

Letter to a Friend on Rumsfeld's

UNKNOWN UNKNOWN ...

Back to Enchantment ... ?

Donald Rumsfeld : A View of the World ?

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Dear ... X ...

Well, after nearly three months, I am slowly slowly getting over that awful viral infection which I managed to fall for while in Cape Town

...

As I was getting step by step better, I started to work on one of those projects which, God only knows how and why, gets always postponed, even if one happens to consider it to be really important ...

The project, briefly, is about how to recover the vast majority of the present day Western world from their aggressive secularism ...

And this is, indeed, an URGENT MAJOR issue, especially due to the ... massive illegal barbarian invasion ... which is happening in the West ...

Yes, we keep saying that, we in the West are the product of the Judeo-Christian civilization. However, ever fewer among us do care even in the least either for Judaism or for Christianity ...

This is, indeed, one of the basic problems, if not in fact THE truly basic one ...

And the story got to the point that, when a Vona Gabor (right wing opposition Hungarian politician) says that ... Islam is the last hope of humanity ..., well, he may - most regrettably - actually be quite near to some most important point ...

Now my mentioned project - shame on me - was inspired no less than 16 years ago, by an accidental public comment made by Donald Rumsfeld who, at the time, was the American Defense Secretary. Namely, he made - what appears to be a first in Western thinking - the differentiation which divides the UNKNOWN into two, namely, the KNOWN UNKNOWN, and on the other hand, the UNKNOWN UNKNOWN ...

Well, I happened to see on the TV the news-briefing at which Rumsfeld made that distinction, and immediately realized the possible immense importance of it ...

Unfortunately, I never followed up with writing anything about it ... Instead, upon the urging of some of my academic friends in Europe, I started a few months ago to write an essay on that issue of the ... massive illegal barbarian invasion ..., and the underlying facilitating circumstance which I call by the name of the "banality of insanity" ...

Well, briefly, the story related to Rumsfeld, that is, the story which I

neglected for no less than 16 years, may go as follows :

The languages which various religions use are excessively dramatic, and have remained ever the same since the great religions were introduced about no less than five millennia ago.

On the other hand, since Renaissance, say, since the 1400s, the educated part of the Western societies has more and more switched to the ... matter of fact, so called objective, cool, calm, collected and cheerless ... language inspired by modern science ...

Consequently, that ever growing and evermore influential Western educated part of the population cannot at all listen even for brief moments to that old language of religions ...

Therefore, an instant and massive repulsion is experienced by them on each and every occasion when they are addressed in such a manner

...

And yet, trivially obviously, that total rejection of the ancient language of the great religions does not in absolutely any way change even in the least that fact that we humans are not the creators of the World, and even less run it moment by moment, consequently it is an extremely dangerous and irresponsible folly to disregard, let alone reject that ... transcendental ... entity which may actually be in charge of the World, and thus also of much of our own existence ...

And here, lo and behold !, can come Rumsfeld's UNKNOWN UNKNOWN ...

Well, I attach the essay which I tried to make as short as possible ... In case such an issue may happen to interest you, then you are of course most welcome to comment, and do so completely freely ... Needless to say, your comments would be dealt with in a strictly confidential manner ...

