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The Agnological Nature of Modern Epistemology: Grounding Knowledge by Ignorance

Abstract: One of the distinguishing features of modern and contemporary philosophy is the fact that they are consistently grounded by the epistemological outlook. The essence of this outlook is the modern conception of knowledge, which could not exist without a proper evaluation of a systemic success — or, even more importantly, in some sense a successful failure — of modern science. The only way for us to perceive the lack of error as the basis of a reliable knowledge is to recognize our own fallacies. In such a way the ancient cosmocentric worldview and the medieval theocentric epistemology have been changed by the scientific agnological approach, which had its origins in the modern times and includes the primary requirement to treat the fundamental ignorance as a reliable foundation of knowledge. In this article the reader is provided with a detailed exposition of the phenomenon of self-grounding of epistemological modernity. Adopting the terminology used in the metaphilosophical reflexion, we could reveal the dual origin of contemporary philosophical discourse, the basic principles which ground the epistemological claims, and also demonstrate the necessity of constant efforts when seeking to avoid solipsism and the paradoxical nature of modern epistemology.

Keywords: metaphilosophy, modern epistemology, agnology, solipsism, scientism

According to the dominant tradition of philosophical historiography, which is frequently encountered both in the mainstream academic fora and in the introductory handbooks of philosophy, the development of philosophical modernity from its very beginning has been marked with a sign of a fundamental division. This binary division is interpreted in more than one way — some scholars see it as methodological

or problematic,¹ others tend to call it political or cultural,² merely stylistic³ or even currently non-existing.⁴ As the interpretations of the nature of this division vary greatly, so differ the names given to it: it is often described as a controversy between empiricism and rationalism, or, alternatively, between positivism and anti-positivism, analytic and hermeneutical tradition, analytic and continental philosophy,⁵ or even, more generally, as a clash between “the two cultures”⁶ — a clash which in the Soviet period was known as the tension between “poets and physicists.”⁷

The crucial question here is what are the principal convictions that determine the present state of self-perception of contemporary philosophy. Could we say that the answer to this question should be sought in the very core of philosophical modernity — that is, in the assumptions of anthropocentric epistemology? These assumptions, besides constituting this modernity, also provide the grounds for solipsism, which radically denies their pretension to validity. This is revealed during the process of a maximally generalizing reflexion of philosophical discourse — a retrospective metaphilosophical outlook. Here I understand *metaphilosophy* in the literal sense — as a “philosophy of philosophy,” which should be defined as a unique kind of philosophical deliberation, that is, a specific discourse, which includes the contemplation of the potentiality of *sui generis* philosophical outlook, its limits, different ways to validate it and its axiological nature.⁸ A *philosophical discourse* is defined as a way of thinking, speaking, writing, presupposing, etc. according to the rules established in the traditional academic philosophy, all without delving into the details of sociopolitical power intersectionality debates.⁹ By *retrospectivity* I mean the revelation of the development of philosophical discourse according to the way this development is seen in the controversies dominant in the contemporary academic philosophy and through their methodological apparatus.

Reflecting on the Origins of the Binary Opposition between Analytics and Hermeneutics

The binary opposition between analytics and hermeneutics, which can be seen — and in some sense invented — only in a retrospective investigation, is by

¹ J. Chase, J. Reynolds, *Analytic versus Continental: Arguments on the Methods and Value of Philosophy*, Durham 2011.

² P. Simons, “Whose Fault? The Origins and Evitability of the Analytic–Continental Rift,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 9 [3] (2001), pp. 295–311.

³ T.J. Donahue, P.O. Espejo, “The Analytical-Continental Divide: Styles of Dealing with Problems,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 15 [2] (2016), pp. 138–154.

⁴ J.A. Bell, A. Cutrofello, P.M. Livingston, *Beyond the Analytic-Continental Divide*, New York 2016.

