

Maatschappelijke Filosofie

The computer (ICT) revolution shatters communism and capitalism

Prof. Em. Mark EYSKENS
Prof. Em. K.U. Leuven, Minister van Staat

By analyzing current world events we are often insufficiently aware of the fabulous upheavals occurring all around us. These mutations are due to overwhelming new scientific discoveries and technologies. They are revolutionary and, due to their secondary effects, affect all aspects of human thought and behaviour. When textbooks on world history talk about BC and AC, they are no longer referring to a time before Christ and after Christ, but rather to a time before and after the computer. The emerging knowledge society forms a new global paradigm, at least for an elite. For it appears that the knowledge society also produces a lot of ignorance and misunderstanding. Too much information leads to misinformation. Our societies are of an inextricable complexity. And this is what I have called "the law of diminishing relative knowledge": the known increases, but the knowable increases much faster. This creates a gap between what we know and what we could or should know. The knowledge economy despite some new forms of discrimination, is however conducive to unprecedented opportunities for human betterment. The worldwide knowledge society leads to an accelerated transformation of the world into our "global village". I call it "Globalistan". The ongoing ICT revolution has had a shattering impact on the two dominant political-economic systems of the 20th century: Marxist-Leninist communism and liberal market capitalism. The global knowledge economy causes two major effects: one of "décollectivisation" and one of "déprivatisation" and "lethal" competition.

* Once human knowledge, fuelled by immense information, flows and communication channels resulting in unparalleled creativity become the dominant factor of production, socialist-communist collectivism loses its foothold, for the simple reason that knowledge and creativity are not susceptible to "socialist collectivization" and expropriation of means of production. Capital, raw materials, and machines may be taken from the rich and capitalists, either by law or by dictatorial methods, and money can be redistributed and managed by the State. Individual knowledge and creativity cannot be collectivized. Knowledge must neither be shared nor divided but multiplied (inter alia through education and research). Exit collectivist socialism and Marxist communism and their recipes for redistribution and collectivization and their faded dream of the mutability of society according to Marxist principles.

* From their side, the supporters of liberal market capitalism also underestimate the impact of the ongoing mutations, which lead to a "de-privatization" of the major input of production. Knowledge and creativity have growing difficulties to be efficiently patented, protected, and licensed. Every invention, every idea circulates freely through the numerous planetary ICT channels, internet, google and facebook. Capitalism was founded on the ancient Roman legal concept of private property. This is no longer applicable to the protection of intellectual property (copyright is read as 'the right to copy') in a world without frontiers, in which markets are virtualized (e-bay), de-territorialized, and even dematerialized due to the dominance of knowledge and creativity as the main factors of production. There is also a phenomenon of "disintermediation", whereby supply and demand are in direct contact without intermediaries. Markets are 'de-institutionalized' as state authorities lose their grip on them (VAT, in the case of electronically concluded trade, is not easily collected). As a consequence of the growing unification of our planet, due in the first place to

scientific and technological developments, the economic playing field has become worldwide, with giant enterprises operating and competing on it. Their competition is of an “oligopolistic type” and corresponds to what the Americans call “the cut the throat over competition”. Small and medium sized enterprises are satellites orbiting around the big firms. These multinationals have huge financial needs, which lead to enormous concentrations in the financial sector. ICT and computer technologies have made it possible to elaborate a whole range of new financial products which were often quite speculative, causing erratic stock market volatility. The financial crisis of 2008-09 undoubtedly undermined the credibility of financial capitalism. The so called sub prime debacle was the trigger for a worldwide financial collapse. The abuses, the huge bonuses for managers and trading scandals confronted the leaders of the banking sector with virulent criticism and the need to sharpen deontological rules of conduct.

Communism and capitalism, both foster fathers of the societal ideologies, political regimes and economic systems of the 19th and 20th centuries, are to a great extent and in a fatal way affected, if not devastated, by the onrushing and growing scientific and technological whirlwinds. In the world of tomorrow the United States of America, the European Union, and China will probably be the main test areas where, due to much trial and error, a new societal framework will be elaborated in order to cope with the new needs and challenges. A new, internationally developed regulation and monitoring system of the financial markets is urgently required. This implies an inescapable ethical dimension. The most important challenge for our global village, "Globalistan," is to transform all the changes, that are so overwhelmingly facing us, into real human progress. But this requires that a consistent and usable understanding is worked out with respect to what is meant by human progress. This refers to an essential ethical question: what is good and what is bad for humans? And who is going to answer this question? Assessing economic, technological and thus greatly material progress in the light of a consistent scale of values appears to be an essential task and challenge for the decades ahead.

