

## **Editorial Foreword: Knowledge, Freedom and Pluralism**

The last decade of this century has witnessed an extraordinary social transformation that has marked the beginning of a new era in the course of history, an era in which a particular type of (centrally planned) socialism, which was plagued by a set of problems ranging from informational, allocative and dynamic inefficiencies to social-political imperfections associated with lack of freedom and democratic participation, has failed. Capitalism, which had profound problems of its own in the same period, has begun to take a new form, direction and trajectory that manifested itself in fundamental changes in production and communication, changes reflecting breakthroughs in information/communication technology inducing a process of information-intensive production superseding, on a considerable scale, industrial production. As the twentieth century draws to a close, a new global capitalist socio-economic order and environment where production and information-flows transcend national boundaries is beginning to emerge. Computer-based technological innovations in this new environment have, to a considerable extent, led to a world-scale dissemination, at a dramatic speed, of interactively produced, reproduced, and transmitted information, transforming the world into a “global village.”

Abstracting from the capitalistic nature of the new order, which may, in itself, undergo considerable changes in the future, there is a striking tendency the information age has set in motion in an irreversible manner, namely the tendency to create a higher degree of freedom for individual and civil society, a degree of freedom required for an effective functioning of an informationally efficient society. An advanced information age would, indeed, necessitate a “larger free space” (than now available) in which people and civil institutions could act and interact without interference from state-like supra-individual entities. The dynamics of this historic tendency for more freedom, which is likely to generate its own norms, rules, and culture, will enable individuals to have a better control of their own lives and fates, challenging any totalitarian, elitist, or oligarchic impositions forced upon them. In today’s world, such impositions are being practiced on a daily basis in the name of some ideology, including modernism itself. Ironically, but not surprisingly, in some newly modernized countries, a static and

dogmatic interpretation of an old-fashioned modernism is being used as a frame of reference to legitimize freedom-constraining practices that embody a unidimensional, unidirectional, and utterly out-of-date vision of society that is at odds with the kind of pluralistic diversity that is likely to characterize the social outlook in the twenty-first century. By virtue of the intensity of such practices, the tendency which the information age has set in motion may be temporarily held back. However, freedom and knowledge at this historic juncture have evolved to such a level that watches cannot be turned back to the old-fashioned modernism and positivism of the late nineteenth or the early twentieth century. The level of social and intellectual sophistication mankind has reached at the end of the twentieth century, which reflects and epitomizes the accumulated wisdom and breakthroughs in physical and social sciences, has long surpassed the contours of old modernism and moved beyond the boundaries of postmodernism. An intellectual landscape that is stretched to newer and richer dimensions could no longer be constrained by its previous coordinates.

Though no old constraint could present a permanent obstacle to a transition to richer dimensions of an advanced information age, such a transition could be slowed down by freedom-constraining practices which could, however temporarily, paralyze the very foundations of creative thinking, inducing an unproductive oscillation between the poles of dogmatism and ignorance. To avoid such an unproductive cycle, those advocating a speedy transition to the information age may need to put forward their democratic and intellectual demands for a social order that protects the right to question the known, and that nourishes the freedom to explore the horizons of the unknown. Through such a social order could creative human intellect, inextricably interwoven with the winds and waves of freely produced thoughts, be unleashed. Indeed, inside perplexing labyrinths of human mind lies an intriguing innovative potential that, if freed and facilitated, could revolutionize the existing matrices of scientific discourse, generating a never-ending exploration of new forms of knowledge. Metaphorically speaking, “unchained freedom” and “unconstrained knowledge” are, respectively, Archimedes’ “strong enough prop” and “long enough lever” that could move the world of science in the twenty-first century.

The social and political order that is more conducive to scientific and intellectual progress in the advanced information age is likely to be a pluralistic one that recognizes, tolerates, preserves and celebrates the coexistence, within a polity, of individuals and groups with irreducibly distinct and possibly conflicting values, ideas and interests. Such an order,

we think, is viable and sustainable, if not inevitable, in the twenty-first century. Out of the remnants of the “old”, we hope, pluralistic styles and forms of scientific and intellectual practices would appear—practices which are multidimensional and multidirectional in nature, and upon which no counter-productive constraints of any kind could be placed.

Predicting that a theory of such pluralism will be a prevailing paradigm of the information age, some of the members of the editorial board of the *Journal of Economic and Social Research (JESR)*, including the author of these lines, are especially inclined to welcome contributions and research on this paradigm in question. It is, however, an intrinsic virtue of pluralism to recognize the incommensurable differences among various discourses and to facilitate the emergence of different voices including the ones questioning pluralism itself. *JESR* is meant to be a platform for research in such different paradigms, research that meets the criteria outlined in the “aim and scope” statement of the journal. Creating a free arena for qualitatively different, contesting and possibly conflicting insights, intuitions and ideas, *JESR* is intended to project forward a vision of intellectual pluralism so urgently and indispensably needed in the 2000s and beyond.

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