OPEN QUESTIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: THE E-LEARNING MANDATE: HOW PHILOSOPHY CAN HELP?

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1. Introduction

Of the title, *"Open questions for the 21st century: the E-learning mandate - How Philosophy can help?"*, the most important term is "open", openness, referring to the imperative openness to novelty and change. Indeed, reality, as interpreted from the perspective of human beings, is forced to face this imperative condition, *sine qua non* evolution is not possible. No matter the historical age, the geographical location or the cultural context, the same imperative applies.

Philosophy of life, from Dilthey (1976) to Henry (1963), touches this openness, impetus and drive, intrinsic to life. Henry's work relates life and affects, as an example of the means through which reality manifests itself. This openness refers also to Heidegger's (1962) ontology, in the sense that Dasein, the being-in-the-world, refers to the truth of being. Heideggerian insights on the human embodied and situated way of being, that is, historically situated, and this refers to such openness of being. There is also an anthropological assumption behind such positions because Heidegger classifies humans precisely by being determined by such openness to the absolute. According to Henry, all material reality is of this order, of openness to the absolute, and, consequently, human's existence is embodied and embedded through the world of affects. Human's openness is an opening to the manifestation of reality.

The present text is itself an act of openness. An act is not an effort, though it requires energy and commitment. An act is not a choice,

though it implies offering enough space for ideas to flow and grow. An act is a mandatory reaction to something prior, which forces itself onto reality, no questions asked; suddenly it is there, already on the move, pushing itself into existence.

Philosophical inquiry helps to trigger action through channelling new energies towards evidence based interpretations of reality. Such evidence takes the form of texts and of narratives. Human beings react to external stimuli by connecting to central issues that serve the role of structuring world visions. Such world-visions include cultural formatting as well as the mechanisms considered to be adequate to think, act and make sense of the world, the world understood as reality, as the concrete real.

In each historical age, certain issues constitute paradigmatic examples of the dominant thinking schemes present in a transversal way across different areas of society. The analysis and interpretation of such issues, taken as instances of philosophical inquiry, enable rethinking present patterns as well as opening new venues for innovation and change. The purpose of the present paper is to address the role played by technology in contemporary societies, namely, by e-learning and its social impact. The rationale is that the purpose driven action and the search for meaningful intervention, at individual and at institutional levels, is conditioned by the availability of connecting mechanisms that may make ends meet, i.e. may enable efficient and effective action to emerge.

Dominant thinking is a self-explanatory term. This terminology has a double reference: on one hand, it refers to the dominant thinking discourse present transversally across different elements of society; and, on the other hand, the process of thinking is itself dominated by certain ideas and concepts that prevail over others. The key issue to be considered is the capacity of marginal and peripheral thought to gain space and attention, being therefore integrated into mainstream positions. This issue, the relationship between the orthodox and the unorthodox, refers both to the individual as well as to the collective process of determining the mind frame and worldview that is prevalent across certain time periods.

The degree in which each new idea or concept is able to offer the best fit regarding current interpretations of reality determines its degree

of acceptance and the speed of its dissemination power. Viral phenomena captures central aspects that characterise a new circumstance; a new term or a new meaning to an old term become fashionable precisely because they are able to highlight and to stress central characteristics that were merely implicit in the past. This is a self-reinforcing process because the more one is aware and sensitive towards the presence of certain aspects of reality, the more facilitated is the process of making such issue relevant and central. This is a naturalisation and normalisation process that is present across cultures and which, in itself, embodies what a cultural phenomenon is. That is, culture is a step-by-step construction process, continuously open to further levels of specification, clarification and determination: A, not B; B′, not B′′, etc.

In certain historical periods the ideals of goodness, of beauty and of truthfulness, were considered to be universal and taken as given or taken for granted assumptions. These are known as the Transcendentals and were developed in classical Greek philosophy and followed both in medieval times and in Modern age. Present societies may still value the same ideals in abstract terms but there is a rejection of the canonical determination of what constitutes an instance of its reification. This implies that there is no single grand narrative that may justify a yes or no answer but rather there is the recognition of the construction process required in order to create consensual views. Shared beliefs and shared worldviews reflect a common experience of reality. However, evolution and change does occur; so, where does this change come from? Does it come from a mind-set, a prior conviction, and a positive and optimistic attitude, which values change and novelty? Does such attitude depend upon previous life experiences of success, of belonging and of being recognised, acknowledged and valued?

