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INTRODUCTION
EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS BETWEEN ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

1. Exploring fundamental questions: the real and the known in ancient and modern thought

The present issue arises from the need of fostering the existing debate and the reflection upon the limits of our current theory of knowledge and ontology, or if the reader allows, upon the limits of the subject/object dichotomy that still pervades philosophical investigation. Any analysis concerning the roots of the reflection upon knowledge, its meaning and purposes throughout history, inevitably implies neglecting a variety of significantly distinct approaches, whose extension and depth cannot be covered in a small number of pages. For instance, recent works have reconstructed and underlined original aspects of ancient philosophy and schools and did so mostly in the field of epistemology and ontology.[1] More modestly, this special issue sheds light on the modification of the debate surrounding the interrelation between ontology and epistemology arising from specific answers to the

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[1] See for instance Chiaradonna, Forcignanò, and Trabattoni 2018, Hetherington and Smith 2019. Cf. also Giovannetti 2021 and *Synthesis. Journal for Philosophy*, Issue 3: *Ancient Philosophy in Dialogue*, forthcoming.

questions "what is knowledge?" and "what there is?" in order to explore their full or partial capacity of grasping what is identified as "real". The present issue includes contributions about authors pertaining to very different periods in both ancient and early modern times and pursues the task of making the reader aware of possible new interpretations of the relationship between ontology and epistemology. The assumption underlying the present issue is that at some stages of its long history, the theory of knowledge has met with crucial turning points, at which its features were either responsible for a significant change in ontology or in some cases were experiencing an overlap with ontological features (see Section 2.1 below).

In this issue, we identify turning points that can be found in both ancient and early modern philosophy, thereby revealing unexpected potentialities to develop original epistemological and ontological claims coming from ancient debates and in modern authors, e.g., Bruno, who created a fracture with the past.

Indeed, the nature of a theory of knowledge portrayed according to the object/subject dichotomy can be mainly explored by studying the extent to which some theories of knowledge rely on ontological views and the extent to which some theories of knowledge require the subject to work in some way which is partially or altogether independent of what there actually is.

However, this special issue sheds new light on the way in which ontology can be reshaped starting from a theory of knowledge and on the legacy of ancient philosophers for the early modern ones. Indeed, the view that in ancient philosophy one is faced only with object-dependent knowledge while the early modern tradition is exclusively concerned with subject-dependent knowledge is too simplistic and should be put into question. This means, among other things, to underline the co-presence of, and possibly the interrelation between the two approaches. Some hybrid theories regarding the nature of knowledge considered in this issue constitute the perfect sample of it (see Leigh's contribution). Thus, our purpose is to highlight (i) new ways of understanding the influence of ancient philosophers on early modern ones and stimulate (ii) innovative insight into the relation between what is real and what is known.

2. Tracing conceptual boundaries: Plato and Kant on the tension between the real and the known

In order to outline how ancient and early modern thinkers can be compared and set in dialogue with respect to the main questions of this special issue, two *caveats* should be considered here. First, it is not our intention to offer a complete survey of the literature on ancient philosophers or modern philosophers with regard to the questions about reality, knowledge and their relation. We will rather focus on some influential studies addressing analogies and differences between these two groups of philosophers. Second, by no means we want to suggest that the many centuries of philosophical reflection dividing ancient and modern times are to be ignored or that they could not illuminate the investigation we are pursuing from a different perspective and with new arguments. We only present some new insights into how some central figures of early modern philosophy are influenced by, or mean to distinguish themselves from, ancient philosophers. This is also possible on the ground of the variety of methodologies deployed by the authors of the articles in this special issues, which range from a careful analysis of terminological and conceptual direct influences and/or differences between ancient and modern (see Chiaravalli, Montosa and Brancato), to an overall assessment of key distinguishing factors between ancient and modern ontologies (see Halper), to a systematic scrutiny of specific concepts or theories (e.g. innatism) as they are represented by modern debates on the basis of their ancient origin (see Shepardson), to a close analysis of some of Plato's works (see Leigh).

The present issue investigates ancient and modern views of ontology and knowledge following upon some illustrious examples and recent attempts at providing suitable tools through which one can navigate a rich material.[2] Considering the prominence of René Descartes in shaping a theory of knowledge and the role of mathematics, it is no surprise

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[2] A classical study is Brochard 2001. Essential studies are Miller and Inwood 2003, Kennington 2004, Williams 2006, especially chapter one, and the collected volumes by Burnyeat, which are significantly titled *Explorations in Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, 2012a, 2012b, 2022a and 2022b. As we will see shortly, section 2 of Burnyeat 2012a is particularly relevant. Cf. also Berchman 2007, Gersh and Moran 2006 and Giovannetti 2020a.

