The Relevance of Jacob Bronowski's Thought in the Ascent of Man to the Development of Digital Technology

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Keywords: Digital Technology Ethics, Technological Philosophy, Science-Art Integration, Human-Technology Coevolution

Abstract: This study explores the enduring relevance of Jacob Bronowski's seminal work, "The Ascent of Man," to the rapidly evolving landscape of digital technology. Bronowski's interdisciplinary approach to understanding human progress provides a unique lens through which to examine the ethical, cultural, and philosophical implications of our digital age. The research employs a qualitative analysis of Bronowski's key concepts, juxtaposing them against contemporary technological developments and their societal impacts. Particular attention is given to Bronowski's ideas on the evolution of knowledge, the integration of arts and sciences, and the moral responsibilities of scientific advancement. These themes are examined in the context of artificial intelligence, big data, and the increasing digitalization of human experience. The study reveals striking parallels between Bronowski's vision of human ascent and the trajectory of digital innovation, highlighting the continued importance of maintaining a holistic, humanistic perspective in technological progress.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving digital age, we are challenged to understand and manage technological progress in accordance with human values. Jacob Bronowski's work "The Ascent of Man" (1973) offers an interesting perspective on the evolution of human knowledge and its relationship to technological development. Although written nearly five decades ago, Bronowski's thoughts remain relevant in the context of today's digital revolution.

The primary aim of this article is to examine the relevance of Bronowski's ideas to contemporary developments in digital technology, with a focus on artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and the broader process of digitalization. By analyzing Bronowski's key concepts and relating them to current digital technology issues, we can gain valuable insights into how to steer technological progress to remain human-centered and humanitarian.

The development of digital technologies has transformed the way we interact, work and understand the world (Luciano Floridi, 2014). Artificial intelligence, big data, and the Internet of Things have opened up new possibilities while raising complex ethical questions (O'Neil, 2016). In this context, Bronowski's views on the integration of science and art and on moral responsibility in scientific progress are particularly relevant.

Jacob Bronowski's "The Ascent of Man" offers an insightful examination of human civilization through the perspective of scientific advancements. Bronowski chronicles the progression of human society, emphasizing the interconnectedness of scientific innovation and artistic creativity. This work presents a sweeping narrative, charting the ongoing

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Soegiarto, A., Fatwa, A., Suyitno, , Djatmiko, W. and Rosalina, I. F.
The Relevance of Jacob Bronowski's Thought in the Ascent of Man to the Development of Digital Technology.
DOI: 10.5220/0013407700004654

In *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Humanities Education, Law, and Social Science (ICHELS 2024)*, pages 431-436
ISBN: 978-989-758-752-8

evolution of humanity from its primitive origins to modern times.

Bronowski emphasized the importance of understanding science as an integral part of human culture, rather than as a separate entity (Bronowski, 1973). This idea is consistent with contemporary thinking about the relationship between technology and society (Harari, 2015). Meanwhile, the concept of "co-evolution" between humans and machines discussed by Mazlish (1993) resonates with Bronowski's understanding of technological development as part of human "ascent".

However, with the rapid advancement of digital technology comes concerns about its impact on privacy, equality, and the very nature of humanity (Zuboff, 2019). Here, the relevance of Bronowski's thoughts on ethics and responsibility in the development of science becomes increasingly important.

An important aspect of Bronowski's thinking is his emphasis on creativity and innovation as the core of human progress. In the context of digital technology, this creativity is manifested in the development of increasingly sophisticated artificial intelligence (AI). Boden (2018) explores the relationship between AI and cultural evolution, a topic implicitly addressed by Bronowski in the context of scientific development (Boden, 2018b). The question of how AI will affect human creativity and cultural evolution becomes increasingly relevant as technology advances.

Innovations like AI, the Internet of Things, and big data analytics have opened unprecedented opportunities but have also raised critical ethical concerns regarding privacy, equity, and societal impacts (O'Neil, 2016). Bronowski's interdisciplinary approach—melding science, philosophy, and the arts—provides a valuable lens for addressing these challenges. His assertion that science is not merely a mechanism but an integral part of human culture resonates with current debates about the social responsibilities of technology(Bronowski, 1973)

In the context of ethical dilemmas, such as biases in AI algorithms, mass surveillance, and the erosion of privacy, Bronowski's advocacy for integrating ethical considerations into technological innovation remains highly pertinent. For instance, the widespread deployment of facial recognition technology raises questions about fairness and individual autonomy, illustrating the moral responsibility of innovators to balance progress with human rights.

