revolutionary step forward, which gives a man an opportunity to create a new type of complicated reality, that is a new type of world, a new type of himself in that world and a new type of transformation of reality inside this world.

Thus the appearance and development of EVR makes possible the comparison of two types of human spiritual experience: the experience of a man in a “hard” world and the experience of a man in a “soft” world. On the basis of EVR at the beginning of the XXI century the new spheres of influence on a man, for example, new types of therapy appear [10, 11]. Most part of moral aspirations of a man...
comes into existence and fulfils primarily in the “soft” world of a dream since the real world often doesn’t permit a man to realize his very cherished dreams and aspirations. The appearance of EVR even in its imperfect aspect, for example, in the variant of computer games, enables the removal of the concealed human desires and aspirations on the level more close to the real life what reveals in following factors.

The first is a factor of justice. In the “hard” world there is a lack of justice or it is formal because of a number of economic, social, psychological and other causes. In the “soft” world of EVR a man himself establishes such type of justice which he considers to be necessary in each concrete case.

The second is a factor of retribution on punishment for the deed. Such principle exists in the “hard” world, though it is not always carried out and is applied fully not to all people, what again can be explained by economic, social and other causes. But the majority of people understand the necessity to bear the responsibility for the violation of moral and legal regulations in accordance with all the rigours of the laws in force. This fear of responsibility for the done has mostly positive educational significance. In the “soft” world of EVR a man may introduce in the program the factor of responsibility for the done or may not that is in this case he himself chooses this factor. Naturally, most people will prefer absence of responsibility for their negative activity in virtual world, since the world is not real, but virtual, that is constructed according to the playing laws.

The third is that human experience in “hard” world is inimitable and always unique. In the “soft” world of EVR a man can repeat both good, sublime, heroic and bad, terrible and vile. In the EVR a man can repeat his acts many times, “perfecting one’s skill” in positive as well as in negative aspects. Human experience in the mental world of dream (out of EVR) isn’t supported by practice. Human dreams are suppressed, a man is afraid to display it for fear of punishment on the part of society. For instance a man having an inclination to violence and murder can fulfill these actions in his “soft” world of dream. The society doesn’t know about his dreams and consider him to be a normal respectable man. But EVR gives such a man new opportunities to fulfill his negative desires in a frank and more intense variant. The experience in EVR is a qualitatively different experience in comparison with the experience in a “soft” world of dream since it is supported by specific material-like practice.

The fourth, in the “hard” world there exists “existential anisotropy” that is nonsymmetry of feelings: the offender doesn’t experience the feelings of the offended. In contemporary electronic games we can see such dangerous for the inner mental world of a man “nonsymmetry” of feelings. A man is killing “a target” but in some games also may be “killed”. However a man being “killed” in a game doesn’t feel neither psychic nor physical pain, but probably is annoyed for being not fast enough. And using of EVR as a training of human ethical experience may be based on the “symmetry” of feelings of a pair: offender-offended, executor-victim. In the “soft” world of EVR a man can experience both the role of an offender and the role of an offended, the role of a slave-owner and the role of a slave and that may give enormous educational effect.

The fifth, in the “hard” world a man often can’t choose the type of his feelings since they are thrust on him by the situation. In the “soft” world of EVR a man can choose himself the suitable circumstances, circle of intercourse and other similar factors to have certain personal experience.

The sixth, in the “hard” world a man often can’t conceive the course of events because in real life things frequently proceed not as it was planned. In the “soft” world of EVR a man can create different variants of plots for himself from most favourable to most unfavourable.

The contemporary computer games in many respects are based on a murder - of some miscreant, soldier of enemy troops, monster and so on. The development of EVR already raises a problem: how should react the society to appearance of a new type of freedom - the freedom in EVR. The first variant: to forbid the computer games or to take strict social control on them. But that wouldn’t give proper effect because people would begin to play illegally. The second variant: to take the specific type of control on computer games that is to investigate the inner world of a man and to give him an opportunity to realize that what is concealed in it, what is in latent potential cubconscience condition. But this permission should be done with one compulsory amendment: a man “killing” somebody afterwards should experience the fillings of the man “killed” by him.

There exist two contrary ethical recommendations. One of them urges to return the inflicted injury in the variant “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”. The other ethical principal proposition insists that evil can’t be defeated by the evil. Before the emergence of EVR these statements mutually excluded each other.
But the appearance of EVR gave an opportunity to combine them. The first statement (“an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”), demanding the offender to be put on the place of the offended, would realize since the EVR is giving such possibility. The other ethical statement (that evil can’t be corrected by evil) can also be fulfilled in EVR. The electronic virtual reality would be able to give an opportunity to get not only abstract theoretical idea of suffering of the other one but to have personal experience of it and really undergo it in EVR. Such combination of incompatible before the emergence of EVR ethical requests would give a man a chance, on one hand, to feel the negative experience and even the whole volume of it completely and on the other hand to undergo the suffering of the other one and thus to learn the harmfulness of his own negative actions on practice, to repent his misdeeds and to get the sufficient negative experience to never act like this again.

REFERENCES