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Epistemology

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Introduction

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. It addresses issues such as the nature of knowledge, the sources of knowledge, the conditions of knowledge, and the possibility of knowledge. The present entry describes some central issues in epistemology and makes suggestions concerning phenomenology's contribution to them.

As a discipline, phenomenology is often considered to be the study «of conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view» (Smith, 2009 #10406). Since experiences (or an important subset of them) are said to be typically intentional, i.e. to involve a *direction on* something, to *be about* something, phenomenology involves the study of the way experiences are consciously directed on something. Phenomenology would be the study of conscious, subjective intentionality.

Such a characterisation of phenomenology is sometimes understood as implying that phenomenology is distinct, albeit related, to other philosophical disciplines such as ontology, logic, ethics and epistemology. The relation would be established on the basis of the fact that those various disciplines concern features that are intentionally given to us in experience, such as moral values (as experienced, for instance, in emotion and action), logical relations between propositions (as experienced in thought) and the identity of material objects in time (as experienced in perception). Not the study of moral values, of logical relations between propositions, of the identity conditions of material objects, would then constitute phenomenology, but the study of the way those various features are consciously experienced.

Following this line of thought, one might argue that phenomenology does not inquire into knowledge, the topic epistemology deals with, but into experiences related to knowledge. Perceiving, remembering, thinking, believing, introspecting, are all experiences that are somehow related to knowledge. Phenomenology would study the phenomenal, subjective characters of those experiences and epistemology would establish what further conditions would have to be satisfied for those experiences to amount, or lead, to knowledge.

Such an approach would be in line with an influential analysis of knowledge, which considers knowledge as a qualification mental states of a certain kind (beliefs, acceptances) obtain if they are veridical and properly justified.¹ Phenomenology would study conscious experiences involved in knowledge. It would not inquire into what it takes for these experiences to be veridical and to be justified. It would study the conscious, phenomenal and subjective qualities of experiences that can be veridical and justified. This is what one might expect from an inquiry into the phenomenology of knowledge.

There are several qualms about this common approach. First, it might be noticed that the relation between phenomenology and epistemology is not really the relation between a discipline that studies intentional experiences and a discipline that studies the objects of those experiences. Values might be the (formal) objects of emotions, and so ethics might deal with the objects of a

¹ The analysis has ancient roots, but it was clearly stated in the 20th century by Ayer (see Ayer 1956: 34) and Chisholm (see Chisholm 1966: 12). Following a number of counterexamples presented in an influential article by Edmund Gettier (see Gettier 1963), epistemology within the analytic tradition has been largely busy trying to enhance the original analysis by providing some further conditions of knowledge. Recently, however, the analysis itself has been questioned (see Williamson 2000: 21ff.).

kind of experience that is studied in phenomenology; but there is no kind of experience that fundamentally takes knowledge, the subject matter of epistemology, as its object. There might be experiences that are fundamentally responsive to knowledge, or that depend on knowledge, but that does not make knowledge to something those experiences are about. This suggests that the way the study of experience is factored out of epistemology cannot be quite the same as in the case of ethics, logic or ontology. The subject matter of epistemology, from a phenomenological point of view, must be experience, not what experience is about.

Knowledge is a quality an experience earns by virtue of possessing objective properties. Correctness conditions, such as those yielded by truth and justification, are objective conditions. So the distinction between phenomenology, which studies the subjective properties of experience, and epistemology, which studies its objective conditions, could still be maintained. But this does not correspond to the conception Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, appears to have had. In *Philosophy as Rigorous Science* (published 1911) he writes:

To the extent [...] that every consciousness is “consciousness of”, the essential study of consciousness includes also [...] consciousness-objectivity as such.
[...] The clarification of all fundamental kinds of objectivities is [...] included [...] in an epistemological analysis [...]. Consequently we include all such studies [...] under the title “phenomenology” (Husserl 1965: 90-91).²

