



Two mirrors the university has never quite been willing to hold.

The Unexamined Institution.

*Two Books, Four Decades Apart, on the Advantage Universities
Reward Without Teaching and the Civilization They Were Never
Designed to Meet*

WISDOM ... RECOVERED · ISSUE 09

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WISDOM ... FORGOTTEN · ISSUE 09

In This Issue

Two books, forty years apart, describe the same failure of attention.

In 1970, two French sociologists looked at a university that had opened its gates and asked what was actually happening inside them. They found an institution rewarding an inheritance it had never taught, then calling the result merit. They gave that mechanism a vocabulary the world has borrowed ever since, though the university has been slow to turn it on itself.

In 2010, an Israeli philosopher of education described a different mismatch. He argued that Western education still rests on the assumptions of a civilization that has quietly passed, while the societies it serves have moved into another one entirely. He refused the language of temporary crisis. The storm, in his account, is simply the weather now.

Read together, the two books pose a single question. What does an institution fail to see when the thing it is looking at is itself?

Christopher, writing this week with Dr. Katarzyna Smulka of Poland, carries the 2010 argument into the age of artificial intelligence and asks whether universities can redesign curriculum and instruction for conditions their inherited structures were never built to hold. Bassem returns to 1970 and asks what the university is measuring when it believes it is measuring intellect.

Neither book offers a blueprint. Both insist that renewal begins with an institution willing to see itself clearly, before it decides what to build next.

This issue of Wisdom Forgotten is dedicated, as always, to those who dare to reimagine.



ARTICLE ONE

Roni Aviram: The Educational Storm We Still Have Not Navigated

Christopher Washington, Ph.D. & Dr. Katarzyna Smulska

Universities are often positioned as engines of social and technical progress. Yet in the age of artificial intelligence, advances in technology and its increased function in society is raising questions about the value of higher education itself. Work once assigned to early-stage professionals can now be performed by AI supported tools or accelerated by intelligent systems. At the same time, entry-level roles in AI-exposed occupations are now much more likely to require more senior level, human-intensive skills such as leadership, creativity, and interpersonal communication and collaboration.

This is part of the educational storm. The knowledge, tools, policies, and procedures of professional life keep evolving, while the advanced human capacities most needed in uncertain environments are likely cultivated in ways that require time, practice, reflection, and feedback. The question is whether universities can redesign inherited structures, curriculum and instructional methods, and academic policies in ways that cultivate those capacities in a world that no longer waits for slow adaptation.

This essay emerges from a transatlantic conversation illuminated by Roni Aviram's *Navigating through the Storm: Reinventing Education for Postmodern Democracies*. As co-authors from the United States and Poland, we approached Aviram's ideas from two civic experiences that converge around a shared question: what happens when universities educate for a society that has already changed?

Aviram, a philosopher of education and educational futurist, wrote the book in 2010, before today's generative AI revolution but amid concern about globalization, information technologies, and weakening social institutions. His book is a broader argument about education in Western democracies, but its implications for universities are unmistakable.

For Aviram, the crisis is the mismatch between institutional design and social reality.

Aviram's central claim is that educational systems remain grounded in what he calls Platonic-modern civilization, even as society has moved into postmodern civilization. The former assumes stable truths, coherent authority, ordered knowledge, and common forms of development. Postmodern civilization is marked by pluralism, decentralization, fragmented authority, unstable identities, rapid technological change, and weakened consensus about truth and belonging.

AI intensifies that mismatch. Universities are adopting AI to improve teaching, learning, research, advising, analytics, and administration. These tools may expand access, personalize support, accelerate feedback, and help institutions sense change. But AI also disrupts professions, changes knowledge work, complicates academic integrity, and raises questions about judgment, authorship, ethics, and human development.

The temptation is to treat AI as another technical layer placed on top of inherited university structures, policies, and curricula. While there may be evidence of improved efficiencies in a college or university that adopts AI, the deeper organizational architecture can remain untouched. The institution may continue to operate according to assumptions formed for a different civic, cultural, and technological era.

This is where Aviram's democratic-humanistic principles become important. He does not respond to instability by abandoning educational purpose. Instead, he defends certain aims of education such as developing personal autonomy and moral reasoning, and "dialogical belonging," a form of belonging built through meaningful engagement with others, conversation, mutual recognition, and shared meaning-making. These aims resist the following two temptations in educational systems.

Aviram argues that education in liberal democracies should be guided by personal autonomy, morality and dialogical belonging.

The first is hyper-individualism: education understood primarily as private advancement and personal mobility detached from communal responsibility. The second is rigid collectivism: the impulse to manage uncertainty through conformity, institutional control, or ideological closure. Aviram helps us see why both are insufficient. Democratic societies require independent judgment connected to shared civic life. Universities must cultivate autonomy without isolation and belonging without conformity.

