

Alexander Muss*

St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg, Russia

CONTEMPORARY MASS HIGHER EDUCATION AND ACADEMIC EXPERT ROLE AS THE POSSIBLE CAUSES OF THE CRISIS

Abstract

Analyzing the contemporary situation, it is possible to raise the following question: what is the potential cause(s) of the ongoing crisis? We should start from the insufficiency of forecasting: having all the available information, we can predict in a narrow spatial and temporal range. Simultaneously, it is possible to imagine an interview with an educated adult from the nineties, who is unable to predict current events. These limits provide both chaotic information absorption and anxiety. In turn, these factors prevent consistent logical and philosophical analysis and provide inconsistency in behavior decision making. Observed conflicts between close relatives and friends show the effectiveness of media reports and the lack of the ability to negotiate. We can also observe the inability to negotiate among professional diplomats, who broke their professional ethos by jargon. Moreover, if political solutions lead to effects that are opposite to declared ones, we can expect a lack of expertise, which is based on the lack of information available to philosophers, researchers, and the other experts as well as their lack of involvement in the decision-making process. In turn, this raises the question of the existence of an academic society that can

*albertwanderer@gmail.com

protect academic values and professional interests. As a result, 21st century society remains a mass society with all its opportunities and limits. Thus, if 'Mythologies' by R. Barthes (1957) and schizoanalysis by J. Deleuze & F. Guattari (1972, 1980) are sufficient to understand the way of thinking of the contemporary person involved in the modern crisis, we need new ideas to develop ourselves and our society.

Key Words: *phenomenology, philosophical anthropology, Roland Barthes' Mythologies, schizoanalysis, mass society, academic society.*

CONTEMPORARY CRISIS AND ITS PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

Last year dramatically changed everything: COVID-19 pandemic and the later events upset the world's balance and broken ties between people. It is obvious that the effects of the occurred events would have several long-lasting consequences and effects. It is impossible to predict and understand all of them before the final stage or the end of the most critical period. Before the end, there are too many possibilities to make justified predictions about the near future. It turns out that there are so many parameters which role cannot be fully measured. These poor opportunities to make predictions could possibly turn our attention from the unclear consequences to the situation itself and the possible causes of this situation. In other words, this stage of the occurring crisis could not provide any available predictions, but we could try to understand the occurring situation and its possible causes better.

All of these remind us of the history of psychiatry. In the early 17-19 centuries, there were only a few psychiatric disorders and the number of their observable manifestations. Without distinction between key symptoms and additional manifestations of the disorders, there could not be any systematization of the disorders and their symptoms as well as the understanding of the possible natural causes of such disorders (Kannabich 1928). Inventing the first classification of psychiatric disorders was a great philosophical and scientific event, because the inventors were able to go beyond specific situations (their professional and living contexts) and highlight key factors. In other words, it is very

difficult to separate the key factors from the additional ones being the part of existing events.

Let us try to highlight the possible key factors. In my opinion, the most part of the dramatic events of this crisis could be interpreted as the additional manifestations of the most general state of modern society. Thus, to find the possible causes, we must analyze these manifestations to find some so-called “key symptoms” of the contemporary situation. One of the most important is the inability of everyone to get and analyze information to take part in global decisions. At first glance, we have a huge number of heterogeneous flows of information that may contradict each other. In this case, the question of the truth and falsehood of each information flow becomes more and more important. In addition, each choice of concrete information would influence our communication with the surrounding people.

In turn, the large amount of contradictory information (as well as the lack of available information) prevents people from making successful predictions. Moreover, many people were dramatically surprised when the analyzing events started. A bit later, there were several memes and jokes on the internet, which highlighted this unexpectedness.

During the unfolding events, the abundance of information and the lack of necessary data provoked people to conflicts. In addition, these conflicts highlighted the inability of people to negotiate among themselves. We can observe such an inability in both families and international relationships: from close relatives to well-qualified diplomats and politicians. Instead of the expected search for opportunities for mutual understanding and cooperation, it is possible to hear mutual accusations and obscene language.

