

KNOWLEDGE AS A DUTY:
A NEW PHILOSOPHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

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It is evident that the new importance acquired by many “external things” (both natural and artificial) has been mainly caused by modern technology achievements. I think this fact implies two philosophical consequences: first, we need to appropriately re-project onto people moral values we have already attributed to external things (I say we have to “respect people as things”); second, a new role of knowledge (scientific and ethical) is being delineated. I suggest that in our technological world, aiming both at “respecting people as things” and “treating people as ends” involves a massive and skillful exploitation of knowledge. Indeed, the aim of my presentation is to highlight that modern technology has brought about consequences of such magnitude on external things (both natural and artificial) that the framework of older ethics and policies can no longer contain them. The idea of moral knowledge as something simple and readily available to all men of good will is not sufficient anymore. Contrary to Kant, who maintained that “there is not need of science or philosophy for knowing what man has to do in order to be honest and good, and indeed to be wise and virtuous”, ethics and decision making behavior should be continually and carefully accompanied by knowledge related to an understanding of the various problems and situations. The “neighbor ethics” of justice, charity, honesty, etc., is not sufficient anymore. If we want knowledge to be considered as a duty in the perspective of that supernational knowledge society I consider the only real Popperian “open society”, the aim should be on the generation, distribution, and use of knowledge in favor of social and economic development. If knowledge has to be considered a duty the problem of its dissemination and distribution is central. I shall introduce some transdisciplinary issues related to this problem, that only a philosophical reflection that adopts a new responsibility can clarify: the need of promoting the study of creativity and model-based and manipulative thinking in scientific and ethical reasoning, the role of some external cognitive structures I call “moral mediators”, that are able to reshape ethical worth of human beings and collectives; the interplay between unexpressed and super-expressed knowledge and knowledge management and their role in the information technology; the importance of the role of the so-called new “knowledge communities” and the privileged status of human beings as “knowledge carriers”.