

# **Pathways of Creative Research Towards a Festival of Dialogues**

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*For*

PROFESSOR T.K. OOMMEN

RACHEL CORRIE

OVE JACOBSEN

*and*

SURESH CHANDRA SHUKLA

## Afterword

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### *Towards a Rationality of Mystery: The Calling of Robust Ignorance*

MARCUS BUSSEY and  
MIRIAM SANNUM

There is little doubt that today one stands in the shadow of the great intellectual legacy of European rationalism/empiricism. It is clear that this tradition has broken many erstwhile limits to set human social, intellectual and technological energies free. Yet this tradition has also come at a cost—planetary environmental deterioration, new forms of predatory imperialism, a loss of diversity and meaning—and this cost calls to all of those who care for this world and its human and other-than-human inhabitants to do something bold on *behalf of, for* and also *with* this planet and its vibrant forms. One is required to be bold to chart new pathways into multiple futures. But how does one do that when the future cannot be read? Well, *plans* are needed and one needs *ideas* and one needs *scouts* to run ahead to explore possibilities. This book offers one such plan, a constellation of ideas and brings together a group of scouts charting new futures in creative research.

The plan needs to be loose and open—and such is Giri's idea of an ontological epistemology of participation. Such an epistemology is celebratory, a festival of encounters. This concept has both a personal and social dimension. At the personal level one can no longer escape from the necessity to engage in the *self-cultivation* needed to ground a reoriented epistemology of practice and co-creation. In this re-orientation the locus of knowing is seen to be shifting from the observer to the observer-observed, from the all-seeing eye to act of co-creating. Also found here is the double entendre of engagement with civilizational insights beyond the Western episteme. The Orient calls, thus a reorientation is emerging. Yet of course the Orient, as Edward Said (1995) reminded one, is not just the old east that dances in (haunts) the Western imagination—ultimately it is the Other. This other is the counterpoint and collaborator in what is yet to

come. It lies beyond the horizon yet one should approach it filled with curiosity and hope.

This curiosity and hope fuel new pathways of creative research. This curiosity is a human attribute that has always leads one to look beyond, whilst the hope is a practical process of not accepting the limits given by any current hegemony (Bussey 2013). This is a calling for practical optimism in a time when hope seems somewhat diminished, even dangerous. And of course hope can be a problem. If one hopes clever people will find solutions to all problems, one is misguided. If one hopes that some new configuration of technology will change the rules of the current global problematique, they are misguided. If they hope that some divine intervention will save the earth they are misguided. All this must be done together and more: the limitations of passive hope have to be transcended.

Yet what remains if hope is abandoned? Or, more importantly, if one is abandoned by hope? This is not a time to cast hope aside. Instead hope requires something—effort, imagination and engagement. It demands practical, creative, resourceful and dangerous explorations into how the limits are approached, to knowing this world inherent in the current paradigm. It calls for a constructive optimism based on a practical hope that takes traditions and extends them in new ways. Such continuity draws on the enabling traditions so ably tapped in the chapters in this book, from Gandhi to Gadamer, Illich to Wilber and more. This creative and transformational traditionalism<sup>1</sup> is vital to any rethinking of research. It calls for new narratives based on the co-creative and spiritual possibilities inherent to the very limits faced. It invites in the energy and possibilities of joyful collaborations with the multitude that inhabit the ontological field. It calls to the self-cultivation of inter-knowing the world through a hopeful inquiry into its possibilities. Such a knowing is about acceptance and dancing together rather than about order and definition; such a knowing embraces the non-knowing that always accompanies the act of research and provides the substrata of inter-knowing at the heart of an ontological epistemology of participation.

So any *plan* must be open ended, inclusive and, we would argue, joyful. The *idea* central to this book of essays is the offering of a *soft ontology of intimacy*.<sup>2</sup> Intimacy is inherent to knowing as one cannot truly know without having merged with the known in a generative act (Bussey 2014). This is a kind of loving that trusts *the dynamics of knowing* to allow co-creation to emerge from the stepping into knowing. To step into knowing requires the cultivation of a robust ignorance<sup>3</sup>. People are not prisoners of ignorance but guests. Ignorance is not darkness to researchers cultivating the soft ontology of practical hope. This kind of ignorance eschews fear and the clinging to past modes of being that limit the heart and distort thought

(Sarkar 1982). What is pointed to here is an open, exciting ignorance that offers the basis for rethinking, reorienting and re-enchanting this world and people's relationship to it.

