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## THE BEAUTY OF KNOWING

**Galip Veliu \***

Being surrounded by beauty, called “nature” by human beings, it has always been a trial-and-error affair to establish a kind of relationship between nature and humans. The procedure of introducing the human element in relationship with nature promotes the idea of knowledge. Thus the process of acquiring knowledge is as old as human beings. There are many attractive things in this world, but experience shows that, what differentiates the quest for knowledge from other enterprises is that it never fades. The continuous interest in knowledge remains always a top priority. Despite the catastrophes as a result of misused knowledge, wisdom and true knowledge have always been considered as the highest goods that humans need in their lives. We never blame knowledge for something unpleasant, done as a result of scientific development, but those who deal with and use it. It seems to me that knowing is good in itself. It is so good that, throughout its development, it never leaves room for blaming it. It always points out very clearly the real sinners by their names.

Human wonder, to learn and know, reflects the infinite character of the beauty of knowing. We should remind ourselves of the famous introductory dictum of Book Alpha of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, “All men by nature desire to have knowledge”. Having final understanding of reality contradicts the essential spirit of learning procedure which is infinite, because learning is a human characteristic. The continuation of the existence of human being means the continuation of the process of understanding. Final understanding of reality is possible only with the end of humanity. Finality in knowledge is the greatest obstacle of the procedure of knowing and it brings the greatest damage to the beauty of knowing, which is characterized by infinite attraction, in the sense that, every generation participates in the process of knowing. We must get rid of what Alfred North Whitehead pointed out once as “the illusion of finality” and focus on the continual rhythm of the infinite knowledge search. This, no doubt, is the true human enterprise.

The procedure of learning does not recognize obstacles. Although many times in the history of scientific development we faced serious obstacles, it is an interesting case that, many times obstacles towards true knowledge have been

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placed by scientific authorities, in the classical understanding of knowledge proclaimed as being absolutely true, such as in the Galileo case. In the 20th century it was the positivistic characterization of scientific understanding as indubitable and objective. “Positivism is a form of imperialism, or perhaps the other way round, or both”.

The claim in terms of the final understanding of reality means, basically, the end of wonder. It means the end of knowing, since it forces reality into a contradictory situation with what is going on in the real life. Our observation of what human beings have been doing shows that this species is always eager to learn. From the newborn to the advanced mature humans, there is continual interest among individuals in the venture to know. Questioning, which is the starting point for learning, is a permanent human property and can never have final answers; it may have various and differentiated answers, but never final. However, our inability to pose further questions about a kind of reality does not mean that there are no further questions to be asked. Questioning goes hand in hand with knowledge. In order to ask we have to know how and what to ask. In fact the Socratic method of knowing seems to be the best and the only method ever discovered to fit the nature of human learning. Thus the end of questioning would mean the end of the human species. Knowledge is so attractive that the more we have the more we realize how little we have. It is like a rose always in its spring the more we work on it the more it flowers. It seems that progress in knowledge will always show us the gap between knowing and not-knowing. The attraction of knowledge appears clearly in our efforts to interpret our knowledge and the knowledge of our predecessors to our descendants. Scientific institutions, universities, foundations for learning are all, in essence, our trial to learn, record and interpret knowledge with the hope that what we know today may help us and the others to know more tomorrow, because, as we know, no knowledge is possible without a previous knowledge, which thus provides a context for the existing knowledge. This epistemological principle is formulated as a logical rule as well: the human mind always paves its way from the known to the unknown.

Interpretation, which in essence represents human ability to transform knowledge, is a continual activity which never ends; it can be terminated only with a final interpretation, which would claim absolute truth, but this finality is never possible because the “social process involved is endless”. Interpretation makes possible the transition of knowledge from one generation to the next. Interpretation does not allow scientific knowledge to perish with the scientist

when a scientist, or a generation of scientists, dies. The process of interpretation or, what Royce calls the “community of interpreters” makes possible the continuation of scientific knowledge. In fact interpretation gives an infinite character to the attraction of knowledge. The purpose of learning must be to aim at the truth, which has to be the main concern of education. Education leads to a formation of human society that knows how to differentiate the good from the bad. Educated society knows how to deal with, and get rid of, bad intended actors of every group in society. Neither the misuse of knowledge by the scholars, nor the use of scientific products, by power-holders, for their interests and even the power-holders’ misuse of the scientists for the scientific justification of their actions, buying them in a pecuniary sense, which is too frequent, has negative effects on our love for knowing.