On Husserl conception, epistemology, the discipline that «investigates the problems of the relationship of consciousness and being» (ibid: 89)³ is an essential part of phenomenology. A study of consciousness that would not contribute to a solution of those problems would not count as phenomenology (but rather as descriptive psychology). The aim of phenomenology, in Husserl's eyes, is to provide an answer to the central problems of knowledge by studying the subjective features of experience. In doing so Husserl suggests that we should not simply *presuppose* that, say, we perceive objects in the external world, that our judgements are made true by facts obtaining independently of us, or that our beliefs are grounded in objective reasons.⁴ We should rather provide a philosophical argument that proves, in the light of an analysis of experience, that those conditions are satisfied. By setting such a requirement, Husserl, in line with most other phenomenologists, adopts a critical approach to epistemology.

Epistemology: Dogmatic, Critical and Sceptic

There are two main ways of inquiring into knowledge, the dogmatic and the critical way.⁵ The dogmatic way considers knowledge as a fundamental feature of our relation to the world and then studies its nature, origins and limitations. The critical way questions the very possibility of knowledge and aims at establishing conditions whose satisfaction would either guarantee its attainment or at least make it possible.

Dogmatic epistemologies typically consider that it is legitimate to assume without any

² Considerations along similar lines can be found in Husserl 1970b: 169-170.

³ Thus problems such as: «How can experiences be mutually legitimated or corrected by means of each other, and not merely replace each other or confirm each other subjectively. How can the play of consciousness, whose logic is empirical, make objectively valid statements, valid for things that are in and for themselves» (Husserl 1965 87-88)

⁴ This is part of a methodological option Husserl calls the *epoché* (see mainly: Husserl 1982: 61). Elements of this option were arguably present in the *Logical Investigations*.

⁵ Various notions of dogmatism, and of its opposing critical attitude, can be found, for instance, in Sextus 2000: 1 (on the ancient notion of dogmatism see Burnyeat 1980: 26 ff. and Annas & Barnes 1985: 1-2); Kant 1998: Preface, Bxxx-Bxxxvi; Pryor 2000: 518 ff. Although different from all of them, the present notion, and the way it is used in this section, aims at capturing some key elements common to them. More distant notions of dogmatism can be found in Audi 1988: 432 ff.

specific warrant the truth of some propositions that play a central role in the domain of knowledge under enquiry. Consider, for instance, the epistemology of perceptual knowledge, knowledge acquired on the basis of perceptual experience. The statement that there is an external world plays a decisive role in that domain. It cannot, however, be warranted by perceptual experience, since the latter's evidential status depends on the very assumption that the external world is real: the experience of seeing my hands can justify my belief that I have two hands only if there is an external world.⁶ The assumption must then either be independently warranted, as the critical epistemologist would require, or one simply accepts, along with the dogmatic, that perceptual knowledge does not rest on any further, more basic justification. Such an attitude might be grounded in a modest conception, which considers that the function of perceptual knowledge in particular, and of human knowledge in general, is to track information about, and offer behavioural guidance with respect to facts that obtain *in* the world, and not to track information about, and offer guidance with respect to the supposed reality of the external world.⁷

Critical and dogmatic epistemologists vary in their understanding of the sceptical challenge and in their reaction to it. Scepticism itself has taken various forms in the history of philosophy, and anti-sceptical arguments have not always addressed the same kind of scepticism. Pyrrhonian scepticism⁸ has been interpreted as presenting an argument that commands *suspension of judgement* as a result of the fact that there is no rational criterion of truth that would ground one's choice between conflicting appearances concerning the external world.⁹ This form of scepticism questions not only our entitlement to claim knowledge, but even the rational grounds of our beliefs. Yet it falls short from involving the kind of radical doubt one finds in Descartes *Meditations*.¹⁰ Pyrrhonian scepticism, it has been argued, leaves knowledge of the reality of the external world (just as much as knowledge of the reality of one's own body) unaffected.¹¹ And as Sextus is known to have emphasised, Pyrrhonian scepticism is not supposed to impinge on our ability to interact with the external world.¹² If appearances are not qualified as reasons for belief, they are yet said to suffice for guiding action.¹³ A reason for a belief must be taken to be truth-conducive, a reason for an action need not.