that important contributions have already highlighted the interrelations and differences about ancient and modern scepticism, on the one hand, and the influence of Platonism, on the other.[3] It is worth mentioning Burnyeat's *Idealism and Greek philosophy: what Descartes saw and Berkeley missed*,[4] as a seminal paper in this respect. In Burnyeat's view, Greek philosophical reflections on knowledge and reality shape the object of thought as irreducible to the activity of the minds.[5] This implies that there is no problem of demonstrating the existence of the external world and that thinking needs to have an object which is in some way independent of the mind.[6] Accordingly, Burnyeat contends, ancient sceptics never really questioned the existence of the external world and it is in fact Descartes the first one to assign subjective knowledge, i.e. knowledge of subjective states a central role in epistemology. This view attracted some criticism,[7] but has been very influential in shaping the debate concerning the distinctive features of modern views with regard to the ontological commitments of knowledge. The notion of coalescence between reality and truth, or between reality and thought, has been seen as a fundamental aspect of the philosophical reflection opened by the Presocratics.[8] However, a notion of strict coalescence is not able to

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[3] To name but a few, on scepticism see Curley 1978, Popkin 1979, Paganini 2008, Machuca 2011. On Platonism see Koyré 1964, Corrigan and Turner 2007, Hedley and Hutton 2008, Chiaradonna 2012. On ancient and modern mathematics, see Lachterman 1989. It is also worth mentioning in passing Augustinian antecedents of Descartes, see the classical study Gilson 1930 and the more recent Menn 1998.

[4] Burnyeat 1982, reprinted in Burnyeat 2012a.

[5] As shown by Burnyeat, against Berkeley's own reading of the *Theaetetus*.

[6] We say "in some way" because one needs to take this independence of the object of thought as the fact that it exists and is what it is regardless of its being thought. This does not exclude that this object being intelligible might qualify as one of its essential traits.

[7] Most critiques focus on individual thinkers or passages, to whom Burnyeat's argument should not apply, for instance Sorabji 1983, Emilsson 1996, Fine 2003, Politis 2006. For a broader view alternative to Burnyeat's construal of ancient scepticism and its relation to anti-realism, cf. Groarke 1990.

[8] The notion of coalescence with regard to the Presocratic thinkers was first spelt out by Calogero 2012. For a survey of the debate surrounding Parmenides' claim about the identity of thought and being, see Fronterotta 2007 and Di Iulio 2020. On the double nature of truth in Plato, cf. Szaif 1998 and as summary Szaif 2018. Cf. also

adequately make sense of Plato's view. Accordingly, in contrast with the notion of coalescence, we deploy the notions of cohesion[9] for Plato and rupture for Kant, in order to portray a fundamental tension in Western thought regarding the dynamics between ontology and epistemology.

Indeed, the contributions of this special issue analyse subjects ranging from Plato to Kant because both might be taken to represent two significantly different theoretical stances. As far as Plato is concerned, one sees a dynamics of cohesion between what is real and what is known. In other words, either one grasps what reality is in itself or one is not knowing in a strong sense. By contrast, in Kant's critical philosophy there can only be knowledge of phenomena, which are other than things in themselves. Thus, with Kant's critical work, one witnesses a disruptive dynamic between the real and the known.[10] Furthermore, Kant represents one extreme case in which *a priori* forms for the possibility of knowledge corresponds to the portion of reality, i.e. an island of truth (*KrV* B, 294-95) that can be reliably explored by human beings.[11] Between these two philosophical pillars, the special issue focuses on the connection between ancient and early modern thinkers. Before turning to a brief exposition of the contributions, we

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Perl 2014 and Fronterotta 2022.

[9] It is worth specifying that the term "cohesion" should be interpreted as meaning the maximum degree of connection between being or reality and cognition, without the two dimensions coming to be the same (as is the case with "coalescence"). For a preliminary discussion of this issue and an extended treatment of how being, thought and language intertwine in Plato's view, see Giovannetti 2022.

[10] This rupture is clearly described for instance in Waxman 2014, Lu-Adler 2018, Abaci 2019, Kraus 2020 and Friebe 2022. Several works highlighted the continuity between Kant and previous philosophers and systems. Recent works for instance include De Boer 2020 and Tommasi 2022 with respect to Wolffian metaphysics and Aristotelianism, respectively, however it is extremely hard to deny that Kant's transcendental philosophy as a system represents a novelty and rupture with previous positions in portraying the relationship between ontology and epistemology, especially considering what Kant clearly states in the *Prolegomena* regarding the task of accomplishing the revolution in metaphysics started with Hume. For the impact of Kant's revolutionary position regarding ontology and epistemology on Schelling and Hegel, cf. Illetterati and Gambarotto 2020.

[11] For a detailed analysis regarding language and ontology in Kant, cf. La Rocca 1999.

need to very briefly expand our discussion of the state of the art upon the two thinkers that set the chronological and theoretical boundaries of the present investigation.

