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Can an innovative society be egalitarian?

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1. Capitalism and life expectancy

In 18 centuries, life expectancy increased from 25 to 38 years, before reaching 80 years in industrialised countries within the space of two centuries. It may be disparaged, but the market economy has enabled this major leap in life expectancy.

2. Innovation: creative destruction according to Schumpeter

The first aim of innovation consists in improving conditions for humanity. It results in the destruction of traditional jobs and the development of new jobs. The greatest innovations free up human time which can then be used elsewhere. It was first necessary to innovate in agriculture to free up manpower for the industrial revolution. One innovation, by destroying jobs and freeing up new manpower, paves the way for the next. Over time, innovation tends to destroy low-skilled jobs and created skilled jobs.

3. Innovation and inequality

Innovation is comparable to motion, while the notion of inequality is associated with a static phenomenon. Inequality cannot be understood in general terms as it has different forms. Fundamental inequality boils down to whether it is possible to take certain paths or not: Studies show that, more than ever before, “grandes écoles” [prestigious higher education establishments] are being attended by young people for affluent social backgrounds.

4. Innovation as a survival factor

In the world, the key factor for success now boils down to an ability of adapt to a moving context. This is true of States, businesses and individuals. Technology has become a machine that focuses and divides by sector. States and mankind shall be faced with ever-increasing culture and technical shocks, to which they must adapt. All professions must prepare for the threat of innovation. Instead of guarding against innovations by trying to thwart them and maintain the jobs of the past, it is better to prepare for the jobs of the future. Training throughout life is therefore of fundamental importance. On this subject it is regrettable that jobseekers have less access to training than those in work.

5. Innovation also demands regulation

Google creates a vacuum around itself by killing off or buying out its competitors. Its dominant position undoubtedly demands global regulatory mechanisms. This regulation must not take the form of a closure that could make matters worse. Instead of closing Google, Europe should come together to set up a competitor to rival it.

6. Is the “Google” model a threat?

Data management constitutes a fundamental factor in this motion of perpetual adaptation, because the vast majority of users grant access to their personal data in return for a better tariff or a free service.

Numerous voices are speaking out against Google’s dominant position. This company is developing a real philosophy, of new mankind, mankind connected to a sphere where everyone is equal. However, non-connection to this sphere denies access to this equality. Faced with the threat from Google, a company that makes a living from users’ data and damages privacy and private life, it is believed that opposition will arise.

7. Innovation requires risk

We must campaign for risk-taking and for the precautionary principle to be questioned. Society must assume and manage the risks of technical progress, which has increased life expectancy by 30 years within the space of a century. The question of technical progress must be viewed pragmatically and not emotionally. To sum up, it is necessary to reiterate loud and clear that the greatest human accomplishments have been made possible by exceeding the precautionary principle and that a society in permanent innovation cannot be egalitarian. However it must be fair.