

EUROPEAN HUMANITIES UNIVERSITY

HUMANITIES EDUCATION

Disrupted and Transformed

*How to Become Human
in the XXI Century?*

Vilnius 2024

RECOMMENDED FOR PUBLICATION:
EHU Academic Department of Humanities and Arts
(Protocol No. 37N-09 dated July 2, 2024)

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Humanities Education disrupted and transformed: How to become Human in the XXI century? Collective monograph edited by Povilas Aleksandravičius. — Vilnius: Ciklonas, 2024. — 184 p. [9.3 a. sh.]

This monograph offers a deep analysis of the current state of humanities education and its transformations in the 21st century. In an age where technology shapes our every interaction and globalization blurs cultural boundaries, the quest for human identity and purpose has never been more urgent. “Humanities Education Disrupted and Transformed” challenges conventional wisdom, exploring how universities can reclaim their role in fostering not just expertise, but true human flourishing. The authors of this monograph lead an intellectual journey that scrutinizes the intersection of technology and spirit, urging a renaissance of humanities education as our compass in navigating the complexities of a rapidly changing world. This monograph invites readers to ponder: What does it mean to be human in the digital age, and how can education nurture our fullest potential?

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ISBN 978-609-8220-27-8

Printed by Ciklonas UAB
Žirmūnų g. 68, LT-09124, Vilnius, Lietuva

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Introductory Word

The issue of human education must be raised in a new way and solved differently. The concept of human being as a “benefit provider” and its education as “training a specialist” not only did not fulfil the hopes of creating a human society but even became a fundamental factor of its spiritual crisis. Does the Western tradition have the internal resources to solve this issue and this crisis? Shouldn’t this tradition itself be reborn and transformed? How?

The authors of this monograph decided to start a complex discussion. Their choice is to analyse a connection between the mission of the university and the question of human nature. How to become Human in the 21st century? In what direction should human civilization develop? How could the university become a space for this becoming? Prof. Anatoli Mikhailov, the main author of the monograph, not only thought about these issues for many decades, but also took an active exemplary role by founding the European Humanities University. Prof. Jeffrey Andrew Barash, another world-renowned philosopher, provides fundamental insights into the role of the university in the modern world, declining the possibility of human universality and the historical conditions of globalization.

According to the authors of the monograph, technology occupies and will occupy the central axis of human development in the future. But this axis is not, must not become the only one. Spiritual capacities have always been hidden in the consciousness of humanity, which today must be realized with a new drive and form the next axis of human development. Relationship, conflict, connection between technology and spirit form the subject of the reflections of the authors of the second part of the monograph, Povilas Aleksandravičius and André Geske. Victor Martinovich’s analysis of Pieter Bruegel’s work blends harmoniously with them, unfolding the same problem of the intersection of humanity and university. Perhaps it is best to understand the problem of spirit and technology, humanities and the university first in art, and only then move it to the level of philosophical reflections?

The authors of the monograph understand how important it is to analyze the problem in an interdisciplinary perspective. In the third part, the connection between the university and the humanities is analyzed from the point of view of history, law, and economic sciences.

Aliaksei Makhnach, Liudmila Ulyashyna, Dzmitry Kruk decided to do this through studies of the historical development of a particular university, the European Humanities University. Thus, all the ideas developed in the monograph are confronted with a special historical reality — the reality of a university in exile, and through that — with the history of Europe and the crisis of civilization.

The problem takes on a specific aspect when observing the geopolitical changes that have taken place in Europe in recent decades. At the time when the societies of Western Europe fell into a crisis of thinking, the countries of Eastern Europe, characterized by an unwanted Soviet mentality, sought to join them in a common political and cultural space. Today, the societies of Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova are beginning to strive for the same. Young people are at the forefront of these complex processes. The issue of mentality transformation and humanities education becomes the key to the future of Europe.

But today, Europe is once again torn by war. As prof. Anatoli Mikhailov emphasizes, “the history of Europe in the 20th century testifies to how closely education is related to the spiritual state of society and how dangerous this state can develop without finding a proper way to nurture humanity. In 1909, Wilhelm Windelband warned German society that the failure of its educational system to assimilate the sources of the classical European tradition would lead to a social catastrophe”. Similar warnings echoed in Germany in 1931. In the introduction of the English version of Ortega y Gasset’s book *The Mission of the University* (1946), an argument is being put forward that proper humanities education is capable of neutralizing the danger of the Third World War. Also, Hannah Arendt analysed the dramatic consequences of the crisis in education, referring to Kafka’s texts and thus highlighting the aspect of absurdity that plagues our education system more and more intensely, with E. Voegelin describing this situation as “the eclipse of reality”. Today’s situation of Europe, and of all humanity is such that ignoring reality can no longer be tolerated.

