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Cognitive Epistemology in Redefining Knowledge

Abstract

A careful analysis of knowing/knowledge of mind exhibits that there are two main distinct epistemic axes, namely knowing and knowledge axes, which should be considered together. They make up four different epistemic cases, and this framework contains the whole subject-domain of cognitive epistemology, which is a part of cognitive philosophy. On the other hand, epistemic gaps, appearing in this area, pave the way for some significant problems.

Key Terms

Cognitive Philosophy, Cognitive Epistemology, Knowing Axis, Knowledge Axis, the First-Person Perspective, the Third-Person Perspective, Knowledge of the Existence of Mind, Knowledge of the Nature of Mind, Epistemic Gap.

Bilginin Yeniden Tanımlanması Sürecinde Bilişsel Epistemoloji

Özet

Zihni bilmeye/zihnin bilgisine ilişkin dikkatli bir çözümleme, bu bilme/bilgi etkinliğinin temelindeki iki ana bilişsel eksenin belirlenmesini, dahası, bu eksenlerin bir arada incelenmesi gerekliliğini gözler önüne serer. Bu eksenler, yani bilme eksenini ile bilgi eksenini, birlikte, dört farklı bilişsel durumun ortaya çıkmasına neden olurlar ve oluşturdukları bu bağlam, bilişsel felsefenin bir alt alanı olan bilişsel epistemolojinin tüm sorun/konu alanını bütünüyle kuşatır. Bu alanda ortaya çıkan önemli sorunların gerisindeyse, bu çerçevenin kaçınılmaz olarak barındırdığı “bilgisel boşluk/kopukluk” yatmaktadır.

Anahtar Terimler

Bilişsel Felsefe, Bilişsel Epistemoloji, Bilme Ekseni, Bilgi Ekseni, Birinci-Tekil-Kişi Perspektifi, Üçüncü-Tekil-Kişi Perspektifi, Zihnin Varoluşunun Bilgisi, Zihnin/Bilincin Doğasının Bilgisi, Epistemik Boşluk.

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Introduction

Because of the strong influence of recent progresses both in information technologies and computing and also in cognitive science, which is a unified scientific activity of human mind, it is clear that “knowing/knowledge” should be redefined by considering all of these new developments as well (Kutlusoy 2007). In the historical process of philosophy since Plato theoreticians of knowledge have tried, on one side, to make a detailed analysis of the concept of knowing/knowledge in order to detect its structural components, on the other side, to determine mental/psychological activities, mechanisms and procedures related to it in order to comprehend what it is. In an attempt to reach a comprehensive definition of knowing/knowledge, I think, it would be much more useful to take both of these routes, namely to consider both a conceptual analysis and related processes concerning it (Kutlusoy 2007). What is more, this kind of epistemological attitude could stand at the same time much closer to cognitive science too; today it seems clearly that so a position is a desired one: “Some epistemologists maintain that a sensible division of labor in understanding justification and rationality is that philosophers investigate the normative elements of belief formation, while cognitive scientists study how we actually form beliefs. To the extent, however, that philosophical intuitions about epistemic concepts need to be constrained by the empirical (*a posteriori*) details of belief formation, cognitive science will play a significant role in epistemology.” (Cruz 2003: 27).

On the other hand, because knowledge is something mental and knowing is one of the mental/conscious states of the knowledgeable subject, there is some relation between knowing/knowledge and mind, for this reason also, in searching for a definition of knowledge, an interactivity bridge between two related areas of philosophy, namely philosophy of knowledge and philosophy of mind, should be constructed (Kutlusoy 2007). Since Descartes’ distinction between mind and body in the 17th century, philosophers of mind have tried to illuminate the ontological status of human mind and mental entities. However, one must also be interested in the knowledge of the mental/mind, for instance, how the mental -or the mind- can be known; shortly, besides the ontology of mind one must concern the epistemology of mind as well.

