Artificial Intelligence

The Fabric of Techne and Technology
Race After Technology
Marianne Talbot on Jordan Peterson
Birth Centenary: Freire and Williams

McDowell on Reason and Nature
Interview with Claude Mangion
Death by a Thousand Cuts
Manifesto - The Environment

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Engaging the Contemporary 2022: Confronting Ethics
17-18 November 2022, University of Malta (Valletta Campus)
Keynote: Sophie Loidolt, Technical University of Darmstadt

Engaging the Contemporary 2022 is the seventh edition of a series of annual international conferences organized by the Department of Philosophy at the University of Malta, with the aim of promoting an interdisciplinary approach to a variety of current philosophical debates. This year’s theme - Confronting Ethics - seeks to examine and bring into discussion recent engagements with the history of ethics as well as present-day ethical theories and practices as confronted by contemporary philosophers. The aim of the conference is to bring together various philosophical traditions into a conversation that furthers our understanding of the ethical perplexities that beset contemporary times. We invite contributions on the following themes:

Contemporary Engagements with the History of Ethics
- Neo-Aristotelian and Virtue Ethics
- Ethics of Happiness, Joy and Wellbeing
- Contemporary Approaches to Hellenistic Ethics
- Ethics, Therapy and Philosophy as a Way of Life
- Ethics, Reason and the Passions
- Ethics and Moral Philosophy
- Ethics and Natural Law Theory
- Neo-Kantian Ethics and Contemporary Deontology
- Contemporary Utilitarian Ethics

Contemporary Ethical Theories and Languages
- Ethics and Postmodernity
- Poststructuralist Ethics
- Ethics of Altery and Immanence
- Ethics and Phenomenology
- Ethics of Affect, Touch, Sight and Embodiment
- Ethics of Vulnerability
- Relational and Care Ethics
- Ethics and Spirituality
- Feminist and Queer Ethics
- Ethics and Psychoanalysis
- Ethics and/or the Self
- Ethics and Critical Theory
- Ethics and Atheism

Contemporary Applied Ethical Issues
- Ethics of Health Care and Medicine
- Business Ethics and Economics
- Ethics and Education
- Technology, AI, and Blockchain
- Ethics and the (Post-)Human
- Ethics of Suffering and Pain, Life and Death
- Ethics, Biopolitics and Law
- Ethics, Borders and Migration
- Political and Public Ethics
- Ethics, Psychology and Emotions
- Ethics and Disability Studies
- Ethics of Sustainability, Climate Change, the Anthropocene and the Environment

Interested participants are to submit a 500-word abstract and a short biographical note through the website by 1 May 2022. Decisions will be communicated by 31 May 2022. Presentations are to be in English and no longer than 20 minutes. For more information, visit www.um.edu.mt/events/etc2022
We invite any person to submit an article on SHARE. Any subject matter may be dealt with, but articles must be of a philosophical nature, in English and no longer than 1,000-1,500 words. References, if any, are to be placed within the text. It shall be the sole prerogative and responsibility of the Editor to determine which contributions to include or exclude from the magazine. The ideas expressed in the authors’ articles represent their views and may not necessarily reflect or concur with the views of the board members of the Philosophy Sharing Foundation.
Whatever the mixed feelings and contradictory ideas that Darwin's evolution theory has given rise to, there surely can be no qualms about the fact that we, as human beings, share the same basic instincts of animals. However it has to be acknowledged that the human brain provides us with rational, cognitive, and conceptual mental processes that elevate us above all other living creatures.

In the opening article of this edition of SHARE 16 magazine, Nebojsa Kujundzic highlights the concept of ‘techne’ which originated in ancient Greek society and encompasses the unique human skills and abilities that have radically expanded and transformed our societies. The trajectory of technology from the very first tools developed by pre-historic man has radically transformed not only human lives but the whole life on the planet.

However, it is in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) whereby humanity has unleashed the greatest potential force to transform life on earth beyond the scope of human consciousness and imagination. Futuristic thoughts of humanity being wiped out by intelligent machines that they have themselves created, has become a popular theme of many movies and science fictions stories. The question of whether AI will lead in the future to a utopian society or a dystopian one, seems always to hang over our heads. Our contributors to this debatable question - Philip Larrey, Matthew Montebello, Steven S. Gouveia, Godwin Darmanin, Ingrid Vella, Vanessa Camilleri and Alexander Lazarov offer a diversity of interesting perspectives that share a common argument - humanity must retain control of AI if it wants to avoid any disruptive consequences that such technological innovations always bring.

The book review by François Zammit ‘Race After Technology’ authored by Ruha Benjamin aptly follows this discussion as it alerts us to the dangerous impact that technological developments can have on minorities while tending to reinforce the social and political powers of established hierarchies.

The position of humanity in nature is tackled from a different angle by Sandra Dingli with an interesting reference to the mind-body problem. Dingli deals with this conflicting duality by referring to the works of South African philosopher John McDowell who viewed reason as part of the natural processes and originating from a second nature inherent in our language and culture.

This edition of SHARE 16, features an interview with Claude Mangion who has been Head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Malta for the past five years. The interview with Claude Mangion focuses on the subject of philosophy within the local context and in the process provide perceptive insights on how philosophy can contribute positively towards humanity.

Another contributor to this issue of SHARE is philosopher Marianne Talbot who was asked to explain why in her previous contribution on philosophy and coronavirus (SHARE-14), she found Canadian acclaimed psychologist Jordan Peterson so controversial and worth exploring in her free time. In her article, Talbot underlines the importance of philosophy in enabling us to question and rethink certain arguments, even when posited by gifted communicators like Peterson.

SHARE 16 celebrates the birth centenary of two great international thinkers - Paulo Freire (1921-1997) and Raymond Williams (1921-1988).

Peter Mayo exposes Freire’s stance of the oppressors-oppressed relationship inherent in colonial rule. Freire’s greatest contribution to humanity was his calls for the decolonisation of education in oppressed native countries to help them regain their freedom in a true manner.

In their birth centenary celebration article of Raymond Williams, Eugenio Enrique Cortez-Ramirez and Juan Carlo Gomez Alonso alerts us to the Theory of Culture developed by Williams that emphasises how all cultural forms within a society are constituted by its historical-material relationships and processes.

SHARE 16 includes another book review by Ian Rizzo on Matt Qvortrup’s ‘Death by a Thousand Cuts.’ The main concern raised by this book is how an established democracy can slide towards dictatorial leadership following the legitimate election of populist strongmen.

Finally as has become customary, the magazine, ends with another series from the Philosopher’s Manifesto. This time, the focus is on the environment. The extreme high temperatures during the summer months of 2021 and the heavy flooding that occurred in many countries, provides evidence of the existential threat currently haunting humanity. The manifesto argues that as long as humans keep viewing their existence as being independent from nature, the global issues of climate change and the current environmental problems will remain ineffectively addressed and compromised by economic selfish pursuits. Our economic and political systems must adapt to the urgency of the pressing issues of the environment. The question remains: Will humanity, despite its rationality ever learn?
When Aristotle wrote about technê many centuries ago, he already noticed its profound complexity and impact. The fabric of technê was already quite thick and intricate, and it seemed to pervade Greek society in multiple ways, both visible and imperceptible. Artisans, craftspeople, farmers, musicians, and theatre performers, among many others, sought to master their respective and unique skills and abilities, and by doing so, they transformed the fabric of their entire society. Aristotle’s masterful eye may have been more focused on some other means of attaining virtue and scientific knowledge, perhaps purer and deeper in the philosophical context, yet there is no doubt Aristotle was puzzled by the effects technê may have on humanity and society.

Fast forward several millennia to twenty-first century technology, which has definitely inherited, and enormously expanded and multiplied, the fabric of technê I just mentioned. It is possible that Thorstein Veblen first linked the Greek technê to early twentieth-century modern technology. At any rate, the latter type of expansion, and the extent to which the fabric of technology appears to enter the fabric of society, is best evidenced by difficulties in defining technology.

I am fascinated by the extent to which technology has become so all-pervasive and all-encompassing that it is very difficult to objectivise it. So I often begin my first-year course, Technology, Values and Science, with the following question: What is technology? Is it best to use a broad concept of technique, proposed by Jacques Ellul, to define technology? Is technology the autonomous juggernaut, made prominent by the philosopher of technology Langdon Winner, that has long been running its course all over the planet? Is it the force of singularity made popular by Ray Kurzweil? Or is technology a part of the dialectics of human destiny, according to Martin Heidegger, whereby technology threatens to bring humanity to the brink of disaster? Is technology perhaps all of the above? Or maybe none of it?

Maybe it is better to ask what technology does to humanity instead of asking what it is? The following questions have been asked, over and over, for at least a couple of centuries. Is technology providing the tools and the means to eventually extinguish humanity through wars, pandemics, and the destruction of the environment? Or is technology the ultimate salvation since it has the capability to provide the technological fix for every problem humanity faces whether it is inherited or itself caused by technology?
I am afraid we have no hope of providing a precise definition of technology or deciding whether it is the force of doom or salvation. It seems capable of being both. In my opinion, the polarizing nature of technological intervention belongs to its very nature. Think of Pandora’s box — according to the Greek narrative humanity cannot help but risk opening the box, which is full of pitfalls, yet which also provides the gift of hope. Since both pitfalls and hope seem to be perpetually awakened by technological intervention into the world, it is difficult to be a technological realist. By technological realist, I mean someone who is well centred between the entrenched camps of “techno-optimists” and “techno-pessimists.” The latter disposition is especially hard to maintain in the last half century or so with the emergence of insight into the environmental disasters largely caused by technology. Is technology capable of undoing the systemic damage it has inflicted on the planet? ‘Maybe so’ is hardly the answer anyone would offer.

Instead, I propose to comment on a relatively well-known perspective, which may help elucidate the more recent transformation of the fabric of modern technology, provided by the Catholic philosopher Teilhard de Chardin. De Chardin postulated a new, and more sophisticated and evolved, sphere that emerged on our planet: the noosphere.

The noosphere is essentially a layer that has evolved based on the platform of geosphere and biosphere on planet Earth. The layer of noosphere is made possible by human consciousness and reason. One could say that the geosphere is the primordial, material basis upon which the biosphere evolved, while the biosphere itself gave rise to the immaterial layer of noosphere.

I wish to argue that the fabric of today’s and tomorrow’s technology is gradually establishing itself in the noosphere, where its future seems to be. It takes only a glimpse of the recent technological advances to add credibility to my thesis: think of the cloud and the impact it has already had on the storage, availability and security of data. Think as well of numerous other phenomena: social media, Wikipedia, Siri, to name just a few examples.

Some commentators argue that the Internet may be seen as the embodiment of the noosphere, yet I believe the examples I provide suggest the noosphere ought to be much broader than the Internet.

I can readily anticipate the most crucial response to my thesis: even if what I am saying is right, what does this mean for humanity? Isn’t the noosphere exclusively the purview of human beings? In other words, can there be consciousness and reason without humanity?

My answer to that question is simple. The fabric of technology already encompasses consciousness and reason; “pure” or “original” human consciousness unfettered by technological tools and aids is a myth and has been a myth for centuries. We humans are increasingly inhabiting the noosphere as an integral part of the technological fabric. Yet the noosphere may in the future feature an entirely new kind of denizen. The best we can do is guess and to speculate since we have no way to predict the future fabric of technology. The journey has just begun.

Nebojsa Kujundzic is Professor and Dean of Arts at the University of Prince Edward Island. He studied Philosophy and Literature at the University of Sarajevo, ex-Yugoslavia and earned his PhD at the University of Waterloo, Ontario. He has been appointed Affiliate Professor with the University of Malta in January 2019. His research interests include Philosophy of Technology, Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Language and Metaphysics.
Our Philosophical Question in this Issue:
‘How will the development of AI change the world? Will it lead to utopia or a dystopia?’

Philip Larrey argues that in spite of the fears that have been expressed on AI as it has become woven seamlessly in our lives, he still remains convinced that AI will have positive effects for humanity in the long run.

Matthew Montebello maintains that AI is another technological revolution that is transforming our lives for the better but which like any other innovation has also its downsides. He recommends three specific actions to ensure AI leads our world to utopia - education, legislation and proper use.

Steven S. Gouveia argues that the question of how AI will influence the world does not depend directly on the technology itself but on how society will participate in the process of creating, developing and using AI. Essentially, it all boils down to a question of ethical expertise and leadership.

