

Knowledge, Opinion, Belief: The Dialectical Challenging

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ABSTRACT. This paper is written in the continental tradition – facing the analytic one – and advocates the knowledge first thesis, reviewing the entailment thesis (where believing is knowing, because to know entails to believe). It starts from the ancient distinction between knowledge and opinion and develops criteria for distinguishing knowledge, opinion and belief. The demonstration necessarily arrives to the kinds of beliefs and thus, to the relationships between knowledge and these kinds. While the distinction of kinds of beliefs leads to the understanding of why the knowledge belief problem did appear in epistemology, the analysis with this distinction is not rigid and can be approached dialectically. This standpoint is aiming at contributing to the debate of knowledge belief problem and to warmer relations between the continental and the analytic philosophy.

Keywords: epistemology, knowledge, opinion, belief, truth, cognisance, system, criteria, dialectic.

Knowledge is that which people know; it is not tantamount to the process of knowing, but is related, intertwined to it: it is the ensemble process of *knowing-cognisance*.

Instead of introduction

How to understand this *ensemble*? There are, of course, different ways of understanding it (psychological, bio-physiological, sociological, cultural, logical). In the following the epistemological is sketched. Epistemology inquires the *cognitive*

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modes, and the *states of thinking* related to the cognitive modes¹, and not the states of consciousness: knowledge, opinions, suppositions, guessing, judging, doubting, ignoring are cognitive modes; beliefs are states of thinking; and decisions and will, for instance, are (only) states of consciousness, irrespective of their strong connections with the former, and of their thinking and cognitive basis.

To understand is to explain the reasons of our ideas about some facts: thus, to explain the reasons of those facts. *As if* we would discover, by our reasoning – and memory, or through memory, pointed out Plato – the inner fabric of reality. Here we see the beautiful and difficult problem of the two main domains of the existence, that of the consciousness and that of the real world, puzzling the ancient mind that contemplated the human reason able to grasp as a correspondent to the reason of the world. Also, we see the *meta* level of theory about theory, and the necessity to re-examine both the theory and the facts; because the contents of a theory does not reflect only the extra-epistemological milieu and it depends just on the inner logical articulation of facts².

How to explain (the reason of facts)? By putting order in the complicated and coloured cobweb of so many and different things and/as relations between them: thus, by distinguishing aspects and phenomena and then by trying to perceive their connections as successions. In order to do this and as a result of this, people cut out in their mind fragments³ of reality according to both their interests towards some aspects and to the relationships between things: these fragments became the *systems* consciously and unconsciously taken into account by them.

Now, if we consider the system of cognitive modes, it's clear that we must explain them *within this system*, i.e., through the causes, results, functions, features of the cognitive modes, thus through their own reason-to-be; and not outside this system, because although we know that the ultimate explanation of a system is outside the system⁴, we cannot explain the cognitive modes by extra cognitive

¹ A.D. Woozley, *Theory of Knowledge. An Introduction* (1949), London, Hutchinson's University Library, 1957, p. 14: "The Theory of Knowledge is that branch of philosophy which has for its study the nature of cognition and its objects".

² Pascal Engel, *Des sceptiques peu casaniers*, 5 septembre 2023, <https://www.en-attendant-nadeau.fr/2023/09/05/voyageurs-doute-van-damme/>.

³ Or, with an ontological word, *μεροι*, parts/portions. The awareness of the mental dissociation of parts from the whole when people see the world led the ancient philosophers to think about separate objects – and the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity – and also about the structural principles which "govern" all of them. For a recent synthesis, see A.J. Cotnoir, Achille C. Varzi (Eds.), *Mereology*, Oxford University Press, 2021.

⁴ Ana Bazac, "The Last Stage Explanation Within the Study of Society", *Noesis*, XXXIV, 2009, pp. 81-91.

causes, the ultimate explanation – that which regards at the relations of the system with its environment and systems – not superseding the explanations of their inner structure and role. (If we want to explain beliefs, the will to have such or such belief or the popularity of such or such belief do not explain the peculiarity of belief towards cognitive modes). We need to discover the *structural-functional* features of a cognitive mode towards other cognitive modes (for instance, *knowledge* as *epistêmê*, and *opinion*): so, within the system of cognitive modes, not within the system of states of consciousness. As we need to discover the structural-functional features of states of thinking towards the cognitive modes. If this “identity principle” would not exist, the defining process and the definitions would fall apart. (Concretely, the will to act is related not only to beliefs, but also to knowledge).

Accordingly, and still from a methodological standpoint, it is necessary to not equate the discussion about structural-functional features of cognitive modes – thus, in any historical occurrence and genetic manifestation – with this occurrence and manifestation. The fact that one may know X after he believed it does not put knowing X tantamount to believing it. Or the fact that a theory was assumed as known even though it was not proved – and it is not proven for the subject – does not mean that knowledge would be a simple assumption of cognisance: on the contrary, knowledge is the assumption of a *justified* cognisance.

Knowledge and opinion: criteria of their dissociation

Thus, first of all the *results* of the knowing process are and show the cognitive modes. According to the title, we will pay attention only to *knowledge* and *opinion*.

For Plato – and letting aside any connection with his⁵ ontology, namely determination of types of knowledge by the world of Forms, the intellectual objects understood through the exercise of dialectic, thus generating true knowledge, and by the physical objects, the particulars, perceived through senses, generating only *doxa* (opinions), even though there are different concepts of *doxa*⁶ – *science*, i.e.,

⁵ And with the ontology of Aristotle, who transposed the difference between episteme and doxa through the medium of the very important notions of the universal and the necessary. See Lucas Angioni, “Aristotle’s Contrast between *Episteme* and *Doxa* in Its Context (*Posterior Analytics*, I, 33)”, *Manuscrito*, 42 (4), 2019, pp. 157-210.

⁶ See Jan Szaif, “*Doxa* and *Epistêmê* as Modes of Acquaintance in *Republic V*”, *Études platoniciennes*, 4, 2007, pp. 253-272; Daniel Larose, “Sur la présence implicite de la notion d’opinion droite dans les dialogues de jeunesse de Platon”, *Études platoniciennes*, 12, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesplatoniciennes.687>.

justified knowledge/ *epistêmê*, was “true judgement with an account”⁷/ “true opinion accompanied by reason”⁸ (*Theaetetus*, 201c).

