

Plato, Hermeneutics and Knowledge

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ABSTRACT: The dialogue “Theaetetus” has once again become famous due to discussion on the concept ‘knowledge’ in analytic philosophy. In my paper, I provide a novel interpretation of this dialogue and demonstrate how it can be applied for a specification of hermeneutics. For this, I revisit this dialogue and argue, against the dominant view, that Plato achieves a positive result concerning the concept of knowledge. I show that this kind of knowledge can be interpreted as a special kind of ‘practical knowledge’ and used for the reconstruction of a hermeneutic tradition *à la Dilthey*. I then demonstrate the main characteristics of this kind of knowledge analysing the relationship between the concepts ‘knowledge’ and ‘belief’ and between the concepts ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’, and challenging the standard definition of knowledge as a true justified belief from the hermeneutic perspective. One methodological implication of my paper may be to challenge the dominant and sometimes eliminative projects assuming that all knowledge can be somehow reduced to propositional knowledge.

KEYWORDS: hermeneutics; knowledge; Plato; Theaetetus; practical knowledge; intellectual perception; belief; truth.

Knowledge is a fundamental epistemological term right at the centre of permanent philosophical debates, and until today no generally accepted definition of knowledge has been found. As a rule, contemporary epistemology differentiates between two main kinds of knowledge: propositional and practical. Propositional knowledge has a formula ‘know that’ and concerns the truth–value of sentences. Practical knowledge is usually regarded as a skill set and underlies the formula ‘know how’. In this paper, I provide a further specification of the concept ‘practical knowledge’ and add a less familiar variety using a hermeneutic approach. Thus, the term ‘practical knowledge’ has to be distinguished from the above mentioned. Another distinction must be drawn between this kind of practical knowledge and the practical knowledge as the most notably required for *praxis*, understood in the Aristotelian sense of deliberative action. In hermeneutics, the term ‘practical knowledge’ was explicitly introduced by Georg Misch and Josef König. It means ‘knowing one thing as something of a certain kind through

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productive articulation'. The word 'practical' should indicate that this kind of knowledge emerges through the transformation of everyday experiences into symbols. In this sense, this kind of practical knowledge can be understood in the more usual sense, as the opposite of the theoretical knowledge. The hermeneutic character of this practical knowledge consists in that that it shapes and forms human reality.

The origin of the knowledge I call 'hermeneutic practical knowledge' can be already found in Plato. An alternative interpretation of the dialogue "Theaetetus" allows us to argue against the common view that Plato achieves a positive result concerning the concept of knowledge in this text. It is then possible to show that the specific kind of knowledge the dialogue deals with has become the basic or paradigmatic kind of knowledge in the hermeneutic tradition of Georg Misch, Martin Heidegger and Josef König, who challenged the traditional theory of knowledge which was oriented to discursive thinking. The characteristic features of this type of knowledge can be reconstructed through the analysis of relationships between the concepts 'knowledge' and 'belief' and between the concepts 'knowledge' and 'truth' from the hermeneutic perspective.

One methodological implication of my paper may be that, by applying to the history of philosophy, it is not only possible to demonstrate an alternative approach to the concept of practical knowledge, but also to challenge the dominant and sometimes eliminative projects assuming that propositional knowledge is the only kind of knowledge and that all apparently other kinds of knowledge must be reduced to propositional knowledge or otherwise integrated into it.¹

1. Plato's Approach to the Concept 'Knowledge'

The central question in the dialogue "Theaetetus" is "what is knowledge?" After rejecting an ostensive definition of knowledge through listing different domains of knowledge such as geometry, astronomy, harmony, arithmetic (145a–c) as well as an account of knowledge as practical skills (shoemaker, carpentering) (146d–e), Socrates explains that his task is to clarify the term 'knowledge'. According to the dominant interpretation of this dialogue, he discusses three definitions of knowledge, namely knowledge as perception, knowledge as a true belief and knowledge as a true belief with an account.² Against this view, it should be stressed that Socrates' discussion

1. Cp. e.g. „As usual, 'knowledge' is understood as propositional knowledge". (Williamson 2000: 185)

2. For example, Timothy Chappell (2013) writes: "The *Theaetetus* reviews three definitions of knowledge in turn; plus, in a preliminary discussion, one would-be definition which, it is said, does

of perception includes the discussion not only of sensual, but also (a kind of) intellectual perception (*doxazein*) (184b–187a)³; and, on my account, it is his understanding of knowledge as *intellectual perception* that gives an answer to the ultimate question of the dialogue. Thus, the dialogue discusses *four* definitions of knowledge and rejects only three of them: “knowledge is neither perception nor true judgement, nor an account added to true judgement” (210a–b). To strengthen my position with which I am pretty much alone among my contemporary colleagues, I refer to Paul Natorp. He also believed that Plato “prefers, in the form of a mere supplement to the hereby completed first part of the study, to give a short, but very direct and positive explanation of the function of thought that forms *the centre of the whole exposition* and, though psychologically introduced, in fact, reveals *the deepest foundation of Plato’s logic*” (Natorp 1921: 111)⁴. To prove my thesis, let us consider this dialogue in more detail.

