

MARGINALIZATION OF THE HUMANITIES AS A FACTOR IN THE CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL CRISIS

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Abstract: The position of the humanities within contemporary systems of knowledge reflects a broader transformation in the way knowledge, education, and social development are valued. The growing predominance of instrumental rationality has strengthened criteria based on economic utility, measurable performance, and immediate applicability, thereby narrowing the space for disciplines whose primary contribution lies in interpretation, critical reflection, and the formation of intellectual and value-oriented perspectives. The purpose of this paper is to examine the marginalization of the humanities as a relevant factor in the contemporary global crisis and to establish a connection between the declining social significance of humanistic knowledge and the weakening of critical capacities necessary for understanding complex processes of social change. The research relies on a qualitative analysis of relevant theoretical and scholarly literature, with particular attention to the relationship between the transformation of knowledge systems, the marketization of higher education, and the changing position of the humanities. The findings indicate that the marginalization of humanistic disciplines extends beyond institutional and academic concerns, affecting the capacity of societies to interpret historical experience, critically assess prevailing models of development, and articulate coherent value orientations. Such a reduction of the humanistic dimension of knowledge contributes to a narrower understanding of contemporary crises, particularly when technological and economic approaches become detached from their broader social and ethical implications. The paper concludes that the global crisis possesses an intellectual and value-based dimension that cannot be adequately addressed through technical expertise alone. Strengthening the institutional and educational position of the humanities therefore represents an important prerequisite for developing critical judgment, historical consciousness, and a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary social transformations. The paper recommends greater integration of humanistic perspectives into educational and research policies, together with stronger interdisciplinary cooperation between the humanities and other fields of knowledge. The study contributes to a broader understanding of how transformations in the contemporary structure and hierarchy of knowledge affect the capacity of societies to critically interpret their circumstances and respond responsibly to complex global challenges.

Keywords: *humanities, marginalization, instrumental rationality, knowledge hierarchy, global crisis.*

Field: Humanities

1. INTRODUCTION

Accelerated technological transformations, the expansion of market-oriented logic, and the growing dominance of instrumental knowledge have profoundly affected the ways in which contemporary society determines the value of education and scientific knowledge. The contemporary global crisis manifests itself in multiple forms, ranging from environmental catastrophes and social inequalities to technological control presented as a guarantor of security, as well as growing distrust in the state and its institutions. Beyond its material and political dimensions, however, the crisis also constitutes a crisis of meaning and values, the deeper causes of which may be associated with the marginalization of forms of knowledge oriented towards understanding human beings, their needs, and their relationship with the community. Contemporary society is increasingly confronted with a diminished capacity for critically reflecting upon the directions of its own development, while questions concerning its purposes and underlying value foundations remain subordinated to the imperatives of productivity, efficiency, and immediate utility. The question of the position of the humanities extends far beyond the boundaries of academic and educational policy. The manner in which the value of particular fields of knowledge is determined reflects broader conceptions of social progress and of humanity's place within it. The marginalization of the humanities, manifested in their weakened institutional position and the erosion of their broader social function, raises fundamental questions concerning the consequences of such a process for society's capacity to interpret its own historical experience, critically reassess dominant values, and understand the consequences of its developmental choices. Understanding the global crisis therefore requires a perspective broader than that provided by technical and economic expertise alone, since its causes and consequences extend into the very ways in which human beings construct their relationships with themselves, with others, and with

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the world around them.

