

---

# CHAPTER 1: The Beginning of a Great Journey

---

## THE INTRODUCTION

My dear reader, this work records how I learn that to understand knowledge, four main skills are necessary:

1. **You need depth of knowledge to create knowledge**
2. **Think Critically. Doubt everything**
3. **Always be aware that everything is part of a bigger picture and are related to one another**
4. **Communicate effectively, whatever the method**

These wisdoms only became clear to me after reflecting on the course materials, panels, and tutorial discussions in light of the course's learning outcomes. These revelations came to me in stages and I will take you through it one by one till the revelations become whole. As a student of law and economics, I will show you that these four skills are very relevant in my disciplines

## STAGE 1: CREATIVITY

Creativity is needed in understanding and creating knowledge. In Week 3, the panellists confirmed that creativity is inherent in everyone. However, for academic research, a higher

degree of creativity is needed. This was confirmed when I read about the three fields of creativity which are the domain, field and person.<sup>1</sup>

From these three fields, I believe that to be creative and to understand the process of creating knowledge, a certain degree of depth is important. It is important then for us to first understand what has already been established (domains), its established standards and traditions (field) and to understand how the two interact with one another.

Furthermore, Aat Vervoon explained that knowledge cannot escape from the context of history.<sup>2</sup> Knowledge is the product of the past and how it progress over time matters. Hence, I am more than convinced that before we can attempt to create knowledge, we must first be aware of its depth and history.

That brings me to the science and humanities. What does it mean by depth?

## **STAGE 2: SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES, THE IDEA OF DEPTH**

Initially I thought that scientific research gives depth and humanities breadth but after the Panel that week, that idea was busted.<sup>3</sup> The scientific field focuses on one type of in-depth research while the humanities an entirely different type of in-depth research. This idea is clearest when we look at the theory of gravity which examines one phenomenon as compared to criminology where various areas of society are studied to learn how they relate to and influence one another. Scientific understanding can be proved mathematically and through experiments which can isolate and control certain variables under observation. The

---

<sup>1</sup> Philip McIntyre, *'Creativity and Cultural Production: A Study of Contemporary Western Popular Music Songwriting'*, *Creativity Research Journal* (2008).

<sup>2</sup> Aat Vervoon, *'Creating Knowledge: Introducing Lecture: 28 July 2011'*.

<sup>3</sup> Week 5, Science and Humanities Week.

humanities on the other hand, seek to understand social phenomenon which is hard to isolate and control. In this sense, the humanities rely on time to give it depth because over time, the variables they are studying will show patterns that can ascertain theories or hypothesis while science relies on precise experimentation and isolation to test hypothesis.<sup>4</sup>

This revelation explains depth to me. When I look at knowledge, there is a need to break it down and study its parts in great detail. However, we also need to look at how that knowledge evolves and how its various components influence one another over time. Components of a body of knowledge would include the domains (established understanding) and the fields (established traditions like their ways of testing hypothesis).

Hence, **Skill number 1: You need depth of knowledge to create knowledge!**

However, there is a danger that we take certain underlying assumptions which are inherent in knowledge creation as conclusive. What is established may not necessarily be correct. This sentiment resounded strongly when we explored great critical thinkers. Thus the second skill we need is to be critical thinkers.

### STAGE 3: DE OMNIBUS DUBITANDUM

Knowledge is created with certain underlying assumptions. Before we can begin challenging them, we need a deep understanding of how that assumption shapes that body of knowledge (Skill no. 1).

After we understood the depth of that knowledge, we can begin questioning their underlying assumptions. Karl Marx's maxim is "De Omnibus Dubitandum", which is to doubt everything. That is the wisdom behind great works such as The Communist Manifesto and

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The Vindication of the Rights of Woman. These works questioned established knowledge and challenge their underlying assumption.

Hence, **Skill number 2: Think Critically. Doubt everything!**

However, I find it important to emphasise that we cannot start asking questions about something without understanding it well. To emphasise this, the two great works above are able to contribute lastingly to knowledge because they manage to question underlying assumptions (critical thinking) and successfully propose new ideas which through the depth of their understanding about a body of knowledge, they successfully reorganised that body of knowledge into something new and cohesive (creativity).