So, in order to know, to say about us that we know, and in order to consider that which we know, we need “the account”, the *impersonal proofs/proving* of that which we consider we know. This impersonal proving unrolls, as *logos* – reason manifested through and as logical analysis – in our mind. Without this proving, that which we consider we know or as the known is only *doxa*, something that we believe, and we believe that which we assume to knowing because it was transmitted to us. Thus, knowledge – different from opinion – is always *proven* and in its structure has nothing to do with belief; the prerequisite of knowledge is *proving, dialectical analysis* (consciously in philosophy, said Plato; unconsciously /spontaneously in the common consciousness). (Rather, *doxa* is like propaganda, taken over information without the necessary method of doubts and critical thinking, thus subordinating the proving to the message of information; or like the superficial labelling of things by those “who think abstractly”, believing their reductionism, as later on Hegel showed⁹).

However, if the concept of knowledge involves the logic as the reason-to-be of the known, at the level of each individual to know means to deploy in his/her mind the logical analysis of the data and information in question. This logical analysis is “independent”, namely it is made aiming only the implicature and correlations between elements, and not the conformity with the points of views of the authorities about those data and information. In this respect, the spontaneous thinking is critical (interrogative and skeptical), thus “anti-authoritarian”. If the infant takes over the known from his mother etc. and he equates her utterances with the objective state of the world (thus with “truth”), as he grows, he develops the ability to remake and acknowledge in his mind the logical reasons-to-be of the known. First, these reasons-to-be are intimately related to the good for him, the logical being good and the good, and as the space of his experience enlarges with new and new things not directly related to him, he learns to exercise the logical analysis: from his aim to understand. And obviously, the independent analysis does not entail a relativism that makes the world disordered and incomprehensible: because it must

⁷ Plato, *Theaetetus*, Translated by John McDowell, Oxford, 1973.

⁸ In *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 12 translated by Harold N. Fowler. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1921, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, “Wer denkt abstrakt ?” (1807), G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, Frankfurt am Main, Surkamp Verlag, 1970, 2 Band (Jenaer Schriften – 1801-1807), pp. 575-580.

fit with the *logos* of things¹⁰. Consequently, and if we transpose the development of epistemic attitudes into patterns, although an “authoritarian” (an “absolutist”) regards knowledge as certain and thus the utterances given by authority as sure and the only ones which afford certainty, a “multiplist” already considers the many different knowledge providers (he is a relativist), then the humans learn to evaluate in their own mind the different points of view (they are “evaluativists”¹¹). And only as “evaluativists” are they open to arguments¹², are critical and interact more¹³.

The key problem, and excluding any correlation with metaphysics/ontology, in the above ancient definition of knowledge is the *truth*¹⁴: that is both the result of the proving and its basis. However, just this presence of truth at the beginning and at the end of the process of proving is and generates an amphiboly.

But why would truth be present at the beginning of the judgement of proving? Perhaps because *people consider/know/remember only true information* as superposing to reality; they consider only reality – equated with *alêtheia*, truth; truth and reality mutually superposing in Plato; somehow as later on, in Gottlob Frege, the sentences in his logical system are true because they are real, thus, *sentences = reality*, the concept of true being redundant, the simple positing of sentences already meaning they are true¹⁵; so, no one would waste time to judge about absurd things. (The sentences themselves having their truth-value (Frege)).

Nevertheless, people are interested to solve *problems*, which obviously are not known at the beginning, and anyway are not known as true. Thus, if we substitute in the above Plato’s definition of knowledge, the *truth* with *the problems* – knowledge being “judgements with an account on problems” – we have that knowledge

¹⁰ And this *logos* is universal: if people would not follow it, they could not understand the world; for this reason, the infringement of *logos* is sad and unfortunate: “most men live as if each of them had a private intelligence of his own”, Heraclitus, *The Complete Fragments*, 2, Translation and Commentary and the Greek Text, William Harris, 1994, <http://wayback.archive-it.org/6670/20161201175133/>, <http://community.middlebury.edu/~harris/Philosophy/Heraclitus.html>.

¹¹ Deanna Kuhn, Richard Cheney, Michael Weinstock, “The development of epistemological Understanding”, *Cognitive Development*, 15, 2000, pp. 309-328.

¹² E. Michael Nussbaum and Lisa D. Bendixen, “Approaching and avoiding arguments: The role of epistemological beliefs, need for cognition, and extraverted personality traits”, *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 28, 2003, pp. 573–595.

¹³ Omid Noroozi, “Considering students’ epistemic beliefs to facilitate their argumentative discourse and attitudinal change with a digital dialogue game”, *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 2018 vol. 55, no. 3, 357–365.

¹⁴ For this concept see *What’s the Use of Truth?: Richard Rorty and Pascal Engel* (2007), Translated by William McCuaig, Columbia University Press, 2016. I endorse Pascal Engel’s view.

¹⁵ Although in Frege the meaning is treated as if it would be external to the proposition – actually this treatment resulted from the need of formalisation – it is, as Wittgenstein insisted, embedded in the proposition, following the concrete use of its parts, i.e., their integral use.

requires *evidence and judgements* facing the problems and their rational inquiry with proofs. The contradiction of the two positions of truth disappears, and once more the definition of knowledge is exterior to belief. And here, knowledge is tantamount to the truth acquired following the process of complex judging/proving.

In the last instance, the basis of knowledge is *truth* (tantamount to reality, see supra): proved by both

- the *correspondence* between our declarations – provided that they express our ideas – about things and the things as such, as they are witnessed by our senses and/or our intellectual faculty,
- and the *logical consistency* of our declarations/ideas.

These criteria proved to be fundamental, with all the aspects of mediation.

“The book is on the table” is proven by our senses; “If $A = B$ and $B = C$, then $A = C$ ” is logically proved (letting here aside any discussion about intuitions). The condition /criterion of truth is its *proving*. The belief in this or that discourse occurs only *after* they turned out to have been proved in a way or another: to have been turned out to be true – this case is the traditional one, illustrating the structural definition of knowledge as truth (a correspondence with facts) that was proven; or to have been declared officially that it is true, even the only truth: here, the declaration substitutes the evidence, the proving process. Moreover, people can believe in false discourses (Plato, *The Sophist*), but this belief doesn’t transform the discourses/ideas into true ones: eventually, people believe them, but in a further fathoming they show their inconsistency and fallacy. The belief is not the condition / criterion of knowledge and truth, but of opinions.