Godwin Darmanin asserts that the development of AI will certainly change the world, particularly in legal systems and citizens’ protection. He does not view the changes of AI in the utopian or dystopian projections as presented in science fiction, but does foresee negative impacts, particularly on the labour market. Nevertheless he still believes that human creativity can always help to overcome the challenges thrown by AI innovation.

Ingrid Vella argues that neither the projection of a utopian or a dystopian future with AI, tallies with what history has demonstrated so far. The question should rather focus on what we as humans desire from AI.

Vanessa Camilleri argues that since AI can learn and act autonomously, it must be guided through infrastructures that promote equality, fairness and sound ethical principles. AI is a technology that must be driven and directed by humans for all humans.

Alexander Lazarov suggests that when considering AI, we need to distinguish between human and machine intelligence and view them in terms of partnership rather than as competitors or opponents.
Adrian Scerri is a visiting lecturer with the Department of International Relations. He obtained a Master's Graduate in Theology and is currently pursuing a doctorate that is linked to the studies of diplomacy of the Order of the Knights of Saint John.

This rather provocative question requires profound thought and is not easy to answer. The short answer, in my opinion, is two-fold: first, it is already changing the world; and second, the development of AI in the long run will be positive for humanity. A longer answer follows.

Evidence that AI is changing the world can be seen in almost any field in society today: the global financial system is now intrinsically tied to “smart” digital technology with the majority of stock market transactions taking place through AI software; self-driving cars, although slow to be implemented on a large scale for legal reasons, are becoming less exotic and more common as time goes on; hospitals in developed countries are moving to digital charts for their patients, where AIs organize and collate patients’ histories; AI for lawyers and judges is now widespread to assist the legal profession, whether presenting past court decisions or suggesting adequate sentencing; the US military is using AI in order to “predict” strategic scenarios days in advance [1]; the British navy is experimenting with AI systems that assist with operations and detect threats [2] as well as developing “smart missiles” that use sophisticated AI in order to be “able to defeat jamming and detection, while autonomously seeking and engaging its own targets” [3]; due in large part to the recent Covid-19 pandemic, educational institutions around the world turned to digital technologies to be able to continue teaching via web; “deep fakes”, i.e., completely artificial video clips, utilize AI to create fake content presented by well-known celebrities or politicians, that are every day more convincing; while still not perfect, Siri and Google Assistant are improving constantly thanks to better and more robust AI programming. And the list could go on and on.

The better the AI gets, the less you notice it: it becomes woven in the very fabric of our everyday world. At the same time, some doomsday scenarios concerning AI are not very likely to materialize in the real world. Elon Musk, Stephen Hawking and Bill Gates have all gone on record saying that AI will be a significant existential risk to humanity (perhaps even the greatest risk for our time). Yet, for all the hype and media coverage, these scenarios will not come to pass. Such was the point of a recent article by Christopher Mims, entitled, “Why Artificial Intelligence Isn’t Intelligent”, with the subtitle, “Some experts in AI think its name fuels confusion and hype of the sort that led to past ‘AI winters’ of disappointment.” [4]

Even John McCarthy, who coined the term “artificial intelligence” back in 1956 at Dartmouth, voiced his concern about the term (because machines are not intelligent at all) but the name stuck and so we have become resigned to using it. In fact, when we refer to “artificial intelligence”, we are referring to a series of algorithms which use logical calculations in order achieve programmed results.
Human beings also can use logical calculations in order to arrive at certain conclusions, like when we create categorical syllogisms, but intelligence is so much more than that.

Gary Marcus and Ernest Davis wrote a fantastic book in 2019 entitled Rebooting AI. Building Artificial Intelligence We Can Trust [5] in which they make the case for a new type of AI which will overcome seemingly insurmountable barriers in terms of general AI. Both Marcus and Davis are experts in the field, Marcus having founded a company called Geometric Intelligence which was purchased by Uber. Precisely because they are experts in the field, they both are keenly aware of the limits of current AI projects and they conclude that without a significant jump in the nature of AI (and machine learning), the goal of matching (and even exceeding) human intelligence in machines will not be achieved. I also make this point in my latest book, *Artificial Humanity. An Essay on the Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence*. [6]

For these reasons (and many others) I am convinced that AI will be useful for humanity as we continue our path forward in this digital revolution. If we become “enslaved” to AI and allow machines to take over our world, it will be because we want them to (like we see in the TV series *Westworld*). Such a risk lurks in the shadows, but I am optimistic that we will use AI for our own benefit, and not to our peril.

References

[1] See https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/41771/the-pentagon-is-experimenting-with-using-artificial-intelligence-to-see-days-in-advance. “According to NORTHCOM leadership, the AI and machine learning tools tested in the experiments could someday offer the Pentagon a robust ‘ability to see days in advance,’ meaning it could predict the future with some reliability based on evaluating patterns, anomalies, and trends in massive data sets.”

[2] See https://gadgets.ndtv.com/science/news/royal-navy-uk-test-ai-artificial-intelligence-counter-missile-supersonic-ballistic-cruise-nato-test-froimidable-shield-2455467. “The Startle application provides real-time recommendations and alerts to sailors monitoring the ‘air picture’ from the operations room. It is designed to help ‘ease the load’ on sailors. And the Sycoia builds on these alerts to help sailors identify the threat and advise the best weapon to deal with it quickly ‘than even the most experienced operator.’”


[5] G. Marcus & E. David(2020) Rebooting AI. Building Artificial Intelligence We Can Trust: Vintage Books, New York. “What’s missing from AI today – and likely to stay missing, until and unless the field takes a fresh approach – is broad (or ‘general’ intelligence). AI needs to be able to deal not only with specific situations for which there is an enormous amount of cheaply obtained relevant data, but also problems that are novel, and variations that have not been seen before”, p. 16.

Matthew Montebello

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is considered to be the fundamental factor that brought about the fourth industrial revolution, coined Industry 4.0 by Wolfgang Wahlster (Kagermann, Lukas & Wahlster, 2011), whereby traditional industrial manufacturing is enhanced through the integration of AI techniques.

The injection of AI smart technologies into practically any existent domain has taken the world by storm as industry, manufacturing, and the labour market in general has realised the potential of AI and the benefits one can reap from extracting further added-value that was otherwise not humanly possible. This next phase of global revolutions will undoubtedly follow the characteristics of its predecessor revolutions, having its obvious positives and multiple benefits, together with the unintentional downsides and unexpected ramifications, leading neither to utopia nor dystopia. However, a deeper analysis into the application of AI into three crucial application areas, namely, education, health and governance, will help shed more light on how AI is influencing and shaping these areas and potentially changing the world as we know it.

Technology-enhanced education is the use of technology to enrich the learning process through the employment of rich tools, as well as the development of academic software that all complement the work performed by educators in person or virtually over a communication network. Some examples of how technology can be employed within the educational context is through the use of digital media employed as teaching aids to enhance the teaching process.

Similarly, software packages, like virtual learning environments, are developed to assist students and teachers communicate effectively thereby supporting the academic process. Furthermore, technologies, like virtual reality and augmented reality, are engaged to embed the educational content as part of modern teaching methods. The integration of AI techniques over and above these technologies is an added layer over and above the benefits reaped by the technology-enhanced methodologies. Digital media can be personalized and tailored to the needs and interests of the individual students rather than a single resource that fits all. Virtual learning environments can propose optimal and most effective pedagogies that a specific teacher can employ with a particular student. Learning analytics can be processed and analysed to extract additional academic information about individual students that can assist educators to effectively apply them in future educational instances.

The application of technology to enhance healthcare, both physical and mental, has improved over the years just as fast as medical tools have evolved and improved over time in a sole effort to assist the patient in the best way possible. Dedicated software is employed to keep track of patients’ conditions, medication intake, and monitoring of vitals. The use of AI can furthermore adapt treatment to the characteristic needs and suitability of a patient after processing massive amounts of the same patient data. Similarly, use of computer-generated acoustics and visually immersive techniques can assist patients in a variety of mental well-being scenarios. Furthermore, continuous smart monitoring systems can be employed to assist doctors understand better patient health patterns in an effort to optimize the medical care provided.
The third application area being analysed that AI has had a considerable impact upon is Governance, which is an important aspect in our society, together with education and healthcare. Policy decisions and implementations are much more efficiently executed and uniformly through the use of technology. Additionally, electronic services, empowering citizens and enhancing participation are other benefits that technology have helped elevate the quality of governance in general. AI can also assist in this case in a variety of government departments to efficiently achieve stipulated public policy objectives. These may include personalised social services, smart citizen assistants, automated routine tasks, and ensure that the required standards are maintained thereby unifying accountability and ethics that human counterparts can occasionally oversee or ignore. Other AI-enhanced governance functionalities include efficient law enforcement, renovating privacy and security mechanisms, enhanced planning and disaster response, as well as, maintaining public infrastructure. In all three application areas it has been made abundantly clear that AI can provide the optimized capabilities and efficient functionality to change our world into a better one that will lead to utopia. However, history has shown us that every revolution has two sides to it. Privacy issues, data protection, and ethical issues are prime issues that can easily dent such a utopia, added with potential abuse and misuse of the use of AI-generated knowledge that can eventually lead to a dystopia. How can we reduce the negative ramifications of AI? How can we ensure that AI leads our world closer to a utopia rather than a dystopia? What specific actions should we take as a society to take full constructive advantage of AI? Three distinct recommendations are proposed here, namely, education, legislation, and proper adoption.

Demystifying AI is the first step in educating the general public in its use, benefits, limitations, and ultimately its convergence from its infamous fictional counterpart representation that unfortunately has captured the public opinion. A realistic outlook in the potential of AI would help the general public not only understand that AI cannot match the cognitive and general problem-solving skills of a person, but also appreciate the limitations and the rationale behind this human programmed and controlled technology.

Proper legislation is required to safeguard and guarantee that nobody can take advantage and exploit AI to their advantage at the cost of others. Regulatory bodies, like the European Commission, are obliged to draft harmonized rules on the use of AI (EC, 2021) in a form of a regulatory framework whose aim is to ensure that AI systems are legal and safe, follow existent laws on fundamental rights and safety requirements, as well as facilitate the development of a single market for lawful, safe and trustworthy AI applications and prevent market fragmentation.

Finally, proper adoption of AI systems, is the third recommendation that goes hand in hand with the previous two recommendations. The essence of this recommendation is that ultimately, we need to focus on the use of AI as a smart decision-support system rather than a definite authority source of information which is considered infallible and perfect.

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Steven S. Gouveia

The inquiry of knowing how Artificial Intelligence can change the world and how it can transform that same world, for good (utopia) or for evil (dystopia), is an interesting question because it has, in its structure, a somewhat indeterminate element: the concept of “Artificial Intelligence” is not clear at all or explicit enough in its current usage.

Take a look at the following example: an important part of the history of Artificial Intelligence was focused on an obsession with chess, given that researchers in the field considered that this game would perfectly represent the concept of “human intelligence” and, therefore, an artificial recreation of that intelligence would create an “artificial ‘human’ intelligence”.

Konrad Zuse created, in 1945, one of the first programs that could generate legal moves in chess – it was, of course, very weak, comparing to the famous DeepBlue who defeated Garry Kasparov in 1997 or the current Stockfish. The founder of Information Theory, Claude Shannon, also contributed to this debate by publishing a paper in 1950 titled “A Chess-Playing Machine”. In this paper, Shannon argued that we could conceive two main approaches in order to achieve the goal of building an efficient chess-program: we could create a kind of brute-force program, based on the idea of performing millions of calculations per play in a detached way without any tactical skill; or we could create a program that would have a strategic and goal-focused approach, closer to what humans do when they play chess.

Two years later, Alan Turing and David Champernowne co-created a program called “Turochamp”, composed of a set of instructions. This was, of course, a purely formal exercise, since computers did not exist at that time, and the efficiency of the program could not be tested. However, the program was recreated in an actual computer later and was also very weak (cf. Gouveia, 2020).

In 1956, John McCarthy, inspired by Alexander Kronrod, described chess as the “drosophila of Artificial Intelligence” (cf. McCarthy, 1990). Why? Because the research made in a common fruit fly is quite simple in comparison to the research made in human beings, for example. Nevertheless, this “simple” research can create a lot of significant knowledge that can be used, then, in complex systems. The essence of the drosophila’s metaphor is exactly this: research in artificial chess could shed light on the way humans perform their reasoning, action or even how they can be conscious (cf. Ensmenger, 2012).

