

# Dogmatic evidence of “the given”

## Abstract:

This paper addresses the epistemological problem of the myth of “the given” from an evidentialist and pragmatic perspective concerning the attribution of knowledge: if the evidence supporting  $p$  may be based on «the given» for  $S$ , how can “the given” be considered the basis of the evidence if it is a myth? The principal objective is to introduce a pragmatic solution to the above question. The main thesis is that there is a dogmatic relationship between the evidence necessary for the legitimacy of our attribution of knowledge and «the given»; however, this dogma does not suggest that these attributions are irrational.

## Keywords:

myth of «the given» - evidence - pragmatic dogmatism - attributions of knowledge

## 1. Introduction

Ever since Sellars (1956/1997) proposed that inferential relationships are always between sentences with propositional forms, the consideration that “the given” must be the starting point of epistemological reflection has become problematic. This consideration was especially based on two assumptions. The first consisted of thinking that knowledge is like a building; it has a structure composed of many parts, each supported by another and all sustained by a common base that acts as a foundation. The second assumption considered that said foundation was simply apprehended by subjects without any intellectual effort; that is to say, that it was evident in and of itself. Such apprehensions have been called different names – for example: “sensations”; “impressions”; “appearances”; “sensibility”; “sensa”; “qualia”; “phenomenon”, depending on the metaphysical or epistemological trait that the authors wished to emphasize- but all of these denominations have been grouped under the single name, “the given”<sup>1</sup>.

Generally, the very expression “the given” seems to indicate a group of objects, or characteristics, that contrast in the point of view of the subject that conceives them. However, this

---

<sup>1</sup> It could even be suggested that “the given” is that which we receive through some type of contact, thus recurring to the Russellian notion of *knowledge by acquaintance*, understanding as well that one is also in contact with concepts and relations.

does not mean that it is always conceived as something passively received, as there are times when this does not only include the mere reception of data by the senses, but also an activity on behalf of the subject –be it through memory, imagination, or, according to Hume, through impressions of sensation or reflection. The focus that there is an activity on behalf of the subject that, in some way, constructs “the given”, does not necessarily enter in elemental assumptions and can often be understood, according to Chisholm (1964), as a phenomenological version of the doctrine of “the given”.

The problem of the doctrine of “the given” is centered, beginning with Sellars, on that the category of facticity is completely different from that of the space of reasons. Due to this, the doctrine sustains itself in a myth: non-doxastic experiential states do not confer justifications that constitute basic beliefs. Or, said in a non-reductionist way: the “given” cannot be reduced to the logical space of giving and receiving reasons. One habitual strategy to answer this problem is to unfold a coherentist epistemology that results convincing (e.g., BonJour, 1985)<sup>2</sup>. Other habitual answers consist in: (a) specifying how the concepts which form “the given” find themselves organized (e.g., McDowell, 1996; Brewer, 1999; Tang, 2010); (b) recurring to some inferentialist variant of a neo-Hegelian vein (e.g., Brandom, 1998; 2009); and (c) sustaining that there is one legitimate form of judgment, by means of the comprehension of the properties that are given to intuition; properties that do not presuppose learning, the formation of concepts or even the use of symbols, and that can serve as a base for empirical knowledge (e.g., Vinci, 1998). And finally, d) there are those who sustain that the myth of “the given” is itself a myth; that is to say that it is objectionable for being an empty concept in relation with our perceptions (e.g., Alston, 2002; Bonevac, 2002).

In addition to all these cases, that the doctrine of “the given” be converted into an epistemic myth becomes a problem for those who consider that evidence is the basis of justification; if “the given” comes to be a myth, with what criterion can we claim that certain evidence legitimizes attributions of knowledge? The principle objective of this paper consists in answering the previous question, converting “the given” in dogma that connects experiences with the evidential basis for the attribution of knowledge; dogma that consists in a criterion with which we cooperate jointly in order to continue with our attributions of knowledge, in such a way that with “the given” an end is put to the infinite regression in the chain of reasons, as all attributions

---

<sup>2</sup> See: Lyons (2008) who attempts to argue an externalist thesis.

of knowledge cannot be inferred from other attributions without there being something that functions as evidence which legitimizes these attributions.

