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# The Loss of Surveyability

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## 1. Diagnosis

If we want to characterize the situation of the contemporary world, we can use the formula “loss of surveyability”; which is not only a problem of our everyday life but also a problem in political decisions. It is destructive for private decisions and dangerous for the political situation of the world because overcompensation leads people to follow extreme positions in politics and in the private lifestyle. It has introduced a lot of uncertainty into our public and private life. Therefore, the political outcome of European culture, the liberal democracy, is in danger to be destroyed. However, the decline of western culture is dangerous for the whole world because the globalization, which is actually a westernization of the world, connects cultures in a specific way.

In general, the *loss of surveyability* can be regarded as a result of the development of the European culture. By doing so, we could differ between internal and external reasons. As internal reasons we can define the change of the role of western sciences. External reasons are rather challenges of dealing with phenomena of interculturality due to the manifoldness of cultures and life-worlds which we encounter in a multicultural world. On the other hand, a constructive-realistic way of dealing with multiculturalism offers a fruitful way to overcome some of the major problems of Western thinking, which resulted in the so-called loss of surveyability.

### A) Internal reasons

In the last 2500 years philosophy has had fundamental importance and different functions for the development of western culture. In the early Greek times it led to the exodus from the *mythos to rationality* in the form of logos: the visual identification of mythos and world including society has been transformed to a linguistic identification. That traces back to Parmenides whose formulation “noein kai einai tauton” (Parmenides 2016), which means “thinking and being identical”<sup>1</sup> has become of axiomatic character for Western science. Its main idea was that knowledge should be the

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1. It actually does not say “is” identical or “should” be identical, rather just “thinking and being identical” (see Parmenides 2016).

mirror of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Another – social – aspect of the thinking structure of the mythos which went the way from Parmenides to Plato and remained important until the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the one that fundamental insight is only accessible to chosen people and not to the ordinary man. In this way, philosophy (and in later times logics) has become a legitimation as normative instance. The conviction that philosophy is a normative instance survived until the last century. Its consequence, which we experience up to these days, is the tendency to delegate problemsolving to experts of different highly specialized disciplines. From a historico-cultural point of view we can state that the increased professionalization and specialization of various disciplines is connected to the Christian reinterpretation of Platonism; with the effect that the level of expertise is implicitly regarded as *nearness to God*. The so-called specialization of various disciplines is however one reason for the phenomenon of loss of surveyability. Professionalization in the best case only leads to a pseudo-surveyability which in fact causes just the opposite.

Against this background, the history of western philosophy can be regarded as a history of self-destruction; from the beginning with the Presocratic thinkers like Parmenides until the end of the last century. We can observe such a development when specific disciplines – due to their separateness – are built on various doubtful presuppositions and therefore show a highly speculative character.

Although some deficiencies of this concept became already visible in the early historical time of western thinking, European philosophy paved the way to modern science; not at least by the establishment of separated disciplines. René Descartes and Isaac Newton are central figures in this context. They developed the logical and ontological presuppositions for *modern* science; e.g. for physics. Descartes questioned given foundations of philosophy, like religious beliefs, and therefore introduced the need of legitimation, which became paradigmatic for Western thinking. Trying to find a doubtless foundation for his philosophical approach, he referred to the thinking ego. By stating “*cogito ergo sum*” he deduced the existence of a thinking *mind*. However, regarding this approach we face some problems. On the one hand, it is trivial to claim that who *thinks* must also be. On the other hand, it is not clear why to deduce the existence of *mind* from a thinking something. Obviously, Descartes’ mistake was to identify an activity with *essence*, respectively a *single acting* with a general essence or quality. However, that mistake was the starting point for the development of Europe’s first explicit ontology which, as is known, differed between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*; which again lead to fundamental problems. Even when we accept that there is a *res cogitans* (because of the fact that we think), it is still not clear whether there really is

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2. This conviction survived up to the point when descriptivism died within the last century. Descriptivism just could not be managed and finally turned out to be a metaphysical fantasy. Until the 20th century the equation *science=truth* was believed by almost any intellectual in Europe, for example by the so-called Vienna Circle, which in the end showed that this is impossible. According to the epistemological standpoint of Constructive Realism, science cannot be understood as a mirror of the world, but rather as a construct which replaces some aspects of the world by technical reasons.

*res extensa*. However, without an adequate legitimation for the real existence of *res extensa*, the preservation of the concept of knowledge was impossible. For this reason the proofs of existence of God played a major role in Descartes' concept of knowledge. In order to be able to know that *res extensa* really exists, Descartes' finally referred to the existence of God, which guarantees the preservation of knowledge; as an indefinite being (God) would not deceive. Regarding Descartes' point of departure, to question religious belief, it is quite irritating that he took such a path to solve the philosophical problems of his ontology. Still, Descartes' philosophy had a widespread influence on the Western thinking in general and on Western science in specific. It became the foundation of Newton's concept of physics, which again was of huge influence for the major part of what was or still is called science in Europe. (cf. Wallner 2017)

Immanuel Kant was aware of some problematic aspects of modern science and tried to solve them by his endeavor to *take metaphysics into the way of science*: "Metaphysik in den Gang einer Wissenschaft bringen" (Kant 1989). In this context, it is interesting that Kant's attempt to demarcate science from religion was not only motivated to create a space for faith. Put this way, the function of religion is neither exclusively to guide morals nor to just ground science but mainly to restrict science. The restriction of science by demarcating it from religion is a necessity to make science comprehensible, which is again a condition for surveyability. Surveyability is just impossible without comprehensibility which again is impossible without restriction of science. That means, the restriction of science is also needed in order to ground science.