Once again with all the very best wishes to you,

Yours the same as always,

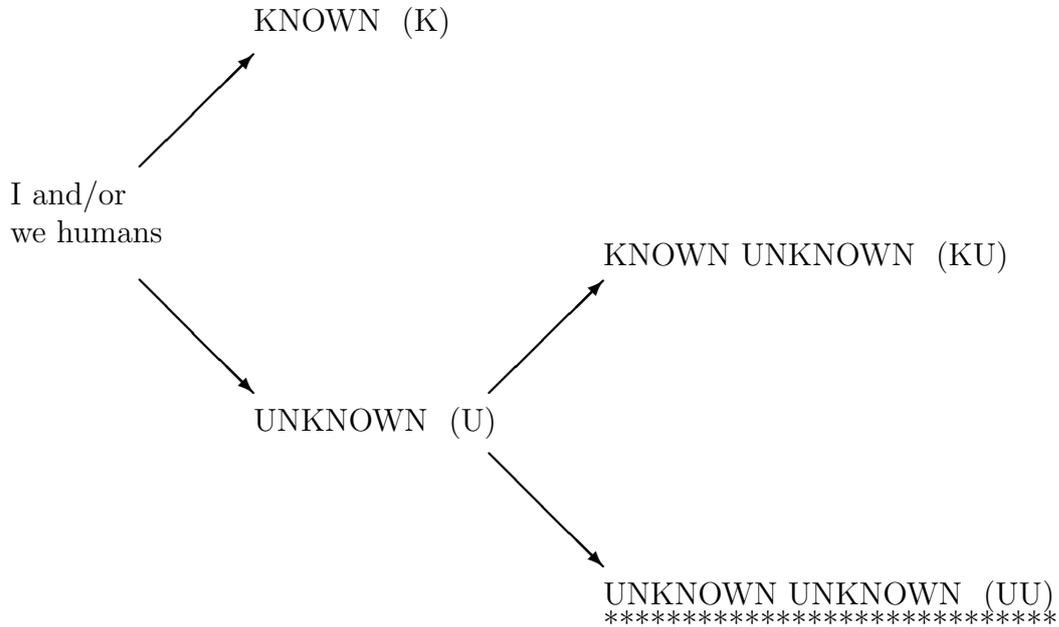
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The Essay proper :

”There are known knowns” is a phrase from a response United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld gave to a question at a U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) news briefing on February 12, 2002 about the lack of evidence linking the government of Iraq with the supply of weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups. Rumsfeld stated:

Reports that say that something hasn’t happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns the ones we don’t know we don’t know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones.

The relevance of the above is commensurate with the extent that today we are already living in what we like to call to be a ”knowledge society”, thus the basic categories of ”known”, respectively ”unknown”, are of a vital importance. Here, it should be noted that Rumsfeld himself, known throughout his long and diverse career in which he performed successfully in a variety of ventures in politics and business makes the astute remark - which otherwise should be quite self evident - that the really important distinction which, as known so far, was pioneered by himself in his above statement, is that between the ”known unknown”, and on the other hand, the ”unknown unknown”. Briefly, we can present it as follows :



One may note that the above scheme need not necessarily be seen as an anthropocentric view, and even less as the view of some more or less typical human individual. Indeed, it is rather more natural to see the above scheme as a view of an observer of human affairs, when - as nowadays - humans claim to live in a "knowledge society", thus issues such as "known", respectively "unknown", are indeed essential. A further clarification may possibly be helped by recalling the following citation from the well known philosopher Karl Popper (1902-1994) :

“The more we learn about the world, and the deeper our learning, the more conscious, specific and articulate will be our knowledge of what we do not know, our knowledge of our ignorance”

or reading the early Renaissance book :

“On Learned Ignorance”, Nicholas Cusanus (1401-1464)

Now, in order to better grasp the importance - and truly major consequences - of the Rumsfeld indicated division of (U) into the two so

much different parts (KU) and (UU), it is worth recalling what, ever since Renaissance, has been more or less consciously the Western view of the divide (K) versus (U). Namely, during Renaissance, the Western world woke up to the fact that the divide (K) versus (U) is not at all permanent, and thus as such given once and for all. Instead, the (K) part is rather manifestly growing, therefore correspondingly, the (U) part is shrinking ...

And here, a most unfortunate conclusion was reached - one often less than fully rational and conscious, and instead a rather emotional one, yet as such deep going in us humans - namely that the ever shrinking (U) part is actually becoming less and less relevant, less and less important ...

That conclusion was, indeed, most unfortunate, since by the time of the late 1800s it led to a considerable shift from belief in God, to belief in Science, as it was the latter which was making (K) grow more and more spectacularly - with its evermore useful and powerful everyday technological application - thus creating the manifestly arrogant human illusion that (U) was by then obviously counting altogether less and less ...

It all led to a massive *disenchantment* which can briefly be described as, Max Weber (1864-1920), “The Sociology of Religion” :

“ ... the character of modernized, bureaucratic, secularized Western society, where scientific understanding is more highly valued than belief, and where processes are oriented toward rational goals, as opposed to traditional society, where ‘the world remains a great enchanted garden’ ...”

Well, the above Rumsfeld view introduces (UU), and does so seemingly for the first time in the Western philosophical tradition, even if amusingly, Rumsfeld himself never fancied being any sort of philosopher, and at that particular moment when he introduced (UU) at the mentioned news briefing on February 12, 2002, he did so in a rather trivial manner, seemingly not being in any way whatsoever aware of what may indeed be the extraordinary consequences of the (UU) concept !

