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## Wisdom as a Special Value of Pedagogy in the Digital Era

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The aim of the article is to show selected changes taking place in the modern world, in particular to draw attention to the enormous pace of technological and cultural changes and the anthropocene epoch, i.e., the destruction of the natural environment. In order not to bring about adverse consequences for people, these changes require a new look at education systems and awakening of environmental awareness.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The article is a contemporary scientific reflection, it is a critical analysis of selected sources (monographs, journal articles and netographic sources). The method of analysis and criticism of the literature was used, as well as in-depth own reflection.

**Findings:** Pedagogical reflection and a change in economic thinking is necessary - moving to the so-called ecological economy, considering environmental costs, slowdown of growth, departure from pro-market policy, focused only on profit, and in global education - education towards wisdom and spirituality.

**Practical Implications:** The lack of information on the current initiation, the perpetuation of the world's weak epidemics of idiocracy is the gradual destruction of our civilization. Too great changes are required in the education system of the ages and an orientation towards education towards wisdom and spirituality. Such a radical change in programming will also contribute to increasing ontological support.

**Originality/value:** Linking contemporary global threats, including, above all, the enormous destruction of the natural environment, with such axiological categories as wisdom, knowledge, responsibility, control over emotions; indication of a possible way out of the current crisis situation and the tasks of education in this area.

**Keywords:** Wisdom, knowledge, idiocracy, crisis, anthropocene, ecology, values, spirituality.

**Paper Type:** Theoretical research study.

**Acknowledgments:** I would like to thank all the wise people whom I have met on my way of scientific development, who in modern society is a definite minority, and the wide masses of denialists whose views - completely contrary to modern science and even elementary logic - prompted me to write this article.

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## 1. Introduction

Many various scientific, journalistic, and even satirical studies have already been written about wisdom. The subject seems to be heavily exploited, however, modern times allow and even force a new approach to it. In this article, I propose a new look at the issue of wisdom - mainly from the perspective of educational sciences, i.e., pedagogy.

The issue of wisdom has been interesting for centuries, although today it seems to be somewhat marginalized. They are characterized by a phenomenon characteristic of the present day - wisdom - from the social perspective - becomes a more and more scarce value, and at the same time - from the individual perspective - no one complains about it, no one admits to this deficit. Yet we are now living in an age of ideocracy - a global epidemic of stupidity. I have presented this topic and the analysis of the causes of this phenomenon in two articles (Morbitzer, 2017; 2018).

Stupidity is the second pole of the intellectual continuum of man. As emphasized by the authors of the excellent work entitled "Sketches on the philosophy of stupidity", considerations on stupidity allow us to better understand the phenomenon of wisdom (Brożek *at al.*, 2021). The advent of ideocracy was signaled at the beginning of the 21st century by the British professor of sociology Frank Furedi in his famous work "Where have all intellectuals gone?" (Furedi, 2004), noting that the tendency to limit reason has become the dominant feature of Western intellectual life (*ibid.*). He also recalled the views of the American sociologist Jeffrey Alexander, who wrote about "ubiquitous irrationality" (*ibid.*).

It is also a paradox that in the era of such easy and quick access to information - mainly due to the Internet, which is itself an ocean of information, but also allows access to various information bases - people do not have more knowledge, they are neither wiser nor better. On the contrary - in addition to the epidemic of stupidity, we observe the phenomenon of anthropological regression, i.e., the regression of humanity in its development (Szmyd, 2015), including - especially for important pedagogy - axiological erosion on a scale never seen before.

Before our eyes, the world of values is being destroyed, authorities are trampled on, ordinary human decency and a sense of shame, which used to be a barrier against vile behavior, infantile statements, intentionally missing the truth, compromising their author, is lost somewhere in the sense of honor and concern for dignity human. Many researchers, especially ethicists and educators, talk about the decline of values.

However, this is a wrong view - values do not fall. As emphasized by the great Polish philosopher and ethicist W. Stróżewski, values are permanent - truth is truth, good is good, and beauty is beauty. Only our perception of them changes. We have lost our sensitivity and taste for value. Therefore, it is not a crisis of values, but a crisis of the axiological structure of man (Stróżewski, 2002).