## **2. Evidentialism in the myth of the given**

According to Conee and Feldman (2004), the evidentialist thesis sustains that *S* is justified in believing that *p* if *S* possesses evidence *E* that sufficiently supports his doxastic state that *p* is the case. Perhaps one of the more relevant commitments of this position consists in the requirement of sufficient proof in order for one to be capable of attributing knowledge in a legitimate way. Therefore, if *S*'s evidence makes it improbable that *p* be known, then *S* cannot legitimately attribute knowledge of *p*. Expressed in this way, the evidentialist thesis involves a certain internalist commitment, because the legitimacy of the attributions of knowledge will depend, ultimately, on internal factors –on the perspective of the subject upon considering that *E* behaves as evidence.

If one commits too much to internalism, then it becomes complicated to explain how, upon attributing knowledge, there are behaviors that are described as self-deceiving or incoherent, and can at the same time be rational in a practical sense. This happens because evidentialism's internalist commitment includes at least two basic problems: (1) it seems to be distant from practical interests, from pragmatic considerations and intrusions<sup>3</sup>. For example, suppose that *S* finds himself in the airport with just enough time to board his plane and does not know which boarding gate is his, so he asks another passenger if he knows where the gate is, and the other passenger responds, "I think in gate nine". This passenger's belief can function as evidence if *S* goes running to gate nine and he is in gate two; but if the other passenger tells him, "I think in gate twenty of the other terminal," (imagine that this takes place in JFK Airport), then the expression, "I think," does not seem sufficient in order to realize a status of evidence. In this way, for *E* –in this case a testimony– to be evidence that justifies a belief, it must satisfy both pragmatic conditions and the practical interests that regulate epistemic standards; that is to say, the different pragmatic circumstances establish differences in the assessment of the attributions of knowledge<sup>4</sup>. (2) Interpreted radically in an internalist way, evidentialism leaves aside the epistemic commitment with deliberation concerning the facticity of the attributions of knowledge.

---

<sup>3</sup> A similar critique to what we find in Ganson (2008).

<sup>4</sup> In this way, Cohen (1988, 1999) has presented a contextualist version of evidentialism, in which the proofs that constitute evidence for a justified belief will fluctuate in accordance with standards that are determined conversationally, regulating the attributions of justification and of knowledge.

As Shah (2006) indicates, the deliberation of questions concerning whether or not to believe “that  $p$ ”, inevitably leads to the question of the facticity concerning “if  $p$ ”, because the answer to this last question implies the will to determine the answer to the first. In order for the facticity of  $p$  to also constitute strong evidence concerning “if  $p$ ”, it must be connected by deliberation: the considerations that do not cause any type of evidence cannot influence the attributions of knowledge. In this sense, the attributions of knowledge –giving and receiving reasons and deliberating over them- need evidence with respect to the facticity of the object to which said attributions refer, and therefore internalism does not seem sufficient.

The structure of legitimacy of the attributions of knowledge beginning with the evidentialist thesis can be rephrased in the following way:

$S$  affirms that he knows that  $p$  iff  $S$  does not have good reasons to sustain that  $p$ , but:

- (1)  $S$  believes in  $p$ ;
- (2)  $P$  is considered true;
- (3)  $S$ 's belief “that  $p$ ” is supported by a *given* evidence  $E$ , which is empirically sufficient for the truth of  $p$ .

Perhaps it could be affirmed that condition (2) results superfluous, since the fact that  $p$  is considered true will not add anything important to (1) and (3), as one could always be in possession of a truth that passes unperceived or for which one has no sufficient evidence to sustain. In addition, (3) alludes to the idea that there is at least one place where non-inferential knowledge of “the given” works very well as evidence: in the simple judgments of perception. With respect to the good work of “the given”, three elemental positions emerge. First, it can be considered that the non-inferential attributions of knowledge are legitimate only if they refer to the security of states of mind, these states being representations in the internal theatre of the mind, without any type of extensive correlation (to use Cartesian terminology). Second, it can be considered that non-inferential knowledge is legitimately attributed to very complex, reliable processes that are assimilated directly via the senses. Third, it can be considered that the legitimacy of attributions of non-inferential knowledge is of a dogmatic character, only applied towards practical ends. The landscape is found open to the crossroads concerning the immediateness of cognitive capacities. What these three positions have in common lies in questioning the circumstances and shades that we accept (3) upon running into the myth of the given. In consequence, beginning from (3), it becomes plausible to move the epistemic commitment with “the given” towards the planting of a type of externalist epistemic

evidentialism, whose objective would be to connect the evidence, the myth of the given, and the cooperation between subjects that attribute knowledge. The epistemological challenge that is presented consists in relating evidentialism with the doctrine of the given that has turned into myth in order to legitimize –even in a dogmatic way- our attributions of knowledge.