And it is most elementarily obvious to any normal decent thinking person that (UU) may indeed be shrinking, yet it is - and it will for evermore remain - nothing short of an ... unfathomably infinite and overwhelmingly important ... entity ...

Unfathomably infinite, at least in terms of each and every human individual, and quite likely, of the whole human species as well ...

Consequently, here we have a most welcome and needed foundational *correction* of the ... learned ignorant arrogance ... we have been wallowing in ever since Renaissance, namely that the World is more and more centered in the ever more knowing human, while by implication, the (U) part keeps more and more fading into irrelevance ...

In particular, we can now recover the essence of the pre-Renaissance *wisdom* of long long ages dominant basic view of the World according to which we humans depend moment by moment, and by far most, on an ... unfathomably unfathomable ... reality, a reality which keeps dwarfing all of (K), no matter how much (K) may ever happen to grow ...

Of course, the point is not in returning wholesale to that pre-Renaissance basic view of the World which had, in fact, been mostly awfully primitive, but rather to its very essence in wisdom, namely that we humans depend moment by moment, and by far most, on the (UU) ...

And if we are lucky - and in fact, if we are no less than blessed - all of what can happen to us in regard to (UU) is but :

- 1) To wake up, or in the perspective of the longer human history, rather to re-wake up to the existence of (UU) and its primordial and permanent action upon us.

- 2) To re-start the possibility and practice that, notwithstanding 1), we may be able to interact in a two ways manner with (UU), and do so usefully for us. Thus in the mentioned terms of Max Weber, to go back to a view in which “the world remains a great *enchanted* garden”, as mentioned at the start of the Old Testament.

Traditionally, “prayer” was supposed to be one such “human to (UU)”

interaction ...

And in modern times we even manage to turn some parts of the (UU) into the (K). Indeed, electricity, for instance, was for us an (UU), say even merely three or four centuries ago. Yet in some ways we managed to get it most usefully into the realms of the (K) ...

The Hindu Aryan civilization, after millennia and untold millions of pages of books and texts of Vedic literature, led to Adi Shankara (788-820 AD) in its Advaita Vedanta branch, who synthesized much of its essence in the brief statement :

“Atman is Brahman.”

Here, when squeezed into usual words, “Atman” means the human individual’s soul, spirit, self ...

As for “Brahman”, it is supposed to be the soul, spirit, self, etc., of the whole World ...

Well, the simple word “is” in Shankara’s statement is about 2) above.

All in all, it is indeed high time, and seemingly rather dangerously late in fact, to recover ourselves from the ... learned ignorant arrogant delusion ... of Renaissance and reawaken ourselves to the (UU) ...

And when we consider a bit better and more carefully such issues as above, we can simply state that in the realms of our “knowledge society”, the (UU) is nothing short of ... God ..., to use a traditional terminology ...

In other words, the understanding of above obviously does not need any of the traditional grandiose languages of claimed to be eternally and infinitely separated realms like “sacred versus mundane”, “holy versus profane”, “virtue versus sin”, “sin versus unpardonable sin”, “God versus Devil”, and so on and on ...

Instead, as seen above, with the use of a simple, minimal everyday language and a rather rational use of it, one can get to (UU) and to what appear so obviously to be its most basic consequences even in our moment by moment lives ...

In particular, most obviously, one need not “believe” in the (UU), since its existence and primordial importance in human affairs is trivially obvious, once one manages somehow to wake up from the ... learned ignorant arrogant delusion ... of Renaissance ...

After all, “belief” is a far far too weak and massively error prone ontological position, and we should do far far better than that, and do so through some versions of “knowing”, that being of course in line with our “knowledge society” ...

yes indeed, let us just remember that less than a mere four centuries ago, Galileo Galilei nearly got killed by the Vatican, since he went against the ... belief ... that Planet Earth is immobile at the center of the World ...

So much for relying on mere “beliefs” ...

Possible Commentaries

We tried to keep the above as short and clear as possible, in order, among others, to minimize the irresistible temptation of the ... learned and distinguished ... members of the “chattering classes” to derail instantly into any number and any sort of hardly relevant directions ... After all, they, too, are the *victims* of a trouble of which - as so many others in our days - they fail to be aware of. Namely, what CHANGED indeed since the early Renaissance, and even more so since the 1789 French Revolutions, and following it, the early 1800s, is the usual language used by the larger and larger classes of educated persons.

