

Person and Knowledge



Edited by

Francisco Ceric

Juan David Quiceno

María del Carmen Tejada

Pablo Fossa

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Edited by

Francisco Ceric

Universidad del Desarrollo, Chile

Juan David Quiceno

Universidad Católica San Pablo, Peru

María del Carmen Tejada

Universidad del Alba, Chile

And

Pablo Fossa

Universidad del Desarrollo, Chile



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PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

Purpose

This book aims to present a compilation of works that explore different phenomena of knowledge in human experience. Through a collection of philosophical-theoretical works, this book attempts to show different philosophical perspectives on human knowledge.

Rationale

The problem of knowledge, as Aristotle commented in metaphysics, is inscribed in human nature. All men desire to know and understand their reality, the world and God who transcends it. From ancient times to our time is a study that, linked to the mystery and complexity of human existence, has required multiple approaches. Furthermore, modern philosophy has given—we could say initially excessively—a central place to the problem of what can be known and how it is known. From this centrality, the development of German idealism and even existentialism, phenomenology, scientific positivism and analytical philosophy can be understood as a response to what has been presented with a totalizing character and that has opened new forms of address the problem of man's relationship with reality.

In this way, the problem of knowledge is not only central to man's life, but it is extremely topical. We live in a time where culture increasingly denies the truth and the very desire to seek it. Furthermore, men are confused by the diversity of approaches to what they can know and what is true in the different areas of their existence and being in the world. In that sense, it seems important to ask the questions that exist behind knowledge in its various modalities and aspects.

Consequently, it is proposed to carry out a joint work of in-depth discussion between researchers with the double objective of enriching the respective visions and moving toward a more comprehensive understanding of human knowledge and its relationship with the human person. In this sense, some questions are proposed as examples, without any pretension of exclusivity and with the intention of opening enough space so that researchers can make their contributions from their own specialty and perspective.

Is knowledge solely a biological function oriented toward adaptation? What and how does neuroscience contribute to the understanding of human knowledge and personal identity? What relationship is there between the social dimension and the individual character of the act of knowledge? Does knowing imply a special participation in being or is it simply a spiritual operation along with others? What is self-awareness? What is practical knowledge? What that aesthetic one? How do emotions contribute to the knowledge process? Is faith some type of knowledge that contributes to the understanding of what man grasps through reason? Does theology contribute anything to the understanding of human knowledge? Is artificial intelligence more powerful than human intelligence and is it destined to replace it? Does understanding what knowledge means to the good life of men in society contribute anything?

These are all questions that are intended to broaden the spectrum as much as possible. In no case do they intend to close the space to different approaches to the problem. Its intention is to serve as a trigger for the possible contributions of the participants in the work; which will be made available to the general public through a coordinated publication.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Francisco Ceric is a Research Professor at the Faculty of Psychology at the Universidad del Desarrollo, Santiago de Chile. He is currently Head of the Affective Neuroscience Laboratory, of the Faculty of Psychology of the Universidad del Desarrollo and President of the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (CEEII). He is the author of numerous publications in the line of cognition and emotions from a neuroscientific perspective.

Juan David Quiceno has a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Navarra. He has a master's degree in Philosophy from the San Antonio Catholic University of Murcia and is Philosopher and Theologian from the Gregorian University of Rome. He is a Professor of Philosophical Anthropology at the Universidad Católica San Pablo (Arequipa, Peru), where he also serves as undergraduate coordinator of the Humanities Department. He is editor of the magazine *Persona y Cultura* and author of the book *Narrative identity according to Paul Ricoeur. Toward a hermeneutics of the human person*.

María del Carmen Tejada holds a Ph.D. in Developmental Sciences and Psychopathology from the Universidad del Desarrollo, Chile. She earned her bachelor's degree in Psychology from the San Pablo Catholic University and a master's degree in Science with a specialization in Clinical-Educational Child and Adolescent Psychology from the National University of San Agustín (Arequipa, Peru). Her research focuses on social and affective neuroscience, with particular interest in empathy, aging, and embodiment, integrating physiological, behavioral, and experiential measures. She currently serves as a Full Professor at the School of Psychology at Universidad del Alba, Chile.

Pablo Fossa is Director of the Cognition & Culture Laboratory (C&C Lab) of Instituto de Bienestar Socioemocional (IBEM) at the Faculty of Psychology, Universidad del Desarrollo, Chile. He received a Ph.D. degree in Psychology from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. His doctoral thesis dealt with the expressive dimension of inner language in human experience.

He did a postdoctoral fellowship financed by the National Commission for Scientific and Technological Research (CONICYT) of Chile, with a research project on thought trajectories from a microgenetic orientation. His lines of research are related to Cognition, Cultural Psychology and Phenomenology. He is the editor of the book *Latin American Advances in Subjectivity and Development: Through Vygotsky Route* (Springer, 2021), *New Perspectives on Inner Speech* (Springer, 2022), *Inner Speech, Culture & Education* (Springer, 2022), *Affectivity & Learning* (Springer, 2023) and *Collected Papers on Inner Speech* (IAP, 2024). Currently, he is Ph.D. candidate in Philosophy at the University of Navarra, Spain.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Mariano Asla has a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Navarra. He is a full-time Associate Professor of Anthropology and Ethics at the Faculty of Biomedical Sciences of the Universidad Austral (Buenos Aires, Argentina).

