

FOREWORD

This volume is one of three in a series devoted to the theme: “Questioning Nineteenth-Century Assumptions about Knowledge.” The project was organized by Jean-Pierre Dupuy (a philosopher of science affiliated with the Centre de Recherche en Epistémologie Appliquée, Paris), Aviv Bergman (an evolutionary biologist who directs the Aviv Bergman Laboratory at the Albert Einstein School of Medicine, New York), and Immanuel Wallerstein (a sociologist, formerly Director of the Fernand Braudel Center at Binghamton University and currently a Senior Research Scholar at Yale University). Its Scientific Secretary was Richard E. Lee, the current Director of the Fernand Braudel Center.

The underlying premise of this series of conferences was that, in the last thirty years, scholars in all fields have been raising into question some of the fundamental premises of the modern view of knowledge, as it had been developing for at least five centuries and, in particular, as it was codified in the nineteenth century. It was at that time that a view of knowledge that was determinist, reductionist, and dualist came to predominate the intellectual scene, and found parallel expression in the natural sciences/mathematics, the social sciences, and the humanities/philosophy.

This consensus, once very widely shared, was seriously challenged in all three arenas in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The object of the series of conferences was to explore the degree of convergence of the questioning in the three arenas, which has often been clouded by the fact that different terminologies are being used in many cases.

The format we used was the following. We sought to have sixteen participants: the three organizers and the scientific secretary; three persons to prepare background papers for that meeting, coming respectively from the natural sciences/mathematics, the social sciences, and the humanities/philosophy; and nine others, three from each of the three arenas, who participated in the debate. The only persons

who were present at all three meetings were the three organizers and the scientific secretary. Each meeting had four sessions of a half-day in length: one each to discuss the background paper in each of the three arenas, and a fourth in which the three organizers led an integrative discussion. We found this formula to be very productive.

We are publishing three volumes, one for each conference. Each volume contains the background paper and an edited version of the discussion (a very lively discussion, it should be said) on each of the papers, as well as the opening remarks of the organizers at the last session, followed by discussion.

We do not consider these volumes to constitute in any sense a definitive resolution of the intellectual issues. Rather, we offer them as what we believe to be a stimulating and intense debate about the underlying epistemological issues. These volumes have the special feature that they bring together scholars from the three main superdisciplines into which the world university system is currently divided. We thereby hope to contribute to overcoming the false separation of the debates caused by the use of differing terminologies in the three domains.

Perhaps in the next thirty years the world intellectual community will find a way to reunify the basic epistemology it uses and to overcome some of the limitations of nineteenth-century views about knowledge. The organizers believe that this would be very useful not only in our intellectual pursuits but in the real world to which our knowledge is supposed to apply.

We are grateful to the Gulbenkian Foundation which made these meetings possible by its financial assistance and to João Caraça, its Director of Science, who not only supported the project fully but participated in all three of the conferences.

IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN