

THE PROBLEM OF “DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE” IN THE INTELLECTUAL MANIFESTO BY VR POTTER

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The article deals with the problem of ethical ambiguity of VR Potter's approaches to the tasks of the civilization development associated with “dangerous knowledge”, primarily to demographic issues. The purpose of the study is to identify the methodological basis for a number of discussion theses in the program book by VR Potter “Bioethics: Bridge to the Future”. Material of the work is presented by VR Potter's “Bioethics: Bridge to the Future”. The research was performed using the comparative-historical and cause-and-effect analysis. The paper analyzes the significance of the “dangerous knowledge” considered by VR Potter as part of the humanistic content of bioethics. The author comes to the conclusion that the discussion theses of VR Potter's bioethical concept are based on the methodological ‘realism’ of an expert who considered the current problems of society in the context of the rationalism of civilization.

Key words: bioethics, Potter VR, intellectuals, humanism, rationalism.

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Received: 03.10.2021 **Accepted:** 20.11.2021 **Published online:** 30.12.2021

DOI: 10.24075/medet.2021.030

ПРОБЛЕМА «ОПАСНОГО ЗНАНИЯ» В ИНТЕЛЛЕКТУАЛЬНОМ МАНИФЕСТЕ В. Р. ПОТТЕРА

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В статье рассматривается проблема этической неоднозначности подходов В. Р. Поттера к задачам развития цивилизации, связанным с «опасным знанием», в первую очередь к демографическим вопросам. Целью исследования явилось выявление методологического основания ряда дискуссионных тезисов программной книги В. Р. Поттера «Биоэтика: мост в будущее». Материал работы — текст В. Р. Поттера «Биоэтика: мост в будущее». Исследование приводилось путем сравнительно-исторического и причинно-следственного анализа. В работе проанализировано значение рассматриваемого В. Р. Поттером «опасного знания» в контексте гуманистического содержания биоэтики. Автор приходит к заключению, что дискуссионные тезисы биоэтической концепции В. Р. Поттера имеют основанием методологическую «реалистичность» эксперта, рассматривавшего актуальные проблемы общества в контексте рационализма цивилизации.

Ключевые слова: биоэтика, В. Р. Поттер, интеллектуалы, гуманизм, рационализм

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Статья поступила: 03.10.2021 **Статья принята к печати:** 20.11.2021 **Опубликована онлайн:** 30.12.2021

DOI: 10.24075/medet.2021.030

Within half a century since publication of “Bioethics: Bridge to the Future” (1971) by VR Potter [1], bioethical requirements have become an essential part of research practice [2, 3]. Thematic development of bioethical discussion completely corresponds to the thesis by VR Potter stating that ‘cultural evolution would be very slow if not a human being's constant strives for introducing something new to his/her life and resisting being in line with what is being taught’.

Considering the work by VR Potter as an intellectual manifest [2], one can't help mentioning some theses contained therein that are controversial as far as generally acknowledged humanistic content of a bioethical concept goes. First and foremost, they include a demographic aspect of the “dangerous knowledge” issue [1, p.79], as reviewed by VR Potter.

According to VR Potter, “dangerous knowledge” is accumulated in a more rapid way than wisdom, required to control it’. VR Potter cites an experience of using poisoning gases during the 1st World War, and anthropogenic factors that are pressing for ecology since the middle of the XX century as an example of “dangerous knowledge” implementation in the XX century [1, p. 35–36, 67, 84–93].

According to VR Potter, “science produced new problems instead of solving the existing ones”. At the same time, “discoveries, that prevent the subsequent spread of malaria, resulted in a significant improvement in child mortality. The

saved children grew up, created families of their own, and thus these discoveries promoted explosion in population. Every scientist studying the problem understands that it's not necessary for every family to comprehend the issue of improved child mortality. It used to control the population growth... the mankind crossed the Rubicon, and can't come back to humane methods of population increase... the unfortunate truth is that the efforts made are not equal to the task set” [1, p. 81].

Considering various aspects of medical science development and stating that “the growth of the world population has been out of control”, VR Potter cites the words by G. Khardin: “demographic problems have no technical solution; they demand proper expansion of morality”, effective birth control [1, p. 167].

