

CONHECIMENTO E AUTOCONHECIMENTO: EXTERNALISMO E INTERNALISMO¹

Knowledge and Self-Knowledge: Externalism versus Internalism

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RESUMO

Este texto será gerado pela contraposição (num sentido amplo) entre dois conceitos, que chamarei aqui “concepção externalista de conhecimento”, de um lado, e “concepção internalista de conhecimento” (como um tipo de psicologismo evidencialista), de outro. Por meio deste contraste, buscarei alcançar alguns novos insights sobre a relação entre as noções de “conhecimento” e “auto-conhecimento”.

Palavras-chave: Conhecimento. Auto-conhecimento. Estrutura Linguística. Experiência. Evidência. Lógica. Psicológica.

ABSTRACT

This text will be generated by contraposition (in the broadest sense) of two concepts, which I will call “externalist conception of knowledge”, on one side, and “internalist conception of knowledge” (as a kind of psychologist evidentialism), on the other. Through this contrast, I try to reach some new insights into the relationship between the notions of “knowledge” and “self-knowledge”.

Key-words: Knowledge. Self-Knowledge. Linguistic Structure. Experience. Evidence. Logical. Psychological.

The term “knowledge” is too vague and broad to be encompassed by a single definition. I will delineate the contrast between what I call “externalist conception of knowledge” and what is called in certain contexts an “evidentialist (in the sense of “psychologist”) conception of knowledge”, understood as an internalist conception.

According to a tendency frequently associated with the classical view of knowledge (since Plato and Aristotle), evidence can be considered as a criterion for justified true belief. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, Frege’s work in logic operates a transformation of philosophy

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which will have an important impact and influence on the philosophical conception of many authors, such that even notions such as “evidence” came to be taken in a logical, not anymore in a psychological sense.

Already in his seminal work *Begriffsschrift* (from here on [BS]), Frege traces a precise line between thought in a psychological sense on one side, and in a logical sense (“rein Denken”), on the other.³ The conception of logical thought as pure thought allows Frege to make an interpretation of “evidence” that is a breakthrough with respect to the traditional one (what we have called “internalist”). The axioms of [BS] are logically evident, independent of the acknowledgement of this “fact of reason”⁴ by a subject.

This logical conception of thought allows Frege to revolutionize not only the notion of “evidence”. It also represents a fundamental change concerning the theory of knowledge and, consequently, the notion of knowledge proper. This is already clear when we consider his words in the foreword to [BS]:

Accordingly, we divide all truths that require a justification into two kinds, in that the proof can proceed purely logical in the case of one, and must be based on facts of experience in the case of the other. But the fact that a sentence belongs to the first kind, and yet could never come to consciousness in a human mind without sense activity, is compatible with this point of view (footnote: since without sense perception no mental development is possible in the beings known to us, the latter [observation] is valid for all statements). Thus, it is not the psychological way of origin, but the most complete way of proof that lies at the basis of the classification.⁵

And later, in *Grundlagen der Arithmetik* (from here on [GA]):

Philosophical motives have also determined me to such investigations. The questions about the a priori or a posteriori, the synthetic or analytic nature of the arithmetic truths, are waiting here for their answer. [...]. Those dis-

³ See [BS], Vorwort, pp. IXff.

⁴ [BS], pp.3f.

⁵ Free translation of: „Wir theilen danach alle Wahrheiten, die einer Begründung bedürfen, in zwei Arten, indem der Beweis bei den einen rein logisch vorgehen kann, bei den andern sich auf Erfahrungstatsachen stützen muss. Es ist aber wohl vereinbar, dass ein Satz zu der ersteren Art gehört und doch ohne Sinnestätigkeit nie in einem menschlichen Geiste zum Bewusstsein kommen könnte (Fußnote: Da ohne Sinneswahrnehmung keine geistige Entwicklung bei der uns bekannten Wesen möglich ist, so gilt das Letztere von allen Urtheilen.). Also nicht die psychologische Entstehungsweise, sondern die vollkommenste Art der Beweisführung.“ ([BS], S. IX-X)

tinctions of a priori and a posteriori, synthetic and analytic do not concern the content of the proposition, but the justification of the assertion of this same proposition [as true]. Where this is lacking, the possibility of that division is also absent. An error a priori is then just as much an absurdity as, say, a blue concept. If one calls a proposition a posteriori or analytic in my sense, then one does not judge about the psychological and physical conditions that made it possible to form the content of the proposition in consciousness, also not about how another perhaps erroneously came to believe it to be true, but about what the justification of the belief is based on at the deepest level. [...]. It now depends on finding the proof and tracing it back to the original truths. If one encounters on this way only the general logical laws and definitions, then one has an analytic truth, whereby it is presupposed that also the propositions are taken into consideration, on which for instance the admissibility of a definition is based.⁶

As we can see from these passages, the division of the kinds of knowledge is to be based on the division of kinds of truth (in the Kantian sense). So far, nothing new. Frege's breakthrough, however, which becomes possible only on account of this development of a "language for pure thought", is that the kind of knowledge will be determined by the demonstration or proof of the proposition which expresses the truth. If the truth in question is retraceable to logical laws and logical definitions, then it is an analytic truth (also we have an analytical knowledge). This not being the case, that is, if facts of experience come into play (whether in the general laws or in the *definiens* of the definitions involved in the proof), then it is the truth synthetic.

