

Helmut F. SPINNER: **Die Wissensordnung. Ein Leitkonzept für die dritte Grundordnung des Informationszeitalters.** (The Knowledge Order. A guiding concept for the third basic order of the Information Age.) Opladen, DE: Leske + Budrich 1994. 273p. = Studien zur Wissensordnung (Studies on Knowledge Order), Vol.1.

*Note from the Editor: We had already published a review on this book in Knowl. Org. 94-3; however, it seemed to us that the ideas contained in this book would deserve more than one different reviewer. The second reviewer had no knowledge of the text of the first one.*

The changes, co-produced by the information technologies, of the forms of interhuman communication have by now assumed global dimensions. The structure of these changes is producing just as radical national and international effects as that of the changes of the legal or economic order. Therefore, says Spinner in this carefully considered "guiding concept", it makes sense to speak of a "knowledge order" as a "third basic order" alongside the legal and economic orders, even though, in my opinion, one might well ask, as Spinner does not, whether there exist any further "basic orders" - e.g. a religious or a medical one - and how they belong together. In library and information science the expression "knowledge order" - or representation of knowledge, or subject or contents description - usually stands for the totality of the various intellectual techniques for structuring the contents of a collection of documents from one, several or possibly even 'all' subject fields for the purpose of target-oriented searches - a question which in library science is coupled with the structuring and sometimes also with the presentation and communication of an existing media store. Within the framework of the present study, however, 'knowledge order' means the totality of the regulations and factually existing conditions" (...) "for the generation, application and utilization of 'information', hence of knowledge of every type, ranging from knowledge based on scientific theories and rules to personal everyday knowledge and technicalized data knowledge" (14). Spinner diagnosticates an epochal break between the "classic" (or "old") and the "modern" (or "new") knowledge order - a terminology which is somewhat confusing, since by the "classic" knowledge order he means in fact the modern-age order that has become established since the Enlightenment and in particular since the start of the 19th century and which in its "modern" (15) (!) further development is finding expression in such documents as e.g. the basic law of the Federal Republic of Germany. If the expression 'postmodern' had not meanwhile become so controversial one might speak of the postmodern knowledge order. According to Spinner the "old" knowledge order is characterized by "four Major Uncouplings", namely: 1) the separation of ideas and property, 2) the separation of ideas and interests, 3) the separation of theory and practice, and 4) the separation of science and the state or government. Economic growth, information explosion and the amalgamation of technology and knowledge are leading, according to Spinner, to a new knowledge order, whose contours are only gradually, however, becoming visible. This means that the "guiding concept" presented here is neither to be understood

as an analysis of existing information or knowledge structures, nor as a prognosis, but rather as a work program or a structured catalog of problem fields. Spinner distinguishes eight "cognitive-informational" order fields which together make up the characteristically "pluralistic", "modern" knowledge order, namely the academic knowledge order, the library/archivistic one, the legal, economic, technological and bureaucratic ones, the one in the military and policy field, and the national/international one.

Knowledge order as "third basic order" is in Spinner's view an independent order distinct from the legal and economic ones. This follows from his understanding of "information" as "knowledge of any type, quantity or quality" which arises as the result of a selection and hence presents a content. This definition of the information concept is comparable to Carnap's semantic 'supplementation' of Shannon's information theory, with the selection process constituting, in Spinner's view, the common core of the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic information concepts. Although Spinner equates information with knowledge, he prefers to speak of "knowledge", since "information" has become a technical term in computer technology (27). By the same token he uses the concept "knowledge order" rather than "information society", or "age of information technology", although, as indicated by his sub-title, he wishes to present at the same time a concept for the "information age". Among the "special properties" of knowledge Spinner counts e.g. its "truth capability" and "common-good character". In other words: we can only then speak of a "third basic order" distinct from the legal and economic order when knowledge or information is not regarded as a thing or a commodity - an assumption which in view of the increasing commercialization of knowledge appears to be a problematic aspect of Spinner's scheme, which thus presents itself, as it were, as a corrective to the trend of subordinating the knowledge order to the economic order. Intermediate positions are e.g. the view of knowledge as a "public good" or a "universal cultural good".

The "knowledge order", as a further basic concept treated in *Chapter One*, is in Spinner's view "a small, but important part of the social order", at the same time its "most sensitive" and "least researched" part (35). Spinner opposes his concept of "thinking in orders" to the thinking in (hierarchical) systems, in blocs and in spheres, distinguishing in doing so between the application of the order concept in the economic field (W. Eucken) and in that of knowledge. In a near-phenomenologic way Spinner describes man's relationship to knowledge from the perspectives of possession, volition, action and ability, with the corresponding addressees: law, society, everyday life, and politics. "It is in these four reference fields that the main problems lie for which ordering solutions must be found" (49), this in contrast with the uncoupling strategy of the "classic" knowledge order. It is evident that such a research program can only come about through interdisciplinary cooperation.

In his *Chapter Two* Spinner describes the interpenetration of knowledge and technology, for which the term "information age" stands as a formula. The new structures give rise to questions such as: "Which society is '(the) rich(er) one' today, the one rich in raw materials and consumer goods, or the one rich in information?" (59). The information age can only then be justly

called so when a new, 'epochal' ordering structure surpassing individual problems has factually taken shape. Our occupation with the effects of technology on the cognitive field is bringing forth, in Spinner's view, a new, fourth, "knowledge-oriented" generation in technology assessment - following the earlier "effect-oriented engineering", "ethics-dominated, philosophical and humanities-oriented" and "context-concentrated social-scientific" types of technology assessment.

