

Book Reviews

Edited by Ingetraut Dahlberg

Acting Book Review Editor

Note from the Editor-in-Chief: We regret that due to his pressing work load, Dr. Werner Bies is no longer able to serve as book review editor. We appreciate his service during 1997 and look forward to further contributions from him in the future. Dr. Ingetraut Dahlberg has graciously agreed to serve as acting book review editor until a permanent replacement can be found. Submissions for this section should be sent directly to her at Woogstr. 36a, D-60431 Frankfurt, Germany.

Qu'est-ce qu'on ne sait pas ? Récit des Rencontres philosophiques de l'UNESCO (14 - 17 mars 95). Paris: Découvertes Gallimard/Éditions UNESCO 1995. 112 pp.

This brochure gives an overview of a first round table talk organized by UNESCO in 1995 on its premises of a series of philosophical talks on various subjects to take place in Spring each year.

The topic "what do we not know?" looked at from a philosopher's perspective promises a lot, and the few pages presented here seem both a challenge and an invitation to find out quickly what the boundaries of present day knowledge are, for knowledge and ignorance are Siamese twins sticking somehow and somewhere together, like curiosity and laziness.

Now knowledge is naturally a laborious long-term production of generations of scholars, researchers, and writers of genius; so you are intrigued at the idea of having it presented in a nut-shell mapping with all the *terra incognita* nicely laid out before you in a good hour's reading. You may be surprised but even UNESCO is not able to meet such an expectation.

What you have got instead is a summary of the proceedings of the talks selected and presented by Ayyam Bureau along 4 chapters: *Can ignorance be understood? Looking for lost knowledge; Boundaries of science; and The desire to know it all.*

Even these chapters are a compromise for various inputs covering views from philosophy proper, education, epistemology, semantics, artificial intelligence, psychoanalysis, esoterism, palaeontology, neurophysiology, astrophysics, biology, medicine, economy, WWWebbing, theology etc.. These inputs had been orchestrated by an inevitable organising committee giving the floor to a mixed team of speakers, including Bernard Williams, Paul Ricœur, Michel Serre, John Maddox, Ann Kerwin, J.P.Fitoussi, Michel Pierssens, Jean d'Ormesson, and Jacques

Schlanger. Selections, including this one, are always partial and disappointing. So let it be.

No speaker attempted to delineate even approximately the *terra incognita* conjured up in the fastidious question serving as central topic. But nobody attempted either to suggest that precisely this question was liable to be a non-starter, like defining emptiness, absence or holes. Instead endeavours were made to distinguish between known and unknown, deliberate and fatal ignorance and the need was pinpointed to agree on modalities of knowledge acquisition to bridge the gap between desire and lure and to highlight the fatal balance governing knowledge and ignorance: both evolve in proportion, particularly if *episteme* and dogma are combined. Then ignorance fares better than wrong knowledge. To avoid such a dilemma, philosophers have used to resort to reasonableness. However philosophers live in a world of their own where action is ignored if not despised. A counsel does not count in real terms and is as easy to deny as it is given. This stands to reason.

One cannot help remembering that reasonableness has always been the cause of disastrous attempts to pacify social relations or to unite the diverging forces of a given society. The reasonable man is a fiction not only in English law. Attempts at establishing societies like those visioned by Thomas Moore, Campanella or Marx have always foundered. Even though the need is admitted that human action should be guided by knowledge and reason, the Round Table agreed on the obvious, viz. that none can know at the moment of decision what the implications and effects of his acts will be.

Michel Serre attempted to draw a line between the language of those who know and that of the ignorant, this dichotomy being particularly sensible for the French language where this demarcation will sift the rich from the poor. Taking 3 topical verbs, *search*,

find, hide, he explores their semantics and origin and shows how they both diverge and agree in evidencing the other's (peasant's or scholars') weak points or fads, language inconsistencies betraying deeper mental defaults, such as the "director of research" where *research* originating from *circle* is *rectified*, leading to an antinomy unless said director is responsible for resolving the squaring of the circle. This contribution may have satisfied the question: *what do we ignore of our language?* Yet it is distracting from more fundamental issues: *...just as of ourselves?* Well: *si tacuisses philosophus mansisses.*