2.1. Plato: the cohesion between the real and the known

Theoretical and ethical investigations and objectives are irretrievably entwined in Plato's work, mirroring the fact that boundaries across disciplines were not clearly drawn at that time. However, Plato's conception both of a worth-living life and of the just political system hinges on the concept of knowledge. The best life, which is also the happiest, is conditioned upon possessing or at least pursuing wisdom, and the just and orderly city can only exist if philosophers become rulers (cf. for instance *Resp.* VII, 540a-541b). Knowledge and authority spreading from them is the only warrant for a correct exercise of power (cf. for instance *Resp.* V, 473d-e). What we tend to translate with "knowledge" in Plato's vocabulary amounts to a variety of nouns and verbs, which unfolds over decades of philosophical reflection and centuries of collective linguistic practice. Among these terms, *episteme* is likely the most representative, in association with dialectic, i.e. the philosopher's art through which one knows being. Defining the notion of *episteme* is definitely no easy matter. Plato studies are far from reaching consensus and, even though most of them agree that *episteme* is infallible,[12] several different and often incompatible accounts have been provided.[13] This also results from Plato's own compositional style and from his long-period writing extending over decades. Nevertheless, two things can be gathered with certainty from Plato's texts. Firstly, everyday objects of experience are not the fundamental layer of reality, and these objects derive their transient and qualified being from other intelligible entities. The latter are uniquely or primarily what (there) is in a proper sense. Secondly, *episteme* as knowledge has some sort of exclusive or privileged relation to such entities.

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[12] Though not all, cf. Broadie 2021.

[13] It is not possible even to survey the main studies or stances within the scholarly discussion; thus, we will limit ourselves to mentioning some very impactful and representative studies.

From these assumptions all sorts of interpretations have been suggested. For the purpose of our issue, it is worth mentioning that on the ground of Eleatic tenets, especially Parmenides, Plato portrayed a big and complex picture of how philosophical reflection about knowledge is grounded in ontology. The 'known' (*to gnoston*) is first conceptualised with regard to the 'real' (*to on*). This does not amount to the truism that to know that *p*, *p* must be true, and therefore *p* is a fact. Plato's view amounts to stating that one can know an entity or portion of reality thanks to this entity's characters such as unity, immutability, clarity, intelligibility, and the like. However, troubles begin when Plato seems to exclude any overlap between the object of knowledge, i.e. Forms, and the object of belief, i.e. sensible things (*Resp.* V, 476ff.). This fostered an exegetical branch, including, just to name but a few significant interpreters, Vlastos [1973], Szaif [1998], Fronterotta [2001], and most recently Moss [2021].[14] Fine [1978] and [1990], who claims one can have knowledge of becoming things and belief about Forms, is opposed to the traditional view.[15] This debate also intersects with another problem: when describing knowledge, Plato oscillates between the metaphorical discourse of seeing or grasping being and providing an account of it by formulating judgements and definitions. Both approaches can be easily found in the central books of the *Republic* (V-VII),[16] but also in the final pages of the *Meno*, where we are told that, through reckoning about the cause or the explanation, we find something that ties down belief and turns it into *episteme*. Or yet again, in later dialogues, such as the *Sophist*, dialectic qua specific technique of the philosopher could be associated with specific methods describing and defining the object of enquiry. Finally, in the *Theaetetus*, the objective of the dialogue consists in defining what *episteme* is, but there is no mention of Forms in it and the dialogue ends in aporia. From all this, entirely different readings have been advanced. For instance, the *Theaetetus* is interpreted as a dialogue showing that without Forms one cannot define knowledge,

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[14] For a survey and discussion, see Giovannetti 2020b.

[15] This view is criticised by many, consider for instance Gonzalez 1998. For an interesting attempt to go beyond this opposition, cf. Smith 2019.

[16] This question has drawn particular attention by Italian scholars, cf. Aronadio 2006, Ferrari 2006 and Fronterotta 2006.

or that Plato is abandoning the theory of Forms altogether.[17] Were this the case, we would then be faced with a Platonic view on knowledge that parts with ontology and goes towards a more "epistemological" approach that tries to find knowledge's ultimate source in its procedures rather than in the nature of its objects.[18]

What we have roughly sketched here does not cover all questions about knowledge arising from Plato's texts, nor is it dealing with these questions the objective of this special issue. However, the debates over knowledge and reality, as well as their relationship, certainly motivated the guideline to be explored in the present issue to compare ancient and modern views. We can already find in Plato a variety of approaches that exhibits a relentless reflection of a philosophically piercing mind and then makes it explicit that Plato undoubtedly cognises knowledge as essentially related to ontology, but at the same time allows a pluralistic approach to what knowing means and implies or at least suggests the investigation of possible patterns or epistemological stances with respect to this question. In this special issue, the reader will find some investigations into specific questions regarding the multifaceted approach to knowledge we already find in Plato (despite him leaning very strongly towards the influence of ontology over knowledge) and other central topics coming from antiquity and influencing early modern philosophers. Thus, in the present issue Plato represents one end of the line, the other end being symbolically occupied by Immanuel Kant, who acknowledged the impact of Plato throughout centuries, but also tried to shape in a new fashion the relationship between 'the real' and the 'known' opening an entire new field of ontological meaning pertaining to transcendental philosophy.

