

## A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CRITIQUE OF REFORMED EUROPEAN EDUCATION<sup>46</sup>

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### Abstract

*The authoress deals with the state of university education nowadays. Starting from theory of miseducation, she discusses the phenomena that have appeared within education as a consequence of European educational politics and developmental movements of contemporary civilization. In this context, special critical attention is paid to the notion of “learning society” and the related terms: IT society, knowledge management and knowledge economization. The antique idea of education, humanistic concept of education and the character of today’s education are compared in the paper. The course of movement of the idea of educatedness is analysed that headed towards obliterating of the paradigms that had been established by educational tradition and which have experienced its negation through the form of modern semi-educatedness and today’s miseducatedness.*

**Key words:** *education, knowledge, spirit, information, humanism*

### Introductory considerations

The paper deals with philosophy of education in its conceptualization implying critical discourse in regard to European higher education. To say the truth, it could be understood as a delayed reaction to what belongs to the very fundament of a human being, but which nevertheless managed to impose itself and enter university life, or as an intellectual compensation for the lacking broader discussion that should have preceded the adoption of the reform. However, if one is aware that the decision on the changes in higher education has been made at political (ministry) level, it is not surprising that we are faced with the lack of deeper spiritual purport of the idea of education reform. It is beyond dispute that it has been missing, thus equally effecting all those involved, regardless of whether we are referring to the settings where it was being prepared along with significant financial investments, or the fact that it was hastily approved by political powers, after the ostensible academic debate which had been over even before it actually began.

It has seemed that those settings in which dominant political dimension was permeated by the ideology of European way, would also confirm their loyalty to strivings

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for European values thus getting closer to European spirit, if they accept this segment of European reality, as well. For the absurd to be even greater, what was known about the given project was rather vague so that the interpretations of the law were mostly wrong and ambiguous, even though groups of expert exegetes, various commissions and councils have been formed to explicate it. Caught by the new rules of work and “business”, scientific and teaching workers have been pushed into the machine of accreditation, evaluation, categorization, standardization, which has become a part of their “everyday university life”.

### **“Knowledge Society” Phenomenon**

More than any other anthropological phenomenon, education has so far shown amenability to reforms. Even though originally the notion of a reform denoted rehabilitation of original form, restoration, renewal of the lost values, in the meaning time it has acquired a completely different meaning. The latest reform has in the very announcement of its establishment developed a radically opponent attitude towards traditional educational paradigms, aiming at their complete suppression. Viewing them as outlived, stereotypical, fossilized spiritual forms, it has radically clashed them, in order to show its own futuristic commitment in being strictly distanced from them. Nothing has been emphasized by the reform so boastfully as its openness and harmonisation with the demands of the future (Liessmann, 2006: 139). All that has been recognized and announced as future perspective by the existing spirit of time has been accepted as a challenge of a novelty. Today’s reformers do not lack boldness to get to grips with changes taking turns rapidly, without fear or responsibility for what they might bring about. What lies beyond the euphoria of permanent reform is the belief that “reform can also be reformed” so that there should be no reservations about the issue of the character of reforms or whether it is justifiable to introduce them.

The concept of new education has also inaugurated new aims of educational practice, for which care has been taken by its advocates in the roles of educational politicians, university reformers, EU trustees to find new words and coins wanting to emphasize new features of education. In his polemical attitude towards the existing European educational politics Liessmann has put accent on one of these coins known as “knowledge society” and the related terms like: mobility, flexibility, informativeness, innovativeness. The first association appearing when the term knowledge society is used is a community where knowledge is raised to the position of highest value functioning at the principle of reasonable thinking, prudent action, wise conduct and humane relationships. If we do not allow to be dazzled by what in its manifested form is intended to be shown as a knowledge society, we will be able to look deeper and get a glimpse of knowledge which does not match the notion of the category which used to be nurtured in European spiritual heritage. For the paradox to be even greater what should be the main purpose and content of knowledge, i.e. finding truth, is considered redundant. An emphasis has been put on learning, but not learning developing the organ for scientific thinking, volition to search for and find the truth and to strive for self-change, but on learning according to which a given content is passively acquired, remaining beyond analytical-synthetic activity, beyond deeper influence on the inner being of the one who is learning. Learning promoted by knowledge society is not turned to practising the methods of thinking, examination and judgement, but to the demanding market of changing knowledge, which, in order to survive, has to encourage permanent readiness for learning so that it could project its

ultimately instrumentalized function through the so called program of lifelong learning (Günther Anders 1986, 120)

