academic freedom. Libor Benda's work gives us robust material for this endeavour. I strongly recommend this book to everyone who cares about our shared academic world.

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"Homo homini hominus" or an Inquiry into "Human" Humans[1]
Emil Višňovský: Spytovanie sa na človeka [An Inquiry into Humanity]
Bratislava, Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave 2020. 92 pp.

Experts today are highlighting the fact that human society finds itself on the threshold of a new "human epoch", the *Anthropocene.* The Anthropocene can be variously characterised, most obviously in terms of the exponential growth of technological development, from "machine learning" in artificial intelligence to "genetic engineering" in biotechnology. The exponential growth of development has meant that technologies are becoming an integral part of human life. Hence the need to ask anew the old philosophical question: *Who is man?* In the context of these technological advances this question is not just acquiring new meaning but becoming increasingly urgent. And it is addressed in Emil Višňovský's *Spytovanie sa na človeka* [An Inquiry into Humanity].

In the book, this question is posed on the *normative plane.* It consists of three key sub-questions: *What value do humans hold for other humans? What value do people have for one another? What value does human life hold in today's info-techno-culture?*[2] Višňovský's book is therefore primarily about the relationship humans have with themselves, other humans, and the natural and cultural worlds. In today's technological era there is a need to clarify the *value* of these relationships.

The monograph is divided into six chapters, or studies, that examine "philosophical and anthropological thinking about humans in today's world, where one of the

2 Višňovský, E., *Spytovanie sa na človeka* [*An Inquiry into Humanity*]. Bratislava, Univerzita Komenského 2020, p. 11 (hereafter *Spytovanie sa na človeka*).

main leitmotifs [...] is technological development".[3] Each chapter is clearly set-out and easy to read and thereby accessible to general readers as well. Višňovský offers an in-depth look at these issues, as is immediately evident from his detailed analysis of contemporary thinkers and futurologists like Leonhard, Harari, Šmajs, Zuboff, and so on. Notably, he also draws on the work of classical philosophers such as Nietzsche, Lorenz, Adorno, and Horkheimer, as well as pragmatists like James and Dewey. However, the biggest influence on his work is Richard Rorty.

The first chapter, "An Inquiry into Humanity: Unresolved Issues", takes a critical look at the nature of modern society as influenced by "posthumanism, and even transhumanism".[4] Readers may observe that Višňovský adopts a normative position when writing about contemporary humans and the ethical and moral issues arising from this relationship. This is evident from the introduction to the book in which he observes that the greatest crisis today is not the Covid-19 pandemic but the "intellectual and moral crisis of humankind that is concentrated in the value crisis".[5] The crisis is largely the result of the ever-present Enlightenment ideas about achieving social progress through the use of *instrumental* reason which is "non-human" and only recognises its own authority. Science, but also digital technologies and biotechnology, are the embodiment of this reason. Višňovský then contrasts the "value awareness" represented by *humanism* with the "techno-awareness" represented by *transhumanism*. He points out that value awareness has been reduced to a techno-awareness that is leading to the "modern rationalisation of society" visible in the prevailing "dataism" whereby "everything is an algorithm" so data decide the value of everything [...]".[6] The value of humans is thereby becoming the value of virtual data.

In the first chapter, the most substantial contribution to philosophy is the section in which Višňovský analyses the relationship between the "natural" and the "cultural" sides of humans. On this basis he defines humans as a "peculiar biological being": "Humans are a peculiar biological being that has created culture in order to live and survive in nature. Hence, we are both cultural and biological beings, and it is this that makes us imbalanced and gives us our inner tension [...]".[7] One could claim that this inner tension is even more visible these days. One of the primary reasons for this being that, in transhumanism, culture is seen as being the opposite of nature, or a means of transcending the biological boundaries of humans. In other words, transhumanists see humans as beings that have evolved both biologically and culturally, and it is on that basis that we have taken control

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3   Ibid., pp. 8–9.
4   Ibid., p. 18.
5   Ibid., p. 9.
6   Ibid., p. 15.
7   Ibid., p. 21.

over our biological bodies. By transcending ourselves using the latest technologies we not only overcome our biological limits but also all the things that make us human beings. This is the point Višňovský makes, arguing that the kind of culture we should be creating is a "culture as humanity" that elevates the value of human life. Višňovský ultimately concludes that the "key issue is what culture takes and develops from nature and what it rejects. The "culture against nature" or vice versa alternative solves nothing." [8] I agree with this; however, it is worth noting that although Višňovský stresses both sides of human being, he does not analyse this relationship further in the book.