*Chapter Three* is concerned with the situation of the knowledge field in the information age, i.e. with the social questions of over- and underinformation and the problem field of the categorization of knowledge types and stores. With the expression "store of scientific knowledge", Spinner has express reference to the "library-scientific" (sic!) concept of "specialized information" (75). The "stores of extra-scientific knowledge" include: everyday knowledge, document knowledge and media information. Finally Spinner calls attention to different functions of knowledge - e.g. for the purpose of gaining insights, for use in practice, in technology, economic life, for control purposes, for entertainment.

*Chapter Four* is of a historical nature. It analyzes the transition from the "classic" to the "modern" knowledge order - including in particular the "Althoff System" criticized by Max Weber. It is evident here that this investigation can only be of an exemplifying nature, or, in other words, that further analyses of the knowledge orders in antiquity, the Middle Ages, etc. are necessary. One might recall in this connection Michel Foucault's thoughts on the changes in the structure of knowledge and power, to which Spinner likewise calls attention. The right to "informational self-determination" means, in Spinner's eyes, "a subliminal transformation" of the otherwise "classic" structure of the knowledge order of the German basic law (95). Spinner characterizes the "post-classic" (sic!) trends toward commercialization, finalization (purpose-orientation), technicalization, politics-orientation and industrialization of the various knowledge fields as efforts to bring together that which in the "classic" order had been carefully separated or "uncoupled". This is treated in detail in *Chapter Five* and ends up in the question how this "new" knowledge order is to be judged from a scientific, legal, technological and ethical point of view.

In *Chapter Six* Spinner presents his aforementioned concept of eight order fields, in each of which the questions of the technicalization of knowledge, the commercialization of knowledge as a commodity, the globalization of the information currents and the privatization of specific knowledge types present themselves. Thus e.g. the "academic knowledge order" - traditionally determined by the production of theoretical knowledge and by unlimited availability, guided by the aim of progressive cognition, upheld and supported by experts and institutes from science and research, morally determined by scientific ethics, and autonomous vis-a-vis economy and technology - is now in a state of complete change with alternatives presenting themselves such as: the university - a scholars' republic or a research community?, science - a vocation or a job? As a second example I mention here the "library/archivistic knowledge order for stored documentary knowledge" (sic!). It is probably characteristic of a problem field hardly deserving to be called "classic" that Spinner mentions the terms "archive" and "library" in one single breath, even links them up by a hyphen

or slash mark and honors the resulting composition with the expression "stored documentary knowledge"! This quasi-identification of archives, libraries and documentation centers with each other will hardly please any of the institutions (and persons!) involved, let alone the confrontation between "knowledge-conserving" and "knowledge-improving" research. Not a trace of the knowledge-imparting (informing!) or even cultural functions of the libraries. Spinner's guiding concept betrays here the prejudice of the theoretician, who considers knowledge primarily from the point of view of the 'academe' - hence a limited social group - and grants second place (as Spinner literally does in his guiding concept of order fields) to the storage of what has been researched. Everyday knowledge comes only third, followed, in that order, by economic, technological, bureaucratic, military and finally national/international knowledge! One wonders whether this order came about only by chance or is rather the heritage of a specific thinking in terms of order. For it can hardly be denied that the concepts 'knowledge' and 'order' belong to the very core of occidental metaphysics, i.e. that they are an expression of what Nietzsche terms an assertive will to power with a claim - of whatever form - to global self-determination.

This metaphysical anchoring of the new (and old) knowledge order is not gone into by Spinner, so that the "new" knowledge order possibly has been erected on the "old" foundations. This is already suggested not only by Spinner's use of the singular ("the knowledge order"), but particularly by his basic approach that knowledge can primarily be determined within the framework of an order. Against this claim to power by metaphysical thinking in terms of orders and causes - and the question is exactly in how far Spinner's thinking in 'orders' leaves in fact the metaphysical horizon of thinking in 'causes' (161) - philosophers such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Foucault have 'rebelled' in the 19th and 20th centuries, such in the name of those dimensions from which any order only appears as a limited and hence changeable one. Already Socratic ignorance and Heraclitus's "unpretentious harmony" testified to a transcendence of knowledge toward dimensions which are neither those of the myth, nor those of the 'political' order.

Of course not much will be gained by a simple 'postmodern' pluralization of Spinner's title, at least not as long as the question concerning the 'knowledge orders' is not reflected within the open, finite horizon of human existence with all its 'distinctions' such as infirmities and worries, natural contingencies and aspirations beyond one's limits, mysteries and banalities. In other words: Spinner's "guiding concept" needs to be examined as one would a philosophical problem.

Finally attention may be called to the "problem catalog" annexed to the book as an appendix and broken down by disciplines and to the voluminous annotated bibliography. This first volume of the series "Studies on Knowledge Order" deserves not only to be followed up, but also to be critically taken issue with. This requires, however, that it should also, and particularly, be read by information scientists.

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