Something does work; it functions; reality does not fall out or break apart. That is, apart from the suicidal states and mental health unbalances. In general terms, this wholesome and unity character of reality is accepted as given. Each culture aims at creating enough sets of answers so that all possible states of the world may be covered with good enough, adequate and sufficiently satisfactory explanations, justifications and arguments. Civilizations come and go but culture is

precisely that process of adapting new answers, new hypothesis and interpretations, which refer to whatever new reality is being faced. Culture is the standard answer, it is the formatted and consensual perspective; yet, culture is also plural and diverse, enabling different alternatives to emerge.

2. Higher education, technology and societal change

The influence of technology in higher education institutions (HEI) is larger than specific e-learning strategies because of the ubiquity and mobility of contemporary information and communication artefacts. E-learning, distance learning and blended-learning (b-learning) are "variations under the same theme", as happens in music. Within the context of the present text, e-learning is key because it enables making explicit the role played by education in contemporary societies. This includes the promotion of economic development in sustainable ways (Adams & Jeanrenaud, 2008).

E-learning may be understood as the process of using electronic-based mediation to support a teaching-learning system. B-learning refers to a combination of distant as well as present face-to-face conventional systems. The importance of e-learning and its positive effects in society are both direct and indirect. E-learning means expanding the educational offer globally, literarily enabling the differentiation and segmentation process in order to determine a unique and personalised value offer and value proposition to the end-consumer on a planetary scale. If one remembers that the international space station is inhabited permanently, e-learning is also the means through which the astronauts practice their own style of continual education, professional training and development and life-long learning.

Technology, as an enabler of human action, may potentiate to the limit the power of radical ideals, bringing commitment and change on a global scale. The Green movement, the fight for feminist rights or the creation and exploration of alternative forms of economic organisation, including novel and plural forms of capitalism, are an illustration of the changes and of the largely unexplored potential of the digital world.

"E-learning has become an increasingly vital tool for worldwide business, education and social development." (Charmonman et al, 2009, 4). In the same fashion, that e-learning is a reality test for HEI and that HEI are a reality test for society as a whole, e-learning is also a reality test at individual and personal level, both for teachers and for students. In blunt and explicit forms, e-learning forces the enunciation of all important issues at hand in a teacher-learner relationship. "E-learning itself is a productive tool for education in the 21st century. The future of e-learning will be more successful than e-commerce." (Charmonman et al, 2009, 4).

Appreciative inquiry has been developed as a tool for change management in widely diverse contexts. Philosophical based reflections are implicitly and informally present in the exercise of appreciative inquiry.

> "Duo-ethnography as strategy provided the researchers with the opportunity to challenge the 'other' to reflect on their own discipline-related appreciative inquiry experiences, in a deeper, more relational and authentic way." (Meier & Geldenhuys, 2017, 9).

For some authors, active reflection is a fundamental part of e-learning. "The core of the shift in thinking towards e-learning is the idea that students should be actively engaged in sustainable communities of inquiry." (Garrison, 2011, 1). For this purpose, it is necessary to promote transformative course and programme redesign. "Pedagogical and technological innovations are redefining higher education. At the nexus of this convergence is e-learning." (Garrison, 2011, 1).

E-learning, as all learning models, has deep social connections. Present day societies may be contrasted with historical models. "In simple sociocultural system, mode of learning was also simple." (Raza, Rashid Kausar & Paul, 2007, 67). These authors argue that Cynthia Pantazis (2002) in "Maximizing E-Learning To Train the 21st Century Workforce", has vividly captured the spirit of this new global outlook, present in contemporary societies.

> "Advances in technology have created an environment for a learning revolution. The power of e-learning comes from the opportunity to leverage

> technology and information to alter the basic tenets of learning by eliminating the one-size fits for all approach to instructions and customizing content to meet individual needs and learning styles." (Pantazis, 2002, in Raza, Rashid Kausar & Paul, 2007, 67).