Nevertheless, the current technology that is labelled as “Artificial Intelligence” is far from the kind of technology I just described. Nowadays, we have autonomous cars, autonomous weapons, and even medical technology that is used in different stages of the medical process (diagnosis, prognosis, treatment, etc). I debated some of these in my documentary published on Youtube “The Age of Artificial Intelligence.”
One of those technologies that interests me are sex robots - robots with a face, a body, and a voice that perform actions contributing directly towards improvement in the satisfaction of the sexual needs of a human being. There are several arguments in favour of the use of this technology: it can help to reduce the human sex trafficking linked to prostitution, a horrible reality of the contemporary world; it can help many people to fulfil their most intimate fetishes and fantasies; and it can help people with specific disabilities (mental, physical, etc.) to accomplish something that is essential to what it means to be human, namely, to have sexual pleasure.

In contrast to these reasons, one can argue against the development and use of this technology for several reasons: first, the “feminist argument” is that sex robots make use of a sexist and misogynistic conception of women (most sex robots are women), since this technology hyper-sexualises that gender, making it completely submissive to the wishes of the buyer; the argument further claims that society needs incentives to look at women differently, rather than a technology that reinforces these negative stereotypes and not the other way around; secondly, this technology could lead to a decrease in sexual interaction between human beings, which could jeopardize human reproduction itself or create a sexual obsession similar to what happens with addiction to pornography. Now, this specific technology perfectly represents the duality of the question of this issue: the optimistic view about sex robots will argue that this technology can help to create a better world, more just for everyone (utopia); the pessimistic view, on the contrary, will argue that this technology will create a worse world and that we should rethink the development and the use of this kind of technology (dystopia). This is, in my view, the most interesting aspect of Artificial Intelligence and technology in general: its value is neutral, philosophically, and depends more on second-order aspects than on the technology itself.

For example: it will depend on how the technology will be applied in the real world; how governments will regulate the technology; who will have access to the technology itself; etc. All these questions are of a second-order regarding the technology itself: they are related to traditional questions of political and moral philosophy like, for example, how to create a fair distribution (of the technology) in the world. And this is where ethical expertise ought to be relevant: all of these technologies have an ethical impact in the world. Currently, we have engineers and lawyers and medical doctors thinking about the normative consequences of the technology. And this is very dangerous: we need ethical expertise in the normative reflection of Artificial Intelligence, since the lack of a cogent ethical knowledge may lead to horrible decisions in the world – something that happened historically with the development of cloning or the technology associated with nuclear bombs.

In conclusion, we need to avoid the same old mistakes of detaching the issue of ethics from the production of technologies. Ethics should be given a role in every stage of development and use of any technology (cf. Gouveia, 2019). This is, of course, a political/sociological aspect that requires a political/sociological change. My hope is that society will notice this before it is too late.

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Such a question appears to be quite a modest one but is undoubtedly one which requires profound contemplation. This is the case since Utopian narratives are commonly found in fiction, foretold with the intention of proposing concepts about how an ideal society ought to be and operate. Hence, while pondering on that rudimentary aspect, I can immediately identify a few issues in relation to the question being posed in the title, mainly: how can a notion which is so much intrinsically related to fiction lead the way to a factual human state, and moreover, is a Utopian society one which is single or multi-faceted? Thus, in essence, can AI alone be the driving force that can change the world for better or for worse?

While keeping in mind my opening reservations, I shall nevertheless try to answer this poignant question and will do so by pondering on both the benefits that I believe AI will bring as it becomes more prevailing, but also about the potential drawbacks. Indeed, the first benefit that I envisage will occur thanks to AI will be that of a better natural environment. This will be the case since AI will for instance drive our future automobiles and take us to our destinations through routes which are the least traffic congested and that will lead to less harmful emissions. At the same time, AI in driverless cars will ensure that fossil fuel is used optimally and only utilised when required while at the same time leveraging on solar power when the right conditions permit it. Indeed, environmental benefits will not only manifest themselves through the use of future automobiles but will also be apparent in our future smart dwellings. For instance, AI-driven air-purifiers can already monitor air quality and other relevant data and then adapt their filtration system for optimal efficiency. At the moment such purifiers are not yet so common, but in the future, these will become as ordinary as having home water, gas and electricity.

Another area where I can envisage benefits is the one related to the legal system and the protection of citizens. For instance, Christopher Rigano has quite recently observed that research is leading the way in applying AI to address criminal justice, such as identifying individuals and their actions in videos relating to criminal activity or public safety, DNA analysis, gunshot detection, and crime forecasting. In this regard he adds that “Artificial intelligence has the potential to be a permanent part of our criminal justice ecosystem, providing investigative assistance and allowing criminal justice professionals to better maintain public safety.” (Rigano, 2019). Indeed, it is an open secret that in the coming years most governments in western societies will not shy away from deploying AI systems to gather and process information on individuals and criminal networks whose criminal operations also extend beyond national borders.

While I firmly believe that the incoming decades, we will see what I have described so far become a reality, I cannot ignore the fact that there will be those who will be experiencing the effects of AI in a negative manner. At least that will be the case until AI establishes itself more firmly in western societies and eventually in the rest of the world. I am here particularly referring to those who will lose their jobs because AI will make them redundant. For instance, Colin Gavaghan et al have noted that “The history of previous industrial revolutions and the deployment of other general-purpose technologies such as electricity, telephony, and the production line, suggests that the deployment of AI will have significant near-term risks including displacement of workers and transition costs for legacy industries.” (Gavaghan et al, 2021). With regards to this I am fully aware that there will be those who will point to various studies which suggest that while it is true that certain jobs will cease to exist, new ones will be created. Indeed, I do not deny that will happen, but my point of contention is the fact that most of the new AI-enabled jobs will require knowledgeable workers with highly...
specialised skills, whereas those jobs which will be eliminated will be mostly (albeit not only) those based on manual work or roles which involve repetitive tasks usually performed by low-skilled workers. Indeed, one question that I always ask to those who are quick to criticise me for my apparent scepticism is whether a middle-aged bus or taxi driver will manage to easily land a lucrative new job thanks to the technological wonders that AI will offer. The same question would also similarly apply to other professions such as for instance customer care representatives. Thus, what I am suggesting here is that during the transitional period there will be a visible divide between the new whiz kids in an AI-driven world and the so-called veterans whose dying professions will be eventually performed by computers or by AI-driven machinery.

Due to length constraints imposed in providing my answer I cannot expound my thoughts any further. However, I invite all those interested in this topic to go through a study published by the European Parliament and in which the authors map the main ethical dilemmas and moral questions associated with the deployment of Artificial Intelligence (Bird et al., 2020). Some of these quandaries, such as for instance the impact on the labour market, the legal system and the environment have been briefly illustrated in my response to the original question, but in the report by the European Parliament other pertinent areas are also investigated such as the effect that AI might have on human psychology, on privacy, on human rights, as well as on trust and on control.

So, I shall now conclude my contribution by asserting that the development of AI will certainly change the world. Nevertheless, such change will neither lead to a utopia nor a dystopia, both of which will remain constrained to (science) fiction. This will be the case since the development of AI will present us with numerous benefits but initially also with several challenges. These will be challenges that will have a negative impact on different sections of society, but these negative effects will be overwhelmingly minimised once the world has fully transitioned to one which is truly AI-powered and where almost everyone has adapted to such a reality. As it has been the case before, that future world will not be a perfect one but nevertheless it will still be one full of human creativity.

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Fast forward to the year 2050. Is AI empowering or endangering humanity?

Before you answer the question, let’s consider the impact of AI on our present lives. Irrelevant of whether you are for or against AI, there is a very good chance that you have already used AI today without your knowing. If you ran a Google search, AI has decided the order in which webpages are listed. If you checked the weather forecast, AI has used past information to predict what the weather will probably be like in the next days. If you logged onto social media, an AI system has recommended to you who to follow. If you searched for products to purchase online, AI is now selecting which ads to show you while you’re reading online news. AI is everywhere.

Specifically within the biomedical field, for example, the Internet of Things can help acquire information about your health via sensors in wearables such as smart watches, and alert you if some measured quantity is considered abnormal. Computer vision can assist radiologists by analysing medical images to help diagnose disease. Virtual reality, apart from being used for entertainment purposes, can help with the rehabilitation of movement disorders and unlike a physiotherapist is available 24/7. Natural language processing can be used in medical chatbots.

These are just some examples in the biomedical field that can reduce the workload of medical personnel and allow them to focus on tasks that, to date, humans are still considered to be better at fulfilling than computers.

Advocates of AI tend to extend this goodness into sunshine and lollipops by projecting a utopian future in which robots and computers work in harmony in service of humanity, eradicating all worldly problems, possibly even death. As AI helps make sense of data and discover patterns that as humans we might not spot, extreme AI advocates project that AI will render us omniscient.

On the other hand, some of the issues which arise in a biomedical setting include whether helpful AI systems are accessible to all, whether patient confidentiality is at risk and whether medical insurance companies could use AI to predict whether it’s financially feasible for them to insure you.

Not only in biomedical applications is there an ever-growing need for explanations within AI to shed light on what might otherwise be seen as a black box that takes in information and shoots out decisions. If an AI system in a bank rejects a customer’s loan application, good customer care would include a fair
explanation for such rejection. Thus, explainable AI (XAI) is AI that attempts to explain in simple language how it is making decisions.

In contrast to AI advocates, AI cynics tend to project a dystopian future in which robots and computers will become intelligent weapons of mass destruction, working against humanity to take over. This view correlates with that typically presented in sci-fi books and movies. For example, in the series NEXT, an AI system applies the knowledge that it has acquired to turn people against each other, eliminating anything in the way of its growth and survival.

However, both utopian and dystopian views contradict what history has thus far proved. Consider the technology behind cars. Even though decades ago, we had expected to be driving flying cars by now, we still do not have flying cars. Instead, every year the technology marginally improves, rendering cars safer and easier to drive. For example, car cameras allow us to park more easily and to drive centred within the lane.

Futurist Kevin Kelly refers to the small incremental improvement in science and technology as ‘protopia’ and claims that technology has probably never led to utopia or dystopia, but rather to protopia which serves us in the way we desire.

What humans desire, can be benevolent or malicious. Hence drones have been used as high speed ambulances with automatic defibrillators but might have also been used to target and kill specific people. Any scientific field could be used to help or harm society. Biologists managed to ban the use of biological weapons after World War I whereas physicists failed at banning nuclear weapons. In the past, AI researchers, including Elon Musk, have called for a ban on offensive autonomous weapons. German philosopher Thomas Metzinger has also advocated the use of ethics guidelines for AI development within the EU.

Thus, fast forward to the year 2050. The question is: Are humans empowering or endangering one another?

Ingrid Vella holds a doctorate in physics and is a lecturer at the Department of Artificial Intelligence within the Faculty of ICT at the University of Malta.
That AI is becoming more pronounced in our everyday lives is an indisputable fact. This is not because we have just stumbled upon AI - AI has been with us now for many decades, more precisely it was a term coined by a group of scientists during a summer fieldwork back in 1956. However in the past decade we have seen a surge in computer processing power, and we have also witnessed a greater accessibility to data which had previously been lurking hidden in the back stages, kept closely guarded by those who held control over it.

Don’t get me wrong, data is and will still be one of the major challenges for the advancement of AI and technology in general, for many more years to come. However compared to previous decades, we are living in an unprecedented period in history when the availability of plenty of data, can be made use of to help the progress of AI. But what we should ask ourselves, is whether society is truly prepared for AI, and whether humanity in general, is ready to co-share life with an artificially-generated actor.

Will AI change the world? I believe that it is already changing our perspective of the world. The way we see the world, even though we may not be fully conscious about it, is now in terms of the data we exchange and make available, in terms of the sensors that capture our daily actions and movements, and in terms of the online interactions and exchanges that happen on a daily basis. People are aware that someone out there may be listening, and there is always some kind of awe, when after discussing a particular topic, several related ads pop up in every Internet-related application one may be using.

Yet I believe that very few people seem to fully understand how and in which ways AI could change the world. A very simplistic view could entail the belief that AI and job automation can take over people’s jobs, creating an employment crisis.
Another simplistic view is that people will soon unwittingly start being served by robots, whether it’s at a restaurant or through customer care service.

The reality probably lies somewhere in between and takes different degrees of forms. It is true that one of the many uses of AI is the automation of jobs that may require more precision and more accuracy, to off-load some of the cognitive strain from people. But it does not necessarily mean that there would no longer be required human involvement. It is up to the decision and policy makers to ensure that the way jobs are handled is in the best interests of the workers and of the employees, in such a way as to avoid any possible abuse.