Bronowski also emphasizes the importance of understanding the long-term consequences of scientific and technological innovation. In the digital age, this understanding becomes even more critical. Kitchin (2021) discusses the importance of data ethics in theory, practice, and policy, an issue that may have been unimaginable in Bronowski's time but is highly relevant to his thoughts on scientific responsibility (Kitchin, 2021). How we manage and use data on a large scale without violating individual privacy or creating systemic injustice is a question that requires an interdisciplinary approach such as the one in.
Furthermore, Bronowski's vision of the human future has interesting resonances with contemporary futuristic thinking. (Kurzweil, 2005) and (Tegmark, 2017) discuss the possibility of a technological singularity and its implications for the future of humanity. Although these concepts were not yet fully formed in Bronowski's time, his views on the potential and risks of technological progress provide a useful framework for understanding and evaluating these predictions.

However, it is important to remember that Bronowski did not only focus on the technological and scientific aspects of human progress. He also emphasizes the importance of human values, ethics, and aesthetics in the development of civilization. In the context of digital technology, this reminds us of the importance of retaining the elements that make us human in the midst of increasingly powerful digitalization.

This article will explore how Bronowski's thinking can help us understand and address the ethical challenges posed by digital technology. How can we ensure that AI developments do not threaten individual autonomy and privacy? How can we utilize big data for social good without creating "weapons of mathematical destruction" as feared by O'Neil (2016)? And how can we maintain a balance between technological progress and human values in the era of "surveillance capitalism" described by Zuboff (2019)?

By using Bronowski's thinking as a lens through which to view the development of digital technologies, we can gain valuable insights into how to steer technological innovation in line with broader human aspirations and values. Bronowski's interdisciplinary approach, combining science, philosophy, and art, provides a useful model for understanding and addressing the complexity of the digital technology challenges we face today.

2 METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a focus on content analysis and conceptual comparison. This method was chosen to allow for an in-depth exploration of Jacob Bronowski's thoughts in "The Ascent of Man" and their relevance to the development of contemporary digital technology.

Primary data was obtained from Jacob Bronowski's book "The Ascent of Man" (1973). This analysis aims to identify and extract key concepts in Bronowski's thought, especially those related to the development of science, technology and their relationship with human values. Secondary data will be obtained from scholarly journals related to Jacob Bronowski's thought, articles and publications on the development of digital technology, books that discuss the relationship between humanism and technology, online documents from trusted academic sources, and relevant previous research.

Data collection techniques consist of

1. Documentation:

- Reading and systematically recording the main ideas of the book "The Ascent of Man".
- Collecting and categorizing journal articles and secondary sources.
- Creation of a coding system to organize the data.

2. Literature Review:

- Perform a systematic review of relevant literature
- Create a synthesis matrix to organize findings from multiple sources

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of Jacob Bronowski's thoughts in the book "The Ascent of Man" reveals some important findings regarding their relevance to the development of digital technology. Bronowski (1973) argues that human evolution cannot be separated from the development of knowledge and technology. In his view, any tool created by humans is an extension of human power and senses. This understanding becomes very relevant when we observe the development of digital technology, which is increasingly integrated into the lives of modern people.

In addition, this study found that Bronowski strongly emphasized the importance of integrating scientific thinking with human values. As he asserts, "Science is not a mechanism but human progress, and not a set of findings but the search for them" (Bronowski, 1973). This view is even more important in the digital age, where technology is often developed without taking human aspects into account. In his research, Ihde (2009) reinforces this argument by stating that digital technology should be understood as an extension of human capabilities, not as a substitute for human values. (Ihde, 2009)

Another important aspect found in this research is Bronowski's emphasis on ethical responsibility in technology development. He clearly states that knowledge comes with great moral responsibility. This thought is highly relevant to various ethical issues that arise in the development of contemporary digital technologies, such as privacy, artificial intelligence, and the social impact of digital media. The main findings and their discussion are presented below:

1. Evolution of knowledge and digital innovation

Bronowski emphasizes that human progress is not linear, but rather the result of a series of innovative leaps in knowledge and technology. Our analysis shows that this concept is highly relevant to the current development of digital technologies. For example, the development of artificial intelligence (AI) can be seen as a qualitative leap in the way humans process information and solve problems.

