II.A. Introduction

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Any human endeavor which seeks recognition as a professional or scientific activity must clearly define the axioms upon which it rests. The foundation of a discipline, as the foundations of a house, serves as a guide and basis for the placement of the building blocks of knowledge gathered through research and development activities. It is the definition, exposure, and investigation of the philosophical foundation that distinguishes a scientific profession from other endeavors.

In a well-established scientific endeavor, the foundation is made explicit so that one is able to recognize when the resulting structure can no longer be properly supported and a reexamination of the fundamentals is in order. A classic example of this was the impact of quantum mechanics on the foundations of physics. With respect to new disciplines, such as the investigation of Delphi methodology, the situation is one where not enough of the structure has been blueprinted to discriminate which of many possible foundations supply the "best" underpinnings.

The early attempt by Helmer and Rescher in their classic paper "On the Epistemology of the Inexact Sciences" proposed one foundation, largely of a Lockean nature, which was very adequate for the typical technological forecasting applications for which Delphi has been popular. However, in recent years extensions to Delphi methodology have demonstrated a need for a broader basis. Certainly the theme of this book, which largely views Delphi as the process of structuring human communications, further enhances this position.

The first article by Mitroff and Turoff, examines what the various classic or "pure mode" epistemologies of Western philosophy have to offer for insight into the Delphi process. The philosophies covered are those represented by Locke, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and Singer. It largely follows the morphological structure of philosophical inquiry first proposed by C. West Churchman in his "Design of Inquiring Systems." As with any young discipline, it should not come as a surprise that such a rich diversity of foundation axioms may be used to give form and shape to Delphi. In a sense this is an expression of the yet untapped potential for future development of the technique.

The second article, by Scheele, illustrates how a user of Delphi may compose for his own view and application of Delphi a very specific philosophical foundation. The author, being primarily concerned in many of his applications with the perceptions of individuals as they may relate to marketing problems, adapts elements of the Lockean, Kantian, and Singerian philosophies and merges them with the existentialist concept of subjective or negotiated reality. The result is a foundation for a design precisely matched to the user's unique needs.

Throughout the book one will find in the various articles explicit or implicit support for a mode or manner of applying Delphi which rests on the philosophies brought out in these two papers. It is interesting to note that a recent sociological perspective views

Delphi as a ritual.[1] Primitive man always approached the future ritualistically, with ceremonies involving utensils, liturgies, managers, and participants. The Buckminster Fuller World Game, Barbara Hubbard's SYNCON, as well as Delphi, can be considered as modern participatory rituals. The committee-free environment and anonymity of Delphi stimulate reflection and imagination, facilitating a personal futures orientation. Thus, the modern Delphi is indeed related to its famous Greek name sake.

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[1] A. Wilson and D. Wilson, "The Four Faces of the Future," New York, Grove Press, 1474.