

Power, “Artificial Intelligence”, and “Decision”

By Panayiotis Christias*

“See God living in His creations:
in matter, giving it existence, in plants, giving them life,
in animals, giving them consciousness, in human beings,
giving them intelligence. This is how He lives in me,
giving me existence, life, consciousness, intelligence”..

[Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* (1522)]¹

I. Decision and Power

In his book *Macht und Entscheidung*, Panagiotis Kondylis analyses the human field where the will to power is being applied². According to him, the driving force of human social and political action is the pursuit of power, expressed through the construction of value systems, worldviews or, in Kondylis’s terminology, “decisions”. At the macro-historical level, we could observe a struggle for domination between historical subjects, individuals, groups or peoples, through the creation of normative systems offering to their representatives the right to act as regulators of human affairs. The prevailing worldview determines the social and political organization, the management of the religious sphere and the settlement of major legal and moral issues. The dominant worldview determines the social and political organization, the administration of the religious sphere and the settlement of the main legal and moral questions.

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1. Ignatius of Loyola, *Πνευματικὲς ἀσκήσεις τοῦ Ἱγνάτιου Λογιόλα*, transl. (Greek). K. Th. Zarras, Iamvlichos Publications, Athens 1990, p. 120.

2. P. Kondylis, *Macht und Entscheidung. Die Herausbildung der Weltbilder und die Wertfrage*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1984 (Greek edition: P. Kondylis, *Ἰσχύς καὶ ἀπόφαση*, Stigma Publications, Athens 2001).

Therefore, individuals and peoples pursue power by “deciding” to create or join a worldview. So how does the dominant worldview is changing today, in the era of artificial intelligence? Will intelligent machines be able to change the dominant worldview or create their own, seeking absolute dominance over human beings, as some fear?

What is the “de-cision”? *De-cisio* (*Ent-scheidung*) is a *caesura*, a choice made in this vast world, a primordial selection cutting through reality’s chaotic and uninterrupted flow. Every living being is constituted on the basis of such caesuras in reality; its normal body is a compromise with the annihilating forces of primordial chaos. To live, it sets itself up as a differentiating machine, separating itself from this flow and forming its own body. So far, this process has taken up almost all of human time and is limited to the human case. The latter’s “historical” time is but only a tiny fraction of the time that intervened between the formation of the first living being and the appearance of language. Nevertheless, human “prehistory” is the moment of the human race’s great politics, its psycho-biology. Its “body”, as a self-contained being, is the sign of its political struggles with the universe and with the forces of chaos. Its eyes are the result of a decision between light and darkness: humanity has chosen to give itself a visual representation of the world rather than a sonic one, as it is the case with the bat, for example. Hearing is the compromise between an unclassifiable and unfathomable acoustic universe and its need to find its way. Its language is the attempt to conquer these universes and connect them in what we call “representation”. These were the “decisions” that made possible a “representation of the world”, a worldview.

All animal species, all living creatures, have made different biological decisions; still, all species have made possible through them a “representation of the world”. Up to this stage, the representations that have been made possible are rather crude, without refinement, higher or mental processing. The latter one, which varies according to the particular species, is called “mind”. Our aim is not dealing with the “history” of animals. Thus, the question of whether and to what extent the mind is an essential characteristic of all animal species is not of interest to us at this stage. Let’s just say that, if we want to be consistent

with our guiding principle, we can only define mind as an organizing force that is able to bring order in a primordial and chaotic world. This capacity is therefore a characteristic of living beings per se, the essential character of life, ordering their world according to their needs for self-preservation and their primordial instinctive will to live or, to be more precise, to power, so that they can survive. We therefore observe the importance and depth of these decisions at the biogenetic level, of which the DNA, our genetic code, is the trace.

So, what is the meaning of "body"? How is a "body" made up? Nietzsche poses the question in a radical way: What is the origin of the phenomenon of "life"? How is a "body" born? How does life penetrate a "body"? Until now, these questions have remained in the dark, as there had been a strange division of the problem of "life" into two separate ones: the life of the body and that of the soul. This division has been established by two different sciences, physiology and psychology. This fundamental error is corrected by what Nietzsche has called an "authentic physiology-psychology" (*eine eigentliche Physio-Psychologie*³). Life is a unified, single phenomenon, and it is to this authentic unity that Nietzsche's concept of the "soul", free from the ancient prejudices, is addressed: "soul as a multiple subject" (*Seele als Subjekts-Vielheit*), "soul as the social structure of drives and passions" (*Seele als Gesellschaftsbau der Triebe und Affekte*)⁴. Soul and body are thus initially linked in the same phenomenon, that of "life": "our body is in fact nothing else but a social structure consisting of many souls" (*unser Leib ist ja nur ein Gesellschaftsbau vieler Seelen*)⁵. As Patrick Wotling notes, "when Nietzsche contrasts the body with thought, he does not contrast them as matter with spirit, but as a genealogically primary case with a genealogically secondary one"⁶, as a relation between substructure and superstructure.