Surrounded by mutually exclusive information flows without the opportunity to cooperate and negotiate, people meet the situation of the lack of expertise. This lack of expertise manifested itself through the significant underestimation of the expert community and their professional opinions. This ignorance of professional opinion led to the following situation: without expertise, activity aimed at a certain result led to the opposite effect.

In other words, the existing dramatic events are surrounded by the lack of necessary information, the lack of communication between people, and the lack of professional expertise. Moreover, these three deficits could be observed as the manifestations of the analyzed crisis. Using the analogy of the development of psychiatry, these manifestations could

possibly be the main symptoms of crisis. After the choice of the main symptoms, we can try to find their possible causes. In other words, if we keep the conflict and the crisis as symptoms, these surroundings could be the main content of the contemporary situations. Thus, to understand it, we need to answer the following question: what factors cause the lack of information, the lack of communication, and the lack of expertise?

To find the causes of the detected deficits, we need a suitable approach. In my view, the most suitable approach here is anthropological one, which is the combination of philosophical and psychological ways of thinking.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL (PHILOSOPHICAL + PSYCHOLOGICAL) VIEWPOINT

In this text, I would like to follow this type of anthropological perspective, which is a mixture of psychological and philosophical viewpoints. The psychological perspective means the attentiveness to concrete people, their values, outlook, needs, and desires. This corresponds to the famous quote by J. Swift: “But principally I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth.” (Swift 1801). For example, if we appeal to humans and humanity in general, we will lose the needs of everyone. In this case, usage of such abstract concept as nation, country, philosophy in general, science in general, and so on would prevent us from such a viewpoint, when nation in general consist of different individuals and philosophy in general consist of the number of ideas and authors, who created them in different period and socio-cultural context. In other words, I would like to start my reasoning from individuals as the carriers of subjective experience interacting with each other to pay attention to each value and needs.

In contrast, philosophical viewpoint means both problematization (as an ability to raise the problems contrary to common sense) and conceptualization (as the creation of new concepts). This type of reasoning seems to be more general and abstract thinking. However, the history of philosophy provides several examples of the combination of such ways.

One of the possible examples here is Descartes’ *Meditations* (Manley, Taylor 1996), in which philosopher tried to call everything into question in his own subjective experience. In other words, he started from his own experience and tried to find in it the effects of more general laws. The project of empirical psychology by F. Brentano (Brentano 1874)

could be the later example of such way of thinking: in contrast to Wundt physiological psychology, in which psychological laws came from the controlled measurement from different people in different conditions, Brentano tried to study and compare subjective experience of different individuals. Over time, these ideas transformed into phenomenology, philosophical anthropology, and existential philosophy, in which one could find this combination of paying attention to individual with problematization and conceptualization.

Later continental philosophy of 20th century (e.g., R. Barthes, J. Baudrillard, M. Foucault, J. Deleuze & F. Guattari) tried to find concreteness in both contextual studies in history and system studies in anthropology mixed with the data of psychoanalytic sessions. Without paying attention to the concrete details and connections between them, one could not differentiate madness from psychiatric disorder, propaganda stamps from the concrete peoples' experience, and late medieval scholars from cotemporary scientists.

In other words, this way of reasoning uses the first-person experience or the concrete data of the individual thoughts as the starting point and foundation and tries to use such an experience to reveal or test some obvious things or fundamental laws.

In other words, by the method of this research I mean the balance between appeal to a concrete individual and problematic intuitions of fundamental laws. In addition, I would like to maintain that balance in the following meditations. Let us try to apply this approach to the studied question about the possible causes of the lack of information, the lack of communication, and the lack of expertise that we could observe during the contemporary crisis.

POSSIBLE CAUSES

I would like to start with the *lack of information*. There is a contradiction between the available variety of information and the lack of trustful and useful information. In contemporary situations, this problem appears when someone tries to compare information from different sources that hold a certain point of view. The other example is an attempt to find all the necessary data that underlies each decision. This problem seems to first appear in Lyotard (Lyotard 1979), and it has remained unsolved... in popular opinion.