While the dichotomy inherent in knowledge finding and application, viz. **truth and error**, is touched upon in N. Singh's paper with special reference to Indian philosophy, this very important issue seems not sufficiently considered by the other participants. This may be due to their instinctive feeling that they are themselves still caught up in the sorely oppressing Neodarwinian dogma which has played mental havoc among those who claim to know what they are talking about and who by co-optation have cornered a position which invests them with the power of proclaiming whatever they deem fit; by this dominance they have managed to peck out whomever claims to know better, so that this insidious error will prevail as a taboo in this type of top-talks as long as materialism remains the orthodoxy of modern scientific thought. This is also borne out by the astrophysicist Xuan Thuan who paid lip-service to the Big Bang credo, another worm-eaten pillar of the incongruous official doctrine.

The truth vs. error antinomy enfolds a second paradigm, viz. **truth vs. untruth**. Now ignorance about what is true or not in our perception of a message can be self-induced, in which case we stick to our illusions and hope for the best. There is no *mistaking* (cf. error above) of an outside reality but, mostly unconscious, self-deceit. This is the common lot and makes the $\gamma\upsilon\omicron\tau\iota\ \sigma\epsilon\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu$ paradigm so hard. Society has managed to live without each member knowing what he intrinsically is but at the same time society has also managed to increase confusion by governing through systematic deceit. The categorical imperative has remained a petition of principle for the sole individual. The State has never bothered about considerations of ethics outside official make-believe declarations. This vital aspect of Machiavellian State-cultivated citizen's ignorance nobody on the panel has dared to bring out. **Nobody knows** how frantically he is manipulated and even the manipulators ignore to some extent their own hand in the pie. Here we have a serious lacuna in this collective brainstorming exercise.

Another point barely taken although historically most conspicuous is what threatens the next minute: the frightening ignorance of what we are in for. Cabala, magic, and astrology are cited but quickly dismissed as unclean, because unreasonable; the immense efforts regularly displayed all along human history by all power-wielders to have a halfway workable pre-warning system to harness if not the finite, which nobody can, but at least the immediate future are no source of inspiration to our bright scholars who have lost contact with history, the Bible, and even the daily press. Obviously, nobody knows the future whether short or long-term. This ignorance is, in fact a double-edged sword to cut our Gordian knot: on one hand it is frightening if you come to think of it, but on the other, man getting accustomed to even living in hell, generally prefers not to think of it but rather to use the future to stave off all his important things to do as good intentions. That is why the morrow will always be the busiest day.

Predictions over the longer term are safer to make than for the morrow since the precise moment of occurrence will not be given and if it is a miss it will pass mostly unnoticed for this very reason into oblivion. In addition, nobody would buy them anyway because good predictions use to be bad news. This has always been the case, (that is why political economy is called the dismal science) but it is more conspicuous today as pointed out by the economist J.P.Fitoussi who shows that the prevalent high interest rates indicate the fear of the longer term and entail the rush for immediate returns with labour losing its social integrating function to become a commodity, like energy or machines. This appraisal of economic data is certainly a piece of knowledge but who cares? Here we have a good instance of people who could change the course of events but **prefer to ignore**, like in the case of AIDS or cancer. AIDS is explained in its lurid aspects of human irresponsibility by the WHO officer Dorothy Blake and Chantal Saint-Jarre. The antagonism between knowledge and politics, although underlying some of the papers like this one, in particular the brutal decision to disregard reliable information for reasons of greed, like in the contaminated blood scandal in France, has been tip-toed over.

The trouble with *reason* is that it can lend itself to greed and other sorts of social disasters, because reason and knowledge are no safeguards against crime or vice. That is why even in France there is the saying by which *science* without *conscience* will spell a soul's ruin. And on the other hand there can always be an overruling *raison d'Etat*, which will soothe qualms or stifle objections.

