

# KNOWLEDGE, CONSCIOUSNESS AND AMBIGUITY

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**Résumé :** *Dans cette étude, nous présentons une perspective théologique et philosophique sur les relations entre conscience, connaissance et ambiguïté. Normalement nous explorons la connaissance et la définissons avec les méthodes et les langages historiquement construits par la philosophie et, plus récemment, par la psychologie cognitive. D'un point de vue philosophique et psychologique, nous parlons donc de connaissance empirique et de connaissance rationnelle. L'homme d'aujourd'hui, notamment la culture académique, intègre difficilement ou contourne délibérément la pensée théologique et la pensée mystique, la pensée des traditions chrétienne et juive, qui nous conduisent à la connaissance révélée. Après avoir défini la conscience, à travers la pensée de Saint Paul en particulier, nous essayons de montrer la puissance de l'amour, la valeur de la connaissance révélée et comment elle change la conscience humaine précaire et l'homme intérieur.*

**Mots-clés :** *conscience, connaissance, ambiguïté, homme intérieur.*

*A perspective on the relations between consciousness, knowledge and ambiguity.* As a rule, we explore knowledge and define it with the methods and languages historically constructed by philosophy and, more recently, by cognitive psychology. From a philosophical and psychological perspective, we are therefore talking about *empirical* knowledge and *rational* knowledge. Today's culture, especially academia, integrates with difficulty or deliberately bypasses theological thinking and mystical thinking, the thinking of the Christian and Jewish traditions, which lead us to *revealed knowledge*.

Consciousness testifies about the awake self and its state of wakefulness. Having the power to reflect on knowledge, only consciousness can (or not) recognize the presence of ambiguity in its territory. However, the ability of personal consciousness to evaluate ambiguity depends on the way in which it assumes knowledge. A personal consciousness that works only with the idea of empirical knowledge and rational knowledge will evaluate with difficulty or will not even know how to recognize the ambiguity in the spiritual and moral plane, where it actually has its origin.

The personal consciousness that assumes revealed knowledge will put reason and experience in light of it and will work very differently with the presence/absence of

ambiguity in any type of discourse. Consciousness plays a crucial role in identifying and managing ambiguity, because only it can reflect on how knowledge is born, on how knowledge is interpreted and used. Also, only the personal conscience can decide whether the knowledge it possesses is true or not. Only consciousness can decrease or increase, through its choices, the presence of ambiguity in assumed knowledge.

Therefore, knowledge is generated, assumed and used primarily by human consciousness. But, consciousness can put knowledge under the sign of ambiguity, confusion and uncertainty. Or it can bring knowledge closer to the truth, to the point of identification with it. Both attitudes express their content in the language used by *personal consciousness*. Language bears witness every time to the presence or absence in human consciousness of the feeling of knowledge. And ambiguity can be the measure of appreciation of the state of consciousness, in relation to its distance or proximity to the truth. But *discursive ambiguity* is an effect, not a cause. The question is, therefore, through what is born the *closeness* of personal consciousness to the truth and, on the other hand, where does its *alienation* from true knowledge come from. If we clarify the cause, we will understand much better the dynamics of its effect.

From the alienation from true knowledge comes ambiguity with all its signs, carried by language just as the feeling of knowing the truth generates clairvoyance in language. The word *ambiguity* comes, in modern languages, from the Latin *ambiguus*, which is composed of two other words. Thus, *ambi*, meaning *both/both*, is associated with the verb *agere*, which means *to lead*. Therefore, ambiguity is a state, a paradoxical choice of consciousness, which leads us simultaneously to two opposite meanings of a phenomenon or to several different meanings, irreconcilable on a rational level. Ambiguity equalizes oppositions, abolishes the moral content of the differences between the choices of personal conscience, puts together black and white, connects incompatible meanings.