The radical character of the Cartesian doubt, in opposition to Pyrrhonian scepticism, lies in its usage of a principle which states that for one to know anything about the external world one must be in a position to exclude that one is dreaming.¹⁴ Since one is said not to be able to do so, knowledge of the very existence of the external world would be compromised. The principle itself can be shown to follow rather innocuously from an even more general epistemological principle which states that one must know that one knows in order to know.¹⁵ However, and in

⁶ The recent debate about dogmatism with respect to perceptual knowledge goes back to Moore's famous, and much disputed proof of the existence of the external world (see Moore 1939). Recent doubts about the cogency of that proof, and of its dogmatic usage, can be found in Wright 2007. Wright's line of argument was originally formulated in Wright 1985.

⁷ A prominent version of this kind of epistemological modesty can be found in Dretske 2005: 22-23. His view was originally presented in Dretske 1970.

⁸ Generally associated with Sextus Empiricus (for a recent edition of his work see Sextus 2000).

⁹ See for instance Burnyeat 1982: 24 ff.

¹⁰ This influential interpretation of the opposition between ancient and modern scepticism plays an important role also in contemporary philosophy (see McDowell 1986 (reprinted in: McDowell 1998: 237 ff.)). It has recently been questioned, especially with respect to Descartes version of it, by Fine 2000.

¹¹ See Burnyeat 1982: 29.

¹² See Burnyeat 1980: 32-33; Annas & Barnes 1985: 169..

¹³ See Fine 2000: 220.

¹⁴ See Stroud 1984: 20. A modern variant of the dream argument has been provided by the hypothesis that we may be brains in the vat see Putnam 1981.

¹⁵ See Wright 1991: 92. This principle is sometimes called KK-Principle, or simply Iterativity. For an influential criticism of this principle see Williamson 2000: 114-ff.

spite of this heavy-weight demand, modern sceptics might be more moderate than their ancient ancestors in another sense. It has indeed been wondered whether cartesian scepticism really impinges on belief.¹⁶ Recognising the impossibility of obtaining the credentials required for claiming knowledge, the modern sceptic might readily retreat to belief, rather than suspending it. Although reasons for believing might ultimately not suffice for knowledge, they could be good enough for belief, just as much as the Pyrrhonian sceptic takes them to be for action. One key assumption in this line of argument lies in the contention that one's belief might be rationally blameless and yet fail to constitute knowledge. Even our best reasons for believing would fall short of leading to knowledge and the distinction between knowledge and belief would fall outside the realm of our rational control.¹⁷ This idea, the idea that there might be nothing wrong with our beliefs, and with our ways of forming them, although they can be shown to be insufficient for knowledge, should appear peculiar to the Pyrrhonian sceptic.

If the epistemologist's task, following the critical approach, is to prove the possibility of knowledge, then the sceptical challenge, even in its most radical form, has to be taken seriously. The dogmatic, instead, will typically endeavour to deflate the sceptic's aspirations. If the critical epistemologist considers the sceptical challenge as yielding a requirement any theory of knowledge ought to meet,¹⁸ the dogmatic epistemologist will rather interpret the sceptical conclusion as a consequence of a misleading conception of knowledge. If knowledge understood in a certain way can be shown to be unattainable, then, the dogmatic concludes, one should revise one's understanding of what knowledge is or should be.

At least two issues have to be distinguished when considering revisionist responses along this line. One issue concerns the extent of human knowledge. The dogmatic may propose to restrain the domain of knowledge to areas where the sceptical challenge has no hold. This may be done either, as shown above, by blocking some common epistemic assumption, such as the principle of epistemic closure¹⁹ or the cartesian principle that one must know in order to know. Another option would leave epistemology as it is, and suggest instead a revision in other relevant areas. Berkeley's idealism, involving the claim that ordinary objects are bundles of ideas, and thus mind-dependent entities,²⁰ leads to a radical revision of our conception of the metaphysical status of the external world. We are allegedly entitled to claim knowledge about the external world, but the external world itself is not anymore what the sceptic assumed it would be.

