

Living in ‘Interesting Times’ as the Imperative of Asking Unimagined Questions

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This article serves as an overview and introduction to the current issue of ‘Philosophy. Sociology’, which is thematically divided into five sections: epistemology, phenomenology, social philosophy, ethics, logic and the historical development of philosophical thought. The author provides a brief description of each of the twelve texts, emphasizing that, despite addressing various topics, they all reflect the spirit of the present time.

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, large language models, and technology, along with political and social turmoil, including the war in Ukraine, have played significant roles in the emergence of the texts featured in this issue. Even when these topics are not explicitly addressed, the historical context in which these discussions unfold shapes the intellectual atmosphere and influences how scholars deal with pressing philosophical questions. Topics include cognition, language games, human enhancement and its ethical implications, the concept of knowledge, the nature of education, the axiology of military leadership, conspiracy theories, the phenomenology of evil, technological morality, the postmodern urban context, and more.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, axiology of military leadership, human enhancement, cognition, conspiracy theories, epistemology, education, language games, phenomenology of evil, symbolic interaction, urban networks, logic

INTRODUCTION

This article offers a general overview of the twelve papers featured in the current issue of ‘Philosophy. Sociology’. The articles are divided into five thematic chapters: ‘Epistemology: Human Cognition, Cognitive Connotations, and the Concept of Knowledge’; ‘Phenomenology: Being-in-the-world, Learning, and Dante’s Phenomenology of Evil’; ‘Social Philosophy: Symbolic Interaction, Conspiracy Theories, and Urban Communities’; ‘Ethics: Axiology of Military Leadership and Technological Morality’; ‘Logic and the Historical Development of Philosophical Thought’. These chapters contain contributions from authors of diverse origins (Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Spain, Mexico and China), research fields, and methodologies.

Although these twelve articles cover significantly different topics, they share a common essence: the unique and unstable historical reality that shapes the intellectual atmosphere. This atmosphere influences how scholars approach critical philosophical questions. The phrase ‘May you live in interesting times’ is often regarded as a translation of a traditional Chinese curse, referring to unstable periods of history, where everything is in flux, and the background for reasoning becomes uncertain. This situation presents an opportunity to construct a gateway in the wall of time – a chance to engage in dialogue about why we feel compelled to examine certain topics from particular perspectives.

OVERVIEW

Technological, social and political transformations not only alter power dynamics and living conditions but also redefine the very terms that structure society itself. In ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, Walter Benjamin examines how the invention of mechanical reproduction reshaped both artistic perception and broader societal structures (Benjamin 2008). Similarly, Thom Mathiesen explores the relationship between the rise of synoptic power and the establishment of the printed press (Mathiesen 2010). Bernard Stiegler conceptualises Google as an externalised form of memory that actively reconfigures cognitive processes (Stiegler 2019). While technological advancements have historically influenced human cognition and perception, the scale and pace of contemporary developments are unprecedented. The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) raises critical questions about its potential impact on epistemology and human cognitive boundaries. Unlike earlier technological shifts, AI does not merely facilitate perception but actively participates in reshaping its conditions. Understanding these transformations requires an interdisciplinary approach that considers both historical perspectives and emerging theoretical frameworks.

In the modern world, ongoing changes overwhelm people with an influx of information. Jean Baudrillard once wrote, ‘We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning’ (Baudrillard 1994: 79). The increase in information is proportional to the formation of indifference toward it. This accumulation of knowledge, information and news is tied not only to internet technologies, AI, and the information society but also to the rapidly occurring global changes that we cannot keep up with and integrate into our understanding. What does it mean to make sense of all this new information? Is it even possible? Perhaps incorporating it into old grand narratives means destroying its essence. We live in a reality that forces us to ask questions we never imagined asking (Braidotti 2016). One crucial condition for ensuring that the new information and rapidly changing circumstances are not diluted in interpretation is the recognition that we are in a fundamentally altered situation – one in which questions must be raised that could not have been imagined before.

At first glance, the topics covered in these papers may seem unrelated, spanning epistemology, phenomenology, social philosophy, ethics, logic, and the history of philosophy. However, a deeper engagement with the body of research reveals the presence of the *Zeitgeist* – the philosophical necessity to analyse and discuss these issues, deeply rooted in our contemporary social and political context. Current sociopolitical events, coupled with rapid technological advancements, create a specific historical moment in which the international scholarly community feels the need to revisit classical philosophical themes from new perspectives.

The development of artificial intelligence and large language models is a major factor driving scholars to reconsider topics such as cognition, language games, human enhancement and its ethical implications, the concept of knowledge, and the nature of education – even

when these issues are not directly addressed in the articles. One of the articles directly tackling these issues is Aistė Diržytė's 'Large Language Models and the Enhancement of Human Cognition: Some Theoretical Insights'. This article explores whether human cognition can be enhanced by advanced AI systems like large language models. An important question raised here is whether such models can make people smarter or, conversely, cause them to think less critically. Human cognitive enhancement is also discussed by Zheng Liu in 'Toward Datafied Human Enhancement: Concept, Functional Classifications and Ethical Issues', where he argues that data-driven enhancement, when properly managed with respect for privacy and human dignity, can promote the common good. Bingzhuan Peng and Xinyue Wang, in 'Cognitive Connotations of Discourse Subjectivity from the Philosophic Perspective', examine cognitive connotations of discourse subjectivity from two perspectives: the speaker's self-ascription to objective events and their concern over the 'self' of the listener or reader.