In its original form the idea could be found in Aristotle (Αριστοτέλης) and his statement: “The greatest good for a man is in the work of spirit leading to its virtue, and if there is more than one spiritual virtue, towards its best and most perfect one and throughout life” (Aristotle, 2001: 1099b). The attitude unambiguously and definitely refers to learning which essentially comes from within as a need and a duty of a man to work on himself, empowering the strength of the mind, developing ability of spiritual perception, practicing reasonable volition and forming spirit. The best indicator showing that through the process of learning the natural strive for knowledge is fulfilled is the life of such people who do not look for pleasure as some kind of a decorative pendant, but have pleasure in themselves. Do today’s actors and participants in lifelong learning think so? Is there any room for pleasure in the activity which is not a choice of the soul choosing its best affinity, but coming from the outer world as a threat for one’s job and a demand to survive in the market, making it appropriate for the parameter of flexibility and mobility so that it could last? Permanent professional development is an extorted adjustment to easily changeable market relations and technical innovations which in the current epoch have nothing to do with Aristotle’s understanding of the notion of wisdom as a unity of theoretical knowledge and practical experience, created in the course of lifelong refinement of spirit.

Three types of knowledge can be abstracted in knowledge society: informational, entertainment-sensational and expert knowledge. Information permeates all three types and it is so dominant that it is not a rare case that knowledge society is identified with informational society. The basic characteristic of informational knowledge is its unambiguous directedness towards purpose (Kastberger, 2008). In this context its value is also assessed according to the degree of its utility. Measured by this parameter, those types of knowledge are accepted which are evaluated as desirable, having in mind the possibility to address certain needs or meet certain targets imposed by a concrete situation. An essential feature of informational knowledge is its abundance and extensiveness which brings any man need for knowledge to despair, having in mind that in the general flood by information puts a man in the position to ask himself – what to choose out of the offered, which selection criteria to establish, i.e. “what has to be known”? As a consequence, there is a paradox that quantitative possibilities for knowledge acquisition are in almost opposite proportional relationship to what is really known. This is best shown through the formation of a modern “data bank”. They could be of technical use in offering certain administrative services, providing a fast insight into certain data, but these are not the places where knowledge is stored, but where data are accumulated. Knowledge cannot in ready form be displaced from the outer storage and through information memorization preserved in the memory of a data base. Such knowledge is not real, due to the fact that it cannot provide an answer to the question “what something is and why it is what it is”. “Knowledge cannot be consumed, places of education cannot be companies providing services and knowledge adjustment cannot madly follow since this is simply not possible without thinking. This is why knowledge cannot be managed in business manner... Particulars and notions become knowledge only when it is possible to interconnect them according to logical and consistent criteria so that they result in meaningful and verifiable interrelation (Liessmann, Ibidem, 27). The changes in understanding of knowledge are directly related to the transformation of “industrial society” into the “society of knowledge industry” when industrial worker was

replaced by knowledge worker, preoccupied by production and distribution of knowledge.<sup>48</sup> Due to superficial understanding of knowledge, the protagonists and planners of education are not able to come out with an idea of education; they rather remain imprisoned by the spirit of time “without courage to step out of self-distorted consciousness” and through the power of their own thinking overcome the limitations of the existing (Kant, 1974: 43). In general industrialization of knowledge a special type of fragmentary knowledge has been filtered whose carriers as multi-experts do not hesitate to show it in sensational-entertaining way and through media attention provide their promoters with great profit. The trend of knowledge socialization, its acquisition by a broad range of people, as well as bringing science closer to all people, under the motto *popular science, science through play*, has formed various models of attractive presentation of knowledge with an aim to show scientific knowledge in entertaining-trivial way, which is always at the border of comical. Such types of seemingly-educative knowledge launched through advertising-media and populist scene are a special way of knowledge metamorphosis and distortion of its true nature and role.