The aim of this paper is to examine the marginalization of the humanities as one of the factors contributing to the contemporary global crisis and to explore the relationship between the changing position of humanistic knowledge and the erosion of society's capacity for critical reflection. Particular attention is devoted to the transformation of the criteria by which knowledge and education are evaluated, the growing dominance of instrumental rationality, and the consequences of such a model for the social function of the humanities. The study is based on a qualitative analysis of relevant scholarly and theoretical literature. By examining the relationship between the transformation of knowledge systems, the market orientation of education, and the changing position of the humanities, the paper seeks to demonstrate how altered criteria of scholarly value affect society's capacity to critically assess its own development.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The humanities comprise a constellation of disciplines concerned with the human being as a whole, as a being of meaning, values, history, culture, and social relations. Unlike the natural and technical sciences, whose primary task is to explain and master natural and technological processes, the humanities are oriented towards understanding human experience in all its complexity and contradictions (Newfield, 2025). Their significance lies precisely in their capacity to shape the interpretative frameworks through which individuals understand themselves, others, and the world in which they act. Education represents one of the principal media through which these frameworks are transmitted, reproduced, and transformed, while simultaneously cultivating the competencies necessary for responsible citizenship. The marginalization of the humanities constitutes the consequence of a deeper transformation of the social system of values, a process that became particularly pronounced with the rise of industrial capitalism and assumed its contemporary form through the neoliberal rationalization of social institutions (Wagenaar, 2022). Rosi Braidotti (2016) has conceptualized the transformation in the position of the humanities through the notion of cognitive capitalism, in which knowledge, information, and intellectual labor become resources for the production of economic value. Universities consequently risk being reduced to "merely epistemological centers," rather than institutions that "respond to the society they participate in creating, serve, and think about." Competitive funding mechanisms, evaluation indicators, rankings, publication productivity, project-based logic, and an increasing emphasis on measurable "outcomes" have become institutionalized. This transformation necessarily produces a specific hierarchy among academic disciplines. Technical, natural, and applied sciences are more readily accommodated within an evaluative model based on patents, innovation, investment, technological development, and employability (Blum, 2022). The humanities, by contrast, occupy a structurally disadvantaged position because many of their essential functions belong to a domain that resists immediate quantification: interpretation, critical thinking, cultural reproduction, the articulation of values, and the deconstruction of ideological patterns. Their object and purpose are therefore difficult to translate into the language of market-based indicators (Hewson, 2026). The same logic has increasingly been projected onto the individual. Human capacities and knowledge, and above all time and creativity, are treated primarily as market potential - as resources that can be invested in, valorized, and converted into economic gain. The contemporary individual learns in order to produce, produces in order to remain competitive, and is deemed competitive to the extent that his or her capacities can be rendered economically useful.

3. RESULTS

The transformation in the position of the humanities can be more clearly understood if the problem is removed from the level of the institutional distribution of resources and situated within the broader horizon of the transformation of the very regime of knowledge production. Michel Foucault demonstrated that knowledge cannot be considered independently of the relations of power that determine the conditions under which it is produced and circulated. The regime of truth encompasses institutional procedures, mechanisms of classification, and discursive practices through which it is determined what may be recognized as relevant, rational, and legitimate knowledge. Certain forms of knowledge become privileged because they correspond to dominant patterns of social organization, while others are pushed to the margins precisely because of their capacity to render those patterns objects of critical reflection. As early as 1979, Lyotard interpreted the transformation of contemporary knowledge in terms of a crisis of grand legitimizing narratives and the growing imperative of performativity (Abdelgawad, 2022). The critique of instrumental reason developed by Horkheimer provides an adequate framework for understanding this transformation in the epistemological function of rationality. The rational increasingly becomes that

which enables the appropriate selection of means in relation to a predetermined end, while the question of whether the end itself is justified remains outside the domain of rational judgment. The humanities encounter a fundamental difficulty within such a conceptual framework, because they constitute themselves precisely within a domain in which the question of ends is inseparable from the question of their normative justification. Their epistemological function therefore rests not only upon the production of answers, but also upon the formulation of questions that cannot be readily translated into the categories of operational efficiency. The instrumentalization of knowledge has consequently produced a specific hierarchy of epistemological functions. Priority has been accorded to forms of knowledge that can be directly integrated into processes of governance, technological innovation, economic reproduction, and related forms of practical engagement (Hewson, 2026). In this respect, the humanities retain a function of epistemological correction within a system that possesses highly developed capacities for action, yet increasingly limited space for reflecting upon its own normative premises. The problem reaches its culmination in the institutionalization of measurability as a criterion of academic value, whereby scholarly work has increasingly been reduced to bibliometric indicators. Certain aspects of academic activity have been singled out as particularly relevant because they are amenable to quantification, while intellectual functions whose effects unfold through prolonged conceptual development are considerably more difficult to accommodate within the prevailing evaluative matrix. Beyond the banalization and diminished status of the humanities and social sciences, the consequence of this reconfiguration is the narrowing of the intellectual space within which the very premises of social rationality might be subjected to critical scrutiny (Lee etc., 2023).