Instead of limiting the extent of our knowledge, the dogmatic might be attracted by a form of anti-realism that does not concern directly the metaphysical status of the external world but the objective character of our beliefs. A belief is objective when its truth does not depend on the belief itself. There are different ways for a belief or for a judgement (an occurrent belief) to fail to reach objectivity in this sense. The judgement expressed by an utterance such as "I am now thinking", for instance, is not objective in so far as the occurrence of the judgement constitutes (part of) the conditions under which it is true. Another, more relevant sense of subjectivity can be found in judgements whose truth depends on the response the subject

¹⁶ See Annas & Barnes 1985: 7-8.

¹⁷ Wittgenstein's famous sentence "It is always by favour of Nature that one knows something" (Wittgenstein 1969: 505) is often interpreted in this sense (see for instance Wedgwood 1990: 47)

¹⁸ Kant, a clear advocate of critical epistemology, has famously declared: «No matter how innocent idealism may be held to be as regards the essential ends of metaphysics [...], it always remains a scandal of philosophy and universal human reason that the existence of things outside us (from which we after all get the whole matter for our cognitions, even for our inner sense) should have to be assumed merely on faith, and that if it occurs to anyone to doubt it, we should be unable to answer him with a satisfactory proof» (Kant 1998: Bxxxix).

¹⁹ The principle says that «one knows every thing that one knows to be implied by what one knows» (Dretske 2005: 13). So, for any p and q, if one knows p and knows that p implies q, then one knows q. The sceptic typically aims at showing that there are propositions we are not in a position to know although we know them to be implied by what we know. Holding on to the principle he concludes that we do not know the antecedents either.

²⁰ This interpretation is suggested for instance by Winkler 1989: 138, in a discussion of Philonous argument at the end of the third dialogue (Berkeley 1998: 142; Berkeley 1948-1957: 262).

manifests through her judgement. Judgements of taste, for instance, tell us something about the subject's response to a certain condition in the world just as much as about the world itself. Different subjects may thus faultlessly come to opposing beliefs concerning taste values because of the difference in their response to some external conditions. The dogmatic epistemologist may be tempted by the idea that all our beliefs are ultimately subjective in this sense and that the sceptical challenge does not need to be met because it is built on the false assumption that our beliefs are, or aim to be, objective. Such a view would arguably imply relativism, a position that threatens the very idea that knowledge is sharable within a community.

Critical epistemology in phenomenology: natural and transcendental

Most phenomenologists from Brentano to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, started with a critical approach to epistemology, although in very different ways. The most important distinction within phenomenological epistemology turns on the acceptance of the transcendental version of critical epistemology. We might thus distinguish *natural* from *transcendental* theories of knowledge within phenomenology.²¹ Franz Brentano, often considered as the founder of (early) phenomenology, is the most influential advocate of natural epistemology. Edmund Husserl, who was a follower of Brentano in his early career, later became the founder of transcendental phenomenology. In spite of Husserl's decisive influence on the phenomenological movement, Brentano's version of natural phenomenology has remained a lively option in phenomenology up to the present. Since Brentano and Husserl have determined the main lines along which the epistemological debate within phenomenology has evolved, I shall concentrate on their views.²² We shall see that in spite of their critical approach, their views can both be suspected of containing elements of dogmatism.