According to VR Potter, “a human being as a biological entity must be considered in the context of specific survival”. Population growth is one of prioritized problems of the mankind. “Dilemma of a human being as a biological entity is that real success in preservation and development of human health is based on the knowledge of regularities that control the entire populations... if the knowledge is used without the respective control of birth, the results will be catastrophic... the necessary birth control can't exist on the basis of individual medical service and only state bodies can accept large-scale decisions required for that. But if people are not treated properly... the organized

minorities will resist and struggle against the birth control set by the majority”.

VR Potter stresses that it is preferable to use the resource of physiological and cultural adaptation [1, p. 173].

Summarizing the data about the demographic problem, VR Potter concludes as follows: “it’s immoral to allow uncontrolled growth of human population wheresoever” [1, p. 174].

VR Potter’s attitude to euthanasia is ambiguous. ‘Medical science has already reached a certain border of solving a question concerning termination of a human life. Every day any diligent doctor faces a dilemma as to whether terminate or continue supporting therapeutic activities which could extend one’s life, but wouldn’t make it more tolerable for a suffering person. The decision about continuing supporting therapy is substantiated easily, but what to do when an elderly cancer patient is condemned to long-term and painful death? In this situation, it’s better not to use medical intervention, as an inevitable death can’t be prevented any way... All we need is to lead a productive life in childhood and middle age, and to end our life in dignity in old age’ [1, p.83].

Analyzing the type of “realistic human knowledge” [1, p.36] by VR Potter, it must be considered that in spite of the declared ‘scientific and philosophical basis of a bioethical concept, VR Potter sees his task set in “Bioethics: Bridge to the Future” as an ability” to understand the nature of a person and his/her attitude to the world’, as ‘the humanity urgently needs new wisdom, that would be “the knowledge of how to use the knowledge ‘for the person to survive and improve his/her life” [1, p. 9]. It means that VR Potter considers a bioethical approach as the universal methodology of progress ethical assessment [2].

In this sense, the “pragmatism” of ‘actual decisions’ declared by VR Potter is not consistent pragmatism in its conceptual and philosophical meaning as, for example, by John Dewey or R. Rorty. VR Potter’s approach to ‘ethical’ (basically, medical and social) issues is not of an ethical and philosophical type. It rather has a sense of statistical reasonability supported by a competent opinion of an investigator with 30 years of experience, on the one hand, and the pathos of “common wealth achievement”, on the other hand [1, p. 5–7, 3, 36].

Thus, VR Potter’s position is restricted by the opinion of a realistic [1, p. 13] expert and scientist [4], who seeks the basis for “integrating” the knowledge of “natural and humanitarian sciences” to form a social development strategy, “recommendations in the area of public activity” [1, p. 10, 14, 35].

According to AV Azov, from the point of view of philosophical methodology, “it is impossible to come back to the former state” when solving the tasks of knowledge “integration”. Something that was divided earlier doesn’t form the primary unity when collected (integrated violently). And this means losses. That’s why we need to search for a philosophical and methodological basis of new integrative knowledge that is inaccessible when separate fragments are collected to form a single system. The principle of consistency is opposed to the principle of integrity” [5].

Developing the idea of three forms of “adaptation” (physiological, evolutionary and cultural) and analyzing “psychological and behavioral changes based on physiological and cellular biological mechanisms, VR Potter doesn’t consider the issue in a broader sense as the problem of philosophical (socio-cultural) anthropology with a focus on the axiological aspect of practical use of knowledge for their subsequent enhancement in favor of human population [1, p. 32–34].

According to VR Potter, “human ethics can’t be examined without a realistic comprehension of ecology in the broadest sense. We shouldn’t consider ethical values beyond the

biological factors. We have a need in agricultural ethics, ethics of wild life, population ethics, ethics of consumption, international ethics, geriatric ethics, etc. They all include bioethics because survival of the entire ecosystem is a peculiar check of our value system” [1, p.5].

It should be noted that not just the underlined dominant of something “biological” in VR Potter’s views introduces significant corrections in the assessment of its concept from the “interdisciplinarity” point of view, but also its bent for the wide periphery of a comparative analysis. A really integrating basis for bioethics as “new knowledge” was its humanistic value as a typical “intellectual manifest’ of its epoch [2]. Meanwhile, being a typical event of that time, VR Potter” concept has peculiarities associated with sociocultural context.