Plato’s suggestion of the difference between *knowledge* and *belief* can be understood if we take into account his equivalence of reality and truth (truth that must be dis-covered, recollected, because only by these means and only if the truth is recollected, can the humans know reality / approach to the understanding of both the eternal and phenomenal reality). So, truth superposes reality, let’s say *truth = reality*. If we put the post-war Anglophone standard formula *truth = belief*, then it occurs that belief establishes reality, *belief = reality*. Something that is not true from an epistemological standpoint, no matter that in propaganda or in a type of education based on mnemotechnics it seems that reality would be the result of beliefs. But $2 \times 2 = 4$ works not because we believe it, but because it is true (demonstrated, experienced. And pragmatically, $2 \times 2 = 4$ is used and useful *just because* it is true, the usefulness as such not being anterior to truth). We know – and use what we know – not because we believe it, but we believe only that which is given us as truth.

However, we may believe not only proven facts – and propositions¹⁶ – but also opinions. Opinions and justified knowledge are cognitive modes.

Methodological remarks

Therefore, the lesson of the ancient philosophy is the epistemological *rigour* in the conception of knowledge. Actually, just because truth is a knot of relations between

- our mind / our logical capacity, including in our discourses, to “fit” to the *kosmos*/ order of things¹⁷, and
- the world as such, *ta onta*, the things (Aristotle), including the intellectual world of Forms or of Categories,

can we conceive it. Just because our ideas and discourses are not simple copies of the existence (as Socrates and Kant insisted), are we interested in their truth and proving. Just because we have a lot of ideas, i.e., standpoints – or propositions, for simplify this according to the order put by the analytic philosophy– which refer/ describe/suggest different aspects of facts and different attitudes towards them, we needed criteria to distinguish the standpoints and considered truth and proving as the paramount ones. And obviously, this process is very difficult: all of the elements of the considered system (*mind/logical capacity – proving – reality*) are *relative*, because all the elements mutually depend on each other, and concretely on the proving, the *actual* manifestation of the capacities of mind; while not forgetting that all the elements are Ones formed by the many parts which are formed by many parts (Plato, *Parmenides*) which may be or are contrary and even contradictory, but this doesn’t annul the common unities. Just the mutual dependence and the

¹⁶ A proposition is a set of signs aligned according to its overall meaning that results from the alignment itself, i.e., from the use of the atomic meanings of words. It is the articulated expression of the cognitive relationship of man with the world. Psycho-physiologically, a proposition expresses the representations formed in mind, thus both integrating different perceptions into an image and the throwing of the consciousness on this representation, that is, giving it meanings. (On its part, representation is based also on the translation of the mutual real and intelligible visual images into the spatial model of knowledge, as ordered succession, as logical inferences and relations; this translation was prefigured by Plato as “spatial ascent”. See Sybille Krämer, “‘The Mind’s Eye’: Visualizing the Non-visual and the ‘Epistemology of the Line’”, in *Image and Imaging in Philosophy, Science and the Arts*, volume 2, edited by Richard Heinrich, Elisabeth Nemeth, Wolfram Pichler and David Wagner. Frankfurt · Lancaster · Paris · New Brunswick, Ontos Verlag, 2011, pp. 275–293 (287).

¹⁷ Patricia Curd, “Thinking, Supposing, and *Physis* in *Parmenides*”, *Études platoniciennes*, 12, 2015, <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesplatoniciennes/741>.

different types of relations between things imply that our logical capacity exercises as *dialectic*. So, with all the relativity, the humans have arrived to *consistent and coherent* knowledge, as well as to proven *criteria* of justification and knowledge. And especially, they have arrived to the ideas and criteria of *critical* analysis of knowledge and criteria of knowledge and justification. This *critical* standpoint is an important part of the human knowledge and gives both its *universal* and *particular* and *individual* features.

The historical character of knowledge, the fact that it is “constructed” in and by different social milieus, and that the same fact manifests in different social-historical conditions in different manners, is not the justification of an *epistemic relativism* where knowing would be believing, and truth would be surreptitiously equated with opinion. In the present political atmosphere, this epistemic relativism is considered the argument of the “anything goes” in the supply of information, proofs, and beliefs/knowledge: so, since there is a multi- dimensional change, starting from the meanings of concepts used in the process of knowing, are there epistemological criteria?

Yes, there are: those of the above-mentioned methods and principles regarding the concept and realisation of the process of knowing. And perhaps the extra epistemological principle of *consequences* of the process of knowing.

Historicity doesn't mean epistemological relativism that dissolves the technical rigour

Once more, the fact that knowledge is *historical* and determined by many cognitive and extra-cognitive conditions, by different subjective inputs, doesn't mean that knowledge would be belief and neither that the proof process would be more or less substituted by belief. Obviously, this happens in the real world, but here the point is just to see if this real aspect of subordination of information and knowledge to beliefs would be epistemologically legitimate; for this reason, the *theoretical, technical definition of knowledge* is so important.

For this definition, not our more advanced judgement and information about a definite fact than they were centuries or decades before is the criterion to consider the anterior knowledge as untrue. Because it is always about the *epistemic responsibility in the discussed interval*. This *epistemic responsibility* involves the knowledge creator subject's awareness of the information related to *that definite fact in that interval*. This information may be impregnated by subjective and ideological interests and views, and thus we simply consider them and analyse their influence on

the assumption of a certain truth/knowledge, but that's all. When Aristarchus of Samos proposed the heliocentric model, it was not accepted: because, epistemologically, there were no (not enough) *proofs* for it. ("The influence of Aristotle's and Claudius Ptolemaeus' theories" does explain nothing: *epistemologically*, this influence as such was related first of all to the systems of proofs, and not to the premises of philosophical principles/worldview which supported and framed them). The geocentric model was thought true (and truthful) and people behaved according to it quite successful. We know that this model is not true, and thus it does not represent *our* knowledge, but it was true then, at least empirically proved, and proved to be untrue nowadays. Generally, the *problem, the trouble* appears when *those who know that a theory is not based on true (proved) information, still impose it*. Except this aspect, all is a question of cultural evolution, *socially* determined.