Nietzsche heavily criticizes traditional psychology for always treating conscious thought, cognition and "intelligence" as an autonomous phenomenon, and not having "dared penetrating into the depths": "its

3. Fr. Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, GF, Paris 2000, p. 23.

4. Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, op.cit., p. 12.

5. *Idem*, p. 19.

6. P. Wotling, *La pensée du sous-sol*, Allia, Paris 1999, p. 66.

greatest error has always been to ignore the subterranean origins that make conscious thought possible”⁷. Now, “consciousness”, and all the phenomena associated with it, can be traced back genealogically to subconscious processes: passions, drives, instincts, influences. However, Nietzsche does not thereby eliminate “thought”; he shifts his focus to the “body”: “the body is a word that covers a certain collectivity of subconscious instincts, impulses, and influences”⁸. Each case is metaphorically defined by “soul” or “spirit”. The “body” is consequently redefined “independently of any notion of materiality, as a hierarchical collectivity of ‘souls’ or ‘spirits’”⁹.

What does “hierarchical” mean? “Every instinct seeks to dominate” (*jeder Trieb ist herrschsüchtig*)¹⁰. What does “to dominate” mean? To impose its own interpretation of reality on other “minds”, to pass its own reality as an irrefutable one to all other cases. Every “soul”, every “mind”, passion, impulse, instinct, influence seeks to impose its interpretation. This desire is what Nietzsche calls the “will to power” (*Wille zu Macht*). The various arrangements between “minds” are relations of domination: a constant struggle for a dominant interpretation, accepted by all and imposed on all. In this sense, Nietzsche states: “Action is everything” (*das Tun ist alles*)¹¹. There is no systematic truth, no world that is a product of speculation: “There are no systems, there are many works”¹². This action is the life of the body: “The will to power interprets [...]. The organic process presupposes a perpetual INTERPRETATION”¹³.

7. Wotling, *La pensée...*, op.cit., p. 65.

8. Wotling, *La pensée...*, op.cit., p. 66.

9. Wotling, *La pensée...*, op.cit., p. 67.

10. Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, op.cit., p. 6.

11. Fr. Nietzsche, *Γενεαλογία της ήθικης*, transl. (Greek) Z. Sarikas, Panoptikon Publications, Athens 2012, I, 13.

12. V. Hugo, *Les Misérables*, Éditions Robert Laffont, Paris 1985, p. 47.

13. Fr. Nietzsche, *Œuvres philosophiques complètes*, XII: *Fragments posthumes* (Automne 1885 - Automne 1887), Gallimard, Paris 1979, 2 [148].

II. Power and Interpretation

Yet, what does "interpretation" mean? What does "interpretation" mean for life as an organic structure? "To interpret, then, means seeking to control competing 'forces'"¹⁴. Nietzschean physio-psychology does not reduce reality to mere physical-chemical calculations. "Every impulse, every instinct [...] perceives, compares, judges, evaluates"¹⁵. – What exactly? Mechanical or physical-chemical reality in its entirety. How is it "anger" that the blood boils? In reality, it is a logical instinct that imposes this "word" on all others. The question is: Who interprets? Or, who "wants"? In the case of the will to power, however, this question is unjustifiable. Will is detached from any subject, individual or collective. It is impersonal: it "wants" (*Es will*), just as it "thinks" (*Es denkt*)¹⁶. The concept of will refers to a subconscious process, a struggle between "drives" or "urges", which in its turn refers to a process of hierarchy. It is precisely to the hierarchical structure of the body - the multiple "souls", not to a subject, conscious or unconscious, that the concepts of "strong will" or "weak will" apply: "The multiplicity and dispersion of the impulses, the lack of a system coordinating them creates the 'weak will'; their coordination under the domination of a single impulse creates the 'strong will'"¹⁷.