Analysing information as a social process is key. "E-learning as a social "given," as well as a new "global outlook" is rooted in and shaped by knowledge and information explosion of our times. Both individuals and communities have to manage lots of information, which is created not only within the social systems but also have to cope with ever flooding rivers of information and knowledge. Information itself is mute and dumb, unless it is raised to the level of significance, of knowledge by the social contexts in which it is created, stored, distributed and shared by human beings." (Raza, Rashid Kausar & Paul, 2007, 71).

These authors stress the political role of information and how e-learning may help to create and foster global democracy.

> "In order to exist as valid information structures, both communities and individuals have to negotiate part of their inherited cultural and social identities and accept other cultural identities as valid expression of information and knowledge structures. Here e-learning can help in creating a globally shared information structure, which do not discriminate, divide, and dislocate, but accepts the valid expression of information differences amongst human actors and communities and help each share part of ones' freedom in order to create a genuine global society, which is not only democratic in governance, but also, democratic in worldview, in economy, in technology, in values and in education." (Raza, Rashid Kausar & Paul, 2007, 71).

Education for peace is also an e-learning mandate. "It is not possible that you generate unequal information structures and yet hope to see a peaceful and equal world. It is not possible that some areas of the new information communities are more democratic, while others are not." (Raza, Rashid Kausar & Paul, 2007, 71). Eric and Judy Landis (2013, 30) argue that "The purpose of knowledge resides in the useful application of knowledge." Furthermore, they stress the importance of philosophy in learning contexts.

> "The introduction and application of philosophy into the learning environment creates an exciting win/win situation for everyone, proving that philosophy remains a living entity that continues to be very relevant in the modern world of the 21st century." (Landis & Landis, 2013, 32).

As large North American Higher Education Institutions have proved, including Harvard University and M.I.T., new spaces and novel ways of working are at the basis of new forms of education, creating new learner-teacher partnerships. These HEI create Fab-labs and help to foster Makerspaces in their communities. The theories related to pragmatism, originated from Peirce's (1974) American School of Pragmatism, from Dewey's (1938) application to an educational setting, and from Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) application to language, to speech-acts, to enunciation and to the taxonomy of illocutory acts, are important to be acknowledged in order to interpret and to recognise the power of these creative and experimental spaces. Later and yet parallel traditions include Vygotsky's Activity Theory and Engestrom's (1987) work; one Russian and the other a Finnish follower. Hierarchical analysis of what motivates human action, and the exploration of a cultural-historical interpretation of behaviour inspired in soviet psychology theories, led to a focus on discourse and language use, which is directed at practice, at action, at doing and at making, therefore helping to highlight the importance of the Makers movement in contemporary societies.

Bakhtin (1981), Barthes, Halliday, Kress, Lemke, and many others, explore the field of semiotics, in particular the social role and the social use of language, through what has become known as social semiotics. The basic idea is that meaning-making is a language based process that occurs as a consequence of participation in social activities, so that discourse and all forms of language use are themselves constitutive of signification and meaning, and are the basic unit of all interpretation phenomenon. As Freud's psychoanalysis has shown, humans are triggered by satisfaction, by pleasure, by enthusiasm, because libido and the sexual drive is merely a specific instance of a broader impetus for life and *joie de vivre*, present in all humans spontaneously, naturally and unavoidably so.

Other interpretations are possible and are even prevalent in terms of determining current dominant thinking, including a favouring of cognitive based approaches over social tradition interpretations of human action, or analytic philosophy as opposed to Continental perspectives, such as Husserl's and Heidegger's (1962) oeuvres. Moreover, action and language philosophy, including the Austin and Searle tradition, as well as Peirce's paramount contribution to semiotics, in parallel and contemporary to Saussure's European creation of a new school of semiotic thought, which later enabled the creation of structuralism, mainly through Lévi-Strauss' work, and the epistemic shift that brought language and meaning to the centre of social scientists production in the second half of the twentieth century, have been majorly interpreted from a cognitivist and not from a social perspective, tending to favour analytical interpretations over Continental perspectives.