Prof. Dr. Povilas Aleksandravičius

Preface

The present monograph is a continuation of the European Humanities University publications “The Language of Humanities: Between Word and Image” (Mikhailov, 2020) and “Thinking in Crisis” (Aleksandravičius, 2023) which address the issue of the nature of humanities and humanities education in the current era of unprecedented social upheavals and challenges.

We must acknowledge that these challenges are not entirely new. The history of Europe in the 20th century has convincingly demonstrated how closely education is linked to the spiritual state of society, and how dangerous that state can become without a proper way of nurturing human values in society. As early as 1909, for example, the German philosopher Wilhelm Windelband warned German society that the failure of its educational system to assimilate the roots and sources of the classical European tradition could lead to social catastrophe. Of course, Windelband was well aware that, in expressing this concern about Germany, he was talking about a country that could not be accused of ignoring the importance of education. Rather, his point was that the quality of education at the beginning of the twentieth century had lost its power to properly shape the personality. As is well known, Windelband was far from alone in his concerns.

In his famous 1919 article “The Intellectual Crisis”, Paul Valéry raised the problem that the world, which had given the name of “progress” to its tendency towards fatal precision, was trying to combine the blessings of life with the advantages of death. Valéry recognised the danger of the European mind being completely defused. In the introduction to the English translation of José Ortega y Gasset’s book *The Mission of the University*, published shortly after the end of the Second World War in 1946, it is argued that proper education is capable of neutralising the danger of a possible Third World War. We also know that Hannah Arendt, in her reflections on the origins of totalitarianism, was acutely aware of the dramatic consequences of the crisis in education in her various publications, in some cases even referring to texts by Franz Kafka and thus highlighting the aspect of absurdity that is increasingly plaguing our educational system. In many cases, all these warnings were based on a common agreement that education has become ossified in its forms and, although based on a kind

— Part 2 —

**Humanities at University:
Technologies, Spirit, Art**

Povilas Aleksandravičius

Thinking as a Spiritual Practice: a Way of Humanities Education in the Age of Technology

In recent decades, we have been talking more and more intensively about the impact of technology on human consciousness. We embrace technological progress. We fear technology, especially in recent times, as artificial intelligence shows such progress that the technological transhumanism program seems less and less utopian: the singularity could happen and artificial intelligence could take over human's place on our planet... Heidegger accustomed us to perceive technology as an ontological danger to existence itself, to *Dasein*. But the same Heidegger also spread a certain hope throughout the world, contained in Hölderlin's words: "But where the danger is, also grows the saving power" (Heidegger, 1954). My reflexion is an attempt to think about certain elements of these lines. Nevertheless, I find Bergson's perspective even closer to me, that technology and the human spirit are intimately connected, that technology can be integrated into spiritual life, thereby expanding its capacities (Bergson, 2008: 283–338). This requires both technological progress and the activation of new capabilities of human consciousness. It is this activation that I would like to discuss. I would like universities to engage in this process of renewal of consciousness.

Is it possible to give a new life impetus to the deep sense and understanding of humanity in the technologized world? What should humanities education be like in our universities to respond to this task? This is a difficult question. And I think about it as if I were in darkness. Nevertheless, I will make a proposition. It will not be a detailed suggestion or detailed answer about which methods must be used in teaching humanities in our universities. I will consider this question on the level of directions that we should take. I suggest the following: humanities education in the age of technology should be grounded in the conception of thinking as a spiritual practice.

Logos and Nous, Intellectus and Ratio

My suggestion arises out of my conviction that there is a potential hidden in human nature that has been very little used so far — this is certain capacities to which we have been paying very little attention, especially in our universities, and which should be activated in the age of technology. This conviction is evidenced by one fundamental distinction which has been discussed by many philosophers, but which — and this is interesting indeed — has been continuously pushed to the margins of the philosophical thinking, depreciated, and forgotten. By this, I mean the distinction, made by Plato and Aristotle, between *logos* and *nous*. *Logos* is a conceptual and logical, theoretical and abstract discourse, a system. *Nous* is intuition of principles, a grasp of the depth of reality, an embryo of the “divine” life in a human being, according to Aristotle. But Plato and Aristotle developed the distinction between *logos* and *nous* rather sporadically. It was much better revealed by the thinkers of the Middle Ages, for instance, by Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart. In their thinking, this distinction acquired the shape of distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus*. *Ratio* is the commonly known rationality, theory, conceptuality, systematicity. And the concept of *intellectus* is explained by Thomas Aquinas as *intus legere*, “reading reality from inside” (Thomae de Aquino, 1871: II–II, 8, 1). (N. B.: the concept of *intellectus* of Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart has nothing in common with Kant’s concept of intellect). *Intellectus* is a grasp of the singular existence, an existential act, a contact with that moment in which the act of existence of a thing is inspired by the divine act. *Intellectus* is an existential judgement, a connection between human life and the flow of reality. It is our correspondence to what really exists. *Ratio* only follows *intellectus*, concepts and systems only reflect life, but they are not life itself. The great human tragedy is the gap between *ratio* and *intellectus*, it is a gap between reflection of life and life itself. In our times, this division was probably most strongly thought by Bergson whose philosophy was overshadowed by other thinkers after the II World War, but today, after 2000, it is entering the centre of philosophical reflection again (this, of course, is not accidental). Bergson differentiated between reason and intuition (intuition of duration). The reason contemplates reality in spatial categories; therefore, it divides it into parts that are located each after other, parts that homogenize it, that stop

