

# Only Humanities Education Will Save Us from Extinction

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to show how the humanities offer a solid support to understand and face social and personal decisions as well, especially looking at Chile although, we know, these situations are not only local. Also, to provide suggestions of help, in education, through the humanities, so that future citizens escape the disastrous results of the studies of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which indicate that a large number of Chileans (53% of adults, but 84% of the country) do not understand what they read, becoming functional illiterates, moving away from the understanding of their social, cultural and historical environment. The above reinforces the idea of a country that can be had. This situation, which has occurred systematically, for different reasons, is what has led, for decades, to a situation of abuse, on the one hand, and weariness and anger in a large part of society, on the other. This is neither new nor local; on the contrary, social discontent has been occurring in different countries for at least thirty years.

**Keywords:** humanities education, social/personal crisis, education,

## Introduction

Certainly, knowledge of history will make people better understand how society has come to the present moment. Experiencing the feelings and teachings of literature and the arts will make citizens more aware and sensitive to reflect on the decisions to be made, by the excessive use of reason, which can lead to mistake the right direction of that society. Possessing knowledge of philosophy will make society develop critical thinking fundamental to help in choosing the destiny of countries.

Today, even prominent economists are asking for humanities education, such as the Spaniard Joan Antoni Melé, with concepts like "ethical banking" or Edmund S. Phelps, Noble Prize in Economics, quoted by Nuccio Ordine says:

[...] Today's economies lack a spirit of innovation. Labor markets not only need more technical skills, they require an increasing number of soft skills, such as the ability to think imaginatively, to develop creative solutions to complex challenges, and to adapt to changing circumstances and new constraints. [...] A necessary first step is to reintroduce humanistic subjects in schools and university curricula. The study of literature, philosophy, and history will be an inspiration for young people to pursue a fulfilling life, a life that includes making creative and innovative contributions to society. (Ordine, 2018, p. 23)

Social crises have been present throughout the history of mankind. Some of them recent, in Chile, as the social question of the saltpeter mines at the beginning of the last century, with all that it meant from abuses to deaths of men, women and children. Then Luis Emilio Recabarren, in his speech "Rich and poor through a century of republican life", in Rengo on September 3, 1910, diagnoses the situation of the workers of Chile when celebrating the centenary of the republic and where he says that the workers, a hundred years after the republic, have nothing to celebrate. That is why it was so important for him that the workers knew how to read:

To encourage instruction, in all its degrees and in all its forms is the duty of every person who considers himself civilized. To encourage instruction, as stated above, is to weaken the bases of unpredictability and vice; it is to begin their disappearance (...). Let us stimulate him to read, to think and to analyze. To do this (...) is to lead the people to improve their living conditions. The more educated people will be the more powerful people. (Recabarren, 2010, p. 55)

Pedro Aguirre Cerda will be in charge of making visible the issue of education for all, with his motto "To govern is to educate", where, for the first time, textbooks are given to all students in public education. The great march of the coal workers from the city of Lota to Concepción, demanding better working conditions and wages for their families in 1960. The 1973 coup d'état, where a before and after in the history of contemporary Chile began, or at least where the division between one Chilean and another became visible.

In Chile, an attempt has been made to implement an idea of an "Apollonian" state, since the beginning of the republic, manifested through peace and order and as a justification to maintain or preserve a socio-economic system, in the last third of the last century, which was imposed in a state of political exception, as Naomi Klein states in her book *The Shock Doctrine*. Apollo represents the sun and light, beauty is his element, he represents wisdom and, ultimately, perfection.

The manifestations of irrationality such as carnivals and artistic expressions, dithyrambs and bacchantes, presented in the streets during the months of October and November, can be seen as an example of the Dionysian, representing what is outside the idea of peace and order, a catharsis carried out by groups of people who escape the idea of the Apollonian of the system. As Nietzsche expresses it in *The Twilight of the Idols* "their will to live", it is this will to live that has led the population to demonstrate to generate changes, to challenge the Apollonian that is the "rationality" that dangerously undermines life. The social outburst could be interpreted as the human being who takes care of himself, in the sense of present and future social damage, to get ahead because he cares about his future (destiny) and escapes from Heidegger's "hidden anguish". Just as in Greek culture, both gods (Apollo and Dionysus) reached a balance, one by the perfection of beauty through Phidias, the other by showing the horrors and enigmas of the world, Chilean society seeks to reach a more equitable and socially conscious society by trying to change the system that prevails in the country.