E-learning, no matter the educational context, has a special role to play in society. The task of HEI professionals, teachers, researchers and other collaborators, is to write in stone that their full time job is to offer hope and trust to their clients and other stakeholders, in short, to society as a whole, on a global scale, including present and future generations.

The 20th century and its war history have created a wave of shock that is still being digested today. Part of this self-reflection has been fuelled by the digital revolution and the transitional phase towards a post-industrial society that emerged in post-war years (Bell, 1974).

In March, 2000, Portugal held the Presidency of the EU, and the Lisbon's Strategy was launched that set the double goal for Europe of social cohesion and of becoming the top knowledge economy in the world within a ten years period. Many of the assumptions that supported this strategy are still valid today yet a critical misunderstanding occurred: the knowledge economy is not a commercial race. There are no winners and there are no losers because if humanity carries on its present blinded denial of the catastrophic functioning of present global economy it is both life in the planet Earth and humanity itself that will face extinction earlier than necessary.

As was discussed above, e-learning brings the digital world to HEI, and both e-learning and HEI have a crucial role to play in enabling the

development of the full potential of the digital revolution, as a powerful instrument for human development and for global change.

3. Education for peace

The role of education in present societies is characterised by a wide scope of functions and goals, both individual and social. Moreover, e-learning forces a reflexion upon current technological impact, including the role played by social relations and by communities of inquiry.

Understanding societal change and the challenges that are being faced helps to bring awareness towards the risks that are present in current times. Ulrich Beck coined the term "risk society", precisely as an effort to raise consciousness towards the fragmentation of the community links and to the loss of the vision of the whole regarding social wellbeing and social justice.

"The more work relations are deregulated and flexibilised, the faster work society changes to a risk incalculable both in terms of individual lives and at the level of the state and politics." (Beck, 2014: 3). These issues help to address sensitive areas such as peace-building efforts, understood as the sustainable and long term practices conducive to risk averse behaviour at society level. Education, in general, and HEI, in particular, have a key role to play, namely, through the promotion of peace-building initiatives. E-learning and the democratization of knowledge that it potentially enables are key in this process of promoting human development.

Peace-building is, *par excellence*, the ultimate instrument of each civilisation - accepting as the end goal, peace itself. Peace-building has been an ever present goal across different historic periods and contemporary societies seek new ways of promoting global peace. "Systemic violence challenges humanity to build cultures of peace based on nonviolence, human rights, equality, freedom, tolerance, solidarity, and protection of the earth's resources. (Gerstein & Moeschberger, 2003, 115). The United Nations has had a positive impact in promoting peace related policies and programmes. Berdal (2017) addresses the reconstruction period that follows war, addressing the complexity of

contemporary global settings. Within the context of the present text, the key aspect to highlight is that it is not violence that breaks peace. Violence is inherent to life and is present in strong emotional states, both positive and negative in nature, related to satisfaction and pleasure, or else to frustration and disgust. Violence may lead or not to aggression because violence is a measure of intensity, of density and of authenticity, and not a measure of aggressiveness and of destructiveness. Violence is there, as a matter-of-fact reality, and aggressiveness occurs when the violence of the emotional impact cannot be hold and contained.

Peace-building is a multifactor process, including the "(…) identification of the psychological, political, economic, social, and religious factors linked with reconciliation." (Gerstein & Moeschberger, 2003, 117). Many different professions have a role to play in the peace-building process, involving education and health related interventions. "Counselling professionals can uniquely contribute to the global cultures of peace movement. This contribution is consistent with the emphasis in counselling on strengths, human potential, adaptive behaviour, consultation, psychoeducation, prevention, and multiculturalism." (Gerstein & Moeschberger, 2003, 119).

Within the context of the present text, peace-building refers to the process through which it is possible to evaluate the adequateness and the resilience of contemporary societies. To be more specific, peace-building is understood as a vital process that is a condition of success and of survival of whatever social organisation one may consider, from a civilisation to a local community. Indeed, this same reasoning applies to the survival of the human species, and, more radically, of life on planet Earth. In other words, human's aggressiveness and destructive capacity may prematurely imply the eradication of life, much before its natural death period with the extinction or the cooling down of the Sun star.

