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## The Idolatry of the Machine

By **Mihai Nadin**

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“AI, over the long term, will render humans mostly useless” —so many have said it that it cannot be properly referenced. Machines are getting smarter while humans are getting dumber because education is guided by a science that’s enslaved to the past.

The mechanics of making sausage have replaced meaningful education. Take the meat (future generations), add condiments (classes in square dancing, or degrees in DEI), and grind away. Rolls of salami (alumni), marketed under a variety of labels (read: degrees) called diplomas, are proof of successful homogenizing. Increasing numbers of Dropouts prefer an alternative path—not always as successful as Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, or Sam Altman of OpenAI (to name a few).

The salami-making machine model of education is the outcome of a view that was revolutionary: determinism, represented by the cause-and-effect sequence, explains change on account of how it took place in the past. Descartes, almost 400 years ago, advanced the view now known as the Cartesian Revolution. The assumption of the sufficiency of inferring from parts to the whole is its corollary. In dismissing, in the name of rationality, what defines life, has ended up instilling its own type of idolatry: That of the machine.

Not only was the universe described, quite precisely, as a machine—the clock—but everything else was considered to be one. The living included. In that paradigm, education had to proliferate this rationality—and even function according to the same logic.

Since life is full of change, education is supposed to be adaptive. It took many generations before knowledge undergirding education started changing so much and so fast that new educational content and new methods for distributing it became necessary. Nobody envisaged a time, such as ours, when those who are educated actually know more than their educators. They grew up tethered to machines.

The anticipatory dimension of education, which means awareness of the future and how to prepare for it, was abandoned in favor of reactive thinking. It seems that educating those in need of it to behave like machines is easier than taugmenting their anticipatory capabilities. Commercialization of college education has led to a practice of higher education that is not higher—in terms of academic standards—but more akin to vocational training.

Imparting knowledge about a faster-changing world is a challenge for which the ever-larger scale of educational establishments has not adapted. The dumbing-down of education is an outcome of the gamble against a future that might not have more in store than entitlements and high debt. Education represents over six percent of the U.S. economy—a huge investment with a fast-declining return. Instead of being ‘ahead of the game’--no significant scientific accomplishment has come recently from our universities--education gives in to political pressure and ends up tethered to the economy. Research is rarely opening new avenues. In the absence of new ideas, millions of pages of regurgitated content have become the subject of plagiarism research instead of stimulating fresh scientific debates.

Living organisms meet the challenges of survival in a fast-changing world through anticipatory actions: birds do it, fish do it, and human beings are supposed to do it--unless conditioned through poor education to become only reactive. The source of such actions is continuous learning. In reality, education today as practiced within the deterministic-reductionist view of the world, undermines learning. Machines do not learn. In machine mode, education does not even prepare students for what is, not to say for what might be. Humankind knows enough science to land on the moon and to research nuclear energy, but not enough to address the fact that in recent times society has failed in addressing disease, painful inequalities, discrimination, and crime. Reacting to shortcomings of the past, as the DEI initiative claims, is way costlier than prevention. Humans learn from errors, and education is supposed to help in the process.

Those who suffer most are the next generations: they are promised cheap, more, and better, and end up assuming this to be an inalienable right. The price escapes their mind, because they were conditioned, through misguided education, to believe that their future is for free. There is nothing in the toolchest of physics or of chemistry that can explain the purposeful nature of life or its adaptive capabilities. Take a simple example: Breast milk is higher in cortisol in the AM in order to wake the baby up and higher in melatonin in the PM in order to put the baby to sleep. The machine model formula milk, i.e., reproducing breast milk with something of similar chemistry, is the same, day or night. On a larger scale, industrial agriculture, propagated through research conducted in educational facilities, provides the illusory abundance from which the degeneration of the species is currently taking place: obesity, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, etc. The mirage of the machine: plenty of cheaper everything at the cost of the future.

What does all of this have to do with the educational system? The idolatry of the machine has foreboding consequences. Progress is no longer one of character expressed in the meaning of human activity, but of efficiency expressed in the numbers derived from measuring it. The university is more into fundraising than raising the level of consciousness of those paying for a ticket into the theatre of illusions called the future.

The failed education system currently in place produces Americans who are educated either for the past, or for the opportunistic goals of the dominant ideology. Nothing corresponds to the expectations of these students—whether lofty, realistic, or mediocre. Fully surrounded by the hottest technology—no student lacks a smartphone, a game station, and an Internet connection—and they willingly submit to it. Google’s Gemini, the newest GPT, reads and writes for them. Technology, more enjoyed than understood, often leads them to avoid reality or make up their own. They expect chatting and gaming, or watching others play games—a new lucrative profession—to become their major occupations. And they often do! The kid who beat Tetris and crashed it, wants his life to be one of endless play. The inadequacies of an education system based on the machine model are a handicap to everyone who does not fit the mold. Of course, machines will replace them. AI plays games better than they do.

The obsession with the financial equation is such that no one can continue to refer to universities as “temples of knowledge” (as idealized as this description was), and even less as mere “socializing environments.” Universities need stars for success; they need Nobel laureates, and they need lobbyists. This is why the administrative overhead in higher education has increased five times more than the number of those who teach and perform research.

Education in America today faces a fundamental challenge. It has to free itself from the tyranny of data in which the past is engraved and focus on meaning. Focus on meaning, which undergirds purposeful human existence, will make it proactive. It has to become purposeful. A *modus operandi* that prepares for the possible futures should replace the pressure of opportunistic wokeism. That is, it should be anticipation-driven, as life itself is. Anticipation-driven education is the opportunity to turn sustainability from a demagogical slogan to a goal significant to society. In the age of global mobility, fast change, and individualism, the focus can be only on distinctions, more precisely, on differences. Living at the expense of the future ultimately undermines our own future. The awareness of sustainability should become the backbone of education if indeed education is preparing new generations for the future.

*Mihai Nadin is a Professor Emeritus of Computer Science and Interactive Media at the University of Texas at Dallas. His latest book is **Disrupt Science: The Future Matters** (Springer, December 20, 2023).*

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