1.1. Knowledge as Sensual Perception

Plato (in the person of Socrates) rejects the sensualistic theory of perception both in the form of *subjective relativism* represented by Protagoras, according to whom a man is the measure of all things, and in the form of *objective relativism* represented by Heraclitus’ theory of the flux of all things. In Plato’s view, the main flaw in understanding knowledge as sensual perception is either a situation when “neither a dog nor ‘the man in the street’ is a measure of anything at all” (171 c), or a situation when a common belief is true “at the time when it seems that way and for just as long as it so seems” (172 b). Thus the account of knowledge as sensual perception leads either to *epistemological scepticism and anarchism* or *epistemological authoritarianism*.

1.2. Knowledge as Intellectual Perception

Plato’s alternative proposal is to replace a sensory perception with an intellectual. According to him, what is encountered is experienced not *with*

not really count. Each of these proposals is rejected, and no alternative is explicitly offered. Thus we complete the dialogue without discovering what knowledge is. We discover only three things that knowledge is *not* (*Theaetetus* 210c; cp. 183a5, 187a1).” Cp. McDowell 1973, Burnyeat 1990, Williams 1992, Brown 1993, Hardy 2001, Becker 2007.

3. Cp. to Kurt von Fritz (1945: 242) who in his analysis of pre-Socratic usage of the term ‘nous’ pointed out that “the intuitional element is still present in Plato’s and Aristotle’s concepts of *noos*”.

4. According to Paul Natorp, Plato prefers „in Form eines bloßen Nachtrags zum hiermit abgeschlossenen ersten Teil der Untersuchung eine kurze, doch ganz direkte und positive Ausführung der Denkfunktion zu geben, die in der Tat das *Zentrum der ganzen Darlegung* bildet und, wiewohl psychologisch eingeführt, wirklich das *tiefste Fundament der platonischen Logik* enthält.“ (Natorp 1921: 111).

the senses, but *through* them (184 c). The perceiving organ is not the sensorium, but the soul, or, using modern terminology, the consciousness. The senses are just tools, instruments for the soul. They are not strictly necessary for knowledge “while the soul considers some things through the bodily powers, [but — M.S.] there are others which it considers alone and through itself” (185 e). Among those things are being and not-being, likeness and unlikeness, sameness and difference (185 d). The soul is also able to distinguish numerical as well as qualitative characteristics (even/odd or beautiful/ugly, just/unjust, cow/horse) (190 b–c). It is the function of the soul to define “the common features of everything” “through itself” (185 e), to compare things, to investigate being bringing “the past and present in relation to the future” (186 b). Based on these considerations, one can conclude that the soul gives *conceptual structure* to the perceived, be it of sensual or intellectual nature, material or ideal things. Thus, the function of the soul consists in providing *categorical distinctions*. As John Burnet puts it: “We have the beginning of a theory of what were afterwards called Categories.” (Burnet 1964: 200)

Plato connects this specific faculty of the soul with its ability to perceive some one thing as something definitive. “To mean some one thing” is for him analogous to sensual perceptions such as seeing, hearing or touching some one thing which is (189 a–c).⁵ To express this, he uses the direct object constructions. To mean something is, hence, to take one thing as being something of a certain kind. Through the meaningful reference to the thing the soul *objectivizes* it as being such-and-such. What one perceives through the soul, one directly and immediately knows. This knowledge, based on *understanding* or *grasping one object* — thing or quality — *as something in and through the meaning* and on distinguishing it from other things can be considered as *basic* or *primary* knowledge. Plato calls this form of knowing “*doxazein*” (187a).

5. There are a lot of contemporary scholars who assume that Plato thinks of knowledge as a sort of grasping. However they don't draw the conclusions from this fact. For example, Myles Burnyeat (1990) argued that Plato's conception of knowledge is primarily concerned with understanding rather than justification. Nevertheless, he sees the understanding as a necessary condition of knowledge, but not as the knowledge itself. Jörg Hardy (2001: 156) writes for example: „Was den epistemischen Status des Wahrnehmens anbetrifft, so verfügen wir nach Platons Auffassung offenbar über ein potenzielles Wissen über das 'Was-es-ist' einer Sache, das auf dem Wege der Wahrnehmung erworben wird.“ (“Regarding the epistemic status of perception, we have, according to Plato, at our disposition the potential knowledge of 'what-it-is' of a thing, which we acquired through perception.”). He does not develop this outcome, but sticks with the traditional view identifying belief with propositional judgement and therefore treats Plato's arguments against the second definition of knowledge as “error-paradoxes”. Alexander Becker concludes (Platon 2007: 316): „Wissen muß nämlich, so hatte sich herausgestellt, Produkt der verknüpfenden Tätigkeit der Seele sein, und 'meinen' sei der Ausdruck für die Tätigkeit der Seele, wenn sie sich 'für sich selbst mit dem beschäftigt, was ist' (187a5f.)“ (“Namely, knowledge must be... the product of activity of the soul and 'to mean' is the expression of this activity of the soul 'when it is busy by itself about the things which are.'”) But he does not accept this concept of knowledge because he considers the latter as having a propositional structure.