⁵ I.D. Thomson, “Rethinking the Analytic/Continental Divide,” [in:] *The Cambridge History of Philosophy, 1945–2015*, K. Becker, I.D. Thomson (eds.), Cambridge 2019, pp. 569–589.

⁶ C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures: And a Second Look*, Cambridge 1964.

⁷ K.A. Bogdanov, “Fiziki vs. liriki: k istorii odnoj ‘pridurkovatoj’ diskussii,” *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 111 (2011), pp. 48–66.

⁸ M. Lewin, “Kant’s Metaphilosophy,” *Open Philosophy* 4 [1] (2021), pp. 292–310.

⁹ D. Howarth, *Discourse*, Buckingham 2000.

far the most acknowledged principle which organizes the modern philosophical discourse. From this statement we should by no means deduce the claim that the opposition in question is artificial and does not tell us much about the intrinsic nature of the architectonics of modern philosophy. On the contrary, despite the fact that the radically bifurcated structure of modern philosophy originated only in the 19th century, while in the 17th and 18th centuries there was not even a trace of the division to the two opposing — empiricist and rationalist — schools of thought, such bipolar description of philosophical modernity, even made *a posteriori*, is highly productive. Adopting the metaphilosophical perspective, this description is also adequate since it reveals the core of contemporary methodological controversies inasmuch as it has maintained its nature since the era of Descartes. In this sense it is also possible to consider the retrospection of Descartes as the founder of philosophical modernity to be productive and adequate, and at the same time admit that a scrupulous outlook of philosophical historiography reveals the fragility of this postulate.¹⁰

The anthropocentric model of Cartesian philosophizing, which has replaced the so-called medieval theocentric “authoritarianism,” is grounded by the utmost epistemological and ontological importance of individual self-awareness. The importance of this self-awareness, which is defined as the core of a reflective mind, is both epistemological and ontological and pertains to almost every sphere of theoretical (and even practical) philosophy. The essential premise of modern philosophy and its main concern is the epistemically and practically productive collision of the subject who engages in the cognitive act and the object towards which this act is directed. This collision is enabled by the resources of individual metaphilosophical reflexion, and the aforementioned tendency to put the active subject and the inert, passive object into binary opposition evolved into the unquestionable dominance of a fundamental modern philosopheme — the method of knowledge. The latter, treated as a universal principle, enabling epistemic acts and guaranteeing their productivity, has indubitably determined the boundaries of methodological controversies of modern philosophy. At the same time this method has given much more credibility to the fundamental metaphilosophical claims about the nature of a philosophical outlook and the universality of its competences.

When engaging in a retrospective investigation of modern Western philosophy, it is highly convenient to adopt a tripartite scheme, which depicts a long-time tradition of Occidental philosophy as the development of three methodological-thematic platforms — anthropocentrism, theocentrism and cosmocentrism. In fact, it is quite ordinary and useful to perceive the ancient Greece, the mother of our philosophical culture, engaged in the curious questions about the totality of beings — *ta onta* — and the nature of their existence. Having left the imaginative mythologemes behind, the ancient Greeks, stunned with amazement, felt the need to find out what really exists in the strictest sense of the word and what gives the ground and sustainability to this existence. They saw themselves, amazed and engaged in these questions, as an integral part of what is real — in the cos-

¹⁰ E. Balibar, *Citizen Subject: Foundations for Philosophical Anthropology*, New York 2017.