its dynamic process, make it logical, but lifeless abstraction and concepts. Intuition grasps reality in the development of process, i. e. its duration, time. Intuition never destroys mind and science, but rather turns the concepts created by the mind into “flexible” concepts (*des concepts souples*), i. e. into dynamic concepts that correspond to reality’s concreteness (Bergson, 2013).

Sophia and Phronesis

Logos, ratio, reason are abstract thinking about the world that is incorrectly called “theoretical” reasoning. *Nous, intellectus*, intuition is the connection of thinking to the concrete process of reality when this process is both understood and experienced; it is a paradigm of thinking as spiritual practice. We can better understand this paradigm by reading some of Heidegger’s texts about Aristotle and about the historical development of history of philosophy that have been explicated in his lectures delivered in 1925 and titled *The Sophistes of Plato* (1992). In these lectures, Heidegger makes a distinction between *sophia* and *phronesis* that is intertwined with the distinction between *logos* and *nous*. He subtly shows how *logos* in the Aristotelian thinking is linked with *sophia* and how *nous* is linked with *phronesis*. Thus, *sofia* becomes a theoretical reflection of the world and *phronesis* — practical *nous*. Namely this concept — *phronesis* as practical *nous* — is what interests me the most. Namely here we encounter the substantiation for thinking as a spiritual practice that I want to propose as the principle of humanities education in the age of technology. However, one question that is raised by Heidegger in these lectures is no less important: which — *sophia* or *phronesis* — were placed higher in the Aristotelian philosophy and, consequently, in the whole Western philosophy? The answer is clear: it is *sophia* whose concept is related to the act of *logos*. According to Heidegger, this decision of Aristotle determined the fact that logical conceptual abstractness, an abstract theory, has become the ideal of European thinking and this has restrained the other possible direction of thinking — the direction of thinking as a spiritual practice that is done by *phronesis* in connection with *nous*. Such development of European thinking finally gave impetus to the emergence of modern science and technologies, but these technologies are characterised by one feature — there is a gap between their practice and a spiritual, or

ethical, human practice and thus there is a gap between the human reflexion and reality as it is. Contemporary people consider the technologized world as real reality because they think abstractly, they have replaced the life by abstract concepts. They fail to see that another reality, a concrete reality, exists inside themselves because they have not activated sufficiently *phronesis* or intuition.

Traditionally, the teaching in our universities is oriented towards *logos*, *ratio* and abstract theoretical thinking, towards the *sophia* that is disengaged from concrete human and ontological reality. The essence of my suggestion is to orient the teaching towards *nous*, towards *intellectus*, towards intuition, towards *phronesis* which links our thinking and concepts with concrete process of reality. Why is it necessary and, most importantly, why is it possible in the age of technologies?

Technology and Reason

I will not discuss here in details the essence of technology and its place in human existence. I will present my idea in four statements. I think all of us will agree with the statement that contemporary technologies whose highest expression is artificial intelligence is a radical result of the historical development of our abstract rationality. Most likely, all of us will agree with this statement: the principle of the technological functioning and the principle of the intuitive acting are different principles. Technological functioning can occur only by reducing reality into certain abstraction that depends on the principle of calculation. And intuition is a direct grasp of reality that touches not only concreteness but also its unpredictability. Maybe we will also agree with the third statement: if a human being, if humanity will remain on the level of abstract rationality and will not activate the level of intuition, it will have to admit the superiority of artificial intelligence. On the level of *ratio*, which is disengaged from intuition, artificial intelligence is stronger than a human being. A human being cannot win a chess match against artificial intelligence. If our thinking remains on the level of the calculation paradigm, it should rather be replaced by machines because machines are better at calculation. In such case, the process of technologization of reality will go on till the end: our humanity will be pushed away from the life, life in this earth will be lived by machines and not by a human being. This statement was

dramatized by a French philosopher Jacques Ellul who did not see any possibility for human nature to resist against technologies, to resist against humanity's becoming a victim of the absolute technological control. Despite of this, I will risk the fourth statement: intuition, in its Bergsonian sense, is the inborn human capacity which, by activation, not only makes it possible to stop the destruction of humanity in the presence of technologies but also makes it possible to turn technologies into an instrument of human spirit, to control technologies. In other words, I suggest the following: to avoid our rationality's subordination to technologies, it is necessary to subordinate our rationality to the intuitiveness which, during the development of Western thought, was referred to as *nous*, *intellectus* or intuition.