Brentano took knowledge to be «good or correct judgement» (Brentano 1956: 2) and therefore epistemology to be the doctrine of good or correct judgement. Somebody judges correctly, if he or she judges «in the way in which the person who judges with evidence would judge» (ibid.: 194). A theory of knowledge thus involves at least two parts: a theory of judgement and a theory of evidence. An important part of Brentano's work, starting from his influential *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (Brentano 1995), deals with the theory of judgement. Brentano held a nominal theory of judgement, according to which to judge means to accept or reject an object. An important consequence of this view is that one can readily admit that to perceive something, as opposed to simply having it in mind (what Brentano called a presentation, *Vorstellung*), means to judge (Brentano 1995: 34), without thereby being committed to the more problematic claim that perception has conceptual content.²³

If Brentano's theory of judgement is part of his general theory of mind, the core of his epistemology lies in his theory of evidence. Brentano thinks that such a theory is necessary in order to rejoin to the sceptic who challenges the possibility of making a distinction between true beliefs and knowledge (Brentano 1970: 160-61). True beliefs qualify for knowledge when they are grounded in reasons. Reasons are typically deductive. But we cannot go on inferring propositions, we have to stop somewhere (Brentano 1970: 145). Beliefs that do not require deductive justification must be beliefs that cannot be false. The dogmatic, says Brentano, maintains that beliefs that cannot be false are beliefs we cannot doubt, irresistible beliefs. But this

²¹ Natural epistemology should not be confused with naturalistic epistemology, a fairly dogmatic form of epistemology the great majority of phenomenologist were opposed to, as we shall see below.

²² One of the important and interesting questions I shall not be able to pursue in this place is whether the notion of *being-in-the-world*, as introduced by Heidegger and used by Merleau-Ponty and many others, offers a solution to some of the problems of critical epistemology without leaping back into dogmatism (e.g. simply assuming that we do stand in relation to the world).

²³ A claim one can find for instance in McDowell 1996: 194 and in Brewer 2005.

cannot be right. Although psychologically irresistible, a belief may be false: there is no guarantee that our natural compulsion to believe tracks the truth. So we need another criteria: it is evidence. Evidence should not be confused with the subjective strength of one's belief (Brentano 1966: 84; Brentano 1956: 142). And although evident judgements cannot be wrong and no doubt can be cast upon them, evidence is not infallibility or certainty, but the trait by virtue of which a judgement is infallible and certain (Brentano 1966: 85; Brentano 1956: 143). Evidence is a primitive concept that cannot be further defined. We can clarify it with examples. There are two basic kinds of knowledge: a posteriori and a priori. Both kinds of knowledge admit cases of immediately evident judgements. Evident a posteriori judgements are judgements of inner perception.²⁴ Descartes cogito is said to be of this kind: «we believe to be thinkers and are immediately entitled to this belief» (Brentano 1970 160). Evident a priori judgements are judgements about logical axioms, such as the law of contradiction.²⁵

Truth has traditionally been defined with the notion of correspondence, following the slogan *adequatio rei et intellectus*.²⁶ Brentano warns against the idea of considering the notion of correspondence as offering a criterion of truth. For correspondence to be a criterion of truth we should be able to recognise both terms of the correspondence. And this, he argues, would generate a regress.²⁷ «The real guarantee of the truth of a judgment lies in the judgment's being evident»²⁸. Evidence is not a definition of truth, but it offers the only valid criterion for its obtaining. If somebody judges with evidence, then he has a guarantee that his judgement will be true.

One knows that p if one judges that p because p is evident or because it has been inferred from an evident proposition. Brentano takes Descartes to have established that one *should* believe only propositions that are either evident, or inferred from evident propositions (let us call it Brentano's Cartesian Norm).²⁹ By suggesting this interpretation, Brentano uses the notion of evidence for two purposes: first, in order to distinguish merely true beliefs from knowledge. Second, in order to generate a norm of belief. It is a norm that presupposes not only that there is a difference between true belief and knowledge, but that knowledge sets a standard of correctness for beliefs. If the norm holds, then a subject has a reason to believe p if and only if p is evident or inferred from an evident proposition.³⁰

Contrary to the modern sceptic, Brentano maintains that our beliefs are correct only if they are based on reasons that suffice for knowledge. Contrary to the ancient sceptic, Brentano thinks that there are indeed such reasons, and that we are thus not doomed to suspend judgement. The Cartesian Norm, and the notion of evidence related to it, are used in order to set objective standards for subjective beliefs. Experiences qualify for knowledge in so far as they satisfy the objective requirement expressed by that norm.