nocentrical worldview, the microworld, which also includes the human existence, is treated as a natural and constitutive element of the homogeneous macroworld. Even having presupposed that man is the measure of all things, we must admit that from the cosmocentrical point of view the priority is always given to the ontological investigation — therefore, the origins of epistemic acts and the reasons of their productivity lie in the being of macrocosm. This means that the acts of knowledge and ignorance, believing and doubting are not only the phenomena of being, but also valid modes of being itself. If man is the measure of all things, then it is due to the universal structure of being, the global order of what is real, and not due to the epistemic act totally dependent on human discretion. The theocentrical perspective encourages us to move the source of the constitution of fundamental principles and their legitimation from the natural cosmological sphere existing on its own to the transcendental area enabled and constantly sustained by the wilful, deliberate act. However, this shift does not essentially change the status of value of ontologizing the theoretical outlook: both perspectives admit the principal methodological maxim — the things that really exist in the strict sense of the word determine what and how we see, can and cannot know. Only with the rise of anthropocentrism in the Renaissance period the epistemological outlook gained its total dominance — at that moment epistemology, not ontology becomes the last instance which has the privilege to articulate the methodological requirements and to this day determines the major shifts of relevant philosophical problems. Now it is the theory of knowledge, not the axiological or ontological outlook, which must provide the grounds to the problems of academic philosophy in the broadest sense of the word (soteriological philosophy included) — from Descartes' proof given in *Meditatio III. De deo, quod existat*¹¹ to the theistic *reformed epistemology* of Alvin Plantinga.¹²

On the other hand, such tripartite narrative should be treated only as a heuristic model which merely defines the most general features of some methodological orientation and gives a preliminary description of the area of its problems. It should by no means be understood as a rigid historiographical scheme which is able to clearly fix different diachronic stages of philosophical development and the logic of their evolution. In other words, the usage of this heuristic trichotomy should not lead us to the strict division of the history of Western philosophy into the three separate — Ancient, Medieval and Modern — sections and to turn them into three inert blocks — cosmocentrism, theocentrism and anthropocentrism, correspondingly — that all share one methodological and problematic horizon. This heuristic scheme is efficient only as much as it is useful in revealing the contours of methodological and thematic vectors as retrospectively seen — *implicite* and *explicite* — principles of the development of modern Western philosophy.

¹¹ D.B. Manley, C.S. Taylor, *Descartes' Meditations — Trilingual Edition*, <https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/philosophy/8> (accessed: 21.02.2022).

¹² A. Plantinga, *Knowledge and Christian Belief*, Grand Rapids 2015.

Modern *Subjectum* as Epistemological and Epistemic *Ego Cogito*

Looking through the prism of retrospective metaphilosophy, the main feature of anthropocentric epistemology which separates it from the cosmocentric and theocentric orientation can be defined as a specific mode of organizing philosophical discourse — here the conception of autonomous metaphilosophical subject becomes the central philosopheme of epistemological and ontological analysis.

In Descartes' epistemological metaphysics the philosopheme known as *subjectum* becomes an autarkical category — a self-grounding (independent, necessary and sufficient) principle that conceptualizes epistemic acts. Unique, highly individual and supremely active *subjectum* becomes the stepping stone for the philosophical analysis of every cognitive act. The efficiency of cognitive acts — their veracity, usefulness and reliability — is analyzed and evaluated consistently taking into account the active, that is, self-grounding presence of a subject who understands, feels, gains knowledge and consumes. Since the only principle of evaluation of the constitution of meaning and the characteristics of meaning enabled in it — such as veracity and soundness — is an autonomous *subjectum*, the necessary condition for an adequate analysis is freely flourishing self-awareness and the possibility to adequately fix — that is, authentically reflect — it.

This is the reason why modern epistemology inevitably gains the form of the discovery of regularities that govern the spontaneity of *ego cogito*. In such a way we are granted the premise of a reliable, clear and universally valid epistemological reflexion. A philosopher, contemplating the act of their thinking, reveals both the *sui generis* constitution of rational thinking and the reasons for its reliability and limits. This leads us to the claim that it is not a spontaneous totality of various modes of human self-awareness, capable to encompass different, even incommensurable forms of reflexion, but rather only historically determined and *hic et nunc* enabled specifics of philosophical reflexion that threaten to become the most important and necessary source, stimulus and warrant of every standard and revelation of all kinds of epistemic moves.