Truth is relative? Of course, but this doesn't mean that there is no truth¹⁸, that there are no criteria of knowledge. In a specific time-interval and in respect to a specific question and specific information, one can arrive to truth, the plausible, proven coherent correspondence of our ideas about that question with facts: if we exercise the critical (and self-critical) analysis of things.

The cultural evolution of knowledge and truth emphasises not only the cardinal role of proving (and proving as essential epistemological feature and means), but also the *socially determined tendency to substitute it with belief*. This tendency was promoted by *the few* and imposed the suitable information and proofs of theories which departed from knowledge as they represented a greater amount of non-epistemic interests. So, the cultural evolution of knowledge and truth depends on both the *epistemic conditions* of levels of information, knowledge and methods, and the *non-epistemic* ones. It's no wonder that *the many* have based their knowledge and conception of truth on the tendency from above that imposed the belief over the proofs and critical analysis of information. The epistemic precedence of knowledge towards beliefs was assumed by Kant who urged: *sapere aude*, dare to know, thus against the mechanical assumption of beliefs.

These social causes of the constitution and history of knowledge are so important that they were transformed (in the post-war Anglophone world) into a dominant epistemological definition of knowledge as *true belief*, i.e., as believed information and theory which, epistemologically, at their turn, were proven before to being true, but descriptively seemed to not needing a previous proving because people believe them. However, this definition ignores that *knowledge as truth /true*

¹⁸ See the survey of problems in the understanding of truth in Panu Raatikainen, "Truth and Theories of Truth", *Cambridge Handbooks in Language and Linguistics*. Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. 217-232.

information, thus proven, is its premise that no needs any belief for its constitution. As well as it ignores that the truth of the belief needs to be proven before the belief as such, because the belief is true (or not true), only information /knowledge is, or is not.

It would be an extra epistemological warning to insist that the belief-centred definition of knowledge is consonant to the cardinal importance of beliefs in the construction of truths given to the public. However, this warning is not superfluous: propaganda – and the whole advertisement industry – are based just on the exceeding of proving in a rationally conducted system of information by beliefs; these are *doxa*. And since these beliefs are held as the only truth, any alternatives being considered as “disinformation”, they become the only information that supports “the proofs”. It is possible, obviously, that people search for other information and proofs, in a critical effort to construct knowledge; but mostly, they do not know to exert criticism because they have only the information, methodology and proofs officially given.

Cognisance

The objects of cognitive modes are *cognisance*, and I think this aspect is missing from the approach that mixes the cognitive states and the states of thinking and of consciousness. The peculiarity of cognisance towards states of thinking and consciousness is that they are positing *around the truth-false end and criterion*. Thus, on the one hand, there is a big difference between cognisance and wills, images etc.; while on the other hand, there is a big difference between knowledge and belief: only knowledge has as core the truth-false end, while the belief as such *moves this end to the margins of knowledge*, because it rarefies its correspondent or possible knowledge. (Actually, not the truth-value is important in beliefs, but their own state of thinking as labelling). The role of truth-false end in the cognitive modes is a main criterion to differentiate knowledge from belief.

However, and rather this is the other, or even main distinctive criterion and feature, knowledge means to have been *scrutinized the logic* (causes, antecedents and posteriors, succession) *of a cognisance and, before, of data and information*, which were received also as beliefs. But structurally, the epistemic peculiarity of data and information does not require – actually, even rejects – the believed status of data and information. A new-born has before him data, which become information in their mental processing, but which do not transform into beliefs. The new-born does not believe anything: he tries to understand the data and information in order

to cope with his needs and environment and to maximize his pleasure to live. Consequently, he tries to know (to understand, as understanding and knowing was tantamount in the ancient tradition), he judges etc. Only after, so based on knowledge, begins he to *trust* his mother etc. (because he knows that she cares of him, caress him, with a word learned late, loves him).

This difference of the *logical analysis* gives *knowledge* the *priority* in cognitive modes and towards the states of thinking (just opposed to those who follow the post-war Anglophone tradition of believing is first, the problem being only to understand that truth is that which transforms a belief into knowledge¹⁹). Letting aside the above genetic example, “knowledge is first”²⁰ because it is “reproducible”, i.e., it can be assumed *on logical basis* by other individuals, and obviously “repeatable” by the same subject in different contexts. These attributes borrowed from science suggest not only the fact that science is a model for knowledge but also that it’s always on the basis of logical analysis of *proving* that we can delimit knowledge from opinions and from beliefs. Both opinions and beliefs are “replicable”, able to be copied, but outside the process of logical scrutiny. Knowledge means that the thinker beings always can explain in their mind the proven logic of cognition. Even when they use a cognisance in a mechanical manner: in the last instance, they can explain in their mind why do they use it. So, they do not believe it: they know it positively.

Cognisance and the two forms of belief

By speaking about cognisance, we must not forget that they are the result of *data* processing in the mind, so of creating *information*. Cognisance is information that is also treated *in mente* logically and thus that receives an *overall meaning*, beyond the meanings of information: thus, a truth-value. But since it’s about data and information, we understand the *context dependence* of both of them and cognisance and that their relativity *does not dissolve the logical criteria of knowledge*.

The above pointing of data, information and cognisance allows us to understand that cognisance is a *system*: it is “a theory” because its overall meaning

¹⁹ Birte Schelling, *Knowledge – Genetic Foundations and Epistemic Coherence*, Epistemische Studien, Band 23 / Volume 23, Frankfurt · Lancaster · Paris · New Brunswick, Ontos Verlag, 2011.

²⁰ Clayton Littlejohn, “How and Why Knowledge is First”, in J. Adam Carter, Emma C. Gordon, Benjamin Jarvis (Editors), *Knowledge First: Approaches in Epistemology and Mind*, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 19-45.

encompasses the disparate meanings of information / propositions²¹ it is constituted from. But the fact that it is a system means that there are two types of systems of cognisance: *proposition* and *theories* which are systems of information or propositions forming an outlook on a complicated state of things. And we must not confound the two types of cognisance, because the means in their proving are different. To proving a proposition involves the analysis of its internal coherence and correspondence with the facts it describes *hic et nunc*. To proving a theory means to add to the analysis of its internal coherence and correspondence with the facts it describes a larger temporal, informational and perspectival space: because otherwise the criterion of universality in proving is not met. We may base this claim on the negative of the above condition: if a theory is not proved “scientifically”/in the larger space without which one cannot “falsify” (Popper) it, it becomes a belief. And the coherence of a theory with circumscribed information does not mean that it is true, namely knowledge. Therefore, the single propositions / information which are members of a theory can be falsified in themselves and among them²² – and thus they are cognisance, units of knowledge – but this does not entail that the theory as such is true, i.e., proven “all the way”, so even by falsifying it.

