Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty: Philosophy & Humanistic Sciences
ISSN: 2284-5976 | e-ISSN: 2501-0409
Covered in: ERIH PLUS, CEEOL, Index Copernicus, CrossRef, CrossCheck, J-Gate, Google Scholar, Ideas RePeC, Econpapers, Socionet, KVK, WorldCat, EBSCO.

2024, Volume 11, Issue 1, pages: 01-11 | doi: https://doi.org/10.18662/lumenphs/11.1/70

New Times, New Knowledge, and Finding the 'NorthStar' of Success in a Changing World of Learning

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Abstract: *As a primordial concept of human experience, knowledge, in a broad sense, was not necessarily and always linked to learning, but rather something bestowed from on high or mysteriously granted. Throughout the eras since, education changed from an esoteric elite marker to one of pragmatic, applied ability to discover and invent. With the coming of the industrial revolution, social massification al la Marcuse followed, and with it the use of mass persuasion, for good (literacy campaigns) or ill (rank consumerism). Knowledge was thus intimately tied up with the processes of democratization and adaptation to trends increasingly related to economic and at most social competitiveness, so, in a word, the need for a programmatic and generally pragmatically oriented Learning. In other words, the accessibility of knowledge and the related methodologies of its teaching, assimilation and evaluation have become increasingly widespread. As Western (and then others) societies have followed the "knowledge society" transformation, philosophical conflicts on the essential meaning of "education" and for whom have persisted and intensified. In the coming A.I. transformation, how will mass education evolve for the many, vis-a-vis of elite esoteric education for the few? To which type of beneficiaries will it predominately serve? To a transhumanist Elon Musk, for example, or, on the contrary, much more sensitively stressed by the rigors of the new "intellectual revolution" (cf European Commission), sustainable development in a broad meaning, post-pandemic resilience and a flexible pragmatism, open to interdisciplinarity and ethical options grounded in self and civic responsibility/ responsibility?*

Keywords: *Knowledge vs. Learning; Esoteric vs. Practical Knowledge; AI and Education; Transhumanist vs. Humane education, EU policy on education.*

How to cite: Avram, S. & Gilder, E. (2024). New Times, new knowledge, and finding the 'NorthStar' of success in a changing world of learning. *Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty: Philosophy & Humanistic Sciences, 11*(1), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.18662/lumenphs/11.1/70

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Introduction: Can "Craft" Work Survive in an A.I. World?

At the close of Gilder's RSACVP presentation of 2020, he noted:

"As the psychologist Abraham Maslow's studies of the most successful people demonstrated (cf. Boeree), once the stage of self-actualization is properly completed, then (and perhaps only then) can one then approach true generatively of human action, perhaps discovering a way out of what Harold Bloom called the "anxiety" of interpretation, relieved by embracing the inevitable "misprision" of language and our bodies. Logos should stand for 'truth' (however imperfectly perceived through our senses and passions), if nothing else" (Gilder, 2020).

The question that we wish to explore here today is whether even very successful people of which Maslow had sampled in his work can survive and prosper in the new A.I.-driven world that is increasingly at our doorstep (Ayo, 2021). As Gilder had mentioned back in 2020, "craft" labor intellectual workers could work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst "essential" "organic" labor workers had no choice but to risk their bodies' health in the "client-facing" jobs, which we all depended upon. Now, both categories of workers will be objects/subjects of a new, transformed workspace (Gilder, 2020).

An Ancient Distinction of Knowledge Seen Again

Drawing from Heidegger, as a primordial concept of human experience, knowledge, in a broad sense, was not necessarily and always linked to explicit learning, but rather something bestowed from on high or mysteriously granted. As knowledge became seen as necessary for human social advancement, it became, at first, a tacit knowledge represented more the prerogative of narrow elites and connected with certain social attributes related to Mystery, Initiation, Faustian, demonic, and traumatic states, with potentially negative consequences or unfortunate 'bargains', as it was in the field of the development of new weapons from Leonardo da Vinci onwards (Steiner, 1999; Polyani, 1966).

The Coming of *Technē* With the Industrial Revolution

Along with the coming of the industrial revolution, social massification (in the sense of Marcuse), the exacerbation of consumerism and literacy campaigns or other large-scale social experiments, Knowledge became increasingly involved in a process of so-called democratization and

adaptation to trends increasingly related to economic and at most social competitiveness, so, in a word, of the need for a provisional, planned, programmatic and generally pragmatically-oriented Learning (Marcuse, 1969; Shook, 2010).

