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ROYCE'S CRITIQUE OF KANT'S EPISTEMOLOGY

Galip Velio*

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Royce'un yapısal epistemolojik temelli bir fikir arayışında bir nesil bilim adamlarının bilimsel bilgisinin bir diğerine aktarılmasını incelemek ve bilimsel gelişmeyi mümkün kılmaktır.

Epistemolojik açıdan bu çalışma, Kant'ın vecizesindeki "muhtevası olmayan düşünceler boştur, kavramsız sezgiler kördür" ifadesine Royce'un yaptığı açıkları incelemektedir.

Göreğimiz gibi, Royce, bir nesil ve diğeri arasında bilimsel bilgi köprüsü bulmak için yorumlama boyutunu ve sezgiyi getirmektedir.

Bu, J.E Smith'in toplumsal sonsuz terimini, bir topluluk olarak bilimadamlarının sonraki nesillerinin yorumu sürecinde bir temel olarak kullanıp, bireysel bilimadamlarının sonlu ve sınırlı bilgisi olarak sistematik bilgiye ve onun bireysel bilgisinin yayılması ve aktarımı olasılığını da beraberinde getirir.

Royce Kantın meşhur "sezgi kavramı" paradigması ve Pierce in araştırmacılar topluluğu kavramının sonsuz ihtimallere yayılmasını teklif etmektedir.

It is well known that for Kant "thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind".¹ So in order to have knowledge, we must make our concepts sensible and make our intuitions intelligible. For, "the understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only through their union can knowledge arise."² Concepts, for Kant, are mere forms of thought, and through them alone no determinate object can be known. Thus, knowledge is possible only in so far as we have experience. Kant distinguishes between experience and sensations. For Kant experience is constituted by a combination of form and content. Sensations are those that provide the content of experience, while the form is provided by the mind. The form, of such a dual combination, of experience in general is provided by the mind in two ways: with the forms of sensibility; namely, space and time, and with categories as the pure concepts of the understanding.³ Only under two conditions the knowledge of an object can be possible; the

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¹ Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), 93.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.,121.

first one is intuition, through which the object is given as appearance, and the second one is a concept through which the object is thought corresponding to this intuition. An a priori concept which is not related to experience (intuition) is counted only as the logical form of a concept "not the concept itself through which something is thought."⁴ Royce launches his objection against Kant here by arguing that: (Kant) "did not really succeed in escaping from the classical dualism with regard to the process of cognition."⁵ Royce is in agreement with Kant and he accepts the view that perception and conception are used in the process of understanding, but this knowledge without the aid of interpretation as a third cognitive process, cannot be counted as complete knowledge. What differentiates interpretation from conceptions and perception is that the proper object of an interpretation can be something of the nature of mind or else it can be a process which goes on in a mind, or it can be "a sign or expression whereby some mind manifests its existence and its processes".⁶ Royce's conclusion is that neither conceptualists, nor intuitionists and, nor yet, the Kantians, who comprise the synthesis of both positions, provide a satisfactory answer to the problem of the continuity of knowledge, which can be expressed also as the problem of a basis for *transfinite knowledge*. This epistemological problem is important not only in this respect, but also in providing satisfactory solutions to some of problems in philosophy of science, such as, the nature of science and scientific knowledge. An epistemology remains as an "individual epistemology", if it cannot cope with this problem; i.e. how knowledge becomes a basis for the scientific ideas and the knowledge of the subsequent generations. Royce's unique answer for this is his doctrine of interpretation, which will be elaborated fully later. Now we shall try to demonstrate how Kant's epistemology remains a model for an individual epistemology.

Kant's epistemology is based on the concept of an individual scientist, which is represented in his transcendental epistemology as the "I". The thinking subject is not taken into a wider scrutiny of the knowledge that is already present in Royce's community of investigators. Therefore, in Kant's model of epistemology the transcendental subject represents the individual self. An epistemology, which is modeled around the concept of an individual subject, is an individual epistemology, and as such it is bound to remain without the consent of a community of scientists. For, only decisions that are accepted by a community as true can be counted as the basis for further progress in science. Moreover, an epistemology that does not deal with the question of how knowledge becomes a basis for scientific progress in general, and also how it can become knowledge of the society in general, is somehow bound to perish with the individual scientist. Even if some pieces of knowledge remain to be recognized by the community of inves-

⁴ Ibid., 129.

