Bronse BSPEE 2025 - Lucas da Rocha Luneng, St.Hallvard vgs. (Lier v/Drammen)

«The real problem of humanity is the following: we have Paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions, and god-like technology.» - Edward O. Wilson, 9 September 2009.

The statement from Edward O. Wilson presents a bizarre diagnosis of the modern human condition. It invites to a reflection upon the relationship between human nature, social organization, and technological power. It suggests that humanity's deepest crises arrives not from malice or ignorance, but from a fundamental mismatch. A mismatch where our emotions belong to a primitive past, our institutions to an outdated social order, while our technologies grant us near divine capacities. These emotions, institutions and technologies defines the center of tension in contemporary existence; in which must be confronted.

The begin with, the phrase "paleolithic emotions" provoke the idea that our psychological and emotional constitution evolved under conditions radically different from the modern world. The Paleolithic era was one of small, tribal based, immediate survival pressures, and direct interpersonal interactions. Emotions such as fear, tribal loyalty and aggression may have been adaptive for survival in said environment. Yet these same instincts persist in the twenty first century, often ill adapted to global, interconnected societies. Outrage on social media, nationalistic rivalries, and the politics of fear all reveal emotional patterns that belong more to the campfire than to the global stage. The problem that Wilson suggests is not that emotions itself is bad, but that the scale and context in which our emotions operate have changed while their nature has not. Our technological age has amplified the reach of our emotions, yet not necessarily its wisdom. Philosophically this may remind of David Hume who argued that reason was the slave of passion. Meaning reason is there to serve and justify passion, not to govern it. And Plato who thought that reason should rule over passion, meaning rather than serving passion, it should govern it.

The second part of the statement "medieval institutions" includes governments, bureaucracy, and economical systems; the structures through which societies organize power, maintain order, and define norms. The description of them as "medieval" suggests that many remain rigid, hierarchical and ill equipped to address the complexities of the modern world. The medieval era was defined by concentrated authority in a feudalistic hierarchy with slow mechanisms, within for example decision making. Yet contemporary institutions often remain similar. As example national states continue to dominate global governance over transnational responses within a cooperative union. From a philosophical perspective we have Platon's critique of governance, he argued that societies are only just when those with wisdom rule, rather than authority being inherited or imposed by tradition. With this in mind Wilson's description of us having "medieval institutions" implies that our institutions have failed to evolve in parallel with human knowledge, technological capability and global reach,

rather remaining, rigid, slow and in a feudalistic structure under different authorities ruling their inherited land.

Lastly the phrase “god like technology”. To describe technology as “god like” is to acknowledge that human beings now possess powers once attributed to deities: the ability to create, destroy, and transform life itself. We can manipulate genes, alter climate and build machines that simulate intelligence. Yet with such power arises the question of whether we possess the corresponding moral maturity. The Greek myth of Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods, serves like a metaphor of that the gift of power without wisdom becomes a curse. We have become capable of altering the world on a divine scale, yet we remain guided by our instincts that cannot comprehend the consequences.

Taken together, the three parts of Wilson’s quote form a moral diagnosis. The mismatch between our emotional, intuitional and technological dimensions threatens to destabilize both human society and nature itself. If our emotions drive us towards conflict, our institutions preserve as is, and our technology magnifies both, then humanity faces an existential imbalance. Therefore, this diagnosis may be a call to transformation. Perhaps not to eliminate our “paleolithic emotions” but educate them into a relationship where meaning governs passion, by for example cultivating empathy, self-awareness, moral reflection and reasoning. Likewise, institutions must evolve towards flexibility, transparency and global responsibility. And technology rather than serving an idol of progress, must become an instrument of purpose.

The quote also implicitly raises a question about what it means to be human. Are we defined by our biological inheritance, our social constructions, or our creative capacities? The tension between these aspects suggests that humanity is a transitional species, not fixed, but self-transforming. If our emotions come from the past and our technologies point towards the future, perhaps philosophy’s role is to navigate between them: to remind us of that power without virtue leads to destruction, but emotion without reflection leads to chaos. The challenge is then to cultivate institutions and moral frameworks that integrate our evolutionary past with our technological future.

In conclusion, Wilson’s statement can be interpreted as both a warning and an invitation. It warns of a world in which humanity’s tools overcome its wisdom, but it also invites a rethinking of what progress truly means. Progress cannot be measured by the sophistication of our machines but by the depth of our understanding. If we are to coexist and dictate life and nature with “god like technology” we must bring our paleolithic hearts and medieval institutions into alignment with the responsibility of our power. The future of humanity then depends on whether philosophy, ethics and reason can evolve as quickly as the technological advancements we crate.