Juan F. Franck has a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the Internationale Akademie für Philosophie (Liechtenstein). He completed postdoctoral studies at the University of Freiburg (Switzerland) and carried out research stays in the United States, Italy and Spain. He is a researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the Universidad Austral (Argentina) and Dean-Moderator of the Center for Philosophy and Theology of the Universidad del Norte Santo Tomás de Aquino (UNSTA).

Maximiliano Loria has a Ph.D. in Philosophy from National University of La Plata (Argentina), is Professor of Ethics and in charge of Graduate programs in the Humanities Department of the Catholic University of San Pablo (Arequipa, Peru). Founding member of the Ibero-American Community of Macintyrean Studies.

Roger Miller Silva has a Ph.D. in Humanities for the Contemporary World (Philosophy and Thought) from the Universitat Abat Oliba CEU, Universidad San Pablo CEU and Universidad Cardenal Herrera CEU (Spain). Masters in Philosophy from the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (PUC-Rio). Ordinary Professor (full time Associate Professor) of the Humanities Department in the Catholic University of San Pablo (Arequipa, Peru).

José Ignacio Murillo is a Full Professor of Philosophy at the University of Navarra. He defended his doctoral thesis in 1993, under the direction of Professor Leonardo Polo, on knowledge as an anthropological key in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. He is currently a Professor of Philosophical Anthropology and Social Anthropology at the University of Navarra. In recent years he has dedicated much of his research to some classical authors,

in particular Aristotle and Plotinus, and to the main representatives of 20th century philosophical anthropology and biology. This has helped him compare the conceptions of life in classical and modern thought and in current life sciences, in aspects relevant to the study of human beings. One of the topics that currently concerns him is the study of the relationships between biology and anthropology, especially the mind-brain problem. Since 2010 he has directed the interdisciplinary project *Mind-Brain: Biology and Subjectivity in Contemporary Philosophy and Neuroscience* at the Culture and Society Institute of the University of Navarra (ICS).

Cristóbal Pacheco is a clinical psychologist, researcher, and Professor at the University of British Columbia, Canada. He is Ph.D. in Psychology at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Argentina, with the research “understanding the particular experience of people with borderline personality disorder from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective”. He is an active member of the Phenomenology and Mental Health (PMH) Network, belonging to the University of Oxford. Along with other researchers, his interests are related to the understanding of the subjective experience linked to different pathologies, as well as the development of improvements in psychotherapeutic interventions, based on phenomenological approaches. His research fields are phenomenology, hermeneutics, clinical epistemology, and borderline personality disorder, developing comprehension and intervention strategies at a psychotherapeutic level, rescuing elements of philosophy and epistemology.

Fabrizio Renzi has a Ph.D. in Scienze del Testo. Sezione Scienze filosofiche from the University of Siena where he also obtained a Master Scientifico Culturale in Filosofia. He has been a researcher at the Fondazione Centro Studi Campostrini of Verona and general secretary of the International Science and Commonsense Association (ISCA). He is currently a full-time Professor at the San Pablo Catholic University of Arequipa (Peru). A specialist in metaphysics, philosophy of religion and theory of knowledge, he has published numerous articles in specialized journals.

Tomás Salazar has a Ph.D. in Philosophy and master's in Theology from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. He is a Professor of Metaphysics and Aesthetics at the Universidad Católica San Pablo (Arequipa, Peru). Currently, he is Director of the Humanities Department of said university.

INTRODUCTION

Juan David Quiceno
Universidad Católica San Pablo

Oh! a mystery is it?" I cried, rubbing my hands.
This is very piquant.

I am much obliged to you for bringing us together.
'The proper study of mankind is man', you know.

Arthur Connan Doyle, *A study in scarlet*

Like many philosophical questions, the problem of knowledge is linked to self-awareness. When a human being looks at their hands, recognizes their face reflected in specular objects, perceives the power of their words, and the ability to direct their actions toward specific purposes, they spontaneously question themselves and everything that constitutes their life context. In other words, they encounter the mystery of their existence and the awareness of not being just another thing in the world, but of being able to reflect on their own reality, the vastness of the cosmos, other beings sharing their condition, and that which transcends them. In this sense, any concern about the problem of knowledge arises spontaneously in connection with the reflection that a human being engages in regarding their own reality and the desire to clarify, to the best of their abilities, their existence to the world they have been given.