Now, a new philosophical discipline, which I call *cognitive philosophy*, or a cognitivist philosophy of mind, as being an area of problem-focused philosophy, is essentially a contemporarily philosophical approach to the mind, more specifically, philosophy of cognition/consciousness. My reason of using this term “cognitive philosophy” is both to differentiate it from the traditional philosophy of mind (because, whereas the traditional philosophy of mind, by means of its accounts, makes only ontological or metaphysical/speculative distinctions concerning the mind, cognitive philosophy, embracing both cognitive ontology -a cognitivist ontology of mind- and cognitive epistemology -a cognitivist epistemology of mind-, has a more comprehensive study/research domain than that of the traditional one) and also to draw attention to its probable relations with contributing disciplines of cognitive science in their own distinctive ways (namely, with disciplines like cognitive psychology, artificial intelligence, cognitive neuroscience, cognitive linguistics, and cognitive anthropology). In my opinion, just in such a framework as cognitive philosophy, the connection of

knowing/knowledge to the mind, consciousness, and cognition could be clarified; and thereby, the relations among epistemology, philosophy of mind, and cognitive science might be built. Yet, this paper is related only with the epistemological foot of cognitive philosophy. It is essentially about the basis upon which all arguments over how one knows the mind and what one knows of the mind are based, and also, about epistemic gaps paving the way for main problems of cognitive epistemology.

Cognitive Epistemology: Cognitive Philosophy of Knowing/Knowledge of Mind

In order to provide an account for knowing/knowledge of the mental/mind, it is necessary first to clarify the ground on which such an account depends; for this purpose, here, I will appeal to Russell's two distinctions; one is the distinction between "knowledge of things" and "knowledge of truths" (Russell 1986: 23-24), and the other, the distinction between "knowledge by acquaintance" and "knowledge by description" (Russell 1986: 25-32). Now, Russell's these distinctions correspond respectively to two distinctions in the context of cognitive epistemology: While the former one of them corresponds to the distinction between *knowledge of the existence of mind* and *knowledge of the nature of mind/consciousness* in cognitive epistemology, the latter corresponds to the distinction *knowing from the first-person perspective* and *knowing from the third-person perspective*. By making up two distinctive epistemic axes, these two distinctions, together, completely determine the whole subject-domain of cognitive epistemology.

The Axes of Knowing/Knowledge of Mind/Consciousness

As far as I see in debates concerning mind/consciousness in cognitive epistemology, there are two axes of -(as a putative knower) subject- S's knowing/knowledge of mind/consciousness; yet, cognitivist thinkers generally study on these two axes by separating them. However, they should be considered together, but at the same time the distinction between them should also be noticed. One of these axes is *knowing axis* focused on the subject S, the other, *knowledge axis* focused on the subject-matter, i.e. mind/consciousness. Accordingly, while on the former axis one might ask the question, as a typical one, "How does/can S know the mind?", on the latter a characteristic question might be "What does S know of the mind?" Now, in trying to reply the related question on the knowing axis, two different perspectives/points of view of knowing can be distinguished from each other; because, as the mind could be known by S from the first-person's subjective point of view, i.e. from *the first-person perspective*, it could also be known by S from the third person's objective point of view, i.e. from *the third-person perspective*. More clearly, in the former one S can directly know the mind from the inside whereas in the latter one she can indirectly know it from the outside. On the other hand, in an attempt to answer the related question on the knowledge axis, two kinds of knowledge of mind/consciousness can be differentiated from each other: knowledge of *the existence* and knowledge of *the nature* of mind/consciousness. And, it can be roughly said that while generally traditional debates are about the existence of mind, especially recent cognitivist/scientific debates are about

what consciousness is. At this point, it seems that, in order to be able to make a careful and complete analysis of the whole picture here, basically four different epistemic cases should be considered one by one: First, subject S's knowing the existence of (her own) mind from the first-person perspective; second, S's knowing the existence of (other) mind(s) from the third-person perspective; third, S's knowing the nature of (her own) mind from the first-person perspective; and the last, S's knowing the nature of (other) mind(s) from the third-person perspective.