This finding is consistent with (Boden, 2018a) view of AI and cultural evolution. Just as Bronowski sees every scientific innovation as part of the human "ascent," we can understand the development of AI as a new stage in our cognitive evolution. However, as (Tegmark, 2017) reminds us, this leap also poses ethical and existential challenges that need to be addressed.

2. Integration of Science, Technology, and Human Values

One of the most striking aspects of Bronowski's thinking is his emphasis on the integration of science, technology, and human values. Our analysis shows that this principle is particularly relevant in dealing with the ethical dilemmas posed by digital technologies.

In the context of big data and surveillance capitalism, as discussed by (Zuboff, 2019) we see the importance of integrating technological advances with ethical considerations. For example, the ability to collect and analyze data at scale must be balanced with the protection of individual privacy and autonomy. This resonates with Bronowski's warning about the dangers of divorcing scientific progress from human values.

The Integration of Arts and Sciences in a STEM-Dominated World Bronowski's insistence on blending scientific and artistic creativity is particularly pertinent in today's STEM-dominated educational and professional landscapes. This integration can encourage innovative problem-solving and holistic thinking, as seen in the emergence of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) initiatives. For example, AI-driven tools like DALL·E or ChatGPT demonstrate how technological advancements intersect with artistic expression, creating new opportunities for creativity. These developments underscore Bronowski's argument that scientific and artistic pursuits are not mutually exclusive but are instead complementary forces driving human progress.

3. Responsibility of Scientists and Innovators

Bronowski emphasizes the moral responsibility of scientists in the development and application of their knowledge. In the digital age, this principle is increasingly important. Our analysis of AI and big data ethics cases shows that Bronowski's thinking can provide valuable guidance.

O'Neil (2016) discusses how, if not carefully designed, algorithms can reinforce systemic injustice (O'Neil, 2016). This supports Bronowski's argument that scientific progress should always consider its social implications. In this context, the responsibility of AI developers and data scientists is not limited to technical aspects, but also includes the social impact of their innovations.

4. Creativity and Innovation in the Digital Age

Bronowski sees creativity as the essence of human progress. In the digital context, this concept takes on a new dimension. Our analysis shows that while AI can perform complex tasks, human creativity remains a key factor in innovation.

This is consistent with (Harari, 2015) argument that in the future, the ability to continuously learn and innovate will be the most valuable skill. This finding underscores the importance of maintaining and developing human creativity as AI advances, a principle implicit in Bronowski's thinking.

5. Data ethics and digital privacy

Although Bronowski did not directly address the issue of digital privacy, his principles of scientific ethics are highly relevant to contemporary debates about data ethics. (Kitchin, 2021) discusses the complexities of data ethics in practice and policy, an issue that resonates with Bronowski's warnings about the potential misuse of scientific knowledge.

Our analysis shows that Bronowski's holistic approach, which combines scientific and ethical considerations, can provide a useful framework for dealing with data ethics dilemmas. For example, when designing privacy policies, we need to consider not only the technical aspects, but also the social and ethical implications.

6. Future visions and technological singularity

Bronowski's thoughts on the trajectory of human progress have interesting relevance to the concept of technological singularity discussed by (Kurzweil, 2005). Although Bronowski did not envision the level of technological progress we see today, his vision of the potential and risks of scientific progress provides a valuable perspective for understanding and anticipating the implications of the technological singularity.

The analysis shows that Bronowski's approach, which emphasizes the balance between technological progress and human values, can help us navigate the ethical and existential challenges that may arise from the technological singularity.

In conclusion, Jacob Bronowski's thoughts in "The Ascent of Man" have deep and multidimensional relevance to the development of contemporary digital technology. His principles on the integration of science and human values, scientific responsibility, and creativity as the core of human progress provide a valuable framework for addressing the ethical and philosophical challenges of the digital age. By applying Bronowski's thinking, we can better steer the development of digital technologies in line with broader human aspirations and values.

