

THE PSYCHODYNAMICS OF EPISTEMIC PROCESS

Isenyo Solomon Ogaba, PhD

Department of Philosophy
Federal University, Wukari
solomonogaba5@gmail.com

&

Egbonu, John Okwuchukwu, PhD

Holy Family Secondary School, Ikom
okwycares@yahoo.com

DOI:[10.13140/RG.2.2.16461.56809](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.16461.56809)

Abstract

The notion that knowledge is either a priori or a posteriori, does not examine the role played by the human mind in ascertaining knowledge. It explains that knowledge is either gained through the help of the senses or intuitively via ideas without considering that there is a relationship between the mind, ideas, the senses, before we can judge and claim knowledge. The mind critically handles ideas or data that the senses bring or the ideas that intuitively comes from the mind. Thus, this article explains the active role the Human Mind plays in gaining, comprehending and assessing knowledge. It critically evaluates the activities of sifting and scrutinizing the mind employs in processing ideas or data to become knowledge.

Keywords: Knowledge, Mind, A prior, A posterior, epistemology

Introduction

Considering that knowledge is not static because something changes from the knowledge of the former to what we see in the future, the mind adopt means to which it understands and know things (knowledge). Example, a small tree that was planted, grows to become a big tree, bearing fruits. Human mind at this point, is not static when epistemic activities are carried out because the mind plays an active role too in gaining knowledge.

To this effect, the mind plays a role in our existence in making sure we make sense of the world around us. No doubt, one of the greatest problems that has

disturbed philosophical search for knowledge, is the debate for mind-body relationship. Some scholars engage in this subject by considering assumptive form either in rejecting the mind or considering the mind less effective to the body. By doing this, it creates a problem, trying to understand how what is superior to the body or inferior to the body can know and the means through which it can know.

Therefore, this work will throw more light on the epistemological process of the mind in getting knowledge and also considering the epistemic relevance of the mind. It examines the role of the mind in knowledge acquisition while stating the active or passive position of the mind in human rationality.

Making sense of the Concepts of Psychodynamics and Epistemology

Psychodynamics:

This is the theory and systematic study of the psychological forces that underlie human behaviour especially the dynamic relations between conscious motivation and unconscious motivation (*Steadman Medical Dictionary*, 2006). Through it, human mind develop means through which knowledge and true beliefs are known.

Sigmund Freud developed “psychodynamics” to describe energy in an organically complex brain (Browlby, 1999). Psychodynamics also known as dynamic psychology is the study of the interrelationship of various parts of the mind, personality, or psyche as they relate to mental, emotional or motivational forces especially as the unconscious level (Freud Sigmund 1923). In this varying state of the human person, new things are experienced and knowledge is gained. It explains some happenings or claims humans make or hold as belief whether gained intuitively, instinctively or experientially.

At present, psychodynamics is an evolving multi-disciplinary field which analyses and studies human thought process, response patterns, and influences. It goes deeply to unravel the varying manners and styles humans have in acquiring knowledge and in their pattern of behaviour. To give insight on this, these areas shall be considered:

- i. Understanding and anticipating the range of specific conscious and unconscious responses to specific sensory inputs, as images, colours, textures, sounds.

- ii. Utilizing the communicative nature of movement and primal psychology gestures to affect and study specific mind-body states.
- iii. Examining the capacity for the mind and serves to directly affect psychological response and biological change (psychodynamics- an introduction)

According to the free dictionary, “psychodynamics is the systematic study of personality in terms of past and present experiences in relation to motivation”.

Epistemology- Generally, “Epistemology can be defined as the theory of knowledge and justified belief. As the study of knowledge, certain questions come to mind such as what are the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge, what are its sources, what is its structure and what are its limits. As a study of justified belief, the following questions could be raised. How are we to understand the concept of justification, what makes justified beliefs justified, is justification internal or external to one’s own mind? (Inyang, 2012).

What are the Processes of Knowing for the Mind?