⁵ Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1968), 120.

⁶ Ibid., 129.

tigators from such a model of epistemology, which is sometimes possible, yet its total framework is bound to be lost. Hence, we consider Kant's epistemology a finite individual epistemology in this sense. For he is not interested in whether a decision of the transcendental ego is accepted by the others as such; or at least he does not recognize that such a knowledge is also open in an epistemological operation of other minds to a wider scrutiny. Hence, Kant is not interested in the problem of what happens to knowledge left behind the transcendental subject after death. For this reason Peirce takes this problem and tries to solve it by means of his doctrine of the community of researchers, or investigators, in order to account for how scientific knowledge is accepted by a wider insight as such. He thus developed a new epistemology on this model which we call "indefinite epistemology" and try to elucidate what we mean by it within the context of our main problem. The indefinite epistemology claims that the truth of knowledge is decided by the community of researchers in the long run.

Peirce thought that continuity is a primary feature of the world; moreover continuity is also a basic law of the human mind that makes progress in science possible. This process of continuity is applied, in Peirce's view, in all empirical sciences. The same thing happens with our ideas also. Our mental life, according to Peirce, represents a continuation of ideas and not a number of particular ideas or a series of events.⁷ The idea of continuity encourages Peirce to pass into the idea of the community. For Peirce we are not interested in what we can infer from a special number of cases, but rather in what happens in the long run. Peirce's probability belongs to a kind of indefinite inference. We are concerned in what happens in the indefinite number of cases in our inference. So far as Peirce is concerned, our interest must not be limited; on the contrary, they must embrace the whole community. The community that is engaged with those indefinite inferences is, for Peirce, the community of researchers. This community also has to be unlimited and it "must extend to all races of human being with whom we can come into immediate or mediate intellectual relation".⁸ Since in Kant laws of nature are entertained by the transcendental subject individually in Peirce this transcendental subject is transformed into the community of researchers. Thus, Peirce transforms Kant's model of individual epistemology into an *indefinite epistemology*; an epistemology, the decisions of which are always dependent upon the investigation of the community of researchers in the long run. For Peirce "...the reality depends on ultimate decision of the community...In this way, the existence of thought now depends on what is to be hereafter, so that it has only a potential existence, dependent on the future thought of the community."⁹

⁷ Charles S. Peirce. *Collected Papers*, vols. 1-6 ed. by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-35), vols. 7, 8 ed. by Arthur Burks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 6: 109; henceforth, our reference for this work will be abbreviated as CP.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2: 398.

⁹ CP, 5: 316; see also John E. Smith, "C. S. Peirce: Community and Reality" in *Themes in American Philosophy* (New York: L. Harper, 1970), 228.

Personal decision and experiences of individual person should be communicated in dialogue with the community. We have always to compare, test and contrast our ideas. An isolated idea cannot be counted as adequate. Science, for Peirce, is a process of inquiry and it cannot be understood apart from this process. The goal of science can be achieved only by the work of the community. In Peirce there is a clear distinction between empirical reality, and reality as a notion arrived at in the long run, by the community of scientists. Peirce's theory of signs is crucial for Royce's theory of interpretation. For he takes Peirce's notion of triadic relation of signs to apply to his theory of interpretation. According to this notion, interpretation involves a triadic relation of signs, which includes three elements in an interpretation: subject, object and interpretant.¹⁰ The authority which decides on the truth of the interpretant is the "community of researchers" in the long run. So Peirce takes interpretation to be primarily a triadic relation of signs. Royce promotes this view by adding that this process involves to three persons.