It is necessary to stress that the terminology of metaphilosophical retrospective which is adopted in this article requires the consistent separation of the epistemological *ego*, or epistemological subject, from the epistemic *ego*, or epistemic subject, as they represent two distinct philosophemes. Epistemic *ego* is defined as a subject, or, *grosso modo*, rationality, consciousness, intellect or mind, who engages in a cognitive (comprehensive) act and whose cognitive (epistemic) acts include every possible form of cognitive (intellectual, perceptive, comprehensive, understanding etc.) activity. Epistemological *ego*, or the subject who constructs the cognitive theory, should be understood as a reflective self-representation of the epistemic *ego* who articulates the epistemological attitudes — epistemological *ego* names itself in a performative way (or is performatively presupposed) in its own constituted medium of epistemological discourse. In other words, epistemological *ego* is a philosophical process of naming oneself performed by the epistemic *ego* and a self-projection of the epistemic *ego* using the available philosophical resources.

We could put the words of Protagoras in a different way by saying that man becomes the measure not only of all things, but also of themselves, their rationality and their epistemic potentiality. The core of the mind which engages in the cognitive act seemingly divides itself into two separate, although at least partially coinciding principles — the one which, observing all that there is, catalogues its observations to the sections which were previously known to be in need of identification, and the one which is capable not only to observe the very observer, but also to name the principles of its operation and, most importantly, to keep an eye on this observer and guarantee that it consistently adheres to those principles. “The observer of an observer” — epistemological *ego* — is capable to adequately carry out the inventory of cognitive devices and modes that are in the disposition of “the observing subject” (epistemic *ego*) and also, being its constitutive companion and participant, to control or at least evaluate the correctness of its epistemic moves.

Therefore, the epistemological observance of the determinateness of human mind, of the parameters of its limits and imperfections exceeds the sphere of theological contemplation. Having evolved into a fundamental — constitutive and warranting — self-determinateness of human mind, it becomes the main and final concern of epistemological doctrines and every philosophical investigation. The cognitive imperfection of human being and its fundamental insufficiency now start to be considered as the immediate and asserting recognition of human self-awareness — the reflecting epistemological subject: I am what I am, because I see myself exactly what I am during the act of seeing. The act of self-measurement, that is, of philosophical reflexion, is a constitutive operation grounding the status of the mind which engages in the cognitive act, its structure and the regularities that govern it. To see oneself in the horizon of the projection of modern epistemology is to “measure” one’s own epistemic power — to determine its capability, limits and to fix the probable causes of such milestones. In this sense the self-measurement of modern epistemology is also a specific act of its self-creation, that is, a reflective performance which *volens nolens* adheres to the present panchrony of a philosophical discourse — a philosophizing *ego* inevitably takes into account what (and in what manner) has been said earlier. This performance delineates and strengthens the contours of the articulated set of problems and the apparatus of their methodological resolution until the influx of “post-philosophical” flashes of contemporary professional philosophy — the flashes which attempt to overcome the binary opposition between analytics and hermeneutics.

The grounds of transcendental, non-human being are shattered by the dimension of theological or cosmological projections. It is also a task of a merely human epistemology which sets its own limits: the being of macrocosm — the nature — here adheres to the anthropic principle and is seen solely as a functional correspondence of the common being, culture and autoprojection of microcosm. The transcendental premises of philosophizing being and the epistemology constructed by it reveal themselves only in the context of such free and unbounded construction. Those very premises are the result of a philosophical reflexion — that is, an essentially voluntary and externally unrestricted self-determination of epistemological *ego*.

For this reason, the transcendental grip firmly holding human being is merely the artefacts of a freely flourishing philosophical reflexion, and not the external frames that give being to this reflexion. The modern philosophical outlook treats the basic categories of non-human being as ontologized derivations of epistemological attitudes which enable an all-encompassing horizon of the deliberations of epistemological *ego*. This means that beyond the human world, beyond the knowledge and value there exists either something not worthy to know and of very little value, or the things which can be known and gain value — or not — only in a human world of meaning. In both cases non-human being is constituted and supported using the epistemological resources of human mind which define the nature, power and value of epistemic acts. In such a way the omnipotent anthropocentric self-grounding of epistemological *ego cogito* overpowers the cosmocentric and theocentric outlook, which tends to limit the spontaneity of human mind and philosophical self-awareness with an all-encompassing natural and supernatural scale of the transcendent.

