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COMMENTARY

What It Means to Be Human: A Response to Harzheim

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Abstract

This response engages critically with Harzheim's review of Thomas Fuchs' In Defense of the Human Being: Foundational Questions of an Embodied Anthropology. Fuchs' work offers a profound exploration of embodied cognition, arguing that human cognition and existence are deeply shaped by our physical interactions. Harzheim's critique highlights significant aspects of Fuchs' framework, including his critique of functionalist models, the impact of transhumanist technologies, and ethical concerns in healthcare technology. This paper extends Harzheim's review by proposing an integration of functionalist and embodied cognitive models, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive evaluation of technological impacts, and advocating for a more robust ethical framework that considers social equity. Additionally, it addresses the is-ought distinction and explores the implications of technological advancements on human identity and mental health. Doede's critique is also discussed, underscoring the importance of integrating diverse cognitive models and addressing technological determinism. Overall, this response calls for a more nuanced and inclusive approach to the discourse on embodied cognition, aiming to enrich the scholarly conversation and address the complexities and implications of Fuchs' analysis.

Keywords: embodied cognition; neuroscience; psychiatry; technological ethics

I extend my appreciation to Harzheim for their astute critique of Thomas Fuchs' *In Defense of the Human Being: Foundational Questions of an Embodied Anthropology*.[1] Fuchs' treatise presents an intricate analysis of embodied cognition, positing that human cognitive and existential experiences are fundamentally shaped by our corporeal engagements.[2] Harzheim's review adeptly foregrounds the book's intellectual import and its resonance within contemporary philosophical and healthcare ethics debates.

Critical points from Harzheim's review

Harzheim's review elucidates several pivotal aspects of Fuchs' theoretical framework[3]:

1) *Functionalism and Artificial Intelligence:* Harzheim highlights Fuchs' stringent critique of functionalist paradigms, which predominantly emphasize computational and neural architectures of intelligence. Fuchs contends that such functionalist models inadequately address the phenomenological and embodied dimensions of cognition. Harzheim proposes that a synthesis of functionalist and embodied perspectives could yield a more robust understanding of cognitive phenomena.

2) *Transhumanist Technologies:* Harzheim interrogates the societal ramifications of transhumanist technologies, critiqued by Fuchs for potentially destabilizing authentic human experiences. Harzheim advocates for a nuanced evaluation that acknowledges both the augmentative and transformative potential of these technologies on human capabilities and experiences.

3) *Ethical Concerns in Healthcare Technology*: Harzheim raises significant ethical concerns regarding technological interventions in healthcare, suggesting that Fuchs' critique of reductionist methodologies might benefit from a more comprehensive ethical framework encompassing issues of access and equity.[4]

4) *Is-Ought Distinction:* Harzheim points out that Fuchs' discourse occasionally conflates descriptive and normative claims, thereby blurring the is-ought distinction. A rigorous demarcation between empirical observations and ethical prescriptions is essential to prevent normative conclusions from being erroneously derived from empirical data.

5) *Human Identity and Embodiment:* Fuchs posits that human cognition and personhood are inextricably linked to embodied experiences, challenging disembodied cognitive models. Harzheim suggests that Fuchs' perspective may overlook the validity of alternative cognitive frameworks, which could offer complementary insights.

6) *Social Justice and Technological Innovations:* Harzheim underscores the need for addressing social justice in the context of technological innovations. Fuchs' analysis could be augmented by incorporating considerations of technological access and equity across disparate socio-economic strata.

7) *Brain Research in Psychiatry:* Harzheim notes that while Fuchs critiques reductionism in psychiatry, there is a need for an integrated approach that amalgamates neuroscientific insights with embodied perspectives to offer a more nuanced understanding of mental health conditions.

