W-ETE–2012 – WISDOM IN THE EMERGENT TECHNOLOGIES ERA (PHEADE 2012)

Ana BAZAC[1]

ana_bazac@hotmail.com

An interesting international conference was held at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, University in Pune, India, from November 1–5, 2012 and chaired by Professor Viorel Guliciuc, „Ştefan cel Mare" University, Suceava, and Professor Kuruvilla Pandikatu, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Director of the Centre for Science Religion Studies.

Beside the opportunity to gather researchers from different parts of the world and different formative antecedents – and to benefit from the hospitality of the Indian university –, the conference was a real event because of its focus on the philosophical re-defining of the concept of wisdom in the present late modernity marked by what were called *emergent technologies* (information technology, nano and biotechnology, robotics and artificial intelligence (AI)).

Let me glean some presentations that support the above-mentioned label. Yolanda Angulo Parra (Universidad Autonoma de Mexic, Mexico) – *Wisdom in contemporary philosophical discourse* – has addressed the concept of wisdom in ancient philosophers (especially Epicurus) as well as in the modern works of Nietzsche, Gerd B. Achenbach, Pierre Hadot, Michel Foucault, and has configured philosophy as *therapeia* or tool of practical reason.

Priyedarshi Jetli (University of New Delhi) – *From Plato's Sophia to Aristotle's Nous in Turing's halting problem* – has started from the idea of self-referentiality contained in the Aristotle's definition of philosophical knowledge (for the sake of knowledge itself – and not for the sake of something from a particular specified domain;

[1] Prof. univ. dr., Universitatea Politehnica din Bucureşti; Comitetul Român pentru Istoria şi Filosofia Ştiinţei şi Tehnicii al Academiei Române.

i.e. the philosophical knowledge is a second order self-referential wisdom) and has demonstrated that, while at the first glance the Turing machine is not a computing machine, which in turn implies that the human mind is not computational, in reality both the Turing machine and the human mind are computational because they can formulate the halting problem and prove it, as second order self-referential wisdom. Indeed, at first glance the endlessly working of the machine would not overlap with the discontinuous and mortal characteristics of man and the human action. But there are three philosophical solutions that deny this impression: the concept of re-incarnation, that of relay (which relates discontinuity to continuity, *realises* the latter), and that suggested by the myth of Sisyphus – only the collective solving of endless problems.

Lorenzo Magnani (University of Pavia, Italy) – *Wisdom does require knowledge: enhancing free will, freedom, responsibility, and ownership of our destinies* – has advocated the construction of a new body of knowledge anticipating, monitoring and managing the hazards of technology, in relation with an ethics that imposes *respecting people as things*. What about this last phrase? Since the technological advances have given greater value to external things – both natural and artificial – people should "copy" this position and value within a new wisdom. Therefore, adding new cognizance is the result of organised activities in cognitive niches. But these are rather separated and thus the prestige of science covers perverse effects. One is "infoxication", the lack of critical capacity, the irrelevance of some information, the epistemological indecency, the lack of long-range terms. The result is rather the "ignorance society", re-enchanting the world, than the knowledge society. The philosophical solution to all of these is a specific use of the theory of alienation and critique of consumerism: if only the objects have worth, so let treat people like the objects, i.e. as ends. And for this goal, the ethics of neighbourhood is no more enough: the local is surpassed by the collective action that configures something like "the moral invisible hand".

Victor Ferrao (Rachol Seminary, Goa, India) – *Science, technology and hegemonic globalization* – has highlighted that technologies are not neutral but are constructed within the dynamic socio-political and economic contexts and as such are thought to embody the ideology of the respective society in which they evolve. And as science and technology have often become resources at the service of the power-elite, as they have become vehicles of hegemonic globalization: as parts of a symbolic order that legitimates, reinforces

and produces it. The neutral face of science and technology was de-constructed and their imperialistic behaviour was unmasked. There is an epistemological effect of colonialism that can be approached with an epistemology of ignorance. This highlights the model of "lazy reason" implemented by the mono-culture of imperialism. Science and technology constitute a semiotic resource that creates and maintains the power relations that sustain hegemonic globalization, but there are emancipative ways of responding to the geopolitics of hegemonic globalization (liberating ecologies, ecologies of recognition).