If one were to continue looking into externalist evidentialism –which considers the attributions of knowledge as products of the relation between subjects and facticity– yet still intended to avoid the myth of the given, then he would find himself with a problem of epistemic circularity. The constitution of a reliable base for the processes which form facticity requires evidence that serves as a warrant so that a doxastic state reaches the status of knowledge; but the evidence itself also requires a reliable base in order to constitute itself as that which it is: evidence<sup>5</sup>.

One exit out of the problem of circularity consists in recuperating the internalist point of view, in which evidence pertains to the internal states of the subject, where facticity no longer occupies the role of the protagonist. In this way, the evidence necessary for *S* to attribute the knowledge that *p* is only part of the experience of *S*, as it is undoubtedly he who can control his beliefs and it is he, ultimately, who has the last word. Notwithstanding, this posture seems to crash directly with the fact that our beliefs are always voluntary, that is to say that perhaps if we are given something in exchange, something that we really want or are interested in, to believe that *p*, then we could believe that *p*. But this is something that is extensively questioned. For example, following Foley (1993), if someone were to offer us a million dollars to believe that the earth is flat, although we would be greatly interested in obtaining that quantity of money, we could not do it.

Voluntarism in relation to doxastic states seems unsustainable; nobody can happily change their beliefs in pursuit of practical interests. Notwithstanding, it is in the possibility of each subject to search for and investigate the ideas that can influence him. Thus, *S*'s attributions of knowledge concerning *p* can imply evidence that is also empirically sufficient to affirm with truth that *S* sustains that *p* in the case that one deliberates about this, but not to affirm the truth of *p*; rather they introduce themselves in the belief of another statement.

Shelving the problems of circularity and of doxastic voluntarism, point (3) implies a difference between deliberations in the context of the evidence presented, the place of these deliberations in discussion with oneself and with other subjects, and the unquestioned evidence

---

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Alston (1986)

already accepted by one and other subjects. From this elemental difference two consequences arise. The first is that the myth of the given is restricted to the factual constitution of evidence concerning the truth, leaving aside the deliberation concerning what one sustains as true. The second is that evidence not only refers to the causal processes produced by doxastic states, but also to what is simply constituted as a deliberation in the logical space of giving and receiving reasons.

It does not seem necessary that in order to legitimately attribute knowledge there must be a causal connection between the content of the attribution and its facticity, as the question is not if there is evidential connection between reliable processes and doxastic states, but rather if the attribution of knowledge can resist reflexive scrutiny. Of course, upon deliberating the offering of evidences, one intends –if he behaves honestly– that said evidences come from a reliable process, as the reliability of the process gives place to the attributions of knowledge being acceptable or recognized as such. Note that we are not alluding to the process itself, but rather to the fact that it is reliable and as such that it implicitly carries intersubjective recognition. Setting aside the discussion concerning the information received in order to identify it as evidence, it is worth noting that the attribution of knowledge of “that p” does not merely respond to an individual state regarding one content or another, but rather to the determination and identification of that state being as such supported in the confidence exercised by other subjects of deliberation and transmitted through an epistemic community.

It is always possible to find a true proposition that fails before a justification, just as it is possible to find a justification that fails before a true proposition. As Stroud (1984) sustained, one thinks that objects have certain characteristics without having to think of all the other characteristics that it has, or that it could or must have. If we had to think of everything that is true with respect to a determined object in order to think of anything true about it, it would be completely impossible to think of the object. In the same way, in the space of reasons’ deliberation, evidences do not put an end to all the possibilities of discussion. In this sense, it can be said that the content of evidence is propositional, as it functions like one more reason in the game of deliberation.