On my reading, it is this kind of knowledge which Plato examines further on in the dialogue, rejecting the knowledge definitions as true belief and as true belief with an account. Because of this negative strategy, his intention was not understood and the dialogue is traditionally regarded as a failed attempt of defining knowledge.⁶ It also contains, many scholars claim, numerous “inconsistencies” (Bostock 1988; Hardy 2001; Becker 2007). However, the novel assumption that the dialogue advocates the knowledge of ‘something as something’ sheds new light on it and provides a satisfying explanation of its apparent ‘puzzles’. In general, the acceptance of this starting point allows for restructuring of the dialogue as concerning the main properties of basic knowledge. They can be deduced from Plato’s analysis of the false beliefs.⁷ I shall demonstrate that to these properties of knowledge belong its absolute certainty (188a–c), the distinctness (188d–191c), the necessity for judgments (191d–199d), the origin from personal experience (199e–200d), and the evidence (200d–209b). Below, the main arguments are briefly outlined.

1.3. *The Absolute Certainty (188a–c)*

In the dialogue, Socrates analyses the sensual perceptive experience under the so-called ‘normal conditions’ and assumes that one either knows or does not know what one perceives, and that it is impossible both to know and not to know it at the same time. He examines four possibilities of how one can refer to a perceived object: one mistakes something one knows for something else one knows; one mistakes something one does not know for something else one does not know; one mistakes something one does not know for something else one does know; one mistakes something one knows for something else one does not know. Since none of these combinations can take place because of everything it is true that either one

6. The typical view is that the dialogue “ends in an *impasse*” (Chappell 2013). But another reading of this dialogue is possible. Cf., e.g., with Paul Natorp’s view who writes: „Für den, der zu lesen weiß, ist der Theaetet keineswegs ohne positives und in gewissem Sinne abschließendes Ergebnis; man soll es nur nicht in platter Formulierung am Ende suchen.“ (“For those who know how to read, Theaetetus is by no means without a positive and in a certain sense final outcome; one should only not look for the platitudinous formulation at the end.” (Natorp 1921: 91) He points to the difficulty which consists in that „daß die Untersuchung ganz vom Gegenpol des Gesuchten ausgeht“ (“that the study begins with the opposite pole to the sought-after.” (Natorp 1921: 91) Rosemary Desjardins (1990) and Ron Polansky (1992) find also a positive outcome in the dialogue, even if their interpretations are very different.

7. Much has been written on the discussion of false belief. The helpful overview of the most representative interpretations is given by Timothy Chappell 2005 and Alexander Becker 2007. These interpretations share one common feature, namely they analyse the false beliefs from the perspective of refutation of the definitions of knowledge as true belief and true belief with an account. Some authors claim that Plato’s models of the mind “are designed to explain how it is possible to make mistakes” (Rowett 2012: 151). In my view, the discussion of false beliefs is rather an integral part of Plato’s defence of his understanding of knowledge as a meaningful reference to the world; and his models are directed to demonstrate that regarding this kind of knowledge it is rather impossible to make mistakes.

knows it or one does not know it, it is impossible to have false knowledge about the perceived object. Hence, we can conclude, this kind of knowledge is absolutely certain.⁸

This passage has controversial interpretations, most of which share a view that it is about the factual sensory perception. However, this construction encounters logical inconsistency which sometimes is attributed to Plato. According to Crombie (1963: III), for example, Plato fails to see the difference between “being acquainted with X” and “being familiar with X”. Such reproaches can be avoided if we assume that Plato wants to demonstrate the *structure* of sensory perception in this passage. He wants to show that sensory perception is not a verifiable process of absorbing and interpreting ‘data’, but, on the contrary, the meaning of the perceived phenomena lies already in this experience. Thus, there is no logical distinction between the subject to be identified and the concept under which it is identified. When we say that we see or hear something, we are expressing the fact that a specific meaningful perception is apparent to us, wherein no alternative perceptions are relevant. This sensual perception can be understood as a simple non-predicative act which has conceptual character.

1.4. *Distinctness (188d–191c)*

Further on in the dialogue Socrates asks whether the source of error can lie in the meaning of something that is not. His answer is that one who means something means something that is and cannot mean anything that is not. He develops, hence, the alternative that one either means something or does not mean at all because there can be no beliefs about nothing. From this follows that there is no thinking without what is thought; thinking and what is thought belong together. Taking into account these considerations, the asked question should be answered negatively.

In line with it, Socrates claims that *allogoxia* — the confusion of known, simultaneous representations in mind — is impossible. Someone who means both of two representations cannot mean that the one representation is the other. This text section has also elicited intense discussions. In my view, the metaphor of the dialogue which the soul conducts with itself provides the key to a proper understanding of it. This metaphor can be interpreted in the sense that the inner dialogue is a condition for a categorially differentiated perception, whereby each meaning is strictly identified within the entire categorial network and subordinated to the logical-semantic unity of the

8. Cp. Bernard Williams who concludes, that “the upshot of the argument, in effect, is that it is a necessary condition of mistaking two items for one another that one should know both of them, but this is also a sufficient condition of knowing them apart — that is to say, of not mistaking them” (Plato 1992: XV).

soul.⁹ Otherwise, the soul would contradict itself and would not be able to serve as a resource of knowledge. The metaphor of the inner dialogue shows that one knows what one is directly aware of, and this knowledge is *distinct*. One can only think X as X (and not as Y); any mistake is ruled out.

1.5. *The Necessity for Judgments (191d–199d)*

Socrates' comparison of the soul with a wax tablet on which perceptions and thoughts have left their marks is another obstacle for the consensus about the interpretation of the dialogue. On my reading, this metaphor illustrates the idea that the origin of knowledge is to be sought in the *intentionality of meaning*. Analogous to seeing or hearing something, one can *mean* something as something. This process of meaning-formation which involves referring to and identifying a thing, not saying something else about it produces the primary knowledge that enables discursive judgements. Using the model of the wax tablet, Socrates shows that the one possible way to form a wrong belief is the incorrect application of the representation stored in the soul to the actual sensory perception. However, even in this case the subject who applies the current perception to the content of his memory possesses already the knowledge of them both.