The mind plays four important parts in knowing, these processes, Omoregbe calls the “functions of the mind” (5). They are means in which the mind gains knowledge such as memory, cognition, volition and imagination. Memory is the retentive or storage part of the mind “it is an aspect of the power of the mind, like a complete diskette where knowledge and experience are stored up and played back (recalled) at will” (5). Any knowledge gotten by the mind, the memory enables man to remember them. Cognition is the aspect of the mind which it performs the cognitive role which is acquiring knowledge. Thinking, reasoning are all things done by cognition. Volition (or will) is the aspect of the power of the mind with which it makes decisions and choices, accepts or rejects any thing. Volition enables the mind to choose and decide actions that should be guided by the intellect which enlightens the mind in grasping knowledge which Omoregbe said the illumination of the intellect on volition brings about “harmony and peace internally” (5). He also added that the will does not follow the intellect sometimes because it is “Blinded by passions it sometimes goes against the guidance of the intellect and executes wrong actions contrary to the directions off the intellect. This results in internal disharmony which express itself as guilty conscience” (5).

Imagination is the power of the mind to picture what the mind is thinking about, like a photographic camera. It gives clear presentation of what the mind is thinking about, even if such a thing does not exist in reality. Imagination is, in other words, man's capacity to withdraw from being into non-being (what does not actually exist). Hence man's power of imagination implies man's freedom, and the power of the Human mind to recall and save events, even in the absence of such reality, accounting for the mind's retentive skill.

How Does the Mind Know?

It is often believed that we obtain knowledge through the senses and "mind" plays the all-important role of interpreting these sensations which often conclude in our attainment of basic knowledge. The mind makes references to previously obtained knowledge which enables us to interpret the world around us. Despite all these roles of the mind, some philosophers have come to deny the existence of the mind and its epistemological roles. Bahm outlines eight key functions of the mind with emphasis on their epistemological framework. These are; **i.** Observes **ii.** Inquires **iii.** Believes **iv.** Desires **v.** Intends **vi.** Organizes **vii.** Adapts **viii.** Enjoys.

In consonance with this Aristotle outlined nine categories under which things could be known namely: quality, quantity, relation, place, date, posture, possession, passion and action. This, whenever we think of an object, will think of it within these categories. For Aristotle, thinking is attributed to the mind. Our minds relate with objects by classifying them under these categories.

Kant explains that the mind has within itself twelve categories which objects confirm to. Kant agrees with Aristotle on the entity responsible for these categories-mind- he nevertheless rejects the idea that the mind confirms to the object but instead the objects confirm to these categories which form the structure of the mind.

The mind undertakes the provision of knowledge through memory. Bertrand Russell has this to say about memory: "It is obvious that we often remember what we have seen or heard or had otherwise present to our senses and such that in such cases we are still immediately aware of what we remember, in spite of the fact that it appears as past and not as present. This immediate knowledge by memory is the source of all our knowledge concerning the past without it, these

could be no knowledge of the past by inference, since we should never know that there was anything past to be inferred (26).

For Locke, the mind plays the role of an organizer and interpreter of sensation. Locke explains:

First our senses, conversant about particular sensible objects, do convey into the mind several distinct perceptions of things, according to those various ways, where those objects do affect them: And thus we come by those ideas, we have of yellow, white, heat, cold, soft, hard, bitter, sweet and all those which we call sensible qualities... secondly, the other fountain, from which experience furnish the understanding with ideas is the perception of the operations of our minds with us as it is employed about ideas it has got: which operations, when the soul comes to reflect on and consider do furnish the understanding with another set of ideas, which could not be had from things without and such are perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing and all the different acting of our minds; which we, being conscious of and observing in ourselves, do from these receive into our understanding, as distinct ideas... (489).

The mind works on ideas gotten via the aid of the senses upon which adequate results and interpretations are drawn and referred to as knowledge. The role of the mind as described by Locke, is to demonstrate the empirical position of the senses in know acquisition. It shows that the mind though necessary in understanding and interpreting perceived ideas, first of all, come in contact with these ideas through the senses. Upon interpretation of the ideas given to the mind by the sense, knowledge is gained.