Agniology, Scientism and the Need to Avoid Solipsism

However, the joyful anthropocentric emancipation from the apodeictical theocentric or cosmocentric transcendent reminds the Pyrrhic victory. The epistemological subject, liberated from the condescending and invalidating custody of cosmocentricism and theocentricism, finds itself face to face with the ephemerality of its own omnipotence and its own being. This subject encounters an even more powerful — non-divine and non-natural, therefore, exceptionally merciless and apodeictical — restrictor who denies the magnitude of its cognitive potentiality. The epistemological subject is constantly haunted by the artefact that is one of its own epistemological creations — the absurd solipsistic nightmare, which does not follow the standards of modern rationality established by the very subject.

It must be admitted that if the epistemological subject engages in a consistent, non-contradictory reflexion and at the same time is capable to determine the nature, structure and limits of being that it constitutes, then the cognitive aims of every such subject are limited by the characteristics of the horizon of problems postulated by it and lose their universal, intersubjective value. For this reason, when seeking for this value, it is necessary to presuppose that there exists only one and unique epistemological subject who engages in an adequate and infallible reflexion. On the other hand, even if there existed a slightest possibility to make ourselves certain of the truth of the latter claim (it is impossible to avoid every kind of doubt completely as such certainty should be grounded by full induction — as we know, in the best-case scenario it could include all the instances of self-grounding by the epistemological *ego* known up to this point, but there could have been much more of them than it is currently known to us, and even more to come), then we should consider the epistemic aims of the epistemological subject to be limited as long as (and as much as) it is obliged to admit the limits of its transcendental potentiality.

In fact, the epistemological *ego* cannot overcome the fundamental limitedness of its own cognitive being when facing the sideline — the epistemological transcendent understood as a prohibition to err on this side of the veil of the meaningful horizon — postulated by the *ego* itself. Although this veil should be treated as a permission — or even as an obligation — to err beyond the limits of the constituted meanings, it does not by itself invalidate the cognitive aims which fit within the confinement — there is always the possibility to move the veil forwards and include the widened horizon of meaning into the sphere of reliable knowledge. In such a way the unrestricted freedom to doubt on this side of the horizon of the epistemological outlook becomes the prohibition to err freely. The freedom to realize one's own defined epistemic potentialities means the necessity to admit the existence of the boundaries which should by no means be crossed: they could *ad maximum* be pushed slightly forwards, but not completely eliminated. However, the constraints put on a free doubt result in its coercive self-confinement and the denial of freedom. It turns out that the emancipation during which the limits of knowledge were slightly expanded was only a different confinement. Therefore, in the sphere of consistently rational and reflective epistemological *ego* — the avanscena and the backstage of modern philosophy included — we can always find a place both for the absurdity drama and the solipsistic phantasmagoria: here the uncertainty gives more credibility to what is certain, while the truth and knowledge are being supported by deceit and ignorance.

The spontaneous moves of the epistemological *ego* are deprived of their inspiring and supporting source — the veracity of the assumption that adequate human cognition is not only conceivable, but also possible *hic and nunc*. The *moto* of modern epistemologized philosophy is the claim that the only thing we can deem to be undoubtedly certain is the doubt itself — on the other hand, could we say that this doubt is a sufficient ground for things that cannot be doubted — that is, for the very certainty? If the answer is “yes,” in what way does the epistemological *ego* grant itself the certainty of its cognitive aims or, in other words, how does it restrict its own postulated constitutional freedom to build the familiar world and in such manner avoid the absurd solipsistic trap?