The idea that only productivity and competitiveness are important for a country's economic growth has led to bad practices that have been detrimental to both the public education system and people's working conditions, as well as to other sectors that will not be analyzed here. Morin puts it this way:

Las democracias del siglo XXI estarán cada vez más enfrentadas a un problema gigantesco que nació con el desarrollo de la enorme máquina donde ciencia, técnica y burocracia están íntimamente asociadas. Esta enorme máquina no produce sólo conocimiento y elucidación, también produce ignorancia y ceguera...En tales condiciones el ciudadano pierde el derecho al conocimiento; tiene el derecho de adquirir un saber especializado haciendo estudios ad hoc, pero está desprovisto como ciudadano de cualquier punto de vista global y pertinente. (Morin, 1999, p. 61)

And he continues:

The problem is not only posed by crisis or war. It is a problem of everyday life: the development of techno-bureaucracy installs the reign of experts in all fields that hitherto depended on political discussions and decisions and supplants citizens in the fields open to biological manipulations of paternity, maternity, birth, and death. These problems have not entered the political consciousness and democratic debate of the 20th century, with the exception of a few cases. (Morin, 1999, p. 61)

Later, he observes:

(...) the reduction of the political to the technical and the economic, the reduction of the economic to growth, the loss of referents and horizons, all this produces a weakening of civility, escape and refuge in private life, alteration between apathy and violent revolutions; thus, despite the maintenance of democratic institutions, democratic life is weakened. (Morin, 1999, p. 62).

Why the humanities serve today more than ever, in relation to technique today and in Heidegger, is because the latter is the representation of society. This society that bases its development on technique, this same technique that is part of consumption to sustain the economy. The conjunction of technique and economy lead to solidify a way to distract attention from what is really important, which is to be aware of reality and the immediate social environment of people. The humanities help to understand the above to form a solid pillar of critical thinking.

Advertising and television have been fundamental tools in this course of developing distracted thinking as Mario Vargas Llosa (2012) points out in his book *The Civilization of the Spectacle*, he says:

(...) en la banalización lúdica de la cultura imperante, en la que el valor supremo es ahora divertirse o divertir, por encima de toda otra forma de conocimiento o ideal. La gente (...) enciende la televisión o compra un libro para pasarla bien, en el sentido más ligero de la palabra, no para martirizarse el cerebro con preocupaciones, problemas, dudas. (p. 136)

According to Martha Nussbaum, quoted by Adriana Valdés (2017), "treating people as manipulable objects if you have never learned another way of looking at them" (p.14) is the basis of inequity in a society like ours.

Society in democracy is difficult to be thought of if citizens are not "capable of thinking for themselves, criticizing tradition, and understanding the meaning of other people's sufferings and achievements". Thus also "...generations of utilitarian machines will begin to be produced, instead of integral citizens" (Valdés, 2017, p. 14). This is how one could think of the educational reforms in secondary education where it was intended to eliminate, philosophy, history, and arts, at some point in Chile. When there is little or no critical or reflective thinking, as Adriana Valdés exposes, the sense of what the country, as a whole, wants to achieve is lost, part of the citizenry begins to feel exploited and excluded. In this way, people become useful in the manner of Heidegger (Acevedo, 2016). The useful, the human being in this case, remained unthemed by deception, or fear thus remaining at the hand of the system for decades, both at the beginning of the republic, as well as throughout the twentieth century. In

the same way, the person is "provoked" and transformed into a resource even when he is not but becomes quantifiable. Without going any further, companies still maintain their Human Resources departments today. Some have recently begun to call their employees collaborators, thus forming a respective totality. When all of the above happens, without realizing it, Byung Chul-Han's statement, "Now you exploit yourself and believes you are realizing", takes on its full meaning. For these reasons is that humanistic knowledge is for life and not instrumental, temporary, as are some skills that have been learned and then discarded because of their obsolescence over time, an example of this is the learning of computer languages that a user needed to have in order to operate a computer before the appearance of the Windows operating system.

