

***Poor People of the World Unite! Poverty and the Future of Research in Heuristics***  
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Some months ago, Laura Cabrera wrote [‘Visioneering and Our Common Future’](#) a post that many artists and intellectuals of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries would have supported as a manifesto that could inspire social movements and establish new ways of understanding political action. Cabrera was warning us: if academics do not intervene in more actively shaping the future, then the future will respond to a very limited set of visions.

Beneath this argument is the belief that academics can, in the first place, give shape to their visions of the future in a special way (for example, because they have the capacity to organise discourses and disseminate them via powerful symbolic technologies such as universities, languages, etc.). And, in the second place, this argument suggests that academics make sure that those visions will not only compete with the rest of alternative visions in a sort of global symbolic market, but also that they make sure that those visions contribute in a cooperative way to the existence of a specific type of discourse called ‘controversy’.

Hence, the competence between visions of the future neither guarantees *per se* the emergence of controversies, nor the axiological pluralism necessary so that different visions can really compete in order to offer the best of them. The old Republic of Letters is still the best global market where our visions of the future can compete, cooperate, exhibit their commonality, guarantee together an elemental level of epistemic pluralism or simply explore the laws (if any) that regulate the genre of controversy.

What would happen if we considered Cabrera’s invitation to “start shaping the future by visioneering ourselves, and not only visioning” as a necessary condition in any theoretical formulation about future life, or society, so that this formulation can be entitled to compete in that sophisticated space for debate called controversy? What would happen is that this condition would imply the elimination from the competition of those visions promoted by subjects, groups and/or collectives that did not satisfy the requisite of being ‘visioneers’ (people that shape future societies and radically transform the human condition doing research and engineering to advance any particular vision, promoting these ideas to the public).

The maxim proposed by Cabrera (*visioneer yourself*) might have normative implications from an epistemic point of view. Maybe it is risky to eliminate from academic debate those visions of the future (e.g., concerning public education, public health service, or humanity in general) that do not obey to this hypothetical discursive condition (i.e., that your vision of the future entails in any sense, and degree, visioneering yourself). However, intellectuals make errors and there must exist institutional and social procedures not only to counteract the effect of the risks they must take, but also (what is more important) promote responsibly and actively assuming the task of taking intellectual risks. After all, is it not reasonable to demand theoretical risks that explore our limits in a technological, social and/or political sense in order to consider them *as* theoretical risks?

In *The Intellectual* (2005), Steve Fuller insists that the intellectual is a person that, because he or she cares more about finding the truth in general (or about what he or she wants to know), can incur errors making statements that he or she might, later, retract. This aspect of intellectual activity is extremely valuable from an ethical and epistemic point of view. Such activity frequently motivates important controversies and additionally shows that affirming something as correct, or even true, does not liberate us from the responsibility of finding new truths (especially if they are not ours).

I would like to draw attention on a collective of people that could contribute to the existing debate on the sense and the future of humanity — if it could be previously conceived in visioning terms, and not visioning. This collective is one of poor people. Authors like Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo (2011) maintain that in reference to hunger — one of the world’s most serious problems due to the scale of its dehumanising effect — the poor have not been considered as a valid and effective source of information for defining the problems and analysing the solutions of global inequality. This fact is due to an understanding of poverty as a natural consequence of the so-called ‘culture of poverty’ that dooms individuals to behave irrationally.

The presumption of irrationality among the poor might be motivated by a view of human psychology and cognition according to which heuristics and cognitive biases distort and obstruct rational decision-making (Kahneman and Tversky). Opposing this view, often called ‘prospect theory’, the well-known alternative of the [ABC Research Group](#) presents heuristics as simple cognitive rules precisely because they exploit complex evolved capacities that lead individuals to constantly adapt and revise their decisions, depending on the changing circumstances which produce their choices (Goldstein and Gigerenzer 1996, 2002; Gigerenzer and Sturm 2011).

The design of a pluralist view of the function of heuristics, as a form of reasoning, can become a toolkit with new instruments and utilities for applied economics. Heuristics must be integrated into a wider action plan that lets us explain how resources enable us to reproduce the sort of knowledge being produced by agents.

I propose that the future of research in heuristics has to be understood as the poor people’s toolkit challenge. With this expression I suggest two things. First, that only an authentically bounded rationality (in the sense described by J. Francisco Álvarez and Javier Echeverría 2008) and cross-cultural research in the field of heuristic reasoning can lead to the exploration of this type of human reasoning. Second, that one of the tasks that should be carried out in order to eradicate poverty is that of visioning ourselves so that the causes and the solutions to this intolerable and lucrative global redistributive injustice can be determined and explored.

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