Traditionally ignorance has been used in research to explore what is known and what is not known. Consider Ph.D. and this is the kind of ignorance at work. Robust ignorance reaches beyond this known unknown to an engagement with the negative space implicit to all epistemological positions: the unknown unknowns. In this way it is acknowledged that there is a revealed way (known unknowns) and the silence (unknown unknowns) that surrounds that which is excluded from any dominant rationality. Robust ignorance brings in mystery as a way of understanding this negative space. It is like the Japanese word *ma*, which refers to *spaces or intervals between* visible, structural elements. There is a kind of Zen mind at work here. This quality invokes a *tolerance for uncertainty* (see Shah's Chapter 10), that develops into a robust engagement moving from the known elements of any context to the many mysterious 'unknown' things that bring magic to the inhabited worlds.

Magic refers to the mystery at the heart of things. This calls for skills in research that relate to the self-cultivation so dear to Giri's project. To go inward, to contemplate and reflect and then act and test are part of this process of cultivation. It is a form of meditative enquiry moving beyond the formal to the informal, beyond the external to the interior domains of reflection as action inquiry. This book offers many approaches to such self-cultivation and the research it engenders. In addition, tools such as visioning, deep listening, engagement with the creative arts, spiritual and meditative practices, experiential research, ensemble learning, social sculpturing, and play all have their own capacity to extend the robust ignorance at the heart of the rationality of mystery. Reason in this context becomes non-linear and intuitive. It functions by navigating and generating networks that work into the unknown, unknowns that punctuate reality.

The *scouts* in this programme of self-cultivation and co-creation are seekers and collaborators across-between-beyond fields of enquiry, often described as 'disciplines', who explore new modalities of research into humanity's relationship with this world. This volume offers some fascinating possibilities in this regard, enacting the ontological sociality Giri calls for. Such explorations are layered—both tentative and assertive, open and creative. They invite possibilities rather than mandating any specific alternative. They involve engagement, as Giri argues in Chapter 2, with theory as a process of closure, with the nature of any given reading of the social as the context for theory and also with the relationship of the theory-maker (a kind of psychotic/paranoid modernist God) with the act of theorizing. In this regard, theory as Theory is overthrown and a new theory

of possibilities and openness turns towards *humility* and the limits to its own aspiration to define and disclose the bones of this world. Such analytic hubris must be relieved of the burden of Truth and instead invited to engage with the power of mystery as a creative calling. Thus the rationality of Modernity gives way to the rationality of Mystery.

To approach a Mystery, centred rationality calls for a robust ignorance. This kind of reason has a deeply counter-intuitive quality but it is also—or perhaps because of this—a *libratory reason*. It invites an anticipatory imagination to unveil new possibilities and draws on what Cornel West (1999) calls the prophetic pragmatism needed to question personal and civilizational 'conditionedness'. The contributors to this collection act as scouts. They offer deep insights into the human relationship with knowledge production working from many sites. Each in their own way is doing the necessary scouting to develop maps to future possibilities. They are seeking, not as imperialists sort to chart and define new possessions, but as co-creators of new territories of possibility: territories where power comes from *within and between* each one rather than being granted/conferred by virtue of birth, citizenship and class/caste.

New worlds need new ways of knowing that go hand in hand with the new ways of being that organically emerge from transformed environments. As each *scout* returns from their explorations of such worlds, they bring insights and visions of alternatives to the one-size-fits-all approach to knowing preached, practised and enforced by the academy. Free people can only be free when their thought is free. Thought can only be free when the values and processes that support it are open, inclusive and multiple. The violence of the current epistemic regime is, we believe, crumbling. There is too much that is unknown and it is becoming increasingly clear that this is not a problem but a gift. *Not to know* is an invitation to refresh one's approach to the world, to embrace a reasoning that works within the mystery of being as a critical spiritual resource for emancipation. This implies, as suggested, a robust ignorance that invites new pathways of creative research that promote the kind of critical inquiry celebrated in this volume.

## Notes

1. For more on creative traditionalism see Bussey 2015.
2. Drawing on Giri's suggestion of a soft ontology implicit to his ideas of weak naturalism, weak identity and weak integration (Giri 2013).
3. This concept takes its lead from Nicholas of Cusa's (1990) description of 'learned ignorance' and also from Sebastien Castellio's (1981) 'art of doubting'.

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