Royce's strategy in order to work out his epistemology of the community of interpretation is three fold:

a). He follows Kant as far as his epistemology is concerned in terms of intuition-concept, only to a certain point;

b). He accepts Peirce's critique of Kant's transcendental philosophy, reaching his doctrine of the community of researchers; and

c). Royce modifies both, Kant's and Peirce's position. This critique or modification is, in turn, dealt with in a two fold way:

i). Royce expands Kant's epistemological construction of intuition-concept to include interpretation;

ii). He emphasizes Peirce's community, but not as an individual epistemological entity, on the contrary, as generations who try to preserve and hand down the accumulated knowledge to the next generation, which is done in the name of interpretation.

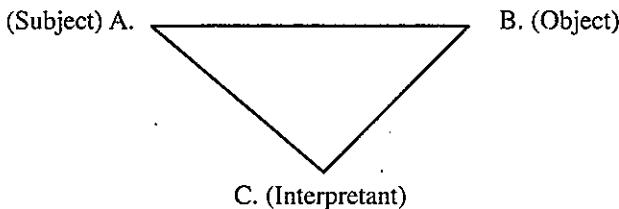
Interpretation as an Element in Knowledge -Transference

Interpretation, according to Royce, is a model of knowledge that introduces an additional epistemological dimension to perception and conception. Understanding, on the basis of perception and conception exclusively, is inadequate because knowledge reaches beyond seeing and cognizing; it demands, furthermore, the unification of life in terms of interpretation. The unification of parts and whole can never be provided by perception, or conception, alone. It is the meaning of the whole of an organism that is of interest in Roycean terms. Perception and conceptuality restrict intelligibility to the percept and its relation to the concept, but does not extend its plausibility in terms of an extended interpretation. Royce does not regard philosophy merely as the work of conception or

¹⁰ J. H. Cotton *Royce on the Human Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 228.

perception, but as an enterprise of interpretation. We should point out that Royce's interpretative enterprise aims at the interpretation of epistemic behavior of human beings, rather than mere textual analysis in the style of Gadamer. In this, Royce is closer to the philosopher-archaeologist R.G.Collingwood.¹¹ Philosophers according to Royce: "...have actually devoted themselves in the main, neither to perceiving the world, nor to spinning webs of conceptual theory, but to interpreting the meaning of civilizations which they have represented, and to attempting the interpretation of whatever minds in the universe, human or divine they believed to be real".¹² Of course, perception and conception are used in the process of understanding, but we need also interpretation, without which the real process of cognition cannot be completed; and it is through interpretation that knowledge is transferred from one scientific community to the next. With interpretation we are able to unify and clarify our ideas about ourselves, and our ideas about the world, of which we are a part. Each individual, in Royce's view, can verify assertions by reference to his own percepts and never to anyone else. Common objects are, therefore, the result of interpretation, which shows to reveal an infinite character. The fact is that interpretation never stands by itself; it always needs another interpretation to satisfy itself, which has been termed "meta-interpretation" by Royce. It is this idea of the interpretation of the interpretation, for short Meta - interpretation, that lands interpretation per se its "infinite character". For instance, the individual ,says Royce: "has made his discovery, but it is a scientific discovery only in case it can become, through further confirmation, the property and the experience of the community of scientific observers."¹³ Thus, knowledge demands interpretation, or, as he calls it "community of interpretation." In other words, knowledge based on self evidence cannot be considered as knowledge exclusively, until it has been subject to analysis by others.

Peirce's theory of signs is essential to Royce's theory of interpretation. Peirce says that interpretation involves a triadic relation of signs, subject, object and interpretant.¹⁴



¹¹ See, example, R. G. Collingwood. *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952); also *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), Collingwood is considered to be the pioneer of "informal logic", i.e. the logic of "questions and answers."

¹² PC, 2: 255.

¹³ PC, 231.

¹⁴ J. H. Cotton. *Royce on the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 228.