Arguments for the Existence of the Mind

Considering the dualist theories, the dualist, acknowledged that “when we introspect or reflect on own thoughts, feelings and beliefs, we do not find anything much like physical objects. Beliefs may be important or trivial, feelings strong or weak, but not literally big or coloured, or heavy and so on. On the evidence of introspection alone, then we might be inclined to conclude that the mind is something quite separate from and deeply distinct from the physical world “(Clark, 162). Although dualism through the years have not been able to

completely vindicate its claims, the question of the mind's location, its functions as compared to brain functions, all these have remained unresolved.

Different from Dualism, some philosophers hold that the body cannot do anything since material things do not know that they are causing anything or how they cause a thing. They believe that the mind influences the body and vice versa. For the dualists, both body and mind in some cases soul, play their roles in every human entity. This is because the human person is a composition of matter and form (body and spirit).

The epiphenomenalists allow that the physical can cause the mental, but denies that the mental sphere can affect the physical sphere. For them, Clark opines, "the mind, on this account, is somewhat (though only somewhat) like the exhaust fumes from a car. The fumes accompany and are caused by the activity of the engine. But they do not (typically) power the car" (163). Significantly, it points to the fact that the mind has a role in knowledge process no matter how small it is. Epiphenomenalism is in some way a balance of dualism and reductive materialism. It does not completely disregard the place of the mind in knowledge process.

Arguments against the Existence of the Mind

Materialism as a theory refers to the view that only matter exist. This doctrine celebrates matter and denies the possibility of anything immaterial. Eliminative materialism as defined by Churchland "is the thesis that our common sense conception of psychological phenomena constitutes a radically false theory, a theory so fundamentally defective that both the principle and ontology of the theory will eventually be displaced, rather than smoothly reduced, by completed neuroscience (151).

Eliminative materialism is of the view those mental entities, such as consciousness and our mental vocabulary that refers to such entities, should be eliminated because they may be meaningless superfluity they are non-descriptive and/or lacking in any truth value; their value and function lie, perhaps, in prescription and certain forms of elevation. Like all forms of materialism, they are centred on three salient points namely: the uniformity of law, the exclusion of purpose and the assertion of monism.

Psycho-Activities of Knowledge

The claim of knowing something or holding that something is knowledge is a complex process. It transcends just mere seeing or thinking a thing to be and it is. As such, if there can be a knowledge claim, both mind, body, a priori and a posteriori have their roles in epistemic judgement. Avoiding the debate of which is superior to the other or which is subservient to the other, this work quickly states that all processes or schools of thoughts, have their varying methods to knowing and knowledge from any of these, if justified and authentic. The psychodynamics involved in gaining knowledge explains the purpose for which both the abstract and empirical realities are observed and rational processed to be called knowledge. It helps humans to be able to act out their rationality instead of instinctively. By this, humans ask questions, inquire and make claims to why they hold to reasons that make their believe knowledge.

Interestingly, this inquiries do not just arise rather there are influenced by his environment and his culture. They wonder why somethings do not actually work the way there appear.it clearly affirms that the mind reflects on what it receives and intrinsically begins an active role of placing each reality and ideas collected abstractly or materially according to its categories. According to Jonathan Okeke and Sunny N. Agu, this happens because; “1. Things are not usually the way they appear. 2. Truth is not found at the surface otherwise men would not constantly escape with their lives. 3. Certainty is not common otherwise men would not make mistakes every new day” (108-120). It states why the activities that bring about common sense, are uncommon activities the mind carries out in arriving at knowledge. Therefore, the role of the mind in sorting out knowledge is in the uncommon role it plays in bringing about thoughts and reflections resulting in substantive ideas and questions. It does not just allow one to accept whatever comes at face level. It supports Russell’s position that “There is no knowledge which is so certain that it cannot be put to reasonable doubt” (iv). All these necessary steps can only help us to make sure certainty is gained in knowledge.