In the history pages the world is mainly represented as the place of competition among individuals, tribes, monarchies, empires, theocracies, aristocracies, ideologies and civilizations, as to who will dominate. Unfortunately, knowledge and scientific progress in general is mainly considered as the best guarantor of the necessary power for domination over the others. “In contrast to the Baconian scientific creed, the message is that scientific knowledge should lead not to the exercise of power above over nature, but should encourage us to seek harmony with it”. The aspiration for domination is as old as human being. For some (materialists) this aspiration is human natural possession, for those who believe, it is a possession given by God. Philosophers and scientists are trying to transform this human aspiration for domination into a good intention of serving humanity, thinking that this is possible through education, and consider it necessary for the achievement of World-Peace. The arguments of the materialists, for the good intention of serving others, are mainly based on humanistic purposes. Believers, on the other hand, base their arguments on the purpose of pleasing God. Although they differ in their purpose both sides, in essence, have very good arguments that, if applied, may lead to a peaceful world. Philosophers and scientists act among people with their thoughts but daily life is more than thoughts, people are in need of necessities, food and shelter in order to be able to make a healthy choice between “bad and good” and “right and wrong”. The actual life of the masses depends very much on pecuniary means and power-holders. People in order to gain their lives are compelled to act in accordance to the wishes of the whims of bosses, according to the logic of supply, demand and profit: “The very problems which have been set for scientists and technologists to solve have been essentially the problems of the owners and

controllers of industry and its allied concerns, rather than the problems of society as a whole”. And “...they support, wittingly or unwittingly, the aims and goals of a specific group, to the detriment of all of society”. Profit is the only rational and right thing for the profit-holders, whatever the irrational methods that led to it.

It is true that humans’ trust in themselves i.e. their senses and mind, led the West to respect the individual and therefore to understand the importance of the freedom of individuals to express their feelings and thoughts, in the service of progress in society. In fact that seems the only way that helped progress in western societies. Modern Cartesian rationalistic philosophy brought the West to the point of not trusting anything, but reason. The philosophy that the rational is true and certain, led to the conclusion that the absolute is certainty, at least in mathematical terms. This, in turn, led western civilization to the belief that what is rational is true, and what is western is rational. Rationality in essence means the continuous strive towards the better and this strive includes the possibility to learn from every human individual whatever ethnicity, he or she, may belong. We must be ready to listen to and read ideas that contradict ours, even if someone is not a scholar or a scientist, but simply voicing his personal way of interpreting the world. That is important, legitimate and relevant. The unification of rational philosophy with absolute truth was the main tool that the West used to justify its politics of domination and usurpation of the others. In fact, as Paul Feyerabend points out:

Western civilization was either imposed by force, not because of argument showing its intrinsic truthfulness, or accepted because it produced better weapons; and its advance, while doing some good, also caused enormous damage. It not only destroyed spiritual values which gave meaning to human lives, it also damaged a corresponding mastery of the material surroundings without replacing it by methods of comparable efficiency.

The identification of all what is not rational, i.e., western, as myths is a western myth in essence, i.e., an invented myth that served the interests of developed countries. It is true that rational-scientific philosophy brought the West to a powerful position in many aspects but the same philosophy transformed it into a totalitarian society. The refugee philosopher Ernst Cassirer has shown this nicely in his famous book *The Myth of the State*. Having no respect toward other people’s views and customs is a well known character of the western authorities. This is very clear from the fact that what is going on contemporaneously, in many countries with Islamic background, as a result of American pres-

sure. We must ask honestly, is it really true that societies must adapt modern methods to be a happy society? Is there a logic of necessity that societies that follow their own time honored tradition must adopt modern ways in order to be successful? And, what, exactly, is the benchmark of success? Totalitarianism in thought has a negative effect not only on science but on the intercultural harmony as well. Freedom means leaving people to think and live as they want, with the condition of not harming the others, and not, compelling them to obey the desires of some particular power-holder groups. Totalitarian rationalism cannot be in the service of human thought and science; it has always played the role of easier justification of the actions of power-holders. The appearance of post modern philosophy is in essence the result of the fight of the contemporary scientists against totalitarianism and Cartesian absolutism. The realization of the catastrophes that ratio-scientific absolutism brought and may bring to humanity in general and its negative effects on the progress of science in particular, is the main concern of post-modern philosophy. Totalitarian rationalism is becoming more dangerous than the Christian totalitarianism of the middle ages. The Pope was punishing those who entertained different ideas from the church, western rational-absolutists are punishing those who do think and live differently from the west. There cannot be “freedom for us” and “not for others”. We must understand that democracy does not mean living the way we want but to coexist with different ideas and people. Freedom is human’s necessary possession in order to show himself as creative creature. The only guarantee of our freedom is the freedom of others.