4. DISCUSSIONS

The human being of the contemporary age has been constituted as a subject of permanent adaptation: expected to be productive, competitive, flexible, technologically literate, and capable of continuously increasing his or her own value. This profound transformation of subjectivity corresponds to the logic of neoliberal rationality, within which the individual internalizes market criteria and applies them to his or her own existence (Cueva Perus, 2024). Homo economicus (as Foucault conceptualizes and explicates the figure) operates as a subject who organizes conduct according to a calculative rationality. Critical reflection requires a certain distance from one's own historical moment. Yet the contemporary human being has, to a significant extent, deprived himself of the capacity for critical engagement by being shaped according to a logic of permanent adaptation that rarely, if ever, questions the order demanding such perpetual flexibility (Holdo, 2023). The system thereby frees itself from the necessity of justifying its own presuppositions. The individual accepts them, applies them to himself, and reproduces them through everyday conduct. It is precisely at this intersection that technocracy exerts its social power. It grounds the administration of society in expertise, procedure, quantification, technical rationality, and process optimization, while political and normative questions are displaced into the domain of managerial decision-making (Normand etc., 2024). A social problem is transformed into a technical task, a decision into a procedure, the citizen into data, and a collective objective into a performance indicator. The individual thus inhabits a space in which his behavior is subject to continuous processing, classification, prediction, and optimization. Freedom is preserved only in a formal sense, because its substantive content is shaped within an environment whose underlying assumptions the individual accepts before having the opportunity to question them (Rummens, 2024). Critical reflection should interrupt this automatism; it should introduce a question between the human being and the world that shapes him, creating space for doubt, hesitation, and judgment. Yet the system no longer needs to silence the critic. It is sufficient for it to produce a human being for whom the critical question itself has become unnecessary. The fundamental problem begins where society ceases to distinguish between what is possible and what is justified (Dantzler etc., 2022). Technology may answer the question of how something can be done; it cannot, by itself, answer the question of whether it ought to be done. Once this distinction is eroded, technical knowledge occupies a space that does not properly belong to it, and the human being is left with increasingly sophisticated means while surrendering the criteria governing their use to the logic of the very system that produces those means (Zamotkin, 2025). A world constructed according to the imperatives of the ideology of progress is increasingly revealing the limits of its own expansion. The ecological crisis mirrors the human assumption that finite resources can be treated as infinitely available; social fragmentation reflects the cost of an order in which the individual is reduced either to a bearer of capital or to a consumer; political apathy reveals the transformation of the citizen from an active participant into a spectator of processes. The greatest paradox of contemporary civilization lies in the fact that, precisely at the historical moment when knowledge has become more accessible to human beings than ever before, their interest in understanding themselves as

the subjects of that knowledge has weakened. The more powerful our means of knowing the world have become, the less certain we appear to be about why that knowledge matters, what purposes it should serve, and what kind of human being it ought ultimately to help constitute (Yemelyanova etc., 2023).

5. CONCLUSION

The contemporary global crisis begins with a human being who has lost the capacity to subject his own power to serious judgment, and to pause long enough before the consequences of his own development to ask what kind of world his actions are bringing into existence. Humanity has expanded the boundaries of what is possible while displacing the question of what is justifiable from the center of its own thinking. It has built a world capable of initiating, accelerating, measuring, and controlling processes with unprecedented precision, yet increasingly incapable of determining what such power ought to serve, where its legitimate limits lie, and what kind of life it ultimately makes possible. The world is polluted, saturated with information, politically agitated, and psychologically exhausted, while the human being remains trapped between the imperative to advance incessantly and the inability to articulate the purpose toward which such advancement is ultimately directed. The humanities have been marginalized as forms of knowledge that fail to generate sufficiently immediate and measurable utility, even though their deepest value lies precisely in their capacity to return the human being, again and again, to the question of his own purpose. Having rejected this capacity, the human being now seeks relief from his exhaustion through the very logic that contributed to producing it: by becoming more productive, more successful, and more efficient, while transforming his own existence into an endless project of self-improvement. The humanities were meant to serve as a compass between the possible and the justifiable, between power and responsibility, between what the human being is capable of producing and the kind of world in which he ultimately wishes to live. Their displacement has left humanity with knowledge that can tell it how to proceed, while gradually surrendering the capacity to determine where it is worth going to the imperatives of utility, efficiency, and perpetual progress. The central paradox of the contemporary condition is therefore not that humanity knows too little, but that it possesses unprecedented capacities for knowledge while becoming progressively less capable of asking what that knowledge is for. The crisis is consequently not merely technological, economic, political, or ecological. At its deepest level, it is a crisis of judgment: a crisis arising from the widening distance between the expansion of human power and the erosion of the intellectual and ethical capacities required to govern that power. A civilization that can do almost anything but can no longer adequately ask whether it should do it has not overcome its limitations. The future of the humanities, therefore, is not simply a question of preserving academic disciplines, institutional positions, or cultural traditions. It is a question of whether the human being will retain the capacity to step outside the logic of immediate utility and recover the distance necessary to judge the world he is continuously producing. The humanities remain indispensable precisely because they preserve the space in which the human being can still ask the question that no technology, algorithm, market, or system of efficiency can answer on his behalf: not merely what can we do, but what is worth doing, and what kind of world is worth creating.

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