2.2. Kant: a rupture between the real and the known?

Our special issue therefore considers comparative studies and/or the legacy of concepts, motives or debates generated in the ancient world in the early modern period up to Kant. We deliberately decided to

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[17] For a detailed state of the art of the classical studies, cf. Chappell 2006.
[18] Even getting close to a coherence theory of knowledge, such as Fine 2004.

avoid a detailed discussion of Kant's critical philosophy in this issue both for the length that this would require and for the systematic reason that Kant explicitly talked about a history of pure reason. He was the first philosopher to offer a system that explicitly set itself beyond former ontological and epistemological positions and used this fact to substantiate the modern notion of the history of ideas. Thus, Kant's philosophy entertains a deeply complex relationship with ancient philosophy *and* with early modern philosophy. This relationship can only be grasped thanks to a multi-layered system of readings. At first, one can include the study of Kant's criticism of ancient and modern positions; a second level of reading however is rather meant to see how Kant reinterpreted philosophical concepts taken from ancient and late antiquity to rephrase his transcendental philosophy; a third level of analysis should consider how Kant and early Kantians understood ancient philosophy and its concepts, as 'moments' in the development of the history of pure reason.

From a Kantian perspective, thus, the historical approach can highlight both aspects of continuity and discontinuity between the ancient and the modern world, but it assumes that the standpoint of transcendental philosophy is more advanced than the previous ones.

Therefore, in the critical period, Kant's reading of ancient philosophers is inevitably biased and forced to fit with the idea that human reason progresses towards the enlargement of our knowledge and through a priori principles of reason for its regulative use.

Aside from this premise, let us notice that Kant had an intense and positive relationship with classics. Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Epicurus, among the most important ones inspired the construction of the concepts needed to overcome (from a Kantian perspective) the ontology and the epistemology of Descartes, Leibniz, Newton, Hume and Wolff, by offering a new definition and function to the notions of "ideas", "dialectic", "categories", "noumenon", "schema", "hypotyposis", "law" and so forth. Even if Kant underscored the rejection and limits of Platonism (cf. Hinske [1988])[19], he also believed that Plato's thought represented a first milestone in the development of the history of pure

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[19] For a recent reconstruction about Kant's view of Platonism and *Schwärmerei*, cf. De Bianchi 2021; 2022.

reason towards the teleological interpretation of Forms.[20] In other words, without ancient philosophers, and Plato in particular, no modern system, including transcendental philosophy, could have produced a history of its a priori principles, as Kant claimed in *Über eine Entdeckung nach der alle neue Kritik der reinen Vernunft durch eine ältere entbehrlich gemacht werden soll* dated 1790.

So far, we sketched Kant's public take on Plato's philosophy, but another story is to assess his debt to ancient ideas. At present, there is still a lack of studies that properly enable one to grasp the complexity of Kant's take on the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle as previous steps in the history of pure reason and this is certainly an important desideratum that the literature should fulfil with respect to peculiar aspects of Kant's system. We refer to the assumption denoting Kant's ontology, according to which what possesses reality (*Realität*) is not necessarily what possesses existence (*Existenz*)[21] and that "to know" (*erkennen*) is not just "to think" (*denken*), which in turn is not the same as "to grasp" (*begreifen*), which is rather the pre-eminent way in which reason formally acts. The fact that the intelligible functions of thought and cognition are separated with a hiatus from the sensibility is not just mirroring Kant's system of faculties (sensible intuition, understanding, reason, imagination and so forth), or just the result of the idea that there are no ready-made phenomena that can be known a priori. Kant's ontology and theory of knowledge are incommensurable (in Kuhnian terms) with previous systems both for the new foundations of logic and for the doctrine of transcendental idealism of space and time. Therefore, Kant gave a clear account of the legacy and limits of both ancient philosophy and early modern philosophy in the light of these two tenets of his system. On the one hand, he provided philosophy with the secure ground of a pure a priori science, i.e. general logic and underscored the great limit of including space and time as categories of a fundamental ontology with a related logical form/content. For the sake of brevity, as the careful reader of this issue will notice, none of the contributions deal with authors that would subscribe to the above-mentioned tenets

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[20] Cf. White 1993 and Serck-Hanssen and Emilsson 2004.
[21] For studies on Kant's view of existence, cf. Stang 2015, and for recent contributions, cf. Rosefeldt 2020.

of Kant's system. In other words, in Kant's system the foundations of knowledge and ontology are unique with respect to his predecessors. Nevertheless, this rupture with the past is just one side of the coin, as just as Kant would like to hear, because his system is the result of the continuity that reason follows in its evolution of a priori forms to grasp its own intelligent nature oriented towards ends. Thus, we suggest that a possible way to effectively portray the discontinuity between Kant and previous philosophers and philosophical systems is to stress that the real and the known are categories reshaped thanks to the operation that makes Kant one of the most original logicians in history: to get rid of any spatiotemporal frame in logic.[22] The huge change in defining knowledge that his system bears with it is just a mere consequence of having denied any direct correspondence or one-to-one mapping between the real in perception and phenomena, but foremost in having concluded that the difference between thinking and knowing relies on the fact that formal logic has nothing to do with any spatiotemporal notion, which rather pertain to sensible intuition. The latter alone, however, is blind if it is not guided by pure forms that makes spatiotemporal relations intelligible. Furthermore, there cannot be knowledge in strong sense of space, time, and pure forms of thought, but just a classification and exposition, and the same holds for the a priori principles of reason. Human beings can define and classify sensible and intelligible forms and more importantly they must *use* them in the appropriate manner, avoiding errors and subreptions. Being these forms the subject matter of transcendental philosophy, e.g. conditions of the possible experience, we can infer that Kant abandons once and for all the metaphysical account of ontology as the science of Being *qua* Being, disclosing the path for transcendental philosophy and epistemology as more secure and prolific. This path consisted in reshaping the notions of the real and the known in such a way that phenomena or objects of mathematical construction that are known must be real in so far as the synthetic a priori judgment about them presuppose acts of the mind unifying through the schema of the category of reality the manifold of and in intuition.[23] However, none