Beliefs as a cover of cognisance

In its turn, belief – which is also context dependent – in the first instance, does not imply the analysis of the believed cognisance, thus neither of its meanings, they are taken for granted. In this respect, belief is either *assumption* of cognisance (belief as *credere*, to rely on, but not as faith, obviously) or its *confirmation* (belief as *convincere*, to win by proving): thus, a “measure” of cognisance, their quantitative evaluation, namely in proportions augmenting or minimizing till annulling them. I am convinced means that I assume the (high) quality of evidence of a certain cognisance. I believe in the sense of *credo* means that not this evidence is important for me, but only the content/the message of the cognisance. In this case, belief is less than knowledge, it is opinion. So, if we must not confuse the two meanings of belief, in both its forms it is a *cover*, an *envelope* of cognisance. This is the *strict* sense, putting beliefs as a mode of thinking: just by being a cover of cognisance, are beliefs not explainable in terms of truth and logical analysis, but in terms exterior

²¹ Linguistically, logically and in the analytic tradition, information is proposition.

²² But the coherence among propositions does not assure that their truth, their contents would correspond to the facts.

to them, determined by a big proportion of extra cognitive causes. They are *feelings involving an attitude towards cognisance*. Thus, strictly structurally, the belief is exterior to cognisance, while only in a *larger* sense is it a cognitive mode.

Beliefs as structural and conjunctural companions of knowledge

If the analytic sense of belief is that knowing something means *to confirm in one's mind* that fact – because only this sense of confirmation in one's mind means that this confirmation is always articulately expressed as propositions acknowledging something – it is the superficial, *weak*, let's say cliché language, namely vague, uniformisation sense. But the humans have developed in their practice strong senses of words, including by constructing new words, because they wanted to transmit the nuances, their internal attitudes towards the many different situations. Even in English one says "I am convinced..." – when he is – not vaguely, "I believe...". So, the continental philosophy brings in to the discussion about knowledge and belief just the strong senses of belief, as either *credere* or *convincere*. I am convinced, because I proved/it is proven. These two strong senses are superposing on each other but in the weakest sense: that when *credo* means *convincere*, and *convincere* means *credo*. But the special meanings of these words – which were constructed just to express these meanings – are just the special attitudes, to being convinced *or* to believe. By taking into account the strong senses, we are challenged to further inquiry their relations with truth, opinion, guessing, doubting, including in the analytic and logical ways.

Therefore, we can distinguish between the *structural* sense of belief – that by knowing we are aware of the cognisance and thus, of the real state of things, and we acknowledge them, but without being convinced of the truth of the cognisance or even without believing it – and the *conjuncture (hypothetical)* sense of special types of attitudes towards the cognisance that involve assumption of their truth in different degrees. The structural sense of belief is the *weak* one: knowing means believing but as a simple notice of cognisance and the facts they reflect. The hypothetical, special sense (of both *credere* and *convincere*) is *strong*.

The model of the child or of AI supports the above distinction. First, the information is taken over (is transmitted) and thus the acknowledgement state takes place. Then, the logic and reasons of information form and strengthen the beliefs of the child and the AI's information about the soundness and the soundness criteria of the information it receives.

The fact that I acknowledge in my mind something – in this sense can we understand the tradition of equivalence between *knowing that* and *truth* and *existence* / and *propositions*, this tradition being that which equates the hypothetical

beliefs and the structural ones, reducing the former to the latter— does not mean “a special form of belief” (that I am convinced or I believe) but on the contrary, a common misunderstanding of the difference between a commonplace equivalence of knowing and believing and indiscriminately treating the beliefs, and the necessary epistemological discrimination between the meanings of belief.

Only in the weak sense of belief the entailment thesis is correct. But in the strong senses – as *credo* or *convincere* – the entailment is only possible, but not inherent. I know something – I noticed in my mind that information – but I do not believe it; and conversely, I believe something but in fact I do not know it. And I know something but I am not convinced about it; or “I am convinced that” but I do not know it. And obviously, I believe something without it being true (so, obviously, without being justified. When I say that I know *I assume the truth* – so the *justification* of facts expressed by propositions – but in the specified senses of belief, I can both not assume the truth – *credo* and *certus sum/persuasum habeo* – and assume it.

Thus, in the weak sense of belief the entailment thesis is not a simple tautology, it is first of all, an *internal* – and in the inherent propositional form – *explanation* of *this* weak sense: that when I know I at the same time notice in my mind that information, and just this internal noticing transforms that information into my cognisance. While in the strong senses, there is certainly this constitutive entailment but further, related to the strong senses as such the entailment is, once more, only possible.

The weak sense of belief is like the “thin belief”²³ and the fact that there are two different kinds of beliefs (the weak and the strong), the weak one being a basic epistemic (i.e., mental logical check of the perception and representation) acknowledgement of the seen facts – irrespective if we see concrete or abstract ones – while the strong ones being superposed on the weak one, and thus on the knowledge we having, as attitudes towards this knowledge. Together they constitute a “deep awareness”²⁴ that explains why is so difficult to distinguish between the two kinds.

Therefore, by distinguishing between the different kinds of beliefs we also can better understand the interference of beliefs in the process of knowing. An argumentation may be rigorous, the conclusions being consistent with the rules of inference and the premises, but we feel that it is disputable. So, we do not think it is true. Why this? Because we consider that the premises themselves are not, we are not convinced about them. Thus, in our attitude towards the theory we deploy two beliefs: one related to premises and one related to the consistency of argumentation.

²³ Wesley Buckwalter, David Rose, and John Turri. “Belief through Thick and Thin.” *Noûs* 49 (4), 2015, pp. 748–75.

