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Reservations towards Steering

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Jerzy Ochmann - RESERVATIONS TOWARDS STEERING

Abstract: The paper puts forward the difficult issue of cultural steering. The author draws attention to potential threats that might result from this process. The main dangers include steering by technocracy, manipulation of information, psychological strain to individuals. A strong technological and technocratic determinism arises and influences the politics, social bonds, human personality, because it changes the essence of man. Further he argues we must consider unpredictable threats stemming from the fact that what is “naturally human,” is steered into something “artificially human” with no concept of possible far-reaching consequences.

Key words: cultural steering, civilization, identity, post-human civilization, post-humanism

The new civilization raises doubts.⁹⁴ Up to date, all cultures and civilizations sprang and grew spontaneously. It seems new ones will be globally steered. At the dawn of a new era, we should acknowledge the dangers brought upon by steering in order to prevent negative repercussions we anticipate, following the rule *savoir pour prévoir*.

The main threat seems to be the steering by technocracy that is oriented towards civilizational progress. The new era vision clearly accentuates a civilizational rather than cultural identity. While the matters of a new civilization are discussed at length, debaters are mostly silent about a new culture. When they do raise the issue, only material culture is discussed. “Among the many results of technological addiction, the spiritual devastation is a significant element. And not only through enslavement to the prevailing materialism, overwhelming consumerism, omnipresent uniformity, ruthless functionalization of nearly all aspects of human life... Man, involved in the processes of urbanization and industrialization, subject to mechanization, technicalization, and economic, social, and political steering, has been separated from nature.”⁹⁵ Life will exceedingly take place outside nature. As the technospheric power grows, technology (civilization) prevails over nature. “When technology enters the world of culture (although these spheres are separated only conventionally), it causes the inversion of the latter. Once man-oriented, culture has turned to tools and means. Finally it has come to this: in the context of the growing complexity of all manner of technological systems, the visions of future and rational strategies are determined by the development of these systems and tools... Modern anthropology can hardly deal with the invasion of technology into human life, because in the course of its history it has perfected the tools for examining the durability rather than change in culture. And said invasion is irrefutable.”⁹⁶ A strong technological and technocratic determinism arises and influences the politics, social bonds, human personality, because it changes the essence of man.

⁹⁴ Por. J.F. Mączyński, *O niektórych anomaliach (sprzecznościach wewnętrznych) społeczeństwa informacyjnego* [in:] L.W. Zacher (red.), *Spoleczeństwo informacyjne w perspektywie człowieka, techniki, gospodarki*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 21–34, 265; T. Goben-Klas, P. Sienkiewicz, *Spoleczeństwo informacyjne, szanse, zagrożenia, wyzwania*, Kraków 1999.

⁹⁵ K. Polechoński, *W świecie technicznym i w świecie mitycznym*, Warszawa 2002, 3 (45).

⁹⁶ K. Krzysztofek, *Człowiek postludzki? Czyli o tym, że nie trzeba będzie iść po rozum do głowy, bo będzie w komputerze i w sieci* [w] L. W. Zacher (red.), *Spoleczeństwo informacyjne w perspektywie człowieka, techniki, gospodarki*, Warszawa 1999, p. 64.

Political steering will consist of new technologies serving the political concepts of power. Everyone sees the benefits (prolonging human life, annihilating many diseases) and the dangers. Almost everyone also sees a new problem: they question who is supposed to make decisions regarding the implementation of novel solutions, who enforces particular ways of development of man. It is widely known that it is not “mankind” that wants to “control itself from the inside,” but that “technological-economic-managerial intellectuals have taken it upon themselves to organize the world. Today these intellectuals have become interested in human beings themselves, in their spirit. In this area too they wanted to act more effectively and so they approached man as they do the objective world. Quickly whole new groups of professionals dealing in man emerged: psychologists, sociologists, social workers, cultural activists, coaches of all kinds, and even the so-called saviors... Many modern ‘body and soul minders’ of today’s man propose forsaking the values that have been inherited from the past.”⁹⁷ Political determinism is not limited to manipulation and propaganda; it leads to totalitarianism as no one will dare to rebel against information. How much political manipulation is there going to be in the new era?