But that is not all that AI can do, or that it will do. Automation is a possible way forward, but we tend to forget that AI can indeed be used for good, and that its good use can lead to an increased quality of life for many persons. If we take the health sector, AI can find its use in so many applications that one can easily get lost. Currently we are seeing AI that is being used to aid medical research in terms of its faster and more efficient data science approach to drug discovery, medical coding, image processing, pattern identification, prediction and diagnosis amongst others. Although these might be seen as rather detached from the human contact, such processes are crucial for the patient’s investigation, diagnosis and possible recovery especially in the case of serious illness such as in the fields of oncology and neurology.

Making use of the data to study, investigate, explore, experiment with and diagnose, can not only provide a solution to facilitate the identification of diseases, but also diagnose and aid in the design of a cure for such diseases. We must also not forget the aspect of robotics in healthcare, in particular, surgery. These surgical robots may indeed help save lives, especially when there is shortage of staff, such as surgeons and nurses to assist in operations and surgeries. But this is not to say that these robots are taking over people’s jobs. These ideas are not ones that belong to the far future. We have to appreciate that the technologies that enable these ideas to take form are already in place.

At the Department of AI, University of Malta, we have for example a number of projects where we are investigating the role that AI can play in for example educating about mental health or providing on the job training about how to handle certain disorders in class. We also investigate how to use AI to help direct patient-care, using the VR medium to support motor and speech therapy. In all of this, our vision is that of utilising the power of AI as a technology and work hand-in-hand with human experts to provide the right service to each individual being when that person needs it most.

Would all of this development in AI be considered as a Utopic vision? Possibly. On the other hand, we have to understand that there are two sides to the coin. In all of this, we have to emphasise that if AI is all about aiding human beings, then we cannot let the technology, whatever its form is, take over. We have to ensure that in such a world we need to have the necessary structures ensuring equality, fairness and ethics and we also need to ensure that they are being adopted throughout. Failing this, the vision for the world we have can easily turn to dystopia, creating an even deeper chasm between diverse societal groups and cultures.

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It is difficult to comment on whether AI will bring a utopic or dystopic world. The challenge arises because AI appears in varied and often contradictory contexts. Utopia and dystopia also fall in a similar framework, although this agenda seems clearer.

The lack of consensus among philosophers when describing intelligence does not prevent us from currently facing a variety of narrow AI solutions that act as specialized human-supervised assistants: speech and image recognition, language interpretation, driverless vehicles etc. Their design is grounded in the notion that intelligence refers to autonomous data detection, collection and processing to produce predictions about changes of state. At this stage, AI overpowers us in some areas while remaining completely under our control, and there is an ongoing debate about whether a universal general AI (AGI) will ever emerge.

Recently, deep learning algorithms, supported by neural network hardware have helped to discover a new phenomenon of big data (BD) which has enforced analytic rethinking. To understand this, one should bear in mind the essential characteristics of BD:

- Enormous volumes of data that no human could memorize and explore;
- Varied, unstructured, real-time, rapidly changing data flows; and
- Diverse data streams to investigate of heterogeneous origins.

Being unemotional, AI repeats a question many times without getting annoyed or dysfunctional. Since we are unable to mentally manage BD, we experience a blind witnessing what machines do during data input and processing. We cannot see or anticipate the computer’s activity by studying the rules they follow because AI constantly learns from its experience, continually produces, and applies new rules (Duranton, 2020) [1]. Hence, humans wait passively until AI generates results.

This black box leads to a conclusion that we can never know whether AI has unveiled all its informational production or just a part of it. In this trend, the discussions on the AGI occurrence have been deepened.

I do not exclude a sudden revolutionary AGI invention, but I can draw alternative scenarios for AI’s evolution towards universality:

- Step-by-step intensifying algorithm’s specialization in new investigative fields to expand its narrow competence. Thus, copying human educational practices, an AI system would become widely applicable, while never becoming completely general.
- Designing an innovative AI to coordinate the activity of several/all existing specialized systems to create a limited universality by synchronized multifunction.
I recognise that these paths of AI enhancement as being easier to construct rather than AGI. I name this eventual next generation technology Advanced AI (AAI). I expect it to appear soon. It will bring considerable new circumstances and contemporary society must prepare to meet this environment keeping in view the following highlights:

- Humans produce predictions based on studying cause-event lines. Computers do the same applying mathematical logic. In addition, BD deep learning generates forecasts, grounded on detecting common patterns while comparing distinct data flows. It calculates the probability of the identified developments in a stream to replicate within a diverse one without being able to describe why these changes happen. We cannot do this. Therefore, philosophers can no more claim that AI simulates/imitates human intelligence because it already operates in a diverse mode.

- As explained above, we cannot control AI/AAI. We will run our AAI-human communication partially knowing its informational product. The same refers to observing the AAI-AAI network informational exchange. Logically, AAI becomes unpredictable, and perhaps, misunderstandings often occurring among humans are probable to arise in the human-machine relations too.

- In addition to generating predictions on how to react to approaching events, the highest intelligence is expressed in influencing developments to modify the future. Therefore, AAI must be expected to manipulate its future together with us. We will have to assess what is occurring combined with foreseeing what the automation is about to perform. Simultaneously, AAI will be doing the same about us.

- Further, continuous judgements on the degree of AAI’s universality will be necessary, because various specialized sets may produce different outputs for similar inputs.

Many thinkers note that to reach understanding of human-to-human communication, the key is more listening rather than talking. I recognise such behaviour works perfectly in our contacts with AAI. Computers are not smarter than we are, but AAI will be smart enough and foreign to us. Perhaps, its conclusions will seem surprising as to content and analytic perspective. However, most of them will be correct.

Evidently, the environment we live in will change once AAI systems start acting in our favour, but also as our competitors and opponents. To avoid conflict, we will need to predict their reaction while recognizing their peculiarities and their ability to run in a parallel, multi-task mode that can result in synchronous driving of multiple robots. Finally, as AAI will be a cloud-based technology, we will communicate with non-singular intelligent bodies, which borrow from common data sources, including deep learning experiences.

The contemporary progress of AI capacities, which seem close to human mental faculties, requires a vast amount of research on how AAI will affect human societies together with a thorough consideration on the new environment profile. It must involve Russell's(2021) [2] claim that currently, AI is already successful in applying predictions which it judged as uncertain when they were generated.

I think that creating any next generation of these technologies will bring about a shift from dystopia to utopia. My argument comes from empirical observation of the evolution and distribution of the Internet and cell phones. At first, both were used only by the richest and most educated groups. Ten years or so later, most kids living in the Northern Hemisphere own a tablet. Nonetheless, the first ones to manage the AAI power will dominate the rest.

However, the possible close encounter of intentions and targeted goals among humans and AAI are of more significant concern.

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Book Review
Race After Technology
Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code
Author | Ruha Benjamin

Reviewed by François Zammit

Benjamin’s book, ‘Race After Technology’ is an indictment of this policy-making and deceitful promises.

Benjamin’s publication is one title among a growing range of voices that are showing how new technologies are brandished as positive tools but are in fact agents of social injustice and a threat to democratic values. ‘Automating Inequality’ and ‘Digital Dead End’ of Virginia Eubanks, and ‘Weapons of Math Destruction’ of Cathy O’Neil, are some of the titles that like ‘Race After Technology’ confront these issues. They offer readers a glimpse into how widely adopted technologies like face recognition or AI powered services are not the symbols of benevolence as portrayed by their creators or the organisations that invest and adopt them.

In her book, Benjamin, uses Critical Race Theory and science and technology studies to analyse and build a critique of technological innovations and the underlying mechanisms that inform and structure these products. In her work, she provides a detailed analysis of the structures and functions of racial discrimination in society, with a focus on discrimination against Black Americans in US society. Benjamin draws a direct correlation between past laws and prohibitions, known as Jim Crow, the contemporary structures and practices which are a rollback on the social rights gained over the years, referred to as the New Jim Crow, and the implementation of new digital technologies, monitoring technologies and AI programmes that reinforce racial discrimination. She refers to these technologies as the New Jim Code, with direct reference to the codes and algorithms driving these AI programmes.

The book gives an in-depth analysis and exposition of the theoretical framework that informs Benjamin’s arguments.
From a philosophical perspective Benjamin’s work questions the ethical and political values and implications of the implementation and adoption of new technologies that use AI to automate decisions and practices linked to targeted marketing, welfare services or job recruitment.

However, more fundamentally the arguments and evidence presented in the book, put into question our understanding and definition of humanity. The vast array of examples presented in the book as evidence, expose the fragility of our concept of what is human. The inferences, predictions and decision made by AI technologies are based on the algorithms created by the programmer and designers and supported by the data that already exists in the digital world.

This implies that the claims that AI and technology are value neutral, colour blind and progressive are false because the building blocks determining how AI works rely on ethnocentric, biased and limited interpretations of the world, both from the aspect of the creators and from the data pool on which decisions are based.

The claims made by Benjamin are not only supported by a strong theoretical framework that includes authors like Franz Fanon and Michel Foucault but are also evidenced through unlimited examples of implemented technologies and their effects.

One of the strongest claims made in the book is its consideration and treatment of racism and racial discrimination as forms of technology created by hierarchies to maintain their social and political power. This claim allows for the possibility of interpreting and reading social policies and newly implemented technologies as redevelopments of older technological structures, namely racial discrimination.

‘Race After Technology’ is a sobering and enlightening book, that illustrates the dangers that new technologies pose. The claims and arguments are not presented in a dystopian or apocalyptic tone; however it does illustrate the reality of the dangers faced by minorities and the threat to social justice that these technologies pose.

François Zammit works in the education sector. His research explores the nexus between the ethical and political.
John McDowell on Reason and Nature

By Sandra M. Dingli

from reconciling the dualistic forces of reason and nature is the naturalism of modern science where phenomena are explained in law-like terms.

McDowell’s position incorporates the controversial claim that our rationality is natural too. This comes about by his ‘reminding’ us of a concept drawn from Aristotelian ethics – that of second nature. We are initiated into second nature through our upbringing (that is, our Bildung, as McDowell prefers to call it) through which we acquire our rational faculties. Since Bildung (which translates into ‘self-formation or cultivation’) actualises a potential which is present in the first nature of human beings, it is perfectly natural.

Kant’s views on sensibility and understanding play a key role in McDowell’s work. Kant assumed that there are two distinct faculties, sensibility and understanding, through which we obtain knowledge. Sensibility, or perception, involves the sense organs, while understanding involves the manner in which the mind makes sense of the information it receives. McDowell clearly states that ‘the original Kantian thought was that empirical knowledge results from a cooperation between receptivity and spontaneity’ (MW, p.9). His aim is to present a ‘picture’ which reconciles spontaneity and receptivity.

Why should our thoughts about the world prove to be an accurate guide to reality if the world has its own mind-independent nature? McDowell claims that ‘our philosophical anxieties are due to the intelligible grip on our thinking of a modern naturalism, and we can work at loosening that grip’ (MW, p.177). This is done through ‘second nature’ which, he claims, goes back to Aristotle. In Aristotelian ethics, the acquisition of ‘practical wisdom’ opens our eyes to the requirements of reason. McDowell uses ‘practical wisdom’ as a ‘model for the understanding, the faculty that enables us to recognize and create the kind of intelligibility that is a matter of placement in the space of reasons’ (MW, p.79).

John McDowell (b. 1942) is a South African philosopher, currently at the University of Pittsburgh. This article explores his ideas on the mind-body problem and the new direction he proposes to unravel this persistent issue that still faces philosophers today.

Philosophers have proposed various theories in response to the mind-body problem. Consensus has, however, not been achieved as there appears to be no satisfactory solution to the question: How can our thinking be linked to an external law-governed world and how can we know whether the subject matter of our thoughts pertains to a reality that is independent of our thinking? There is considerable evidence that the external physical world is subject to natural laws. On the other hand, human thinking and reasoning appear to belong to a special rational sphere of their own which is not subject to natural laws.

In Mind and World (MW)(1994,1996), McDowell attempts to ‘dissolve’ dualisms including that of reason and nature. The conception of nature that prevents us
McDowell claims that ‘second nature’ is ‘all but explicit in Aristotle’s account of how ethical character is formed, where practical wisdom is considered to be ‘second nature to its possessors’ (MW, p.84). In his view, ‘human beings are intelligibly initiated into this stretch of the space of reasons by ethical upbringing, which instills the appropriate shape into their lives. The resulting habits of thought and action are second nature’ (MW, p.84). McDowell’s concept of ‘second nature’ broadens the meaning of what is normally conceived as ‘natural’ in order to accommodate spontaneity and thought, that is, to accommodate our mental faculties too.