As it is seen in the above table, Royce claims that this process involves three “persons”; let us say the student A is studying a text by B, e.g. Kant in this case, and C is the teacher teaching this text. Hence, in the example of this student studying a text by Kant and guided by a teacher involves ‘A’ the student, ‘B’ Kant, the writer and ‘C’ the teacher. The teacher mediates between Kant and the student through the Kantian text. This process of mediation means that, for instance, if a student is faced with a difficult passage of Kant and an instructor mediates Kant’s text to the student, extended interpretation of Kant ensues. For Royce, this mental process, which involves three members, differs from perception and conception in three respects:

- a) Interpretation is a conversation, and not a lonely enterprise.
- b) The interpreted object is itself something which has the nature of a mental expression. Pierce uses the term “sign” to name this mental object which is interpreted.
- c) Since the interpretation is a mental act, and it is an act which is expressed, the interpretation itself is, in its term, a sign.¹⁵

Interpretation is always oriented to the future and this gives to the process of interpretation an infinite character. The category of the future, therefore, becomes an important feature of the philosophy of Royce. Every interpretation is always addressed to somebody, and this continues into the infinite. The process of interpretation is a social process which is at least ideally endless. This process “can be terminated only by an external and arbitrary interruption, such as death or social separation.”¹⁶ Hence, the very possibility of a basis for transfinite knowledge is interpretation. But this conclusion is not sufficient as yet to prove this possibility. Hence, we ask, what element is it, in interpretation that proves or rather expresses this possibility more vividly? We shall try to show how Royce’s epistemology answers this question.

The method of the process of interpretation is a comparative method. To compare and to interpret are, for Royce, two names for the same cognitive process.¹⁷ Comparison is always triadic, for two different thinkers, A and B, for instance, we can ask wherein does A resemble B, or wherein is their difference? The differences or resemblances can never be their own interpretations, because interpretation needs always a third without which there cannot be interpretation. Royce illustrates this by the “mirror-script”. For instance, if you are confronted with a piece of writing that you cannot read, and then hold up to a mirror and you will be able to read it. With the mediating third you are able to read it, and what makes the difference clear is the mediating third. The function of the mediating third is the same as the function of the community in Kuhn’s period of normal science. However the community, in which the scientist functions, judges, verifies or tests

¹⁵ *PC*, 2: 148.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 280.

the paradigm, represents the mediating third; with this function, the community enters into the process of interpretation. According to Royce, the primary concern of man is to engage for more fruitful interpretations of universe. Interpretation needs always three terms and the result is a sign which calls for the process to be repeated. Royce explicitly points out that "by itself the process of interpretation calls, in ideal, for an infinite sequence of interpretations".¹⁸ Interpretation can be terminated only with a final interpretation, which would claim absolute truth. Alfred North Whitehead, the philosopher-mathematician, once called this "the fallacy of the perfect dictionary". But this finality, according to Royce, is not possible because "the social process involved is endless".¹⁹ With interpretation we are able to clarify our ideas about the world and ourselves. Each individual, according to Royce, can verify assertions by reference to his own precepts and never to any one else. All common objects are the result of interpretation. The time order is known to us through interpretation and it is neither a conceptual nor yet a perceptual order. Interpretation differs from perception and conception essentially, in its being a social process. How this is so will be examined now.

The three terms involved in the process of interpretation appear as three selves between which exist certain chasms, and the will to interpret is that which bridges these chasms and "undertakes to make of these selves a community".²⁰ In Royce's view, we can best conceive the divine nature in the form of the community of interpretation. Every sign which has to be interpreted can be interpreted in the form of the community of interpretation, since every act of interpretation involves three persons and those three together form a community. This is why we interpret his theory of interpretation to be primarily a social process. For, again, he argues in this connection to prove that the basis of the community is to be found in the nature of interpretation, and interpretation denotes a cognitive process, because the mediator between two ideas functions like a mind and the result is another sign, which is in need of being interpreted. John Smith, a foremost authority on Royce, illustrated this point by the following example.²¹ We have three signs in understanding, for example, an Egyptian text;

1. The text itself,
2. An English translation, and
3. The translator.

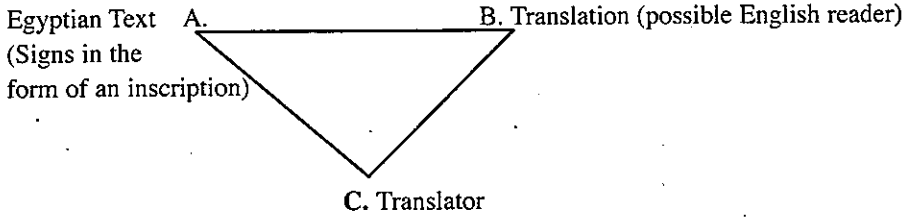
We can illustrate Smith's example on the following diagram.