There are, however, two main problems with Brentano's epistemology. First, it is not clear that his notion of evidence suffices in order to attain knowledge of the external world. As it is often noticed, not even Sextus would have doubted the idea that we have knowledge based

²⁴ See Brentano 1956: 154 ff. On Brentano technical notion of inner perception see Soldati 2005.

²⁵ See Brentano 1966: 88.

²⁶ Brentano has some qualms about this notion. He wonders, for instance, which *res* is supposed to corresponds to the true judgement that some thing does not exist. See Brentano 1966: 81-82.

²⁷ See Brentano 1966: 81-82 and Brentano 1956: 192. Brentano appears to think that the inference is obvious. His view might be this: for correspondence to be a criterion of truth we should be able to recognise that the correspondence between mind and reality obtains before we know that the belief is true. But for this to be the case, our belief that the correspondence obtains, should be true. But then we need a criterion for knowing that it is. And thus we find ourselves in a regress.

²⁸ See Brentano 1966: 81.

²⁹ See Textor 2004.

³⁰ The assumption behind this argument is that if there is a norm that says that one should do x if x is F , then x 's being F provides one with a reason to do x . Notice that Brentano uses the notion of evidence both for contents of beliefs and for beliefs. I take it that the content of a belief is evident when the belief is. The evidence of the belief that I am now thinking provides me with a reason to form it.

on what Brentano calls inner perception.³¹ The problem concerns the external world. The further prospects of founding all *a posteriori* knowledge on inner perception³² are famously thin.³³ But even if this were granted, the second problem in Brentano's epistemology runs deeper. For the Cartesian Norm to offer a genuine bridge from the subjectivity of experience to the objectivity of knowledge, evidence, the reason the subject has for forming a belief, should be subjectively distinguishable. One should not only judge on the basis of evidence, one should be able to know that one does. But how should the subject come to know that a judgement is evident if subjective force and indubitability do not suffice for evidence? There ought to be a subjective difference between someone who judges on the basis of evidence and someone who judges on the basis of what she mistakenly takes to be evident.³⁴ Brentano does not succeed in showing what that difference could be and it is hard to see how this failing could be repaired within the framework provided by his philosophy.

An epistemology based on Brentano's view thus faces a dilemma. Either one considers evidence as a property an experience can have independently of the subject's capacity to assess it. In that case a subject may know without being in a position to know that he does. This would amount to a revisionist response to cartesian scepticism that would lead to a shift from critical to dogmatic epistemology. Or one accepts that evidence can be subjectively assessed (as subjective indubitability, say), but evidence would then offer no *guarantee* for knowledge. Beliefs based on evidence could be correct although failing to amount to knowledge. By endorsing such a view, one would join the modern sceptic, rather than offering him a rejoinder.

Husserl was mindful of the difficulties in Brentano's epistemology, especially with respect to the notion of evidence. He first tried to settle them within the framework of natural epistemology. Realising that this was doomed to fail, he opted for a transcendental approach. Even Husserl's version of transcendental idealism, as we shall now see, might be open to the charge of dogmatic revisionism.

In the *Logical Investigations* Husserl characterises evidence as «the 'experience' of truth, [...] *the experience of agreement* between [...] the actual *sense of an assertion* and the self-given *states of affairs*» (Husserl 1970b: 121).³⁵ He insists on the fact that evidence is «no mental character [...] attached to [...] true judgements, so that the phenomenological content of such a judgement [...] would be the same whether or not it had this character» (Husserl, 1970 #10314}: 120-21). The intentional content of an evident judgement is the agreement between, for instance, the content of an assertion and a perceived state of affairs. To say that a judgement

³¹ See Burnyeat 1982: 25-26.

³² See Brentano 1970: 169. Brentano's further contention that «external perception cannot be considered as a source of knowledge» (Brentano 1956: 154) doesn't make things any better.

