

## NEWS & OPINIONS

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# Knowing Humanity in the Social World

**Francis X. Remedios and Val Dusek**

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While the *On Knowing Humanity Journal* promotes a Christian faith based approach to anthropology, *Knowing Humanity in the Social World* (KHSW) (Remedios and Dusek 2018) provides an alternative Abrahamic approach to the impact of the sciences such as the nanosciences, artificial intelligence, and synthetic biology on humanity, including humanity's future in the post-human age. KHSW, based on the work since 2000 of the sociologist and philosopher Steve Fuller, is a study of an anthropology of humanity's future from an Abrahamic perspective.

KHSW focuses on the changing boundaries of humanity due to changes in biology and in religion. Fuller in *Humanity 2.0* (2011) follows the Christian theological principle of *Imago Dei*, which is humanity made in the image and likeness of God. As in theological anthropology, which asks the question, what does it mean to be human?, Fuller asks the question with these additions: what does it mean to be human with changes to humanity due to biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and genetic engineering? Fuller (2011, p.78-86) writes that humanity faces a bipolar disorder between our animal nature and our search for transcendence. Is humanity more Darwinian, closer to animals, or more Christian, closer to God? This difference can be portrayed in the difference between Peter Singer, who is one of the intellectual fathers of animal rights, and Ray Kurzweil, who is Google's chief engineer and predicts the age of "spiritual machines."

Humanity is the central moral project of the social sciences, which includes anthropology. For Fuller, the project includes resistance in a socially organized manner to natural selection through Christianity, the university and the state as collective projects.

With the impact of nanotechnology, artificial intelligence and genetic engineering on humanity, Fuller believes that humanity can be enhanced by technology to a state known as transhumanism, or humanity 2.0. Fuller's humanity 2.0's agent, is ontologically open and is indifferent to material instantiation even within the human body as long as the person, whom Fuller has defined legally as a liability notion of personhood in which is a 'person' is held responsible for her actions, is intact. As long as machines pass Turing's test they are candidates as persons.

Corporations, universities and nation states are considered to be persons. Against the work of Bruno Latour, whose actor network theory disperses the agency of humans throughout a network of where responsibility is distributed across the network, which includes scallops and physical artifacts such as door stops, Fuller considers humanity's 2.0 "person" to have it's own agency.

As the central project of the social sciences, the problem of humanity started with John Duns Scotus, who believed that humanity's difference from God is by degree rather than kind (the difference espoused by Thomas Aquinas). From a Christian theological perspective, humanity is made in the image of God; for scientists such as Bacon, Newton and Mendel, to do science is to participate in the mind of God and it is the same for Fuller. With biotechnology, artificial intelligence and genetic engineering advances, Fuller believes that life's future can be engineered, perhaps even to the point of science playing God. Hence, for Fuller, doing the sciences of nanotechnology, artificial intelligence and genetic engineering is to participate in God's mind.

Fuller's earliest work and part of his recent work can be viewed as an anthropology of science. Some writers such as Sharon Traweek and Paul Rabinow explicitly present their work as part of professional anthropology applied to science. Fuller does not do so, but does deal normatively and critically with the culture of the scientific community, the social structure of science, and the relation of science to human nature.

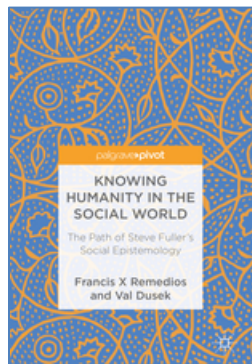
Fuller also notes that the negative reaction of many scientists to cultural and social studies of science parallels the negative reaction of religious dogmatists to the nineteenth century studies of the Bible in historical and linguistic terms, the so-called "higher criticism." Just as many traditionally religious persons falsely portrayed the proponents of so-called "higher criticism" of the Bible as anti-religious, so the so-called "Science Warriors" falsely portray Science Studies practitioners as anti-science. In fact, many Science Studies people are former scientists and/or respect science and "higher critics" were themselves religious.

Fuller notes that many traditional religious notions and features are surreptitiously present in science.

Eschatology in terms of the ultimate outcome of science, soteriology as total secular salvation, the overcoming of threats of nature of limits of humans, and the “priesthood” of scientific experts are religious features that find hidden parallels in science. Fuller also calls that science in which lay people participate while criticizing the results of science, “Protscience,” an analogy to Protestantism, in which the ordinary believer could interpret the Bible for herself, as against Catholicism’s authority of the church on the interpretation of scripture.

Another movement relevant to humanity’s future, in part stemming from Russian Orthodox Christianity with which Fuller positively allies himself, is Russian Cosmism. This movement uses the Orthodox notion of *theosis* or becoming one with God. It describes the human task as control of forces of the universe as well as the pursuit of human immortality. These goals considerably resemble those of transhumanism and pursuit of Fuller’s humanity 2.0 despite the very different sources from which it stems.

A number of conservative Christian writers have accused Fuller’s advocacy of Humanity 2.0 as Gnostic. The heretical Christian sects of Gnostics purported to have superior knowledge that would allow them to escape from and transcend the evils of the ordinary world. Though Fuller is concerned with this criticism, an influential line of criticism of Gnosticism as the source of modern totalitarian movements has mistakenly identified Gnosticism with eschatology. Fuller himself accuses certain biologists who deal with issues of race of Gnosticism since he claims that they present popular views to the masses while holding a different view themselves.



Our book, *Knowing Humanity in the Social World*, is on the uniqueness of Fuller’s approach to questions of the future of humanity from an Abrahamic perspective. Scientists who participate in the mind of God have the ability to transform humanity to be Godlike.

## References

- Fuller, Steve. 2011. *Humanity 2.0: What it Means to be Human Past, Present and Future*. London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Remedios, F. X. and Dusek, V. 2018. *Knowing Humanity in the Social World: The Path of Steve Fuller's Social Epistemology*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.



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