The human mind assists our rationality to make right placement of knowledge. The mind through right reason enables man to point out that which is situational knowledge, conceptual knowledge, procedural and strategic knowledge. These varying placements ensure one to be able to identify any type of knowledge and means of gaining such type of knowledge. Ton de Jong and Monica G.M. Ferguson-Hessler identified and explain these varying placements of knowledge as follows; *Situational Knowledge* “is knowledge about situations as they typically

appear in a particular domain. Knowledge of Problem situations enables the solver to sift relevant features out of the problem statement (selective Perception) and if Necessary, to supplement information in the statement” (105-113). The mind’s role is to sift those qualities that make such knowledge. It helps man to be able to differentiate every relevant data gained to be able to contain what makes knowledge situational. *Conceptual Knowledge* deals with those things that are fixed and unique about a particular affair. The psycho-activities here make it possible for one to have added information that can help solve problems faced by humans. According to Ton de Jonag and Monica G.M., “Conceptual knowledge functions as additional information that problem solvers add to the problem and that they use to perform the solution.” This is possible because the Mind has been able to cognitively appropriate each data to its functional place. It portrays the power of common sense through uncommon exercises of the mind in knowledge placement. Conceptual Knowledge is also known as “Static knowledge about facts, concepts and Principles that apply within a certain domain” (105-113). This kind of knowledge is always about a particular thing and cannot be changed. It is a particular way to knowing and doing a particular domain. *Procedural Knowledge* “contains actions or manipulations that are valid within a domain.” Through it, one is able to manoeuvre his challenges from one level to another. This knowledge helps generate different approaches to handling problems one is faced with. Finally, *Strategic Knowledge* “helps students organize their problem solving process by directing which stages they should go through to reach a solution” (Types and Activities of Knowledge, 105-113).

Conclusion

Conclusively, the place of the mind cannot be denied despite the criticisms against it. This is because, through the senses for the empiricists, the mind receives impressions and ideas while for the rationalists, the ideas are first developed in the mind before it is expressed. Both the mind and the senses work in-tandem in developing and processing knowledge. The psychodynamics of knowledge promotes human sanity and rationality through judgmental activities it does in affirming and discarding what is and what is not. It helps in decision making and maximizes epistemic activities in gaining knowledge.

Also, the Brain stores and the mind processes data collected. In considering the process or functions of the mind in grasping knowledge, it memorizes, chooses whatever it likes at will and stores it through the power of the brain for future use. Therefore, the acquisition of knowledge devoid of the mind is near

impossible and incomplete, thereby making it ever active in knowledge acquisition generally.

Works Cited

- Bahm, J. Archie. *Epistemology, Theory of Knowledge*. Oxford Albuquerque: world Books. 1995. Print.
- Bowlby John *Attachment and Loss*: Vol 1, 2nd edition. Basic Books, PP 13-23.
- Churchland, Paul. "Behaviourism, Materialism and Functionalism. Joel Feinberg and Russ Shafer-Landau (eds) In Reason and Responsibility. Belmont: Wadsworth Group. 2002. Print.
- Clark, Andy. *Mindware; An Introduction to the Philosophy of Cognitive Science*. Oxford University Press. 2001. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund, *The Ego and the Id*. W.W. Norton & Company. PP (4-5) 1923.
- Inyang, John. Lecture Note on Epistemology, University Calabar. 2012. Print.
- Jonathan C. Okeke and Sunny N. Agu. "Triangular Epistemology: In Defence of Positive Scepticism In *Journal of Integrative Humanism-Ghana*. Vol 2.1. 2012, 108-120.
- Locke, John. "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding". In *The Philosophy of Mind*. Editors, Brian Berkley and Peter Ludlow New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India. 2007. Print.
- Omeregbe, Joseph. *Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge) A Systematic and Historical Study*, Joja Publishers Lagos. 2009. Print.
- Psychodynamics an Introduction (online Encyclopaedia of Philosophy). Retrieved 12th October, 2009.
- Russell, Bertrand. *The Problem of Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1998. Print.
- The Free Dictionary.com*.
- Ton de Jong and Monica G.M. Ferguson-Hessler. "Types and Qualities of Knowledge." In *Educational Psychologist*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc, 1996. 31(2), 105-113.
- What is Psychodynamics? Web MD, Stedman's Medical Dictionary 28th Edition. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins. 2006 Print.