The American and Polish contexts illuminate differences in the nature of the present challenge of universities developing learners for both civic and professional life. In the United States, universities operate within a culture shaped in part by individualism, competition, market responsiveness, and personal mobility. In Poland, universities carry memories shaped by political rupture, ideological control, democratic transition, and the reconstruction of civil society so questions of autonomy, authority, and intellectual freedom carry distinct historical weight. Yet both contexts reveal the same structural mismatch: universities are being asked to sustain democratic life under conditions their inherited systems may not have been designed to address.

Aviram's use of "storm" is somewhat misleading. For him the situation is not a temporary condition that will blow over. Technological acceleration, pluralism, social fragmentation, and democratic uncertainty are described as defining conditions of educational and social life. So the difficult task for academic leaders is to ask whether uncertainty itself can become intellectually and democratically productive within the aims of universities.

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Aviram does not give universities a simple blueprint. Educational renewal is not merely about improving systems or adding technologies. The wisdom worth recovering rests in the adaptive role of academic leaders who are in position to decide what kind of society education should help make possible through the design of curriculum and instruction when knowledge is abundant, expertise is shifting, and democratic life is under strain.

The value of higher education may become even more important to society, not less. But that value will depend on whether universities recognize the storm around them and redesign their curriculum and instruction accordingly. If universities cultivate in learners' qualities such as judgment, autonomy, moral responsibility, and dialogical belonging, then universities may remain among the most vital institutions for helping democratic societies navigate the future.

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05 August 2026

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ABOUT THE BOOK

TITLE	Navigating Through the Storm: Reinventing Education for Postmodern Democracies
AUTHOR	Aharon (Roni) Aviram
PUBLISHER	Sense Publishers, Rotterdam
YEAR	2010
SERIES	Educational Futures: Rethinking Theory and Practice, Volume 34
PAGES	446
ISBN	978-90-8790-977-2 (paperback); 978-90-8790-978-9 (hardback)
CORE INSIGHT	Education systems built for a modern civilization cannot be corrected into fitness for a postmodern one, because the mismatch is not operational but foundational. What is required is deliberate reinvention around a defensible set of humanistic aims, personal autonomy, moral seriousness, and dialogical belonging, so that the disruptions of the present become the instruments of formation rather than its undoing.

#WisdomForgotten #HigherEducation #RoniAviram #NavigatingThroughTheStorm #PostmodernDemocracies #EducationalFutures
 #PersonalAutonomy #DialogicalBelonging #ArtificialIntelligence #CurriculumDesign #AcademicLeadership #DemocraticEducation
 #FutureOfUniversities #WorldUniversitiesFoundation



ARTICLE TWO

The Quiet Inheritance

On What the University Rewards Without Ever Having Taught It · Prof. Bassem Khafagy

In 1970, two French sociologists handed the university a mirror it has never quite been willing to hold up. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron published *La Reproduction* in the wake of May 1968, when students had filled the streets of Paris demanding that the university democratize itself. The book delivered an unsettling diagnosis.

The university was already democratized in form, and in substance it remained a sorting machine, distributing privilege along the very lines its public language denied.

The argument rests on a single, devastating observation. Education does not begin where formal schooling begins. It begins in the home, in the inflection of speech, in the books on the shelf, in the assumed familiarity with certain words and references.

The university then arrives and tests for these inheritances as if they were universal achievements. It rewards what it has not taught.

Bourdieu and Passeron called this the cultural arbitrary. There is no neutral standard of cultivation, because every standard reflects the taste, the syntax, and the assumed knowledge of those who already hold cultural power. When the university adopts that standard and presents it as the threshold of competence, something is being done that the institution will not name.

The university then arrives and tests for these inheritances as if they were universal achievements. It rewards what it has not taught.

The authors named it. They called it symbolic violence. The genius of the modern university, on their reading, is not that it excludes, but that it excludes while persuading the excluded that they have been fairly judged.

Half a century later, the diagnosis has not faded. It has migrated. Today's debates over admissions, standardized testing, and credential inflation rehearse the same questions in new vocabularies. Who decides what counts as readiness. Who defines rigor. Whose cultural inheritance is mistaken for intellectual merit.

The genius of the modern university is not that it excludes. It is that it excludes while persuading the excluded that they have been fairly judged.

We have built more campuses, opened more gates, and raised more scholarships. And still the social geography of the graduate class tracks the social geography of the parental class with an accuracy that would have struck Bourdieu and Passeron as entirely familiar.

This is not a counsel of despair. It is a counsel of clarity. The university cannot dismantle every inequity that arrives at its door, but it can refuse to disguise inequity as merit. It can teach its own conditions of possibility, and it can ask, in every committee that ranks and selects, whether the standard being applied is a standard of intellect or a standard of inheritance.

