

Foreword

This book is about a journey, the author's intellectual journey in search of an understanding of that strange, ethereal thing we call knowledge. Like all good travel books, it can serve as a guidebook for other travelers on the same journey, whether they have taken it in the past or they embark on it in the future.

Elie Geisler is a knowledgeable and sensitive guide. He brings to the journey the academic disciplines of philosophy, organizational behavior, technology management, and related subjects. He brings years of experience in applying these academic disciplines to practical real-world problems of all kinds of organizations: businesses, government entities, and academic institutions. Most importantly, he brings a lively curiosity about how things work and a tenacious drive to understand

He starts his journey—and our journey—where anyone who is serious about it must start, by defining the geography we will travel together: the structure of knowledge, its components, how the components are formed, and how they are combined into that thing called knowledge. At the end of the first leg of the journey, we and he have reached a common understanding of what knowledge is and how it is formed.

The second leg of our journey explores how knowledge progresses. As human beings grow and mature, as cultures grow and mature, their stocks of knowledge increase (most of the time) and sometimes 'old knowledge' is discredited or superceded by new knowledge. We learn that understanding the progress of knowledge requires a different mindset from understanding the structure of knowledge itself. We see variants of that different mindset that are confusing and non-productive, and finally reach one that describes the progress of knowledge in clear and useful terms.

Knowing what knowledge is, how it is formed, and how it progresses takes us to the threshold of the final part of our journey: understanding how knowledge is applied to better the human condition. We look at individuals, organizations, and society as a whole.

This is a very personal book. It is as much about the way Professor Geisler reached his conclusions as it is about the conclusions themselves. Along the way he draws powerful analogies with biology, the physics of sub-atomic particles (superstring theory), Darwinian evolution, and theology. Fellow travelers will find these analogies fascinating and provocative.

Travelers often go to museums as they travel in order to understand the history behind the current “sights” they see. Professor Geisler has provided us with an intellectual museum of the history of efforts to define and understand knowledge. It is a fascinating place.

The journey toward understanding knowledge with Professor Geisler is not an easy one. Most interesting journeys are not. But it is a feasible one, with many homely examples to ease the road. The trip is well worth the effort. I urge you to take it.

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