Social steering will utilize new technologies to create new versions of social bonds. The main result of the information era is human communication. This is the important factor that will power the development of the new civilization because it offers the impulse for evolution. “How many notable thinkers have engaged in polemics with this trend in civilization? Certainly Erich Fromm... in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. It is a polemic with biological determinism and instinctivism, aimed at weakening biological factors and mechanisms. According to Fromm, mankind appeared at a point in the evolution when ‘instinctive determination had reached a minimum and the development of the brain a maximum,’⁹⁸ and the brain became an organ that transcended biological evolution. Fromm opts for a behavioral canon based upon the concept of personality–environment interaction rather than for evolutionary psychology. What goes on in science and technology is possible thanks to the genius of the mind, but also because of the fact that man destroys cultural taboos... We constantly deconstruct, desacralize, demystify, de-taboo-ize, not so we could understand but in order to negate, at the same time demanding the right to yield to primitive urges, in the name of spontaneity which is supposedly truer than reflection.”⁹⁹ In this way the ethical bases of collective life that follows the old rules are lost. New communication channels, so typical of information civilization, will weaken the biological (natural) bond even more and introduce a strong bond of human interaction based upon computer communication, transmission or telephony. Social determinism is the most visible aspect of information civilization.

Individual steering starts on the intellectual level. The youth puts indiscriminate trust in information, accepts all truths and the commands and prohibitions which stem from them and give rise to conflicts of opinion between a group on the one hand and tradition and parents on the other. Mankind yields uncritically to intellectual determinism and the process of steering news and information, which, besides offering multiple benefits, also put mankind at the risk of far-fetching manipulation. An uncontrolled access to information, including pornography, violence, brutality, obscenity, will lead to moral threats. Volitional determinism causes the mindless emulation of unethical behavior, lack of restraints, acceptance of attitudes, styles of thinking and value systems. Man will want what is forced upon him by the mass media or what is advertised. New values and new anti-values will emerge from what is the most publicized, proclaimed fashionable, most often anonymous. Educational threats are visible even today. The significant role mass media play in education these days and the complete lack of censorship impact education, downplaying the influence of parents. “In the late capitalism schooling is oriented towards utility, effectiveness, supplying the elite with tools of power and control over people, while people are left with only the feeling of power and control over objects.”¹⁰⁰ Externally-steered education may lead to unpredictable results. Psychological threats appear as a disconnection from life

⁹⁷ Ibidem, p. 63.

⁹⁸ E. Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, Holt, Reinhart and Winston, New York – Chicago – San Francisco 1974, p. 224. [TN]

⁹⁹ K. Krzysztofek, op. cit., p. 64.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem.

and isolation. “In the words of Henri Bergson, we are cornered by the Moloch of the material world, while our tiny soul lingers, smoldering, and keeps on shrinking.”¹⁰¹ People will become thoughtless, will absorb anything that is presented to them, they will be easily trapped, will accept everything inconsiderately. This process has already begun. If people stop to consider at all, they only notice what endangers themselves and their families, regardless of where they live. The first Report by the Club of Rome¹⁰² shows that people are only concerned with themselves and with what is suggested to them. The more general the question, the rarer it gets answered in questionnaires. The following factors rank as second in the scale of causing anxiety: poverty, diseases, loss of job, outbreak of war, unemployment, crime, incompetent government. Further down the scale are: hunger, the fall of religion, bad mores. As many as 38 percent respondents are convinced that the world is heading in a wrong direction. Feeling threatened by the universal determinism is almost common.¹⁰³ Physical threats, stemming from the lack of physical activity, genetic manipulation, and pharmacology, rank the lowest. Some view the new, universal programming as conscious acts of Evil, supported by promoters and broadcasters of Evil. Phrases like “threatened by evil” and “change for the worse” appear in many versions. This observation is corroborated by Józef Bańska’s classification of culture and his warning that we are threatened by bad values, bad culture, deceit.

Anthropological (concerning humanity) steering causes the most fear. Aside from global (i.e. technocratic, political, social) and individual (intellectual, moral, educational, mental, and physical) determinism we must consider unpredictable threats from “human” and “social” factors. What is “naturally human,” is steered into something “artificially human;” however, those who steer have no concept of what will result from the continued development of the “artificially human.” What is as yet “naturally human” oscillates between crisis and development, whereas the difference between man’s cognitive and transformative power grows. The effects of human creativity become unforeseeable. With increasing frequency man asks if the limit of what is human has been breached yet, or if it is constantly moved further; and if we are at all able to foresee the consequences of pushing that limit. Technology encroaches on human life very deeply, and we are unable to anticipate either its development or the degree to which it will affect man. The influence of technology on human life is exceedingly greater than the influence inflicted by the invention of the sword or wheel. To top it all, technology and scientific experimentation are getting out of control by society and its normative structures. Human life is increasingly dependent on the technical and economic world that tries to impose its language even on politicians and lawyers. In general, it augurs over-steering man into another version of himself, and it may go in an unforeseeable direction. Many thinkers have the courage to dub the man of the next generation “post-human” and to describe the future civilization as “post-human.”¹⁰⁴ So what emerges is a new anthropology as a change occurs in the very core of man.