Bildung plays a key role in this process as it involves the process of ‘having one’s eyes opened to reasons at large by acquiring a second nature’ (MW, p.84) which is a ‘central element in the maturation of human beings’ where language ‘already embodies putative rational linkages between concepts’ (MW, p.125). Bildung comes about as a result of our being initiated into the language, customs and traditions of the culture into which we are born and raised. It is through Bildung that we develop the skill to discern between what is right and what is wrong and through which we acquire our values and ethical principles.

For McDowell, human beings are born mere animals, yet they ‘mature into being at home in the space of reasons or … living their lives in the world’ (MW, p.125) by means of initiation into language and culture through which the human potential for acquiring mind is actualised. ‘If we could achieve a firm hold on a naturalism of second nature … it would be to have achieved ‘the discovery that gives philosophy peace’ (MW, p.86).

McDowell’s quest to find peace for philosophy is influenced by the later Wittgenstein who said: ‘The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring itself in question’ (1953, 1995, §133).

McDowell is convinced of the picture he proposes, but whether he succeeds in convincing others is another matter. This makes it difficult to accept his ideas on second nature and Bildung as ‘peace giving’.

Criticism has been directed against McDowell by philosophers such as Brandom (1998) who states: ‘McDowell contents himself with making his commitments explicit … without showing just how he would propose to show himself entitled to them’ (p.370).

McDowell’s views raise a number of questions. Is McDowell’s concept of ‘second nature’ sufficient to explain the situation of human beings within nature, yet not completely governed by the realm of law due to our second nature? Does McDowell’s ‘second nature’ create a new dualism, that of nature and second nature? Is McDowell merely making a change in the language we use to refer to the mental by calling it ‘second nature’? If we adopt McDowell’s ideas, do we still require the concept of (first) nature or does it become superfluous? McDowell has pointed towards novel possibilities related to the mind-body problem, but a satisfactory solution still seems to be far away.

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An Interview with Claude Mangion

Claude Mangion is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Malta and has been appointed Head of the Department of Philosophy since 2017. He received his PhD at the University of Sussex. His research interests focus mainly on contemporary western philosophy, philosophy of communication and speculative realism. He is the author of the book ‘Philosophical Approaches to Communication’ published by Intellect Books in 2011 and has written numerous academic papers on communication and Nietzsche in many local and international journals. In this interview, Ian Rizzo discusses with Claude the subject of philosophy within the local context while taking the opportunity to learn more about his philosophical background and what philosophy holds for the future.
Are you satisfied with the number of students taking up philosophy at the post-secondary and University level?

It is always better if more students take up the study of philosophy for a number of reasons: for a start, it will constitute an important feature of the educational background of the person; if we had to ask ourselves what are the characteristics of an educated person this would have (among other humanistic subjects) some knowledge of philosophy and its tradition. This in turn would feed into the cultural context that we – as Maltese – find ourselves in. In the bigger picture, if we want to think of ourselves as promoters of culture, then it has to start with our students.

How does the philosophical work and research produced in Malta measure up to international standards?

Maltese academic texts in philosophy are on a par with international standards. I don’t say this out of any misplaced patriotism but because I know that international publications go through a rigorous process of peer review. The Department of Philosophy as well as the University of Malta insist that publications should be submitted to this process so as to ensure that a certain standard is achieved, a standard that the community of scholars in a related topic are competent to evaluate. I agree with this policy both because it raises the bar for all scholars as well as because the actual review – even though harsh at times – is still rewarding.

Given the highly polarised political climate, many Maltese academics tend to take an apolitical stance in order to play it safe. Do you agree?

The question needs a bit of unpacking: I am assuming it refers to local politics and in particular to our context where political discourse is hogged by party politics, with a few exceptions. If the question refers to local politics, then it is typically Maltese in that politics seems to be promoted as the highest value in human existence – I am always amused by the way people seem to genuflect when a politician walks past them. From an academic perspective, the only problem I envisage with political involvement (unless you think a Facebook post is political activism), is that it is time-consuming and so must compete for the time required in academia.

If you want to conduct research – as every academic should - then one needs a lot of time to conduct research, to think, and to produce high-quality creative work. It is impossible to do everything well. In addition, some might have other commitments – caring for children or their parents – that again requires time. So in answer to your question, given that as an academic, research and publication are an essential part of the job description, it is quite hard to be also involved in political matters, in a serious way.
According to you, what are the role that philosophy and philosophers should have in Maltese society and local policy making?

I find the use of “should” too strong when answering the part of the question concerning the role of philosophers in Maltese society and with regards to policy. The roles I think that they might have is as advisors and to clarify policies in terms of rigour and consistency. This is not to say that only professional philosophers can perform such roles, though, they might be the best ones given their training. With regards to the role of philosophy in Malta, it contributes to the cultural richness of our society, fosters an open-minded attitude, and encourage critical debate. These are the ideals I dream about.

As a philosopher to which school of thought do you subscribe to? Why?

Over the years my philosophical interests have changed. As with many twenty-year-olds, I was greatly interested in Camus and Sartre. Existentialism was my point of entry into the world of philosophy. However, during my studies in the United Kingdom in the 1990s, I was introduced to the work of Derrida by Geoff Bennington and Foucault by Homi Bhaba; these philosophers were relatively unknown in Malta where the dominant philosophy here was analytic philosophy given that my lecturers were trained in the UK. Anyway, Derrida and Foucault took over my academic reading along with other poststructuralists, for a long time. As readers know, poststructuralism – falling within the rubric of the postmodern – challenged notions of objectivity by arguing for various forms of linguistic and social constructionism. In the past couple of years, I have changed direction again: I am now interested in realism and in particular in the writings of Meillassoux and Badiou. These together with Harman and Zizeck form the thrust of those philosophers from the Continental tradition that are returning to questions on the nature of the real. I find their ideas exciting. Incidentally, I also continue to pursue my studies in the philosophy of communication, a subject that Prof. Peter Serracino Inglott had asked me to take up many years ago.
Whom do you consider the philosopher to have contributed most to your thoughts?

Probably Nietzsche who was the subject of my doctoral research (guided by Prof Joe Friggieri). Nietzsche influenced both Derrida and Foucault (whom Schrift has called the post-Nietzscheans) which probably explains why I spent so much time reading their texts. Nietzsche is difficult to avoid if you are reading western philosophy and even though I am currently reading other philosophers, especially Meillassoux, they still engage with his writings. One can read Meillassoux’s ‘The Immanence of the World Beyond’ as a case in point.

Do you have any forthcoming publications or research projects that you would like to share with us?

I am currently working on my second book related to the philosophy of communication where I hope to tackle the role that communication plays in a number of philosophical themes. In addition, I am working on a couple of papers – on Nietzsche and St. Augustine – in the pipeline.

The power of new technologies has the potential to augur for a better future. Will we be able to deal adequately with perennial social problems like poverty, inequality and crime?

While it has a lot of potential, the history of technology has shown it to be double edged. Personally I am not overly optimistic about its potential for social justice. I remember the heady days of the early internet with all the dreams of a universal community entwined in free and open communication. Now, it seems to have become another one of those technologies that one needs to be wary of. And as long as we live in a world dominated by the capitalist imperative, I doubt that these technologies can be of any substantial help to alleviate social injustice. The writings of Christian Fuchs highlight this problem in depth.

How do you envisage the role of philosophers in safeguarding our environment and the sustainability of the human species?

Philosophy can safeguard these situations by doing what they do best: they can contribute to the discussion by conducting serious research into the problems under consideration. Such research needs to be thorough and well written, and, depending on the audience reading this material, pitched at the right level. In addition, what others say or write can be critically evaluated and in so doing improve the quality of public debate, especially when it is in danger of being poached by interest-groups with no interest in truth, but revel in obfuscation.

One last question: can you comment on the philosophical scene in Malta?

The scene here is quite vibrant and engaging. For a start, aside from the University at Tal-Qroqq, there are a number of tertiary institutions – the University of Malta, Junior College, Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School, De la Salle – with their own academics who contribute to the philosophical scene and crucially, through their dedication, encourage young students to pursue a philosophical education. There are also other spaces for philosophy in Malta: the Augustinian Institute comes to mind and it has, over the years, provided a number of philosophical courses to the public. And so too, does this journal itself - SHARE - provide a space for philosophical discussion. In addition, over the years, with more students furthering their studies at an MA or Doctoral level the pool of those interested in philosophy has grown with many debating various issues, through different platforms. Finally, I mustn’t forget to include that category of independent researchers who also, through their passion for the subject, participate in our philosophical culture. As is evident, there is a lot going for the philosophical scene in Malta.
A Philosopher's Critique of Jordan Peterson

By Marianne Talbot

My brother started it. He asked me what I thought about Jordan Peterson, the controversial Canadian psychologist. (https://www.jordanbpeterson.com).

I had to admit that, whilst I knew about the controversy, I didn't know what Peterson actually thought or said. As a professional thinker I was embarrassed to find myself without a reasoned view on the views of such a well-known professional thinker.

Then lockdown came and with it the gift of unallocated time. I felt as if I had been challenged to give my brother a more coherent response and set out to form a grounded view of Peterson's claims.

I was soon more engaged than I imagined I would be. Listening to Peterson's (in)famous interview with Channel Four's Cathy Newman, I was surprised to find myself rooting for Peterson. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMcjxSThD54)

The usually admirable Newman was appalling. Almost every one of her questions started 'You say...'. Peterson would respond “I did say that”, and he would then offer cogent reasons for saying it. Or (more often) he'd answer “I didn’t say that. What I said was...”, followed by a claim that, however controversial, was backed by reasons to which a sensible answer was required. He did not get sensible answers. Newman let herself and her audience down badly.

Newman was hostile to Peterson before she started. But critical thinking flies out of the window once emotions are engaged. It is OK to have emotions, of course, it is not OK to let them do the thinking. But this is precisely what she did throughout the interview. As a life-long feminist, I was coming from the same place as Newman. For me this was a cautionary tale – when you have skin in the game you must take extra care that you do not set up straw men.

In the case of Peterson, and especially his views on feminism, I think this is particularly important. Peterson's followers are mainly young men. Many young men think the world sees them as a menace. They are only too glad to embrace the views of someone who sees them – at least potentially – as worthwhile.

Peterson is worried that calls to dismantle the patriarchy, amplified by the 'Me Too' movement, are undermining the confidence of boys and young men and making it difficult for them to become decent adults – good sons, husbands and fathers. Men, says Peterson, have traditionally represented order in relation to the chaos represented by femininity. In doing away with the bad things this causes, he argues, we are losing the good too.
Chaos represented by femininity? That hurts. But, tucking away my outrage, as a good philosopher should, what do I think of the key message and the arguments for it?

I have had similar misgivings myself. In 2000, I chaired the National Forum of Values in Education and the Community. I spent an inordinate amount of time in school libraries waiting to talk about values. I started to notice all the books entitled (I paraphrase) “Yay Girls!”, “Girls are wonderful” and “Girls are marvellous”. I also noticed that teachers would happily diss boys, and that advertisers seemed to take pleasure in portraying men as incompetent idiots.

This worried - and worries – me. We don’t improve the lot of women by treating men as women have not liked being treated. The aim, surely, is to treat everybody, men and women, with dignity and respect? If this is what Peterson is saying then I agree with him.

But is it what he is saying? I read a review of his book by another philosopher Julian Baggini who warns “Peterson has a knack for penning sentences that sound like deep wisdom at first glance but vanish into puffs of pseudo-profundity if you give them more than a second’s thought.”

Was I being misled by pseudo-profundity?

Well, I know what this philosopher means. Peterson’s book 12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos is full of pompous, almost unreadable sentences. I lost patience and skip-read most of it. It felt like one of those books that are urged on authors whose names and ideas sell: ‘Go on, write twelve rules for life, you’ll knock it out in no time. It’ll make you loads of money’. It has to be admitted that the controversy surrounding Peterson hasn’t done him financial harm. His net worth has been estimated at $40,000,000.