Somehow the opposite, to ground scientificity out of science, was the approach of the Vienna Circle. The Vienna Circle (VC) can be regarded as the last influential intellectual movement which tried to create surveyability based on pure scientificity. The idea was to justify science based on the role of an indubitable observer, which together with logics should enable *perfect science*. Regarding the fact that one of the VC's main ideas was to eliminate metaphysics from science (in order to enable pure science), it is somehow ironical that its approach failed due to its implicit metaphysical presuppositions: it was built on metaphysical ideas of transcendental philosophy and therefore demonstrates a sad end of the attempts to justify science by itself. The last battle for a scientific worldview failed because the idea of the pure observer does only work based on the presupposition that there is a transcendental form of rationality. Using Kant's terminology it becomes clear that such a transcendental rationality is only accessible when there is something like a transcendental ego, which must somehow be identical with the *real* reality of the *thing in itself* ("Ding an sich"). Otherwise it would not be clear how to proof that the scientific *objects* are *really* identical with its observation by a (human) subject.

The consequence of the VC's failure to establish a unified (pure) science, grounded on scientificity, goes hand in hand with the loss of the concern to make the world comprehensible. Although science offered some rich results by a lot of different methodological approaches, it cannot offer comprehensibility. That means that the so-called rich progress of knowledge is by bad luck not knowledge under the concept of European philosophy.

Science nowadays just offers problem solving but not a way of understanding of the reality or the world. We can formulate it in this way: the idea of pure science is lost and replaced by the concept of applied science. By doing so, the core idea of European science is lost: to make the world understandable by reasoning or by scientific research. Science has become an instance which offers the possibility to improve the life, to take away problems which are disturbing the personal life or society and politics – but that is rather technique than science.

Science in the western sense needs reasoning and understanding. But as we already stated, in order to reason science, we have to refer to a sphere which is not part of the science. If we have no demarcation criterion, we cannot choose and so we lose the possibility for rational decisions. The consequence is that science becomes borderless and feasibility replaces understanding – or in other words: the loss of *surveyability*. However, if we lose surveyability by the loss of a demarcation criterion, this is a fertile ground for ideology and radicalism.

## **B) External reasons**

Some might argue, that one of the external reasons for the loss of *surveyability* in general and the understanding of science in specific can be seen in the manifoldness of cultures. However, from the point of view of Constructive Realism, the opposite is the case. The manifoldness of cultures is rather considered as condition of understanding science.

The problem about science in the framework of globalization is that the manifoldness of cultures is not appropriately taken into account, as intercultural understanding of science only takes place on a trivial level by not questioning the presuppositions of the other and the own culture.

Therefore, one can say that the international success of western science started with the destruction of scientific insights. In this situation, western science supposedly became more and more structurally free and therefore applicable for different cultures; or in another formulation: its intercultural success is based on the loss of insight in its own cultural conditions. The influence of Western science in different not European cultures more and more destroyed their own structures because Western science was convincing by its supposedly supra-cultural importance. In other words, western science is so successful in other cultures because it has lost its own cultural dependency.

What can we do in this situation? It is clear, that the appeal to the own culture does not help. A retreat to the values of the own culture does not work, much more it increases the problem. According to our opinion and our intercultural experiences, there still is a successful strategy to deal with this problem: the *constructive-realist* strategy of *strangification*. It does not claim a comparison between cultures or for a compromise between different cultures. It claims the study of the difference - the incompatibility of the structure of other cultures. Strangification needs a lot of intellectual work - the comparative cultural research clearly cannot solve the problem because it has the methodological burden that it is dependent on Western science. The method of strangification has the preference to make the differences visible which is clearly increasing

the work of scientific research on cultures. By taking concepts and argumentation structures into the framework of the other culture and vice versa we can become clear about the real differences between these two cultures. Besides, we can become clear about what we presuppose in our culture if we use a specific concept and what the others are presupposing within their argumentation. Put this way, a multicultural world is not the reason for losing surveyability but rather the condition for overcoming the loss of surveyability; provided that we have adequate methodological prerequisites.