The metaphor of the aviary (197c) continues the topic of wrong belief and serves finally to show that one has to distinguish between two mental states, namely "to possess knowledge" and "to have knowledge". The first can be interpreted as the acquired and buffered knowledge, the second as the operative, actual knowledge.¹⁰ To be able to operate with knowledge, one must already possess it. It can happen that one possesses true knowledge, but makes mistakes by using it. Nevertheless, knowledge is a *necessary* condition both for true and false beliefs.¹¹

1.6. *The Origin from Personal Experience (199e–200d)*

Using the jury example Socrates shows the difference between direct knowledge of eye witnesses and correct beliefs of judges which are achieved via testimony "without knowledge" (201c). The assumption that the dialogue advocates the knowledge of 'something as something' puts a new spin on

9. Cp. Natorp who interprets the passage 189c as follows: „Hiermit ist klar *die Bewußtseinseinheit als Grundfunktion der Erkenntnis* ausgesprochen.“ (“Hereby is clearly expressed the unity of consciousness as a basal function of cognition.”) (Natorp 1921: 91)

10. Cp. to Bernard Williams, who calls these forms of knowledge „dispositional“ and „knowledge in action“ (Plato 1992: XVI)

11. Cp. to Bernard Williams who has the same opinion: “knowledge is necessary for error” (Plato 1992: XVII)

this text part. This passage can be interpreted in the sense that knowledge necessarily emerges from the personal experience of the subject, from her acquaintance with the phenomenon, while true belief can be a result of reflection (inference, conjecture).¹² This kind of *experiential* knowledge is directed towards things and states of affairs rather than propositions.

1.7. *The Evidence* (200d–209b)

The so-called Dream Theory which seeks to construct knowable complexes (“whole”, “sum” and “totality”) from unknowable elements is refuted by Socrates in two steps. If the complex represents a whole without parts, it can be seen as a single element which is unknowable. This contradicts the original assumption that complexes are knowable. Or, one can argue that a knowable complex is constructed of the sum of unknowable parts. But this is an absurd idea. It follows from this that elements have to be known. Socrates claims that “the elements are much more clearly known, and the knowledge of them is more decisive for the mastery of any branch of study than knowledge of the complex” (206 b). According to him, the knowledge of an element consists in its distinction from other elements; an element is, hence, a definite unit.

After the rejection of the Dream Theory, Plato shows that a definition of knowledge as a true belief with explanation is unsustainable. The three possible forms of explanation — an expression of thought, an enumeration of the parts of a thing and a detection of distinguishing characteristics what marks the thing off from another — do not contribute to the understanding of the term ‘knowledge’. The first and the final explanations appear to be redundant: They only articulate the distinction that *de facto* has already been done. Besides, the final definition — *knowledge* being a true belief combined with the *knowledge* of the distinguishing property — is formally incorrect, since the term ‘knowledge’ is used both in the *definiendum* and the *definiens*. The explanation based on an enumeration of all elements of a whole is discarded because the knowledge of elements is different in comparing with the knowledge of a whole and contributes little to it, even though without the knowledge of the elements the knowledge of the whole is impossible.

The proposed new reading of the dialogue prepares the following conclusion: through the rejection of the Dream Theory and the definition of knowledge as true belief, Plato points out that knowledge of a thing as such—and-such is *evident* and does not need any theoretical verification.

12. Cp. Tamer Nawar (2013: 1053) who has the same opinion: “that if it is to be knowledge, then it has to be something the agent has achieved for themselves and as a result of their own agency (and not the agency of another)”.

To sum up, the assumption that the dialogue concerns knowledge as a kind of intellectual perception allows us to re-read it as having a consistent logical structure. Within the larger picture of the dialogue as a whole, this structure looks as follows: rejecting the definition of knowledge as a true belief, Plato shows that neither the comparison of current perceptions nor the comparison of actual mental representations with each other can lead to an error. Mistakes are possible about the incorrect application of the representations to the sensual phenomena or about logical interrelations of the mental representations. In both cases, the knowledge in form of knowing the concepts has already existed. Refuting the definition of knowledge as a true belief with explanation, Plato shows that any explanation is superfluous: it either explicates what is already known or misses its target.

This negative strategy leads not to the conclusion that Plato could not clarify the concept of knowledge, but rather to the conclusion that it offers a carefully developed account of knowledge. The knowledge in the analyzed dialogue has to be understood as the simple experiential knowledge of one thing as a something being such-and-such. It is knowledge of unitary objects, knowledge of particular things and states of affair. In this sense, to know a phenomenon means to have a mental representation or a concept of it, since, unless one distinguishes a thing from other things, one cannot even think of it.

In spite of the negative strategy, the dialogue, in fact, elaborates the main characteristics of this basic knowledge as the certainty, the distinctiveness, and the evidence which can be reconstructed in virtue of Socrates' analysis of mistakes. On this reading, the dialogue has a positive outcome: knowledge arises from the intellectual perception as a meaningful reference to phenomena that precedes the propositional judgment and enables it. We can assume that due to this kind of knowledge the world becomes semantically structured.