According to this Nietzschean perspective, also shared by Panagiotis Kondylis, the crucial question is: What exactly are current "artificial intelligence" machines or will they be in the foreseeable future? Subjects in the struggle for dominance or means at the disposal of the existing subjects who already exercise power over others and are constantly seeking to increase it? To what extent can the unceasing competition be affected by a systematic use of AI systems on a daily basis? Or should we simply call them super-computing power systems incorporating machine learning and language models, which underpin the technology behind

14. Wotling, *La pensée...*, *op.cit.* p. 72.

15. Wotling, *La pensée...*, *op.cit.* p. 74.

16. Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, *op.cit.* p. 17.

17. Nietzsche, *Œuvres philosophiques complètes*, XIV: *Fragments posthumes* (Début 1888-Début janvier 1889), Gallimard, Paris 1977, 14, [219].

ChatGPT, or even advanced neural coding and decoding networks? The difference in naming prevents from identifying human or “living” subjects with algorithm systems, since it is quite unlikely that in the near future these systems will acquire self-awareness, individual will, personality and the inherent capacity for goal-setting.

We should distinguish here between natural and artificial intelligence. They are not simply different forms of intelligence, of a computing machine and a biological being. There is only one form of intelligence: the natural / animal one, and man can only understand this one. It is the intelligence of the biological being when it survives. In relation to a biological being, artificial intelligence machines can only euphemistically be called “intelligence” machines. They remain complex sub-computational machines and their output is not called “intelligence”, but “computing power”. The question that ultimately arises is the following one: Why do we humans ask questions? Our ability to ask questions is based on an element of our biological existence, our mortality, and our awareness of the existential fact of our inescapable death. Thus, the capacity for thought is not found in *living*, but, as Jacques Derrida has written, in *surviving*. A machine is devoid of worries, existential problems or quests. It has no biological will to live. It feels no satisfaction or pleasure, it has no appetites, instincts or drives – that is, all the things that are related to the biological need for survival and domination. Even the thought process, logic or philosophy, are first and foremost biological facts, providing pleasure to thinkers! As Nietzsche has written, if we do not feel Plato’s pleasure when he did his logical exercises, we will never understand him. Human beings become “intelligent” the moment they realize their mortality. Their intelligence is based on the search for, and knowledge of, their possibilities and limits. To be able to transcend one’s limits, whether individually or collectively, is called “intelligence”.

Let us therefore rule out, at least for the time being, the catastrophic science fiction scenario of a war of machines against the human species, with a rather ominous outcome for humans. Let us leave aside for the time being the scenario of the use of artificial intelligence by evil political subjects, states or dictators, corporations and sneaky mafia organizations. The biggest revolution of artificial intelligence machines will be in our

everyday life, in the conditions of everyday and ordinary competition, in the fields of work and self-improvement, in our investments and choices. At the Meta Connect conference held in Wednesday, 27 September 2023, Meta presented a series of virtual assistants with distinct personalities, with whom Internet users can chat and ask for advice on their daily lives. This chatbots series is the first demonstration of the capabilities of AI Studio, a platform that will soon allow software developers to create their own virtual assistants, which will operate on the group's messaging systems. What is emerging as a general trend, through the generalized use of specialized consultants in every household and personal computer, is an even greater rationalizing of our everyday life, an even greater rationalization in the service of efficiency and profit. It will also bring about another, even more dramatic change: a simultaneous tendency towards the homogenization and equation of the intelligence of the different individuals who will make use of this technology.

If a natural inequality actually exists, it is none other than intelligence. We do not have absolutely not a clue whether it is a matter of chromosomes and heredity or experience and living and growing conditions; still, we do know that not everyone has the same level of intelligence. This will change with the "intelligent" engineering consultants. Of course, the IQ of the users will not increase dramatically, but if they will be listening to the advice of their humanoid engineer friends, they will make intelligent decisions. In essence, what will be achieved is optimizing the use of available resources to achieve the intended ends. A first assessment of this is that market competition will become even more fierce. After all, what else could entrepreneurship be, if not the sound and efficient management of scarce resources? And who is in position to better manage scarce resources than machines built for that purpose? It would be like two players playing chess, making moves dictated by computers. On a second level, however, there will be an unprecedented devaluation of all forms of intelligence, emotional or otherwise, which are mainly developing in individuals in whom computational intelligence and rationality are limited by the other qualities of their overall personality. In other words, machines are not going to be humanized by the widespread use of "artificial intelligence" machines, through all possible

systems of augmented machine learning. On the contrary, it will deprive their human users of any reasonable but not rational choices in their daily lives, as a result of their “*esprit de finesse*”. “The heart has its reasons, of which reason is unaware”, wrote Pascal. At any rate, while the ability of machines to acquire these special intelligences found in human and living beings is extremely limited, the degradation of these characteristic attitudes, ways of being and behaviors in humans is a very real possibility. By obeying to machines, humans will think, act and feel mechanically. In other words, they will speak the language of power and efficiency and not the language of good and evil.