⁶ Free translation of: „Mich haben auch philosophische Beweggründe zu solchen Untersuchungen bestimmt. Die Fragen nach der apriorischen oder aposteriorischen, der synthetischen oder analytischen Natur der arithmetischen Wahrheiten harren hier ihrer Beantwortung. [...]. Jene Unterscheidungen von a priori und a posteriori, synthetisch und analytisch betreffen nun nach meiner Auffassung nicht den Inhalt des Urteils, sondern die Berechtigung zur Urteilsfällung. Da wo diese fehlt, fällt auch die Möglichkeit jener Eintheilung weg. Ein Irrtum a priori ist dann ein ebensolches Unding wie etwa ein blauer Begriff. Wenn man einen Satz in meinem Sinne a posteriori oder analytisch nennt, so urteilt man nicht über die psychologischen und physikalischen Verhältnisse, die es möglich gemacht haben, den Inhalt des Satzes im Bewusstsein zu bilden, auch nicht darüber, wie ein anderer vielleicht irrthümlicher Weise dazu gekommen ist, ihn für wahr zu halten, sondern darüber, worauf im tiefsten Grunde die Berechtigung des Fürwahrhaltens beruht. [...]. Es kommt nun darauf an, den Beweis zu finden und ihn bis auf die Urwahrheiten zurückzuverfolgen. Stößt man auf diesem Weg nur auf die allgemeinen logischen Gesetze und auf Definitionen, so hat man eine analytische Wahrheit, wobei vorausgesetzt wird, daß auch die Sätze mit in Betracht gezogen werden, auf denen etwa die Zulässigkeit einer Definition beruht.“ ([GA], § 3)

This characterization of the kinds of knowledge revolutionizes the theory of knowledge, as we have said, in the following manner: we don't need anymore a prose to characterize the types of knowledge, since what determines the types of knowledge is "the way of proof" ("Art der Beweisführung"). The distinction made later by Wittgenstein about what can be said, and what can only be shown, is in some form already in Frege. We don't say what an analytical (or synthetic) knowledge is, we show that through the chain of steps of a complete proof (i. e. a proof without gaps; Frege's notation, in his mind, was the proper form to carry out such sampling).

From Frege's viewpoint results a very radical and sharp conception of knowledge, which will be very useful for the following discussion in the present text: every knowledge is formal in the sense that what we know must be objectively demonstrable from laws and definitions in some system. The usefulness that such a characterization of "knowledge" has for our discussion, as well as for a further clarification of this same term, as for the notion of "self-knowledge" which results from it, can be executed by a relational procedure, namely by establishing a radical difference between "knowledge" and "experience".

For one thing, "evidence" in a psychological sense belongs to the field of the experience of a subject (self), such as his perceptions, memory, creeds, etc. No one can live the experiences of another person, given the impossibility of overlapping them.

In contraposition to that notion of "experience", the term "knowledge", such as we understand it here, has an a priori condition to be realized (effectively), what I will call from here on "the a priori possibility of a configuration". This term is coined in the present text and will be made clearer in what follows. It means, basically, conceptual formulation. This conceptual formulation allows individuals of a certain linguistic community to have access to the world of their own experience or reality. By this we mean that the perception of reality itself is given by the set of possible configurations for a culture, or, in a broader sense, for a civilization at a given stage⁷.

⁷ What I mean here is simply that there is no pure sensory experience. Every experience takes place within a linguistic structure.

In Ancient Greece, for example, the gods are not abstract creations, the individual “sees” the gods in phenomena. In the Trojan war, for example, it can be said that Achaeus and Trojans see the skirmish as a clash between Apollo and Athena, because their perceptions are conditioned by this context of possible configurations. This applies to perception in general: memory, feelings, hopes, in short the living of the individuals in question. This is so on account of a very simple fact: at those times there was no mechanics, there was no precise developed conceptual configurations of modern physics, among other things. Even the abstract ontological thought of the large philosophical systems of later times had not yet been constituted. The conceptual formulations that guided in their life experiences were aesthetical, not logical configurations.

Another illuminating example of our point of view can be taken of history. Let us think about how human beings have interpreted “randomness” over time, how they have produced knowledge to describe and try to control the world of their living experience. So the I Ching was used in Ancient China to determine the omens of the wheather, fortune in battle, and so on. A similar role was played by dice game in Ancient Rome. In Ancient Greece, we see sortition as one of the fundamental mechanisms that allowed their democracy to function (originally, probably, considered as an interpretation of divine will, represented by chance).