2. Practical Knowledge as Hermeneutic Knowledge

There is much discussion concerning the concept of knowledge in Plato's "*Theaetetus*". The scholars committed to analytic philosophy are apt to consider it as propositional knowledge (McDowell 1973, Bostock 1988, Hardy 2001, Chappell 2005, Becker 2007), while the scholars committed to hermeneutics construe it as non-propositional knowledge. For example, Schleiermacher used the term 'Vorstellung' (representation) by translating this dialogue and not the term 'Urteil' (judgment) to escape false associations with the propositional structure of the knowledge that the dialogue handles. Heidegger understood Plato's term "episteme" in this dialogue as "grasp of being" (Heidegger 1988, 159). Some scholars like Chappell propose a middle way

claiming that “Greek idiom can readily treat the object of propositional knowledge. . . as an object considered as having a quality. We may always say that Greek treats what is known in propositional knowledge as just one special case of what is known as objectual knowledge.” (Chappell 2005: 32).

On my account, this discussion is provoked through the somehow ‘ambitious’ understanding of knowledge as inferential and as operating with existing concepts.¹³ This ‘ambitious’ concept of knowledge can be confronted with a ‘modest’ one that has a focus on non–discursive concept–building. Using Plato’s metaphor of *discursus*, we can say that in the first case ‘to know something’ means ‘to say something about something else’; in the second case it means just ‘to say what is’. While the former deals with the analysis of things, the latter constitutes things as such. In this sense, Heidegger interprets Plato’s concept of ‘knowledge’ as „Präsent–haben der Dinge“ (“to have things in their actuality”). According to him, to know something in Plato’s sense means „das Seiende in seinem Sinn zu begreifen“ (“to grasp being in its essence”) (1988: 160). Heidegger considers this knowledge to be evident, distinct and necessary for propositional knowledge. Even if his ontological approach is somehow suspect, it is nevertheless a remarkable attempt to dissociate Plato’s theory of knowledge from its Aristotelian reception, still dominant today, which sees the “doxazein” as a judgment (logical reasoning) and, hence, as a proposition. As a side note, it is worth to mention that Platonism forms a background for Heidegger’s own conception of meaning.

A hermeneutic reading of “*Theaetetus*” may be that to know a certain thing means to have a grasp of it; to grasp a thing means to give it a name; and to give a name to a thing means to explicate and generalize a special cognitive experience toward it. That is what results in Plato’s concept of a thing (*doxa*).¹⁴ The latter is *logos*, “one statement made not with a voice addressing to an Other, but silent within itself” („eine Aussage, nicht zu einem Andern mit der Stimme, sondern schweigend bei sich selbst getan“) (Natorp 1921: 112). Being taken in this original sense (and not in the sense of ‘belief’ or ‘opinion’), ‘doxa’ which is the inherent part of any perception stipulates ‘what is’ as truth. This ‘doxa’ can be interpreted in the sense that one thinks not *about* things, but one thinks *things*. ‘Doxa alethes’ meets the requirement that knowledge is always right about the thing it knows. Yet, ‘doxa’ is not identical with a process of logical deduction in the sense of formal logic; it is still its primary function to be in direct touch with ultimate reality. It reaches this reality not as a result of discursive, logical process and

13. The most common translation of the Greek term ‘doxazein’ into English is “judgment”. This word gives an impression that it is all about the operating with ready concepts. Recently, some attempts were made to escape the usage of this word. For example, Catherine Rowett (2012) proposes, instead, the term “discernment”.

14. The term ‘thing’ includes material and ideal things, properties, etc.

pure contemplation, but in a practical–hermeneutic way through which things uncover themselves through articulation.

This discussion on the term “knowledge” is of more than merely historical, antiquarian interest. It is possible to show that this Plato’s line was continued in modern hermeneutics.¹⁵ Moreover, if we define the knowing “what something is” as *practical hermeneutic knowledge*, we can show that this kind of knowledge was the main concern of hermeneutics in the twentieth century represented by such philosophers as Georg Misch, Martin Heidegger and Josef König. These philosophers have in common that they tried to reform the traditional logic and the traditional theory of knowledge which was oriented to the formalism and propositionalism. For it, they proposed different approaches aimed at the explanation of how knowledge originates. These theories can be called *hermeneutic theories of meaning*. The starting point for their criticism and for their ‘extension’ of logic in the direction of theory of meaning was the reflection on the knowledge of “what something is”. Their explanative models are the theory of “evocative discourses” (Misch), the theory of the “hermeneutic as” (Heidegger) and the theory of “know as” (König). Below, I am giving a brief overview of these theories from the perspective of this paper.

Georg Misch challenged the traditional theory of knowledge with his project of a “hermeneutic logic” founded on a philosophy of life. He identified life with articulation (*Ausdruck*) and considered it as a set of multiple forms of knowledge reflecting different forms of rationality. In turn, he understood knowledge as the form of “self–representation” of life. In particular, human life — “the world of words” (Misch) — articulates itself in two kinds of language: the “pure discursive” and the “evocative” languages which have different logical foundations. The “evocative” utterance reflects creative hermeneutic productivity, while the “discursive” utterance is directed to analysis of existing phenomena. The “discursive” knowledge is based on the formal logical reflection. By contrast, the evocative concepts or, in terms of Misch, “hermeneutical constructions” (“hermeneutische Gestaltungen”) are products of the immediate articulation of cognitive experience incorporated in practical activity of the individual. The “evocative” discourse can be interpreted as hermeneutic practical knowledge, for it emerges from the articulation of lived experience (*Erlebnis*) by an individual.