#### **Self-educatedness – Semi-educatedness – Uneducatedness**

Theoretical knowledge encompassed by *prima philosophia* and elevated by antique educatedness to the level of supreme life (*bios theoretikos*), as a privilege of rare minds liberated for the truth about ultimate things, has systematically been suppressed under the breakthrough of particular-pragmatic knowledge. Even though it caused contempt of extreme scientists at the time it was uttered, Hegel’s standpoint that *A nation without metaphysics is like a temple without a shrine* has nowadays brought us closer to understanding of existing epochal situation created as a consequence of meta-knowledge devaluation. The change permeating the deepest structure of scientific knowledge was pointed out by Heidegger in his lecture *Vulnerability of Science* (1937/8) suggesting: “The most severe vulnerability of today’s science is in that it is so well off at the moment as it has never been before, i.e. in that it confirms itself and drives itself by the progress it ensures on its own. This is a sign that it does not stand in truth and that it has denied essential knowledge – in spite of all worldly robes covering benefits of science (Heidegger 2006: 322). It is not knowledge if it is transformed into one-dimensional, instrumental experience. Such knowledge can easily become the means of economization viewed as goods that should be produced, sold or purchased as a resource of future. It is nowadays recognized in the form of “managerial knowledge” whose acceptability is measured according to the level of being appropriate for and adjusted to market laws. Deeper changes have started to affect education only when scientific knowledge with significantly changed notional determination has become superordinate to philosophy, when factual, particular insight has taken over the insight into the whole. Philosophy has tried to build necessary legitimacy in relation to sciences in self-defence of all of them until Hegel and Shelling. These were the efforts to reconcile the heritage of metaphysics with the spirit of modern science (Gadamer, 1981: 11). However, having entered the age of positivism starting from Comte, scientific feature of philosophy has assumed merely academic matter without full seriousness. This is when the culture of its vital spiritual fields has been deprived: religion,

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<sup>48</sup> For more details, see: Drucker, Peter: *Was ist Management?* Munchen, 2002.

philosophy and creativity, having given place to various materialistic and hedonistic variants showing receptiveness for economic-technological spirit. Disastrous effects of such currents were felt by great minds of contemporary age, ranging from Spengler, who marked technical civilization as an artificial state appearing after existence, to Berdyaev (Бердяев), who through his mystical-apocalyptic view evoked the vision of a breakdown of civilization as an inevitable consequence of dissolution of the faith in God and, as a consequence, of a man, as well (2006:17). Thus the new age, sublime celebration of creations of science has turned into celebration of the power to enslave nature, world and man, while the idea of logos, ontologically-axiologically structured in antique philosophy, has been reduced to strict rationality separated from sensitivity and creative intuition. New existential situation can be well described according to an example of today's man who is burdened by the established aims and how fast he is moving towards their realization. The paradox is that he constantly thinks that the faster he goes, the further he is from his aim, ultimately resulting in pathological fear that others will reach the aim sooner. Fundamental fear of our epoch is encapsulated in the maxim – We must not lose the connection: either with globalization or with international development... Others have gone further, we have to follow them. Such a strive to catch up those who are faster, who are always ahead is distancing us from the life itself, from the presence and makes us unhappy (Liessmann, 2007).

The breakthrough of empirical knowledge has brought about the prevalence of *poietika episteme*, i.e. knowledge, which is, according to Aristotle's view, having in mind its lack of inner purpose and directedness to object creation, evaluated as instrumental. In the conditions having purely technical features, it has opened up possibilities for fast and massive production of consumer goods, having brought about the multiplication of artificial needs and thus to the distortion of its original purpose. As a consequence of going beyond the limits of existential moderation, today we are facing the syndrome of uncontrolled consumption, which is a symbol of modern "consumption slavery" which hurts less than classical slavery, but has the same consequences, i.e. a man deprived of his dignity and identity.

The expansion of object knowledge has produced the spread of the idea of the society of experts where we turn to an expert and ask him to unburden us from practical, political, economic decisions we should make. "In the technical ruling of social currents, an expert is a necessary figure – his position can now be described as what once used to be craftsmanship. The expert should replace practical and social experience. This is the expectation the society projects on him he, in his sober and methodical self-evaluation and sincere belief, is not able fulfil" (Gadamer, 1981: 38). An expert is not educated, he is trained, he acquires knowledge and skills that can be applied in performance of certain functions, most often consulting ones, implying the implementation of manipulative practice in exercising powerful influence on public opinion. This is a distorted picture of an educated person who, having in mind that he acquires his knowledge from the outer world, remains out of the real educational process, since his personality remains unchanged.

