

**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of
World Philosophy Day**

16 November 2023

In a world of profound technological change, with the development of artificial intelligence (AI) and the emergence of neurotechnology, scientific and technical developments are likely to have a profound impact on the mental health of individuals and the equilibrium of societies.

World Philosophy Day 2023, in raising questions about the upheavals and their individual and collective ramifications, invites us to reflect, with the faculty of reason, on the best way to continue to live together as a community.

We need, for example, to examine the role of the algorithmic models in the digital field that are disrupting interactions on a planetary scale and throwing free will into a state of confusion.

We also need to reflect on the ethical implications of neuroscience and climate engineering technologies that can serve as tools for progress but whose consequences with respect to human rights we are still struggling to fathom.

Philosophy actually gives us the keys to be able to consider and put into perspective those fundamental challenges in order to find answers that are as accurate as they are insightful. Therein lies the strength of a discipline that draws on the thinking shaped over centuries by generations of women and men from all cultures – from Aristotle to Maimonides, from Avicenna to St Thomas Aquinas and from Aminata Diaw-Cissé to Hannah Arendt.

Philosophy is a constantly living exercise that enables us to question the world of today and tomorrow, to visualize it both as it is and as it might be.

For artificial intelligence, when it serves to underpin human intelligence, holds great promise for social and political dialogue, for disseminating insightful information and for allowing all voices to be heard.

To ensure the best possible use of the new technologies, they need to be regulated so as to contribute to peace, to the stability of societies and to the well-being of humanity. It is a requirement that is central to UNESCO's work.

Our Recommendation on the Ethics of AI, for example, which was adopted unanimously by the Member States in 2021, proposes effective solutions to make the most of the technologies while ensuring that human rights are respected.

In keeping with that work, the 42nd session of UNESCO's General Conference (7-22 November 2023) has also initiated a debate on the possibility of producing a normative instrument to maintain control over neurotechnology and ensure its ethical use.

That is why UNESCO, on this World Philosophy Day 2023, is reaffirming the crucial importance of a discipline that makes it possible to continue the debate on our common destiny – a debate that is open to all forms of knowledge and, in particular, to the contribution of human and social sciences to efforts to grasp the world in all its complexity and to translate the thinking into action; a debate that is above all open to one and all.

For philosophy is not the prerogative of the isolated sage in his or her ivory tower: it provides the tools to collectively reinvent the world and the humanity of tomorrow; the humanity to come.