The Triumph of the Technocratic Age

Technē was manifested especially at the level of those who guided and implemented learning curricula in various systems, stages of conceptual and societal evolution, which elaborated increasingly diversified and complex methodologies in various curricular areas or systems of approach to knowledge and learning. A long polemic was manifested, in this sense, for example, even or especially in the United States, we still are able to remember the purpose of supporting and encouraging the development of elite sciences and knowledge in abstract fields, without an embodied connection with social applicability to practical living for the masses, and their consecutive implementation capacities (Keane, 1975). From the point of view of political and administrative decision-makers, in many societies, the emphasis has been largely shifted towards utilitarianism and scientism in what concerns knowledge. Therefore, a strong emphasis was placed on the training of generic technical skills. Only later, in more advanced societies, this orientation shifted to 'soft skills', especially to the training and consolidation of those related to social and emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and educating active global citizens, especially on topics related to sustainable development and combating climate change, officially foreseen by the UN rather ambitiously for 2030 (Freedman, n.d.).

A Gnostic Rebellion against Mass Mere *Techne*

The economic euphoria of the 1960s and 1970s was quite naïve, not being based on geo-economic realities that were only taken into account later (regarding the impact on the environment), marked by an obsession with increasing the classically calculated GDP at any cost. By focusing upon industrial competition only, policymakers had few ways of respecting the age-old pact between the Human Being and Nature, which at that stage only led to relatively marginal pro-ecological or New Age reactions (Stolzenberg, 2009; Convery & Davis, 2016).

However, the transformation of Nature into a means of production was constantly accompanied by important components of social alienation and ever more intense forms of social and individual anxiety, diversified forms of deception, and even depression, not only in Europe and the United

States. Even if it is not necessarily possible to quantitatively demonstrate a direct link between these processes at the home-life level encompassing both psycho-social health both individually and collectively, it is obvious that these negative, toxic consequences are interconnected, producing ill effects at a territorial level, of local and regional development, demography, etc. (Avram & Gilder, 2021).

Hope of Transforming the Technocratic Age into a Humane One

Returning to the role intended for Learning and implicitly the access to Knowledge through this transformation, we propose to address here with particular rigor the question of how and for whom Learning serves, especially considering the broader meaning throughout life, since we see frequently antagonistic models of the so-called project of human development with humans as key subjects. It is clear that we are no longer even in the somewhat idyllic stage of Adorno and Horkheimer, in which the desire to achieve some changes in the margins of post-Renaissance neo-humanism and its successors were still felt (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2010). Although fictional literature often talks about dangerous dystopias, about the symbolic imprisonment in a kind of 'Desert of the Tatars', about a new Kafkaian 'penitentiary colony' or according to Michelangelo Antonioni, a 'Red Desert', we wonder if people still take it all seriously (The Desert of the Tartars, 1976; In the Penal Colony, F. Kafka; Michelangelo Antonioni : Red Desert).

From a Humane Analogue Technology to a Robotic Digital One

Now, with the triggering of the dominance of digitalization and A.I. applications, with the misleading information styles and traditional way of reading in the traditional way, the dissemination of Knowledge has predominantly taken on extremely pragmatic and entrepreneurial characteristics. Indeed, these have been accepted and appropriated by the majority of societies and States as inevitable driving forces. In parallel, as a kind of psychological comeback, entire societies and social groups choose hyper-hedonism (or hyper-repression) practiced in various ways, as alternative compensatory, but not remedial attitudes. In relation to these responses, pressures strongly related to new wars or bellicose threats, pandemics, calamities, destruction, massive displacements of population, extreme pollution, etc. occur.

More recently, universities themselves have embraced this pro-entrepreneurial and technologically innovative wave, continuously

innovating almost as a goal in itself in pursuit of a competitive advantage through their educational offer. Yet, we cannot claim that we don't see eternal trends of profound social injustice, of modern slavery, of emphasis on the exploitation of naivety or good faith through enormous political media manipulations, etc. (Eagleton, 1997). The high promises of the SDGs have, for example, not been met (Walling, 2023).

Open Social-Political Infection Points in the A.I. Epoch

So, a wide-ranging spread of 'solutions' is already being configured for the concerns noted here. In what sense will the Learning of the future evolve to face challenges; a more or less traditionalist, or instrumental ex-cathedra type, or something else? To which type of beneficiaries will the learning and knowledge predominantly benefit - the advocated transhumanism articulated by Elon Musk (Hughes, 2023), for example, or, on the contrary, a high humanism bound by the rigors of the new 'intellectual revolution'? (European Commission, 2020; Choi et al., 2023).

In the face of such challenges, where does a humane sustainable development (in a broad meaning), including post-pandemic resilience, a flexible pragmatism (open to interdisciplinarity and ethical options such as self-responsibility/social responsibility in the sense of Edgar Morin's reflections on a pro-active European citizenship) fit in? (Morin, 1999). What of the democratic, liberal values, dedicated to opposing fanatical radicalization tendencies in Europe, of combating democratically elected autocracies with their counterfactual attempts of arbitrary re-writing of a post-factual History? (Olsen, 2022).