The aim of the article is to show that this state leads to life in a worse world - admittedly in a zone of greater comfort built based on new technologies, but at the same time in a huge deficit in the axiological layer, in terms of spiritual development, and above all in wisdom, which it is decisive for important human decisions concerning personal and professional life. As a result, it means that mankind is on a path towards a catastrophe - self-destruction, where like at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, after a certain tipping point, there will be no possibility of turning back.

## **2. Selected Contexts of the Contemporary World**

The world is an extremely complex system, encompassing a great many forms of human activity. They are often described in various reports presenting selected segments of this activity. Due to the pedagogical perspective adopted in this article, we will limit ourselves to two important contexts - the changeability of the world and ecology, at the same time indicating their numerous relationships with selected other contexts.

The modern world is a world of constant changes, which the Polish sociologist and philosopher Z. Bauman (1925-2017) called "liquid modernity", characterized by constant changeability, instability, uncertainty (Bauman, 2011), and the German sociologist U. Beck to define the consequences resulting from accelerated development, leading to irreversible changes that cannot be controlled, he used a new term - "risk society" (Beck, 2012). The educator M. Jędrzejko introduced the term "turbulent world" (Jędrzejko, 2015) to describe the present day, especially pedagogical (Jędrzejko, 2015), and Pope Francis in December 2019 went even further, saying that we live not so much in the era of changes, but in a situation of change epochs (Przeciszewski, 2021).

This rapidly changing world constantly surprises us and puts us in decision-making situations. The quality of our life depends on the decisions made, both individually and professionally, and the fate of individual people and large social groups depends on them - so they are of great importance. One of the most important definitions of wisdom is the ability to make the right decisions, especially those that bring positive consequences in the long term and in the wider social dimension. Thus, this simple observation already shows that wisdom is the condition of good functioning in society - as an individual and a member of a community. Of course, the most valuable for an individual will be their own wisdom, but the wisdom of other members of the community to which we belong is also of great utility - in the social dimension.

The second context, crucial for the modern world, is the ecological one. At the same time, it seems that the current dramatic ecological situation in the world, which boils down to a huge contamination of the natural environment and all the negative consequences of this phenomenon, is also the most spectacular example of global stupidity, as this was caused by irresponsible decisions and human actions.

In order to emphasize the driving force of modern man and his significant impact on the ecosystem of our planet, the epoch from the beginning of the industrial era, i.e., from around 1750, was called the Anthropocene - the epoch of man (Greek *anthropos* - man). The name was proposed by the Nobel laureate in chemistry (1995) Crutzen (1933-2021), and then was approved by a 35-person group of experts, the so-called the Anthropocene Working Group (Lax, 2021). The new name replaced the previous geological epoch - the Holocene, which lasted about 11,650 years, which was a natural epoch. The Anthropocene is an artificial creation. The name of the new era was supposed to sound proud and apotheosis of man. Meanwhile, the opposite happened - the new era is the greatest failure of humanity in the history of human development, and the arrogant, narcissistic admiration for his own agency showed his helplessness and made him a victim of climate change caused by him.

Man turned out to be more a destructor that destroys our Earth than a creator who rationally supports its development. Therefore, the Polish journalist and publicist E. Bendyk aptly described the Anthropocene as what humans have ruined on their planet (Bendyk, 2016). We led to a global ecological disaster. Today, the Anthropocene is associated with environmental pollution and ubiquitous plastic, rapid urbanization, fossil fuel exploitation, loss of biodiversity, unfavorable global climate change, including climate warming, rapid melting of glaciers and extreme weather events, including (Webster and Marshall, 2019; Thomas *at al.*, 2020).

The philosopher E. Bińczyk in her book "Epoka man. The rhetoric and apathy of the anthropocene" (Bińczyk, 2018) points out that the Anthropocene is an era of repression, myopia and irreversible losses. These three attributes are closely related, because it is myopia, resulting mainly from the desire for immediate profit, with a complete disregard of possible future negative consequences for the environment, both on a local and global scale, a kind of repression of our own awareness of the destruction of our planet, which leads to irreversible losses in the field of nature and the global ecological crisis. Thus, E. Bińczyk rightly postulates the necessity to change thinking in economics and move to the so-called ecological economy, considering environmental costs, slowdown in growth, departure from pro-growth and pro-market policies, focused only on profit (Pietras, 2021).