Geoff Harris (2010) argues in favour of "Studying conflict, violence and peace in African universities", as the title of his article indicates. Analysing social contexts, certain key concepts are highlighted:

> "Structural violence refers to the damage resulting from social, political and economic structures in society. It usually does not have the intention

> to harm but is nonetheless deadly. The apartheid system in South Africa is an obvious example but many commentators would include less obvious examples like the capitalist system in general and the failure by governments to carry out basic health care initiatives to check the spread of communicable diseases." (Harris, 2010, 294).

Regarding the staffing of a peace-building course, this author clarifies the need for a personal commitment attitude, helping to forge the idea and the practice of peace as a way of life.

> "A lecturer in history, politics or sociology might hope that students will enjoy their studies and maintain a lifelong interest in the discipline. Peace studies is quite different: its purpose, to return to our earlier definition, is to encourage students to adopt peace as a way of life. While it is possible for academics from various disciplines to teach the content of peace studies, it is unlikely that they could encourage students to adopt peace as a way of life unless they are personally committed to it. 'A demonstrated commitment to peace' should be a pre-requisite for appointment as a lecturer in peace studies." (Harris, 2010, 300).

Peace-building has been studied from different angles, including the importance of leadership for peace. In the mid-2000s, Jean Lipman-Blumen began asking the question: Leadership for What? (Mexiner, 2006). Her notion was for scholars and practitioners to ask why one should lead, if not for peace. What might be obtained by leadership if peace could not be obtained? This question caught fire in numerous influential networks of scope, not least of which was within the International Leadership Association (ILA). (McIntyre Miller, 2016, 218).

Different characteristics are common to all leaders, yet peace-building requires some specific traits.

> "Overall, what the peace leader literature demonstrates, then, is that there may be important traits, characteristics, and practices a peace leader can embody. Some of these include empathy, optimism, forgiveness, being reconciliation and service-orientated, intellect and imagination, a focus on the future, a holistic viewpoint, flexibility, strong relational skills and interconnectedness, cultural appreciation, use of narrative, integrity, character, trust building, humility, and a sense of humour. While the larger trait-based

> leadership studies literature demonstrates some of these same practices, traits such as empathy, forgiveness, optimism, and reconciliation-orientation might be unique to those leaders who intend to, and do, engage in efforts of peace." (McIntyre Miller, 2016, 220).

Research has a powerful role to play in promoting global peace and a "(…) way of enhancing peace leadership scholarship is through building informed theoretical models and perspectives grounded in the literature and the research emerging from the field." (McIntyre Miller, 2016, 223).

The point that is to be made by the present text is that all intentional efforts may be contrasted against the ideal of peace-building. The World Health Organisation, in the 1970' decade, defined health beyond the absence of illness in order to specifically state that there is more to health states than the mere non-presence of pathogenic agents and conditions. This definition implied a revolution in thought, indeed opening up a new paradigmatic instance commonly understood as the holistic view of health.

Between peace and war, war events may emerge, yet it is the continuous workings of building peace that may prevent future wars and help to end current war conflicts. More importantly, before killing with guns and bombs, humans kill in thought, words and gestures of neglect, of indifference and of self-denial. Self-denial because every time a human being inflicts damage upon someone else, she or he is firstly inflicting damage upon herself or himself, as has already been referred elsewhere.

4. Artificial Intelligence and information technology

The social impact of information technology is a central knowledge area to take into account in order to situate, position and interpret contemporary societies. The context of the programmed society, the digital world, or the post-industrial economy, and the use of concepts such as industry 4.0, big data, internet of things, mobile computing or cloud computing, imply a new eco-system of meanings that may

describe the new digital eco-system of technology enhanced human action.

Information technology has enabled the development of research areas that help to reflect upon future models of society. These models take into account the impact that technology has in how human beings organise themselves in social terms. "Revolution in economy and society, next to the Industrial, Information, and Knowledge revolutions, is post-knowledge revolution, especially of knowledge sprang from Intuition, Imagination, and Creative capacity of the human being; it represents Creative society." (Todoroi, 2011, 103).