My critique and extensions

In extending Harzheim's review, I offer additional critiques of Fuchs' arguments:

1) *Integration of Cognitive Models*: Fuchs' emphasis on embodied cognition, while profound, necessitates integration with functionalist models. Functionalist approaches, which focus on information processing and computational frameworks, could synergistically complement embodied perspectives. Shapiro argues for a hybrid approach that incorporates both functionalist and embodied insights to address the limitations inherent in a purely embodied model.[5]

2) *Reconsidering Technological Impact*: Harzheim's observations about the societal implications of transhumanist technologies resonate with my critique that Fuchs' analysis may be overly reductive. Gallese elucidates how digital technologies reconfigure self and other experiences, underscoring the necessity for a multifaceted evaluation of how such technologies enhance and transform human experiences.[6]

3) *Ethical and Social Justice Issues*: Both Harzheim and I highlight the imperative for a robust ethical framework in evaluating technological interventions. Fuchs' critique of reductionism would benefit from a comprehensive analysis that includes considerations of social equity and access. Gallese's exploration of embodied simulation further underscores the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives in assessing the ethical ramifications of technological advancements in healthcare.[7]

4) *Reductionism and Integration in Psychiatry*: While Fuchs' critique of reductionism in psychiatry is well-founded, a more integrative approach that combines neuroscientific and embodied perspectives offers a richer understanding of mental health phenomena. This aligns with my view that synthesizing various approaches can address the limitations of reductionism while appreciating the contributions of each perspective.

Doede's critique and alignment

Doede offers a critical evaluation of Fuchs' work, focusing on several key issues[8]:

1) *Integration of Cognitive Models*: Doede critiques Fuchs for not sufficiently integrating diverse cognitive models with embodied cognition. This critique resonates with my position that a more

integrative approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of cognitive processes. Combining functionalist and embodied perspectives offers a more nuanced view of cognition.

2) *Technological Determinism*: Doede raises concerns about Fuchs' potential technological determinism, suggesting that Fuchs may underappreciate the complex interplay between technology and human experiences. This critique aligns with my concern for a balanced perspective that considers both the enhancement and transformation of human experiences due to technological advancements.

3) *Ethical and Social Justice Issues*: Doede's support for a more comprehensive ethical analysis of technological interventions aligns with my view that Fuchs' analysis should address social justice issues more thoroughly. Evaluating technological innovations through the lens of access and equity is crucial for a balanced ethical framework.

4) *Reductionism in Psychiatry*: Doede concurs with Fuchs' critique of reductionism but advocates for an integrated perspective. This alignment with my view underscores the value of combining neuroscientific insights with embodied approaches to provide a richer understanding of mental health conditions.

Conclusion

Reflecting on Harzheim's review and the critiques of Fuchs' *In Defense of the Human Being*, I recognize the importance of addressing the complexities and nuances in the discourse on embodied cognition. Fuchs' focus on embodiment is crucial, yet integrating functionalist models, evaluating technological impacts comprehensively, and addressing ethical and social justice issues are necessary for a more holistic view. Doede's critiques align with my position, emphasizing the need for an integrative approach and a balanced assessment of technological advancements. By incorporating these dimensions, we can advance the scholarly conversation on embodied cognition and its implications in a more nuanced and inclusive manner.

Competing interest. The author declares no potential conflicts of interest.

Notes

1. Harzheim JA. What does it mean to be human today? *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 2024. doi:10.1017/S0963180124000100.

2. Fuchs T. *In Defense of the Human Being: Foundational Questions of an Embodied Anthropology*. New York: Oxford University Press; 2020.

3. See note 1, Harzheim 2024.

4. See note 1, Harzheim 2024.

5. Shapiro L. *Embodied Cognition*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge; **2019**. doi:10.4324/9781315180380.

6. Gallese V. Digital visions: The experience of self and others in the age of the digital revolution. *International Review of Psychiatry* 2024;1–11. doi:10.1080/09540261.2024.2355281.

7. Gallese V. Embodied simulation and its role in cognition. *Reti, Saperi, Linguaggi, Italian-Journal of Cognitive Sciences* 2018;**7**(13):31–46. doi:10.12832/90969.

8. Doede RP. In defense of the human being: Foundational questions of an embodied anthropology. *Essays in Philosophy* 2024;**25**(1/2):54–61. doi:10.5840/eip2024251/23.