

Principles for a Pedagogy in the Technological Era

<"xml encoding="UTF-8?>

ABSTRACT

I argue that humanity is initiating a new historical era: the Technological Era. While this mutation opens to man extraordinary possibilities of spiritual and material progress, it is irreversible and threatens to destroy him. The eminent danger can be relieved only by adequately preparing the younger generation. In what follows, the principles which guide this preparation are enunciated and justified. The nuclear importance which should be given to moral education is emphasized, and the cultural and sociological obstacles opposed to it are analyzed. Finally, the means to overcome these obstacles are indicated.

1. At the dawn of a new era, characterised by the vertiginous multiplication of machines on the face of the Earth, competing for space and invading all realms of nature, and which increasingly restrain and condition Man's daily life, a clearer, lucid vision of the new world which is forming before us is vital. This is the greatest social duty of all intellectuals, but namely and above all, it is the greatest duty of universities researchers.
2. The theme is extremely vast, yet we cannot forsake having a broad perspective, since without it, it would not be possible to delineate a course that would otherwise be unilateral and simplified. Therefore, we will only point out the most relevant topics.
3. To begin with, we wish to accentuate the immediate and generalised practical interest of theoretical reflection which is in direct opposition with the pragmatic sufficiency of politicians (reflection alone could alter this attitude), especially when they exercise their tragic office in an imprudent manner, not advised, as Max Weber so wisely forewarned, that it is proper of their profession to make serious public decisions which may have unpredictable consequences, but for which they are, notwithstanding, still responsible.
4. As it is known, neither politicians nor civil servants have the obligation to create culture or to educate. It is, however, their obligation to establish the conditions which will permit that cultural life flourishes and that the new generations be prepared to achieve the destiny they choose in the best possible manner, as well as providing them with guidelines which will lead them to being concerned and just citizens.
5. The times in which we live are still governed by economicist criteria, it not being easily intelligible that these criteria are, in essence, instrumental. We witness a mythical over-

valorisation of the power of money, which lead some to unwisely think that the solution for the grave problems experienced today in the education system depends on the amount of funds which is attributed to it. As if money could think, or even lead anyone to think with justice and independence...

6. On the other hand, we verify that the manufacturing industry of goods and material artefacts, has decreasing social and market interests, whereas the industries focused on the provision of services and on the production of cultural goods are growing at an extraordinary rate. And if it is generally accepted that today's entrepreneur lacks sensibility and humanist values, so as not to jeopardise his professional endeavours due to short-sightedness, it is legitimate to endorse that the entrepreneur of the future should be a humanist, capable of putting all the benefits technology offers at the service of culture. A humanist, be it understood, because he is aware of all of Man's different dimensions, namely, his religious dimension.

7. We are not going to risk entering the domains of futurology; we will take, as pointers, the directives which project us into the future and are today so apparent that they have become common-place. They are the following:

A- The technological era is irreversible. The neo-bucolic vision of the ecologists would be utopic if what was proposed was a return to the daily life existent before the revolution of the machines.

B- And it is not only irreversible as it is desirable. Technology brought Man extraordinary benefits and it is predictable that they be further developed in the future.

C- The technical action, however, contains potentially noxious effects which could come to threaten the survival of the species.

D- This happens because, being essentially instrumental, technology does not possess within itself a guiding directive; the principles of economy and of efficiency which animate it are also subaltern and axiologically neutral; they may serve both for good and for harm.

8. From this, a first directive of orientation for the education of the future becomes apparent: it is necessary to humanise technology; it is necessary to educate people in the adequate use of machines; it is imperative to impede that machines, in their innocence as unconscious and passive artefacts, potentiate the errors, harm and perversions of men, and transmit the repellent and degrading image of a world much worse than that which is, nevertheless, the real world.

It is, above all, necessary the teach the users of the technical means of communication not to ignore or disdain their ethical, pedagogical and civic responsibilities. In order to do so, an impartial, theoretical reflection on the phenomenon of social communication has much to

reveal, namely showing that, while the public is the ultimate judge of these communicators' work, it can not nor desires to guide it; that that same public always ends up punishing those who valorise it negatively, mythicizing it as a sovereign power, yet unlearned and foolish, and, still and above all, that the social responses are not instantaneous: the quantitative results of the opinion polls, even when successive and systematic, have to be interpreted in a very skillful manner; as Bergson would say today, a sequence of photographs may simulate a physical movement with fidelity, but it is not capable of translating an organic movement, nor, much less, a spiritual movement, free and spontaneous in essence.

