

DR. SIEGFRIED REUSCH

THE BLUE TRAILBLAZER



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The first comprehensible philosophy journal in German: this was the aspiration of Dr. Siegfried Reusch when he and other alumni of the universities of Stuttgart and Ulm founded the journal *der blaue reiter* (The Blue Rider) in 1995, making him one of the pioneers in public engagement.

Does sustainability always call for self-restraint? Are revolutions the engine of culture? And is there any such thing as certain knowledge? These are some of the fundamental ethical questions that *der blaue reiter* (the blue rider) addresses. “These are the questions we want to put to society at large and show what philosophy can do,” Reusch explains. Philosophy is all about thinking about the fundamentals and asking questions rather than taking anything for granted. The articles, on the other hand, do not necessarily provide answers. “We want to point out what is conceivable. People have to come up with their own answers,” says Reusch.

The first issue of the magazine in 1995 asked the fundamental question: “What is philosophy?” There are no clear answers to this either. In his editorial, Prof. Günther Bien, under whom Reusch completed his doctorate, describes philosophy as the “... path to wisdom through the narrow gate of science ...”. By contrast, the philosopher Dr. Otto-Peter Obermeier sees philosophy as “... failure in a more or less skillful manner ...” and thus as the cornerstone of a successful life. In so saying, he came quite close to the magazine's logo, which is a silhouette of Don Quixote, whose fight against the windmills may be seen as a metaphor for failure. This struggle is also reflected in title of the journal, *der blaue reiter* (the blue rider): It ties in with the eponymous artists' almanac published by Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, in which the color blue symbolizes the spiritual aspect and the rider the combative one.

THE IVORY TOWER IS ALSO IMPORTANT

These struggles are also reflected in the balancing act between the use of specialist jargon and comprehensibility for a readership that is largely made up of academics, but not necessarily philosophers. “Comprehensibility is relative,” says Reusch. That is why, he adds, technical terms, sometimes even Latin, are still needed even in a generally →

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studied chemistry at the University of Ulm and philosophy at the University of Stuttgart. He has been editor-in-chief and co-publisher of *the philosophy journal der blaue reiter* (the blue rider) as well as director of the eponymous publishing house since 1995. Reusch, who has also published and authored several books, organized the first philosophical cafés in Stuttgart and has initiated numerous other philosophical events.

→ understandable article in order to describe things with precision. “It's no use railing against the much-cited ivory tower,” says Reusch, “it's definitely important. However,” he says in the same breath: “scientists do need to stick their heads above the parapet every now and then and show the public what they are up to. The public has a right to know what's going on in expensively funded universities and research institutions.” However, knowledge transfer should not be a one way process. “Both sides are slightly reserved when it comes to contact. Science and society must enter into a dialog,” says Reusch. His most “philosophical” interview was with star chef Vincent Klink.

Feedback from the general public to the scientific community – or, as Reusch casually puts it, “the connection to real life” – also benefits science, he says. It broadens one's view of one's own subject area, as was seen, for example, in the research into nuclear power, which initially had a strong technical focus. “Whereas many researchers may have felt that people's fears about nuclear power were irrational, they have greatly advanced the safety aspects of reactor research in response to these.” A similar situation can be observed today, he continues, for example, in the discourse surrounding the sequestration of CO₂, in which the public are asking whether this technology is also earthquake-proof. “We need critical discourse with no reservations,” Reusch sums up.

BRINGING TOGETHER THE NATURAL SCIENCES AND THE HUMANITIES

An interdisciplinary approach is indispensable in order to shape this discourse. The relationship between the natural sciences and philosophy was already addressed in the first edition of *der blaue reiter* (the blue rider). To this day, the editorial team has been put together on a deliberately interdisciplinary basis. Dr. Klaus Erlach, for example, is a mechanical engineer and holds a doctorate in philosophy, Rüdiger Vaas combines biology and philosophy, and Dr. Elke Uhl heads the University of Stuttgart's International Center for Cultural and Technological Studies.

Reusch himself also epitomizes the connection between the two disciplines in his own life: Born in Freiburg, he originally studied chemistry in Ulm and, after obtaining his degree, went on to study philosophy at the University of Stuttgart, where he received his doctorate in 2004. Asked how that fits together, he says: “Chemistry and philosophy are simply two different ways of describing the world, but they are inseparable and ideally complement each other to give a more rounded view of the world.” This requires openness to the views of researchers who work in other disciplines such as those, which natural sciences graduate Reusch learned from the teaching staff at the University of Stuttgart. “I'm extremely grateful for this,” he says, and appeals to practitioners of both the humanities and the natural sciences to listen to one another and to seek a dialog – “as difficult as this may be in practice”.

Universities could and should put structures in place to foster a successful discourse between the various disciplines, he continues. For example, it would make sense to co-opt philosophy professors in the science faculties and to allocate a few semester hours per week for networking as part of the curricula. “The University of Stuttgart was quick to recognize this, which it did, for example, by establishing the IZKT. Provided the university continues steadfastly along this path, it will create a genuine sense of esteem.” The result, according to the philosopher, alluding to the University of Stuttgart's stated vision, “will not only be intelligent systems for a sustainable society, but also systems that will be embraced by society.” →

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