The second chapter, "On the Value of Human Life Today", is a philosophical look at human life. Here, Višňovský draws on the work of critics of modern and postmodern culture, such as Nietzsche, Liessmann, or Bauman. He critically analyses the main features of modern life, primarily its "liquidity", "individualisation", and "instrumentalization", which best characterise modern life: "Our life is no longer a goal, but a means; we no longer know how to live for life's sake, merely for something else." [9] This question about the value of human life thereby takes backstage. For Višňovský this and the question of "what one living person is to another" [10] are key. That means living life under its circumstances, in which "our desires encounter our possibilities; our aims encounter the aims of others; our will for life encounters the will for life of others." [11]

In this chapter, readers may be interested in Višňovský's view on the role of philosophy. He states that it is philosophers who ask questions about the value of human life: "Is living worth it?" [12] Despite the somewhat negative character of this question (which brings suicide to mind), philosophy can show us how to accept life and love it for what it is: "Knowing how to live means knowing how to conjoin the will to live with respect for life." [13] Hence, Višňovský defends the view that philosophy can teach us "the art of life". I think the second chapter shows the reader that seeing philosophy in these terms can help us recognise that it is the "belief in life as an intellectual force that gives life its value". [14]

Both the third chapter "Life on the Net" and the fourth chapter "Caught in the Snare of 'Big Brother'" focus on the relationship between humans and contemporary digital technologies. In these chapters, Višňovský examines the "digitalisation of society" and how it is manifested in both private and public life, asking questions such as: What do we mean by digital technologies? How do we interpret

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8   Ibid., p. 22.
9   Ibid., p. 37.
10 Ibid., pp. 28–29.
11 Ibid., p. 43.
12 Ibid., p. 38.
13 Ibid., p. 46.
14 Ibid., p. 40.

ourselves through these technologies? Do we know how these technologies work and who they serve? These are ethical questions about modern intelligent technologies (e.g. the internet, intelligent households), the loss of privacy that occurs when people are being monitored, being addicted to technologies, and so forth. As Višňovský states, "we are increasingly living in the digital world, in the emerging and interlinking data networks and we have almost no means of escape".[15]

But the digital world does not belong to people; it belongs to "technology oligarchs" such as Google or Facebook whose "economic logic" is based on "surveillance capitalism". This issue is covered in detail in chapter four, which draws on Shoshana Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.[16] "Surveillance capitalism" is the "application of capitalist relations to digital civilisation that has entered the 'big data' era."[17] Višňovský stresses that the problem with the digital civilisation is not the technologies themselves but rather the "social means and economic relations" within which these technologies function.[18] On careful reading, it is clear he attempts a moderate position on digital technologies in that he doesn't engage in either "digital Luddism" (rejection of technologies) or "digital techno-optimism".

Content-wise, I think the third and fourth chapters are the most problematic. Višňovský does focus on the issue of digital technologies, but only in general terms, and he does not analyse the consequences of using these technologies (e.g. "digital nudity" and the issue of internet privacy). Given however the normative nature of the book, readers will be expecting these to be analysed and to be presented with a solution to the problem. But one isn't presented. For instance, Višňovský argues that technologies should be more human, meaning that they should serve the people and not line the wallets of technological oligarchs.[19] However, he does not explain what being more human would mean in practice. Similarly, he says that digital technologies should not be controlled by technological oligarchs but by "educated, cultured, and democratic actors" who could help ensure the technologies were more human.[20] But the question remains, "Who would these educated actors be?" All of us? Who are "us"? Information technologists, philosophers, or scientists? There is no clear answer to this, and the reader gradually begins to feel they might have to answer the questions themselves.

The fifth chapter, "Homo Harariensis", is primarily a critical look at interpretations of contemporary humanity in Harari's *Homo Deus*.[21] This chapter is more of

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15 Ibid., p. 61.
16 Zuboff, S., *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York, Public Affairs 2019.
17 Višňovský, E., *Spytovanie sa na človeka*, p. 65.
18 Ibid., p. 63.
19 Ibid., chapter 4.
20 Ibid., p. 71.
21 Harari, Y. N., *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. New York, Harper 2014; *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. London, Harvill Secker 2015.

a review and offers no new insights. Nonetheless, I still think it gives the reader a good opportunity to compare the author's thinking with that of others tackling this issue.