A consciousness thus ends up transferring ambiguity into language when it is no longer based on comparative thinking and dissociative thinking, but on a diffuse, protoplasmic thinking. Comparative thinking dissociates frontally between *yes* and *no*, between similarity and difference, between presence and absence. That is why, from a moral perspective, a consciousness that leads to ambiguity in language does not know and/or does not want to separate *good* from *evil*, but puts them together, in a protoplasm that tends towards *a-morality*, through poor interpretations or weak judgments, in the postmodern discourse. It does not choose between good and evil, but wants to manifest and assume both. The paradoxical moral content of the ambiguity is the sign of the confusion and uncertainty under which the personal consciousness manifests it lies. But the moral paradox of ambiguity shows that it is not part of the deep nature of human consciousness, that it is not beneficial to consciousness and that assuming it cancels the access to the knowledge of the truth.

Discursive ambiguity is, therefore, first a moral ambiguity. It originates in the precarious nature of personal consciousness. The precariousness of consciousness comes from its weak power of knowledge. Personal consciousness does not know and cannot overcome its own precariousness by itself. In order to approach the truth, the personal consciousness needs to put itself under the cover and to be in touch with the source of truth. And that is her own Creator. Moral ambiguity is then overcome, and discursive ambiguity loses its power to control language and orient its content.

*Conscience.* For thousands of years, the problem of consciousness has always been in the attention of philosophers, the Holy Fathers, then artists, writers and simple people who reflected on their own person. The problem of conscience is a fundamental one, both for the layman and for the man who knows God. The source of human consciousness starts from where man came to life. The way consciousness is present in our life shows, in fact, how much we access this source. He is like the well, which, the more it is used, has more and sweeter water than the abandoned well, which ends up drying up. The man who does not use his conscience as often as possible buries it. He gives himself a *willow* consciousness - lifeless.

We can ask ourselves: *what, in fact, is consciousness?* In understanding consciousness, we start from several hypotheses built up over time, which help us a little in understanding its ultimate nature. But how is consciousness born, who created it? Where does it spring from, and more than that, what is its connection with the *inner self (inner man)*? Between the personal consciousness and the inner self there is an interconnection and an interdependence impossible to annul, without the inner self and the consciousness representing one and the same thing. Consciousness is the one that can explore the authenticity of the inner self. She can become aware through verbalization of the hidden and less accessible part of the inner self. On the other hand, the knowledge of the inner self and his evolution largely depends on the nature and positioning of the consciousness that discovers him. The inner self and the person's consciousness feed and influence each other, grow and mature together. A revealed consciousness will work differently with his inner self than a rational-empirical consciousness. Consciousness can, for example, stimulate or discourage, even resolve, the ambiguity (moral and not only) transmitted by his inner self. The knowledge available to the person depends on the way the connection between his own consciousness and his inner self works.

In order to reach the understanding of consciousness, we should summarize a path of knowledge traveled by man, a mission difficult to achieve. Consciousness itself has its own metamorphosis. Since Adam was created until today, consciousness has known different forms. If we start from the consciousness of the first people, we may notice a lack of it. If Adam or Eve had a working conscience, would they end up tasting the tree of knowledge, although forbidden by God? Their consciousness is missing then. Why? Did they have no remorse or did they not know what conscience means? Or was their consciousness different? Not! Adamic consciousness was present. That is why the first state of consciousness of Adam and Eve was that of shame. We could say that then consciousness is born.

But the consciousness of the first people was different from that of today. Culture, environment, history make the difference. If in the past man was limited, in terms of technological civilization, but, perhaps, internally evolved, today man seems robotic, over-informed, bombarded by technology, social networks. It would be said that this new man can quickly get to know different cultures, civilizations, through a previously unimaginable access to information. Consciousness is also differentiated by the person's culture, which can generate either a superficial consciousness or a deeper consciousness. Strong moral principles, however, allow man to venture into any literature. That man will always use any word, to awaken his conscience more.

