

A New Look at Known Issues¹

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Adam Riggio and Steve Fuller’s discussion—over Fuller’s *Knowledge: The Philosophical Quest in History* (2014)—involves us in the process of forming a new system of philosophical notions. Notions that, until recently, were perceived as basic and unchangeable, acquire quite different meanings and even get removed. During the discussion, many important ideas become problematic—which helps us understand the peculiarities of current thinking.

Fuller defends his views by relying on social epistemology (of which he is the founder). Indeed, an understanding of what it means for knowledge to be social allows us to see the main characteristics of Fuller’s thinking. I will allow myself to dwell briefly on the turn in thinking about scientific knowledge over the past few decades, which finds expression in a new interpretation of knowledge and important features, discussed by Riggio and Fuller. I am more familiar with Fuller’s ideas, so I find it easier to understand his position in this debate.

Science’s Social Characteristics

Both Riggio and Fuller have common basis for the justification of their positions. This basis comes out the turn to understanding the role of science’s social characteristics. We deal with the relationship between humans and the environment in any kind of science—be it the classical (analytical, academic), or postclassical. But, in classical science, we follow Descartes’ division (*res extensa* and the *res cogitans*) as a certain axiom that requires no proof. The natural world is silent, dead, colorless, soulless and indifferent to human existence. Our goal is to discover the laws that lie at the basis of material world and to use them in the creation of artificial environment incapable of thinking, like the stuff from which it is made. We want an objective knowledge that reproduces nature as an object of study and that obeys the same laws. The result of scientific investigation cannot contain any traces of thinking, because nature is unable to think (*res extensa*), and human thinking (*res cogitans*) exists all by itself, quite separate from the material world.

Postclassical science confronts us with a different situation. The scientific revolution of the early 20th century showed that it is impossible in quantum mechanics to get a result that would not contain the elements of the process of its production and, accordingly, the author of this process with their social and individual features. But, if cognitive activity does not remain outside the logical structure of the result obtained, it is possible to assume that some kind of thought exists in the material natural world, that it can be conceived as able to correspond with us at the level of its *birth*, of its creation by its author. Everything in the world can be considered a work of the art. Yet, one cannot understand a picture by a painter, or a symphony by a composer, as simply resulting from an artist’s effort. Understanding results from communication (not generalization) between

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you, as an author of the nascent knowledge, and the author of the subject of your research.

While, in classical science, one seeks to find the correspondence between measurable characteristics of the external world and the logical structure of knowledge (mathematical science), in postclassical science one tries to establish a mutual understanding of the scientist's thinking and the creative activity of the author of a thing. In classical science, everything (including humans) may be understood as a thing. In postclassical science everything may be understood as a conscious being.

If we agree that scientific investigation has its subject of study that must conform to the obtained result, we have to pay attention, first of all, to its processes—the *birth* of an explored object, to the beginning of its existence, to its history. Researchers in social epistemology are focused on the subjective pole. Social factors are not *external*, they play a crucial role in the logical structuring of a new scientific knowledge. This radical turn in the philosophy of science explains, to my mind, the interest in the *beginning* of science that is seen in the discussion of Fuller's book. From here, we can provide particular attention in the debate to such concepts as history, intuition, creation, God, context, individual and collective, and others.

On History

History for Fuller is not forward linear motion. "One should imagine that all the possible futures for philosophy are already inscribed in its past, albeit usually as unrealized potential, in which case re-examining the history of philosophy is never a waste of time" (KK, Part I). Fuller states this idea not for the first time. For instance, he studied the relationships between the discoveries of Boyle and Hobbes from this point of view. Fuller writes about his attitude to the history: "Navigating between possible worlds has been central to my own thinking over the past quarter-century or more, and it is developed in some detail in *Knowledge: The Philosophical Quest in History*" (KK, Part VIII). The ability to make a choice is the main point of the historical process, which defines its further development.

Fuller's considerations are very important, to my mind, for a new understanding of history, in general, and of the history of scientific knowledge, in particular. However, we should not forget that each of these points of choice do not represent ready-made variants of a possible future. The investigation by Fuller of the discoveries of Boyle and Hobbes testifies that this historical situation was formed by the context of that time, which included the knowledge of the past and of the future, too. More precisely, the issue is not about *knowledge* as such, but about the *possibility* to communicate with the past and future, wherein both sides are changed by this communication. Each paradigm (theory, system) can use these previously hidden possibilities. Such communication can occur only between *different* participants, each of whom has their own individuality—and pluralism inevitably lies at its base. It is not necessary to seek features common for all participants; on the contrary, only the preservation of singularity makes it possible to create logic of a new type that deals more with space than with time.