²⁴ As Neil Mehta formulates, <http://www.profneilmehta.com/>.

This simultaneity of beliefs explains why it is so difficult – and obviously, we consider here only the epistemological aspect – to think in a critical manner, that is to arrive to conclusions after critically judging the political standpoints and messages: because some aspects seem believable, while other one not.

The dialectic of knowledge and belief

1) However, if “knowledge is first”, knowledge and belief are not mutually exclusive. The qualities of cognisance – its justification by their correspondence and coherence – do not necessarily involve to being believed. And, as above mentioned, knowledge is not definable in terms of beliefs. But: one can know and believe *at the same time*, in both forms of beliefs (I know theory X and I’m convinced about it; I believe – in the sense of *credere* – rather theory Y that I also know). I either believe or disbelieve, and I can feel both by knowing the objects of my feelings. As well as in a larger sense, we can consider that we start from beliefs which we then try to understand/scrutiny.

These *dialectical* situations of cognitive and thinking modes – they can be united but they can also diverge from each other, apparently taking over the priority, taking part of each other etc. – neither annul the core, the knowledge around which all states of mind spin, and impose to rethink their existing definitions. We need the discipline to construct structural-functional definitions – thus relative only to cognitive aspects of cognition. Anyway, we have to be both disciplined and, actually just from this aim, open to discuss the dialectic: the dynamic of modes and their intertwining, their contradictions, the criteria of analysis and also the criteria of the context dependent subjects, the awareness of cognitive and thinking modes, what the critical spirit in knowledge does mean.

And although the meanings of *dialectic* have appeared when discussing about Plato, we can encapsulate it as unity in/with difference and as dynamic unity of the contradictory.

2) Knowledge means known facts, i.e., certainty. The *anticipative* thinking is based on presumptions and probabilities; but also on some known facts, even though past ones or prerequisite secondary facts. But one can believe anticipations: consciously, as certainty of the *trends*, based on knowledge of probabilities, and not on indefeasible situations. Here, beliefs are no longer calm states of consciousness, noticing certain facts in front of which one is not even aware that one believes them – so are these facts assumed as certain – but enthusiastic impulses, driving forces of further research and understanding. In other words, the logic of knowledge, as

logic of certain facts, generates its own impetus to continue, while in the anticipative thinking this impetus is rather fuelled by beliefs, but obviously, not only by them.

The model of scientific research and knowledge helps us to understand the distinction between knowledge and beliefs. The epistemic starting point is the *hypotheses*, supported according to their level of plausibility. Here it's clear that the beliefs in hypotheses depends on their level of plausibility and follows the process of choices of hypotheses. The result of the scientific research is a multiply-verified *theory/knowledge* and thus, of certainty. The researchers know that this theory is context dependent (on the data and information etc. of the while), but this doesn't dissolve the certainty of the theory according to the present scientific context. They positively know it. Again, the belief follows the knowing. However, in order to endeavour scientific research, we need to *believe* the reasons-to-be of that research, its *telos* as the core ideas of its hypotheses, and the beauty (possibility and necessity) of the hard work of the research. But these beliefs, as their joy and worry, are exterior even to the believing of knowledge in the process of knowing.

The importance of the enthusiasm of the scientific research as such, of "believing" both the reason-to-be of a certain particular research and its paradigm as encompassing theory and research programme, must not be confused with the theory of equivalence of knowledge and belief. This warning is confirmed by those moments in the history of science when: 1. on the basis of experiments or a theory, a new unsuspected phenomenon is suggested to a scientific community; 2. the phenomenon is accepted by it with enthusiasm, whilst its basis is still unknown; 3. the theory of the new phenomenon becomes fashionable and is endorsed with unquestionable formulas.

However, the phenomenon is still unknown, or insufficiently known and the formulas appear to have contradictory consequences: they have an explaining role but at the same time, they close the phenomenon in the frame they edge. Consequently, they become dogmatic means to stop further inquiry of the phenomenon and, inherently, to go beyond their stakes.

3) An interesting aspect is that of "self-experiments" or self-studies. Here, we may surmise that both knowledge and beliefs are strengthened because of the most direct relationships within the proving process. And because the researcher is a human being, we may suppose that his beliefs are stronger than his knowledge and even determine this knowledge, preceding it and being tantamount to it. However, if we take the researcher as only a researcher, it's obvious that he knows that the theory resulted from his self-studies must be replicable, namely verifiable by other researchers, if he wants his theory to be really scientific, reliable, certain. Thus, again knowledge is stronger than the belief.

4) We must not forget that the analytic approach discusses propositions, thus not necessarily theories. When one discusses “All Cretans are liars”, one knows (intuitively) that this is not true, so it’s not the case to believe it. Moreover, if one knows that it’s about a famous ancient example of logical paradoxes, the more so the speaker is “Cretan”, one can believe that the discussion will turn toward paradoxes and, even though we do not know the subtleties, we nevertheless react when someone says “All Cretans are liars”: “ah, a discussion about paradoxes will follow”. We believe that the message of the proposition – which we know, and know that it is false – has the above significance, that it starts a discussion about paradoxes. Our belief that we know what it is about – although we do not really know the problem of paradoxes – is somewhat instead of knowledge.

But when it is about theories, or more exactly, about the making of theories, which involves more judgements, things are more complicated. We choose some *hypotheses* – from a previous state-of-the-art analysis of existing theories, hypotheses and proofs – and they seem to us plausible, perhaps even true. But we don’t know exactly if they are true: we must use the specific scientific means (experiments etc.) in order to assume they are true, or not. Here, the belief precedes knowledge; and after the process of proving, the knowledge precedes the belief and determines it.

From a different standpoint, the analytic approach of propositions as “atoms” is certainly useful. And the propositional and formal methods force us to better understand the “nuances”, namely the different situations of the relationships between knowledge and belief. However, just the axioms of the standard analytic approach²⁵ of the knowledge-belief problem, rather reducing the first item to the second should be rethought. In the analytic technical understanding, it is about propositional knowledge. Language mediates between the consciousness of humans and reality. In this approach, to know means to believe the proposition that expresses the real states of things. But whether I know that it’s about a proposition – so, I know – I can doubt its content, so I do not believe it, but I believe I’m understanding why was it said. However, the intention condition of the speaker does not necessarily lead to the equivalence of knowledge and belief or to their opposition: anyway, it is *exterior* to the truth-value of the proposition stated by him. The same is with objective conditions. The proposition “it’s five o’clock” is true when I do not know that my watch stopped yesterday just at five o’clock, so

²⁵ As shown in Jonathan Jenkins, Matthias Steup, *The Analysis of Knowledge*, 2017, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2019 edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/knowledge-analysis/>; Eric Schwitzgebel, ‘Belief’. In E. N. Zalta (ed.). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2019 edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/belief/>.