While Jacob Bronowski's The Ascent of Man offers profound insights into the ethical and philosophical dimensions of scientific progress, it is essential to recognize the limitations of applying his mid-20th-century ideas to the complexities of today's digital landscape. Written during a period when technological advancements were centered around

industrial and early computing innovations, Bronowski's work does not directly address the scale, speed, or scope of contemporary digitalization, such as the pervasive role of artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and the Internet of Things. For example, Bronowski could not have anticipated the emergence of phenomena like surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019), where personal data is commodified at an unprecedented scale, raising new ethical challenges. Similarly, the existential risks associated with advanced AI systems, including concerns about algorithmic biases or the potential for autonomous systems to act beyond human control (Tegmark, 2017), are far removed from the technological context of Bronowski's time. These issues require new frameworks and tools for ethical analysis, extending beyond the foundational principles Bronowski articulated.

Furthermore, Bronowski's focus on the integration of arts and sciences, while still relevant, must be adapted to address the dominance of STEM disciplines in a globalized, digitalized world. Interdisciplinary collaboration now necessitates not just an emphasis on ethical responsibility but also an understanding of cultural diversity and geopolitical dynamics, which Bronowski's largely Western-centric perspective does not fully encompass.

His core principles—ethical responsibility, interdisciplinary integration, and the human-centered approach to progress—serve as a foundation that must be built upon with contemporary theories, such as Floridi's (2014) concept of the "infosphere" or Harari's (2017) explorations of the future of human agency in a world dominated by AI. This balanced perspective not only preserves the relevance of Bronowski's insights but also ensures their applicability to the unique challenges of the digital age.

Overall, this research shows that Jacob Bronowski's thought has deep and multidimensional relevance in the digital age. His principles of knowledge integration, ethical responsibility, and the importance of human values in scientific progress offer valuable guidance in dealing with the complex challenges posed by digital technologies.

The findings confirm the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and guiding technological development. By adopting Bronowski's perspective, which balances technological progress with human values, we can better steer digital innovation for the benefit of society as a whole.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This research explored the relevance of Jacob Bronowski's thought, as presented in his work The Ascent of Man, to the development of contemporary digital technologies. Through extensive analysis and conceptual comparison, several important conclusions can be drawn:

1. The Evolution of Knowledge: Bronowski's perspective on human progress as a series of transformative innovations remains highly pertinent in the era of the digital revolution. Technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence (AI), represent a continuation of the "ascent" he described, bringing forth significant opportunities while simultaneously presenting complex ethical challenges that demand careful consideration.
2. Integration Across Disciplines: Bronowski's advocacy for blending science, technology, and human values offers a critical framework for navigating the ethical dilemmas posed by contemporary digital technologies. This interdisciplinary approach is particularly vital in addressing pressing concerns such as data privacy and the broader societal impacts of technological innovation.
3. Ethical Accountability: Bronowski's emphasis on the moral obligations of scientists resonates strongly with the ethical considerations surrounding modern digital technologies. His call to evaluate the social and ethical consequences of innovation provides an enduring guide for ensuring technology development aligns with societal needs.
4. Creativity in the Digital Era: Bronowski's belief in creativity as the driving force behind human progress holds significant relevance in the age of AI. As automation increasingly permeates various domains, fostering and preserving human creativity becomes essential to ensuring that technological advancements continue to enrich human potential and cultural evolution.
5. Data Ethics and Privacy: Bronowski's scientific ethical principles provide a solid foundation for addressing today's data ethics and digital privacy challenges. His holistic approach can help shape policies and practices that balance technological progress with the protection of individual rights.
6. Educators: Revamp STEM programs to include cross-disciplinary collaborations and courses in ethics, cultural studies, and philosophy to prepare students for the societal impact of their work.

7. Technologists: Commit to designing systems that prioritize user autonomy, fairness, and inclusivity, ensuring technological advancements contribute positively to society.
8. Anticipating the future: Bronowski's vision of the trajectory of human progress provides a valuable perspective for understanding and anticipating future technological developments, including the possibility of technological singularities.

In conclusion, Jacob Bronowski's thoughts in "The Ascent of Man" have deep and multidimensional relevance to the development of contemporary digital technologies. His principles on the integration of science and human values, scientific responsibility, and creativity as the core of human progress provide a valuable framework for addressing the ethical and philosophical challenges of the digital age. By applying Bronowski's thinking, we can better steer the development of digital technologies in line with broader human aspirations and values.

This research also paves the way for further exploration of how philosophical thinking from earlier eras can provide insights for dealing with contemporary technological challenges. It underscores the value of an ongoing dialogue between humanistic thought and technological progress in shaping a more ethical and humane future.We hope you find the information in this template useful in the preparation of your submission.

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