A Struggle in Geo-Political Powers Taking Place within a Virtual Cloud

Yet, according to Ian Bremmer and Cliff Kupchan (Bremmer & Kupchan, 2022) we are at a critical infection point at the crossroads of a so-called "technopolar world" – defined by a shift in power from state governmental actors (responsible at least in part to their national publics) towards ungrounded techno-bros of immense wealth of uncertain political loyalties. It is upon this "cloud" stage that geo-political struggles are now underway between the 'traditional' Western keepers of the world governing order and an insurgent China/Russia/Global South power bloc, who seek to design a re-fashioned world order according to a relativistic multilateralism – often in opposition to a US/EU/UN universalist hegemony (Biden Official Admits Russia, China Challenge to U.S., 2023).

World Polarization: A Threat and an Opportunity for the EU/NATO Space

Following the outbreak of war in Ukraine and at the Black Sea, the polarization between autocratic regimes and liberal democratic societies considerably increased. Also, the 'illiberal democracy' ideology model has become more and more seductive for various geo-economic regions, especially for Central-Eastern Europe, under the challenge posed by Victor Orban of Hungary (Lewsey, n.d.). Such a changing and challenging controversial landscape paradoxically has become an opportunity, mostly for EU and NATO, to revise security-related legislation, such as the functionality of AI systems, the allocation of responsibilities between different economic operators, changes to the concept of safety, and so on (Broadbent, 2021).

After some delay, mostly at EU level, an elaboration of a new "Regulatory Framework for A.I." has taken place. Such a new framework focuses on most of the critical issues (such as the use of other's data to train A.I., for example) and the newly applicable legal requirements are to be complied in practice and be "effectively enforced" in view of protecting both citizens and entire societies (EU AI Act: first regulation on artificial intelligence, 2023).

Moves towards Effective and Ethical Security Governance in the EU

In terms of governance, the new EU security structures to be assumed also by each Member State should guarantee "maximum stakeholders' participation", including researchers and civil society organizations. In terms of power and ideological constructions, one of the main dangers would relate to the "rationalize unaccountability" by entire organizations or societies (European Commission, 2020). The main ethical concern is considered to be concentrated on the risk of this new "political dimension of intelligent agents and algorithms" (Vesa & Tienari, 2022).

The Coming A.I. (ChatGPT) Revolution and a Changing "Education for All" Model (Elites and Mass Populations)

As a matter of example, the appearance of ChatGPT, from the beginning, seemed to herald an era of knowledge accessibility of more and more learners as a so-called amalgamated collected knowledge. Most of the initial academic/intellectual reactions have been manifested at the level of fear of more subtle plagiarisms or mere compilations of (dis)information (Douglas, 2023; Guggenberger & Salib, 2023). However, a much deeper

concern and enigmatic issue relates to the loss of encouraging the self-exploration attempt by knowing human subjects of holding to original thought and interpretation possibilities (Comitta, 2023).

Thus, the entire transformation of education, promoted and stimulated by UNESCO and EU, known as lifelong learning (LLL), should now be explicitly much more attached to holistic, mindful learning as a final goal (Krauchenberg, 2021). As a consequence, the further process implies identifying the individual and social stakes and goals of humane knowledge and learning much more clearly and targeting ways to achieve them. This should concern not only the current stage of overlapping crises and the conceptual deadlock in which we seem to be stuck but also for equipping students today to meet tomorrow's challenges. As a conclusion, it means the entire educational world should move towards the courageous transposition of this lifelong learning vision through a holistic integrative exploration of the entire process in terms of obtaining a new "intellectual Renaissance" (European Economic and Social Committee, 2014).

Conclusion: Different Crisis Turning Point, Same Educative Prescription?

Back in the first weeks of September 2001 (dates 5-9), author Gilder took part in a World Future Studies Federation meeting in Brasov, "Many Cultures, One World: Globalization and Local Development". It was a wonderful meeting and the futurists there, by and large, painted a largely bright future for the world, with some existential caveats. He peened a somewhat cheeky contribution, "On Naming the Beast Properly". Pointing out the limits and contradictions of a lofty "New World Order" envisioned by the senior George H. W. Bush (41st President), he stated: "Even if we debate the precise meaning of globalization, it is not in doubt [that] … the world is a more pluralistic and complex place. Therefore, we posit that facing the challenges of the 21st century will require not mere inter-cultural communication ability on the part of individuals, but rather enter-cultural empathy, not mindless galloping consumption practices, but engaged, extensive earth-here-ness, not hankering after security and avoidance of scarcity, but embracing the Aristotelian values of sustain-ability, of having (and be-ing) enough. (Let it be recalled that Adam Smith and Karl Marx were, in the main, moral, not economic, philosophers. What they sought was knowledge of how people and societies best flourish.) Let us look here. In our work in HE policy development on three continents, we are currently exploring along this path of thought" (Gilder, 2001).

Acknowledgments

This paper is a revised version of the presentation given by the authors to the 19th LUMEN International Scientific Conference RSCAVP2023, 21- 23 September 2023, Iasi, Romania (online). We give thanks to the organizers and the colleagues who participated in the lively and fruitful discussions. We are grateful too to Sandu Zamfirescu who assisted in the translation of the text from PowerPoint to Word formatting.

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