Due to its importance, topicality and global dimension, the problem of the contemporary ecological crisis was also raised by Pope Francis in an important document, which is the "green" encyclical "Laudato Si", devoted to "caring for the common home". Pope Francis reminds us that the ecological crisis is not a new issue: (...) in 1971, Blessed Pope Paul VI referred to the ecological problem, pointing to a crisis which was a "dramatic consequence" of uncontrolled human activity, which "as a result of the careless use of nature causes a danger its destruction, and that he himself will fall victim to this degradation" (Laudato Si and the Environment, 2019). The Pope points out that Climate change is a global problem, with serious ecological, social, economic, political, and income-sharing consequences, and is one of the greatest

challenges facing humanity. Most likely, the most severe consequences will fall on developing countries in the coming decades (ibid.).

In another passage of the Green Encyclical, the Pope emphasizes the educational shortcomings of modern man: The fact is that "modern man was not brought up to be able to use his power properly", because the enormous technological growth was not accompanied by the development of the human being in terms of responsibility, values, and conscience (ibid.). These words have a special power because they are an excellent diagnosis of the existing state, as well as they set very important tasks for modern education. The thought of the American biologist and zoologist, one of the founders of contemporary sociobiology, Edward Osborne Wilson, perfectly resonates with them - Man still has emotions on the level of the Stone Age, institutions from the Middle Ages, and a technique about divine possibilities (Wilson, 2021; Hys, 2015).

It is clear from the above arguments that the ecological crisis is now a huge educational challenge, a topic that the school, in the name of human survival, must not only undertake, but also involve young people in various pro-ecological initiatives.

### **3. Methods**

The considered category of wisdom as a special value of education, which is the subject of the presented research, was analyzed in terms of qualitative research (Silverman, 2004). The entire text is a modern scientific reflection. It is a critical analysis of selected sources (monographs, journal articles and netographic sources). The research used the method of analysis and criticism of the literature as well as in-depth own reflection (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The research problem took the form of a question, to what extent does wisdom as a special value in the digital age allow us to have a new look at education systems and awakening environmental awareness to understand in the world of constant changes and in the Anthropocene?

### **4. Wisdom as an Educational Value**

Wisdom is not an unequivocal term. It can be viewed from various perspectives; hence, it can be defined in various ways. Due to the limited scope of the article, only selected definitions of wisdom will be presented, mainly those related to the area of pedagogy.

One of the most basic definitions of wisdom is the ability to make the right decisions that will bring positive long-term results. Many definitions of wisdom indicate the great importance of knowledge in building wisdom. The Latin words for wisdom as *sapientia = sapida scientia* - "knowledge that is particularly delicious" emphasize this very aspect. Knowledge is necessary for a person to manage their own life and pursue their profession.

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These elements are emphasized by A. Świderkówna (1925-2008), wisdom allows a person to manage his life well and helps him to be prosperous, successful and even happy. It does not identify itself with knowledge, although it presupposes having it (...). Wisdom is also the ability to perform one's profession well (...). It is the fruit of personal experience, careful observation of both human and animal behavior, as well as the laws that govern nature (*Philosophy of Life ...*, 2021). Knowledge, therefore, is the subsoil of wisdom, and the subsoil of knowledge is information.

The words of the co-founder of Apple, its long-time president Steven Paul Jobs (1955-2011) are significant for education implemented in the modern hybrid world, technology itself does not count. What is important is the belief that people are good and wise, and that if we give them modern tools, they will be able to do real miracles with them (Russell, 2021). It is one of the most beautiful sentences, very useful and important for modern pedagogy. It combines teaching and upbringing and shows that the competences necessary for the rational use of modern technologies, i.e., the richness of the digital world, are not only hard technological competences, but also soft cultural competences related to the axiological layer.

Steven Paul Jobs' statement is not only a beautiful example of the interpenetration of the teaching, learning and upbringing process, but also the integration of the world of technology and the world of culture. S.P. Jobs emphasizes here the special importance of axiological categories - wisdom and good. But what does it mean to be educatively wise? One must recall the distinction existing in philosophy from antiquity, and strongly popularized by the German enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), between two components of the human brain, intellect, and reason.