Yet another vital point disregarded by the panel is our ignorance of **the right moment**. This means not

the famous *carpe diem*, nor to make the best of opportunities but rather the knowledge of maturity for everything where the time factor is capital not to miss out on. The keyword is maturity and not opportunity. This knowledge is not obtained by reason as is true for all essential knowledge which derives from other sources; call them life experience or God. *There is a time to every purpose* (Ecc3.1) and *my time is not yet come* (John 7.6) may illustrate this. Now it does matter to know when the time is come or else essentials risk to pass by unnoticed and what is possible now will no longer be so a moment later. *Readiness is all*. Since nobody really knows when the thief will break into the house, the antidote against the ignorance of the right moment is preparedness, which brings us back to the reason of the categorical imperative.

In the last but one chapter Michel Pierssens and Luciano Floridi pinpoint the weird world of the Web, where knowledge is galore to a point where you risk to be flooded or stranded whatever you prefer. Virtuality offers piecemeal, scattered, dispersed, and frantic information and hence knowledge; here the gap between action and knowledge, for sheer virtuality, has widened to a point where the real world is wiped out by dematerialization and delocalization of the objects or situations on the screen. WWW is the modern Tower of Babel with its splinters of knowledge exploding world-wide and the proverbial *the devil knows* may give an inkling of what is behind. And back we are to the bedevilled dark Middle Ages when knowledge was the doorstep to hell and ignorance a safeguard against the stake.

This again brings up another point not raised in the booklet which is that of **fear** linked up with the issue of ignorance. When your life is at stake, ignorance in matters of dogma can spare you the fear of an ordeal; but on the other hand ignorance can also be fearful to the effect that only knowledge can prevent you from panicking. A feeling expressed by Rimbaud exclaiming *the atrocious thing is not to know!*

Obviously, round table talks, just as the Web, suffer from weak organisation so that thoroughness and systematic coverage of issues cannot be expected.

The last contributions had to be metaphysical. A Jewish professor of philosophy at Jerusalem university wants to demonstrate his gift as logician or maybe Pharisee by talking of God only to point out that His attributes of omniscience and perfection are mutually exclusive. It is most doubtful whether he convinced anybody with his argumentation, including himself.

Jean d'Ormesson, an editorialist of the Figaro, had undertaken to address himself to the predicament by which we know nothing about the Omniscient

Whom he declares to be *the great mute, the black hole of eternity, the great absent*. The journalist concludes his jottings by saying: "the sense of the world and of our own adventure is as we all know in what we all ignore". Well, such an evidence of spiritual indigence could be shrugged off were it only a random opinion of a bread-and-butter journalist. The trouble is that such a view is rife among people who represent a vast majority of theists, including assiduous church-goers. And churches, temples, synagogues, and mosques propagate such a view not short of dogma. Of course, not all believers worship a great mute and this leads us to two capital questions: 1° why is this the prevalent view? and 2° why scarcely anybody cares to find out better? These two questions bring us back to *reason* in the sense here of *cause* of distress. The fundamental issue every man should be confronted with is the *reason* of his existence on this planet. If he does not *try to catch his falling star* he might have had it for quite a terrible while. That is the anguish of a Rimbaud.

The tentative answer to the first question is that the great mute is the result of killing the Father in them. The short-term *dolce vita* fares better without a cumbersome father-figure. They are mistaken about the father whom they have changed into a Knecht Ruprecht or père fouettard, because such is the need of their conscience. Here too they will reap what they have sown.

Their bad conscience is the provisional answer to the second question. If they wanted to they could find better by descending from their head into their heart. But this is a long and perilous way for a philosopher to take, because it would entail giving up flattering ideas about one's status. Humility and love is not the daily bread dealt out in these circles.

There remains a last point where to get the light from to find the way down from top to heart. A suffering mind will get a dim insight into the right direction because suffering softens the hard crust which haughtiness and self-conceit have laid around the heart. However, maturity permitting, there are easier and more pleasant ways to find out better (cf. question 2 above).

There is an abundant literature based on the Bible, on prophets, on heart-seekers from all times, including our own, which can provide food for thought and for the heart - the daily bread prayed for - and thus throw a blazing light on the path.