Having admitted the unrestricted power of the epistemological *ego*, there remains only one way to overcome this trap — that is, by constructing the barriers which validate the transcendental knowledge. From the perspective of epistemological subject, the intersubjectivity is always the result of its free choice (the agreement to deem something indisputable and true or, according to Descartes, the inability to distrust something), and not the pre-condition for such choice. To put it differently, the solipsism dictated by the epistemological *ego* can be overcome by the very same epistemological *ego*, who freely postulates the limits of its own potentiality. In other words, the only way to conquer the imminent threat of solipsism is by the contrived self-restriction of the unrestrained spontaneity of the epistemological *ego* itself.

This can be achieved in many ways — for instance, by admitting that the epistemological stance should be governed by the dictatorship of “innate ideas” — the dictatorship capable to restrain an absolutely free act of human cognition with the

intersubjective structures of meaning, that is, with the confinements of absolute freedom that establish the absolute restrictiveness. It should be understood as an endeavour to restrain the ferocious solipsistic power of epistemological *ego* using the old-fashioned straightjacket of the transcendent. This situation also gives the rise to the radical Kantian self-limitation as a form of confinement which is even more directed to oneself and should be understood as the final and irrevocable, this time transcendental, self-determination of the epistemological *ego*. There has also been an attempt to achieve the same result by postulating some kind of “collective solipsism” which seems like a *contradictio in adiecto* — that is, a self-defeating concept. In such a way we see the development of a Hegelian historicist outlook which ties the potential of epistemological *ego* to the progression of a panenteistical historical mega-context, brought into being by the dialectical totality of epistemic moves. The result of both “total transcendental solipsism” and “collective historical solipsism” is the transformation of intersubjectivity to an inseparable definition and necessary condition for all kinds of cognitive activity. In other words, we should understand the ontologization of intersubjectivity as bringing it into being beyond the kingdom of always reflective and always subjective epistemological *ego*, sacrificing this kingdom’s autonomy, subjectivity, reflexivity and spontaneity. In such a way the fundamental premise of intersubjectivity essentially takes away the formerly unquestioned monopoly of truth and knowledge that had belonged to the anthropocentric epistemology and thus poses a serious threat to the philosophical competences of the reflective self-awareness grounded by their uniqueness.

Therefore, the very heart of anthropocentric epistemology is put into shape by the reflective self-grounding of human being understood as the task to overcome the ephemerality of solipsistic human world. The stepping stone for a modern philosopher engaging in a reflective deliberation is the rational certainty of knowledge, its trustworthy transparency and evidentness that goes beyond all doubts. However, it becomes less secure when striving for a reliable reconstruction of a non-cosmo-theocentric world of a reliable epistemology — here the epistemological *ego* is capable to overcome a reflective anthropocentric doubt only for a brief moment. The forgetfulness of a reflective philosophical self-awareness to perform its newly acquired duties — to doubt everything that there could possibly be (although not necessarily in fact is) false — can last only that long. This doubt should reach not only what is beyond the limits of reflexion and therefore still lack the legitimacy provided by it, but also the things which should be clear and transparent when staying in the area of “safe knowledge.” This duty requires us to doubt even the success of the project of self-grounding by the modern mind which engages in the cognitive process and the discovery of unique, reflective and constitutive powers of epistemological *ego*.

To doubt the possibility of knowledge and at the same time dread and avoid to gain it, to engage in the never-ending process of reaching it — such, in its essence dual and self-contradictory, strategy is dictated by the aim to avoid the trap of solipsism at any cost. Perhaps for this reason the philosopheme of ignorance is so rarely seen in the vocabulary of academic philosophy.¹³ In fact, this striving

¹³ R. Peels, M. Blaauw (eds.), *The Epistemic Dimensions of Ignorance*, Cambridge 2016.