“Behind the anticipated scenarios of a computer-steered society lurks a gaunt vision of what is to become human: a model of a person as a being whose purposes we have understood and can fulfill with our computer programming; a person who is as satisfied with simulation as with reality and who reacts in the same way to images and sounds rather than mind and souls of those hiding behind those images. We are in fact extremely complicated organisms, striving to achieve goals that we cannot understand, for reasons we certainly do not feel up to investigating.”¹⁰⁵ Kazimierz Krzysztofek goes as far as to say: “Already it is said that science and technology make it possible to ‘better man.’ But what does it mean to ‘better’? What criteria to use when measuring this ‘betterness’? If you read papers on this subject carefully, it is easy to see that ‘betterness’ does not mean moral improvement but the psychosomatic

¹⁰¹ Ibidem.

¹⁰² D.H. Meadows, D.L. Meadows, J. Randers, W.W. Behrens III, *Granice Wzrostu*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa 1973.

¹⁰³ Por. M. Gołka, *Poczucie zagrożenia i wyzwania cywilizacyjnych*, Poznań 2000, pp. 11, 64.

¹⁰⁴ Por. K. Krzysztofek, *Człowiek postludzki?*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁵ Ch. Jonscher, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

perfecting of an intelligent machine, bio-electronic hybrid.¹⁰⁶ Posthumanism refers to Nietzsche's concepts of the end of morality, the will to power, 'overman'; freedom is expressed in the absolute liberty to manage the evolution of one's body and mind; they have no pity on those economically or physically weaker. The lack of this element will bring about the 'Last Man', as Francis Fukuyama calls him – perhaps he is already here."¹⁰⁷

There are many dangers to humanism, each of them a threat in its own way and each leads to the transformation of humanity. Listed among the most significant, changing factors are: genetic manipulation and cloning; memetics, or cultural genetics, psychopharmacology; and the bio-electronic hybridization of man.¹⁰⁸ The issue demands due consideration and stressing all foreseeable and unforeseeable negative effects. Claude Lévi-Strauss states that "three-quarters of the achieved progress serve to remedy its negative consequences."¹⁰⁹ It is impossible to foretell the changes in man caused by the changes in his civilizational background.¹¹⁰ Civilizational development eradicates previous threats, but exposes us to new traps. It is impossible to foretell new cultural dilemmas,¹¹¹ both in the context of a cultural clash and cultural synthesis. How will they influence the new shape of personality? It is also impossible to foretell transformations of society.¹¹² Aging and dying-out communities give way to masses of immigrants. The synthesis of the settled and the immigrants will surely create new societies (e.g. in France, England, Germany), and the effects of this, though they are the subject of several prognoses, remain unpredictable. Will the new European be offered a sound ideological synthesis; will it be rooted in its forerunner; will it be at all comparable to mother-culture; will a new religion emerge?

¹⁰⁶ K. Krzysztofek, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

¹¹⁰ p. Huntington, *Zderzenie cywilizacji*, Warszawa 2005.

¹¹¹ W. Jackowska, *Kultury pozaeuropejskie i globalizacja. Zderzenia*, Warszawa 2000; Z. Krasnodębski, *Postmodernistyczne rozterki kultury*, Warszawa 1996; A. Posern-Zieliński, *Tolerancja i jej granice w relacjach międzykulturowych*, Poznań 2004; J. Rokicki, *Kolor, pochodzenie, kultura*, Kraków 2002.

¹¹² G. Janusz, *Prawa mniejszości narodowych i ich ochrona: standardy europejskie*, Warszawa 1995; H. Skorowski, *Problem marginalizacji imigrantów i uchodźców*, Roczniki Naukowe Caritas, 1999, Rok III, p. 82; J.E. Zamojski, *Migracje doby współczesnej: geneza, charakterystyka, wyzwania, odpowiedzi*, [w:] P. Korcelli (red.), *Przemiany w zakresie migracji ludności jako konsekwencja przystąpienia Polski do Unii Europejskiej*, „Biuletyn Komitetu Przestrzennego Zagospodarowania Kraju”, z. 184, Warszawa 1998; J. Zarnowski, *Spoleczeństwa XX wieku*, Wrocław 1999.

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