³³ See for instance Bonjour 1978.

³⁴ One might think, following a proposal Brentano appears to have considered, that reflective accessibility, rather than phenomenal manifestation, would do the job. My judgement that I am now thinking would be evident by virtue of the fact I know (or could come to know) that it could not be false. Such a result is not to be available in outer perception: if I judge on the basis of visual experience that there is a tree in front of me, I cannot come to *know* that my judgement could not be false (see Brentano 1970: 164). But even this won't do. Compare two subjects, A and B, so that A judges that he is judging and B judges (on the basis of visual perception) that there is a hand in front of him. Suppose that both A and B think that their judgements cannot be false. Suppose thus that their beliefs have the same strength, that neither A nor B sees any reason to doubt. A and B are subjectively indistinguishable with respect to their beliefs. But A is right and B is wrong. And this is the reason why A is supposed to know that he is judging while B, on Brentano's account, does not know that there is a tree in front of him. This would mean, however, that the evidential character of one's belief ('I am judging') depends on the brute truth of one's counterfactual belief ('I could not be wrong'). But then, far from being a guarantee for the truth, evidence would depend on truth. The truth of the counterfactual belief would be a condition for the evidence of the judgement of inner perception.

³⁵ In the passage under consideration the English translation (by J. N. Findlay) systematically qualifies evidence as 'inner' or 'inward'. No such qualification is present in Husserl's original text (see Husserl 1975: A190/B190). Similar remarks apply to the translation of §39 of the 6th Logical Investigation, where the German «evident» is translated with 'self-evident'.

about (the fact) A is evident, means, «that A is not merely meant, but also genuinely given, and given as precisely what it is thought to be. In the strict sense it is itself present» (Husserl 1970a: 266). Husserl maintains that judgements with the same content (A) cannot be evident for one person and absurd (i.e. evidently false) for the another. For that would mean that both A and non-A could be genuinely given in experience, and this, Husserl contends, is what the law of contradiction excludes.

An evident judgement would thus be distinguished from a non-evident judgement not by a phenomenal feature related to its evidence, but by the conscious presence ('Gegenwärtigkeit') of the intended state of affairs. Such a view might be taken to imply that an experience that involves a conscious relation to an obtaining state of affairs belongs to a fundamentally different kind than an experience that involves no such relation, although experiences of the two kinds might be subjectively (e.g. introspectively) indistinguishable.³⁶ This disjunctive view of experience has been considered as the starting point of a transcendental argument that would block a certain kind of scepticism about our rational entitlement to claim knowledge of the external world.³⁷ Experiences of a certain kind, perceptions and evident judgements in Husserl's sense, present us the world as being in a certain way. But we can be misled by experiences we cannot distinguish from them. The sceptic assumes that subjectively indistinguishable experiences must be of one and the same kind and derives from the fact that some of them do not yield knowledge the conclusion that we are not entitled to think of any of them as doing. By rejecting the assumption, one would be entitled to maintain that an experience that presents an obtaining state of affairs suffices for knowledge. And it would only be in the light of this possibility that experiences of that kind could be genuinely understood as presenting the world as being, rather than simply seeming to be, in a certain way.

An argument along such lines would arguably address the main premise of Pyrrhonian scepticism. We would not be rationally compelled to suspend our judgements. It might be complained, however, that it does not really address the cartesian challenge³⁸ and that it therefore fails to qualify for critical epistemology, in spite of its transcendental credentials. Indeed, even if evident experiences are supposed to belong to a distinctive kind, even if the epistemic warrant they offer does not depend on the benevolent collaboration of the world, the fact that the subject is not in a position to assess their occurrence against the occurrence of their misleading counterfeits prevents the position from offering a reply to cartesian scepticism.