towards the undesired knowledge leads us to the conclusion that the development of modern theory of knowledge has always been and still is the search and reflexion primarily not of knowledge, but rather of the principal inability to know and of its many faces. Due to this fact it is reasonable to call this theory by the name of modern theory of ignorance — *agnoiology*. The latter term — as well as the philosopheme of epistemology — was coined by the underrated James Frederick Ferrier,¹⁴ according to whom agnoiology is “the true theory of ignorance.”¹⁵ This theory, considered as “the law of ignorance,” is supposed to show us that “we can only be ignorant of what can possibly be known; in other words, there can be an ignorance only of that of which there can be a knowledge.”¹⁶ This means that Ferrier, willingly obedient to the dictatorship of the epistemological *ego*, who contemplates itself and knows only itself in this process, reduces the possibility of ignorance to the potentiality of principal omniscience. According to him, even lacking knowledge of something we are still aware of the fact that this something could become known to us. The obscure ignorance here acquires a definite form of “knowing that we know nothing” and becomes a necessary and essential condition for knowledge. After gaining a particular form and having been ascribed the method of knowledge, this ignorance has laid the foundations for scientism.

This means that the overlook of contemporary epistemology is constructed according to the strict principles of the efficiency of experimental science. At the same time, we face the warning that such effectiveness is in a tension with moral, political, religious, esthetical and other kinds of imperatives, which, due to their practical and theoretical importance, are also in need of the status of epistemic outlook. This gives rise to a variety of differing cognitive outlooks and diverse criteria of truth, lie and fallacy. Today there exist numerous deliberations about the extent and modes of different kinds of knowledge — the ones that we gain by guessing mysterious quantum and gravitational patterns, trusting the evidence of our own intuition and self-awareness or trying to combine all other possible approaches. However, this variety of different methods of knowledge does not eliminate the new epistemological stepping stone — experimental, essentially scientific modern erudition grounded not by heterogeneous situational fundaments of human knowledge, but rather by universal principles of anonymous ignorance. In such a way the reliability of every kind of non-scientific outlook necessarily turns into the paraphrasis of the evaluation of the success and the failure of modern science. This paraphrasis requires us to ground the fundamental scientific outlook — even if we know what beauty, goodness and virtue is, we are capable to do this only because (and as much as) those things cannot be known relying upon the omnipotent experimental power of modern epistemology. Finally, it has to be admitted that knowledge is possible only because of ignorance.

¹⁴ D. McDermid, *The Rise and Fall of Scottish Common Sense Realism*, Oxford 2018.

¹⁵ J.F. Ferrier, *Institutes of Metaphysic: The Theory of Knowing and Being*, Edinburgh-London 1854.

¹⁶ J.F. Ferrier, *Philosophical Works of James Frederick Ferrier*, vol. 1: *Institutes of Metaphysic*, Bristol 2001, p. 412.

The Paradoxicality of Modern Epistemology

Having adopted the distinction between the epistemic and epistemological *ego*, it is obvious that the fundamental premise of anthropocentric epistemology requires us to identify the epistemic subject with the autonomous epistemological subject, and to admit that the content of modern epistemology is primarily the results of the reflexion of epistemological *ego*. To put it differently, the premise and the form of epistemological metanarrative is the decisive assertion of the omnipotence and uniqueness of a peculiar philosophical *ego* (*metanarrative* here is understood in the widest sense of the word — as an all-encompassing theoretical outlook, capable to explain everything that there is and must be and, in such a way, pretending to a special — surpassing the contexts and for this reason absolute — validity of this explanation).