However, Skills 1 and 2 are insufficient to grasp the idea of knowledge. As explained, knowledge cannot be devoid of its context. So we need to study the context and how it came about. Hence, we move to the idea of 'space'.

## STAGE 4: THE GREAT SPACE

The concept of 'Va' or space is a concept that connects everything with one another in a great unity.<sup>5</sup> I then realised that instead of seeing this concept as a different way of knowing, we should view this concept as an integral part of knowing.

From this concept, I learn that knowledge is part of a greater reality. The approach of academic research thus far is to isolate parts of reality and study it. As shown in Skill 1 and 2, this approach is very useful. However, we cannot stop there. We must go back to that reality where we derived that knowledge and see how what we learn and know fits into the bigger picture.

---

<sup>5</sup> Albert Wendt, *'Afterword: Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body'*.

I believe that by viewing knowledge this way, we are able to advance what we know further by attempting to integrate various fields of knowledge together. This process may give rise to new and bigger questions thus opening up avenues for knowledge to grow. This may seem daunting but I believe that by braving the immensity, we will get a better understanding of the world.

Hence, **Skill number 3: Always be aware that everything is part of a bigger picture and are related to one another.**

Is this 'space' an indication of me being foolish?

Aat Vervoon highlighted in his lecture that academic fields are merely categorisation. It makes teaching and funding a lot easier.<sup>6</sup> Also, categorisations are merely social construct. To understand the broader concept of knowledge one needs to break free from this categorisation and relook at the way we see research and disciplines. This helps give me an idea that the bodies of knowledge we learn today are not actually meant to be neatly categorised. They have the potential to merge or complement one another. With such insights, the idea of a greater whole becomes evident and the idea that everything is related to one another in a great space finally makes sense.

## STAGE 5: LITERATURE

Lastly, I have learnt that the way knowledge is communicated also shapes the body of knowledge itself. We learnt that a piece of literature gains a meaning of its own that may not be intended by the author.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the knowledge that the author intends to

---

<sup>6</sup> Aat Vervoon, 'Creating Knowledge: Introducing Lecture: 28 July 2011'.

<sup>7</sup> Week 4: Ways of Writing Human.

communicate may change from reader to reader and that change may be radical as it gets translated to another language and read by readers with varying backgrounds.

Hence, we need the skills to communicate knowledge succinctly so that the meaning does not get lost. This is important for knowledge development because when the meaning gets lost in translation, people may not be aware that an idea has already been found and humanity might be wasting time raising the same point.

So, **the fourth skill is to communicate effectively, whatever the method.**

Literature has shown me that academic texts may not be the only effective way to communicate knowledge. An idea or knowledge can be communicated through cartoons, movies or stories. It is important to remember that great wisdoms are still passed along through fairy tales and stories. What matters is that its content does not get lost.

This awareness is useful in other ways too. I find that when looking at a text, we must question whether what we understood is what the authors intend it to be. By doing this, we can check our idea against theirs and perhaps through that reflection bigger questions and different ways of seeing may arise, which may give rise to more research. This will definitely help us in the pursuit of critical thinking because it challenges accepted knowledge and norms.

## **CONCLUSION: THE FIRST SYNTHESIS**

All these four skills are relevant in law and economics because these two disciplines changes with society and time. A lawyer, a judge, an economist or national leaders must have the skills to question established laws, principles and assumptions wisely and critically to ensure

that the law or the current economic system continues to be relevant. This is very important because these two disciplines influence the livelihood of many people.

With these four skills I hope I am able to live up to the expectations of my disciplines and be able to uphold justice and fairness in law and economics, so that the lives of many may be improved and injustice abolished.

1495 Words

---

# Annex 1 – Tutorial Ticket

---

## Week 1 – Great Thinkers

John Rawls is to me a great thinker.