In all historical ages, technology embodies the expansion of possibilities and works as an enabler of human action. A techno-science environment, covering all areas of production and of consumption of economic activity, represents a direct mirror where the hidden imaginary of society is reflected. Values and belief systems are made visible through the collective decision-making processes related to technology mediated human activity. However, the apparent transparency of reporting, of accountability and of legal justice, formally present in modern democracies, is captive of a myriad of levels of hidden complexity. Institutional economics (e.g., Galbraith, 1973) is a powerful tool to interpret the apparent paradoxes of the economic system. Concepts such as path dependency and locked-in effect refer to the way institutions tend to fall prey of strategies that served them well in the past and yet are a nightmare and a denial of current reality, when used to respond to present challenges. In other words, institutional and socially determined factors may work both as a success and as a failure factor.

Bernard Stiegler has been engaged in an active critique to current society's social and cultural problems (Stiegler et al, 2008). His focus is on the commercial logic informing the globalizing digital media transformation in course today. Bruno Bachimont follows this need to address the social aspects of technology. Semiotics analysis and designing information systems ontologies, namely through the integration of semantic commitments, is part of the methodological strategy for the organisation of hierarchies, using technology to mirror organisational social structures (Bachimont et al, 2002). In more explicit terms, the central argument is that digital technology hides the millenary layers of meaning

that are present in social and technical conventions. Therefore, computer ontologies, together with their corresponding computer protocols, need to clarify their semantic commitment, which is implicit in the normalisation of the meaning of the concepts being used in each system.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has helped to foster critical analysis of the labour market and discussing alternative ways to present arrangements regarding low and high skill jobs. "Technological innovation is not guaranteed to leave humans with better jobs." (Loi, 2015, 206). Alternative systems aim at rethinking the role of technology in society. "Pointing out the danger of technological innovation without a basic income may be instrumental to provide support to these social movements." (Loi, 2015, 208).

Taking into account the importance of information technology in current times, it is relevant to address the role played by AI. In sequential terms, AI emerged as a knowledge area in parallel to the social transition from an industrial to a post-industrial era (Simon, 1996). Since the 1950', in the post-war years, computing science represented, simultaneously, a fast evolving academic discipline and a highly productive and profitable industry.

In the early decades of the 21st century, AI helps to interpret current reality in a bi-directional way. From a techno-science perspective, it supports the description of the ubiquity and of the inter-connectedness of the digital ecosystems; from a cultural-symbolic perspective, it reflects current advances in the life sciences, the neuro-sciences, neuro-psychoanalysis, and in the geo-strategic, political and social values and belief systems that permeate economic decision-making.

The power of AI to help to model human behaviour has been explored in different social sciences, including in economics. "(…) rather than model artificial intelligence on human intelligence, the argument here is that the human intelligence of neoclassical economic agents is increasingly being modelled on artificial intelligence." (Davis, 2005, 592).

Philosophical, ethical, axiological and epistemological considerations are implicitly present, when addressing the role of technology and its impact in social sciences. "(…) the scientific status of economics today has been achieved by lowering the status of ethics and by

economics' distancing itself from ethics." (Davis, 2005, 600). The argument of the present text is that technology, irrespective of time and place, understood as an enabler of human action, is used at the service of both visible and invisible intentions, goals, desires and wishes. In a cultural setting of destructive competition, where no win-win solutions are desired, there is an outcome of cultural, symbolic, as well as real and objective death, in terms of global populations suffering from famine, misery, extreme poverty and treatable illnesses. A death culture justifies wars, crime, social abuse, injustice, and, more importantly, it enters into a self-denial process. The first crime of a culture of death is to naturalise and to externalise everything that may be condemned, individually and collectively. In other words, the answer is either interpreting horror as needed normality, or else, as an independent entity, far apart assuming any kind of responsibilities or connections, making such horror seem invisible and non-existent.