The earlier language was much influenced by that of the great holy books, which was basically that of various religions. And that language, seemingly, took central stage with the passing about three millennia ago from the ancient Era of Magic to the Era of Myth, to use a terminology introduced by Karl Jaspers (1883-1969).

Now, that language of the Era of Myth proved itself to be nothing short of a miracle in succeeding to impress for nearly five millennia a relevantly large part of a population which was utterly lacking any education, and in its vast majority was in fact illiterate, overworked, poor, and deadly tired most of the time, if not even sick ...

And an important “secret” of this incredible success was precisely in

the word “myth”, so perfectly utilized by Jaspers in describing all that long era. Namely, myth is supposed to present one with avalanches of dramas. And dramas are highly popular among the largest masses. After all, in such masses just about each human does nearly all the time experience his own drama which is, and remains much the same during most of his life. Thus added to it comes the drama of its bored hopelessness, or of the hopeless boredom ...

And then, being taken away into the myth can offer a welcome change where so many other and different dramas are recalled as vividly as possible ...

And no doubt, it is nearing quite a top performance in drama when *counter-posing* terms such as “sacred” and “mundane”, or “holy” and “profane”, not to mention “virtue” and “sin”, and why not “sin” and “unpardonable sin”, or ultimately, “God” versus “Devil” ...

And a good part of such implied drama is, of course, a support for the enchantment, even if quite inevitably it also supports a significant amount of awe, and even fear ...

But then, even such a drama-mix does further contribute to the overall drama ...

And clearly, the presently disenchanted masses can only be further disenchanted if in their ontological searches they again and again are presented with the ... language of myth ..., the very language which did disenchant them the first time, and has done so more and more since the Renaissance ...

Shall we then conclude tentatively that, following Jaspers, we may call by the name of the ... Era of Disenchantment ... the era started with Renaissance, the era when we humans have so massively fallen for an ... ignorant arrogance and arrogant ignorance ... in which we simply and so catastrophically *overreacted* to the promises of the growing modern science ... ?

The above rather short and cursory presentation may be helped by a number of commentaries. And in this regard, any further contributions which may indeed prove to be useful are, needless to say, most welcome ...

a) One may note, as mentioned, that Donald Rumsfeld himself did not seem to care much about the deeper and wider significance of the (UU). In his large and detailed autobiography of 2011, entitled “Known and Unknown”, for instance, the words “known” or “unknown” do not figure in the Index at the end of the book. This fact, however, need not diminish the extraordinary importance of the introduction by him of the division of (U) into (KU) and (UU), and above all, of the introduction of the (UU).

b) The importance of the (UU) does not consist in the possibility, briefly sketched above, to de-sacralize religion, and turn it from an issue of “belief” into one of very simple ... matter of fact ... one. No, a significant importance of the (UU) is in the possibility it offers to the humans of our “knowledge society” who have fallen so hopelessly totally to the mentioned learned ignorant arrogant delusion of Renaissance and place the human at the center of the World, to recover a more realistic and less arrogant ontology.

As for those who have not fallen for the mentioned ... disenchanting and all consuming Renaissance aberration ..., they are welcome to keep to their given ontology, as long as God, Divinity, or any in other way named entity which is ... transcendentally transcendental ... is supposed to be the ultimate and all determining foundation of reality ...

c) We can never - and should never - forget that warning of Plato in his book “Republic” that everybody older than the age of ten (yes, 10) should be sent away from Plato’s City. And the reason obviously is that even by such a young age one has quite likely gotten by hook or by crook, and mostly by default, an ontology which, typically, is hopelessly off the mark in a number of possible ways ...

And indeed nowadays, such a process happens even earlier than the age of ten, and does not lead to better results ...

Of course, as long as such an ontology does not suffer from the mentioned Renaissance aberration, perhaps the respective person need not necessarily be ... sent away ... from anywhere ...

d) Regarding 2) above, which obviously is a rather ... hot ... issue, we humans may inevitably react emotionally, and do so not only as a

first reaction, but also rather exclusively so ...

On the other hand, the matter of fact approach to ontology which - as sketched above - the existence of (UU) offers to us must not be neglected.

Fortunately, that matter of fact does not need much further elaboration ...