However, this problem inherent to the human condition becomes complex in the face of two initial evidences. The first is that living beings have various ways of "cognitively" relating to reality. In some cases, these forms of relationship resemble the way humans know, but in others, they differ profoundly. The second evidence arises when attempting to systematize questions about what, how, why, and above all, who in all knowledge. When trying to answer these questions, reflection becomes entangled in

abundant complexities that, with the advancement of human knowledge, become increasingly difficult to unravel. Consequently, knowledge is an issue linked to the phenomenon of human existence itself, but it is also an extremely challenging matter.

Thus, the spontaneous self-awareness is confronted with a reality that, as Aristotle immortalizes, is a desire inscribed in the nature of the human being and, as if it were a new evidence complicating the matter further, does not easily fade away. Partial knowledge is insufficient for humans; hence, they typically remain dissatisfied with the irrational, the unreasonable, the illogical, the incomplete, or the false. Humans attempt to encompass totality as part of their desire to know and seek in it the truth—that which appears capable of giving meaning to what they see, touch, feel, imagine, remember, think, and desire. In this lies the mystery of knowledge—the attempt to encompass totality is fundamentally something that touches their being. Humans desire totality because, in some way, they sense it as appropriate to their being and because they cannot live in nakedness or in darkness. On the other hand, every partial object is insufficient to satisfy their desire to encompass all knowledge. The world and everything in it present itself as an inexhaustible horizon of knowledge in height, depth, and extension, and yet, none of it seems sufficient to satisfy their openness to knowing what exists. Hence, this problem is also tied to the inexhaustible or, in more ontological terms, to the seal of the infinite in the human being.

This mark of the infinite reveals at least three aspects of the human quest to understand the horizon of what appears knowable. Firstly, that the totality aspired to is actually unattainable, always seemingly beyond what one can grasp with their faculties. Secondly, the “mixed” condition of human existence—the intertwining of the finite and the infinite. Humanity is marked by the infinite, yet its capacities are destined to inadequately possess that which they tend toward in time. Thirdly, linking the previous aspects, the human interior is as inexhaustible as the totality of the world to which it is open. If humans are oriented toward the knowledge of a seemingly inexhaustible world, it is because within themselves lies the capacity to encompass that world in all its dimensions. Moreover, they must be able to delve into the depths of themselves. This recalls Socratic fascination with self-knowledge and the concept of “learned ignorance” by Nicholas of Cusa. Enveloped in the inexhaustible, the human can be interpreted as a microcosm—a reality where the gaze fails to perceive the limit. Hence, humans look both outward and inward as something that attracts, fascinates, amazes, and, in a way, challenges them to find an ultimate point of support that lies beyond their own strengths.

The uncontrolled vertigo caused by this apparent absence is perhaps the beginning of modern distrust. Seeking that point of support within the world, modern philosophy ends up reducing the unfathomable nature of human beings and reality itself to the verifiable and to a self-founding

project. Doubt as a method, mistrust in human powers, the identification of truth with certainty and functionality, and absolute and uncritical trust in mathematics, philosophy, and emerging empirical sciences, as many thinkers have emphasized, turned the problem of knowledge into a matter of psychological security, political power, and technical capability.

The result of this combination of factors made the problem a central issue for sciences and philosophy. In other words, knowledge ceases to indicate the complexity and ontological structure of the human being because knowledge itself has been doubted. The question of whether it is possible to know and how one knows what seems to be known has immersed humanity in the realm of the possible and the imaginary. The philosophical self-foundation of knowledge becomes an increasingly distressing and unfinished enterprise as doubt continues to triumph over the evidence of reality and common sense. Thus, humans plunge further into nihilism, distrust of their personal powers, and the depression caused by the loss of the sense of being. In this world of possibilities, technical and technological imaginations have comfortably taken root to provide us with a new world tailored to human fears.

This perspective has opened new challenges. Not everything is dramatic and negative. On the contrary, the rationality sought by modernity and the utility that drove the beginning of the development of empirical sciences have positively questioned ancient dogmas. They have allowed philosophy to revise its human foundations, to thoroughly study the problem of method, to reevaluate the personalistic elements of authority and trust linked to the problem of knowledge, to better delimit the sciences, and to seek a relationship with greater respect for their specificity. Furthermore, it has presented new scenarios for humans to better understand their existence, their relationship with the world, with themselves, with other human beings, and with God.

In this sense, linked to the development of sciences, human knowledge has been a topic that, in contemporary culture, has assumed various perspectives. In this case, to mention a few, one can refer to medicine, physics, biology, psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and engineering. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that the problem of knowledge is not only spontaneously central to human existence and the systematic concern of philosophy, but it also enjoys enormous scientific, cultural, and social relevance.

This relevance has also made it an interdisciplinary matter. Philosophy incorporates into its reflection the contributions of empirical science that allow for a better understanding of the reality of knowledge, its specificity in the life of humans and other living beings. Moreover, this operation involves reflecting on the pressing challenges posed by the new technological reality, which has a huge impact on contemporary society and the inner life of humans. We refer here to the development of computer sciences and their increasingly automated products through artificial intelligence.

