Editorial

Knowledge Organization and Truth

The late co-founder of this journal, the philosopher Professor Dr. Alwin Diemer, defined *science* in a propositional way as

a system of propositions about a specific domain which are related to each other by an inherent foundational relationship and which are oriented towards the postulate of objective, epistemological truth[1].

When early this year I quoted this definition in a conference paper, I was asked by a discussant, how I could dare bring the idea of truth into this context, as computer science people had long ago already dismissed such a truth orientation as an unfruitful concept.

This remark shocked me so much as to render me almost speechless, for I had to assume that it was correct, this discussant being regarded after all as an authority in his field. But convinced though he was that a scientist need no longer orient himself in his propositions to the truth, he was unable to disprove the proposition in the above definition, namely that a science is characterized in that it consists of a system of propositions pertaining to a specific field and necessarily related to each other in a foundational relationship - since otherwise we will not be dealing with a science. However, axiomatics - a tool borrowed from mathematics to make up for the loss inherent in dispensing with the founding of a scientific field on an ultimate true statement - does not, in my opinion, by itself suffice to furnish a foundation for a science, since it makes us merely "move around in circles", as it will. As Mephisto puts it in Goethe's Faust ("a man who speculates is like an animal on the heath *led around in circles* by an evil spirit while all around it there are fertile meadows"). We cannot dispense with the truth postulate; i.e. the verifiability of our propositions is a sine qua non for our knowledge and its survival power.

Of course we can err, and he may be called wise who is willing to admit and correct an error which someone else, better informed about a subject, calls to his attention. If we humans had not been endowed with the divine freedom of will we would not even be able to distinguish between true and untrue, for with our freedom of will we received not only the possibility to decide for or against an assumption, but also the consciousness which enables us in the first place to think, consider, theoretize, compare and deduce, since in every single case it depends on man's good will and willingness to do or to fail to do something called for. But not only that, our freedom of will extends also to the 'how' of our deeds: whether we think, speak or act in accordance with a recognized truth and thus with our inborn conscience - or against it.

But what is truth? Pilatus' ancient question should present itself today more pointedly than ever before - as we saw above - and should be more relevant than ever in workings of science and hence in knowledge organization.

Two contributions in this issue are in the nature of 'corrections': Ewald Kiel takes issue with the conclusions in Peter Jaenecke's contribution ("To what end Knowledge Organization") (KO 94-1) and rejects the controlling function demanded by Jaenecke for KO with respect to scientific knowledge, while showing on the other hand, that knowledge should be relativized with respect to individuals, culture, time, space and knowledge fields, with KO not having the task of checking knowledge for correctness, but rather of supplying users and producers with control instruments for making knowledge available.

A second rejoinder is directed against an authority who made a statement outside of our journal which calls for correction, with policy reasons ruling out the printing of this correction at what should actually be the 'proper' place: Robert Fugmann just had to comment on Wilf Lancaster's book review in the Journal of Documentation[2], or rather on the incorrect presentations contained in that review, without it being claimed in any way that Lancaster was aware of the incorrectness of his statements and made them in full knowledge thereof. The fact that Fugmann links up his rejoinder with an argumentation of principle using most vivid examples induced us to include it likewise in this issue in the form of an article ("Galileo and the Inverse Precision/Recall Relationship").

Dear readers, please understand: a science can only then develop and science as such only then prosper when the community of those who practice it are *a true community of members with concern for each other and for each others arguments and the correctness or incorrectness thereof* - even where this might be disagreeable for someone, for no one likes to stand corrected. But, may I add for those perhaps affected, as said before, wisdom is a good quality to have, it is even a divine strength.

One of the oldest members of ISKO and at the same time its very first one is Prof. Dr. Otto Nacke, who at the ISKO Conference in Bratislava read a paper on "Structures of Truth"[3]. He not only presented and analyzed 14 definitions of truth, but also cited a host of examples to show the difficulties encountered in many fields of knowledge in the investigation and ascertainment of truth. Would that his interest in this problem field - which also recently induced him to found his Institute for Veritology to elucidate the problems of truth-finding and to develop methods that can be applied in all knowledge fields for the recognition and verification of truth - find adherence also in our field of KO! For we are convinced that the human family on this earth can only then become a new and better one if, out of love - yes, love - for truth, it again takes seriously the striving to fulfill the awareness of and quest for truth, both innate in everyone of us!

Ingetraut Dahlberg

1 Diemer, A.: Der Wissenschaftsbegriff im historischen und systematischen Zusammenhang. In: Diemer, A.(Ed.): Der Wissenschaftsbegriff. Historische und Systematische Untersuchungen. Meisenheim am Glan: Hain 1970. p.3-20

2 Lancaster, W.: Book review of Fugmann, R.: Subject Analysis and Indexing. Theoretical Foundations and Practical Advice. Frankfurt: INDEKS Verlag 1993. In: J.Doc. 50(1994)No.2, p.149-52

3 Nacke, O.: Structures of truth. In: Stancikova, P. et al: Environmental Knowledge Organization and Information Management. Proc. 1st Europ. ISKO Conf., Bratislava, 14-16 Sept.1994. Frankfurt: INDEKS Verl. 1994. p.95-102