If the axis of what we assess as empirically sufficient results from the confidence that we place in its functioning as evidence, then the same notion of “empirically sufficient” will occupy a prominent space in the deliberative game. Notwithstanding, said notion must be supported in the given, even if the given is not what assesses or is assessed. Take as an example the relation

between a thermometer, the temperature of someone with a fever, and throat pain. A doctor does not question the reliability of the thermometer in measuring the body's temperature or the reliability of the statement "my throat hurts". Rather, he elaborates a diagnosis beginning with these unquestionable data, since he would not be able to do so by any other way. This procedure does not make the reliability evident, but rather makes the reliability constitute the base of evidence. The evidence is the temperature that the thermometer marks and the statement of throat pain, not the thermometer itself, nor the pain itself, nor the reliability itself. This happens because what is empirically sufficient begins with the confidence in what the thermometer and subject express. Thus, the legitimacy of the attributions of knowledge depends as much on the statements that evoke experiences of reliable processes, as on the subject and object themselves; in the same way that in certain contexts the evidence for a statement depends on the acceptance of the statement itself and on the fact that its adaptation to the given be acceptable for epistemic subjects. The statements we trust in every day have a foundation as much as in themselves, as in the subject of attribution and in the fact that they function via epistemic, social cooperation. Therefore, the last statement in a chain of reasoning will be *a priori*, that is to say its justification will not be based on its experience as an object, but rather in the confidence placed in it from a dogmatic but acceptable fitting of the given.

The evidence of the statement depends on the trust deposited in the statement itself. It does not depend on any correspondence with reality or trust in dealing with a given object. As in the case of the thermometer, the evidence depends on statements about the object and not on the experiences had of it. To trust a statement is to trust in its use, not in the goal of its use but rather the use itself, though it may have a determined goal. In this sense, evidence and trust go hand in hand, as they permit different associations. The association between propositions is a capital point of any cognitive system. Each proposition contributes to the linguistic exchange beginning from a common base or shared criterion. However, the associations are limited. It is possible to associate a statement with a representation or possible state of things, but it is not possible to associate any statement with any representation, nor any statement with any other; this is a limit in order to establish associations in any system that seeks to be coherent. Although these limits are imposed by the norms which make a system coherent, the trust in a final association also imposes its own limit, as it uses the deliberation for attributing knowledge via available evidence as its axis, omitting certain fundamental assumptions. Although the statement will say something about the world -as it is not independent of the world- it does not use

experience or perception or, more generally, the given, as an object of foundation, because the evidence that it holds uses the given as a base. In this sense, the given is placed as the limit of the space of reasons.

### **3. The dogmatic relationship between evidence and the given**

Prima facie, evidentialism hits one important target: that of being able to give a foundation to attributions of knowledge, by means of simple explanations. This indicates that the attributions formed beginning with evidences can be considered knowledge, even if they are not justified by the given. Thus, attributions of knowledge must play down classes of reference, without necessarily being understood as a characteristic class of inference. Of course, there always exists the danger of an excessive overstatement in this type of evidentialism that consists in disregarding, completely, the deliberation that appeals to the given as part of the space of reasons. An asymmetry, then, will arise between epistemic norms and practical reasons. Notwithstanding, both are found to be related with the social functions of cooperation between epistemic subjects in order to reach practical ends via deliberation, since the diverse implicit commitments in human discourse are also of a social nature (see: Brandom, 1998; Chrisman, 2008).

Where there is most epistemic cooperation is in the nominalization of perceptions and in the transmission of internal states and, greatly and for being more complicated to agree on, in value judgments. However, in many cases, especially in those which are presented as testimonies and as conceptual references, the cooperation between epistemic subjects can be simplified in such a way that there is not too much inquiry, constituting the basic non-inferential knowledge that many times turns out to be dogmatic. In this way, a relation is woven between cooperation and judgments concerning the given, via the dogmatic character of many of the attributions of knowledge. Suppose that *S* has his hand raised, in which case it could be said that he knows this non-inferentially, not only because he believes so and nobody questions his belief in that context, but also because this belief is empirically sufficient to affirm the truth that he has his hand raised. However, this non-inferential knowledge serves only for a particular situation: in this case, that of having his hand raised. The expression, “empirically sufficient” corresponds only to an individual situation. If, however, the deliberation were to follow a course that included the reliability of a source of knowledge such as perception, then a final point would be placed on the chain of reasons with the idea that the attribution of knowledge is empirically sufficient. In consequence,



the attribution of knowledge must be such that, in a particular situation, it is empirically sufficient so that those who deliberate will conceive it as true.