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[22] For extensive studies of Kant's general logic, cf. Capozzi 2002 and Capozzi 2004. For a discussion of Kant's logic and ontology, cf. Tolley 2016.
[23] A very clear account is given by Paek 2005.

of the known objects is real *per se* or as thing in itself. This in turn can be read as Kant's solution to the problem of an alleged dichotomy between subject and independent external objects, since there is no such distinction in the act of knowledge. In order to appreciate this huge change of paradigm in the history of philosophy, we will now critically review the content of this special issue.

3. The Real and the Known: Contributions on ancient and early modern philosophers

The first essay by Edward Halper titled *On the principles of reality* offers a far-reaching study focused on the notions of being and knowability, contrasting the ancient mind-set as is represented by Aristotle and inherited by Aquinas with early modern philosophers. This study surveys many thinkers and complex issues and provides a synoptic view which, irrespective of the many details, represents an innovative and at times controversial framework for our main question. Halper starts with Aristotle's view according to which to know something one needs to understand its cause or principle and at the same time the latter are viewed by Aristotle as beings of some sort, i.e. an existing entity in the world. In focusing on sensible substances, Halper reports Aristotle's view that form is very often what provides the formal, the efficient and the final cause and, to this, the matter (material cause) must be added. Thus, the cause or principle of sensible substances is their form and matter; from this, Halper draws the conclusion that «a sensible *ousia* is not just an independent, self-subsistent being. It is a unit of knowing. In other words, an individual *ousia* is known through its own essential nature; that is, through its form and through the matter in which that form resides» (p. 38).

This claim seems to be at odds with Z 15, where Aristotle clearly states that one only has knowledge of the universal and never of the individual. To deal with this objection, Halper claims that individual substances are known through formulae as they are expressed by language, which however are common by many instances, which makes them universal. This is said to be due to the nature of language. Thus, a question arises: should it not be excluded that individual substances are

the basic units of knowledge? It should not, insofar as, Halper suggests, Aristotelian universals are not to be conceived of collectively, but rather distributively. In other words, to know a universal means knowing an individual through a character that belongs to it and to all individuals of the same kind, i.e. its form. This is compatible with Aristotle saying (Z 13-17) that forms are not universals because they belong in a particular matter as what provides the unique principle of the functioning together of its parts: «Insofar as the form is the *functioning* of a particular matter, it not only unifies the organs, but also makes them into a *single*, composite individual. A matter that has the first actuality, that is, the form, is an individual. To be sure, we know a form's nature through a universal formula, and this formula characterizes the forms of all the like instances of the species. However, the form cannot *be* a universal because it is the functioning of some particular matter and, thereby, constitutes that matter as a particular individual» (p. 40). The conclusion to be drawn, for Halper, is then that individuals are the basic units of being and knowability insofar as they exist separately and they are known through themselves (i.e. through their forms qua non-universals).

Given this picture, some problems arise when it comes to accommodating relations between substances. This is because relations are not substances and thus cannot exist without substances. Indeed, Aristotle thinks of relations as located in substances: a single *ousia* contains a relation to another *ousia* and the latter contains within itself another relation to the former. Before turning to modern philosophers, Halper briefly mentions the interesting case of Aquinas, who tried to save the Aristotelian picture by providing – at least in his view – a more robust account of the relations linking substances, where the cosmos is made unitary by being produced, preserved and governed by God, who is each being's efficient, formal and final cause.

In contrast with Aristotle's view, «instead of individual, self-subsistent *ousiai*, modern philosophers talk about mathematical laws of nature that express relations between characters; specifically, between characters that are themselves defined through these relations» (p. 45). In other words, relations are the basic units of being and knowledge. This, Halper maintains, brings about the problem of locating such units, i.e. relations understood as expressions of the laws of nature, and is

what motivates the emergence of many debates in modern philosophy. Accordingly, Halper surveys the major early modern thinkers through the lenses of his interpretation: he shows that the great variety of theoretical options put forward by modern thinkers can be seen as aiming to answer the same question concerning the existence of relations as basic units of being and knowledge. Thus, he provides an interesting framework for the question of the relation between reality and knowledge in sharp contrast with Aristotelian metaphysics.