Rawls's Original Position has provided new insights into the formulation of the principles of justice. It proposes an objective framework for the search of justice namely that the principles of justice must be acceptable to all. This has challenged the prevalent utilitarian thought by placing the individual as central in the equation, not the aggregate benefit of society.

Hence, Rawls have reopened the discussion of social justice by providing an alternative to the prevalent utilitarian approach. Rawls have invited academics to reconsider the individual and the definition of overall social good.

## Week 2 – Creativity

Both the works to me proved the need to acknowledge the world should we ever want to be creative. It is never only in our heads. It is the world around us that inspires in us a sense of awe and wonder that motivates us to study, learn and theorise thus creating that domain and field which McIntyre talks about. Often times, once this is done, we take it as a given. However, we are limited in our sight and understanding. There are great things in the universe that is out there that we don't know. Most of the theories we found out are like small islands in the world. Our job is to discover the world, not settle on the islands.

We should not only try to constantly ask questions but also develop in us a sense of humility to acknowledge the limitations of the theories taught and to cultivate in us that sense of awe to always wonder the heavens. This will ultimately foster creativity. Lastly, creativity to me is not just something new or different, it builds on what we know and will ultimately lead us closer to the truth which is our existence.

## Week 3 – No tutorial Week

## Week 4 – Writing Human

Firstly, I look for simplicity because it paints the world or fantasy world and all its characters in a comprehensible dimension where I can relate. Take "The Simpsons" for example, how simple is the world they live in. I cannot help but admire Homer Simpson's life because it is devoid of all the stress and worries or the complexities that haunts my life as it does everyone.



Secondly, more pronounced for literature, I seek the inevitable truth about myself. As a reader I cannot help but feel a sense of vulnerability and mortality. This can be seen generally by the innocence of the hero, the mistakes they made etc. Reading 1984, or Brave New World, I cannot help but feel a sense of anger towards the state of the world Orwell painted but at the same time I felt a sense of being overwhelmed and helpless because of the sheer power of the dictators. From this I relate to the fact of how human I am.

I seek these aspects because it reminds of the reality of my life. Is it that I have forgotten simplicity? Am I always so stressed because I forgot that I am but a human? I seek these to understand myself and the world better.

### **Week 5 – Science and Humanities Gap**

In my opinion, the gap is REAL. In the abstract one can assert that ultimately these disciplines seeks to understand the nature of things. What is 'nature' in this context? It is so vast and complex that it is inevitable our inquiries be broken down into its respective disciplines. This is crucial so that we can achieve both depth and breadth. If ever there is a hypothetical human being who can live forever, he will in due time be able to witness the birth of new disciplines, the birth of bridging disciplines, till finally the body of knowledge accumulated merges into a whole which is the rationalisation of reality.

As for me, I wish to be that hypothetical human and witness the beauty of knowledge. I wish to be FEDGEHOG! I would further assert that human beings in general are FEDGHOGS! This is so because to think like a scientist is part of being human and so is thinking like a proponent of the humanities. We are both. We are always seeking breadth(fox) and depth(hedgehog). That is how the world makes sense. To me, this distinction exists because some of us display more of a hedgehog character(me!) than a fox, but in reality, we are a hybrid.

### **Week 6 – Pacific Ways of Knowing**

From Week 3 and 4, we've learnt how subjective writings can be. Mary had shown us the many ways of reading a written piece of work. In this sense, what structures the way we see or understand a piece of work is very much our upbringing and experience. For most of us, we're brought up in a world where written words are dominant and that to a certain extent explains why books and words are so central in our transmission and creation of knowledge.

Hence, being brought up in that world, I would find that tattooing, singing or dancing is a terrible way of transmitting knowledge, especially so to most parts of the world whose society are similar to mine. However, if we are taught to think and understand the world through dance and song, this mode would be the best in storing and creating knowledge because the way we think are engineered along this avenue.

Nonetheless, I find that the tattoo-ing, singing and dancing also taps on the human spirit, our emotions. Words appease the intellectual mind. Dancing and tattoo-ing on the other hand, is a rich and holistic mode of transmitting knowledge. Perhaps what we need is a merger of the two to create a higher sort of knowledge?

