DO UNCONSCIOUS BELIEFS YIELD KNOWLEDGE?

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1. Introduction

Epistemology has now been for long widening the gap that separates it from the experimental sciences. I specifically mean sciences such as cognitive neuropsychology and cognitive science, which share their object, cognition, or knowledge, with epistemology. The method by means of which it has been doing so is a negative one par excellence, and one guaranteed to give one the results sought for. I am referring to ignorance, deliberate or accidental, in that epistemology has consistently ignored for many decades important results concerning perception and cognition obtained in these experimental fields. This cannot be due solely to a dislike of experimentation, because epistemologists often resort to it, if only of the purely fictional kind (mental experiments); it thus remains that it must be because their approach targets processes of perception and cognition that are different in some way from those empirically approachable, which does not seem to be the case.

While psychology has, in the last decades, been forced to reconsider many of its basic presuppositions in light of findings issuing from experimental research on cognition, epistemology has stuck to a petrified analysis that wholly disregards the actual conditions of formation and acquisition of knowledge. Of major import has been the work carried out both in perception dysfunctions and by experimentation on learning showing that knowledge is not entirely equatable with consciousness, i.e. one may have knowledge without for that being aware of that possession. We are now at a point when psychology frequently and unproblematically speaks of ‘unconscious knowledge,’ thus frontally opposing epistemology, in whose vocabulary this is a contradiction in terms: the tripartite analysis of knowledge requires (implicitly, if not explicitly) that subjects be