In her *The Wolf and the Dog: eristic,* elenchus*, and kinds of wisdom in Plato's* Euthydemus, Fiona Leigh provides a very clear case study concerning Plato's reflection upon epistemic procedures, not immediately related to matters in ontology (though ultimately not incompatible with the view that an analysis of knowledge calls for some sort of ontological theory of known object). Leigh's goal is to assess the difference between two opposite stances: eristic and elenctic discourse. These two types of discourse are quite generally treated in the *Sophist*, where the former is associated with the sophistic art of creating verbal appearances and of producing contradictions and the latter with a particular characterisation of sophistry as cleansing of the soul, which is clearly attributed to Socrates. These two conversational techniques are metaphorically embodied by the wolf and the dog, respectively. The main similarity between the two is that they both lead the interlocutor to contradiction, while their difference is that the eristic method is destructive, whereas the elenctic method is constructive. This is so mostly because the elenctic method makes some tacit belief of the interlocutor explicit and «it is not infrequently one of these tacit beliefs that contradicts a belief the interlocutor has previously avowed, in strong terms, on the subject of investigation. Thus, the interlocutor is brought to see that and how he holds contradictory beliefs on that subject, and so is ignorant with respect to it» (p. 65). This allows the interlocutor to assess what she knows and the limits of her knowledge, and in this way the elenctic method facilitates a kind of self-knowledge. Leigh then turns to the *Euthydemus*, where these two stances are extensively portrayed. For instance, in the case of the eristic discourse, Clinias is led to admit that he has contradicted himself as he believes that the ignorant are those who learn and the wise are those who learn

at the same time. Leigh's take on this is that since Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, the eristic brothers, dropped all sort of qualification to the above statement regarding the subject of wisdom, Clinias is led to think that his statements are in contradiction, when in fact they are not (if properly qualified, e.g. if "learning" means acquiring knowledge, the ignorant learn, if "learning" means being diligent and interested in carrying out enquiries, then the wise learn). The outcome of this is that the interlocutor ends up being confused and at the farthest end of being aware of what is going on in her mind. By contrast, Socrates protreptic interactions with Clinias are considered by Leigh, against most of the critical literature, to be genuine instances of the elenctic method. Leigh's major exegetical proposition deploys the notion of tacit belief. Socrates prompts Clinias to avow beliefs he is committed to, though unaware of holding them, when addressing the question of well-being and its relation to good fortune. In her detailed analysis of this exchange, Leigh draws a distinction, which is key to her argument: the distinction between ordinary tacit belief and elenctic tacit belief. The former is a type of belief one has not overtly avowed, but which is assented to easily and straightforwardly and is not required any degree of reflection such that it must be figured out or learned. Unlike ordinary ones, elenctic tacit belief are beliefs one is already committed to without knowing it and without being able to immediately recognise it. Socrates is able, thanks to his elenctic method, to first make explicit ordinary tacit belief and through logical implication and commitment to conversational norms elicit the interlocutor's awareness of other beliefs she is committed to, which could not easily be found outside a genuine dialogical investigation. In this way, Socrates fosters his interlocutor's self-knowledge, and in particular the epistemic awareness of one's commitment to a series of beliefs that are difficult to retrieve and that require a significant amount of reflection. To conclude, we wish to spend few words in relation to the purposes of *The Real and the Known*. This essay provides a fine reading of a passage from Plato, where one can find at work some epistemological reflections, aiming at reflective self-knowledge on one's beliefs, without any reference to ontology. At the same time, such knowledge focuses on the cognitive activity of a subject entertaining a belief and is not the ultimate knowledge about a what-is

question or independently existing beings. This provides a very good example of the fact that if it is true one can find in Plato sophisticated enactments of epistemic procedures without any reference to ontology, at the same time, this does not exhaustively define what knowledge is and how it works. In other words, there is autonomy of epistemological reflections to a significant degree without ever suggesting this suffices to understand what knowledge is.

The third essay, titled *Varieties of Platonic innatism: an introduction through early modern parallels*, by Douglas A. Shepardson focuses on Plato's innatism. His main objective is to clarify the conceptual space of different types of innatism, where a variety of interpretive options offered by the scholars have a parallel in early modern discussions. The author focuses on the ways one can frame innatism leaving open the question regarding what innate items are being recollected. Shepardson moves from a type of innatism that is introduced and criticised by Locke, which is labelled "explicit content innatism". The general view is that from birth on one has some content, in the form of propositions or principles, fully and openly available to one's belief or knowledge (depending on how the view is specified). In other words, this type of innatism is the view that the mind has immediate contemplation and awareness of some content upon birth. This type of innatism is not compatible with what one can easily gather from Plato's texts and is introduced for the sake of comparison with the other types of innatism. The second type of innatism is called "dispositional innatism" and is associated with Descartes (at least some of his texts, as he does not seem to be entirely consistent on the issue). This type of innatism denies that there is any actual content at birth and maintains that the mind has the capacity to work out such content by itself. This denial is not so much of content being explicit as of the actual existence of that content. In other words, innate content is not an entity and thus is not distinct from the faculty of thinking. The way one can distinguish dispositional innatism from common empiricism is by emphasising that the faculty of thinking, though not dealing with pre-existing content, plays an essential role in shaping it in a determined way. The third type of innatism is called "latent content innatism" and is associated with Leibniz (or again, in some of his works). This is the view that there is a

content that is innate but not available or accessible at birth and possibly for one's entire life. There are some truths in one's mind, only waiting to be found. According to Shepardson, along with some other scholars, this is what best captures Plato's theory of recollection in the *Meno*, the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus*, specifying that the content being recollected is of special objects such as Platonic Forms.