The intellect (Latin *intellectus*, German *Verstand*), which is instrumental, emotionally disengaged, axiologically neutral, performs revealing functions, leading to cold learning about the truth. On the other hand, reason (Latin *ratio*, German *Vernunft*) is related to the axiological layer, provides reflection, evaluates, and indicates what is good and what is bad. It is a concept close to wisdom. Intellect is necessary for man to be an inventor and discoverer, but it is reason that determines how we will use these achievements. The German pedagogue and philosopher O.F. Bollnow (1903-1991) very aptly points out that the intellect will teach us how to build a house. But that is not enough. Only reason will teach us how to live peacefully in it (Gadacz, 2021). The problem is that modern education values the intellect more than the reason, and it is reason that should be the axiological guardian of the intellect.

The combination of the categories of wisdom and good can also be found in the concept of wisdom by the American psychologist R. Sternberg. He defines this category as a specific balance between the interests of the individual, the needs of others and the environment, and thus the readiness to achieve the common good (Sternberg, 2001; Sternberg and Glück, 2019). Wisdom requires not only knowledge, but also connecting it with emotional processes and motivation to act for the good of all. The path to wisdom is also spiritual development, which is associated with the

weakening of egocentrism, resignation from selfishness and the growing importance of global problems. This definition is of particular importance in the present epoch of the Anthropocene.

As already mentioned, this era is closely related to the ecological crisis. And here, even more than knowledge, it is necessary to be aware of taking various actions to protect the natural environment, which is a common resource and good. Any such activities for the common good can therefore be treated as manifestations of wisdom.

Nowadays, we operate in conditions of a huge flood of information and media bombarding us with various stimuli. It is therefore worth proposing yet another definition of wisdom. In this vibrating world, full of noise, crowds of thoughts, excess of stimuli and information, wisdom should be perceived not only as the ability to make the right decisions, but also as the art of inner calmness. It is an extremely difficult art, available to a few, and its shaping should certainly be included in the list of tasks of modern good education.

Z. Pietrasieński (1924-2010) in his excellent dissertation on wisdom entitled "Wisdom, that is, the great endowment of the mind" defines wisdom as a high general cognitive culture, combined with extensive knowledge about life (Pietrasieński, 2001). As features of a wise man, he lists:

- critical attitude towards one's own knowledge, which is the core of wisdom,
- searching for justifications and evidence,
- researching opinions different from one's own,
- predicting the consequences of your decisions and actions (including those incidental and unintended),
- testing the accuracy of one's predictions (ibid.).

The approach to wisdom as a form of culture indicates the purposefulness and even the necessity of shaping it from an early age and passing on to the child values useful for building the characteristics of a wise man listed here. At the same time, it means that it is a specifically human and social problem, and gaining wisdom is a long-term process that is part of the lifelong learning process. In today's constantly and faster and faster changing world, it is necessary to search for new concepts of learning. First, it is already visible shift from storing knowledge and striving for its accumulation to the flow of knowledge, i.e., its constant renewal (Lamri, 2018). This task requires new competences, which the French businessman and innovator in the field of human resources J. Lamri called 4K. They include creativity, communication, critical thinking, and cooperation. This article does not allow for the development of this interesting issue, so we will limit ourselves to listing these clearly legible competences.

However, it is worth pointing to their mutual relationship with wisdom, which is the main axis of the discussion presented here. On the one hand, the shaping of the

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abovementioned competences supports the process of acquiring, and above all, the flow of knowledge, which - as it was noted - is the subsoil of wisdom, on the other hand - wisdom, and even just following the path towards this value significantly facilitates the shaping of each of the four abovementioned competences. So, there is a kind of feedback.

The most important of all the elements involved in the learning process are values. They play an essential role in making decisions. This process is based on a sense of responsibility and the ability to define preferences, weigh the advantages and disadvantages, and analyze the future consequences of current decisions (Botkin *et al.*, 1979). The authors of the report further note that if there were no values or we were to avoid them, we would not be able to deliberately choose between one course of action or the other. Without values, it would not be possible to pursue politics or formulate goals, programs, and strategies (*ibid.*).

The reflections quoted here show an evident relationship between values and wisdom. Since wisdom is the ability to make decisions and make choices, and values play a key role in these processes, they are the same (directly) indirect determinant of wisdom. It should be emphasized, however, that only socially correct choices lead to wisdom, bringing beneficial results in the long term, i.e., choices based on positive, noble values.