In European (or, in a broader sense, western) history, intellectuals were literally ‘connected’ with the authority. This organic social and cultural symbiosis was a consequence of the historical correlation of “power” and “will” factors in the development of social regulations [2].

Unlike the people of the “Old World”, the post-war American society, that was unaware of the 2nd World War’s dramatic depth, didn’t require a “neorealistic” selection of the new generation of intellectuals not organically associated with the “New Deal” political strategy of F. Roosevelt’s epoch. The “academic” American intellectual didn’t only retain his state-run speaker positions, but could also literally “identify” himself as the authority (what happened to D. Kennedy can serve as an example). However, at the cusp of the 1960s-1970s and under the conditions of crisis of the Great Society by L. Johnson, a typical alliance “authority and intellectual” was perceived as “a misalliance” by the massive American consciousness. The most socially active part of the American society, that underwent active separation in the early McCarty years and never consolidated at the times of D. Kennedy, was ready to perceive with a more sympathy not the politically respectable position of “servile intellectuals” of the establishment, but out-of-class charismaticness of “independent” and unobviously biased progressive pillars of culture (from Martin Luther King to Bob Dylan).

Under these conditions, conceptual manifestation of the “academician” intellectual, who still preserved its independent status in collective consciousness, could not help being heard. Even the evidently seeming “democratic character” of bioethics, essentially addressed to a narrow circle of like-minded intellectuals, was not an obstacle for that [1, p. 10].

VR Potter’s deliberate “mechanistic pragmatism” as a “specialist’s competent opinion”, which is of little interest for the mass audience, ultimately gave way to the humanistic value of its intellectual manifestation by the value for interpreters. His message is in ways idealistic and partially artistic. The world of the future in VR Potter’s concept is like an ‘immersive installation’ similar to the works by Sam Gilliam. He was popular in Madison (where VR Potter lived and worked) in the 1960s-1970s. In accordance with the theses that summarize VR Potter’s conceptual program “Bioethical Credo” of the personality, a person of the future is included into the reality of the progress tasks marked with wide artistic strokes as an active transformer equipped with the “integrative knowledge” about not only life, but death as well [1, p. 209].

Intellectuals’ approach to the issues of “integrative knowledge” means a lack of interest to usual values. It is important to find the axiological basis of simplicity, relevance and humanistic rationality of motivation of a human being and entire humanity [6]. This is the task solved by VR Potter from the position of actual social experience of these days.

Social history of the XX century repeatedly showed the possibility of humanity transition into the state close to the primitive rules of survival of the strongest, and superiority based on the "laws of the forest". In the metaphysical and literal sense, the borderline of the "forest" is the most vivid symbol of the rational humanism demarcation. In this sense, VR Potter's 'bioethics' reflected the most important requirement of the society in rational explanation of social reality inconsistency, i. e. hope for a human being of the future who can overcome the imperfectness of the present.

Relevance of humanistic prognoses concerning a human destiny, that appeal to scientific substantiations, especially on the "borders" of epochs and when new civilization threats are incrementing, comes as no surprise. Design of the optimistic future is a task of intellectuals. VR Potter's position, which is pragmatic by shape, but evidently humanistic by essence, is not an exception. Disputing theses of his book ('Bioethics: Bridge to the Future') are based on the methodological "reality",

typical of the approach of an expert, who considers the actual problems of the society against the background of civilization rationalism.

Admitted competency of VR Potter as a practical specialist allowed the bioethical concept to integrate into the context of professional discussion of not just medical and biological, but also of a scientific society in a broader sense. The bioethical theses continue to serve as a basis of theoretical reinterpretation of global tasks and axiological substantiations of a practical activity and various forms of social practice [3].

Meanwhile, a modern reader, commenter and interpreter of VR Potter's bioethical concept should be aware, that the development strategy simulated by him, can be implemented using not only the objective attitude to bioethical principles, but also the real estimation of resources, and necessary potential of practical efforts concerning their usage by every specialist and every human being [1, p. 84].

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