15. Of course, there are also earlier candidates who can be named. Nietzsche who saw the concepts as “merely the residue of a metaphor” (1966: 315) and signified his philosophy as “reversed Platonism” (1988: 199) had contributed most to the development of hermeneutics. Dilthey’s hermeneutic investigations focused on the so-called “concrete concepts” and were aimed to deduction of logical categories from the ‘real’ categories of life. Instead of formal analysis of phenomena he concentrated on their ‘genetic’ analysis and intended to develop a general theory of knowledge which would embrace both propositional and non–propositional forms of thinking and cognition.

Misch's main attention belongs to the "evocative" utterances whose "hermeneutic logic" he tried to develop. This logic comprises "the logic of things, the logic of creativity, the logic of the heart, and the logic of life" (Misch 1999: 29). It includes not only discursive thinking, but also intuition and insight. Beside causality, it accentuates significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*) as a principle of meaning-making. The premise for his analysis of the "evocative" utterances is the understanding of human mind as *logos* in Plato's sense which combines language and thought. This assumption allowed him to separate *word* from *concept* (*Begriff*) and *meaning* (*Bedeutung*) from *logical judgment* (*Urteil*) and to introduce a wide concept of knowledge including propositional and non-propositional forms.¹⁶

Heidegger's 'destruction' of Aristotelian metaphysics in "*Being and Time*" can be interpreted as replacement of the theoretical sentences through the practical. Under the theoretical sentences I understand Heidegger's *apophantic* sentences that describe things as objective and independent of a human being, and having a truth-value. The objective being as a correlate of the theoretical sentences that Heidegger called "das Vorhandene" ("present-at-hand" or "extant" being) is opposed to the form of being called "das Zuhandene" ("ready-to-hand" or "available" being). This second kind of being results from the sentences whose structure is based upon the "hermeneutic as" (*das hermeneutische Als*). These sentences can be called 'practical' sentences since they reflect the human pre-discursive understanding of being. This understanding is not an explicit reasoning based on formal-logical inference, but is integrated into practical activity and emerges from it as reflecting significance of things and processes from the perspective of humanity. Besides, they refer to the world not by means of predication, but through articulation.

Heidegger shows that it is the covering up of the "hermeneutic as" that turns the sentences I call 'practical' into *apophantic*, theoretical sentences. The consequence is that the non-discursive and non-predicative grasp of things has been taken for the discursive, predicative judgment; the phenomenological understanding of things as relating to the being-there (*Dasein*) has transformed itself into the objectivist approach to the world. Reflecting on these processes, Heidegger's fundamental ontology is aimed to disclose the illusion of the objectivity as a "view from nowhere" (Nagel) and to re-activate a living connection between (wo)man and world. It is the ontology of the practical sentences continuing Plato's line with which he tried to replace the ontology of the theoretical sentences continuing Aristotle's line. Introducing this project, Heidegger searched to provide an adequate, i.e. more complicated, understanding of the human being-in-the-world

16. More about Misch's hermeneutic theory of meaning in: Soboleva 2014.

and to re–think the traditional concept of knowledge as a sum of verifiable propositions.

König’s major contribution to epistemology is the extension of the concept of knowledge. He distinguished between “know that” and “know as”¹⁷. The first form is propositional knowledge based on causality and language conventions. The second form is the immediate, “coinciding with the perception knowledge” (König 1994: 165) of a thing as something definitive. To give one example: by the “knowledge that” one knows that the thing in front of her is *a* dog, i.e. it belongs to the species “dog”. In contrast, by the “knowledge as” one knows that the thing in front of her is a particular thing, namely “dog”, i.e. this thing is individually grasped through and in the concept “dog” (König 1994: 148). This kind of knowledge can be called *basic*, since it cannot be justified by giving reasons.

To explain the “knowledge as” König falls back on the term “idea”. Akin to Plato, he interprets the “idea” not as a result of discursive judgment, but as an insight into a thing. However, in contrast to Plato, the “idea” reflects for him the “original” behavior of the human toward a thing. The word ‘original’ refers to the typical behavior which is relevant for conceptual differentiation which proceeds, to use König’s exact words, as “Sich–Innerwerden” (“awareness”) of the thing (König 1994: 185). To have “knowledge as” means to be aware of a thing and, hence, to constitute it for the first time at the very moment of speaking.

The “knowledge as” reflects a selective process of “meaningful” relationships of the human being to the world and, therefore, it reflects the forms of human cognitive activity, and the forms of human life. This kind of knowledge is not a catalog of ‘objective’ forms of being, but rather it manifests the human attitude to the world, the preoccupations and the biases. Since König’s “knowledge as” is not founded in the formal–logical reflection, but has the transcendental–pragmatic foundations, it can be interpreted as *practical hermeneutic knowledge*.