While the ancient dream of producing human consciousness through machines—which has been abandoned by many today—has long driven the development of these sciences, we now face a weak artificial intelligence capable of performing processes with greater capacity and efficiency than human intelligence. This misleadingly labeled intelligence relies on processes that handle a colossal amount of data (which could eventually be called knowledge) and on automatisms in which human decision plays a minor role. Efficiency and autonomy are turning them into an integral part of human life, becoming increasingly indispensable voluntarily and involuntarily, and transporting us toward a new way of seeing existence. Knowledge has become a powerful tool that moves societies in different directions, invites them to interpret their lives in one way or another, and transforms their values according to the economic needs of the market and the modern state.

This brief general framework has served as preparation for the work presented below. It is a collaborative effort that brings together specialists in philosophy and psychology with the aim of delving into the problem of the relationship between the individual and knowledge. It is clear that humans, unlike everything else that exists, have a particular condition and refuse to be treated as just another partial object of the world. As mentioned earlier, their being is marked by the infinite. In essence, this indicates, in part, what it means for a human being to be a person—philosophically speaking, a being that has been ontologically constituted in itself and is radically open to relationships—in various forms—with God, with other human beings, and with the world. Precisely what knowledge, in its complexity, somewhat clearly manifests. This quality of personhood grants humans a dignity—an invaluable value that commands respect and makes the human person irreducible to a thing, an object, a means, a tool, or something that can be dominated at will. Being a person for the human being indicates that their life is invaluable and has a unique and unrepeatable character.

With this in mind, the problem of the relationship between the individual and knowledge takes on a precise contour, where any reductionism is violence against the human being and any complementary and integrative view is an opportunity to better illuminate their reality. Thus, the scholars presenting their work in this volume have chosen, based on their expertise, the best way to approach this relationship and express their perspectives and concerns about the proposed topic. What is presented in this volume is the result of a rigorous collaborative process that has gone through several stages.

Firstly, discussions about how to approach the project—answering the question of what united us as researchers and where we should lead the work to compose a symphony where diversity finds harmony. Secondly, individual writing work in which each author gave birth to their own reflections. Thirdly, a workshop held at the Universidad Católica San Pablo (Arequipa, Peru)

where the works were presented, and there were extensive spaces for dialog where each author received questions, requests for clarification, and suggestions for further improving their chapters. Fourthly, a rigorous editorial process where the Editorial Committee of the Universidad Católica San Pablo and external blind peers carefully reviewed the work and provided observations to improve the cohesion of the project and each of the ideas outlined. Fifthly, a style correction process that improved the overall understanding of the text and, more importantly, made the authors more determined about what they wanted to convey. Lastly, a thorough review of the critical apparatus and all types of errors—which, as is known, are never completely eradicated—so that the reader finds a polished work that does not hinder reading and facilitates the consultation of the material that has guided the authors and is made available to the general public.

The book has a fairly logical thread, although it was established afterward, and it is not possible to close all the gaps. Nor has this been the intention. On the contrary, the goal is for those spaces not entirely sutured to allow the dynamics of the established community work to be reproduced in the coming years. In that sense, the text has a scheme that could be indicated through the movement “from inside out.” That is, it proposes an open review of the current problem of knowledge linked to the individual to give way to the exploration of self-knowledge, pass through the knowledge of the other, and reach questions of a more public scope related to aesthetic, ethical, and political discussion.

Each author takes their own path to address the topic to which their reflection subscribes. In this way, the first chapter masterfully opens the volume by conducting a systematic and very reflective review of the problem of animal and personal knowledge. The chapter reflects extensive knowledge on the subject and a great ability to synthesize and present philosophical and scientific content on the paths that have led the debate to its current configuration.

The second chapter is a review of some neuroscientific positions on the problem of self, i.e., self-awareness. The chapter proposes the need for neurosciences to present an open response to the problem of self that allows for the integration of new knowledge. In this case, the stance of Joseph LeDoux is presented as representative to show the role that emotions, for example, play in shaping self-awareness. Thus, the problem of self is presented as an open horizon where neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy can collaborate to seek an explanatory level that respects the personal reality.

The third chapter is focused on the reflection about the pre-reflective conscious. The author makes a systematic review of some of the authors who, from a phenomenological perspective, propose to recover the passive synthesis of consciousness as a constitutive aspect of human identity. In this way, the chapter proposes to approach to the self in an integral way and, specifically, both the relationship between the mind and the brain and body

and soul. That is, giving value to the lived experience as the place where the different cognitive sciences can meet each other.