Democracy in any area, in essence, represents the will of the people living in that area, not the application of America’s will there. The unification of anti-Americanism with terrorism reflects the unwillingness of American rulers to learn from others which is the only way of learning about us.

To find out whether our ideas are sound, we need other people to try them out on. Critical discussion is the basis of free thought for each individual. This means, however, that freedom of thought is impossible without political freedom. And it also means that political freedom is a precondition of the free uses of reason by each individual.

The ruling monarchies and oligarchies of the most countries of the third world are in power despite the will of their people. They do not care about the wellbeing of their people as much as they care for the American interests there. The sincere services of the rulers of the third world to the American interests, is what keeps them in power. The local armies and police forces are not so much

interested in the establishment of the security of local people; their main duty is the protection of the ruling oligarchies of these countries from their own people. Armies and police forces of most of the third world countries, although paid and fed by taxes taken from people, have no responsibility for their misbehaviors towards the citizens. The population of the third world, pay taxes in order to be bitten or imprisoned and tortured, if they claim dissatisfaction from their rulers. Knowledge in order to reflect its beauty in a clear cut manner is in need of free people. No population of any third world countries is free. Only those who possess freedom can benefit, in the real sense, from the beauty of knowing. Freedom is a necessary precondition for the uncensored use of human rational capacity.

The primary concern of academicians is necessarily, the search for rational justification of the policies of their institutions, which, in turn, is the necessary condition for the extension of their contracts, so that the ideal of search for the real and the good, whatever the circumstances, remains an illusion. Any academician in order to work as lecturer in any university in a foreign country, although he may be considered as a good professional of a field of study by the university department, is entitled to a working visa permit by the authorities of that country; yet, visas are never the criterion for the professional abilities of the subject. The affirmation or rejection of the visa matters, in essence, represent the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the political authority of the subject, in the sense that, if the professional is known as an opponent of the respective authority's philosophy of ruling applied to the visa permit, for him, it becomes an illusion. "Science and scientists were used to advance the interests of a new group in society- a group of industrial capitalists' entrepreneurs at the expense of the more established landed classes". Truth and the good are what the power-holders expect them to pursue. Scientists, academicians, specialists, craftsmen provide the tools that the power-holders use as means to realize their plans. Any interpretation of truth that contradicts the interests of the owner of capital has no chance for survival. This seems to be the practice of today. But one thing is certain, i.e., the reality of our claim that the misuse of knowing can and will be overturned by future progress of knowledge, that keeps the hunt and quest for new knowledge in perpetual motion wherein the beauty of knowing lies.

The philosophy of what is rational is true suits very much the interests of power-holders. In fact, the maxim what is rational is true, was the best ideal, because the economic leaders can achieve this goal by simply hiring rationalists to do the justification arguments for them. Every small company serves,

one way or another, some other bigger company and finally, right or wrong, true or false, the quarrel between big companies as to their respective profit margin, will provide more power to the company. The quest for certainty, as John Dewey pointed out, was the essential spirit of progress in knowledge, starting with Socrates and Plato and solidified by Descartes is now transferred into the quest for increasing the profit margin with the approval of the actions by the stock holders. Rationalism, in essence, means the continual strife for a better solution. Having final solutions is contradictory to the essence of rational analyses. Ratio is a subjective possession. Thus, to admit something as knowledge is possible on the basis of new knowledge, which is the only way of classification of some opinion, as knowledge. Knowledge inherited from previous generations, in order to take the status of knowledge, must be best sustainable knowledge; this knowledge must be acknowledged by the critical mind of today and not because some authority the claims it. Otherwise, it turns to be the knowledge rubber stamped by authority, which is the most dangerous form of knowing and acknowledgement. To accept a solution as rational represents an activity of re-rationalizing it, because when a subject sees something as rational it is not because somebody makes claims in the name of the rational, but because he becomes convinced that it is rational and the process of justification itself represents new knowledge. Rationality in the sense of proving right makes room for egoistic use of human abilities. In this case a researcher will concentrate on his abilities, instead of continuing in the line of knowing itself, rather than on the purpose itself that he has done the best does not enhance the spirit of learning. There is no best or final knowledge. The beauty of knowing lies in the continuity of the process of learning. To be proved right in knowledge opens the way, for inspirations, for domination and authority. What Socrates meant with questioning is the same as what we today mean by the critical approach. Critical thinking is the only method that keeps the doors of knowing open, and it reflects, in essence, the transfinite character of knowledge. Thus, critical thinking is our attempt to know that never ends. Although we are aware that stability of knowledge cannot be guaranteed we still do our best to acquire knowledge about reality. We still, in the depth of our souls believe that perhaps, one day, we can obtain true and reliable knowledge about the universe.