The inconvenience in cases where the given is presented as a condition for being empirically sufficient, is that those who deliberate would have to discover the empirical connection between the evidence, the attribution of knowledge, and the truth of  $p$ . Notwithstanding, this seems to be an excessively intellectual job, since, how can we consider that there exists such a connection if it is not through inferences? What's more, in such a case, how can we establish a correspondence between certain states of things conceived as true and certain states that are merely attributed?

The answers to these questions are not only of a descriptive order, but also a normative one. And they consist in recognizing, in determined contexts, that there exists a dogmatic relationship between evidences and the given. That the connection is dogmatic means that it is thoughtless, that is to say that an attribution of knowledge is simply accepted without thinking about it, and though it is not irrational it is not inferential. Many times what we have in mind are simple statements that only tacitly imply the form "to know that  $p$ ". Such cases are the statements that surround perceptual experiences such as evidences beginning with the given. When  $S$  says, "Here comes the train," he is suggesting tacitly that he knows that the train is coming ("I know that the train is coming"). In this sense,  $S$ 's affirmation is sustained beginning with a sort of act of trust, as it does not pass by any thoughtful examination.

However, it is not legitimate to apply any dogma; dogmatic attitude ends with evidence and the given, and cannot be unconditional, since in being so we could attribute knowledge to any state and, due to inflation, in doing so the very notion of legitimacy would be lost. But this does not mean that one must revise his attributions over and over again; a dogmatic attribution can legitimize knowledge and at the same time confront what is our own fallibility.

One response to this question is that the attribution of knowledge in one's opinions ought to be proportional to the evidence that one has for these opinions and that these evidences constitute the strength of their legitimacy. For example, the evidence produced by our intellectual abilities when we infer propositions can be very useful in a wide gamut of aspects, but is not always appropriate. As there are quick manners of explaining the attributions of knowledge, it becomes complicated to determine general epistemic norms. To assess attributions in a way that they be legitimate or not depends on the goal we aspire to; if the goal is to have precise and complete evidence, then inference and our intellectual abilities play an important role for

collecting evidence and for determined doxastic states to occupy said role. But we have many other objectives and necessities that impose restrictions on the time and strength that is reasonable to dedicate in order to prove that the attributions are legitimate. It is not feasible, given the entire group of our objectives and necessities, to dedicate all the time and effort needed in order to obtain precise and complete evidence –if it existed. In fact, many questions are neither intellectually nor pragmatically important and, in consequence, it would be absurd to spend much time scrutinizing evidence concerning them. Given a subject’s relative lack of importance and the daily pressures that make one occupy himself with other objectives and other necessities, it is reasonable to dogmatically accept evidence concerning “the given”. The small amount of time that one dedicates to the examination of and reflection over a subject is sufficient in order to be finished with the subject.

It does not seem irrational to establish dogmas essential to quickly continue with daily life or to deal with the world without losing time in deliberation, even if the resultant attributions are in agreement with deeper reflections made by other subjects, whose evidence aspires to the effective fulfillment of the epistemic goal that these attributions be precise and complete. Therefore, a legitimate attribution does not need much time or effort, but rather simply that the attribution be pertinent to those reached by it –which can be others or only the subject himself.

As has been argued, “the given” forms the base and limit of evidence. Evidence, of course, depends on deliberative circumstances, while “the given” depends on our access to the world. The dogmatic relation consists in that there is a semantic connection between “the given” itself and our references to “the given” and that this connection does not need any explanation or foundation.

