KNOWING AND PREJUDICE. AN EDUCATIONAL MISSION

1. Some Conceptual Distinctions

The former chapter is a prelude to the one on knowing and prejudice, as both notions are explained by Twardowski in terms of judgement. The standard explanation of knowledge as justified true belief seems not to have judgement as part of its explanation, but as we have seen in the former chapter, the term “belief” needs to be disambiguated. The two notions that seem to play a role in the standard account of knowledge as a kind of belief are the notions of conviction and of disposition to judge, at least, if knowledge is understood as a disposition, a potentiality (a *habitus*, see chapter IV). It is well known that there is an important problem with the standard explanation of knowledge, as we may create Gettier cases. We can imagine a case in which a belief is justified and true, whereas we would not call it knowledge. If someone looks at a clock, reads that it is three o’clock, and the time is also three o’clock, his judgement seems to be true and justified, and would normally count as knowledge. The Gettier case is created by adding to the example the perspective of a third person, who knows that the clock is defect. From this third person perspective, the person’s judgement can no longer be understood as knowledge. I will argue in this chapter that Twardowski’s account of knowledge is able to prevent such problems.

Just as we have to make a distinction between the act of judging and the judgement made, we have to make a distinction between the act of knowing and knowledge as product. Examples of acts of knowing are acts of perceiving resulting in a perception made: an act of insight or understanding resulting in a certain insight, and an act of demonstrating resulting in a conclusion, a knowledge product. Sometimes an act of knowing is acknowledged, while the act is explained as an act of getting to know, an act through which we acquire knowledge (as product). On such an account, knowledge is prior in the order of explanation to the cognitive act. Twardowski rightly saw that
the product is the result of the act, and that the act is thus the notion that needs to be explained first.

Second, we have to make a distinction between the act of knowing and knowledge as disposition or \textit{habitus}; we may have knowledge, although we are sleeping. Knowledge as disposition is not an act; knowledge is a potentiality that can be actualised in acts of judging, which may be accompanied by a state of conviction. The distinction is made by Brentano in his \textit{Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt}. We may possess a storehouse of obtained cognitions (\textit{Erkenntnisse}) without thinking of them. Such knowledge has to be understood as a disposition to make certain acts, not as itself being an act of knowing (\textit{ein Erkennen}; cf. (Brentano 1874, p. 144)). This may also be called the distinction between \textit{knowing} and \textit{having knowledge}.

Third, knowledge is often contrasted with opinion. Whereas knowledge is always the result of a true judgement, opinions may be true or false. If someone utters a declarative sentence, one is entitled to ask “How do you know that?” If no answer is given, we may draw the conclusion that only an intimation of a subjective opinion is given, and that the declarative sentence was not uttered with full assertive force. If the speaker has presented his subjective opinion as though it is valid for all, that is, if the declarative sentence is put forward with full assertive force, we may say that his opinion is a \textit{prejudice}. Because the speaker has no ground for his assertion, he is not entitled to make the judgement. Prejudice is an opinion without judgement, as Voltaire put it: \textit{Le préjugé est une opinion sans jugement}. We may call the prejudice a “judgement” but only in a deprived, modified sense of the term.

Finally, we have to make a distinction between knowing an object and having knowledge about something, on the one hand, and knowing \textit{that} … and having knowledge \textit{that} …, on the other hand. The distinction is difficult to formulate in English; most European languages make a distinction between what is called \textit{kennen} and \textit{wissen} in German, and in French \textit{connaître} and \textit{savoir}. Seeing John is an example of knowing an object, and to know Paris is to have knowledge about Paris, to have become acquainted with Paris. Perceiving \textit{that} John is wearing a red jacket is an example of knowing \textit{that} … as an act, and knowledge \textit{that} $7 + 5 = 12$ is an example of having knowledge \textit{that} so and so. The latter is sometimes called “propositional knowledge”, but this is an inappropriate formulation, just as speaking of knowledge as a “propositional attitude” is confusing. These phrases seem to imply that we know a proposition, but that cannot be true. Knowledge that snow is white is not identical with the apprehension of the propositional object \textit{that snow is white}; such conceptual knowledge is not what is at stake. What we know is that a certain proposition \textit{is true}. We may call