Consequently, the kernel action of a life culture is to aim at dismounting the hidden connections that make horror possible: to accept child poverty on a global scale whilst continuously investing in the same perverse system of incentives that justifies such state of affairs is the promotion of pure mediocrity. Denouncing crime, corruption, mal-functioning and abuse of power is relatively easy when compared to the task of reflecting upon why such state of affairs prevails and prospers. The central issue is, first, the rejection of the naturalisation process, where horror is made external and distant, detached from concrete reality; second, the active identification of both the positive and the negative effects of current decisions, both promoting that which facilitates and enables change and novelty to occur and dismantling that which is an obstacle to evolution and that hinders human development; and thirdly, and more importantly, fighting horror and promoting the idea that human development is everybody's business, it is not an issue to be restricted to experts, politicians and anonymous commissions. This third item, the awareness raising and the creation of an emotional link to what apparently seems to be detached and alien, is a process of development at individual and collective level.

The feeling of belonging, the recognition of the power that each generation holds to influence the destiny of the planet's resources and

the quality of life of the generations to come, are tasks to be performed both at singular and social levels. In other words, global change occurs thanks to the acknowledgement of that which may be made differently and better. Leadership and the management rectory of the strategy orientation of each institution, based on its values, vision and mission statement, are important achievements, together with the social responsibility and social entrepreneurship areas. However, it is imperative to start, to enunciate and to offer evidence of life's worth on a global scale. Both scientists and poets have a role to play because no art and no science exist without the ideal goal of contributing to the manifestation of the best possibilities of human existence.

The field areas covered in the present text, including of e-learning, peace-building and Artificial Intelligence, though widely diverse, share the capacity of touching sensitive issues of present reality. There is a wide spectrum of epistemological choices and scholarly positions.

Key issues that have been identified include the heavy weight of a culture of death, which hinders creativity, spontaneity and blocks novelty and change; the revision of the traditional heritage, which aims at denouncing hidden taken for granted assumptions and consequently enables greater degrees of freedom of present day interpretations of reality; and analytical *versus* continental perspectives are confronted addressing the role of technology as an enabler human action. Openness to the unknown is also openness to transcendence, in the sense of that which stretches to the limit present horizons of possibility.

The central message of the current text is that thought and action are possible within a specific horizon of possibilities. This horizon, itself, may be expanded. This expansion may occur once certain structuring world-views address human experience in terms of potential and of openness to novelty and to change. In short, wishful thinking and self-fulfilling prophecies permeate human's relationship with reality, creating significant narratives out of the apparently void and absurd experience of existence. It is affects, and emotions, that capture the authenticity, density and intensity of the interaction with the concrete real, enabling learning, evolution and development to occur. Finally, from a non-anthropocentric perspective, reality manifests itself and it is the participation in this manifestation process that may open the full

potential of human action, thought and capacity to create something new and significant, literally creating new worlds of possibility. The intrinsic intelligibility of affects and of emotions, and its interpretation as both manifestation and participation, is a tribute to the Continental philosophy tradition, including Husserl, Heidegger and Henry.

5. Conclusion

The ability to ask key questions, which open up new angles of interpretation of present reality, leads to awareness raising which, in turn, enables a greater degree of openness and trust in the future. Such confident attitude creates a virtuous circle of enthusiasm and of self-motivation capacity, consequently leading to extra investments, determination and perseverance. These characteristics may be promoted via cultural dominant, or not so dominant, thinking or else forged individually in exceptional circumstances. The main argument of the present text is that within the turbulent and transitional stage of the emergent post-industrial society, certain core knowledge areas enable disclosing central insights, which work as a reality test and as a mirror image of contemporary societies. The presence of technology in quotidian life and the impact of techno-science in framing thought and action are reflected upon all areas of society. The impact of e-learning in higher education institutions is an example of such changes. The rationale is that HEI help to shape societies, which, in turn, shape HEI. This central role of education in contemporary societies stresses the fact that HEI both replicate social norms and promote the *status quo* view or else reject the establishment and try to promote innovation and change. Either way, the impact of technology enables e-learning to become a mandatory complement to conventional and in presence learning classroom modes of operation. E-learning represents a powerful shift towards more active learning designs, relevant to promote more active roles in society. The digital economy forces the convergence between global and local perspectives and the challenges posed by this technological shift need to be addressed from a holistic perspective, open to change and to innovation.

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