Nishant A. Irudayadason (Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth) – *Revisiting Jonas' Ethics for Technological Civilization* – has made a significant analysis of Jonas' ethics of responsibility as necessary answer to the problems brought by the progress of the modern technology. He underlined three ideas of Jonas: that of the necessity to revisit the concept of technological progress in the light of the ethics of responsibility, that of enlarging the paradigm of responsibility by including the generations to come and nature, and that of the use of scientific research as knowledge production toward the problematic technological innovation.

Stephen Jayard (Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth) – *Should science be wise too?* – has supported the ideas that the classical picture of science as rational, objective, empirical etc. is in need of drastic revision to create a new and more realistic picture of science as social, human and ethical. In fact, scholars like Maxwell (insisting on the moving beyond classical rationalism and empiricism), Th. Kuhn (exploring the process of theory choice in science), P. Feyerabend (liberating society from the iron clutches of science) and Stephen Nathanson (elaborating on the need of reasonable rationality) have led to the above-mentioned idea. Being *knowledgeable* was, perhaps, enough to do science in the past centuries, but the enormous potentialities and power of science requires science to be *wise* too.

Job Kozhamthadam (Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth) – *Technology-wisdom partnership for a healthy humanity* – has focused on the contrasting image of the positive and negative consequences of the modern technology and identified the root cause of this contrast as the absence or inadequate presence of wisdom in the development and application of technology.

Colin T.A. Schmidt (Le Mans University, Laval, France) – *The re-conception of wisdom: to sublimate or not to sublimate* – has addressed the practical problem of placing funding of research in

emerging technologies and, through the analysis of inter-institutional communication, showed that sound knowledge in philosophy and social informatics is a prerequisite for directing and adapting research programmes in the nano, bio, information, cognitive field.

Stefan Lorenz Sorgner (University of Erlangen, Nurenberg, Germany) – *The moral duty to enhance?* – has analysed the principle of procreative beneficence (which claims that there is a moral duty to choose the child with the best chances of a good life after in vitro fertilization and preimplantation genetic diagnosis), namely the two versions of Julian Savulescu's thesis, and supplied an alternative version stressing on the norm of negative freedom.

Johnson J. Puthenpurackal (ACPI, Eluru, Andra Pradesh, India) – *Wisdom vs knowledge* – has focused on the relation and difference between wisdom and knowledge, demonstrating that wisdom has an ontological priority over knowledge. Using Panikkar concept of wisdom as development of the cosmic character of the human person and Husserl's and Heidegger's concept of horizon, wisdom was defined as *openness* to the wide horizon that goes beyond the limiting boundaries of knowledge: as vision of the future, of the possibilities and the not-yet, wisdom implies imagination and creativity.

Ana Bazac – *Could we talk about human wisdom?* – has defended two theses. The first is that the concept of wisdom cannot refer to the individual: there is only collective wisdom. The second confronts – because the paper has received, as landmark of the present human behaviour in search of joy of life, the emergent technologies that constitute the structure of the present civilization – two types of technologies, that of biomedical engineering and that of food and agricultural engineering, with the real state of the present world population, and this situation and the human wisdom. The result of the lack of wisdom that is involved in the real use of specified technologies, is the *irreparable*, and thus it leads to both the sorrow for this apparent implacable and the strain of the human action in order to reduce the irreparable and to enhance wisdom.

Viorel Guliciuc – *The crowd research and the ancient wisdom* – has stopped upon an interesting historical fact: that of ancient groups, namely formed by un-professionals, which could solve problems like a modern individual expert. In its turn, a modern group of non-professionals can behave like an ancient one, and this approach of knowledge management helps us to understand that the collaboration within the group allows the passing beyond the accredited elements of knowledge, grasping complexity, and this is wisdom.

Kuruvilla Pandikatu – *Wisdom in the age of technology and emergent transhumanism: toward an Indian ending* – has followed Amartya Sen's *The Argumentative Indian*, in order to counter pose to the common Western prejudices the harmonious Indian cultural tradition, balancing rationalism and religion, openness toward technology and depth of spiritualism, multiculturalism, celebration of the difference and affirmation of the Other. This cultural tradition configures an optimistic solution just opposite to transhumanism.

A concluding remark of this short presentation of the conference is that if some researchers (and I do not necessarily speak about the participants) still work in the inertia of disparate fields – by saying that science and technology as such would have negative effects, and not their use within a political frame – a pattern that is no longer feeble is that of field crossing and insertion of the sociology of science and technology within the research of philosophy of science.