

# Knowledge, ethics and innovation in the horizon of human well-being: repositioning a discourse

Conhecimento, ética e inovação no horizonte do bem-estar humano: reposicionando um discurso

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In this editorial, we intend to address points that can improve our questioning on the theme presented in the title of this paper, without sacrificing rigor in the face of questions regarding knowledge. To set a starting point for the conversation, we allude to Plato's dialogue, *Theaetetus*, which was written around 369 BC and questions 'what is' and 'what is not' knowledge<sup>1</sup>. In this essay, we consider knowledge as 'justified true belief', a claim reminiscent of Plato's philosophical musings. While some points of this proposition are worth questioning, it is reasonable to admit that from a scientific perspective, the act of knowing is compatible with the methodical and rigorous justification of a belief (or hypothesis).

The current theory of knowledge was strongly influenced by the Renaissance and the scientists of that period. During the Renaissance, defending the act of knowledge gained by experimentation was strengthened through its presentation as the rational analysis and synthesis of phenomena through human experience. The term 'epistemology' was adopted to denote a philosophical field in which the paths of scientific knowledge are discussed. It is worth noting that in ancient Greece, *episteme* was opposed to *doxa*, which referred to a vulgar type of knowledge obtained without rigor.

According to Edgar Morin, at the dawn of western science, Francis Bacon championed the idea that the quest for knowledge, in order to purge itself of inaccurate and frivolous methodology, must complete a project of emancipation and purification to become science<sup>2</sup>. It is possible, however, that the project findings, while remarkable, could assume an improper bias by neglecting other values and approaching Logicism as an ideology. With a cautious spirit, we intend to broaden the usual considerations regarding the approach to and study of the interaction between knowledge, ethics, innovation, creativity, the human condition and well-being.

According to Ernst Derringer, in the scope of zoo anthropology, man differs from other animal species not by his rationality but by his enjoyment of a symbolic system of communication - a new syntax<sup>3</sup>. For example, man can capture and transmit the aesthetic 'overflow' of the world as forged through anthropic gestures such as art. Art relativizes gestures toward the world and utilizes a language that amplifies and restructures the emotions of the observer. A sanitary, scientific or pedagogical journey is impossible without the assistance of art because without an artistic network, humans are unable to relate to anything. Everything becomes stagnant and oppressive, lacking artistic and scientific creativity. Even truth holds mysteries.

To present a brief judgment on these issues, two assumptions are required: language and anthropology. These assumptions are included in the dialogue within this text with their references. Indeed, we agree with the point of view that human beings only change or innovate their pattern of action if it breaks from what is known. Only then do we adjust and reconsider our relationship with formal language and anthropology. This process can happen through intuitive or transcendental contingency, similar to what might have occurred for Isaac Newton in his conception of universal gravitation, or through unintentional guidance from an illuminated colleague, such as when Kant admitted that reading Hume 'woke me from my dogmatic slumber' or when Whitman said 'I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to a boil'.

The anthropology advocated here calls attention to what is given *a priori* to the developmental process of human beings. Therefore, personhood (not individuality or naturalness) is the proper human 'way of being'. In the words of Gilberto Safra<sup>4</sup>, for example, personhood requires what is 'constitutive'? In this broadened view, there is also a constitutive language (unspeakable, though unveiling) that precedes the language acquired *a posteriori* (able to be spoken, shared and embodied). Therefore, in the transgenerational construction of knowledge, there will always be an underlying language problem to be resolved that concerns the ability to convey the totality of what is meant. It is man's duty, from the moment he is 'born,' to unite his anthropological background and his language and to add the acquired knowledge to the constitutive granted to him by the Absolute Other. Therefore, constitutive knowledge is present before neuro-psycho-intellectual maturity, which provides the alterity in a life of quotidian relationships. This record can be accessed even among the alienated and those with cognitive or psycho-socio-cultural disabilities.

Thus, we can infer that a unilateral, vertical, moralizing, corrective or strictly hygienic-sanitary proposal, which does not consider that which originates to be accessible, is unable to be ethical or lead to well-being. To innovate or renew oneself without considering visiting or being visited by the ineffable is impossible. Words alone are not enough; without the ineffable, proposals for justice or social inclusion fall by the wayside, and situations are made and remade in the medium of

agreements, contracts and their temporal-spatial-circumstantial conveniences. Due to the interactions and paradoxes between anthropology and language, the accepted concepts employed to assess reasonable sustainability against questions regarding the meaning of being must be brought 'in community' with one another. This unification must be accomplished with a high degree of freedom, dismissing the mere functionality or institutionalism of non-creative gestures.

The scientific and technical method that guides a significant portion of the processes of the contemporary world, however, tends to consider it a 'methodological error' to accept a human as a person. The human ethos is discarded because of a pedagogy that is reduced to a rationality based on quantity, productivity and reproducibility, proving itself to be incompatible with life in a community. It is, however, through ethics that the human being and the limits of his actions in question are oriented, including those that tend toward barbarism. It is in the encounter with the dignity of the other that the questions of truth and the mysteries of self take place. At the same time, health professionals suffer from a lack of knowledge about the human condition, in particular those conditions that are most originating, constitutive and communitarian. Even when assisting a patient, it is not only a patient that is assisted. In fact, multiple voices speak through each person – those of his family, people, hierarchy of values, knowledge and community. In the end, from an ethical perspective, when two people speak to each other, humanity converses.

In this sense, to think in a communitarian style would be, for example, to think of birth/nativity as the beginning of the process of receiving, dwelling and sustaining (holding) the solitary human being who is thrown precariously into existence; to think of illness/morbidity as a moment to 'be with' one's patient or community, witnessing and assisting in the lucid transition through suffering as part of the inherent human condition; and to think of death/mortality as a moment that also requires a witness, comprehending that preparing for death is, in fact, preparing to face the fear of loneliness that comes with human finitude. Thus, the health scientist is established as the one who seeks the appropriate knowledge in order to be the 'healer' of his community. By publishing and conveying his findings, he also bears the human need to universalize his work and be witnessed by his peers.

The world, however, appears to therapeutically and provocatively separate people from questions of alterity and interiority, ignoring the fact that there are situations in which suffering itself is a source of knowledge that can be both necessary and healthy. This separation reveals itself on a daily basis in scientific research involving human beings, for example, when outlining the proper measure of 'informed consent' for a community under study. Is scientific production in fact incompatible with ethics? Is knowledge incompatible with knowing? Is the socialization of knowledge a utopia now abandoned by modern scientists? In 1945, doctor and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott wrote, "We are poor indeed if we are only sane"<sup>15</sup>. In the tone of the text related herein, we agree that, amid so much progress and so many comforts, we are in fact poor if we are only sane, rational, operational, efficient, productive, persistent and identified as devoid of 'being.'

## REFERENCES

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