III. Interpretation and Language

But how is it possible for the machines to “unconsciously” dominate? To impose a new interpretation means first of all to impose a new language or to interfere with the old one in such a way as to make it foreign, uncanny. Leo Strauss emphatically stressed the need for us to constantly revisiting the major works of humanity’s greatest writers. He believed that contact with these great minds through reading, and the dialogue with their original texts is the only way for the establishment of critical thinking, the cultivation of linguistic competence, and the spiritual development of individuals. The three elements (thinking, language and spirituality) are inextricably linked; none of them can function satisfactorily without the other two. The great texts of world literature exemplify through their language the thinking and spirituality of their authors. For this reason, those who share their language, those who study, learn and teach these texts, acquire a different sense of discourse, an “*esprit de finesse*”, as Pascal has said, capable of distinguishing between animate human speech and the inanimate speech of artificial intelligence machines. This critical faculty is particularly useful nowadays; the danger of replacing human language with machine language, i.e. of people expressing themselves in stereotypical machine-coded expressions, is now much more imminent than one might think. One only has to scroll through the various social media and carefully observe all those advertisements promising future

writers to write papers on the subject of their choice. They even propose the publication of books on topics that the computer, the AI Chat bot, will analyze, which will be published under the name of the machine's user. The danger overlooked in such a process is not related to "copyright", but to the use of language and speech which is completely alien to human beings. Let us consider that, in just a few years, the market will be flooded with thousands of such school aids, in all sciences, arts and literature without exception. Compendia summarizing the positions of Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau and Voltaire will flood the university libraries; the machine language of artificial intelligence will become the dominant language in human societies, dictating the way we think and eliminating dangerous spirituality and anything else that might stand in the way of the hardware's unimpeded expansion. The machine will perhaps be able to analyze Plato's positions in *Theaetetus*, but incapable to transmit the dialogue's aporetic spirit.

Yet, the "contamination" of language by technology has been going on long before the AI communication and conversation machines were first launched. As early as 1949, in his text "The Question of Technique", Martin Heidegger warned of the uncontrolled development of exact sciences and technology, beyond any possibility of controlling this development by human discourse¹⁸. Influenced by Rousseau, the German thinker explains in his seminal text that the material-technical civilization and technical-scientific progress are in no way the result of human will. Technique is now presented and imposed itself on man as destiny. Cut off from any spiritual endeavor, modern technique presented its dark face for the first time to the propaganda and social engineering machines of totalitarian systems and disproportionally grew in the post-war societies of the West, replacing the social dialogue with "wooden discourse". Many artists and intellectuals severely criticized this course of events, without anyone ever being able to reverse the very ugly dynamics of this replacement. With chatbots and their advanced abilities, language itself is now endangered, as a means and purpose of dialogue, but also as an expression of spirituality and a way of thinking.

18. M. Heidegger, «La question de la technique», in: Martin Heidegger, *Essais et conférences*, Collection Tel (n° 52), Gallimard, Paris 1993, pp. 9-48.

In this way, the dominant worldview is altered; a new language, and therefore a new interpretation, is imposed.

Schools and universities have already participated in this process of linguistic replacement, as vehicles for the dissemination and transmission of culture and spirit. Replacement here follows the dual process of simplification and massification of knowledge. Whereas forty years ago original works were taught at all levels of education, in whatever language they had been written or translated, today only summaries and short analyses are taught. This destroys the totality of the work, from which its unique spirituality derives. For all the reasons above, it is imperative that we return to the study of the major writers' greatest works in their entirety and not through a fragmentary presentation of their main points in a machine language. Young people should be nurtured in their original language in order for them to be initiated into their spiritual universe. Only then will they be able to distinguish the human spiritual language from the artificial and lifeless language of machines. The stakes are even higher if one considers that human thought is the reflection of the human being in the mirror of language and that there is no thought outside the realm of language. The mechanized language that results from the replacement process is a precursor of an unpleasant development, the mechanized thought, which will not be able to think outside a specific and predetermined framework, defined by machines. This last sentence is devoid of metaphysics; it is nothing else but the realization that the mechanized language leads to *inhuman* societies.

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