Then Shepardson turns to what he calls "constructivist nativism" as inspired by Immanuel Kant. Plato's innatism is conceived of as working like Kantian categories: it is not possible to have an experience of a given portion of the world without innate concepts. In other words, innate concepts are required to structure experience. Of course, this view is not Kant's, who strongly denied in all his corpus that ideas and categories are innate, but Shepardson rather tries to find a further possible reading of Plato's Forms as conditions. A fifth type of innatism is called "transcendent innatism" and is somehow similar to some core ideas of Malebranche. Retrieving innate content is like connecting with another transcendent realm for at least some types of thoughts, i.e. those dealing with Forms. On this reading, one is not just recollecting some latent content *concerning* Forms, rather one is exerting the innate capacity to access Forms, residing in a transcendent domain. The sixth and last type of innatism is called "condition innatism" and is associated with some Plato scholars, most notably Gail Fine. The way one has to differentiate condition innatism from latent content innatism is that along with content Plato is alleged to consider propositional attitudes as innately determined. Shepardson offers some counter-arguments and concludes that this last type of innatism is not a live option in making sense of Platonic innatism.

In *The irony of essence: Proclus and Descartes on geometry*, Iacopo Chiaravalli presents the key ideas underlying Descartes' view on the ontology of mathematics and geometry. While acknowledging the essential role the Platonic tradition played in the new philosophical and scientific developments of the seventeenth century, Chiaravalli's objective is to highlight what is specific to Descartes's treatment of mathematical entities, despite some terminological similarities to Proclus. In Proclus' reflection on mathematics, we find the distinction between *theorema* (i.e. what can be shown about a mathematical entity,

namely the belonging of a property to a certain object) and *problema* (all those procedures which produce or deal with a certain figure). Chiaravalli's reading of this distinction in Proclus comes down to the idea that there are two different ways to represent a mathematical entity as is grasped by intellect: on the one hand, there is the *logos* or *horos*, i.e. the definition; on the other hand, there is what is produced by the *phantasia*, i.e. imagination, which however produces the sense-like mental figure of the intelligible mathematical entity. The definition sets the boundaries for the imagination to produce the figure, and both derive their being, more or less immediately, from the external, intelligible entity grasped by *nous*.

By contrast, in Chiaravalli's reconstruction of Descartes philosophy of mathematics, there is no such thing as an external mathematical object, and mathematical objects are thought of as the outcome of a process of discovering the proper solution to a problem. In other words, the nature of mathematical objects is determined in relation to the method of their production, i.e. an equation. Chiaravalli argues that in Descartes' geometrical calculus one must resist the temptation of taking the equation as an essence and the curve as a particular. By contrast, the curve represents all the possible results of the equation, thereby giving shape to the algebraic complex itself, which of course marks a radical difference within the notion of imagination when compared to Proclus', insofar as the imagination ends up having its own generality. In addition, in Descartes' view the mathematical object ultimately comes to be the same as all the operational possibilities the mind has in dealing with it. This is precisely what makes the equation the expression of the geometrical figure and vice versa: both amount to the same operational procedures. This shows that the distance between Proclus as eminent representative of ancient philosophy of mathematics and Descartes is enormous and that the latter is employing a Platonic jargon in a decidedly non-Platonic way. In other words, as Chiaravalli concludes, Descartes' essence is only to be found within thinking, without any reference to external entities, in sharp contrast with the ancient notion of essence.

In *Upsetting an upside-down world: Bruno's reassessment of Aristotelian infinity*, Pablo Montosa focuses on Bruno's work *On the Infinite*, a dialogue presented by Bruno as an open refutation of the

Aristotelian finite cosmos. What Bruno mainly criticizes is Aristotle's rejection of the infinity of the universe. According to Montosa, Bruno believed that Aristotle motivated such rejection on the cognitive biases that lead to the assumption of moral universalism. On the ground of this claim, Montosa shows that contrary to the established interpretation of the dialogue, Bruno's critique of morality is not a consequence of his cosmological view but rather that the latter derives from the former. Thus, behind the controversy between Bruno and supporters of Aristotle about the existence or not of infinity lies a more profound dispute about the existence of absolute moral values; on the other hand, to show that, by tracing back the former controversy to the latter, Aristotle and Bruno's arguments become more apparent. Thus, contrary to Aristotle, who conceived of God as an unmoved mover that can only think himself as detached from a world populated by finite substances, Bruno identifies God with the only infinite substance, of which things are nothing more than its modes as immanent expressions of its infinite power. According to Bruno, Aristotle's first mistake lies in turning his perceptual limitations into an attribute of the universe: «it is asserted against all reason, that the universe must terminate exactly at the limit of our perceptive power» [Singer 1968, 299]. This erroneous assumption in turn depends on taking the relative immobility and centrality observed from our terrestrial horizon as essential attributes or properties of the Earth, thereby erecting a subjective centre of absolute rest, which can only have a place in a finite cosmos: «Once the end of the thread is found, the tangle is easily unravelled. For the difficulty proceeds from the method and from an unfitting hypothesis, namely, the weight and immobility of the Earth» (Singer 1968, 361). On the contrary, in Bruno's view, things as modes are the reverse of substance: they are in something else by means of which they are conceived.

