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4-29-2021

The Seen and the Known, The Visible and the Invisible

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Recommended Citation

Wasch, J. (2021). The Seen and the Known, The Visible and the Invisible. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/phil_stuwork/1

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The Seen and the Known,
Visible and the Invisible

...

Jeff Wasch

Roadmap

- Preliminary definitions: the Given, experience, and concepts.
- The Problem
- The Phenomenological & Semantic Contents of Experience
- The Seen and the Known: The *Chiasm* Between the Sensible and Intelligible
- The Result

Background Definitions:

- The Epistemological Given:
 - Known independent of any other kind of knowledge (usually a kind of sense experience)
 - Epistemically efficacious, provides foundation for knowledge.
- Experience: passive and active faculties working at the same time.
- Concepts: items of a public language.

The Problem

- What is the role of language in experience and knowledge?
- Defining Knowledge
- Sellars (1997): Introduces the “Myth of the Given”
 - Allowing the Given to have these two roles is problematic
 - Knowledge is justifying and being able to justify what one says
 - It follows from this that all knowledge is linguistic and/or conceptual
 - Something like a Given remains as a kind of data, related to the senses, which our beliefs can be about.
- What about experience?
 - Experience has a passive, nonconceptual level *Given* over by the senses.
- Answer: On the one hand, knowledge is purely linguistic, but, on the other hand, while experience has a linguistic level; it has a nonlinguistic, passive, sensory level as well.
- The Takeaway If knowledge has to be linguistic, what is the role of experience in the acquisition of knowledge?

What is the Role of Nonlinguistic Experience in Knowledge

- If there is conceptual and nonconceptual levels to experience, it implies that there is two kinds of content in experience, one conceptual and one nonconceptual.
- Bonjour (1999): There is a nonconceptual content (the Given) which is described by concepts in instances of perceptual knowledge.
 - For Bonjour if we are (1) if a belief I have describes nonconceptual content and (2) I understand what that belief is describing, i.e. I understand what an experience is like to have such a conceptual description, then I am in good position to be justified in that belief.
- The role of experience is as a limited justifier.
- However, still two kinds of content, one linguistic, which makes up knowledge, and the other perceptual, and related to the senses. This resembles an idea from Merleau Ponty, that there is *Chiasm* between the sensible and the intelligible, i.e. there is a gap between the senses and knowledge.

The Phenomenological & Semantic Contents of Experience

- Crane (2013):
 - Phenomenological Contents:
 - “spaciotemporal, concrete, particular, and specific to the subject”
 - The Given
 - Not knowledge: but can provide limited justification.
 - Semantic Contents:
 - *Abstracted* from phenomenological content
 - Forms beliefs
 - Conceptual/Linguistic
 - Knowledge: can be about phenomenological content.

The Seen and the Known: The ~~A~~B Between the Sensible and Intelligible

- For Merleau-Ponty there is *anchiasm* between the sensible and the intelligible. (Toadvine, 2016).
 - I want to clarify this idea:
 - I suggest that this implies there is a distinction between the kind of content which we “see” in experience, and the kind of content which structures our knowledge.
- The Seen (the Phenomenological content):
 - Given over by the senses.
 - Nonconceptual in nature.
 - Only limited justificatory power.
- The known (the Semantic content):
 - Linguistic/conceptual.
 - Constructs knowledge.

The Result

- The Visible and the Invisible (Merleau-Ponty, 1968):
 - “if speech, which is but a region of the intelligible world, can also be its refuge, this is because speech prolongs into *the invisible*, extends unto the semantic operations, the belongingness of the body to being and the corporeal relevance of every being, which for me is once and for all attested by *the visible*, and whose idea each intellectual evidence takes a little further”
- Here, the Visible is what is Given over by the senses; while the Invisible is made up of language which makes the world “intelligible”.
- *We never really see what we know*
- *Seeing is never believing*

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