De crisis van het liberale kapitalisme

1. Systeemcrisis die structureel is. Crisissen binnen de crisis: financieel, economisch, demografisch, vergrijzing, immigratie, multiculturaliteit, energie, representatieve democratie . Het werelddorp mist een wereldregering .
2. ICT leidde tot de implosie van het communisme. Die kennis als belangrijkste productiefactor kan niet worden genationaliseerd. Decollectivisering.
3. ICT leidt anderzijds ook tot die privatisering; geen enkele uitvinding blijft geheim ondermijning van privé eigendom en dus van kapitalisme. Daarop ent zich een wereldwijde extreme concurrentie. Premie uitbetaling aan personeel . Markt verstoord door desintermediatie
4. Onder druk van concurrentie; rommel kredieten, subprime, CDS, CDO, buiten balans, versnipperd, toxic products, securitization,: totaal 700.000 miljard dollar of 12 maal het wereldwijd product

5. zeer gesofistikeerd en intelligente mathematische modellen. Kans dat men verliest is heel gering. Maar vermits het slaat duizenden miljarden realiseert de onkans zich. En dan begint werking van domino theorie
6. beurzen zijn computergestuurd. Robots geven beursorders. Kudde gedrag. Resonantie
7. kolossale snelheid en omvang van crisis. Koersen gedaald met de helft in 1929 was de daling erger: 86 % en kromp de economie in die tijd met een vierde. Maar crisis is niet gedaan.
8. Overwinning van verstand op wijsheid, van complexiteit op efficiëntie, van concurrentie op coöperatie en van de winst streven op ethiek
9. verandering van mentaliteit en gedrag
 - A. Mensen: bonussen, speculatie, gambling, fiscale fraude
 - B. Producten: hedge funds, toxic, derivatives, CDS, CDO
 - C. Territoria: Weg met fiscale paradisijsen
10. oplossing:
 - * regulering van de financiële markten best zo internationaal mogelijk
 - * regulatoire competitie vermijden
 - * herkapitalisering in banken; gedeeltelijke nationalisering; afschaffing gemengde bank; bonus van managers op wacht rekening
 - * versterking monetaire unie: intrede Groot-Brittannië
 - * economie ondersteunen door Keynesiaanse maatregelen: deficit spending consumptie en openbare investeringen
 - * opgepast op termijn voor inflatie, stijging openbare schuld, lekken naar buitenland stagflatie
 - * België blijft kwetsbaar door zijn hoge openbare schuld, de vergrijzing . Voorzichtig met begrotingstekort
 - * internationale samenwerking, ook met China, India en Japan. Betere samenwerking van multilaterale instellingen: IMF, WTO, Wereldbank, G20... Economische Veiligheidsraad.

Uitdagingen

1. De onmogelijkheid van het noodzakelijke.
2. De allergrootste uitdaging voor het oude Europa: vergrijzing en daling van de actieve bevolking.
3. Beleidskeuzen: taboe's doorbreken
Immigratie; vanaf 2015 begint actieve bevolking te dalen
De uitbreiding van de EU: kans en/of bedreiging
Delocalisaties
Eeuwige werkloosheid
Van baanzekerheid naar werkzekerheid
Pensioen loskoppelen van leeftijd; afhankelijk maken van loopbaanduur
4. De arbeidsmarkt
Wat met CAO's?
Strijd tegen werkloosheidsvallen

5. emerging states: BRIC
Wet van de opwaartse nivellering van de arbeidskosten
Brics: China, India??
6. Te weinig kennis-economie: R&D
7. Menselijk kapitaal
8. Energie
9. De superprioriteit: innovatorische concurrentie.
Meer R&D, Imec,
10. Selectiever sociaal beleid en efficiëntere armoedebestrijding.
11. Het federalisme op zijn Belgisch werkt niet optimaal
12. regionaliseren, interregionaliseren, internationaliseren

Conclusie

Niet elke verandering is vooruitgang. Vooruitgang moet ‘menselijke’ vooruitgang zijn. Dit is ethische opgave en vereist ethiek van de verandering, meer dan een verandering van de ethiek. Onderscheid tussen goed en kwaad. Maar hoe dit onderscheid bepalen en door wie? Alvast is er nood aan een nieuw mensbeeld, wereldbeeld en - misschien – Godsbeeld.