Husserl himself does not appear to have understood the epistemic import of the disjunctive approach in the way suggested above. In his lectures of 1907 he made clear that the existence of the perceived object does not belong to the essence of a perception.³⁹ The immediately given presence of a state of affairs in an evident judgement would thus not imply its obtaining. One may conclude that evidence, understood as a feature of judgements that involve conscious presence of the object, does not suffice to yield knowledge of the external world. It would be at best a necessary, but no sufficient condition for knowledge.⁴⁰ The study of evidence, of the way it is experienced, would then have to be understood as the study of necessary but not sufficient conditions of knowledge. Phenomenology would establish the conditions of the possibility of knowledge, not of their satisfaction.

This result might be taken to correspond to a transcendental conception of epistemology.

³⁶ A view allowing such a result has recently been defended by Martin (see for instance: Martin 2006: 366). A discussion of it is presented in Soldati & Dorsch submitted.

³⁷ See McDowell 2008. An earlier version of the argument can be found in McDowell 1982 and McDowell 1996: 12-13.

³⁸ The complaint has been articulated in Wright 2008.

³⁹ Husserl 1973: 15. (english?)

⁴⁰ In fact, Husserl now uses the notion of presence ('Gegenwärtigkeit') in order to make a distinction between perception and, typically, imagination. When I imagine an object or state of affairs, it is not given to me as present. (See Husserl 1973: 14. (english?).

Transcendental projects can be more or less ambitious. In their most ambitious wearing they aim at deriving knowledge of features of the world the sceptic was challenging from properties of the experience he is supposed to have accepted. In their more modest version they would simply establish the conditions for a rationally irreproachable right to claim knowledge, once the full nature of experience has been uncovered.⁴¹ The modest project might be seen as aiming at Pyrrhonian scepticism, the ambitious one at the cartesian. In line with what we said above, Husserl's project would have to sit on the modest side.

But Husserl would not have accepted such an offer. Starting from his 1909 lectures on the *Idea of Phenomenology* (Husserl 1999) until the *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl 1960) he would repeatedly insist on the need for epistemology to ground knowledge, not just our rational entitlement to it. His intention was to meet the cartesian, not the Pyrrhonian challenge. He writes, for instance: «How do I, the knowing subject, know – and how can I know for sure – that not only my experiences, these acts of knowing, exists, but also what they know exists? Indeed, how do I know that there is anything at all [...] ?» (Husserl 1999: 17).⁴² But how could this be done, one must wonder, if evidence is not tied to the existence of the consciously presented object, or to the obtaining of the consciously presented state of affairs? One would expect that Husserl would either abandon his theory of evidence or accept the modest transcendental project. But he would not. Husserl's move to transcendental idealism becomes understandable in this context. In *Ideas* He writes, for instance, that «the whole *spatiotemporal world*, [...] is a being posited by consciousness in its experiences [...]: *beyond that* it is nothing: [...] Reality is not in itself something absolute which becomes tied secondarily to something else; rather, in the absolute sense, it is nothing at all; [...] it has the essentiality of something which, of necessity is *only* intentional, *only* the object of consciousness, something [...] apparent 'as apparent'» (Husserl 1983: 112-13). Passages of this kind are fairly radical and they may not be representative of Husserl's final view on the matter.⁴³ One can see, however, that under such idealistic assumptions evidence would indeed suffice for knowledge. It would, in so far as evidence would not depend anymore on the existence of the presented object, but the object itself would depend on the evidence of the experience.

It might be suspected that such a move finally leads to a form of dogmatic revisionism, either in form of anti-realistic subjectivism, or of metaphysical idealism. It is probably fair to say that much of Husserl's later work, and of work done in the phenomenological tradition that shares his version of transcendental idealism, aims at showing that such consequences can be avoided.

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⁴¹ Recent discussions about different forms of scepticism have their root in debate between Strawson and Stroud (see Strawson 1966) and Stroud 1968).

⁴² In line with such a demand one may interpret Husserl's epistemological project as motivated by the principle that any difference in being must distinctively *manifest* itself in consciousness (see Meixner 2010: 192).

⁴³ It is often noticed, for instance, that Husserl did not think that external objects, which are said to depend on consciousness, are mental entities. They have a different ontological status.

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