From 2500 years ago, the time when the first recorded scientific inquiry starts, until today, the only reliable knowledge we possess is nothing more than the hope that, we may know. We are witnessing that, in our real life, we are never satisfied with what we know and what we have achieved. But always do

come up with new discoveries and achievements and always critical with new ideas forthcoming as well as explanations (interpretations); we do this with more intensity than before, but we realize that we are “know-nothings” as far as reality is concerned. This in essence shows that the attraction of knowledge is functioning completely all the time. It is no surprise that Plato spoke of Eros as a form of knowledge in the Symposium. The erotic component in the search of knowledge is the love for wisdom. That is the reason why philosophy, by definition, attains its authority, i.e., the love of wisdom.

Human capacity of knowing is not something invented or found by him but it is a given and it is a kind of given that, without it, other givens would have no sense. The universe, and what is in it, would have no meaning if not for the human capacity of knowing. Thus, without the ability of knowing, the universe would not even be called universe. I wonder, if there would not be the human capacity to rationally comprehend and define what is there, would there be any “there” at all? Everything around us is closely connected with knowing. The beauty of what we see, around us, depends on our knowledge and understanding of it. Knowledge is so good and important that, without it, living would have no sense, because we live on the basis of how we know. Change is one of the constant characteristics of knowledge because the future is a part of previous and today’s knowledge. Thus, we cannot decide about the fate of today’s knowledge in the future.

Taking into consideration the continuation of the existence of human being, no generation, can claim for the final word on knowledge. Although the amount of knowledge accumulated is considerable, we are nowhere close, as far as reality of the universe is concerned. We are still at the beginning of our understanding of the beauty that is surrounding us and how long the beginning phase will take, we are not sure. In our universe:

each entity behaves in a complex and characteristic way which, though conforming to a pattern, constantly reveals new and surprising features and thus cannot be captured in a formula; it affects, and is affected by, other entities and processes constituting a rich and varied universe. In such a universe the problem is not what is “real” and what is not: queries like these do not even count as genuine questions. The problem is what occurs, in what connection, who was, or could be misled by the event and how.

We are still in the beginning as far as the reality of the universe and ours is concerned. We have made some technical progress but technological progress is not contributing at all to our knowledge of reality. Thus, we still have no

scientific idea about whether the patron of our universe is Plato's Demiurgos, or Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, or what else. Most of the times, we are in doubt of religious claims about universe, just because we cannot prove them scientifically, but we must not forget that we possess the same degree of doubt related to scientific reality as well. Plato's Demiurgos is characterized as a clever engineer who handles the basic elements of the universe in geometrical proportion. It is the legacy of geometrical beauty and aesthetics that connects divine knowledge to human wisdom. Later Plotinus and Neo-platonism worked out a systematic description of Godhead and its emanations. In the Platonic and Plotinian tradition traditional science, Eros, and Techne, are synthesized into a grand theory of the universe. This synthesis was forsaken during the scientific revolution in the West. However, slowly we re-discover the aesthetic dimension of knowledge not only through Plato and Plotinus, but also in becoming aware of non-western cultural traditions. The Rock Garden in Kyoto, Japan, is a classical example of that ancient synthesis, wisdom, Eros, and Techne, in the spirit of Zen Buddhism.