¹⁸ Ibid., 150.

¹⁹ Ibid., 149.

²⁰ Ibid., 208.

²¹ John E. Smith. *Royce's Social Infinite* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 83.



Therefore, a mediator is required, because

1. B' can produce no cash value for A's mind,
2. B' cannot identify A's mind with any universal abstract idea he knows. So there is a third type of cognition, a mediator 'C', which functions like a dialectic mind, and is capable of interpreting 'A' by providing the equivalent of 'A', in a language understandable by 'B'.²²

All events in the universe are signs followed by acts of interpretations and this constitutes the history of the universe. For, says Royce, as Bergson rightly asserts: "The world of any present moment of time is a summary of the result of all past experience. This view of Bergson's however, is no mere intuition, but is itself an interpretation."²³ Therefore, concludes Royce, our memories are signs of the past; our expectations are signs of the future.

All varieties and problems that appear in our experience are signs, and since signs always need interpretation, the truth of all the events in the universe consists in the truth of the interpretation which these signs obtain. According to Royce "my idea of myself is an interpretation of my past linked also with an interpretation of my hopes and intentions as to my future."²⁴ The community, on the other hand, is actual when the process of interpretation leads to two or more selves to recognize that a common element is part of their individual pasts, when they recognize that, then Royce concludes: "They may be said to constitute a community with reference to that particular past or future event".²⁵ Interpretation thus demands an infinite series of distinct individual acts and: "If then real world contains the community of interpretation just characterized, this community of interpretation expresses its life in an infinite series of individual interpretations, each of which occupies its own place in a perfectly real order of time".²⁶

Therefore, every person who wants to confirm or negate a discovery is involved in the process of interpretation, because he seeks to contrast and compare.

- a). The available evidence with,

²² Ibid.

²³ PC, 2: 285.

²⁴ Ibid.,42

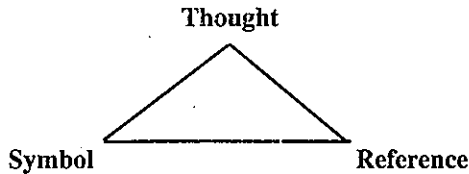
²⁵ Ibid.,50

²⁶ Ibid.

b). The assertions which he is attempting to test (sign), and the result of this process will be,

c). A further interpretation standing in need of the same critical analysis from which it has resulted, and so on.²⁷

Thus, Royce conceives of a chain of interpretation, as the 18th century philosophers did, in terms of the famous model known as "the chain of being". Every being was linked to every being in a hierarchical structure. Ultimately all beings were linked to the omnipotent Being-God. In the chain of interpretation we must understand Royce's model as transformative structures that constitute the condition for every member of a community to come to terms with himself or herself in terms of interpretations, past, present, and anticipated future. The chain of interpretation, therefore, is counted as the life of the scientific community by Royce. When the web of interpretation breaks down, as we pointed out, the community ends, and what remains are beings who do not know, who they are nor what they are doing. Every interpretation is in need of a meta-interpretation and the world of interpretation includes an infinite series of acts of interpretation. So, for Royce, we can have knowledge about the universe and ourselves only with the unending chain of interpretation. Royce's fundamental postulate is that "the world is the interpretation of the problems which it presents".²⁸ Since every interpretation, as we have just mentioned, is a sign and calls for a new interpretation, the sequence of these signs and interpretations constitutes the history of the universe. In order to clarify the Roycean idea of a transfinite basis for knowledge we may use the so-called "Semiological Triangle"²⁹



Semiology, or the doctrine of signs, was extensively explored by Peirce.³⁰ Royce immediately understood the significance of Peirce's application of sign-theory to epistemology. According to this model, the thought represents that which has been signified;

²⁷ RSI.5. Also see in this connection A. O. Lovejoy. *The Chain of Being* (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1968)

²⁸ PC,2: 323

²⁹ Cf. Charles Jencks. " Seismology and Architecture" in *Meaning in Architecture*.ed. by Charles Jencks and G.Baind (New York: Brazillier, 1970), 15 f. The Semiological triangle was adopted from the linguistics of Saussure and the structuralism of Barthes and Levi-Strauss.