In the same review Peterson’s readers are dismissed as mistaking ‘repackaged clichés’ for original insights. But I think lots of people, especially young men, are desperate for guidance on how to live life. To achieve one’s potential, Aristotle tells us, we must exercise the virtues; we must exercise self-discipline and tenacity in forming the habits that will enable us to live a virtuous life. Peterson is basically saying the same thing. I think Peterson does offer profound insights, though not particularly original ones, but that he buries them in puffs of pseudo-profundity.

Peterson, for me, is better live than in writing. I think the video of his Oxford Union appearance is the best showcase for his views and the effect he has on young people. The environment is not hostile, as it was in the Newman interview, and Peterson responds convincingly.

A lot of the controversy surrounding Peterson results from his ‘anti-woke’ views. He first came to attention when he argued against a proposed law that would have mandated calling students by their transgendered pronouns. Peterson said he was happy to call people by whatever pronouns they chose, as a matter of courtesy, but that it would be wrong to prosecute someone for failing to do this. I am pulled in two directions: I agree we do not need a law to require what is required by common courtesy but I wouldn’t go to the wall against such a law. But maybe that just makes me a coward?

Is Peterson happy with the controversy he causes by speaking out? He spent 2020 in hospital for benzodiazepine addiction, originally prescribed for anxiety. If I attracted the venom he does, I would be extremely anxious. Does he keep going because he sincerely believes his views (rather than, for example, the money)? If so, then good for him. We need people who have the courage of their convictions to speak out. Even – especially? - if we disagree with them.

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Birth Centenary: Paulo Freire
A powerful voice on decolonising education

The past month of September 2021 marked the centenary of the birth of one of the twentieth century’s most powerful social theorists and exponents of democratic education and social action - Paulo Reglus Neves Freire (1921-1997). His influence continues to be felt in various fields. Freire’s impact on pedagogy is well known but his influence is also strong in such areas as health work, social work, community development, cultural studies, communications, theology, philosophy, and sociology. Colonialism is a key aspect of Freire’s oeuvre.

Colonialism or neocolonialism takes many forms and comprises issues concerning a “heterogeneous set” of subaltern “subject positions” (Slemon, 1995, p. 45). I will limit myself, in this short piece, to the following: (a) the concepts of ‘oppressor consciousness’ and ‘cultural invasion’, (b) the very complex issue of language in a post-independence, post-colonial situation. These issues feature prominently in Freire’s body of work and are discussed against contextual backgrounds where direct colonialism, in Edward Said’s terms (Said, 1993, p.8), neo-colonialism and, to adopt Gramsci’s perspective, ‘internal-colonialism’ make their presence felt, often in crude and exceedingly violent ways. There are those who have discussed the notions of dependency and the roles of the colonial traditional/neo-colonial modernizing churches, as opposed to the ‘prophetic church’, in this context.

The contrast lies between what Cornel West calls the ‘Constantinian Church’ (the ‘Church of Empire’) and the grassroots-oriented ‘Prophetic Church’ with its basis in Liberation Theology.

The latter is a decidedly anti-colonial theology born out of the most overtly colonised contexts which have moved from being directly colonised to being informally colonised by the superpower that is the USA and multinationals. His is a brand of pedagogical politics for ‘decolonising the mind’, the first step towards which is that of verstehen (understanding) which takes the form of comprehending the nature of oppression and the way ideology operates to render human beings complicit in their own oppression and the oppression of others. The image of the oppressor is internalised by the oppressed (Freire, 1970, p. 30) which prevents the latter from contributing to resolving the oppressor-oppressed dialectical relation. This situation echoes Hegel’s Master-Slave dialectic.
Divide et Impera

Those who are oppressed in one context can be oppressors in others. In a colonial context this manifests itself in instances of ‘divide and rule’, a theme broached by Freire in the additional chapter to his original draft of Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Segmentation on racial/ethnic lines constitutes a key contemporary strategy of divide and rule predicated on the process of internalizing the oppressor’s image. This becomes more important in a period of hegemonic globalisation where producers are segregated on ethnic and national lines. This is connected with the notion of the ‘oppressor within’, a situation evident, for instance, in the perpetration of acts of violence against people constructed as different and whose characteristics do not fall within Eurocentric terms of reference.

Conquistador Mentality

This situation applies to Western countries developing their economy on immigrant labour and at the same time being places where fear of and ‘competition’ against the ‘Other’ prevail. It also applies to countries such as Paulo Freire’s native Brazil with its complex set of racial politics involving whites, positioning themselves as being of European stock, south-east Asians to a limited extent, blacks and Indigenous people. The last mentioned are still among the greatest victims of rapacious capitalist speculation in areas such as the Amazon. They are victims of the sort of contemporary atrocities which Eduardo Galeano saw as a continuation of the old ‘Conquistador’ mindset (Galeano, 2009).

Freire’s chilling account of and reflection on the wanton killing of a Pataxo Indian, Galdino Jesus dos Santos, in a piece included in the posthumous Pedagogia da indignação (Pedagogy of Indignation) (Freire, 2000), highlights the continuation of barbarous racist acts in Brazil. This particular crime is an example of the oppressor consciousness residing within people who use white supremacy as a means of positioning themselves against alterity.

It gives them that sense of ‘positional superiority’, to use Said’s pervasive term, that would allow a few of them to kill fellow humans for their sport, like ‘flies to wanton boys’ in Shakespeare’s famous line from King Lear. Violent, racist, sexist, cross-tribal, anthropocentric and homophobic acts are examples of the kinds of behaviour that indicate the presence of the ‘oppressor’s image’ inside the oppressed. Again, this behaviour can be encouraged by a colonial strategy of ‘divide and rule’ (Freire, 1970, p. 137).

Cultural Invasion

The situation is exacerbated by the process of what Freire calls ‘cultural invasion’ – the colonisation of “the mental universe” of the colonized, in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s (1981, p. 16) words. This is ‘banking education’ (top down, unquestioned knowledge transmission) on a large scale. It was historically characterized by the direct imposition of the ‘cultural arbitrary’ (cultural interests and choices) of the colonizers in most sites where ‘official knowledge’ (Apple, 1993) was imparted, schools in particular. The process of ‘Anglicisation’ in the British colonies is an obvious example. Nowadays, cultural invasion is manifest primarily by that all pervasive type of Western Eurocentric neo-colonialism we call, echoing Boaventura de Sousa Santos, ‘hegemonic globalisation’, in recognition of the presence of an alternative type of globalisation: ‘globalisation from below’.

‘Cultural invasion’ was the process by which certain Africans saw themselves as ‘Black Europeans’ or, in Frantz Fanon’s terms, ‘Black skins in white masks.’ It is what has led people from Malta to play down the strong Arab element, if not Islamic element, that is part of the country’s history, and all this to emphasise the country’s purportedly uninterrupted ‘Christian lineage’ and ‘European vocation.’ All this can be read as part of a process in which certain formerly directly colonized subjects desire to be identified with and assimilated within the centres of Eurocentric colonial power. Of course discussions in each of these contexts become more complex when one recognizes hybridization as a feature of postcolonial life, including resistances, assimilation and appropriation.
**Fear of Freedom**

Echoing Fromm, Freire goes on to maintain that, under these conditions of prescription and cultural invasion/dependency, freedom can become a fearful thing for the oppressed. People can be so domesticated that any activity entailing creativity can appear to them to constitute a journey into the unknown. As Freire has argued, creativity involves risk taking (Freire, in Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 57). ‘Can the country survive as an independent nation?’ People of my age recall this question in the build up to the withdrawal of the UK armed forces from Malta in 1979. I often heard the same thought among Scots in light of Brexit and the possibility of another referendum on whether Scotland should remain within the Union (this in a country which has much more natural resources than Malta). The fear of ‘liberation’ and the unknown is very much part of the colonial form of Banking Education - prescription is the order of the day and the cultures and creative spirits of the colonized are denigrated and constructed as inferior to those of the colonizers and their comprador elites. This is why post-Independence or revolutionary leaders use such catch-phrases as to ‘Africanize Africans’ or ‘Grenadise Grenadians’ or ‘Our country first and foremost’.

It was intended to not foster jingoism, right-wing xenophobia, but help people gain the confidence necessary to partake of the development process, and do so in a conscious manner: development for whom? This echoes the kind of reflection at the heart of Freire’s central pedagogical and philosophical notion of Praxis. Praxis entails action-reflection for transformative action, the process being not sequential but dialectical (Allman, 1999).

**The Language Question**

Freire argues that not all that derives from the colonial experience is irrelevant to the new postcolonial context. This point becomes all the more valid when one considers that hybridization is a feature of the colonial power-resistance experience.

Freire refers to the knowledge of the colonizer’s language as beneficial in the postcolonial situation of such former Portuguese colonies as Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau or São Tome e Príncipe or Mozambique. For instance, where and when different languages are used by different Indigenous groups, the colonial language can serve as a ‘lingua franca’.

Of course, the language issue in former direct colonies remains complex, as the colonizing standard language becomes a source of social differentiation between groups and classes, even though, in small states, it serves as a language of international currency, therefore being an economic asset.

I would submit, however, that the language needs to be taught differently from the way it was taught under direct colonial conditions. In former British colonies, the emphasis would be placed not on ‘Anglicisation’ and English language teaching as a ‘civilising mission,’ with its connotation of constructing that which is native/Indigenous as ‘uncivilised, but on language learning as a liberating experience. Language education policies would, in a postcolonial context, include teaching/learning the national-popular or Indigenous languages and literacies.

The colonizing language would, from a Freirean perspective, need to be taught in a problematising manner, in which its historical and socio-political roles are addressed; problematising entails learning together how ideology, including colonial ideology, resides in languages – a far cry from the colonial and neo-colonial, simply ‘technical’ way of teaching languages till this very day.

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**References**


Raymond Williams (1921-1988) was a true Angry Young Man. He was the son of a railroad man who managed to study at Cambridge, developing a strong social conscience, becoming a focused intellectual pioneer in the areas of Philosophy and Literature. He was the central figure of the New Left movement (1960 - 1970) in England. His position was marked by his struggle against the elitism of British Conservatism and the dogmatism and reductionism of the Stalinist Left.

As a contributor to the New Left Review publication, one of the main vehicles for the dissemination of the ideals of the New Left, he was also one of the promoters of the so-called Birmingham Circle, from where he promoted the studies of the Theory of Literature and Cultural Studies, specially oriented to the study of popular cultures. At the time, in European history according to Williams, a phenomenon of massification of culture was beginning to take place. This view was also shared by his most immediate predecessor, Richard Herbert Hoggart (1918–2014). In his work The Uses of Literacy (1956), Hoggart stated that ‘We are entering a mass culture, configured with remnants of what was once an urban culture ‘of the people’ and that is being destroyed.’ In fact, Hoggart’s attack was not against popular culture, but against mass culture.

The definition of culture

In this way, for Williams, England was, at the end of WWII, undermined by the bankruptcy of the old class culture. There was a loss of tightly knit communities that were replaced by the emerging mass culture, dominated by tabloids, advertisements, and Hollywood stories. These ‘alien’ phenomena had colonized local communities and removed their distinctive features.

‘Popular culture’ however was self-created, had integrity and was developed according to its own laws and not as an object that was manipulated by the mass media. It reflected what Gramsci, a huge influence on Williams, and later exponents of cultural studies such as Stuart Hall, called as the ‘popular creative spirit’.

According to Williams, Culture helps maintain political order in modern society. The impulses towards action help the desire to avoid human errors, to clear up confusion and mitigate misery. The aspiration for a better and happier world than the one that exists comes from the foundations of culture. Being the engine for these impulses is the task not of scientific knowledge but of morality and corresponds to the passion to do good.
"High' and 'Low' Culture

Having culture is knowing the best that has been written and thought about the world. When the term Culture had a broader meaning, more inclusive of all productions and processes within a given society, it was not simply restricted to most of the cultural manifestations of the elites. The idea of 'High' culture refers to those aspects of culture that are mainly valued by an intellectual, political, social, economic elite. In general, the most powerful members of society are the only ones who have real influence on sense-oriented cultural systems, and thus the most powerful classes tend to enjoy the privilege of defining their own lifestyle as 'high' culture.

Popularity is not necessarily fame and great diffusion such as the highest engrossing series and movies, or the television or radio programs with the highest ratings. All societies have their own objectives and purposes and mechanisms to produce meanings. All societies express their meanings, in institutions, and in the arts and school and non-formal education. The production of a society consists of finding common meanings and directions, and its development derives from a debate and a constant adjustment of the course demanded by experience, contact, and discovery. Culture comprises this sense: a total way of life that entails the common meanings, the arts and education, the special processes of discovery and creative endeavours.