Every good and beautiful thing can be misused. There is always the chance of misuse of the true and the beautiful; evil does not lie in beauty but in the perception of the beholder. History exemplifies that knowledge is mostly misused by groups or individuals. The negative effects of the misuse of something good and beautiful are proportional to its positive effects, if properly applied. Learning the good in order to do it and learning the bad in order to avoid it is the proper use of knowledge and this is where the moral dimension of the beauty of knowledge lies. Knowledge provides the basis for the good if accompanied by the natural intent for learning. This seems to be the real meaning of the famous opening of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, "All humans desire to have knowledge."

The basic problem of science and technology since the 17th century has been the misuse of this kind of knowledge by rulers of the West. Science and technology was used to usurp and dominate non-European lands and turn them into colonies to be exploited. Yet, as we saw in the development of the atomic bomb, human nature seems to have a universal tendency to use science and technology for dominating others. The famous dictum of Francis Bacon, "Knowledge is Power", disgraces the platonic idea of harmony and beauty of the universe. It could be said that, as soon as the ancient tradition, connecting knowledge, the good and beauty, was dissolved, disaster struck in the hearts of those who should have known better. The only effective way towards a peaceful world is the tolerance of the powerful to the less powerful on the basis of toler-

ance and respect of religious principles. It is true that progress in knowledge leads to power, but we need power in order to help the less fortunate, and not be bitten like dogs being last in line. The main duty of supremacy in knowledge should be teaching and not exploitation. If the natural purpose of knowing is learning, the natural purpose of learning should be teaching. The main duty of a knowing person, nation or country, should be teaching, which in essence, represents the best example of the proper use of knowledge. Using knowledge for biting instead of teaching, as some who claim to represent America are doing, represents the amoral character of American rulers and not the good characteristic of knowledge.

For some knowledge is attractive just for the purpose of learning, for others, for different pragmatic reasons. Thus the end of knowing brings progress in both: good and bad, depending on the intention of the individual in using it. Knowledge is a kind of treasury that everyone can find some kind of benefits in it. It fulfils many kinds of interests. Knowledge is a human possession, and naturally, every human possession has the characteristic of being used, for evil and for good, depending on the character of the users. The beauty of knowing is embedded in its essential and natural purpose which is learning or “knowledge for the sake of knowledge”, as Aristotle would say. There is no bad knowledge. Experience shows that no one qualifies knowledge as bad. Even knowing the bad is qualified as good, because the only way of avoiding the bad, of course, if we want to, is through knowing it. As a contemporary philosopher of science put it, “Even when we find that technology has created personal or environmental problems, we tend to turn to science for a remedy. If car exhausts pollute the atmosphere, we look to science to provide cleaner fuels or more sufficient engines”. On a metaphysical level what is needed is a re-enactment of the ancient paradigm of the true, good, and the beautiful in modern dress. A science that re-discovers its Eros in the quest for knowledge, will serve, in the long run, human beings in the name of truth, good, and justice.

## Özet

### Bilmenin Güzelliği

Güzel olan şeyin devamlı takip eden özelliği çekici olmasıdır. Bilim ve hakikatin bilimsel anlayışının çekiciliği, Sokrat ve Platon tarafından, ilk icad edildiği zamanki yoğunluğunu korumaktadır. Çoğu zaman, güç sahipleri ve bazı bilim adamları tarafından, kötüye kullanıldıysada içgüdüsel olarak biz bilimsel anlayışın insanlığın iyiliği için öncülüklediğine hâlâ inanmaktayız. Bilime olan sevgimizin ve yorum yapma kabiliyetimizin arkasında duran şeyin,

ne olduğunu öğrenme isteğimiz, bilimsel bilginin ölümsüz çekiciliğini oluşturan iki insani özelliktir: İyi ve kötü. Bu çalışmanın amacı bütün bu saydığımız özellikleri aydınlatmak ve bunlarla alakalı olan diğer konuları tartışmaktır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** güç, baskın, totaliterizm, insan tabiatı

### Abstract

The permanent characteristic of something beautiful is its being attractive. The attraction of science and scientific understanding of reality keeps the intensity that it had when it was initiated by Socrates and Plato. Although, many times, scientific achievements have been misused by the power holders, and some scientists are continuing to misuse it, we still instinctively believe that scientific understanding is advantageous for the good of humankind. The purpose of learning, as to what lies behind our love of knowledge and our ability to interpret, are the two human characteristics that make up the immortal attraction of our quest for scientific knowledge: The good and the evil. This paper is an attempt to unravel those characteristics as well as to discuss other related issues.

**Key words:** Power, domination, totalitarianism, human nature

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