The hermeneutics of Misch, Heidegger and König refer explicitly or implicitly to Plato who was “preparing to attack the problem of predication in his own way” (Burnet 1964: 203). It is characteristic for them that they, like Plato in “Theaetetus”, explain primarily the *genesis* of knowledge and are not concerned with the problem of knowledge justification. Misch’s “evocative” knowledge, Heidegger’s knowledge based on the “hermeneutic as” and König’s “knowledge as” can be construed as the forms of *practical hermeneutic knowledge*. To have this type of knowledge means to see a thing (a quality, a state of affair) as something of a certain kind. This kind of knowledge has Platonic background since it can be interpreted in the sense that one thinks

17. Lectures from the 50’s (König 1994).

not *about* things, but one thinks *things*: one thinks “in the accusative” (König). This kind of knowledge results in that one *becomes aware* of things and states of affair through articulation and, these things, in turn, become for the first time explicit, objective and communicable. This kind of knowledge arises not out of theoretical contemplation, but out of the cognitive activity of the practically acting subject who is ‘situated’ and ‘embodied’. Despite the fact that the level of reflection is mostly propositional, the first immediate contact to the world proceeds by *articulation* of phenomena, circumstances, situations, processes, etc. that can be either real or ideal. Similarly to Plato’s position in “Theaetetus”, rather than supposing that articulation is a medium through which an independently existing world is observed, the hermeneutic approach in question accepts that phenomena are seen not *through* the articulation, but *in it*. From this Platonic view, articulation is not a description of phenomena, but, in the opposite, these phenomena themselves derive their very identity through articulation.

2.1. *The Relationship between ‘Knowledge’ and ‘Belief’*

Some significant characteristics of the hermeneutic practical knowledge introduced by the Platonic hermeneutic tradition can be illuminated due to analysis of the relationship between the concepts ‘knowledge’ and ‘belief’. According to the common view on knowledge, *we know what is proved as a true belief*. Regarding the practical hermeneutic knowledge, we can say, on the contrary, that *we believe what we know*.

The practical hermeneutic knowledge works according to the following scheme: The awareness of the entity F results in the knowledge of F that is or makes possible the belief F. In this case, there is no belief without knowledge. It is only because human knowledge is usually verbalized by means of subject–predicate structure, one talks about ‘belief’ in the sense of discursive judgment even if the subject merely articulates her knowledge and does not ‘mean’ (or believe) anything in the sense that she would assert it, or would be convinced of it, or would doubt about it, etc. In this case, the discursivity is a characteristic of language, not of thought.

Hermeneutics teaches us that in order to avoid confusion between the terms ‘knowledge’ and ‘belief’ one should distinguish the belief as *awareness of something* in the process of life from the belief as *mental attitude* to the attained knowledge. In the first case, ‘to believe something’ means ‘to become aware of something’ due to verbalisation. Here, the term ‘belief’ coincides with the term ‘knowledge’, for the belief is nothing else than the *articulation* of knowledge which *constitutes* this very knowledge for the first

time.¹⁸ For example, ‘to believe that it is cold’ means *to know this* through the articulation of the physical condition. Thus, the hermeneutic position asserts that articulation does not translate the given experience into words; on the contrary, speaking constitutes experience: it comes into being for the first time. By contrast, in the second case, the terms ‘knowledge’ and ‘belief’ have a different meaning: ‘belief’ is a kind of *conscious action of taking a position* to the *attained* knowledge. For example, someone learns from a textbook on geography that the earth is a sphere. She can either share this knowledge and believe it in the sense that she consciously argues for it, or she can doubt about this knowledge.

Another significant characteristic of practical hermeneutic knowledge is that it is not the knowledge of propositions, but the knowledge of things or states of affair. This claim can be illustrated with the following examples: if one expresses a sentence that she is seeing a red rose and I do not agree with it, I will question not the belief, but the person’s faculty for identifying this colour or that one. Analogically, if one asks for the way to Larissa (Plato’s “Meno”), one asks not for one’s belief, but for the path itself. It would be strange to hear a following answer to this question: “Do you want to know the way or what I believe about it?” Who claims to know the way, knows the way itself — *the way as being such and such* — and not the truth–value of the corresponding proposition. Either one knows the way — from personal or interpersonal experience — or one does not. What one believes in this case is either knowledge or one doesn’t have a belief at all (what Plato has clearly demonstrated in “*Theaetetus*” and Josef König has showed in his investigations of the practical and theoretical sentences). Who contests the answer, does not contest the truth of the proposition, but the fact of the person’s knowledge. The circumstance that the verbally articulated knowledge can be represented in discursive form does not change its content and adds nothing to it.

The hermeneutic theory of meaning has clearly demonstrated the fact that not every verbal expression is or can be reduced to a proposition. It showed, for example, that the sentences like “the landscape is beautiful” can be either a proposition if it is a judgement *about* the landscape or a non–proposition if it articulates (or constitutes) the knowledge *of* the landscape *as* beautiful or the knowledge of the *beauty* of the landscape (König 1937: 159). Thus, it differentiates between the proposition and the articulation, and between the discursivity of thought and the discursivity of

18. The predication should be distinguished from the articulation. The former implies that one describes fixed properties of the given things; the latter explicate these properties within a concrete context of activity. For example, my view on the hammer being a heavy hammer results not from the predicative judgment coupling the concepts (ideas) ‘hammer’ and ‘heavy’, but from handling and manipulation with it (cp. Heidegger 2006: 155).

language. While language is *per se* discursive, thought can be either discursive or non-discursive. The concept of discursivity is, therefore, heterogenic, and demands a selective analysis of its parts.