9. In order for the University to adequately embrace all these issues, it is necessary that a vision of its own essence be recuperated, and that it be structured in such a way so as to permit that the human sciences, the arts, the formal sciences, the nature sciences and philosophy become intertwined in a mutually prolific interdisciplinary process.

It also appears indispensable that the aims of the University itself be distinguished from the aims of Professional Higher Education. The former has its vocation in pure research, in the preparation for generic culture and in the concession of post-graduate academic degrees. The latter aims to prepare for the exercise of relevant social services and for the scientific research relative to it.

10. Another sociological current underway, unfortunately already visible, is the preoccupying fragility of the familiar institution which imposes upon the State an indispensable suppletive action. The action of the State should not, however, fall in none of these two extremes:

*A- neither impose the values of its ideology upon the children;
B- nor alienate itself from the responsibility of their education, not even ministering a solid civic education, as is its duty.*

11. One other vector which projects into the near future is the progressive equalisation of the classes, and the generalised acceptance of the Christian and democratic values of freedom, civic equality and of social justice.

No-one accepts as just that the State not strive to guarantee, even if in a suppletive manner, identical opportunities to all children and adolescents so as to achieve their personal fulfilment and so that they come to occupy, in the community, the places which are within the reach of their capabilities and merits.

In turn, the access to cultural goods, which are by nature intensive and susceptible of multiplying and enriching if, to this end, the capabilities of their beneficiaries increase, demands that the State guarantee a solid education.

12. It is therefore necessary to accept once and for all, because the image which we may

already have of the near future forces us to accept that the new generations should be prepared for a society where the hours of obligatory or remunerated work will progressively decrease. We can almost touch, in a literal sense, the "society of leisure" which is being formed. But its advent may be blocked if the economic and technical values continue to prevail.

And for this not to happen, it is necessary that the University and all other creators of cultural goods manifest a generalised vision of richer human values. If Man's mind and heart, and the collective structures do not open themselves to the crescent manifestations of the Spirit (which, we repeat, the technological era can propitiate if it is humanised), we will continue tragically and perversely subjugated to social forces which, in their mechanised movements, insist blindly on instrumentalizing us as well, in function of objectives which, in essence, no-one knows what they will be.

13. It is therefore indispensable, we repeat, that all the younger generations receive a solid, basic education, without premature professional specialisation, but rather directed at enabling two very important aspects:

A- that they exercise any profession without being marked by the stigma of social inferiority, seeing as its practice would not be, in any circumstance, considered an indication of lack of culture;

B- that the entrepreneurs from various branches of economic activity have qualified workers who learn to easily adapt to what is specific, in accordance with the circumstances.

14. This preparation, which should be gratuitous, should include the minimum instruction and education which the contemporary world demands.

Instruction should simultaneously aim at:

A- A proficient technological preparation. It seems unforgivable that they do not all learn about and know, inside and out, the machines used daily and on which most users do not know how to do the simplest repairs on their own.

B- An adequate humanist preparation which gives all easy and gratifying access to the goods of culture and, together with this, from a national perspective, a secure vision of the world we live in, be it in its historic dimension, be it in its geographical and sociological dimensions, and that it make the youth of today aware that the rapid acquisition of knowledge of any profession is essential.

Education should be of an ethical and civic nature. To this should be linked, in accordance with the cases, the various religious confessions and should aim at facilitating the personal identification and achievement of each teenager. Civic education should have as its goal the

preparation for the conscience and responsible practice of citizenship.

15. It should be recognised that this aspect of personality development continues to be dangerously minimised. Contributing to this, is a poor understanding of the liberal principles.

In effect, the freedom of consciousness guarantees that every person has in relation to themselves, to the world and in relation to the fundamental problems which arise in the spirit of humanity, the solution which to them seems preferable. Each person could try to be, in accordance with their own decision, a mystic, or a saint, or successful in the business world, or a hedonist, only interested in corporal goods, or simply, a passive follower of the social patterns in vogue.