Who stands in the centre of antique and humanistic concept of education is a self-educated man who takes care of his gifts and the feeling of inner connectedness; he develops them to the extent of his full personal growth, acting responsibly towards his talents. The paradigm of such a project is education as a medium in which spirit is educated. In the basis of such education is the demand for truth articulated through art,

religion, science as objectified objection of spirit. If spirit is understood as an idea that can be educated and education as a phenomenon not strange to it or given from the outer world, any banishment of philosophy from science and culture can be explicated as denying education. Abolishment of spirit takes place when education is mediated through imposed necessity. What Nietzsche has to say about this type of education is the following: "I for my own part know of only two exact contraries: institutions for teaching culture and institutions for teaching how to succeed in life. All our present institutions belong to the second class; but I am speaking only of the first."<sup>49</sup>

The issue imposing in the general race for as broad education as possible refers to the motive of education. Antique education practice testifies on education as a free act, learning as a thoughtful encounter of spirit, a virtue as a product of unconditioned work on oneself. In such a horizon of liberation from the externally imposed obligation of learning, of undisturbed personal choice of a teacher, an individual turned to education was able to truly advance. Nowadays the "schools of life misfortunes" have been multiplied according to the multiplication of socially-existential misfortunes. The institutions offering a shelter from life scarcity, where one looks for a refuge from existential fears, which are not places of leisure, focus, contemplation and thinking, cannot be real places of education (Nietzsche, 2005: 220). Theoretical conception of education is necessarily involved in critical comparison between antique education as a unity of being educated and honourable, the new age idea which was building an ideal of humanistic education and today's concept of education which has developed in the sharp opposition towards the traditional one. The course of development of European idea of education has moved from educatedness, through semi-educatedness to uneducatedness. Unlike antique education which had been established according permanent spiritual striving for reaching a paradigm set by mind, not deviating from ideals, humanistic concept of education has changed in its act of realizations. It is beyond dispute that, relying on classical antique culture, it has contributed to the creation of significant works of literature, philosophy, visual arts, and music in formation of civil middle class as elite part of civil-humanistic society. However, in time the lass has abandoned and distorted the original educational norm, so that it does not accept education itself as a value, but as a possibility to obtain position and acknowledgement in society. In such a way the original ideal of civil education has been transformed into notion of semi-education which was theoretically developed by Adorno. The essence of the notion is in the hybridism arising out of non-understanding of the real nature of education, creating a difference between rhetorical and factual, normative and real. According to the concept of semi-education, education means "semi-understood and semi-experienced education". As such it is not an introduction into education, it is not pre-educational level and it does not have propedeutic character; it is rather a hybrid idea of education living its objectified form at the expense of the truth contained by it. Semi-educatedness is not a stadium where spirit alienation ends. What comes after it is uneducatedness. While in the former spirit is objectified, in the latter it is abolished. However, uneducatedness does not mean the lack of knowledge, but the lack of truth; not the lack of information, but the lack of argumentation; not the lack of aggregated data, but

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<sup>49</sup> A part of a lecture delivered by Nietzsche at the University in Basel in 1872 *On the future of our educational institutions*.

the lack of their synthetic connectedness into a whole. Knowledge in the form of information and unrelated data is even excessive, to such an extent that at the moment it has a status of knowing a lot with the tendency to get transferred into knowing all.

### **Reformed Education**

If we ask ourselves when the contemporary European education started to adopt the character of uneducatedness, when it stated devaluating the idea of university education, it seems inevitable to remind ourselves of the idea of educational politicians to create a unique framework of European higher education aiming at facilitating diploma recognition, which was adopted in the form of Sorbonne Declaration in 1998. The suggestion turned out to be a good way of stimulating mobility of teachers and students, as well as mutual recognition of diplomas according to the criteria of comparability of the quality of a study program. Not later than the following year, without the necessary and along with the barely noticeable public discussion, it was accepted as a part of a concept of a new mandatory organization of European higher education space.