A university that cannot examine its own cultural arbitrary will keep producing its own past, generation after generation, while believing it is producing the future. That is the cost of the unexamined threshold, and it is paid quietly, by people who never learn what was actually being tested.

This is not a counsel of despair. It is a counsel of clarity.

There is a future-looking lesson here that too few institutions have absorbed. The reimagining of the university will not come from new buildings or new platforms. It will come from a willingness to ask, of every threshold the institution sets, what is being measured and what is being assumed.

Are we testing the student, or are we testing the family that raised the student. The two are not the same, and the honest university knows the difference and acts on it.

A university that cannot examine its own cultural arbitrary will keep producing its own past, generation after generation, while believing it is producing the future.

Bourdieu and Passeron did not write a manual for reform. They wrote an indictment, a method, and a vocabulary. That vocabulary has spread far beyond the sociology of education, and terms such as cultural capital, symbolic violence, and the cultural arbitrary are now part of how thoughtful people across many fields understand institutions. What the university has been slower to do is apply the vocabulary to itself.

The reproduction of inequality is not loud. It does not announce itself. It happens in the room where the syllabus is set, in the office where the rubric is written, in the corridor where the recommendation letter is composed.

The reproduction of inequality is not loud. It does not announce itself.

That quiet, daily reproduction is the work of the university whether the university notices or not. And the future of the institution rests on whether it begins to notice.

To those who dare to reimagine.

PROF. BASSEM KHAFAGY

Prof. Bassem Khafagy, Chairperson, World Universities Foundation · connect@wisdom-forgotten.com · 05 August 2026

ABOUT THE BOOK

TITLE	La Reproduction: Éléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement (English: Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture)
AUTHORS	Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron
ORIGINAL PUBLISHER	Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris
YEAR	1970
ENGLISH TRANSLATION	Translated by Richard Nice. Sage Publications, London, 1977. Second English edition with new foreword by Bourdieu, 1990.
ISBN	978-2-7073-0226-7 (French); 978-0-8039-8320-5 (English, second edition)
PAGES	approximately 280 (French); xx + 254 (English)
CITATIONS	Estimated 15,000 to 20,000 plus (Google Scholar)
CORE INSIGHT	Universities do not merely reflect the inequalities of the societies around them. They convert those inequalities into the appearance of merit, and they do so through the ordinary machinery of syllabus, rubric, and selection. An institution that will not examine its own standards of cultivation cannot claim to be selecting for intellect.

#WisdomForgotten #HigherEducation #Bourdieu #Passeron #Reproduction #CulturalCapital #SymbolicViolence #SociologyOfEducation
 #UniversityReform #EducationPolicy #AcademicCulture #FutureOfHigherEd #WorldUniversitiesFoundation



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- Share your comments, and let us all learn from you.
- If there is a book that you believe deserves a place in this conversation, tell us. Recommend it. Make the case for it.

About this newsletter • *Wisdom ... Forgotten* is a weekly newsletter by Prof. Bassem Khafagy and Dr. Christopher Washington. Together, they bring six decades of combined experience spanning global higher education strategy, institutional leadership, governance, workforce innovation, and organizational transformation across multiple continents. Each week, this newsletter surfaces ideas from two classic academic works that were often written for moments very much like the one higher education is navigating today, and asks what becomes possible when those insights are brought back into active practice. This newsletter is not a book review. It is a conversation between two thought leaders and a growing community of academics, university leaders, and practitioners who believe the future of the university is strengthened when we reconnect with the intellectual foundations that shaped the field and reinterpret them for today's realities. Many scholars and leaders have carried these ideas forward. Our goal is to help reconnect them to everyday leadership, policy, and institutional design decisions.

Dr. Christopher Washington • Provost Emeritus of Franklin University, is the Founder and CEO of ResiliencePlus Advisors LLC, an executive coaching and advisory firm focused on equipping leaders to navigate complexity, disruption, and rapid organizational change. He also serves as President of the ILI Think Tank at the Innovative Leadership Institute, leading a global network of scholars and senior practitioners advancing the theory and practice of innovative leadership. A contributing author to Forbes Nonprofit Council, Dr. Washington publishes on leadership innovation, organizational culture and performance, and learning ecosystem design.

Prof. Bassem K. Khafagy • An academic leader, best-selling author, award winning researcher, and strategic thinker whose work spans the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. He is currently dedicating his time to rethinking the "University" as a transformative force in society. Prof. Khafagy is the founding force behind several global academic initiatives, most notably the World Universities Foundation, WUF, the World Summit on Universities, WSU, and the Re-Imagine University Newsletter & book series.

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The visual compositions • throughout this newsletter and the series are original works by Prof. Bassem K. Khafagy. They are crafted using advanced technological tools, including artificial intelligence, guided entirely by the author's artistic vision and design sensibility. In a series about reimagining the university, it felt only right that the art itself reflect that spirit of creative possibility.

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