

## Let's talk about knowledge, let's talk about human nature

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During the past years knowledge has become the most controversial subject of our contemporary society. Knowledge seems to be a magic word, a universal key capable to open a door that is still closed to men.

What is the sense of such a proliferation? Why is "knowledge" considered the universal solution of all problems today? What's really new in nowadays research? What is the purpose of all intellectual effort?

These questions crossed my mind as I was working on an economical anthropological theme. I found the works of some outstanding philosophers who are the founding fathers of the economic theory of modern Europe.

Let's consider for instance the great thinker John Locke. In his work he treats about the subject of Economic Man. Hence the necessity, in my opinion, to study the works of John Locke. The more I read his ideas the more I discovered a very modern thinking, a source of inspiration for the understanding of human nature and not only; his essays on government, human understanding, tolerance, natural law, education surprise us with their actuality and with their wisdom.

His most important essay on human understanding starts after a meeting between friends where the subject is on the principles of the morality. Locke sustains that we cannot establish the solid basis of morality but before having analysed the capacity of understanding of the human being and before having understood the process of knowledge as well as its limits<sup>1</sup>.

Knowledge is a product of the human being. It is absolutely senseless to talk about knowledge without talking about the human being. I propose to reconsider our approach on knowledge by launching a debate on human nature as we perceive it today, in the 21st century, with all the scientific discoveries and with the experience of the 20th century. This "divagation" on human nature gives us the possibility to interrogate ourselves on the purpose of knowledge, as when we have the objectives, we will be able to conceive strategies and apply them in society.

But knowledge is not only a product of the human being. Knowledge has an active role in man's life, at both personal and collective levels. Knowledge has a dynamic (performative) effect on humanity, due to its impact on human nature that produces it but also due to the transformations that it, in its turn, brings on human nature. In this way we can really understand the importance of all debate on knowledge.

Talking nowadays about knowledge means talking about the human nature of the future. **What today is knowledge, tomorrow is human nature.** I like to use here the image of an ascending spiral that with every stage it reaches actually prepares new one. Or we can have in mind the image of a scale. Human nature engenders knowledge, knowledge influences human nature, influenced in this way, human nature engenders new knowledge and so on.

This is the first aim of my essay – knowledge and human nature.

But this approach gives new directions to all questions on knowledge.

### 1. First of all we can talk about **knowledge – at both a universal and personal level**

- in a universal sense – knowledge is a scientific category with a universal application – focus on the needs of society
- in a personal sense – "le connais toi-même" – the well known concept "know yourself"- is a method - also implying a certain degree of universality, but with personal goals and with indirect but strong consequences on society

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<sup>1</sup> Simone Goyard-Fabre, John Locke et la raison raisonnable, Paris, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1986, p. 20.

## 2. Secondly we can talk about a **cultural approach of knowledge**

Starting from this connection between knowledge and human nature, where human nature is understood not only as a theoretical category but as a reality having its own history, we shall analyse the impact of culture on the comprehension of knowledge. And when I say culture I have in mind the historical aspects, the geographical and economical aspects, as well as literature, music, religion; I actually think at a complete vision of life and of man in society, this vision being a result in time of all these above mentioned elements functioning together. Usually we find this vision in popular wisdom, and in fairy tales.

Why is this approach important? There is one question I would like to bring into discussion in my presentation. What can we understand by Romanian scientific knowledge, and what can we understand by a German scientific knowledge? I am sure that this kind of analysis gives us very precious information on knowledge.

Another example concerns economy. A certain culture shapes a certain kind of behaviour. Culture models human nature, encouraging some behaviour and discouraging another. We can see this difference better when we analyse a conflict for example in an enterprise. In a conflict with a manager the Spanish behaviour will be different from the Swiss one. Behind these differences there are different cultures, different educations, different psychologies, - in a word different knowledge.

## 3. Third aim of the presentation: **the results of knowledge**

The idea I am defending is that knowledge (production and distribution) depends on human nature, on the way in which we conceive human being. When I say human being I have in view not only the individual aspect but also the social one. The way in which we conceive man at personal and collective level represents the premise of the debate on Knowledge.

But when I talk about what is **before knowledge** I sustain that it is human nature, when I talk about what exists **at the same time with knowledge** I say it is culture. But what is **after knowledge**? What are the results of knowledge? I suggest considering that knowledge provides us values, values shared by all the people in a society, values in which all men trust, values accepted as useful to a both personal and collective evolution.

So, what we obtain is a vision of a future society as we want to build it, a vision of the future man as we expect and want him to evolve.

I make up this presentation following the model of a mathematical demonstration. I start with a hypothesis and axiom - human nature; we have a kind of evolution of a culture where different factors multiply or division some elements of the equations, and thus we arrive to some results in the end, the values.

In the case of knowledge we can act using the same formula but we start from results. We establish the results we want to obtain, in other words, towards what kind of society we want to go, and we imagine the man of the 21st century in Europe. At this level of reflection we have as starting points the past, history and culture, which are unchangeable elements, but we also have the present and the future as we imagine them. This process is not definitely determined, we are supposed to act in the present and to influence the process in the sense we want.

We can introduce in the demonstration some new procedures, factors, elements, plus or minus, in order to obtain the results we want. In fact this has the same logic as in economy but applied at the level of human being and of society. What is determinant is **the goal** we fix, and this is no more a purely economical problem, neither political, nor social, it is all these seen in the light of a **philosophical inquiry on man and society**.

## **Conclusion**

Talking about Knowledge implies that we already have an idea about what kind of society we want to build. This idea can be issued through a debate where all disciplines are invited to dialogue. It is a new Round Table where the knights are the different actors of society discussing the matter of **knowledge as method**, as a way to the flourishing of humanity.