³⁰ See Charles S. Hardwick, ed. *Semiotic and Signifiers: The Correspondence Between Peirce and Victoria Lady Welby* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).

the symbol acts as a signifier, and the referent is the percept on the thing denoted. If we apply this semiological model to Royce's community of interpretation the result is as follows: The referent becomes a paradigm of a generation of scientists which act upon it in the context of Kuhn's normal science. The symbol is the community of scientists as signifiers who signify a concept, such as truth, in terms of content. The interpretation adds to the signified, or thought, in reference to the thing, or object denoted. Thus, the interpretation in Royce's sense is able to adjust the triangle-thought, symbol, and referent in such a way, as to make it functional for each generation of scientists. In a brief sketch, what this means is that since each generation of scientists experience the world in a different context with various conditions, the interpretative process bridges the chain from one generation to the next. The whole process of interpretation continues to include the interpretation of interpretation, in short, meta-interpretation. The sign, as a referent, takes on a multi-dimensional meaning. Since one generation can only elicit a limited number of meanings contained in a sign, precisely because of the mortality factor, interpretation helps to continue a chain of meanings. It is this chain of meanings that expresses the possibility of a transfinite basis for knowledge of a community of interpretation in each subsequent generation of scientists. In these matters, no doubt, Royce showed original insight and thereby was able to suggest a subtle connection between epistemology, logic, and human existence, or mortality.

Neither Kant nor Peirce addresses the problem of mortality of the individual scientist. Yet, this is exactly Royce's critique: on the one hand, Kant's epistemology cannot explain progress of accumulated knowledge in terms of Kuhnian Paradigm, because he holds on to his doctrine of the "thing-in-itself" which, he claims, we can never know. Thus, for Kant the "mortality of knowledge" of the transcendental subject is not seriously considered. For Peirce the thing-in-itself is a fiction, since Peirce rejects absolute truth and holds that truth can be acquired "in the long run".³¹ Here, Royce agrees, but insists that, if we can attain truth in the "long run", how is this truth transferred from one generation to the next? Royce also rejects the Kantian "thing-in-itself", but on different grounds than Peirce. For Royce knowledge is empirically mortal, but transcendently immortal. This means, again, rejecting Kant's idea that we can never know a thing as it really is, but only its representation. Royce holds that our empirical knowledge is real, but limited to the morality of the individual or a generation. Nevertheless, knowledge can go beyond its immediate morality within the process of interpretation of the facts, and result attained by a previous generation. Thus, for Royce interpretative knowledge is also transcendental knowledge in terms of a transcendental community of scientists.

The greatness of Royce lies in synthesizing the insights of the German idealistic tra-

³¹ VUC,24-26. Peirce seems to apply here the common American usage "in the long run" for the technical term 'probability'.

dition, the transcendental vision of Kant, despite his critique, and the conceptual pragmatism of C.S. Peirce thereby transforms several traditions in western philosophy into an existential pragmatic vision of transfinite epistemology. This was no small feat.

Abstract

The aim of the paper is the study of Royce's quest for an idea of a *structural epistemological* basis, in order to explain how the scientific knowledge of a generation of scientists is "transferred" to the next, so as to make scientific progress possible. In terms of epistemology the paper investigates how Royce expounds upon the Kantian dictum: "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind". As we shall see, Royce introduces the dimension of interpretation, besides concepts, and intuitions in order to find a "bridge" between a generation and the next one to transfer scientific knowledge. This confronts the systematic knowledge as the mortality and limitation of knowledge of the scientist as an individual and the possibility of extending and transferring his individual knowledge, to use J.E. Smith's term, as a base onto a "social infinite"; i.e. through the process of interpretation of subsequent generations of scientists as a community. Royce suggests Kant's well known notion of "intuition concept" paradigm and Peirce's concept of community of researchers be extended into infinite possibilities.