Yet they can never have behaviour which is harmful to the community, seeing as, above all else, these may be particularly dangerous today, given that technology is increasing in a frightening manner the individual capacity for physical violence; we note that the disappearance of the so-called "social pressure" (at least in Europe) permits unhindered the anonymous behaviour of individuals in public.

And it would be unwise to suppose that all that is necessary is the Police and the court-rooms to discourage potential criminals. These are, however, no more than the last line of defence which can only take action in exceptional cases and in a suppletive role.

In truth, the potential criminal is he who does not discipline himself in accordance with the ethical parameters which he may have assumed.

And if the majority of the citizens in a society have not made their ethical choice, there will neither be public force nor judicial action which will avail them, since, it should be understood, we cannot disregard the possibility of they being, in this situation, contaminated themselves.

All that remains, so as not to result in chaos, will be a Mafiosi neo-feudalism cynically disguised, with more or less skill, by the appearance of a Liberal State.

16. Therefore - and it is necessary that this be clearly underlined - an ethically responsible majority is only possible if the education system attributes priority to moral education.

17. Yet, we have to admit, the task is not an easy one. Many doctrinairian obstacles render it difficult.

We will note only two:

A- A unilateral sociologism which diminishes and almost annuls in behaviour, the individual creative initiatives, thus minimising the importance of personal ethical education.

B- A psychological vision of Freudian inspiration which over-valorises the subconscious instances of the personality, comprehending that these should not be repressed, but liberated and assumed so that each person can achieve happiness and maturity.

18. The first obstacle is in some form reinforced by the very circumstance of schools being collective entities which tend to impose their own standards attending only to the fact of their predominance. And, more serious, is that this same sociological factitiousness is rendered helpless when confronted with the fact of the emergence of violent gangs which dispute effective power in the classrooms and corridors.

To break this state of affairs, the only recourse left is to categorically subordinate the schools to a set of ethical principles (easier in confessional private schools), or, at least, to civic imperatives in relation to which disrespect should be inexorably punished.

Nevertheless, for this to be possible, it is necessary that a much generalised equivoque be destroyed, that of understanding that a Liberal State, not being Totalitarian, should never use its authority inexorably, a prohibition which is considered extendible to the holders of a lesser social authority. This being so, everything happens precisely on the contrary. It is precisely due to the limitations which the Liberal State imposed upon itself in relation to its competencies, that the Liberal State can and should exercise its authority in an efficient and intransigent manner, because it runs the risk of actually losing its legitimacy if it is not capable of guaranteeing the security of people and goods, public order and the opportune administration of justice, or, in a word, if it is not capable of complying with the Law.

19. The second obstacle is a spontaneous egocentrism which seems to exclude, in reality, any modality of pedagogical instruction. Except when it serves as psychoanalytic therapy.

As it happens, its foundations, in spite of the suggestive power which came to multiply them, are in reality very fragile. Against them we can call upon Freud's dogmatic presuppositions and mutation in thought. However, a criticism of Freud's theories would be inappropriate here.

20. Confronted with this picture, Locke's sensible positions on pedagogy still seem pertinent today:

- A- One can only be free if he/she learns to control him/herself;*
- B- Learning the fundamentals of the use of freedom consists in the practice of obedience;*
- C- The respect for the rights of others is a prior condition for the legitimate exercise of freedom itself.*

21. The comprehensive period of compulsory and gratuitous schooling referred in the previous paragraph should be organised in such a way as to achieve two apparently contradictory objectives:

- A- Permit the identification of the most capable, in order to guarantee from the start their scholarly progress. It should be noted that this capability should not be evaluated with basis only on the intellectual component, but also with basis on character and willingness to study.*

Furthermore, what is at stake, in these circumstances, is not only the right each individual has to occupy a place correspondent to their merits in collective life, but also the general interest of society in not dissipating its best values.

B- Nevertheless, those with less capabilities or more fragile in temperament or character, should not be traumatised nor diminished. Reprobation and all forms of exclusion due to scholarly failure are not today the most adequate forms of evaluating or selecting. The Darwinian and economicist criteria of the fight for survival and unbridled competition, is not the only nor the best means for the most capable to reveal themselves. And this is not only because, in this way, too much is conceded to voluntarism and cruelty, but also because an essential characteristic of human societies is lacerated, which, since Aristotle, is clearly identified in the theoretical plane. These are the ties of affection implicit in the very notion of sociability, which schools should deliberately cultivate