It is symptomatic for our time to shop around for all sorts of rhetoric questions appealing to the distracted and ailing mind but which are but a sop to Cerberus for an easier crossing into hoped-for oblivion. Yet the awakening will be terrible once it will be discovered after having crossed the Styx that the right

moment was missed out on. And the right moment is now. Here is the overall answer to the initial global question 'what do we not know?' We do not know how to practise true religion, yea what true religion is, namely a religion of love with the only command: Love God above all and your neighbour as yourself! With this in mind you can set out on the right search of truth, because everybody will find what he is after: if he looks for trouble he will find it; if he looks for hatred, he will find it; if he looks for the Almighty, he will find his justice attenuated with mercy; because God is love; likewise if he looks for love and peace, he will find it too, just as he will find his Father with all the might of his love: *suum cuique* as the sage Stoic would say. Though Stoicism ignored love and we should know better. As Pascal put it: the heart has its reasons which reason will ignore.

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(1) A. SCHREINEMAKERS, JOS. F. (ED.): **Knowledge Management. Organization Competence and Methodology. Advances in Knowledge Management** Vol. 1. Würzburg: Ergon 1996. 307p. ISBN 3-932004-26-4; ISSN 1432 3516

(2) B. SCHNEIDER, URSULA (ED.): **Wissensmanagement. Die Aktivierung des Intellektuellen Kapitals** (Knowledge Management. Activating Intellectual Capital). Edition Blickpunkt Wirtschaft. Frankfurt: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. 1997. 207p. ISBN 3-929368-53-6.

1. To restate the trivial: Knowledge Order (KO) is always a quid pro quo. It always means the ordering of information in terms of classification, taxonomy or model towards a purpose. Doing so it follows also the qualities of the system concerned. Knowledge order always serves as an instrument for Knowledge Management (KM) within a system shaped by internal and external, physical and intangible - e.g. societal - qualities.

This introductory note is meant to put the theme into a non-guru environment and, at the same time, to enhance the importance to understand it anew and creatively. For, likewise a matter of course, the preconditions of KO and KM have been changing dynamically. Foreshortened, the information society has gradually developed into a knowledge society. No longer 'information' and information handling only (mainly by computer) supports life, survival and development. The environmental and societal system of information has a serving function and therefore has to be transferred into operationally ordered knowl-

edge networks when increasingly facing fundamental changes. The catchwords Knowledge Society, KO and KM express the necessity to reconsider also the basic, normally non-questioned 'reality' we perceive as to its appropriateness concerning our behavior, our actions and our policies. What has to be adapted - creatively - are our intrinsic pictures of our world, so that we may adapt the KO expressing them.

Closely entwined with this fundamental change seems to be the also exponentially exploding dynamity, the acronym combining 'dynamics' and 'complexity'. It seems futile to discuss whether it represents an independent factor in its own right. Dynamity affects KO and KM both as a quantitative factor and as a phenomenon that has attained factor quality and impact. In this context, however, it indicates more the secondary, the more formal conditions for information handling and KM. In this role dynamity becomes decisive when we quest the degrees ways and means to cope with (real, information and knowledge) complexity by reductive and/or value setting modes.

Lastly, knowledge has to be seen as a medium of communication and conversation, as an instrument to cope with issues, owing to its impact as a resource. KO and KM, have grown into a factor of societal coherence, of societal power, of societal change and of societal control. For quite some time now the world intelligence services have been collecting predominantly technical/economical Know How besides the traditional political information. The more comprehensive knowledge, the better fitting KO, and the more effective and efficient KM will decide on competence, position and advantage in the competitive struggles within and among societies.

The threefold approach of: a) changing the ways to understand and to act upon the world, b) meeting exponential change within growing dynamity, and c) securing the knowledge fundamentals of societal/social survival, exclude by no means the more technical side. Scientific endeavors from mathematics to quantum physics toward software epistemology (!) enforce a development to ever faster and more sophisticated computers. They enforce the use of ever more complex systems ware, hardware and software. Behind new techniques and new modes there emerges a no less fundamental development in the epistemological background. From the classical base far removed from logic has sprouted into wholly new branches to deal e.g. with ill defined, fuzzy problems. Order theory has gone all the way back to basics, e.g. number and prime number theory. Chaos has been found to be, and been corroborated, as potential order, following basic numerical orders and describing highly complex fractal structures. All this new knowledge on basic structures has if not triggered by KM, been, rather