A *social* surrounding of a creative act plays quite a different role. Fuller continues to develop his understanding of the fundamental (in his opinion) question of social epistemology that he put in 1988:

How should the pursuit of knowledge be organized, given that under normal circumstances knowledge is pursued by many human beings, each working on a more or less well-defined body of knowledge and each equipped with roughly the same imperfect cognitive capacities, albeit with varying degree of access to one another's activities?

Now, after 27 years of the social epistemology's development, Fuller lends a different sense to the question: "How should the pursuit of knowledge be organized?" It is possible to suppose that the question is about an external social activity, which must organize scientific thinking. At least, that is a first impression.

Meanwhile, in the polemic with Riggio, Fuller is primarily concerned about the birth of a new knowledge in the head of a scientist. In this case, the second part of his "fundamental question" comes to the foreground. Indeed, there are many scientists and each of them has an access to a more or less defined body of knowledge. In the meantime, a new thought arises in *one* person's head, why not in *all* heads simultaneously?

Intuition, Exploration and Understanding

The role *intuition* plays, and the role of *God*, in the process of cognition is discussed vividly both by Fuller and Riggio. Classical (academic, analytical) thinking is adequate for scientific thinking. It is directed to the external world, to the *res extensa*, which has nothing common with a human as *res cogitans*. Now, the material world in a scientific laboratory and the knowledge about it obtained by a scientist become animate. Gradually, we begin to realize that nature is not indifferent to our activity (for instance, ecological problems), that it can answer us.

We seek, then, not only to *explore*, but also to *understand* the world around us. Ethical issues are becoming more important. Not only do *we* suffer, because we are losing necessary resources, but *nature* also suffers as it has the ability to feel and understand. It has its own author or creator. Riggio writes:

Human suffering in all its forms is the heart of the most powerful weakness of theodicy, particularly the ethical dimensions of the order of the universe. The optimism of theodicy is also its cruelty. Suffering and pain has its place in the overall fabric of the universe such that it is justified in the ultimate outcome (KK, Part III).

Fuller has a different opinion about theodicy:

'God's sense of justice' (the literal meaning of 'theodicy') has always fascinated me, largely because it seems to be the ideal perspective from which understand human rationality as something fallible yet aspirational.

We can understand the bad things that happen to us as episodes in learning to get somewhere better” (KK, Part III).

In this way, Fuller understands the bond between good and evil. I would talk about this bond somewhat differently. We know that one of the Biblical Old Testament commandments is: Thou shalt not kill. It is not a law that cannot be broken. In some cases you even have to kill, defending a child for instance, or to kill an enemy in a just war. But the readiness to do this “need not be something imposed from the outside (even by God) but can—and should—be something that is voluntarily assumed on one’s own part” (KK, Part III). I agree completely with Fuller. But all the same, I would like to add that a man, well-intentioned in killing somebody, must remember that a murder is always an evil—even in cases when we can say that the end justifies the means. We may talk in the same way about our rational thinking.

Currently, the trend is becoming dominant to consider every notion (thing) keeping in mind its dependence on the context of its origin, and, therefore, on its individual features. At the same time, you must avoid empiricism and relativism. For this you need to have a logical system, which is created not on the basis of generality, but on the preservation of differences. Despite the difference of contexts, we are talking about one and the same thing. For instance we see, at first, a wild duck in the sky; then, the duck being killed by a hunter, the duck being sold on the market, the duck being prepared in kitchen and so on. Every time the context creates another image of a duck, but we are sure that we deal with a duck and not with something else. The same thing happens with our perception of evil. To kill the child, and to kill the one who kills the child, are totally different things. The actions are different and our attitude towards them are the opposite. Yet, we must remember that murder remains evil.

A tendency to attach utmost importance to temporary conditions plays a role in theology too. Some theologians are of the opinion that religion is perceived by believers in a different way depending on who translated the Bible in what historical period. The differences are so significant, in their opinion, that doubt appears as if there is something permanent behind all the variants of translations, whether God exists. I can refer to the conference on this topic (see *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World* edited by Frederic Burnham), where many participants supported this view. I believe that the possibility to use the notion (or some text) in many situations demonstrates its stability, its ability to communicate with a large number of interlocutors.

Of course, I refer only to the issues discussed by Riggio and Fuller that seem especially important. But I would like to emphasize that all problems that were raised are closely connected with each other. This indicates the formation of a quite new *system* of thinking.

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