Preface to the English Edition

The story of this book is somewhat unusual. A few years ago I started working on a monograph, where I intended to collect a number of problems concerning ancient and modern physics. I had on my desk a pile of assorted notes taken during many years and during the course of many lectures and discussions, which would have provided enough material to fill a thick volume. Yet, when, after my retirement, I maintained more regular contact with my birth country, I was encouraged by old friends to first publish a short version of the book, addressed to a broader circle of Italian readers. This implied selecting suitable subjects and establishing the depth of their treatment at a level suitable for and palatable to non-specialists. After discussing with the publisher’s advisors, I was asked to keep the text within what they considered “standard limits” for this specific book market. I first accepted the suggestion and did not worry about the consequences. As the work progressed, however, I began fearing not only to have almost deprived the book’s skeleton of its necessary substance, but also to have weakened the force of the argumentation on delicate and debated questions. It has been indeed a rather lengthy and hesitant work that finally led to the publication by Jaca Book of the essay entitled L’Albero della Conoscenza. However, when, some months after publication, I re-read this slim book, I realised that it did indeed present some positive traits. Of these, the best was a necessary distance to so vast a subject, at least in terms of approach that, anyhow, even several weighty tomes would have hardly been sufficient to expose in any detail even the most pertinent matter. I thus resumed working on the English version by maintaining the same height of flight over the subjects as in the Italian edition. I only inserted some further details in the central part of the book and a new section regarding the $p$-adic numbers—which few people are familiar with—since they represent today a most promising instrument for invigorating the mathematics of quantum physics. The last chapters, dealing with anthropological aspects of science remained substantially unchanged.

The book, at any rate, required short but fluent expositions of sometimes complex arguments and, in this respect, I should like to gratefully acknowledge the invaluable, competent contribution of Tina Saavedra who polished my English so that this book perhaps makes for pleasant reading and at least reduces the reader’s fatigue which the original text might have caused.
In the end, the *Tree of Knowledge* turned out to be much more similar to its Italian brother than to the monograph I had initially in mind. However, I myself am satisfied: since the book is essentially a *plaidoyer* for simplicity and clarity in science I find its size and contents comply with these attributes.

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