In contrast to this view, every epoch has its way to systematize different information and to help people find the necessary one. In the so-called “analog epoch” there was a variety of library catalogs and codes, and in the “digital epoch” there was a variety of search machines and neural networks, which helps individuals to find information they need. In addition, if we are unable to use such instruments (or if we cannot produce any reliable criteria for information choice and later analysis), it is a question of both our qualification and skills. In other words, there are several different analog and digital instruments, which helps to find the necessary information and compare it. Thus, if we are unable to use such an instrument, this could be the lack of necessary skills.

As for *the lack of communication* (by which I mean the inability to negotiate and interact during the cotemporary crisis), I should start from the communication process itself. Communication is not an easy activity, and high communication skills (as well as diplomacy) are not default human beings’ settings. These skills need both education and intuition to use them appropriately. Each communication situation has its own *ethos* or standards: you possibly can be rude with your close friends, but you cannot behave in such a way with a dean of your faculty or department. Moreover, in communication it is necessary to be attentive to your interlocutor’s social role and status, to his/her attitudes, feelings, emotions, and values. This needs both empathy and self-reflection (in a psychological sense), which could be achieved via training. In other words, if someone (especially a high-level diplomat or politician) is unable to maintain communication that is the question of his /her education. In other words, during the history of humanity many people developed and improved communication techniques and skills. Therefore, our inability to use such a legacy is our own problem.

The lack of expertise raises the question of the role of well-qualified or expert opinions and suggestions in contemporary politics, economy, education, and so on. In addition, this problem raises the question of the causes of the underestimation of the professionals’ opinions. In other words, I would like to discuss whether expert opinions play a significant role in the decision-making process during the modern crisis or not. If the role of expert opinions were great, we would observe both the accessibility of the necessary and state-of-the-art information about the current situation to the experts, as well as the great involvement of the different well-qualified and well-educated experts into the discussion around the situation. Moreover, in this case we would observe the work

by specific institutes, whose researchers try to analyze the available information to make forecasts and try to make their research, opinions, and predictions public. If the presented situation is quite different from such a description, it can be assumed that experts are far away from state-of-the-art information and their expertise is far away from people, who make significant decisions in this crisis.

Thus, I can assume that the main causes of the contemporary crisis and its manifestations are the lack of education and underestimation of the expert opinions. In other words, lack of information, lack of communication, and lack of expertise as the key symptoms of the actual situation could be caused by the lack of necessary skills, which can be acquired through education, and ignorance of the professionals, who can help to train these skills or can provide a justified opinion about the actual problems. All of these provide the situation, in which decision-making processes are mostly based on emotions instead of rationality in both common and official contexts. In the situation of decision-making, rhetoric and populism by orators and politics instead of expertise and prognostics by philosophers and researchers could drive these emotions and, in turn, these decisions. In other words, if emotions are the main basis for decision-making, this process could be agitated by propaganda. One of the possible mechanisms of propaganda could be interpreted as semiotic myths. In turn, if the main reasons for decision making during the contemporary crisis are people's emotions agitated by the flood of semiotic myths, it is possible to conclude that contemporary society remains the mass society with all its opportunities and limits.

This characteristic of contemporary society is also an opportunity for researchers, because there are several philosophical approaches created to study mass society. So, if contemporary society is a mass society, we could apply Barthes mythologies (Barthes 1957), Foucault subjectivity studies (Foucault 2017), and Deleuze & Guattari schizoanalysis (Deleuze & Guattari 1972; Deleuze & Guattari 1980) to better understand its main characteristics.

Firstly, I would like to use the concept of mythologies in philosophy and semiotics developed by R. Barthes (1957), when second order semiological systems create new meanings, which govern people in their activities and choices. I would like to recall Barthes' own example from the chapter "Myth today". On the magazine or newspaper cover, we can see a boy in a uniform as a symbol of successful imperialism, but there is a concrete boy, who has chosen military education. If we tried to

reveal the individual history of this boy to understand his motives and feelings, we would refer to the first order semiological system, with its concreteness and uniqueness. If we would follow the image of a patriotic youth, who has found his place in the army of the metropolis, we would ignore the concrete man in concrete context and would follow the empty signifier. In other words, if the opinion of the contemporary situation were based on the second order semiological system, we would follow a myth instead of the concrete experience. Moreover, we could find such semiotic myths in contemporary pamphlets, web sites, and TV-shows. After the detection of such second-order semiological systems, it could be possible to describe them and try to return to the used word or image its original content or its personal history.