The fourth and fifth chapters are linked by their orientation toward the knowledge and understanding of the other person. A topic that seems evident but, in reference to the uniqueness of the individual, the eidetic reduction of knowledge to the subject-object relationship, and the apparent possible separation between interiority and exteriority, poses difficulties for which connaturality is insufficient to affirm the openness of consciousness to otherness. That is, asserting the possibility of the ability to truly encounter the other and understand their innermost reality. Thus, the chapter dedicated to empathy and the person begins with a discussion of Thomas Nagel's naturalistic phenomenology as a way of showing the aporias that the conflicting view between the objective and the subjective has caused today. The chapter proposes the idea of recovering the fundamental value of being a person and its embodied nature as the basis for all knowledge of the other and their objective aspect. In that sense, it proposes a cognitive inversion that complements very well with the fourth chapter, where Edith Stein's phenomenological studies on empathy in her doctoral thesis are referenced to integrate them with Antonio Rosmini's vision of the issue of uninobjectivation. The attempt aims to demonstrate the possibilities of the relationship between the objective and the subjective as non-exclusive—as they do not primarily refer to their epistemic sense—and that intelligence unifies without reducing in its act of grasping the personal reality of the other.

From this openness to otherness, the following chapters appear in the aesthetic, ethical, and political context. In that sense, the sixth chapter discusses the idea of aesthetic knowledge in St. Thomas Aquinas that has given rise to other important reflections on beauty in the contemporary context. The text studies primary sources to show how Aquinas proposes the possibility of knowing the beautiful as distinct from the good and the true and as an activity proper to humans. That is, although perceived by the senses, beauty is only predicated by a being capable of intellectually grasping the being of things. Therefore, humans can also recognize themselves as by nature oriented to the knowledge of beauty.

The seventh, eighth, and ninth chapters are presented as a deepening of the ethical question. Thus, the seventh chapter metaphysically studies the connection between free will and intellectual knowledge. The work presents an analysis of intentionality that opens up the consideration that free assent is involved in the cognitive act, that is, it is not a mechanical operation, but human intelligence assents freely and responsibly to the known reality as a way of accepting its truth or rejecting its falsehood. On the other hand, the eighth chapter explores the cognitive foundations of what could be recognized in nature as a transition from being to ought to be. That is, it proposes a way to moderately suture the classic empiricist

aporia between being and ought to be. That is, without excluding the person too much and, at the same time, without turning the world into a mere creation of human consciousness. In that sense, the text addresses with the categories of the naturalist debate the contributions and also the limits of some scientific studies in order to allow the knowledge of a moral order anchored in the nature of what exists. As the last part of this ethical section, the ninth chapter is dedicated to discussing the contemporary perspective of the morality of human acts, where a substantive rationality of morality is opposed to a mere instrumental or preference and benefit maximization rationality. Fundamentally, the struggle for a recovery of the possibility of judging human acts as good or bad is raised, stemming from the orientation inherent in human nature and not so much from the utilitarian criteria that govern our contemporary society. In that sense, the intention is to recover the idea of a substantive ethical rationality in which the duty is not reflected as an imposition, but in how moral goodness animates the life of the human being and directs it toward its most proper temporal and transcendent end.

Finally, the tenth chapter takes one more step toward the public sphere and closes the volume's journey. This last chapter addresses a question of enormous contemporary relevance. That is, it raises whether it is again possible, in the current political context, to speak about truth. The distrust expressed by people regarding political praxis ultimately has something to do with the fact that its discourse has broken with the truth and, in many cases, is explicitly and voluntarily deceptive. Moreover, it is contradictory to demand truth from politics when society explicitly claims to have a relativistic discourse about truth and human values. Thus, the author tries to lead the reader to accept that it is necessary to recover the discourse of the practical value of truth. In this, much of the future of human politics is at stake.

Thus, this extensive journey is concluded, which we hope can be traversed with patience and depth, linked to human existence and the scientific, cultural, and social reality of our time. In this, we must thank the Universidad Católica San Pablo de Arequipa (Peru) for recognizing the importance of this work and allowing us to continue with this series of debate and reflection meetings where we can put all our concerns, ideas, and solutions at the service of society. Also, I would like to thank all the authors of this volume who have patiently worked on each of their contributions and promptly responded to all the editorial requirements that have allowed the present publication. We hope that the readers of this work appreciate the effort contained in it and, above all, that they can embrace and convey the few or many truths that we make available to the public.

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CHAPTER 1

HUMAN COGNITION: CORPOREAL LIVING BEINGS, SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE AND OUR PERSONAL CONDITION

José Ignacio Murillo
University of Navarra, Spain

ABSTRACT

Knowledge and cognition are topics of interest not only for philosophy but also for science. After behaviorism, cognitive science tries to scientifically understand the black box of the human mind, but there are different difficulties as the problem of consciousness and the relation of cognition to the organism and life. Deeper is, however, the problem of the openness of human cognition to all reality and its relation to truth. Classical philosophers can shed light on the relation of intellection, as the primary sense of cognition, with the life of human beings. But we need further developments, based on contemporary philosophy, to better understand the relation between intellection and the personal conditions of human beings.