Properties, in any case, supervene these things. However, adequately conceived, things will always be parts «in» the whole, not parts «of» the whole: «since being is indivisible and absolutely simple, because it is infinite, and is act in its fullness in the whole and in every part of it (in the same way we speak of parts in the infinite, but not of parts of the infinite), we cannot think in any way that the earth is a part of being, nor that the sun is part of substance, since the latter is indivisible» [Bruno 1998, 92].

Thus, Montosa concludes that if things are modes, and modes are always in something else in virtue of which they are conceived, then in Bruno's view things are intrinsically relations. But not relations which take place «in between» things, but which essentially constitute them, just as, for example, we can say that «husband» and «wife» do not exist as such before the relation «marriage». These constitutive relations are reduced to properties by removing one of the relata in such a way that a wife becomes a widow when the husband dies, and their former relationship becomes one of her properties. By investigating Bruno's "method" of reduction of polyadic predicates to monadic ones, Montosa suggests that this suppression and, in particular, negation understood as deprivation plays a fundamental role in the rejection of Aristotelian theory of knowledge and ontology.

In his contribution *Leibniz and the conciliarists on natural motion and the legacy of ancient philosophy*, Mattia Brancato develops an analysis of Leibniz's concept of natural motion thanks to which he portrays Leibniz's understanding of the relationship between the real and the known, i.e. between the supposed objectively true and universal field of natural science and the subjective one of knowledge. Brancato assumes that historiography has to get rid of the notion of syncretism in a derogative way, but rather should investigate Leibniz through the lens of conciliarists, just as Leibniz would call them and himself, stressing the fact that they are not philosophers imprisoned in an old way of thinking, but thinkers that reintroduced concepts dear to ancient philosophy in order to enrich the theory of knowledge in the face of the new scientific achievements of Copernicus, Galilei and Newton.

According to Leibniz, conciliarists conceived of natural motion as something which was not completely opposing mechanism, but something that must be thought of as a completion of an experience that is lacking something. For instance, in experiencing motion, one witnesses its true nature, but one can still learn something from its geometrical and mathematical exemplifications. This means that any reading attributing to what is known a mere subjective connotation does not hold in this case, and Brancato suggests that Leibniz shared this view with the conciliarists not only with regard to physics. Not by chance, when confronting the problem of false perceptions in the

Nouveaux Essais, it is the experience based on something real that grants the possibility of being deceived. According to Brancato, in ancient philosophy, the idea that even in the experience which is far from the truth we are somehow oriented towards it, because the experience of knowledge shares with the truth its ontological foundation, is connected with Aristotle's notion of *eikos*, especially when applied to physics. By revaluating the influence of the conciliarists on Leibniz then one can also infer important consequences with respect to the impact of Leibniz on the young Kant. In Brancato's view, works such as Kant's *Monadologia physica* could be interpreted as attempts at making sense of Leibniz's compatibilist approach in physics. Therefore, in his view, Kant's mature criticism can be seen as a reaction to these failed attempts of his early years, which led towards a more drastic rupture with the past.

4. Open questions and future perspectives

Thanks to the studies collected in the present issue, we offer an overview of the dynamics of tension surrounding the reflections upon the real and the known in both minor authors and renowned philosophers, such as Plato, also by investigating what are considered 'minor' works (e.g. the *Euthydemus* in Leigh's contribution to this issue).

Thus, a preliminary, methodological result of this issue consists in showing that when it comes to foundational and complex questions, such as those about the relationship of ontology and theory of knowledge, the distinction between 'minor' and 'major' works, as well as the restricted literal interpretation of each of them (see Montosa's contribution for instance) are neither profitable nor suitable.

Second, this issue is unified by means of a conceptual tool, i.e. the notion of cohesion as opposed to that of rupture that is suitable to portray the tension between ontology and epistemology across Western culture. This conceptual tool offers a valuable enriched picture that can be further investigated by considering other case studies describing the dynamics to which the relationship between ontology and theory of knowledge undergoes in the modern age. Moreover, this tool allows us to define in more detail the role of the interpretation of ancient philosophy in early modern works and beyond.

This in turn opens the perspective of investigating in more specific terms the way in which Kant's philosophy constituted a rupture with past schemes. In other words, one can also assess with more clarity and in more detail which aspects of ancient thought Kant deployed and modified for his purposes to overcome what he called "dogmatic metaphysics". It seems indeed that only a deeper understanding of the grounding relation (or its denial) between the real and the known, between ontology and theory of knowledge, can effectively constitute a guideline to assess recursive or new patterns in the history of philosophy, and this issue represents a contribution to stimulate new interpretations and interrelations among suitable answers to never-ending questions.

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