The return of the original content of words and multimedia used in semiotic myths could be done *via* Foucault subjectivity studies (Foucault 2017). His combination of philosophizing, studying history and language to reveal the specific context and practices could be applied for contemporary crisis. In this case, every dialog, interview, or text could be interpreted through the individual history of its author, his or her language, culture, values, individual and group identity, education, and social status. Studying such amount of heterogeneous data about concrete people played role in contemporary crisis could help better understand their motives and the degree of disagreement among themselves. One possible limitation is the ignorance of the concept of the author's death. However, our attitude towards paying attention to both individuals and fundamental laws (so-called anthropological point of view that I mentioned early) could prevent us from reducing everything to the texts.

Paying attention to subjectivity, to each personal history and context also allows some philosophical generalization. Schizoanalysis by Deleuze and Guattary (Deleuze & Guattari 1972; Deleuze & Guattari 1980) could be the possible instrument for such summary. Their idea of the combination of Marx and Freud, the governmental control over desires described using the concepts of body without organs and desiring-production could explain the role of everyone in contemporary mass society as well as interpret an individual activity through this desiring-production. For example, both dramatic changes of political system and the values of the concrete individual could be described using the concept of de-territorization, when individuals' desires transform in their content to remain the flow of desires itself.

It is possible to conclude, that in contrast to the number of higher educated people and thousands of papers on the decision-making process and critical thinking, 21st century society (at least in some regions and countries) remains a mass society with all its opportunities and limits. Moreover, we can use theories and conceptions which describe such a society. For example, we can detect and describe semiotic myths used by propaganda; we can return original content and personal history of the data used in such myths; we can interpret both original and mythological content *via* Deleuzian concept of desire to understand behavior and decisions of concrete people. In addition, it is necessary to find the reasons why contemporary society remains the mass society.

MASS HIGHER EDUCATION

I would like to assume that mass society is based at least partially on mass education. Mass education involves many young people in relatively long school, which gives a variety of fundamental and applied skills, and relatively short higher education, which results in narrow focused specialists, involved in design, research, or business.

The variety of disciplines in mass higher education provides disciplinary boundaries, which prevent successful communication between different researchers. A possible example here is actual terminology: different sciences and humanities provide quite different meanings to the same terms: one of my colleagues always reminds me of the different meanings of the term “potential” in physics and psychology.

There is also one more limit: if more students pass through the limited number of academics, grades also become more formal. In other words, mass higher education involves more students each year (as the number of people on Earth grows) and usually uses the constant or the smaller number of professors. In this situation, the quality of higher education would fall dramatically. There are too many specialists who can use the existing knowledge to solve practical or engineering problems, but there are only a few people who can try to acquire new knowledge. For example, contemporary educational system prepares hundreds or thousands of cognitive psychologists, who use such a paradigm, but only a few researchers can develop the useful research paradigm itself.

As a result, contemporary higher education (mass higher education) seems to prepare specialists, unable to solve complex problems and develop new approaches. Interdisciplinary paradigm is trying to overcome

such restrictions, but it is also resulting in communicational problems between researchers from different fields.

In contrast to mass education, there was an earlier educational model – Humboldt Educational Ideal. This model is oriented on lengthy training of individuals, which began as a drill in a gymnasium and later transformed into freedom to learn (as well as freedom to teach) (Nietzsche 1954; van Bommel 2015). The result of such education is an all-round researcher, who understands and implements his scientific interests. However, this model seems to be unsuitable for the educational standards, which significantly reduces the number of teachers and enormously increases the number of students. In other words, in both structure and aims Humboldt Educational Ideal is opposite to mass higher educations. Therefore, it can be one of possible alternatives or we can use opportunities of such model to provide better education to our academicians.