As for the emotional human reactions, well, they are supposed to range - in terms of usual religions - from awe and fear, on one hand, to love, on the other ...

And the commandment for “love” is quite the same and rather dramatical in its formulation in Deuteronomy 6:5, Mark 12:30, Matthew 22:37, Luke 10:27.

Well, some of us may be accustomed to a matter of fact approach even of such hot issues, and then, deal with the one at hand as, for instance, one deals with “ $1 + 1 = 2$ ” ...

Here however, it may be useful to recall Shankara’s statement that “Atman is Brahman” ...

Or perhaps, even simpler : let us make use of Weber’s term and ... try to find out way back to Enchantment ...

That very Enchantment which we may as well call by the name of (UU), provided that we may recover our ... two-way ... essential interaction with it, as mentioned earlier in 2) ...

e) Above we used the formulation that science “was making (K) grow more and more spectacularly, thus creating the manifestly arrogant human illusion of (U) counting altogether less and less”.

In fact, this turns out to be a considerable understatement of the state of affairs at the end of the 1800s and beginning of 1900s. A good description of the situation can be found in the 2012 book “Science Set Free” by Rupert Sheldrake, on page 19, in the section “Further fantasies of omniscience”.

One typical example among many other ones is the case of William Thomson, known also as Lord Kelvin, at the time a much celebrated English physicist, who in 1900 stated that : “There is nothing new to be discovered in physics now. All that remains is more and more precise measurement.” ...

And indeed, by the time of the late 1800s, the ever aggravating fundamental Renaissance error, according to which the (U) was evermore

fading into irrelevance, managed to go so far as to turn into ... fantasies of human omniscience ...

Yet, in the very same year 1900, Max Planck introduced Quantum Theory, which was so revolutionary new a theory of physics, as to come directly from the (UU) ...

And a few years later, in 1905, a no less revolutionary theory of physics, Special Relativity, was to be introduced by Albert Einstein ...

So much for ... human omniscience ...

f) One *must* be very careful when ... trying ... to think rationally about the (UU) !!!

There is, in our “knowledge society”, an immense temptation to think about the (UU) and assume that the results of such thinking are ... sufficiently ... relevant ...

On the other hand, the very definition of (UU) in the sense of Donald Rumsfeld is precisely that the (UU) is ... untouchable ... by *any and all* rational thinking ...

Of course, since Renaissance, the very existence of such realms which are absolutely outside of our rational human thinking is more and more *totally* rejected : this is but one of the fundamental *insanities* of modern times ...

But then, for instance, just look at a dog which is one of the most intelligent animals quite abundantly present around us humans : does the dog, can the dog ... understand ..., say, Quantum Theory ???

Yet Quanta are absolutely relevant to the moment by moment existence of a dog ...

Yes, the dog cannot at all understand even the very fact that it cannot at all understand Quantum Theory ...

Yes, try and make a dog understand :

*) that there is Quantum Theory

***) and that the dog simply cannot understand even the mere fact that there is Quantum Theory.

Somewhat *similarly* are we humans with the (UU) ...

So then, please, try and look at the (UU) at something for us humans which is like Quantum Theory for a dog ...

But then, this is precisely one of the ... reasons ... why we should *recover* our Enchantment now, when we know about the existence of the (UU) ...

g) As for a two way interaction with the (UU) :

g.1) But of course, parts of the (UU) become (K), and they may even do so directly, or first they become (KU). This is clear proof that - at least in principle - we can usefully relate to the (UU).

g.2) It looks most likely that in the World everything depends to some extent on everything else, even if often only on a very small, or rather negligible extent : otherwise, it is us humans who must prove that it is not so, and clearly, we cannot even think how we could ever prove that ...

g.3) The above g.1) shows that we can indeed usefully interact with the (UU), even if we do not seem to know any method which would give us 100% sure results.

g.4) The issue is to find more and more and better and better ways in which we can usefully interact with the (UU) : “prayer” and “scientific research” are so far the two methods seemingly most tired historically in this regard ...

And “scientific research” in its more proper sense is merely a few centuries old, if at all, and it is pursued still by a tiny minority of humans ...

g.5) Since the (UU) is not ... shrinking into relevance ..., and will never ever do so, contrary to the rather insane Renaissance exaggeration, it should be quite likely that moment after moment we depend, and will always depend, far far far more on the (UU), than on anything else ...