Tasks for University

Now it only remains to ask the most difficult question: how can it be done? How to activate that practical *nous*, that *phronesis* which would be primary in regard of the theoretical *sophia*? How can we inspire in our students the thinking as a spiritual practice? We should consider in detail our teaching content and methods, the nature of communication with students, and, finally, maybe the key question of us as teachers, of our own thinking and life. Not being able to provide a detailed opinion regarding these questions, I will only formulate the aims that should be sought to enliven thinking as a spiritual practice.

1. Following P. Hadot's research (2012), I would formulate the first aim in this way: we should awaken such thinking which would seek inner transformation of a man, a perception and an experiencing of inner me; which would shake value-based priorities; which would allow answering questions regarding what is good or bad, true or untrue in a very personal (but not "subjective") way. Thinking should touch, even coincide with, an entire existence, with life itself, and not with theoretical abstract knowledge about it. Epictetus defined the philosophy in this way: "It is the art of life whose material is everyone's life" (Epiktetas, 1986: 53 (I, 15, 2)). This definition is closely related to what the young Heidegger called the "facticity of life" (Heidegger, 1991). Thinking as knowing oneself that coincides with a care for oneself, or, as the famous Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka called it, "the care for the soul" (Patočka, 2021). Namely the thinking that

coincides with life itself is *phronesis*. *Phronesis* is the reflection of life that enables “living good” or “living with pleasure”, where the concept of pleasure is understood in the sense of an in-depth experience, in-depth joy. Undoubtedly, here we are in the understanding of thinking as a source of *eudaimonia*. And maybe I am not wrong in giving a reference to the conception of the “therapy of soul” in the philosophy of Marta Nussbaum (1994). Going back to Aristotle, he wrote in his *Protreptique*: “Those who live indeed, are not satisfied with pleasure experienced only from time to time; they derive pleasure from the simplest fact of living” (2006: 89d). I believe that today students must be taught humanities, especially philosophy, by directing thinking towards the spiritually practical conception of “good life”.

2. The second aim of thinking as spiritual practice is the enablement of the in-depth dialogue. Intuition is never only intuition of ones own me. Intuition is always a grasp of unity with everything that exists. It always coincides with understanding of the depth of other beings, especially other human beings. On the grounds of this in-depth understanding of the Other, an in-depth and real dialogue (conversation) with the Other can emerge. Today the concept of empathy is used rather often. The essayist Jeremy Rifkin is even sure that a globalized humanity is going in the direction of an “emphatic civilisation” (Rifkin, 2009). I am not sure how much this kind of optimism is substantiated. We should clarify the concept of empathy. But it is clear that an inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue has to occur on the grounds of mutual empathy, and not on the grounds of changes in abstract ideas and systems.

3. The third aim is the formation of an open society. I use the concept of an open society not in Popper’s sense, but in Bergson’s and Voegelin’s sense (Aleksandravičius, 2023: 55–62). These thinkers showed how the processes that occur in the human consciousness determine the political state and structure of a society. Thinking as spiritual practice is a real opening of a man to the source and the principle of life (according Bergson) or a leap in being (according Voegelin). How a new political society is born out of these processes is already a separate theme. But there is no doubt that university should be at the core of this process.

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Anatoli Mikhailov was member of Martin-Heidegger-Gesellschaft (Germany), as well as member of the editorial board of "Mesotes" journal (Vienna) and "Schopenhauer-Studien" (Hamburg). Over the years, presented at 50+ conferences in Germany, USA, France, Austria, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Hungary. In 1989, organized in Moscow the conference dedicated to Heidegger's 100th anniversary and invited Jürgen Habermas and organized his first visit to the Soviet Union, also translating Habermas' talk subsequently. In cooperation with Professor Friethof Rodi (Bochum, Germany) and with the support of Fritz Thyssen-Stiftung (Germany) initiated the translation into Russian of six volumes of Wilhelm Dilthey's Collected Works.

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- The Language of Art: a Saving Power? In: Art History and Emergency. Yale University Press, 2016.
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- Thinking in Crisis: On the (Ir)Responsibility of the Philosopher. In: Thinking in Crisis. Ed. by P. Aleksandravicius. Vilnius, 2023.

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Humanities Education Disrupted and Transformed: How to Become Human in the XXI Century?

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Printed by Ciklonas UAB
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