I believe it (I know what time is it), but my knowledge is false and opposed to my belief of the proposition.

More: the attitudes towards knowledge and any cognitive state are *exterior* to these states. I am *convinced that* – in propositional form, *p* – or I *believe that* means the attitude towards *p*, but *p* itself is true or false by its own epistemic structuring. My feelings that I believe *p* in a way or another are epistemologically *ulterior* to the internal logic of the proposition (that it is coherent in different degrees etc.). I know the facts described by *p*: that's all.

These dialectical situations led sometimes to confusions, but just this dialectic must be “dis-covered”: as it was also in pages of the postwar analytic philosophy. The awareness of this dialectic protects us from inertia in the attitudes towards paradigms.

5) Both knowledge and belief have the same practical result, they both lead to action: and it is not necessary to pass from one another in order to pushing to act. One can act on the basis of knowing something, without being necessary to believe it, and one can act on the basis of believing something without knowing it really. And obviously, the same practical result is not tantamount to the same practical results.

6) The *complexity* problem: which are more complex, belief or knowledge? Some state that it is belief²⁶, because to believe something would mean to judge that information and to decide to believe it/which attitude toward that information one chooses. However, from the points of view of the above criteria, both are just as complex. If to believe *X* means that *X* meets the consistency criterion, the correspondence one – and many times even the coherence criterion – is tantamount to know it: we know something if our idea about it corresponds to the fact, and this correspondence allows its articulate description consistently, etc.

7) Knowledge entails belief in many cases, but not in all of them. One may believe something – as both *credo* and *convincere/persuasum habeo* – but this may not be on the basis of knowledge, i.e., of independent mental analysis and demonstration, but only on the basis of the *authority* that emitted the ideas. Thus, knowledge and belief are separated. Exclusive to each other? No, because the subject assumes the logic of the authority, and he “knows” and can reproduce *in mente* this logic, irrespective of its correctness. Anyway, in the authority argument belief is first: sometimes devoid of any knowledge, other times leading to it.

Psychology and neuro-psychology shed light on an interesting form of authority argument: that when the authority is our memory. We see something which we never saw before but which, inherently, resembles – or some aspects

²⁶ Monika Gruber, *Either you know or you've gotta believe*, Jun 1, 2023, <https://www.qeios.com/read/IMUAZJ>.

resemble – to known things, collected in our memory. And we say about the new thing: *déjà vu*. Neuro-physiology explains that the process of focusing on something engages the activation of networks of information in order to compare the new thing with the existing knowledge, as a normal checking²⁷ and our reaction is only the articulation of this moment. Or, on the contrary, we see something which we already saw and we become confuse and say: *jamais vu*. The unfamiliarity manifests through the difficulty to put the thing in relation with different familiar categories of things (information) and thus to articulate it²⁸.

8) But letting aside the authority conjuncture, the relationship between knowledge and belief is more complicated than we suppose on the basis that knowledge means logical analysis and the discernment of truth. One can believe false ideas, why – is the business of sociology of cognition, but epistemologically this occurs because *to know is tantamount to believe in the structural unity of these processes*: as having information and believing it; in other words, only by reasoning one arrives to true conclusions and obviously, one believes them. However, this equivalence is doubtful if we universalize it. Georg Simmel has showed that in knowledge (theories, deployment of theories) there are, apart from explicit propositions, some implicit ones, implicit suppositions, and people do not control them (they are not aware/fully aware of them)²⁹: that is, the conclusions may be false even though the explicit premises and the reasoning with explicit premises are correct. Another case is the existence of polythetic notions³⁰: they are not simply polysemic, but notions which have one meaning but it is used in more and different meanings by people (and by researchers) in dialoguing. Thus, everyone thinks that the interlocutor uses the same meanings as himself/herself, and obviously the result is not only a dialogue of the deaf but also inadvertences between conclusions from the same premises. One may believe the conclusions by supposing that they refer to the same theory/the same meanings of concepts, but in fact the theory is given by those who assume other meanings.

When we think we focus our attention on something (this is Brentano's and Husser's intentionality) which we know at least a little part of it, even though we do not know the rest – we try to understand the thing by comparing or relating it to

²⁷ Radka Jersakova, Chris Moulin, Akira Robert O'Connor, "Investigating the role of assessment method on reports of déjà vu and tip-of-the-tongue states during standard recognition tests", *Plos One*, Volume 11, Issue 4, 2016, e0154334.

²⁸ Chris J.A. Moulin et al., "The the the the induction of jamais vu in the laboratory: word alienation and semantic satiation", *Memory*, Volume 29, Issue 7, 2021, pp. 933-942.

²⁹ Georg Simmel, *The Problems of the Philosophy of History: An Epistemological Essay*. (1892/1905), Translated and edited by Guy Oakes. New York, Free Press, 1877, p. 46.

³⁰ Raymond Boudon, *L'art de se persuader des idées douteuses, fragiles ou fausses*, Paris, Fayard, 1990.

some known facts, be they part of it and/ or distinct facts –. We are curious about the thing, or we focus on a thing that actually we do not know but we believe it. (Or) we recollect our memories about it, including doubts or our more or less enthusiastic support, fully believing it. We may remember our false opinions about the thing and the tumultuous history of our revisions and change of opinions: now we know all of that and certainly being convinced about them. While when our present opinions are false, we believe them, indeed.

Or, when we know how – at the superficial level of acknowledging this because we saw the steps to doing something or we retained them because we were told or we read, so because the know-how was formulated in our mind as propositions – it’s clear that we believe these steps in both the structural meaning of belief as structurally united with knowing and the conjunctural meaning (in both varieties); and it’s not necessary to have the ability to perform these steps³¹.