According to Ordine (2018), knowledge, humanistic for our interest, is the only form of "wealth" that is not diminished or lost when surrendered and, on the contrary, does enrich the recipient for life.

### **Television and other factors.**

Television, which was originally presented with the mission of informing, entertaining and educating, has become a mere means of entertainment. Where, in addition, today he focuses on looting and violence, losing the sense of what is happening in the background, which are the social demands of Chileans. Television itself creates public opinion when people see the authority of the image, according to Sartori (2012), "The essential thing is that the eye believes in what it sees ... What is seen seems real, which implies that it seems true" (P. 76). But, on the other hand, it makes the ability to think atrophied by having everything visually. As Sartori says:

And this is the process that atrophies when homo sapiens is supplanted by homo videns. In the latter, the conceptual (abstract) language is replaced by the perceptual (concrete) language that is infinitely poorer: poorer not only in terms of words (the number of words), but above all in terms of the richness of meaning, that is, of connotative capacity. (Sartori, 2012, p.52)

Certainly, all the above is applicable to current social networks, especially when people have become accustomed to speaking in one hundred and forty characters on Twitter or with invented abbreviations and various forms of icons that communicate ideas, without taking into account the myriad of curses and expletives that replace formal vocabulary. On the other hand, according to Terry Eagleton (2017), universities have been losing the ability to train people and citizens with critical and cultured thinking by becoming institutions, similar to companies, with the aim of

obtaining profits and delivering "products" that contribute technology in society, physically reducing them to a minimum expression to the point that not even books can be kept in their small offices, thus also relegating the study of the humanities to a mere filling of academic meshes with "soft" skills that students They do not value in the immediate, but also, in many cases, not in the long term since they are not seen as a value for professional development. Nothing could be more wrong, according to Nuccio Ordine (2018), when he talks about humanistic knowledge or those that do not produce an immediate economic benefit. These are an end in themselves since "they can play a fundamental role in the cultivation of the spirit and in the civil and cultural development of humanity" (p. 9). In this way, the "useless" becomes useful by helping people to be better or, at least, having more tools to evaluate when making work or personal decisions.

The fact that people always experience crises is a fundamental reason to study the humanities. An example of the above are, in general, engineers who throughout their lives make decisions based on the quantitative; However, when all the goals are fulfilled as a family, home, car and midlife approaches, some begin to wonder what the meaning of all this has been, feeling enslaved to work and the responsibilities of life. It is when the midlife crisis can appear. The humanities are the way that leads to the answers and that resolves such uncertainties and questions by finding in them those answers that are not quantitative, but qualitative. Literature gives some examples that transpose time such as Hamlet and his vital doubt of taking revenge, or not on his mother and uncle for the death of his father, the king of Denmark or Faust selling his soul to the devil for the success that did not it came to him. How useful it is to read these texts to realize that literature contains this knowledge that has no immediate economic value, but helps people understand vital issues in times of crisis. In an interview, Howard Gardner (2016), says:

... and it is one of the reasons for the great crisis of maturity, when they realize that there are no (...) humanistic studies: Philosophy, Literature, History of Thought (...). You can live without philosophy, but worse. In an experiment with MIT engineers, we discovered that those who had not studied humanities, when they reached their 40s and 50s, were more likely to suffer crises and depressions (...). Because engineering and technological studies end up giving you a sense of control over your life in the unreal background: you only focus on what has a solution and on the questions with answers. And for years you find them. But, when with maturity you discover that it is really impossible to control everything, you become disoriented ... for lack of humanistic studies.

Training in the humanities allows to promote particular reflection in people, producing an internal change in them. This also allows for personal reflection to make a generational comparison between the present generation and their parents or grandparents. So also, with the evolution of society, allowing a reflection on this and how they will develop in their work environment, for example, to help improve society. This reflection gives the opportunity for all people to share and realize that they have common ideas.