Theory of Culture

Williams's proposal of a Theory of Culture appears mainly in two of his works, namely, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1958), and *The Long Revolution* (1961). In the former, Williams offers a critical panorama from Romanticism to Orwell.

He defines the literary as a cultural process that should not be understood through its adaptation and mechanisms of incorporation. He reviews the study of the critique of culture, in a parallel way to that carried out by F.R. Leavis in his book, *The Great Tradition* (1948).

Williams makes clear that the modern use of the word Culture has appeared in the Industrial Revolution period together with other terms that are part of common jargon, such as Art and Industry, in tension with industrialism. Culture is presented as a process within the semantic alterations that are linked to social, political, and economic changes, and not simply as the highest products of society as expressed in the great works of an individual genius. It reflects a 'whole way of life' which can provide different readings of texts according to these ways of life, including that of the subaltern, without 'cheapening' or 'adulterating' the work in question (a response to T.S. Eliot).

In *The Long Revolution* (1961), Williams analyses the history of cultural forms and institutions in Great Britain over the past two hundred years. Moreover, he develops a theoretical framework whereby one can explore this process of dynamic change, by means of some notions such as Structure of Feeling, Dominant culture, Residual culture, and Emerging cultures besides the emergence of the dominant and oppositional forms.
Theory of Culture as Poetics of Feeling

Williams characterises the experience of the quality of life within a spatial temporal configuration that is operating in the most delicate and least tangible part of our activities. Besides, he evokes a common set of perceptions and values shared by a generation that is articulated in artistic forms and conventions. In addition, Williams retains the complex relationship between differentiated feeling structures and differentiated classes: it is the tension between ideology and experience.

In his book, Marxism & Literature (1977), Williams following Gramsci, rejects the reductionism of a certain orthodox ‘vulgar’ Marxist image to highlight the relative autonomy of the superstructure, of the cultural dimension. Williams rejects the Marxist position for different reasons: it reduces the superstructure to a mere reflection, it abstracts culture from the historical process, it depicts human needs as mere economic and not social needs, it marginalises the cultural within the economic organisation. For Williams, the practices are social and contain both material and symbolic elements. Moreover, Williams points out the importance of the material component with the symbolic belonging to the base of material life and social experience and, therefore, having a strong presence within social and productive relationships.

In 1962 he also published Communication, a highly influential study among communication researchers in the UK in the early 1960s. His polemics on the meaning of television were recorded in Television: Technology and Cultural Form(1974), where he synthesises his contribution as a media analyst. This work is the fundamental example of the application of cultural materialism to historical analysis. The main features of these works are, on the one hand, an original reflection that associates his class extraction, his militancy, and his sensitivity to the cultural transformations of the United Kingdom. On the other, there are also educational commitments, links in the working class and proximity to the movements of the New Left and the Labour Party.
Conclusion

The categories of Class, Culture, Industry, Art, reflect Williams’ contention that literature is far from being a solely aesthetic device; his aim is to highlight its cultural, political, and social dimension. This is an important decentralisation regarding the concept of literature and the literary. For Williams, sociological culture or cultural historical studies are social practices and relationships, producing Culture or Ideology more significantly. Their inherent dynamics provide continuity and determinations, tensions, conflicts, resolutions, irresolution, innovations, and changes. There is also a possibility to make general differentiations between different periods of history based on different modes of production.

The dominant formations are too broad and need to be divided at different times. Each epoch not only consists of different variations or stages, but each point is also composed of a process of dynamic and contradictory relationships in the game of dominant, residual, and emerging forms.

Williams’ Theory of Culture provides an analysis of the role that identities as well as subversive and opposition movements play in the dominant culture, and how effective they are in changing it. This concept is materialistic because it suggests that cultural artifacts, institutions, and practices are, in a sense, conditioned by material processes. It is also cultural because it insists that there is no crude and material reality beyond that which sustains culture, that is material in itself.

The media are essentially other means of production. Cultural forms should be seen not as isolated texts, but as embedded within the historical-material relationships and processes that constitute them and within which they play an essential role. Human communication is socially productive since it is reproductive. In other words, it is similar to other production processes. The technologies of cultural production play a crucial role in the modelling of cultural forms and institutions, but they do not determine them.
Democracy is a well-diffused political idea that has evolved since ancient Greek civilisation but remains to date subject to a wide variety of definitions and interpretations. Over time, it has become to be more understood as a representative democracy, whereby a selected number of people are chosen to govern on their behalf.

Few people, though, might appreciate the challenging time, effort and patience required to build a democracy. As a matter of fact, strong democratic practices have only been established in a minority of countries, mostly in the Western world.

But a far more worrying concern, as witnessed in the past decade, is the decline of the values of democracy in certain countries following the legitimate election of populist strongmen. These include, for example, Hungary, Poland, Turkey, the Philippines, and Brazil. One may also include the controversial four-year presidency of Donald Trump, who on various occasions between 2016 and 2020, clashed with the established institutions and resigned without conceding electoral defeat.

The sharp decline in the norms and values governing the rule of democracy in states that had previously some form of established democratic principles is the main theme of this book. Matt Qvortrup, in ‘Death by a Thousand Cuts’, observes that in the past century, attempts have been made to embrace and install political dictatorship regimes. He provides evidence to show, that contrary to claims made by the historian Frances Fukuyama after the fall of the Berlin Wall, (who declared the end of history and the triumph of liberalism) democracy has actually been in retreat.

Qvortrup observes that the decline of democracies tends to be rooted in a cause that is attributed to a concept first identified by Plato – ‘thymos’ - a feeling of humiliation or wounded pride. He links this concept with another definition coined by Rousseau, ‘amour propre’ – vanity – which is the universal desire for reputation, honour, and privilege after humanity lost its affinity with the natural world.
The concept of ‘thymos’ has indeed retained a common feeling of the population subjected to rule ever since politics became an established element of civilised society. The rise of the Nazi Party in Germany is one of the best examples of ‘thymos’ since it is attributed by various historians to the humiliation suffered by Germany after its defeat in the First World War. In modern times this wounded pride has manifested itself in the inequalities gap created by globalising forces, the anxieties of open markets and freedom of labour and the threats posed by immigration to national culture.

Qvortrup explains clearly how such feelings tend to be easily exploited by charismatic demagogues who appear to comprehend the grievances of the population and are ready to act as champions of their cause. From a historical perspective, Qvortrup identifies typical well diffused traits among such personalities, the most common being a display of narcissistic behaviour that is accompanied by an inner craving for recognition and an exaggerated sense of importance.

Once such manipulative people are elected, they immediately start changing the political rules of the game on the pretext that the current ones are unfair and an impediment to the solution of the problems afflicting their electorate. They will somehow always manage to pinpoint a scapegoat that can be blamed for society’s ills and acting as a hindrance. In tandem with this development, demagogues seek to assert a stronger hold on the two main pillars that sustain democracy - the media and the judiciary. They commence by appointing new people sympathetic to their ideology in all key positions which over time will eventually dominate the ruling establishment.

After the opposition becomes practically silenced and the playing field changed to give the incumbent administration an advantage over any other daring contestants, these demagogues can ensure that their continued presence in power remains democratically legitimised by the electorate. The successful transition from democracy to dictatorship is thus achieved when the public and the institutions have resigned themselves to a state of apathy and do not feel troubled at the way the mechanism of democracy has been dismantled.

This is why Qvortrup aptly calls this process ‘a death by a thousand cuts’. It does not come about with a single violent blow such as a coup d’état, but rather through a gradual and well-planned process.

Qvortrup calls into question how a democratic set-up that is complemented with a bureaucratic organisation based on rationality and knowledge can succumb to a dictatorship. But with his reference to Weber and Hume, he reminds us that emotions always remain an essential component of human nature and can easily fall prey to the ‘irrational’ enthusiasm and hope offered by charismatic leaders.

The main message that Qvortrup’s book seems to impart is that civil and political societies need to be constantly on their guard against aspiring politicians who play on the emotions of the electorate with a high dose of charisma. But a much more effective response, would be a vigilant attitude against any situations leading to ‘thymos’. In this regard, Qvortrup provides many recommendations.

Qvortrup does offer hope that democracy will survive in the future. By making use of statistical evidence and well-articulated arguments, he clearly shows how democracy constantly outperforms any mode of dictatorships. He does not though, delve into why democratic practices have failed to gain foothold in many countries. Nor does his book answer certain troubling questions as to whether democracy is really the best solution to tackle world problems such as climate change or serves as the best antidote to future challenges that will be afflicting humanity.

However, Qvortrup states from the outset that the objective of the book is to comprehend what it takes to have a democratic set-up dismantled. The crisp, digestible essay that Qvortrup provides in his book with a short read of not more than 150 pages certainly enables the reader to gain such a perceptive insight while making the case that democracy should never be taken for granted.

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Science has for years been unequivocal in its proclamations that the world is getting warmer. The summer months of 2021 have been the warmest on record. An extreme heat wave that affected much of Western North America and Canada from late June through mid-July has registered record high temperatures close to 50°C and caused a number of fatalities. In Sicily, the highest ever recorded temperature reached close to 49°C in August. In Greece and Turkey, thousands had to flee from home to escape from the ravages of wildfires caused by the excessive high temperatures. Our small island was not spared either from the intense heat as three consecutive heatwaves were registered during the period of July and August, with the first two covering an unbroken spell of seven days. Meanwhile torrential flooding has battered countries such as China and Germany, prompting outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel to declare publicly that Germany must be do more to fight climate crisis.

Introduction – Quo Vadis Humanity?

The first part of the manifesto emphasised Aristotle’s view that man deep down is a political animal, and a good life requires some form of political state. It was acknowledged that the well-being to which every citizen is entitled may be dependent on four basic requirements - a family which provides social order and stability, organisational life that provides meaningful work, a sense of individualism that allows free expression of creativity and innovation and a market that allows the satisfaction of wants.

However, the attainment of a good life that humanity seeks for its future is under severe threat unless the problems of climate change and environmental degradation are adequately and urgently addressed.
The United Nations Inter-governmental Panel for Climate (IPC) issued a report in August 2021, three months ahead of a key world climate summit in Glasgow, known as COP26. The report while issuing a code red alert for humanity makes it clear that human influence mainly through the emission of greenhouse gases trapped in the earth’s atmosphere has warmed the atmosphere, oceans, and lands.

The Paris Climate Agreement that was signed six years ago in 2015 by 196 government members of the United Nations pledged to keep the world’s average temperature from rising above 2°C than it had been before the pre-industrial times – with an initial target of 1.5°C over the coming years.

There seems to be consensus among the scientists community that if drastic action is not taken now, the 1.5°C target will be reached much earlier than originally envisaged, possibly before the end of this decade.

As stated in the UN report, once temperatures exceed 1.5 °C, a catastrophe on a huge unimaginable scale beckons for humanity. Scientific evidence has persistently shown that climate change is contributing to rising sea levels, shrinking of ice sheets in Antarctica and the Artic, habitat destruction, loss of biodiversity due to drought, flooding and firestorms, disappearance of coral reefs and wild forests, and severe disruptions in the delicate balance of ecosystems.

Time Magazine in its 2021 April 26/May 3 issue declared on the front cover: ‘Climate is Everything.’ The Economist, in its 2021 July 24th - 30th edition could not have said it better: ‘No Safe Place – The 3°C Future.’

As David Attenborough stated in an interview given to the BBC, ‘humanity will be faced with the collapse of everything that gives us security – food production, access to freshwater, habitual and ambient temperature and ocean food supplies. And if the natural world can no longer support the most basic of our needs, then the rest of civilisation is likely to break down.’

While climate change is at present overshadowing all the other issues related to the degradation of the environment, there are other serious environmental problems which may have been caused by human negligence and indifference. These include the massive deforestation of the Amazon and other wild forests, over-fishing of the oceans, extinction of species, air pollution, light pollution, acid rain and the transmission of infectious diseases (as highlighted by the worldwide havoc wrought by the recent covid-19 virus).

The Manifesto argues that while climate change should remain at the top of the environmental agenda, all proposed solutions should be related to the problems that have been caused by the onset of the industrial revolution in the mid-nineteenth century. In its wake, the industrial revolution has created six major repercussions on the environment.
REPERCUSSIONS OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Impact on the Environment

1. DEMOGRAPHIC EXPLOSION

World population has increased from 1.2 billion in 1850 to 7.9 billion in 2021 and is projected on current trends to rise further to 9.5 billion by 2050.