## 2. Methodological prerequisites. guidance by Constructive Realism

The Viennese school of Constructive Realism is an epistemological position which was mainly developed within the 1980's and 1990's in order to overcome fundamental problems of philosophy of science; which became even more fundamental against the background of globalization and the manifoldness of cultures. Its central methodology is the one of *strangification*, which helps to enable a way of surveyability. (Cf. Wallner 1997)

Karl Raimund Popper showed that the Vienna Circle's methodology – of *verification* – does not work to legitimate knowledge; not at least due to its implicit metaphysical presupposition of the possibility of an absolute truth. Popper then introduced the methodology of *falsification*, which does not claim to grasp truth but implicitly presupposes the possibility of getting closer to the truth by each *falsification* (cf. Popper 2002). Therefore, Constructive Realism (CR) replaces the methodology of *falsification* by *strangification*, which even negates the possibility of getting closer to the truth (about the reality). However, to understand CR as a cultural relativism is a misunderstanding. Denying the possibility of an absolute truth is not per se *relativism*. Rather, relativism implicitly presupposes that there exists an Archimedian point of view, from which someone would be able to guarantee that everything is in fact *relative*. If relativism does not presuppose the universal validity of its own position, it consequently has to relativize itself. (Cf. Annerl 1993, Singer 2005, Beck 2009, Brousek 2017) At a first glance, this does not seem to help for overcoming the loss of surveyability. However, in fact it does. The methodology of *strangification* can be understood as a form of translation of different constructions of reality. Whereas a universalist standpoint would deny the possibility of different *true* descriptions of the world, the relativist standpoint would accept the idea of different descriptions, rather understood as constructions, but deny their commensurability. However, the consequent self-relativization of relativism opens the field for *strangification*. We neither have a guaranty for the existence of only one absolute truth, nor an absolute guaranty that different constructions of reality cannot be compared, but we have the possibility to *strangify* – culturally as well as disciplinary – different constructions of reality. *Strangification* means to take a sentence of one sentence of a – culturally or disciplinary – context and put it into a different – *strange* – context. In a first step, such a *strangification* will cause confusion; due to the fact that the two contexts do not share the same presuppositions. However, by going further we can reveal these implicit presuppositions of both

contexts and so we learn to better understand under which circumstances specific constructions do work and make sense.

By means of the methodology of strangification CR is taking the culture into their own rights and by this way it enables us to understand the restrictions by truth which we have in our cultural concept and which are the restrictions of truth in the concepts of another culture. If we use this strategy consequently, we can see what are the borders of our convictions as well as of our scientific results; respectively which are the conditions under which our results are true and under which conditions they are wrong. This means not at least that strangification can help us to handle the problem of surveyability.

In order to better understand how different true constructions of reality can be possible and how strangification works, someone might need to understand the ontology of CR. In terms of ontology Constructive Realism differs between three realms: firstly, *Wirklichkeit* as the ontological condition for (scientific) activity or quasi the *natural* world, secondly *Reality* as the – artificial – product of (scientific) construction and thirdly *Life-world* (*Lebenswelt*) as the world of historically and culturally constructed beliefs we live in and which we usually do not question. In short, (scientific) construction of reality works in the way that we construct *microworlds*, which can be understood as – technically functioning – sub-areas of *Reality*; quasi against the resistance of *Wirklichkeit*. However, once a microworld works, some aspects of *Wirklichkeit* are transformed into *Reality*. From the point of view of CR, scientific conduct can be understood as replacement of aspects of – natural – *Wirklichkeit* by – artificial – *Reality*, respectively specific microworlds. Therefore, science can also be grasped as the transformation from nature into culture. Put this way, we can better understand why different cultural backgrounds lead to different forms of construction of reality. However, this is not the reason for losing surveyability. As pointed out, it is rather the condition for overcoming its loss, which is caused by the implicit idea of Western science, that there must be just one correct way for grasping the world.

### 3. Conclusion – surveyability by strangification

The goal cannot be the establishment of a unified world culture which was the attempt of the Vienna Circle. Rather, we have to keep the different cultures alive in order to have instances for processes of strangification. Only at first glance, the manifoldness of medical systems implies a loss of surveyability. But on closer inspection, we can understand (the restrictions of) the different medical systems when we are able to strangify them against each other. (See e.g. Wallner 2006, 2009)

According to our research, unification makes the science dependent on metaphysics. In this sense, the Vienna Circle with its attempt of a unified science, made the concept of science dependent upon metaphysics. This does not mean that we have to fight metaphysics but of course we have to overcome the delusion that we could presuppose just one specific metaphysics as

true for the whole world; which is again a specific metaphysical approach. The fact that different cultures have different metaphysical presuppositions enable us to better understand their strengths and weaknesses. The weakness of the Western philosophy is the try to create surveyability by a unified world.

The relation between cultures is to be regarded as a partnership with the aim to strangify cultures against each other. In this sense, the most interesting point about e.g. cultural studies is not the content of their scientific sentences but rather the presuppositions which are mirrored in these sentences.

Therefore, we need ways to escape from the restrictions of our own culture, in order to be able to live in and with other cultures. We will of course not be able to free ourselves from our cultural background. By means of strangification we can create (more) open spaces which enable us to have more possibilities for decisions; in private life as well as in the political sphere. By this procedure, we cannot overcome the lack of surveyability by one strike, but we can avoid that the loss of surveyability destroys our communication and our private as well as our political life conditions. Put this way, the conclusion might be that surveyability cannot be given, but rather is a task which is to be worked on permanently.

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