Introduction: Knowledge, Between Science and Philosophy

To ask about knowledge is somehow paradoxical, for its aim is precisely to know knowledge. But what can it mean to know knowledge? Can that which makes everything clear turn out to be obscure for us? Knowledge is an immediate phenomenon, whose meaning we all grasp, but it is difficult to define. And it is no wonder that this is so. After all, defining is also a way of knowing, and moreover a way of knowing that involves delimiting; and how can we effectively delimit that which by its very nature presents itself as open-ended, and which accompanies all reality without restrictions?

It is unsurprising, then, that the study of knowledge is considered part of the first science sought by Aristotle, which his disciples called metaphysics. Since then, knowledge, and in particular human knowledge, has been subjected to an intense scrutiny with scientific aspirations, which has aimed to characterize knowledge and determine its place in reality, but which, in the attempt, has also led to numerous paradoxes and difficulties.

In view of the tortuous history of the question of knowledge in Western culture and the state in which it currently finds itself, which is overtly problematic, here I propose, first of all, to offer some indications that will serve to approach it in a broad and open-ended way that counterbalances unilateral and reductive approaches. Putting this aim into practice will, of course, raise some questions that may remain largely unanswered. I will have achieved my objective, however, if I manage to clear the horizon a little, so that the light that emanates from this topic—and in relation to knowledge, light is much more than a metaphor—shines by itself.

Before anything else, it is worth considering the very name of knowledge in order to determine what name should be used, so that we avoid confusion and rely on well-established consensus. The terms “know” and “knowledge” belong to both ordinary language and philosophical tradition. They have the advantage of being very inclusive, since they can be applied to ordinary as well as to scientific and philosophical knowledge, and not only to human beings, but also to other organic and nonorganic living things, and to sentience and to that which surpasses it, if what is traditionally called “intellectual knowledge” exists.

However, in recent decades the term “cognition” has also begun to be used systematically. Although this usage may have been influenced by the demands of the English language, whose term for knowledge is not as flexible as its Spanish equivalent, it is also true that the use of the term “cognition”—which rehabilitates the Latin term “cognitio”—involves attending to both the universality of the phenomenon and the intention to reclaim it for science. An example of this is the term “cognitive science,” which designates a particular consideration of knowledge as well as its application to other areas, as in “cognitive neuroscience” and “cognitive psychology.”

It is the conversion of cognition into a topic of empirical science that has inspired me to choose this term as my starting point. The fact that knowledge, like consciousness, is an especially important topic in contemporary science is something to be celebrated, but we must also take care that the descriptions of knowledge proposed in this area do not obscure some of its most important aspects.

Behaviorism and Cognitive Science

The history of cognitive science provides a good example of these difficulties. This discipline initially presents itself as an alternative to and an advance from behaviorism, since it precisely aims to investigate the workings of the black box that, for behaviorist psychology, was the mind. This omission can be explained if we understand the postulates on which this way of approaching psychology was based.

Behaviorism adopted, first of all, a postulate that is characteristic of all post-Cartesian psychology: that the mental involves consciousness and that it consequently must be defined in such terms (Murillo, 2016). The mental was no longer a monopoly of philosophy by that time, since it had already been adopted as a subject of study by the new psychology, which understood itself as a discipline with aspirations to become a full-fledged empirical science. Accordingly, referring to consciousness was key to defining its subject matter; to such an extent that, when one of the currents that were forming the new psychology claimed a place in this discipline for what was not conscious, it not only decided to call it “unconscious”—assuming it to be understandable only in relation to consciousness—but also treated it as a set of dynamics that should be brought to consciousness.

The introduction of the unconscious into the study of the human mind could only have been new in a context in which the mental had been identified with the conscious. The unconscious was of course nothing new for classical psychology, which considered conscious phenomena to be just part of the subject matter of psychology. In its Aristotelian version, psychology was defined by the study of vital operations, which also included vegetative activity and many unconscious sensory activities. Even unconscious dynamics, in the sense that this term was now given, had been well studied since antiquity, albeit above all from the point of view of moral reflection (González Vidal, 2014).

But the new characterization of the unconscious, which was presented as an expansion of the subject matter of psychology, was problematic from the outset because the unconscious to which it referred was too limited. Concerning this issue, in the mid-20th century, Charles Scott Sherrington offered an interesting observation. The unconscious, of which the psychology of the unconscious speaks, can be compared to a part of the surface of

a lake whose depths correspond to another unconscious presupposition of our mental activity: brain activity. The so-called unconscious would be a part of brain activity

... which lay as it were by a charm restrained for the time from entering activity, and therefore from participating in the general consciousness, a restraint which we might correlate with the inhibition which visits the nervous system far and wide. (Sherrington, 2009, p. 308)

In other words, for him, the truly unconscious is nothing but the brain (Kandel, 2007).

Now, together with this way of conceiving the mental, which is common to a good part of the philosophy of recent centuries and the first stages of empirical psychology, behaviorism also accepted another postulate. That is, science, as a public and intersubjective reality, cannot have as its subject matter the mental, characterized as we have seen by consciousness, which is subjective and private. Accordingly, by accepting these two premises, psychology was forced to change its subject matter on pain of being excluded from the canon of science: to abandon the mind and instead concentrate on behavior and its governing laws.