Man is created by God aware and with conscience. The text of Scripture says that man is created in the image and likeness of God:

“Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (*The Bible*, Genesis: 1-26, 27)

If we have the face, we must acquire the likeness through the work of consciousness. That is why consciousness exists in man, only that it acts according to how we, as conscious beings, let it work. The choice of the person triggers the work of conscience. If man allows himself to be carried away by the primary animal state, the inner work is blocked.

Conscience cannot be detached from truth. It is linked to a morality inherent to all people, who cannot be separated from the Truth, from creation. A consciousness devoid of truth is a non-existent, dead consciousness. If man can lie to himself, but conscience cannot! Conscience is, thus, the inner voice or, we could say, it is “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” (*Bible*, John, 1-23: 1557). John the Baptist is the one who speaks the truth and announces Christ, the embodiment of Truth.

400 years before John the Baptist, the Greek Socrates, the one for whom “only God is wise” (Plato, 1997: 111), calls it “his daimónion guide”. About the way in which Socrates manifests his consciousness and his connection with God, Xenophon says:

“...Socrates spoke, as he thought, namely that a daimónion guides his steps. And to many who accompanied him, he showed them what to do and what not to do, as he commanded the daimónion... The fact is that one could not think that Socrates wanted to appear to those around him that he was mad or boastful; and such a thing would have happened if the things shown by the Divinity had proved untrue. It is therefore clear that he would not have supported these, if he was not convinced that he was telling the truth.” (Xenophon, 1987: 1-2)

Regardless of what we call it, consciousness remains the inner path that gives man knowledge of all types of reality. We could give conscience the name *John*, because Saint John the Baptist is the only one that has the courage to tell man where he is wrong, but also what is the right way. Conscience is also the book of human life, the memory of a person’s deeds, thoughts and words.

Schools of psychology define consciousness as a cognitive process that causes emotions and rational associations, based on an individual’s moral philosophy or value system. From my point of view, consciousness is not what causes emotions, but emotions are what awaken consciousness, because we are beings created with emotions. The main emotion is *love*. It tilts the scales of each person’s conscience. How? It is love that transforms the inner self. Through the particular content of love, consciousness works on itself. It reveals his choices, his moral energy, his proximity or distance from the other, who becomes the stranger or the neighbor. If love can be blind, the consciousness nourished by love is the light of the eyes, which nourishes balance in man. From this whole process, the memory and history of each personal consciousness is born, which is the territory of each person’s knowledge.

The own way of assuming consciousness gives meaning to personal knowledge and generates moral ambiguity or not. A working conscience is one that dedicates itself and recognizes itself in the love of God and in the love of neighbor. There, comparative-

dissociative thinking will always act through rules, which diminish, subordinate or cancel any form of moral ambiguity. Through an ever-living ethical imagination, a *working consciousness* gives birth and nurtures, at the same time, the knowledge of Divinity and otherness. At the opposite pole, a *selfish consciousness* focuses on self-love. Moral ambiguity, translated into discursive ambiguity, is, naturally, proper to the conscience that serves the personal self, because it needs the relaxation until the disappearance of moral rules.

*Knowledge, at Saint Paul.* In the First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 13, St. Paul talks about the indissoluble link between love and knowledge. He says:

„But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” (*Bible*, 1 Corinthians, 13: 8-12)

To be able to truly understand these verses, we must look above, in chapter 13 of the Epistle, where the Holy Apostle Paul speaks to us about love:

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” (*Bible*, 1 Corinthians, 13: 1-8)

Paul shows the power of love and that it is the one that helps and directs man to knowledge. Beyond simple love, there is a union of love with the Holy Spirit. This is the love that makes man reach a full knowledge, a knowledge both inner and one through revelation. Love makes a person know because the feeling intervenes, the leaning towards the depth of things. Man can begin to know love by himself, but not in its true and ultimate nature. The story of the inner transformation of Saul, who becomes Paul at the moment of his meeting with God, synthesizes love and its power to generate a change of consciousness and the acquisition of a new inner identity. The meeting with God awakens in Saul the love for knowing Christ. The moment of union with the Holy Spirit perfects man, leads him to full knowledge. On a direct level, Paul sees love in its relationship with other qualities, but indirectly reflects it through the role it plays in the human heart or in society.