Perhaps it will be objected that this dogmatic attitude encourages skepticism. But it is necessary to remember that the ground of skepticism is not a daily possession –although on occasion to the philosopher it may seem otherwise–, but rather speculative: one possesses the right to doubt philosophically about certain attributions, in the same way that one possesses daily the right to be convinced by them, and to doubt the philosophic doubt. On the contrary, there will also be those who think that the dogmatic relation between “the given” and evidence suggests the legitimacy of there being a sort of bolt against errors in the attributions of knowledge. If the relation is dogmatic and it is fine that it be so, then we could establish the dogma that we want and that guarantee the success of our attributions, even if they are mistaken. Of course, the limit of dogma is the rejection of those who interact epistemically with oneself; this is where

explanations begin. One can attribute the knowledge that he wants, but in order for this attribution to be legitimate, it must not be rejected, or it ought to successfully leave the deliberations concerning it.

It is also important to note that the fallibility of the attributions of knowledge does not necessarily lead to skepticism, since the fact that one can always make mistakes in his attributions does not mean that he always does so. This modal difference finds itself full of uncertainties, but it ultimately legitimizes a conviction, even if it be of a pragmatic nature. In the past, arguments were believed which presented evidences in favor of determined hypotheses that later resulted to be erroneous, which is only a sample of the fallible character of our attributions of knowledge. However, that the opposite of a belief be proven in the future does not imply that in that moment—in which one believed that the attribution of knowledge was correct—those beliefs were unjustified. That momentary conviction was and will continue to be important, as it permits us, albeit dogmatically, to deal with the world and continue a conversation via numerous epistemic agreements: the right to thoughtlessly continue and sustain affirmations about  $p$ , is also the right that we all have to convince ourselves that  $p$  is the case, a right which carries the possibility of being in agreement about something concerning dogmatic and pragmatic connections.

#### **4. Three elemental objections**

Dogmatic evidentialism, with a basis in the given, must confront three elemental objections.

The first objection consists in that it allows us to think that the notion of evidence ends up being superfluous. Indeed, if the given is a dogma that puts a limit on the never-ending chain of inferences, then the role of evidence is not clear, since evidence also generally has the function of limiting the game of giving and asking for reasons. To this, one could add that the notions of “reliability” or “trust” could serve the function of being the groundwork for attributions of knowledge, with which the notion of evidence would be completely superficial.

The second objection lies in that the definition of non-inferential knowledge is insufficiently permissive. Suppose that there was a fact in which the attribution that  $p$  was not empirically sufficient for its truth to be evident; but let us also suppose that there was a situation in which said attribution gave a high degree of probability that  $p$  be true. Could it be said that one does not find himself legitimized to attribute the knowledge that  $p$ ? What is the difference

between the evidence that  $p$  is true and a high degree of probability that  $p$  is true? Perhaps it is the same difference that exists between “to be completely sure that  $p$  is true” and “to be almost sure that  $p$  is true”. The sureness, in cases like these, can be produced as much by the high probability of our beliefs as by the available evidences. In this sense, what is important perhaps is to be *sufficiently* sure so as to attribute the knowledge that  $p$ . However, when is it sufficient?

The third objection is based on the fact that non-inferential knowledge only seems to be plausible in situations in which the sources of attributions of knowledge, such as perception, play a central role, with which the notion of knowledge becomes too narrow; since it does not seem to involve attributions of knowledge that deal with general truths, such as “arsenic is a poison” or those logically necessary and *a priori* truths like in mathematics. One could say, for example, that the belief that arsenic is a poison is empirically sufficient to know that arsenic is a poison. The same goes for mathematical truths or with the beliefs that allude to some type of perception. However, the concept of arsenic inferentially presupposes that it is a poison; the same occurs with mathematical truths, since they deal with a coherent totality wherein determined functions lead to others.

The answer to the first objection is based on clarifying what is the specific function of evidence, as well as the difference between “the given’s” role and that of reliability/trust. We have sustained that “the given” can be understood as the limit of the space of reasons, and as such it cannot occupy evidence’s space, which finds itself within the space of reasons. Having said this, there are times when evidence needs to support itself on this limit (“the given”), by referring to it. In this sense, “the given” passes to be evidence’s reference. This reference cannot be anything but dogmatic; it cannot be inferred, because if it were inferred we would find ourselves again before the myth of “the given” and before a sort of circularity in the attribution of knowledge<sup>6</sup>. Concerning trust and reliability, one can understand that trust is deposited in the person that presents the evidence, whereas reliability would pertain to the constitutive processes of the attributions. Think of it in the following way: (i) John claims that Mary knows that the bank is closed. If John were asked how he knows, he would respond (ii) because Mary works in the bank. This reason brings to the deliberation new evidence that constitutes the reason one should believe John. As such, (ii) functions as evidence for (i). However, if John were not a trustworthy person, then one shouldn’t believe him and neither (i) nor (ii) would be acceptable. Neither would they be

