

From Self-Knowledge to Knowledge of the Self

Abstract

When I type in „self-knowledge“ in the search engine of the most famous online bookseller, the results that pop up include guidebooks on meditation and yoga, on how to live, on how to find oneself, as well as academic literature on the topic of self-knowledge. Let me limit the scope of the presentation by saying that I don't think that these topics, broadly speaking topics concerning self-discovery or journey to myself on the one, and topics regarding knowledge that I have of my mental states which are prevalent in contemporary philosophical discussion on the other hand, are dealt with under the same heading accidentally or on grounds of some minor resemblances. I assume a relation between the two.

One of the challenges we take Sartre to have given us consists in the alleged exclusiveness of simultaneously being and knowing oneself. This challenge entails a certain understanding of self-knowledge without which the challenge wouldn't be one: In order to gain knowledge of what we think, feel or believe we step back and *objectify* ourselves. Now, replacing this understanding of self-knowledge (*The Perceptual Model*), according to which we become divided into two in reflection, with a view of self-knowledge on which the object known doesn't exist independently from knowing that object (*The Constitutivist, Expressivist and/or Agency-based view*) may lead to solving the challenge. For the relation in which I stand to myself, or my mental states, is genuinely practical, which most often implies the assumption that the objects of my reflection are not my own mental states, but the objects of these mental states, I do not objectify myself (*Transparency Criterion*).

Although *practical self-knowledge* is essential to a general account of self-knowledge and to an adequate understanding of who we are, we more than often, and not merely in cases of identity crisis, do step back, observe, interpret ourselves and even search for evidence for what we believe, think or feel. I cannot evaluate on whether I am living up to my commitments, I cannot tell whether I am telling a coherent story or act in accordance with my practical identities or decide in cases of conflict in favor of one belief over the other by merely looking at the objects of my beliefs and desires, that is, I do not *only* direct my attention toward the outside. However, neither to the inside. Thus, it will be argued that in addition to practically and theoretically knowing ourselves, put in in Richard Moran's terms (2001), we know ourselves in a way that is neither purely theoretical, nor purely practical, while it shares features with both kinds of self-knowledge.¹ The knowledge that I gain of myself in *taking a stand* is substantially different from another person's view on myself; it is essentially first-personal. Yet, it is different from practical self-knowledge in the narrow sense, although its distinctiveness cannot be understood separately.

¹ Moran, Richard (2001) *Authority and Estrangement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.