The implementation of the behaviorist paradigm contributed to expelling the mind and consciousness from science, since it questioned them precisely within the science that had adopted them as its subject matter. But the application and development of this program pushed the study of the nervous system forward and offered an opportunity to recover them. Another circumstance was crucially added to this development: the invention and development of machines that simulate the capabilities of the human mind. These were artifacts constructed by human beings and therefore could not be classified as “black boxes,” since they were systems and mechanisms that could be known, manipulated and improved. Be that as it may, in the last part of the 20th century, attention was diverted from behavior to those activities or processes that make it possible, which we largely share with other organisms, and which we now want to reproduce artificially.

Knowledge and Information

Cognitive science initially revolved around a definition of cognition that identified it with information processing. The notion of information was another example of a concept that had successfully entered scientific discourse. Shannon’s information theory (Shannon, 1948) even proposed a precise and mathematically tractable definition of information, in such a way that—although it did not manage to resolve, once and for all, the ambiguities that accompany information—it became a scientifically respectable concept. As for representation, the symbols that served for programming,

whose final result was the closest thing to a “behavior,” seemed the best way to approach the phenomenon of knowledge. Once again, technology served as a paradigm for understanding reality, in this case not only the reality of organic living beings, but also that of human beings.

Computer science served as a good model for characterizing cognition and even that qualified form of it that we call intelligence. The way in which knowledge had been conceived in both rationalism and empiricism contributed to this. In both, reason tended to be understood as a combination and comparison of ideas, which could be represented with signs; in such a way that when a way was found to incorporate complex logic into the operation of a machine, the dualism between the material basis and the algorithm it implemented became clear. This model provided the strength of functionalism, a position in the newly created philosophy of mind, which considered the mental to be independent from the basis that realizes it, at least to the extent that it can be realized by different bases (Block, 2007). Without judging the merits of this proposal or its place among the various proposals that have appeared in the area of knowledge that has come to be called “philosophy of mind,” the importance of the place it occupied showed the relevance of distinguishing between the logic of cognition and intelligence, with respect to the physical causes that can perhaps support but cannot strictly cause them. In the same way that information can be identical, even if it is realized by different bases, its processing involves a logic that cannot simply be reduced to the physical behavior of material beings.

Functionalism is a good example of an understanding of the mind that focuses on information processing. This is a theory about the workings of the black box disparaged by behaviorism, although, like behaviorism, functionalism seems interested above all in inputs, outputs and their relations with mental contents. However, although this recovers some important features of our conception of the mental, it seems hard to find a place within functionalism for the most characteristic and immediate features of knowledge: experience and the grasping of meaning.

Consciousness as Experience

One initial question that arises before these approaches is, indeed, the role that consciousness plays in cognition. Is this a concomitant phenomenon that can be dispensed with without changing the result? Chalmers has popularized this problem with the thought experiment of philosophical zombies, which, if the claims of some functionalists were true, could behave exactly like human beings, without that involving any conscious experience. This question, along with that of *qualia*, has been one of the most debated issues in philosophy of mind and has also had an impact on neuroscience (Chalmers, 1997). What is consciousness for? What is its place in living beings and the workings of their brains?

The second question has led, instead, to further questions and further alternatives. An approach to consciousness and knowledge that was based more on phenomenology than on rationalism and empiricism connected the role of consciousness with the question of meaning and, ultimately, with the question of life. The *embodied approach* to philosophy of mind,¹ also known as “enactivism”—which has led to further approaches such as *4E cognition*—takes living things as its starting point, in the interaction that they carry out with their environment in order to guarantee their own conservation. Thus a different way of approaching cognition emerges, which is more interested in the vital meaning of experience and less interested in understanding cognition as the processing of representations independently of their material realization.

Whereas functionalism revealed in a certain way the nonphysical character of cognition, these new positions highlight its subjective character and its relationship with living things. Emphasizing conscious experience can lead to distinguishing cognition from the physical to the extent that it appears to be another substance. Although there has been no shortage of self-declared dualists in philosophy of mind, this is usually considered a risk, since it seems to irremediably place the mental beyond the scope of science. Although enactivism, for its part, seems to promise scientific access to cognition, firmly rooted in natural processes, it brings to the table profound philosophical issues, such as our understanding of life, and with it such dangerous topics for contemporary scientific culture as teleology and even meaning.

From this survey, we can draw the lesson that knowledge, in the form of cognition and the mental, with its accompanying conscious experience, has rightfully reentered the field of science. One problem with the current situation, however, is a certain form of naturalism that dominates these debates. Talking seriously about these issues in a scientific context requires rethinking the very foundations of science and opening it up to new notions and approaches. The interest in not diverging from science leads, on the one hand, to avoiding excesses such as those of dualism and its paradoxes, and those of idealism, but also, on the other hand, to accepting too easily postulates that may be useful for delimiting various scientific disciplines, but which obstruct properly philosophical—that is, sapiential—research.