## 5. Conclusion

The quoted here E. Bińczyk puts forward in his publications and lectures the shocking thesis that it pays for humanity to perish (it pays to get extinct for humanity, 2021). He points out that economic values overwhelm existential values such as health and even life. And the authors of the report "Learning - Without Borders" warn that Learning has become a matter of life and death, and not only in the case of people who are barely satisfying their hunger. The 'learn or perish' alternative is faced by all societies today, both poor and rich, and it also applies to those members who are richer in material goods, even though many of them still feel that they are well protected against this brutal fact life (Botkin *et al.*, 1979).

Although these words were written over 40 years ago, they are even more relevant today than when they were written. This shows that the development of the world is going in the wrong direction. Today, many climate reports indicate that with 100% certainty, man is the perpetrator of unfavorable climate change, which may result in his physical destruction (Climate Change 2021, 2021). It can be prevented by human wisdom, and above all by the awareness of threats and readiness to take actions for the common good, aimed at protecting the most important values for man and each species.

There is a special dependency here - it is politicians who decide about ecological decisions to the greatest extent. They are elected by a society consisting of the so-

called average units. So, it is the common man who indirectly influences the environment in which he lives. Only that most often he does not notice these dependencies. On the other hand, he sees the benefits promised to him in the elections, which, by the way, are often not implemented. And politicians do not appeal to reason, but to emotions. Emotions always win over reason. As aptly noted by the already quoted Z. Pietrasiniński, a demagogue or fanatic who knows no hesitations or doubts can easily capture the minds of limited or frustrated people than someone who weighs all the pros and cons (Pietrasiniński, 2001).

So, with full conviction, simple recipes for healing the world are an effective way to convince people of your case. The author concludes, "How comfortable a person who has no doubts feels (*ibid.*)". In this context, Z. Pietrasiniński quotes the words of Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), "The great strength of fools is that they are not afraid to speak nonsense (*ibid.*)". Political choices therefore require the wisdom of voters who make decisions very important to their future fate at the ballot box.

In today's complex, rapidly changing world, wisdom is a value necessary for good functioning in society. Referring to the new concept introduced in 1991 by a contemporary British sociologist - A. Giddens - "ontological security", which - unlike the traditionally understood security related to survival - concerns the existence, being and functioning in the world, i.e., the sphere of the psyche and awareness, trust, identity, searching for life goals (Steele, 2008), it can be shown that the knowledge and wisdom of an individual, combined with the competence to control one's own emotions, significantly increase the sense of this security, and thus the feeling of being better in the world.

Therefore, a thesis can be formulated that cultivating the cognitive link appropriate for the digital world, information - knowledge - wisdom, learning to be the architect of one's own life and thus an internally controllable being, combined with shaping the imagination, which is a necessary condition for values so important in the contemporary world - knowledge and responsibility - they are essential elements of building one's own ontological security. However, the best way to improve it is good education - education understood broadly and addressed to the entire society, regardless of age. In many cases, it is not so much the acquisition of knowledge that is important - it is enough to be aware of the need to comply with certain rules of conduct (ecology, vaccinations, care for the planet as the common good, etc.).

Good education is education towards wisdom and spirituality, allowing for the reduction described in the report referred to here, "Learning - without borders. How to close the 'human gap'?" (Botkin *et al.*, 1982) the human gap - the opening scissors between the technical complications created by people and the progress of our skills (*ibid.*, P. 48) and the mental preparation of man for the rational use of technological achievements. The salvation for humanity is therefore the search for the meaning of one's existence, freed from the disastrous and arrogant desires of total control over the natural environment (Dacko *et al.*, 2021).

Many events from recent years, and even months or weeks, show how defenseless and small man is in the face of powerful forces of nature - various cataclysms - floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, or the ongoing pandemic (Dacko-Pikiewicz *et al.*, 2021). The concept of the world-famous sociologist M. Castells - nature as a reconstructed cultural form (Castells, 2009) - turned out to be a total fantasy and suffered a spectacular defeat. Wisdom - as a condition for human survival on his planet Earth - also consists in showing due humility to the power of nature and contemplating its beauty, and not constantly thinking about outsmarting, overcoming, and mindlessly robbing its resources.

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