The first one is the case of S's immediately, directly knowing the existence of her own mind from the inside, namely, from the first-person perspective/view. In this case, she becomes acquainted by introspection with her own mental things, contents, activities, events, shortly, all the data of her inner sense; thereby, her knowledge of the existence of her own thoughts, feelings, desires, etc. is knowledge by acquaintance (i.e. self-consciousness). This case is the one in which purely philosophical arguments like Descartes' "*Cogito*" take place. Now, it must be clear that by this direct mental experience subject S can be aware of the existence only of her own mind (self) not of other minds.

S could know the existence of others' minds not directly but with the intermediary of any inferential process. This is the second epistemic case here, in which she as an observer could know the existence of other minds from the outside, namely, from the third-person perspective/view; thereby, her knowledge of the existence of the minds of others is knowledge by inference from her perceptions of for instance bodies/brains or behaviors of others. Yet, here, since she cannot have direct access into the mental lives of others, whether she can really know their existence is viewed as problematic.

In the third case, by introspection again S knows directly from the first-person perspective, i.e. from the inside, as her own subjective experience, the phenomenal/qualitative character/nature of her own consciousness as it appears to her, namely what it looks like. The phenomenal consciousness is the content -that is, the qualitative character- of S's conscious experience in her subjective awareness.

In the fourth case, S, from the third-person perspective, i.e. from the outside, can have the scientific, objective, observational-experimental, and quantitative knowledge of neural basis of her own or another person's consciousness observed as a physical object. S, here, in an empirical study observes the causal character/nature of consciousness; she reports what it causes, namely consciousness as it causes. Yet so, in this case, a very significant problem in cognitive epistemology, which is named as "the explanatory gap", occurs.

Epistemic Gaps

The framework of cognitive epistemology with the above-mentioned four epistemic cases has some problems. Yet, here, I will only focus on the basis of some main problems such as the problem of explanatory gap and concentrate on the way from epistemic asymmetry in the knowing axis to a kind of gap in the knowledge of the existence/nature of mind. For this aim, let us consider here that S attempts to know the mind on the knowledge axis. As long as she tries to know it just from the inside, that is,

from the first-person perspective, and thereby she starts with whether it (i.e. her own mind) exists then goes on with its nature, there may be no problem for her in this pass from the knowledge of its existence to the knowledge of its nature. Yet, later if she wants to continue with the third-person perspective in order to know the mind from the outside, then she cannot escape from some problems; because, there is an epistemic asymmetry on the knowing axis because of the privilege of the first-person's epistemic position in knowing the mind: "(...) there appears to be a genuine asymmetry between the *mode of access* to facts of one's own consciousness and the mode of access to facts about others' conscious states." (Güzeldere 1998: 24). Since these two perspectives/points of view are epistemologically asymmetric ones, an *epistemic gap* inevitably appears both in the knowledge of the existence and in the knowledge of the nature of mind. In order to escape solipsism, one needs the third-person perspective but then encounters the problem of epistemic gap, behind which an ontic/ontological gap lies, in the knowledge of the existence of mind. Anyway, partly ontological arguments such as "Turing Machine", "Chinese Room", and "Zombies" show the epistemic gap in the knowledge of the existence of mind/consciousness. On the other hand, in order to escape from some problems of the first-person's view from the inside as well as the subjectivity and the circularity (self-reference) problems, the third person's view from the outside is required. Yet, then also, again an epistemic gap in the knowledge of the nature of consciousness occurs. This latter epistemic gap gives rise to the explanatory gap (the hard problem of consciousness/the problem of phenomenal consciousness), which is a gap between the phenomenal-intentional consciousness from the first-person perspective and the functional-causal consciousness from the third-person perspective. This problem/gap expresses that the qualitative character (phenomenal properties) of S's conscious experience cannot be explained on its physical or computational basis. Furthermore, "[t]he explanatory gap is a fundamental aspect of the mind-body problem, the problem of determining the relation between physical and mental phenomena." (Levine 2003: 86).

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