*Love and knowledge.* If we go back to ancient Greek, we discover there well differentiated in language states of love that man can know. By *éros* we define, thus, sensuality, passion, the purely physical expression of love. *Philia* (*philia*) calls the relationship of friendship, friendly, brotherly love, devoid of the passion of *éros*. And *agape* is *love that leads to revelation* or even *revealed love*, based on will and choice, which involves dedication to

the other, sacrifice, self-denial. Thus, *agape* is the best name for the love that unites with the Holy Spirit, Man thus chooses through his free will the sacrifice of perfect love in order to know the other better. And the knowledge of the other through sacrifice leads to the knowledge of God by faith: “For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.”

Faith is helped by love. Man, in order to know God, must love Him. And in order to love Him, they must know Him. So love is necessary for knowledge. *Agape* and the knowledge it produces bring man closer to perfection. Thus we speak of the knowledge revealed through love. But, Saint Paul shows, man’s relationship with God is not complete now. Man is known by God. But man will know God perfectly in the life after death, in the kingdom of heaven:

“...Knowledge is conceited, but love builds. If it seems to someone that he knows something, he has not yet known how he should know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.” (*Bible*, 1 Corinthians, 1-3)

Paul directly explains the source of the precariousness of personal conscience. Overcoming knowledge “in part”, “through a mirror...” and receiving full knowledge is possible only through the revelation of the truth in the *face-to-face* meeting between man and God. Personal consciousness thus discovers through revelation the presence of the inner Master, Christ, as Augustine shows in *De Magistro*. He can only acquire that knowledge “in part”:

“However, when we refer to what we perceive with the mind, that is, through intellect and reason, we are talking about the realities present in us, which we glimpse through the mediation of that inner light of truth, which is enjoyed and through which the same on which we call the inner man. All this leads us to the conclusion that, when he himself, through that mysterious and naive look, realizes the truth, my interlocutor understands what I say thanks to his own contemplation and not thanks to my words. Therefore, I do not teach, by stating a truth, someone who intuits this truth on his own.” (Augustin 40, 1995: 14)

*Precarious consciousness.* Personal conscience can only be a precarious conscience. She has access only to knowledge “in part”, through revelation. But, if the personal conscience chooses to be without the Holy Spirit, so without love (*agape*), without selflessness, the precariousness of the conscience will be complete. The man remains alone. The memory, thinking and personal history of man are, in this way, marked by alienation from the truth. The conscience becomes little or not at all aware of the truth about the other, about itself and about God. This precarious *non-awake* consciousness, while based on experience and reason, produces languages that obscure meanings, multiply interpretations, pluralize the message. This type of personal consciousness is, in the terms of postmodern philosophy (Vattimo: 1998), a *weak consciousness* whose languages are marked by a dominant ambiguity. That is why, in a moral sense, the non-awake conscience hardly separates good from evil or leads man to the moral paradox of ambiguity, where good and evil are equalized.

By opposition, knowledge through union with the Holy Spirit, nourished by love (*agape*), by selflessness, gives birth in man to a precarious awake consciousness “in part”, in its historical dimension of time and of the being. This is the *revealed consciousness*. True knowledge, the acquisition of fully knowing consciousness, the overcoming of precarity is possible only in the *face-to-face* meeting between man and God. The revealed precarious

consciousness, knowing “in part”, creates languages where the truth that comes through revelation frees discourse from ambiguity, clarifies meanings and unites messages. The revealed precarious consciousness cancels the moral paradox of ambiguity.

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