The speech figures like ‘I think that the way...’, ‘I believe that the way...’ are not indications for the propositional structure of thought. They are merely markers that express the speaker’s attitude to her own mental state. They are, therefore, of interest for cognitive science, not for epistemology. Hermeneutics challenges the propositionalism as the main principle of cognition and the paradigm of knowledge and stresses the role of immediate objectivization without intellectualization. It has pointed out the importance of “thinking in the accusative” (König) — of the “doxa” as the “it-thinking” — for comprehending the nature of human thought. In contrast to the traditional theory of knowledge, its analysis focuses on productive, explicative articulation constituting knowledge, but not on predication which presupposes operating with the already existing concepts. The point is to approach something outside oneself that is available as a series of more or less illuminating insights that never coalesce into the entire and final truth about that thing.

2.2. *The Relationship between ‘Knowledge’ and ‘Truth’*

The analysis of the relationship between the concepts ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ can shed light on some further properties of the practical hermeneutic knowledge. According to the traditional definition of knowledge as a justified true belief, truth appears to be the constitutive part and the criterion of knowledge. On the contrary, to recognize the truth in relation to the practical hermeneutic knowledge means to recognize how something *is* for us. Correspondently, the term ‘truth’ is *not a correlative term* here. In this primary sense the concept of ‘truth’ was understood by Plato, by the representatives of hermeneutics mentioned above and many others. For example, Heidegger understands the truth in this original sense of Platonic “doxa” when he writes: “To say that an assertion ‘is true’ signifies that it uncovers entity as it is in itself. Such an assertion asserts, points out, ‘lets’ the entity ‘be seen’... in its uncoveredness. The Being-true of the assertion must be understood *Being-uncovering*. Thus the truth has by no means the structure of an agreement between knowing and the object in the sense of a likening of one entity (the subject) to another (the object).” (Heidegger 2006: 218) That means: the things have to be already known as something definitive before any analysis, any logical relation to them and any judgement about them.

We can say that the hermeneutic knowledge is to some extent *indifferent* to the truth-value if one construes the truth traditionally as the correctness of beliefs. For example, I know my brother’s being in Munich (he told me

this on the phone) (König 2005: 165–169). König argues that even in the case that my brother was no longer in Munich this original knowledge does not cease to be knowledge for me. Moreover, this knowledge, in contrast to propositions, cannot be discursively justified, because this knowledge is not *about* things, but is the knowledge *of* things.

In fact, a normal situation of a human being is a situation of a knowing being: we acquire, produce, correct, test, use and lose knowledge. All human cognitive efforts result in knowledge. Of course, our use of the term ‘knowledge’ conveys the meaning of possessing ‘true knowledge’. Nevertheless, regarding the practical hermeneutic knowledge, truth appears to be just a *claim* (Anspruch). This claim is intrinsically connected with the concept ‘knowledge’ and implicitly integrated into it. We just want to have knowledge and we mean, of course, ‘true knowledge’, even though we are usually aware of the fact that our knowledge is fallible and can be erroneous.

In contrast, for the propositional form of knowledge, truth becomes the explicit *criterion* of knowledge. The critical analysis of beliefs that function as propositions requires examination of the conditions of their truth. Thereby the concept ‘truth’ has to be formulated and justified in dependence on the type and the sphere of knowledge as correspondence–, coherence– or consensus–theoretical concept. It becomes problematic; and the analysis of the concept ‘truth’ and the conditions of truth becomes a special field of research. The dependence of the concept of truth on the concept of knowledge shows that the latter has a more fundamental role in epistemology.

3. Conclusion

Much of the twentieth-century literature on the analysis of knowledge took the definition of knowledge as justified, true belief, which Plato has rejected in “Theaetetus”, as its starting-point. However, it was in particular hermeneutics that made use of Plato’s account for knowledge as the *doxa* understood as a direct grasp of a thing. According to this view, any thought of a particular thing or person or state of affair that identifies it is knowledge. For hermeneutics, this kind of knowledge makes something existing by connecting a non-symbolic realm with a symbolic realm of meaning. “To mean something” is considered equivalent to “being aware of something” and, *vice versa*, “being aware of something” means “to give meaning to something”. Thus, hermeneutics considers non-propositional knowledge not as a deficient mode, or as a kind of “proto-rationality”, but as a genuine human cognitive capacity for *objectual thinking* which characterizes the human mode of cognition as such and makes the human being able to systematic knowledge.

The hermeneutic approach to the concept of knowledge serves to bring Plato's relevance to contemporary epistemology into an alternative focus by continuing a Platonic line of argumentation as it is developed in the "Theaetetus" and showing that a two-valued predicative logic is not normative for all areas of cognitive experience. In fact, a theory of meaning that restricted itself to deductive and referential procedures would be radically incomplete. It would exclude from the scope of knowledge the entire range of meaningful and significant relationships, structural influences of social action, and the interpretative activity of the human being which are based upon another form of logic — practical significance, metaphor, analogy, emotional value, intuition, etc.

The anti-theoretical stance that is inherent in philosophical hermeneutics does not exclude that hermeneutics is becoming more analytic. But, for instance, in contrast with the analytic philosophy of language, the hermeneutic analysis begins not with semantical analysis, but with analysis of forms of human cognitive activity and types of knowledge. In this way, the hermeneutic approach gives a fascinating resource for re-thinking some significant epistemological concepts and stimulates new discussions.

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