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"Humankind and the Environment: An Anatomy of Surprise and Ignorance"

Faber, Malte, Reiner Manstetten and John L. R. Proops

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This paper addresses the problem of 'ignorance' in philosophy and science, particularly with respect to the conceptualization, study, and solution of environmental problems. The authors begin by distinguishing between 'risk', 'uncertainty,' and 'ignorance'. They then offer a categorization of ignorance, and use these categories to assess the role of science as a means of reducing ignorance. They note that to proceed with science, several 'acts of faith' are necessary and they conclude with a discussion of the importance of an attitude of openness in science and philosophy, especially regarding environmental problems. Throughout, their discussion of ignorance, and the problems involved in its reduction, are illustrated by reference to environmental issues.

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