Thus randomness has been object of speculation and various explanatory structures and configurations since the most remote times. All these old explanatory structures can be seen as attempts, even if rudimentary, to transform into knowledge⁸ a typical human experience, that is “the expectation of future events in accordance with their probabilities on the basis of the observations made so far.” (Carnap, 1947, p. 141). That is, this experience (expectation of future events) is as old as human beings as we know them. Notwithstanding, it was only when a sufficient amount of significantly precise (formal) configurations was at our disposal, that we reached the point in which the description of our experience becomes something which can be accepted as legitimate knowledge nowadays, for example, the alre-

⁸ A term understood, as we explained above, in the sense of something expressed in a symbolic system that has a character, if not objective in its fundaments, at least intersubjective.

ady constructed steps of theory of probability (such as, for example, Reichenbach's frequentism, and Carnap's theory of probability (this last based on the idea of degree of confirmation)).⁹

Once what I have developed above is placed in the background, we can now outline an attempt to clarify the term "self-knowledge" through its relationship with which we have stated about the meaning of "knowledge". What I have called configuration makes up a context of configurations. The subject depends on this context, which is objective (in the sense of "given") and intersubjective at a time, to have access to itself; that is to say, this structure is a determining factor of the subject's experience, but it is in no way to be confused with this same experience.

The degree, clarity or obscurity, and the complexity with which a subject can build formulations about himself are in a dependency relationship with the culture in which he is inserted (that is, in a dependency relationship with the amount of configurations (knowledge) available. In normal ways, the subject does not go beyond the possible configurations in his culture, i. e. beyond the structure of determining forces in which he lives. But if this same subject, in some way, goes beyond these configurations, this happens through his living experience, whether we call it "intuition", "instant" ("the experience of the Now", as Einstein called that¹⁰); this does not belong anymore to the sphere of knowledge. We can only call "knowledge" the moment when these experiences are subject to be verbalized, formulated, thus acquiring the configuration we have already pointed out.

One of the consequences of the adopted viewpoint is that the relevant notions for knowledge, such as "truth", "justification" and so on, depend of the language-structure in which language users are inserted. Knowing or self-knowing involve the basic notion of justification, in such a way as to be able to establish, in a satisfactory way and always relationally, the truth of what is being formulated. In a predominantly mythical or religious society, as well as in a society that intends to be guided by scientific

⁹ See on this point (Carnap, 1945), as well as (Carnap, 1946) and (Carnap, 1947).

¹⁰ In discussion with Carnap (see Carnap [Autobiography], 37f.) The differentiation between "knowledge" and "experience", which I make in the present text, was also inspired by the distinction we can find by Carnap, although my line of thought does not coincide with all Carnap's position to make this distinction, and, anyway, the context in which I try to use this distinction here is, so I believe, very different.

structuring of concepts, the possibilities of justification, which must lead to the truth (however one accepts such a term), are given; they are, therefore, independent of the subject, external to him. This is in line with what we call here an externalist position. This position or conception can be formulated in the following terms: justification is not based on internal experiences (such as introspection, for example), but on reliable objective and intersubjective processes.

Finally, it is worth noting that nothing prevent us from adopting an internalist language that contains concepts such as “seeing”, “perceiving”, “feeling”, “to believe that something is justified”, “to believe to have a priori internal knowledge about itself”, and so on. These terms are elements of a language and, as such, can be used to build configurations. There is nothing to stop us from constructing such a language, although we may, of course, wonder about its usefulness. Let us note, however, that according to the meaning that we give to the expression “external to the subject”, such language is in the same relationship to a determined subject as a deductive system, or calculus of probability, or any other structures.

On the other hand, and here following the line of thought of anti-psychologist philosophers such as Frege and Carnap (notwithstanding the great differences between their philosophical views), we have presented her the reasons for the rejection of such psychological internalist questions. Such questions, so as questions of the kind “does the world really exist, or is a construction of the “I” (self)”; “is there only one “I” (self) that constructs the world?” are pseudo-questions. There is no well-constructed inferential process through which we can justify positive sentences correlated to these types of questions.¹¹

To conclude, therefore, it can be said: self-knowledge depends on the adopted conceptual structure¹², which predetermines the facts that one

¹¹ By the way, it must be noted that we come from the thesis (also originating from Carnap) that we can construct all inferences in a deductive manner. In an inductive inference, of course, we cannot conclude with certainty what will happen. We conclude: it is probable (or improbable) that such and such facts will follow from these facts. Precisely, it is only that probability that we actually infer, and the inference of this probability is itself analytic (more precisely, it can be reconstructed analytically, since we can state the probability numerically in an analytic way; cf. thereby Hochkepel, Interview mit Rudolf Carnap, p. 143 f. also as a film in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GNzd8IDCrw>).

¹² That is, on the set of configurations available.

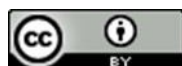
knows about itself and that it can communicate to the linguistic community to which it belongs, even if this community, in whole or in part, cannot, for some reason, understand what is communicated. The experiences (livings) of a subject, however, do not overlap or confuse with that of any other subject.

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