

Criticism Towards Progressivism in Science and Philosophy

Through Consideration of Unexpected Outcomes Classified as Ignorance

Takashi Watanabe (Kyushu University)

In the field of science and technology as well as philosophy, an open discussion concerning *unexpected outcomes as ignorance* (or ignorance for short) as one of the fundamental causes of environmental destruction seems to have long been neglected. However, the topic of ignorance has never become obsolete because it has yet crucial importance to be discussed in the field of philosophy. Admittedly, ignorance is a slippery and almost inconceivable object or idea for both science and philosophy. Nevertheless, it remains as something essential to grasp and examine in order to undertake a practical survey on environmental problems.

To understand its cunning nature, we investigate how ignorance escapes from researchers' careful examination by focusing on the notion of identity.

Scientists examine phenomena with scientific methods such as observation, experimentation, measurement, statistics, and theorization, which require, without exception, repeatedly identifiable objects with naked eyes or via devices. This implies that a particular phenomenon can be scientific and therefore scholarly object so long as it is *identifiable* as something individual. However, through this procedure, science loses its capacity for relating itself to the unidentifiable, which becomes problematic when scientists analyze various types of danger. For example, scientists will not be able to detect unexpected outcomes classified as ignorance, for they are considered to be something unidentifiable with scientific methods. Here we see ignorance as a threat to the environment as well as to the credibility of science in general. Fundamentally, scientific methods are the principles which make science superior to other research fields, and identity provides the foundation for scientific methods, which defines the *nature* of science. If so, then the validity of dependence on the identifiable should be discussed.

However, the dependence on the identifiable is an unquestioned universal conviction or a *doxa* even in the field of philosophy. For example, when Husserl presupposes continuously changing adumbrations as something identical through their continuous multiplicities and acknowledges adumbrations as the basis for evidence which allows no further skepticism, he is exactly relying on something identifiable. Furthermore, Husserl considers ignorance as something which has a property of becoming identifiable by further knowledge acquired in the future. Hence, for Husserl, ignorance must remain attainable in due course in the horizon of knowledge as identifiable. What is more important is that such an attitude towards the identifiable is not only of Husserl's but also shared among most of the philosophers appear in the history of western philosophy¹. If this is the case, and if scientific methods share the same attitude towards ignorance with philosophy, then there would be no chance for any discourse on

environmental problems to investigate *ignorance defined as unidentifiable*.

This indicates that so far as we depend on the notion of identity, we have no choice but approve the improvement and expansion of academic knowledge founded upon the idea of the identifiable, which excludes ignorance from scholarly investigation as non-identifiable and therefore non-evident. This is what we call progressivism or, more appropriately, [G1] [G2] *totalitarian progressivism*. [G3]

However, such progressivism will never be able to detect unexpected outcomes classified as ignorance and hence will inevitably aggravate the environmental degradation by incessantly introducing more and more unknown causes for that, no matter how such progressivism improves itself. Interestingly, in this process, progressivism both in science and philosophy increase the degree of criticism against ignorance and attempt to reduce it into uncertainty which will further be reduced to mere risk. Here, ignorance is retrieved from outside of non-scientific and non-philosophical vagueness and once again enclosed in the field of academism.

However, we strongly doubt that the progressivism above mentioned will be able to solve environmental problems, and therefore we inquire into the problem of ignorance and its importance in the field of discourse concerning the environmental problems where ignorance has no relation with either perception or cognition. Ignorance is not even something which connects itself with perception and cognition as *something impossible to perceive or recognize*; we can only describe it as something which cannot be called as *something* and hence is no more than a mere logical term which has no relation to the reality. Nevertheless, through further investigation, it reveals itself as a class of danger totally incomprehensible and yet as something possible to break out in reality or even alter our understanding of reality.

In conclusion, we stress that we need to pay more attention to progressivism shared by both science and philosophy, and investigate, with broad flexibility in mind, unexpected outcomes classified as ignorance.

¹ I will talk about this more in detail in the presentation.