### **Paradigm shift.**

Vergara and Martin (2017), alluding to Dewey say:

Dewey understood and made manifest the profound relationship that exists between the educational system and institutions in contemporary societies. It could be said that the analysis of an educational system shows us how a society seeks to train its new members; how you envision your future; what she wants to be or, at least, as in the Chilean case, the project of society of the power elites. (p. 96)

Later the same authors point out that Dewey:

It noted with concern the growing business and banking concentration and the increase in social and political power of these sectors. He considered that industrialization and the form that economic growth had assumed had produced a corporate transformation of society that generated social and political conformism, social fragmentation, subordination of the masses in a way of life that he called "the culture of money." (p. 97)

According to the above, this situation that has occurred for more than thirty years, and the level of reading comprehension of Chileans today, it is evident that there is a lack of training in the humanities that has allowed a large part of the population to be subjected and abused with constitutionally endorsed arguments by not forcing the state to educate its citizens comprehensively.

Perhaps the time has come to change the ways, not the substance, of educating in the humanities. What would happen if teachers, of biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, English and others, focused their teachings from a paradigm of questioning the world? Split its contents, units or learning results with a philosophical question. Wouldn't it be interesting for teachers to approach their subjects from questions that, together with their specialty, make their students think about their environment from that area? The above to have in the end, not only a specialist who

makes better decisions, but also an integral person, aware of their social, historical, cultural environment and with instrumental knowledge for life, at the same time.

Never in the history of mankind have there been so many opportunities to educate formally and informally in public or private educational institutions and through the internet, with free online courses, respectively. Unthinkable that a person from a working family could easily access higher education only sixty years ago. The reasons were varied, among them, the non-completion of basic or secondary education. It was only at the beginning of this century that secondary education became compulsory, opening the door for all young people to have the opportunity to think about continuing towards higher education and become university professionals, certainly leaving aside other factors such as economic, such as it is until today. However, thinking of either of these two forms of education starting from a humanistic basis could result in a society with developed critical thinking and, at the same time, more cultured.

## **Conclusions**

Humanities education helps, especially in these times, to counteract the effects of excessive use of social networks where the progressive deterioration of spelling has been seen when using abbreviations, icons or memes and the loss of vocabulary when using words like Wildcards, such as the frequently used rudeness, which make you lose the minimum amount of vocabulary to express yourself correctly in more formal situations. This becomes worrying when people's reading comprehension drops, especially in recent years and increased with the appearance of different social networks in the last ten.

Humanities education helps people in the process of "learning to learn" or to acquire knowledge of a higher order. In this sense, the humanities are an important tool for the process of understanding the fundamentals of crises and a subsequent definition of these social phenomena with a much more solid base than if they did not have this humanist training. Fernando Savater (2015), in relation to education for civic life, says "that this conception of education has especially to do with philosophy, both for its reflection on social practice and the values that guide it and for its preparation for reasoned communication" (p.90).

If the humanities are not included with greater emphasis in the different areas of training of students, to substantiate the origin and objective of what they study, there will hardly be citizens who give meaning to the future society or country that they



want to achieve. Another way of saying this is expounded by Professor Ordine as follows:

... the purpose of the school is not to make our students lawyers or engineers, but to make them free women and men, we have to teach them the importance of some things such as democracy, justice, legality, love for the common good, respect to nature, the significance of artistic heritage and art in general, and, above all, the very high value of human solidarity. (Ordine, 2018, p. 43)

It is the ethical duty of the state to educate its citizens in the humanities to avoid the statistics that lead a large percentage of the country to not understand what they read. In an interconnected world, in the age of knowledge, there cannot be such a situation in which a society leaves aside the part of education that trains the person and makes us more human for the benefit of technical training. No social equilibrium can result from the thought that places the utilitarian or the technical as a primary necessity above the humanist. All technical, economic, or scientific efforts should supposedly be focused on contributing to the common good and the development of people. The example of Chile, during the last thirty years, has shown that this has not always been the case.

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