ACADEMIC SOCIETY EXPERT ROLE

What else can be opposed to mass society and mass (higher) education as possible causes of the current crisis? As stated before, Humboldt Educational Ideal is opposite to mass higher education, like customization or individual approach are opposite to an assembly line. The result of Humboldt Education Ideal is a researcher, who can seek new knowledge inventing new instruments. Simultaneously, the result of mass higher education is a narrow-focused specialist, who can use the variety of the existing instruments to solve the already stated problems. In this case, old-fashioned academicians as a result of Humboldt Education Ideal is opposite to such specialists as a representation of contemporary mass society.

In this case, such a well-prepared academician could be the answer to mass society and the lack of information, the lack of communication, and the lack of expertise as the key symptoms of the crisis caused by such a society. However, during the argument between contemporary politicians and the Humboldtian-styled academician, one opinion of the well-educated specialist would stay the voice in the wilderness. Therefore, the expert opinion should be represented, shared, and protected to play a role in social and political processes.

In other words, each individual expert's opinion should be supported *via* the professional community, and the expert who speaks should be

protected from possible slanders and attacks. In addition, an expert's opinion should also be shared with many people to get enough attention. Moreover, this expert opinion should be shared with people who take part in political decision-making, and this opinion must be significant for them. In this case, such experts and academicians must form a professional community that would help to represent an expert opinion correctly, understandable, and consistent and to protect this view and its authors.

Thus, there should be an independent professional community that can protect and support their members, interests, values, and opinions as well as make these opinions public. In the context of academic experts, I mean academic society. In my opinion, this society should be closer to the medieval guild or early modern period academy of science, in which every monarch was only an honorary member. This could help this society to be independent and to have a connection with other people.

However, there are several objections that could be given to the idea of such an academic society. The first objection is the utopian nature of such an academic society. However, the idea of the society of independent and well-prepared academicians as a political force is a more of a theoretical generalization like Plato's ideal city or a simple sketch that can be developed later through a discussion. This idea mostly represented the value of an alternative educational model and the necessity of professional society that would have a bigger role in political processes in the context of the existing crisis.

The second objection may raise the question that all the proposed innovations pykyare rather related to the past, and therefore cannot lead to development. Every historical process in both life and science could be described *via* complex models, including different interrelated stages of progress and regress like Thomas Kuhn concept of scientific revolution (Kuhn 1962). Like Lacatos' research programs, different ideas, technologies, and practices of each epoch could not be finally evaluated as progressive or regressive.

To put it in a nutshell, my idea of using the old-fashioned Humboldt Educational Ideal as a bunch of useful educational instruments and the being of old-fashioned academic society as a political subject is only a simple sketch of resolving the existing crisis. Their usefulness depends on the correctness of my choice of the key symptoms of crisis and their possible causes.

CONCLUSION

As a concluding remark, I would like to remind you of the sequence of my reasoning. The study of the ongoing event is very hard because of the large number of its different manifestations. In this diversity, it is impossible to find causes and make predictions. Thus, to analyze this event, it is important to find key symptoms and later try to find their possible causes. I suppose that the brightest signs of the contemporary crisis are only symptoms of the lack of information, the lack of communication, and the lack of expertise, which, in turn, are the effects of the lack of education and the underestimation of the expert opinions.

A deeper look into the society that is not educated enough and prefers emotional arousal to justified professional opinion leads to a conclusion that contemporary society remains a mass society. This working hypothesis allows using the concepts and methods from 20th century continental philosophy to find and overcome propaganda clichés. Moreover, I tried to highlight the relationships between mass society and mass (higher) education.

This educational model could be the possible target for preventing future crises that could have a lot in common with the studied one. From my view, to resolve the contemporary crisis, we need people, who could be qualified enough to look ahead. In other words, we need philosophers and researchers, who would have enough education to state and investigate complex problems, which, in turn, could be the opportunities to develop humanity and overcome the existing problems.