2. RISE OF OVER-CONGESTED CITIES

An urban sprawl that has severely encroached on the natural habitat.

3. MASS PRODUCTION

The mass production that followed industrialisation has contributed towards overexploitation of natural resources that outstrips by far their preservation.

4. HEAVY USE OF FOSSIL FUELS

Increased use of fossil burning such as coal, oil, and diesel to cope with the additional demands of our energy and transport needs, is being the main contributor of carbon intensity trapped in the atmosphere.

5. INDUSTRIALISED FARMING & FISHING

Industrialisation has led to aggressive farming and fishing practices that have contributed further to the shrinking of the natural environment and overfishing of the oceans.

6. POOR WASTE MANAGEMENT

An inability to manage human waste – chief among them plastic and nuclear waste.
The Industrial Revolution – a revolution or a curse?

When the present state of the environment is assessed and compared with pre-industrial times, it is clear that the economic and political systems of humanity across the world have utterly failed to address the adverse effects related to the sustainability of the environment. We disagree with the views expressed by ‘The Economist’ that we should accept the reality of global warming and find solutions as to how we can adapt to the consequences of the increased temperatures. Rather than subscribing to this view, the manifesto argues that we should understand the problems of human nature in both the economic and political systems and try to reform or adjust our policies, lifestyles, and aspirations accordingly.

The Economic Problem

The transformation from a hunter-gathering community to a farming society marked the first paradigm shift in the economy. This economic transformation has made possible the management of a surplus of agricultural produce that could be stored, consumed later, or bartered with other products.

As Yannis Varoufakis aptly explains in his book ‘Talking to My Daughter About the Economy’, the management of this surplus was behind the revolutionary change that led to developments in writing (to keep records of storage) and debt, while necessitating the creation of a state that could safeguard property rights and regulate transactional activities through a trustworthy medium known as money.

The biggest curse of civilisation has however resulted in the commodification of every type of human activity that is ultimately influenced by social actions through the interaction of demand and supply. In this process, the human being has become an economic animal who rations the limited resources available in order to satisfy his unlimited wants and expectations. The quest for endless economic growth is born from the ingrained human condition that a certain degree of material satisfaction can only be attained if there is a marked improvement over time in the economic situation.

Following the fall of communism in the former Soviet Union and East European countries, a sense of global consensus has prevailed that the invisible hand of the market has proved to be more efficient and viable than centralised planning in the allocation of resources. Even China, forced by the imperatives of the global economy, had to embrace the principles of the free market system whilst retaining the one-party state in this political spectrum.

The Polar Bear is predicted to be extinct before end of century unless more is done to tackle climate change
But as the world economies have converged towards a free-market model that is balanced with some state intervention, international financial institutions and credit ranking agencies have not yet fully addressed one of the fundamental flaws of the invisible hand – that our economic systems irrespective of the left/right wing ideology have miserably failed to adequately address the negative impact on the environment caused by human activity in the economic sphere. The British economist Arthur Pigou explained that market failure occurs when there is a difference between the social effects (the impact on everyone) and private effects (ones that only affect the person producing the externality).

It is therefore a tragic reality that the GDP measure which is renowned internationally as the best indicator for a country’s standard of living focuses mainly on the monetary private costs and benefits while ignoring the social impact. Until and unless this economic measure is reformed, the zeal for endless economic growth at a great cost to the environment will remain the driving force behind our aspirations and wants for the future.

It has to be pointed out, though, that investment in renewable energy industries such as solar panelling and electric vehicles have incentivised many consumers to switch over to such ‘green’ products as the prices drop further and generate more savings. The growth in digitisation of many services has also led to a sharp fall in prices and costs. In this regard, the free-market principles play a valuable role for the rational economic human being to reduce the carbon footprint without sacrificing any loss of income.

The question though remains whether the reduction in carbon emissions from new technological products and digital services are adequate to meet the 1.5°C target as set out in the Paris Accord.

Humanity must take more radical action to change its lifestyle that cuts down on work, consumption, and leisure. The dietary intake on factory meat processed products that results from intensive agricultural and fishing practices should also be re-assessed in the light of the global warming crisis. As humans tend to be creatures of habit, it will not be an easy task to bring about such a paradigm shift. Voluntary will tend always to remain an elusive task in achieving this goal.

Such a consideration will also force us to question how we shall be spending our time on the planet as we feel obliged to reduce human activity. Maybe we need to think more about how we can enjoy more time in natural surroundings or be engaged in community groupings.

We also have to take notice of the perennial economic problem that is likely to continue to haunt us in our task of addressing climate change and the protection of environment. This is the question of inequality – whereby people will always be reluctant to accept to lower their standard of living and well-being for the benefit of the environment unless it is matched by a similar proportionate share from people who are higher on the economic and social scale. This ultimately extends to nation-states and has been behind the torturous negotiations of carbon cuts in the last UN Paris Climate talks, five years ago.

Put simply, climate change and environmental protection require strong government – both at national and international levels. Unfortunately as we argue, our political systems have not as yet been up to this task.
**Political Systems**

The representative form of democracy prevalent in the West is unfortunately being held hostage by the diversity of presidential candidates and political parties competing against each other to appeal to the broadest interests of the electorate. If the electorate does not consider climate or environmental degradation as a top priority issue, political action in this regard can easily fall off track or be side-lined to other issues that are deemed to be more important – say migration, terrorism, job security or protection against globalised markets.

We have already seen this situation arising in the past five years with the election of Donald Trump in the United States (2016–2020) and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (2018–). Immediately after his election to the White House, Donald Trump pulled out the United States from the Paris Accord. His top priority was the development of projects relating to oil pipeline projects and drilling of oil reserves in Alaska.

On the other hand Jair Bolsonaro has encouraged further the development of agricultural and mining industries in the Amazon rainforest defying the pleas of the scientific community that such development will have a negative irreversible impact throughout the whole world. He went further than that by cutting funding to federal agencies that have the power to fine and arrest farmers breaking environmental laws. These actions tended to be sustained by his continuous calls into question as to the validity of the deforestation data provided on the Amazon.

The possible election of such climate sceptics or deniers in any democracy may confirm the well held belief that the representative democracy model is based on the rule of an elite that guards its own self-vested economic interests, while being constantly forced to seek compromise with the demands of different lobby groups in order to legitimise itself.

The authoritarian government can ironically be deemed to be more effective than the democratic model in tackling climate change and environment protection given that citizens have to abide with the imposed measures from above – whether they like them or not. China, as a matter of fact, looks well on track to fulfil the pledges it made at the Paris conference to cut carbon dioxide emissions.

Nevertheless authoritarian government have their own inherent problems to deal with. A policy geared towards climate change and the environment remains dependent on the key influential persons in power. Such a problem can be further compounded by the lack of accountability, transparency, and public debate that are embedded in the values of any normal democratic system. An electorate that is unable to question or challenge its rulers can be offered little guarantee of what real action or progress is truly being achieved in the environmental field.

Historical experience has also shown us that the top concern of any authoritarian government is to deflect at all costs any criticisms or protests that are levelled against it. In such situations, it is tempting for authoritarian government to pursue populist measures, pointless projects, and the cultivation of other feel-good factors to keep their citizens satisfied. These policies can easily override the urgent priority that the environment issue demands.

The greatest challenge to address climate change remains though at the international level. Climate change and other environmental issues such as the Amazon have a global impact that call for global solutions, while requiring implementation at local or national level. The United Nations which is the best international institution to deal with global solutions, is at times seen to be ineffective due to the political bickering that occurs among nation states and the great economic gap between developed and developing countries.
The human population cannot simply remain growing while the resources of the planet are shrinking. Of course, this does not mean advocating sterilization or free access to abortion in order to keep the population in check. The best tool always remains educational campaigns that reduce unwanted pregnancies and birth of children from different and unstable relationships. Every country should have a targeted rate of sustainable population growth and if faced with a demographic deficit should perhaps rely more on shared migration with other countries.

The present habitats and eco-systems should be identified and frozen from any further development. They should enjoy international rights like any other legal personhood to ensure that they will never become victims of any economic development. Legal rights might also ensure that such natural surroundings are given the protection and attention they deserve. On this binary, humanity urgently needs to commence a worldwide program of reforestation of lost habitat and rewilding of our oceans and seas.

At a minimum, these issues must be urgently addressed if there is to be any hope for dealing with climate change and environmental protection.

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Record temperatures reached 49.5 degrees Celsius in Lytton, British Columbia in the last week of June, beginning of July 2021
• Every country must be encouraged to have a common basic legal framework that can deal with the myriad of environmental problems afflicting humanity – from climate change, to air pollution, waste, and ocean acidification. Constitutions should contain adequate safeguards that prevent any elected presidential candidate or political parties to halt or reverse any international commitments that have been made towards the climate and the environment. Legal frameworks should be based on environmental ethical principles that also protect non-human animals and other living creatures.

• The production of coal and other fossil burning industries that are emitting huge quantities of carbon dioxide should be phased out with immediate effect. Least developed nations that will be affected by the closure of such industries should be financially compensated by any possible economic means.

• The GDP yardstick that measures the wealth of the nations must be reformed to include green economic measures that reflect environmental externalities and sustainability issues. The well-being of the nation must also be judged by other criteria – such as inequality, work-life balance, community activities, happiness index, and other relevant matters.

• Every citizen should be made aware of the daily carbon footprint he/she is leaving on the planet. Economic incentives should be given to switch to the use of green products, particularly in energy needs and transportation and to make further use of the services offered by the digital economy (government, banks, education, and health come to mind)

• Every country should have committed targets on the handling and recycling of waste. The first steps that must be taken is to reduce the use of plastic, especially through a reduction in the use of packaging.

• Concerted efforts should be made to rely less on factory farming and industrialised fishing for our food supplies. Urging people to convert to a vegetarian lifestyle is likely to be a non-starter. But reducing the number of days in week for meat consumption could be a starting point.

• Finally, educational institutions should widen their focus on climate change and protection of the environment. This focus should be maintained even in the higher forms of schooling at university levels. All the mainstream professional degrees such as law, commerce, architecture, engineering and medical should incorporate climate change in their curricula.

Why Philosophy and Philosophers can be a beacon of hope for the Planet

Ultimately, philosophy and philosophers can be part of the equation in the continuous struggle to help humanity salvage the planet from climate change and environment destruction. As a discipline, philosophy prods humanity to constantly reflect, rethink, analyse and address the problems that arise. Philosophers have made a valid contribution to the analysis of the human race by challenging some of the prevailing basic concepts which were once considered to be dogmas.

The power of reflection sets the human race apart from any other creatures. Nevertheless history has proved that the human race has not always adapted seamlessly to the new scenarios brought about by the transformative changes. The issue of climate change is an apt example in the history of mankind where there was a lack of sensitivity to its calamitous effects. Humanity has in fact been made aware that its activities contribute to climate change since 1850, when Swedish scientist Svante Attehnius suggested that people burning fossil fuels were adding to global warming. It had to take over a hundred years for the first international environmental conference to be organised under the auspices of the United Nations in 1972 at Stockholm, Sweden and address the first global awareness of climate change.

And yet still, a code red alert report had to be issued in this millennium by the United Nations to warn of all possible catastrophes that can strike humanity in this century. This is indeed a tragic confirmation that the warning signs given over the past decade have not been much heeded by humanity.
Part of the reluctance and slow response to address environmental problems could stem from the fact that civilised man has always believed to be superior to all other creatures – even though in his struggle for existence he shares the same biological features of other animals and like them is a mortal being. The US historian Lynn White claimed that environmental crisis was the fault of Western Society, in particular the original Christian thinking that depicted the creation of nature as being at the service of humanity.

If humanity becomes truly aware that there is just one living planet with a finite capacity of resources, it might perhaps be forced to question its place in nature. Perhaps it might then come to its senses that the survival of future human species is only possible if humanity remains part of nature – not as something distinct or living in artificial adapted environments.

Maybe such an awareness might serve as a wake-up call that the solution to our environment problems cannot remain being done in incremental steps that are based on compromise and constantly translated in private economic values.

The readiness to respond to climate change and environmental crisis also ties in with two other ancient philosophical questions – what are we living for and what is the meaning of life? If we are blinded with beliefs that we can ignore our mortality (with the comfort of religion too) or that we have the possibility to inhabit other planets (be it Mars or a heaven), we can easily lose the sense of urgency to place climate change and environmental degradation above economic and political considerations. 'It's the climate stupid!' should be our rallying call.

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