In my view, the last chapter, "Philosophy Must Survive!", contributes more to philosophy than the previous one as, in it, Višňovský explains his views on science and its relationship to philosophy. He critically analyses the nature of Western philosophy today, which is based on "scientism" and that in turn leads to "scientocracy" – the notion that science is the most reliable human knowledge we have that is independent of society and culture. But this is not a notion that Višňovský subscribes to. Instead, he stresses that science cannot be separated from society because science is a human activity: "Science per se is a societal occupation, a social practice. It does not exist 'outside' practice or society and so cannot be neutral and value-free."[22] Via his analysis of science as a human activity – and drawing on pragmatism – Višňovský argues that science is a "sociocultural practice".[23] This leads him to the question of whether there can be such a thing as "science with a human face" or a "humane science". And it is here that philosophy comes to the fore, with its aim of "questioning the point of everything, including science".[24] In the end, he concludes that science cannot exist without philosophy, that is, without a value philosophy. Understood thusly, philosophy acts as the "intellectual conscience of humankind"[25] because it asks ethical questions about the value of science per se.

One can agree with Višňovský that philosophy should ask critical questions about the value of science and yet still think his understanding of science somewhat radical. Although science is a human activity and so does not stand above society, that does not mean it cannot be the dominant means of inquiring about the world. In other words, defending the claim that science is the dominant means of inquiry does not automatically mean that one supports scientocracy. Instead, I think that the authority of science is being undermined by the ascendant post-factual era and the associated questioning of facts. That can have negative consequences such as the spread of disinformation via the internet. In my opinion, we should adopt a more moderate view on science and ask critical questions about the value and point of science but without casting doubt on its standing in the world.

In this book several key questions are raised but left unanswered, such as: Where is the human race headed? Do we know how to be human beings or are we pursuing a utopia that we will never in fact achieve? Višňovský deliberately chooses not to answer these questions – just as he doesn't attempt to answer the ques-

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22 Višňovský, E., *Spytovanie sa na človeka*, p. 83.
23 For more on this issue, see: Višňovský, E., *Veda ako sociokultúrna praktika* [*Science as a sociocultural practice*]. Bratislava, Univerzita Komenského 2019.
24 Višňovský, E., *Spytovanie sa na človeka*, p. 85.
25 Ibid., p. 54.

tion "Who is man?". Instead, he leads readers to find the answers themselves and articulate them in normative terms. The main question here is "What makes us human beings?"

One could therefore say that the author is not investigating humanity in the general sense, but the humanity of people. For it is the human side of us that is being lost in "info-techno-culture" in which the other person can seem like an inhuman machine or tool. Hence, the book as a whole has something of a utopic sense of society in which people are seeking their humanity. Nonetheless the question remains – is such a society even feasible? Despite the utopic element I believe that humans, who have become lost in today's world, should continue to seek answers to these questions. The reason being that doing so could significantly influence the future direction of human society. Emil Višňovský's book is therefore a stimulating addition to anthropological studies into the humanity of today and tomorrow.

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Martin Nuhlíček: The Value Problem of Knowledge
Bratislava, Comenius University in Bratislava 2019. 107 pp.

Science, Society, Values: A Philosophical Analysis of Their Mutual Relations and Interactions, is the name of a research project that has produced many important publications, including an academic monograph on the value problem of knowledge. Although this complex issue has been widely discussed abroad, Martin Nuhlíček contends that this is not true of Slovak philosophical research. This book seems then to be an attempt to engage the Slovak philosophical community in tackling one of the five most pressing issues in contemporary epistemology.

The value problem of knowledge. More attention should be devoted to defining this research area. It is usually automatically divided up into separate (well-known) areas – specific axiological questions and scientific knowledge of values usually spring to mind. But here we are concerned with the *epistemic value of knowledge.* The question is located on the *margins* of epistemology and axiology, which is an interdisciplinary space that might offer a qualitatively new perspective.

Right at the beginning Nuhlíček outlines the basis of his belief in the *meaningfulness* of the question of the value of knowledge: "Everything suggests that know-