

Facts, truth and objectivity today

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How can we safeguard ideas of facts, truth and objectivity in an era that seems to be taken over by the conviction that nothing is stable, nothing is reliable and that knowing amounts to nothing more than having an opinion?

episteme

doxa

Protagoras, 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE  
The 'homo mensura' fragment:

Of all things the measure is Man,  
of the things that are, that they  
are; and of the things that are  
not, that they are not.

episteme

doxa

epistemology

doxology

Ludwick Fleck (1896–1961)

*Genesis and Development of a  
Scientific Fact*

*(Eng translation 1981)*

Original title:

*Entstehung und Entwicklung einer  
Wissenschaftlichen Tatsache.*

*Einführung in die Lehre von Denkstil  
und Denkkollektiv, 1935.*

Ludwick Fleck (1896-1961)

In comparative epistemology, cognition must not be construed as only a dual relationship between the knowing subject and the object to be known. The existing fund of knowledge must be a third party in this relation as a basic factor of all new knowledge. /.../

What is already known influences the particular method of cognition; and cognition, in turn, enlarges, renews, and gives fresh meaning to what is already known.

Cognition is therefore not an individual process of any theoretical 'particular consciousness'. Rather it is the result of a social activity, since the existing stock of knowledge exceeds the range available to any one individual (*Genesis and Development...*, p 38)

Ludwick Fleck (1896-1961)

Whereas an experiment can be interpreted in terms of a simple question and answer, experience must be understood as a complex state of intellectual training based upon the interaction involving the knower, that which he already knows, and that which he has yet to learn. (*Genesis and Development...*, p 10-11)



Ludwick Fleck (1896-1961)

Truth is not "relative" and certainly not "subjective" in the popular sense of the word. It is always, or almost always, completely determined within a thought style.

One can never say that the same thought is true for A and false for B. If A and B belong to the same thought collective, the thought will be either true or false for both. But if they belong to different thought collectives, it will just *not* be *the same* thought. It must either be unclear to, or be understood differently by, one of them.

Truth is not a convention, *but rather (1) in historical perspective, an event in the history of thought, (2) in its contemporary context, stylized thought constraint.*

*(Genesis and Development..., p 100)*



Cornelius Castoriadis (1927-  
1997)

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Social Imaginary Significations

# Cornelius Castoriadis (1927-1997)

The self-institution of society is the creation of a human world: of 'things', 'reality', language, norms, values, ways of life and death, objects for which we live and objects for which we die - and of course first and foremost, the creation of the human individual in which the institution of society is massively embedded.

*(The Castoriadis Reader, Blackwell, 1997, p 269)*

# Cornelius Castoriadis (1927-1997)

[T]here is creation in being, or, more precisely, being is creation, *vis formandi*: not creation of "matter-energy" but creation of forms. What is the point in adopting a term with such a loaded history? On the one hand, to end the subterfuges and the sophistries concerning the question of the new: either there is creation, or the history of being (and consequently of humanity too) is an interminable repetition (or an eternal return).

(*Fait et à faire – les Carrefours du Labyrinthe V* (Seuil, Paris, 1997), p. 212.

# David Lewis Williams (1934-), *The mind in the Cave*, 2002

- 1 An explanation of a phenomenon must accord with received, well-supported general work as well as with overall theory.
- 2 An hypothesis must be internally consistent, that is it must depend in all its parts on the same premises and the parts must not contradict one another.
- 3 An hypothesis that covers diverse field of evidence is more persuasive than one that pertains only to one, narrow type of evidence.
- 4 An hypothesis must be such that verifiable, empirical facts can be deduced from it, i. e. that an hypothesis must relate explicitly to observable features of data.
- 5 Useful hypotheses have a heuristic potential, that is, they lead on to further questions and research.







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