The main characteristic of programming and projecting the reform was the odium towards everything that carried a character of traditional educational values. The concept of educational changes should have proven its *novum* in being radically distanced and different from everything which used to be applied in higher education practice so far. The fact that the structure of knowledge society has been developed in the correlation with the structure of technological-informatics society has made the reasons of unification of national academic communities under the patronage of European community more clear, but not justified. Frequently used arguments in favour of reforms have involved newly formed terms like: mobility, quality insurance and quality control, achievement, efficacy, competition, standardization. Up to now, not one of the ideas of university education or education in general contained these terms as a measure of academic work quality. What is essential is that all these terms do not encode what evokes the meaning of these words, while hiding what they actually induce. Having this in mind, subjected to contemporary evaluation criteria, I. Kant could not have count on academic advancement. According to his example it is possible to see the meaninglessness of all the conditions imposed on modern university teachers, having in mind that in his work and life he embodied exactly what would not meet today's evaluation demands (Liessmann, 2006: 77). Before all, Kant would not have met the condition of mobility, nowadays implying various exchanges of professors with the status of emeritus, professional development abroad, professional scholarships, having in mind that he spent whole his life working in his born town, Königsberg.

The race and the competition in regard to who will spend more time abroad have become main indicators of international status of university workers. Apart from the total immobility which contributed to Kant's lack of international experience, he would not fulfilled another significant condition and it is publishing of scientific papers in certain time interval. Publication of two papers in the period of ten years would, according to today's evaluation, certainly have been below any threshold of the proclaimed scientific and research efficacy. However, after all this time of what had seemingly been "leisure" and passivity, *The Critique of Pure Reason* appeared, showing that all these years actually were the most prolific years of Kant's philosophical contemplation. It could not happen today to a scientist working at higher education institution not to publish papers for such a

long period of time; as a consequence, it is also not possible for him to conduct such serious and far-reaching research demanding long-lasting commitment and persistence in research. The one who would dare to do so would have to be aware of the evaluation consequences of such a choice. The phenomenon of meeting the need of quantity in order to satisfy the demand for “quality insurance” has led to such amount of published papers that reaches the ranges of inflation. The pressure of evaluation has made such an attack on the freedom and ethos of work of scientific workers that it has resulted not only in self-understanding acceptance and adjustment to the established standards but also in the emphasized anticipation of new demands and expectations which would be useful to meet in advance. Therefore, even though the presence of the *science citation index* and the improvement of the *journal impact factor* are not sufficiently adequate criteria to measure real value of scientific achievements, they are nevertheless the factors significantly determining and directing the work of scientists which is, unfortunately, much less devoted to finding out the truth and much more turned to survival on scientific scene.

It is interesting that such type of a *paid scientist*, as it has been called by Schiller<sup>50</sup>, existed even in the time of the mentioned author, recognized in scientific circles through being occupied with their status, rather than scientific insights. Such type of scientist has survived in the new form of “scientific manager” who, to say the truth, is modified according to new spirit of the time, but with the preserved main motive of scientific engagement. In spite of the fact that “scientists” of all profiles have the possibility to place their “scientific services”, we will deal with several most striking types. First of all, those among them could be the so called “strategists of social development”, engaged through managing functions in ministry organs and university bodies for implementation of measures and decisions of current politics. Then there are “expert knowers” familiar with social-political problem matter, acting in apologetically positivistic manner with the aim to preserve the current ideology at all the places where they have, not accidentally, found themselves, carrying out managerial-advisory role in a variety of bodies, commissions, councils, committees... However, the most successful among such “scientists” at the “knowledge market” are those oriented towards the field of natural and applied sciences, since the profitability of knowledge applied in the most recent nanotechnology, the military and bio-engineering, pharmaceutical industry and similar fields, is so high that it leads into temptation their scientific and human responsibility.