The Project of Naturalizing Consciousness and Its Difficulties

Although there are many forms of naturalism, for now I will use this term for all those approaches that postulate some form of causal closure that

¹An important milestone in framing this approach is Varela et al. (1992).

refuses to accept realities or principles that are not backed by the methods and results of empirical science. In this way, nature is defined as an area whose boundary, although perhaps common sense for some, is nonetheless problematic. It is worth noting that the very definition of naturalism that I have proposed here refers, in order to make sense, to the sciences, since it considers to be natural that and only that which is the subject matter of some science. Moreover, for this term to have a definite meaning, one is forced to consider the sciences in the state in which they are found today. This type of naturalism is just a version of what was previously called “materialism,” although it eschews this name largely to avoid the difficulty of defining matter (Murillo, 2017). There are more and more types of naturalism that reject the reductive nature of this position, even if it is based on the evident plurality of those particular disciplines that we call scientific, a plurality that is irreducible if we cannot go beyond them all (di Caro & Macarthur, 2004). But this does not prevent the study of cognition in dialog with science from tending to reject a priori as unacceptable some theses that, in their dualist or spiritualist forms, could cast it into the hands of spiritualism.

But this resistance has serious consequences for the study of knowledge, since it blinds us to some of its most notable characteristics. If we understand cognition by using logic as its paradigm, as functionalism does, then we may harbor the illusion that we can reduce it to a particular configuration of material elements. If we understand it in the light of the processes through which organisms constitute, maintain and adapt themselves to their environment over time, then we may hope to understand knowledge in the light of other physical phenomena that tend to spontaneously maintain themselves.² But the truth is that these approaches, considered in the light of Western thought, only scratch the surface of a dimension of reality—knowledge—that is impossible to delimit or redirect to any model of empirical science.

At this point we are interested in returning to the potential and the limits of enactivist approaches. Their great achievement consists, as we have seen, in redirecting the study of cognition to our understanding of living things. According to this approach, cognition cannot be separated from the organic corporality of living beings and their interaction with their environment. This is an inseparable phase of motor activity. Motor abilities largely determine what is cognitively relevant and are, in turn, established and guided by cognition. In this sense, as von Uexküll pointed out, each living thing has its own environment: its *Umwelt* or surrounding world (Ostachuk, 2013). But although this very accurately describes the cognition of many animals, it cannot account for genuinely human cognition.

²An understanding of life that is based on these physical phenomena, but is aware of the characteristics that distinguish it from them, can be found in Moreno and Mossio (2015).

In the case of human beings, as pointed out by Max Scheler, who is one of the recent philosophers who has best recovered an ancient Greek discovery, cognition is not determined by the organism's vital needs. Scheler shows this by pointing out the human capacity to independently capture essences, according to which reality presents itself to us apart from any vital value. In his final work (Scheler, 1928/2009), this difference from the cognition of other animals seems so extreme to him that it leads him to contrast life—which he identifies with the impulse and origin of strength—with a new principle that emerges in human cognition: spirit.

Leaving aside the pessimistic and disenchanted metaphysics that Scheler proposes in his final period, his thesis confronts us with the difficulties of all attempts to “naturalize” human cognition. Before him, Husserl, in his criticism of psychologism, had pointed out as an unavoidable requirement of any theory that its conditions of possibility be respected.³ For this reason, those who maintain that cognition is determined by vital needs incur a contradiction, since they cannot defend the validity of their theory, but at most cognition's positive contribution to satisfying those needs. And they cannot even affirm this while aiming for truth, since aiming for truth presupposes that what is defended is valid regardless of its consequences.

In my opinion, any theory of cognition should address, as a minimal requirement, the truth contained in these observations. An interesting task for historians of contemporary culture and philosophy would be to investigate why so many brilliant and suggestive approaches overlook these observations, or are even impervious to their importance. The issue is crucial, and from the point of view not only of these authors but also of the classical tradition in philosophy, it is surprising. Well, as I have said, naturalistic approaches, which rely on the prestige of science as a method for discovering the truth about nature, paradoxically study cognition, a requirement of science, as a phenomenon that is incapable of carrying out the declared cognitive aims of science. In other words, the nature described by reductionist naturalism, which is so widely taken for granted, cannot accommodate the phenomenon of science; nor can it explain why we are confident that through it we can know what reality is like in itself.

There is, in any case, a reason for refusing to integrate the positions of these authors into the study of nature that may render this decision understandable. As we have seen, the distinctive features of human cognition led Scheler to a strange form of metaphysical dualism. Husserl, for his part, would eventually drift into a position that, for many of his disciples, was

³“The worst objection that can be made to a theory, and particularly to a theory of logic, is that it goes against the self-evident conditions for *the possibility of a theory in general*. To set up a theory whose content is explicitly or implicitly at variance with the propositions on which the sense and the claim to validity of all theory rests, is not merely wrong, but basically mistaken” (Husserl, 1900/2001, p. 75).