Briefly – and although the sense of belief as *credo* can be tantamount with *persuasum habeo*, i.e., I am convinced that – belief as conviction is the inherent follow-up of knowledge where to know involves the understanding of logic and reasons of an idea; while belief as *credo* is rather anterior to an information, and also ulterior to it.

Instead of conclusions

I conclude in a sociological note. The emphasis of beliefs indiscriminately in the definition of knowledge is a *contemporary* pendant of the contemporary *dominant* praxis of creating knowledge, and it is opposed to the ancient tradition of understanding knowledge as distinct from belief. This praxis is viewed in the natural and “exact” sciences, too, but it is specific to the humanities and, obviously, to the social-political formation of common conscience. This core idea doesn’t exclude the history of complexity in the definitions of truth: that, for instance, the truths are constructed (as the beliefs are) and that the consequences of this construction and specifically of beliefs retroactively configure the truth and knowledge. Simply my note reverberates the feeling that the theoretical equivalence of truth and beliefs and knowledge and beliefs, so a kind of reduction to beliefs, an epistemological relativism, could be a theoretical legitimation and can be used as a legitimation of the political practice of forging the general beliefs of people, of moral relativism.

³¹ John Bengson, Mark. A. Moffett & Jennifer C. Wright, “The Folk on Knowing How”, *Philosophical Studies* 142:3, 2009, pp. 387-401; Michael Brownstein & Eliot Michaelson, “Doing Without Believing: Intellectualism, Knowledge-How, and Belief-Attribution”, *Synthese*, 193(9), 2016, pp. 2815-2836.

This “ideological” observation did not forbid me to insist that strictly, the *definition of knowledge is based on epistemic elements and is constructed in strict epistemological frame*. While holistically or within the system of thinking, and more, within the system of consciousness, knowledge is constructed as a result of all types of information and influences: but it cannot be defined by these influences³². If so, strictly, belief is not a cognitive element, that is, *sine qua non* for knowledge. It is only an element of thinking. Whilst knowledge is a cognitive element that is the reference of the belief, i.e., of the attitudes towards knowledge. *Epistemologically*, and obviously letting aside any philosophical tradition³³, the thesis of distinction between knowledge and belief is justified. The weak sense of belief – that it is a structural cover of cognisance, a notice of cognisance but not a judgement on and attitude towards them – helps us to understand that the strong sense (as *credere* or *convincere*) cannot be confused with this weak sense, and thus that beliefs cannot be treated out of order. Knowledge, i.e., the understanding of logic and reason of cognisance and facts, is not based on belief and the belief has as “substrate” different forms of knowledge (knowledge, ignorance, opinion, false opinion etc.). Only *broadly culturally*, the belief can be “the basis” of any knowing, thus having the role of knowledge.

Are there differences between the colloquial sense of (some) words – here *belief*, but also *knowledge* and *truth* – and the technical analytic sense? And is this analytic approach equivalent to the modal logic treatment? Concerning this last question, it is obvious that there is no equivalence: essentially, epistemology treats cognition beyond the logical formalization, but with its help. While regarding the first question, as long as the technical analytic discussion of these words gives examples, in fact problems, from the real world, it’s difficult to consider that the research of these problems would solve something without taking into account aspects emphasized outside the analytic approach³⁴. Because the *system* here is not

³² George Boger, “Subordinating Truth – Is *Acceptability* Acceptable?”, *Argumentation*, 19, 2005, pp. 187-238.

³³ As in the important paper of Maria Rosa Antognazza, “The distinction in kind between knowledge and belief”. Meeting of the Aristotelian Society held online on 18 May 2020, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 2020, Vol. cxx, Part 3. But see before, Theoni Anastassopoulou-Kapogianni, “The Evolutionary Conception of Knowledge: A Reference to Ancient and Modern Views”, in *Greek Philosophy and Epistemology*, Volume II, Edited by Konstantine Boudouris, Athens, International Center for Greek Philosophy and Culture & K.B., 2001, pp. 11-18.

³⁴ Contrary to Miesko Tałasiewicz, Review of: Either you know or you’ve gotta believe, Jun 14, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.32388/7A2O6U>: “epistemologists should not be too quick to use linguistic intuitions derived from phraseological associations and not rely on bon-mots and untranslatable puns of one language or another”.

that of analytic philosophy – or that of continental philosophy – but just the end, the question of knowledge and belief. If we treat it exclusively in the frame of analytic philosophy, we risk to be opaque towards aspects shown by continental philosophy, so we narrow the answer to the question.

If in many cases knowledge entails belief – as *convincere* – this entailment is not universal: because, we must not forget, beliefs are attitudes towards knowledge and these attitudes may miss. Simply, “I know this” and this acknowledgement is enough for me as grounding of my following thoughts and actions. While in other cases, I feel the need to express my assessment of cognisance: “I believe...”, either as “I am convinced of” or “I think that... (*credo*).

However, why this? Because beliefs are attitudes and as such, they involve the awareness by the subject of his assessment. “He believes...”, not simply knows. It is possible that concrete attitudes as beliefs be so internalised that they are unconscious, but ultimately, they are based on conscious feelings. “I know” is a simple noticing of the cognitive relation. “I believe” is a conscious assessment of the level of knowledge. And to changing the perspective against the mechanical assumption of equivalence of knowledge and beliefs means to understand just the dialectic and the historical reasons-to-be of their relations.

The intentions of people manifest in their words. They say, strictly epistemologically – and regardless here of clichés, or of extra cognitive, moral intentions, or of euphemistic expressions just of doubts – “I believe”, in both its meanings, because their intention is not to noticing something by showing that they know it, but to express the exaltation of their feelings towards the facts.

By speaking about beliefs, one sheds the light of doubts regarding the definition of knowledge, and this is very good. Cognisance is information about the state of things, but since we witness doubtful information and clear-cut extra epistemic forces constructing it and imposing it as an undisputable belief, then once more it is necessary to question both the epistemic and extra epistemic aspects of knowledge and to endeavour to understand the peculiarity of epistemic aspects. And this doesn't mean to plunge in an infinite vicious circle: the *limits* between epistemic and extra epistemic aspects are not absolute – and what we should do is just to face the limits and to approach them dialectically – but we do this in an ordered way, in a scientific one, where the logic of excluded middle treats the many included ones.

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