The criticism of theory of uneducatedness has focused on the field of “education ethics”. Trying to define the conditions under which we can manage knowledge in a responsible way, it has raised the following question – can knowledge be a candidate for ethical reflections, or they nevertheless have to remain limited to the actions of people, whose assumption is the existence of certain prior knowledge (Liessmann, 2006: 124). If we talk about object knowledge in the field of natural-technological sciences, we can say that they themselves contain no moral feature, but they gain such a dimension when their application gets into collision with moral principles. There have been an increased number of the examples of “short-term use of one technology producing long-lasting damage” for human health, the life of flora and fauna leading to the endangerment of survival of the

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<sup>50</sup> Schiller talked about this type of scientist in his inaugural lecture delivered in Jena University in 1789 under the title *Was ist und zuwelchen Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte?* Friedrich Schiller: Sämtliche Werke, München 1980, IV, p. 750.



planet. Of course, what we have in mind at this point is not object knowledge and its (mis)use, but moral awareness being jeopardized as an inevitable consequence of the abolishment of ethical reflection from the process of education. Knowledge has become morally indifferent, so that what is implied by educated person is a person who has object knowledge, but not moral competencies. In regard to the moral status of the educated there is no reliable data, even though numerous extrinsic indicators may be in favour of the confirmation of their professionalism. As a consequence, who we are dealing with now are professionals and experts who have no sense of shame, whose knowledge is not subjected to verification of values before moral imperative. This is the very indicator which has nowadays imposed a necessity to ground an ethics of education, which would make the category of responsibility a relevant educational maxim. Such a status of responsibility ethos which is immanent to education was something that the former, humanistic-oriented standpoints used to have. Their significance was reflected in that they also involved practical knowledge into the system of theoretical knowledge, and its aim was to help a man resolve fundamental issues of his existence.

### **Conclusion**

If humanity is a measure of civilisation growth, can we ask ourselves what is today's civilisation like? Is its undisputable technological progress proportional to growth of humanity? Is today's man ready to accept the existing world with the sense of belonging or he feels trapped in it with the emphasized original experience of *being thrown* and the subsequent feeling of *being thrown away*? His creation is so great that the creator can no longer control the direction and courses of its proliferation. In such of world, one are those who are rare and full of anxiety, worried about human destiny, while other are its powerful protagonists, the advocates of *new knowledge mastering* and gaining of unconceivable power. Between their divided positions and roles there is a man exposed to systematic indoctrination of those who are powerful, with unarticulated bunt against something which is only sensed as something bad coming, along with the low aspiration to remain a part of the order even at the expense of seeming certainty.

It seems that what has left of the sublime idea of an educated man who builds his educatedness on the renowned values of antique spirit new age began with, is almost nothing. Deconstruction of the education project of a humane man started with the weakening of faith in God and continued with the loss of faith in man has now entered its last phase with the faith in unlimited power of technique and economy. The idea of education as development of spirit heading to self-knowledge, autonomy and freedom has been replaced by the idea of education market. In economic knowledge competition it is most profitable to invest into knowledge providing certain profit. Aspiration arising out of creative inspiration and thoughtful curiosity has stepped back in front of the strive for economic and political power, the cult of money and profit. Healthy competition which used to rely on best ideas, implying various methods in search for the truth, respecting cultural diversity of academic communities has now been replaced by sick ambition of "winning the best place in a ranking list".

The extent to which academic level of education has gone below the line can be seen in comparison between higher education reality with what it should have become. First of all, university education should provide education and upbringing for independent being and thinking (Iljin, 2001: 77). This means that academic teaching should prepare for

thinking and cognitive self-activity, rather than passive, imposed and controlled acquisition of patterns and methods. Instead of mechanical filling of memory and technical exercise of thinking, the task of higher education teaching should consist of the development of independent approach to a subject matter, its independent perception and examination, with the aim to deepen the power of judgement. Academic exam should not assess memory, but the power of argumentation and judgement, as well as the skill of orienting oneself in unexamined and unknown, since a student who has reached the end of his studies and who has passed his exam should show that he is able to independently encounter the subject, i.e. to observe it, systematize, experience and examine it with the necessary level of spiritual curiosity and according to adequate methodology.

The spirit of higher education should be grounded on freedom relying on responsible, critical thinking fighting for the truth, freedom not liable to limitations of extrinsic political and social demands, liberated from the pressures on consciousness and the mind of a researcher. Apart from responsibility and independence, a man raised in academic spirit should be liberated from vanity and envy, having in mind that meekness resulting from his powerful experience and respect of the world as a great secret of all that can and cannot be seen is typical only for a true scientist, who tries to perceive and research it.

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