Unlike the cosmocentric and theocentric outlook, the anthropocentric epistemological subject is defined as the only source and guarantee of the normativity of efficient, useful and reliable epistemic activity. Such reflective metaphilosophical subject becomes the only possible “observer” of epistemic activity (this is also true of theocentric and cosmocentric outlook inasmuch as we can talk about the exposition of a philosophical theory of knowledge in them) and, even more importantly, both (a) the autocratic element that governs the cognitive activity and determines the correctness of epistemic process and (b) the performative agent who always, although to a different extent, participates in this process. No one besides the epistemological subject is capable to recognize and (or) to provide the factors that validate the cognitive activity — correctness of the articulation of meanings, argumentative power, verification sources, method etc. The modern epistemological subject, understood as an immanent and principal element of all kinds of rationality, is a fundamental source and guarantee both of regular everyday and of scientific, religious or aesthetic knowledge. Its performative capability to be omnipresent, that is, to present itself in every situation which requires rational experience, guarantees both the fundamental homogeneity of epistemological activity and the philosophical regulation of such activity which gains the form of agnological epistemology.

Therefore, the core of the modern epistemological *ego* who adheres to solipsism and at the same time rejects it is a universal individual *in abstracto*. This individual exists as an unrestricted cognitive act and as its grounding (and at the same time disciplinary) principle: as an epistemic *actus purus* and epistemological *quid juris*, as a spontaneous fact and as a grounding of its facticity subordinate to the irrevocable order. In other words, it exists as an unrestrictedly self-restricting selfdom, as a subservient rebel, constituting the limits of its own (lack of) freedom. For this reason, it inevitably gains the form of aggressive — undeprivably performative — rationality: it becomes a self-contradictory, unstable and mysterious compound of a spontaneous will and disciplined knowledge, since the apodeictical premise of the selfdom of a cognitive act establishes not only the unconditional will to know, but also the performative necessity to restrict it. Here the freedom to know in every possible way is guaranteed by the unified standards of knowing

in only one way. Such an epistemological attitude is the fundamental source and warranty of radical self-contradictions of modernity and has gained (and is still gaining) the names of various dichotomies: of knowledge and will, spirit and body, rationality and intuition, physicists and lyricists, analytics and hermeneutics, modernity and “postmodernity,” etc. The quest to overcome these dichotomies has to this day remained unsolved and, in some sense, reminds the divine philosopher’s stone, hidden by the long-desired and never found Holy Grail.

This leads us to the silent acceptance of solipsism and its persuasive rejection. Such fundamental paradoxality of modern philosophy establishes the agony of a schizophrenic division of the epistemological *ego*. On the one hand, the pathos of the self-grounding of a unique epistemology, sustained by the promise to reveal the constitution of reliable knowledge — *cogito ergo cogito ergo sum*. On the other hand, the non-reductive possibility of the various modes of self-grounding and the desperation which drives it and is caused by the lack of reliable self-grounding — *sum ergo dubio* and also merely *cogito ergo dubio*.

For this reason, the price that must be paid for the agnoiological epistemologization of Western philosophical discourse is final and non-negotiable. The agnostic solipsistic nightmare and the manifestation of the triumph of ignorance (which is no less agnostic) cannot be subjected to philosophical considerations, conceptual discoveries or combinations of methodological principles. It is not an object of modern philosophical negotiations but rather a precondition of every kind of modern philosophical consideration, characteristic both to analytic and hermeneutic tradition. In this sense the methodological binary distinction between analytic and continental philosophy has been and still is futile. Both these schools of thought are based on the fundamental binarism of modern philosophy — the agnoiological tension between the strength of metaphilosophical self-awareness and its incomparable power and duty to err. The same holds true for the 21st-century project of continental philosophy which goes by the name of “speculative realism” and is an attempt to invoke the dual interpretation of “speculation” as a special philosophical outlook¹⁷ and thus gain the potential of metaphilosophical knowledge, consistently adhering to the modern agnoiological principle of epistemological *ego*, according to which we are capable to know only because of ignorance. Therefore, the modern epistemology grounded by ignorance is of a paradoxical nature and forces us to pay a significant price for it: it must be accepted that its constitutive epistemological self-grounding is possible and at the same time this possibility must be denied, since this self-grounding is by no means unique — as long as there exists a terrifying diversity of them, all expectations of its uniqueness are futile.

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