Moreover, these people must be part of such an academic society, which could be independent and self-sufficient enough to develop, share, and protect their own views, values, interests, and ideals. In addition, this society must be heterogeneous and diverse enough to cover a broader scope of the studied topics.

Therefore, consistent philosophical study of the current crisis allows identification of its possible causes. In addition, such a philosophical reflection could suggest possible ways of dealing with the studied crisis.

REFERENCES

- Barthes, Roland. 1957. *Mythologies*. Paris: Les Lettres nouvelles.
- van Bommel, Bas. 2015. *Between "Bildung" and "Wissenschaft": The 19th Century German Ideal of Scientific Education*. Institut für Europäische Geschichte.
- Brentano, Franz. 1874. *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*. Duncker & Humblot.
- Deleuze, Gilles. & Guattari, Felix. 1972. *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. L'anti-Oedipe*. Les Éditions de Minuit.
- Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Felix. 1980. *Mille plateaux*. Les Éditions de Minuit.
- Foucault, Michel. 2017. *Dire vrai sur soi-même. Conférences prononcées à l'Université Victoria de Toronto*. Paris: VRIN.
- Kannabich, Jury. 1928. *Istoriya psichiatrii* [History of Psychiatry]. Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Medicinskoe Izdatelstvo (in Russ).
- Kuhn, Thomas. 1962. *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lakatos, Imre and Musgrave, Alan. (Eds.). 1970. *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. 1972. *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*. Les Éditions de Minuit.
- Manley, David B., Taylor, Charles S. 1996. *Descartes' Meditations – Triangular Edition*. <https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/philosophy/8>
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1954. "Über die Zukunft unserer Bildungs-Anstalten." In *Werke in drei Bänden*, Band 3, S. 174-175. München.
- Swift, Jonathan. (1801). "Letter: Swift to Pope - 5." In *The Works of the Rev. Jonathan Swift, Volume 14*. Ed. Thomas Sheridan, John Nichols, John Boyle, Patrick Delany, John Hawkesworth, Deane Swift, William Bowyer, John Birch, and George Faulkner. London: H. Baldwin and Son.

Александар Мус

Универзитет у Санкт Петербургу,
Санкт Петербург, Русија

САВРЕМЕНО МАСОВНО ВИСОКО ОБРАЗОВАЊЕ И АКАДЕМСКА УЛОГА ЕКСПЕРТА КАО МОГУЋИ УЗРОК КРИЗЕ

Апстракт

Анализирајући савремену ситуацију може се поставити следеће питање: шта су потенцијални узроци текуће кризе? Треба да почнемо од непотпуности сваке прогнозе јер обзиром на информације које имамо можемо предвиђати у прилично уском просторном и временском оквиру. Истовремено, могуће је замислити интервју са образованом одраслом особом из деведесетих која не може да предвиди текуће догађаје. Ова ограничења узрокују и хаотичну апсорпцију информација и анксиозност. Последишно, ови фактори онемогућавају конзистентну логичку и филозофску анализу као и неконзистентност приликом доношења одлука. Сукоби између чланова породице и пријатеља показују ефектност медијских извештаја и мањак способности да се преговара. Можемо уочити и неспособност преговарања и међу професионалним дипломатама који крше професионални етос употребом жаргона. Штавише, ако политичка решења производе последице које су супротне декларисаним циљевима можемо говорити о недостатку стручности која произилази из недостатка информација али и о недостатку учешћа филозофа, истраживача и других стручњака у процесу доношења одлука. Последишно, ово се поставља и као питање егзистенције академске

заједнице која може да брани академске вредности и професионалне интересе. Следствено томе, друштво XXI века остаје масовно друштво са свим могућностима и ограничењима. Ако су Митологије Ролана Барта (1957) и шизоанализа Делеза и Гатарија (1972, 1980) довољне да се разуме начин мишљења савремених особа које су инволвиране у модерну кризу, потребне су нам нове идеје како бисмо развили и нас и наша друштва.

Кључне речи: феноменологија, филозофска антропологија, *Митологије* Роланда Барта, шизоанализа, масовно друштво, академска заједница.
