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SIMILARITY

From Epistemology Naturalized to Topological Ontology

*Abstract*

Contemporary epistemology is founded on Descartes' theoretical framework that provides for the reduction of the problem of knowledge to objectifying logical characteristics. The conception of similarity in Quine is continuous with such a formulation. First of all, he tries to provide a logical-mathematical solution to the similarity problem, but, after some efforts, he finds it cannot work because of a radical ambiguity of the concept of similarity itself.

Then he moves to a psycho-biological ground and faces a sort of "naturalistic deduction" of the a priori standard of similarity connected with the problem of induction. Nevertheless Quine's solution suffers of insufficient awareness about the theoretical and metaphysical presuppositions adopted in such a process of justification. Those presuppositions, if analyzed in depth, are scarcely consistent. The only element that keeps Quine's theory together is the presupposition of a fundamental reduction of all questions to a logical and objective ground, that is typical of the "epistemological view of knowledge". This element allows to eradicate any aspect of ambiguity and polysemy from a concept such as similarity. Such an attitude directly derives from Descartes' distinction between Subject and Object.

We try to question the objectifying framework through an ontological analysis derived from Heidegger's. We start from the conviction that knowledge is a phenomenon of *Dasein*. The phenomenon of knowledge is well-known to be complex: in it we can find not only gnoseological but also ethical, aesthetical and, in a wider sense, existential aspects. This involves that conceptual ambiguity is not only *essential* but very fruitful of meaning too.

Heidegger analyzes the problem of spatiality in *Being and Time*. He underlines that Descartes' view of spatiality sterilizes such a concept, reducing it to mere metric extensionality. In contrast to this interpretation, Heidegger thinks spatiality as the essence of *Umwelt* (environment) and connected to the phenomenon of Being-in-the-World. Entities manifest themselves to us in our dealings (*Umgang*) within the environment.

Being-in-the-World primarily means to be in relation to a complex of "read-to-hands" (*Zuhandenes*) not of "things" (*Vorhandenes*). Although this primary relation isn't a contemplative one, it is not "blind": it happens through a pre-theoretical exploration of the complex of read-to-hands that Heidegger calls *Umsicht* (circumspection). *Umsicht* is mainly topological-existential not metrical-objective. Gnoseological and ethical characteristics of things will be derived secondarily from this existential orientation. Similarity can now be interpreted as a phenomenon connected to *Umsicht*.