The changing nature of reasoning also compels scholars to rethink education. In 'The Myth of Rationality and the Dualistic Concept of Knowledge on the Example of the Formation of the Concept of Information Literacy', Michal Černý analyses the conceptualisation of information literacy in modern society, contrasting the Enlightenment and Neo-romantic models. Nerijus Stasiulis, in 'Heideggerian Notes on Education: Learning and Being-in-the-world', discusses trends and possibilities in current education through Heidegger's philosophy, arguing that education is inherently tied to the broader socio-political situation of our time, where enframing presents both dangers and opportunities.

Another significant contemporary issue resonating throughout these articles is the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. This historical reality shapes the intellectual atmosphere in which these discussions take place, influencing how scholars engage with philosophical questions. Dyiak Vadym and Volobuiev Vladyslav, in 'Evolution of the Axiology of Military Leadership: Historical and Philosophical Aspect in the Context of the Russian-Ukrainian War', demonstrate how the ideal of a military leader has evolved, with the Ukrainian military leader aligning with Western ideals and the Russian military leader adhering to archaic ideals of warfare. Mindaugas Briedis and Mariano Navarro, in 'The Enaction of Embodied Metaphors in Dante's Phenomenology of Evil', argue that the language of embodied metaphors offers a new approach to the ontological, epistemological and ethical aspects of the phenomenon of evil, as seen in Dante's work.

The issue also pays significant attention to the transformations within contemporary society. Lina Vidauskytė's article 'On Conspiracy Theories as Irony and Language Games (with Continual Reference to Richard Rorty's Philosophy)' explores conspiracy theories as irony and language games. Gabriela Ambas and Paula Gargoles, in 'Fashioning Society: An Exploration of Collective Behaviour and Cultural Change Through Symbolic Interactionism', reflect on fashion's capacity to introduce new cultural models, challenge established norms, and guide social dynamics. Vaidas Jakutis, in 'Urban Community in the Postmodern Urban Context', argues for the necessity of discussing what an urban community is and how it shapes the identity of a city.

Even texts dedicated to logic and the history of philosophy are intricately connected to questions about the time and reality we live in. Vytis Valatka, in 'The First Age of Logic in Lithuania: *Propositio* as Such and the Necessary Propositions', shows how 16th-century Lithuanian logicians, in analysing necessary propositions, presented an approach closely aligned with modern logic. Sherman Xie, in 'The Three Elements Involved in Causality and Their Correspondence', explores causality using a Buddhist framework for universal causal analysis.

CONCLUSIONS

While philosophy remains one of the few disciplines in which past ‘discoveries’ retain relevance, the rapidly changing global landscape presents a unique opportunity to revisit the questions posed by past philosophers from new perspectives, as well as to formulate entirely new questions – ones that humanity had not previously envisioned.

A particularly significant area of reflection concerns the enhancement of human cognition, a topic closely tied to the growing influence of AI. These discussions will continue to evolve alongside technological progress, requiring a close philosophical examination of the new dimensions of cognition, knowledge and ethics that emerge in tandem with AI advancements. At the same time, political and social changes shape the discourse on power, the nature of leadership, and the foundations of societal organisation.

These papers represent a profound reflection on the uncertainties of our era, urging philosophers to reconsider the premises on which they base their analyses and actions. This work is not only an intellectual endeavour but also a moral responsibility to confront the challenges posed by our ever-changing world.

References

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Gyvenimas „įdomiais laikais“ kaip imperatyvas kelti anksčiau neįsivaizduotus klausimus

Santrauka

Šis straipsnis yra redaktorės apžvalga ir įvadas į dabartinį žurnalo „Filosofija. Sociologija“ numerį, kuris tematiškai suskirstytas į penkis skyrius su straipsniais, susijusiais su epistemologija, fenomenologija, socialine filosofija, etika, logika ir filosofinės minties istorine raida. Autorė apibūdina kiekvieną iš dvylikos tekstų, atkreipdama dėmesį, kad nors jie nagrinėja skirtingas temas, juose visuose atsispindi šio laikmečio dvasia.

Straipsnyje teigiama, kad dirbtinio intelekto, didžiųjų kalbos modelių ir technologijų spartus vystymasis, politinė ir socialinė suirutė pasaulyje bei karas Ukrainoje yra svarbios aplinkybės, prisidėjusios prie šiame žurnalo numeryje publikuojamų tekstų atsiradimo, net jei dalyje jų apie tai tiesiogiai neužsimenama. Istorinė tikrovė formuoja intelektinę atmosferą, kurioje vyksta šios diskusijos, ir daro įtaką tam, kaip mokslininkai nagrinėja aktualius filosofinius klausimus: pažinimą, kalbos žaidimus, žmogaus tobulinimą ir jo etines implikacijas, žinojimo sampratą, švietimo prigimtį, karinės lyderystės aksiologiją, sąmokslų teorijas, blogio fenomenologiją, technologinę moralę, postmoder- nų urbanistinį kontekstą ir kt.

Raktažodžiai: dirbtinis intelektas, karinė vadovavimo aksiologija, žmogaus tobulinimas, pažinimas, konspiracijos teorijos, epistemologija, švietimas, kalbos žaidimai, blogio fenomenologija, simbolinis interakcionizmas, urbanistiniai tinklai, logika