---

<sup>6</sup> An attribution of knowledge concerning that  $p$  is circular when  $p$  is being assumed in the evidences with which one tries to demonstrate that  $p$ .

acceptable if the process by which John acquires knowledge was not reliable<sup>7</sup>; in such a case the testimony of Mary herself might not be reliable— suppose that, some time before, Mary had commented to John that she worked in the bank with the intention of tricking him. Finally, we find “the given” and its dogmatic relation with evidence. Thus, “the given” would include objects that constitute the attribution, in the case of (i): Mary, the bank and the very fact that implies that something is closed; on the other hand the dogmatic relation with evidence consists in that the objects of attribution are taken to be existent and with a conceptual content, without this requiring the most minimal demonstration. As such, one can employ the distinct notions without them overlapping or becoming dispensable. If this is so, then the notion of evidence would not seem superfluous or trivial.

With respect to the second objection it is important to note that not every attribution of knowledge is non-inferential. On the contrary, we sustain that not every attribution of knowledge is inferential. In this sense, *S* can be justified in attributing knowledge that *p*, even on the base of reasons, without having ever sustained those principal reasons and, therefore, without having participated in the activity of legitimizing said attribution; given that if we participated all the time in the activities of giving and asking for reasons we would have very few attributions of knowledge that were legitimate. It even seems possible to legitimize attributions of knowledge, on the base of reasons, without even being capable of producing arguments that prove these reasons; it can occur, for example, that the reasons be too complex or too subtle, or that they are in some way too hidden and the person who attributes is not capable of finding them, as it can also occur that the only thing that *S* finds are inarticulate evidences and that he cannot deal with those reasons. All of these possibilities lead to the attribution of knowledge being dogmatic. However, this would be an acceptable dogma when the causes that lead to the attribution of one thing or another are not being deliberated. What’s more, the second objection seems to imply an absurdity upon sustaining that “the given” does not possess any referential correlation. If “the given” did not possess any referential correlation, neither would it be able to give knowledge, and as such, everything that functions as “the given” would also not be able to give knowledge. A large part of what we consider to be evidence functions as something “given”. Therefore, evidence would not be able to function as a condition for the attributions of knowledge. In order to avoid this undesired consequence, it seems necessary to turn to dogma.

---

<sup>7</sup> That a process be reliable means that it was regularly successful upon forming attributions of knowledge.

For the response to the third problem, it is convenient to take it on with a clarification that ought not to pass unnoticed: that one affirms that *part* of the attributions of knowledge are non-inferential does not mean that he is surreptitiously sustaining that *all* the attributions of knowledge end up being non-inferential. Indeed, there is no reason to suppose that the sources that are used as evidence will always be the same from every perspective. On the one hand, it could be the case that perception was the source of evidence that Mary knows that the bank is closed, and in this way it would give place to a basic belief in the legitimacy of what Mary says she knows. On the other hand, it could also be the case that one is dealing with formal systems whose objective consists in possessing an internal coherence, wherein the myth of “the given” would not even be pertinent.

The duality between basic beliefs and coherence are naturally settled between epistemic subjects, starting with the context in which evidences are unfolded. In contrast, said objection arises principally because the focus of a theoretical project, which is adopted by an epistemologue, is prioritized. In this sense, the perspective of the cognitive system itself plays a role in the research concerning the relation with “the given” and its difficulties which come about in mythology.

## **5. Some comments and conclusion**

Throughout the present paper it has been suggested that evidence constitutes the elemental support of our attributions of knowledge. A large part of the group of evidences, including those which are born in deliberative circumstances, have “the given” as a base. Notwithstanding, if “the given” ends up being a myth, then said evidences do not find themselves appropriately justified, becoming illegitimate for our attributions of knowledge. The problem can be developed in the following five points:

1. We need evidence to sustain attributions of knowledge, especially when these are placed in doubt by our conversational partners.
2. A large part of the evidence we appeal to is found supported by – or uses as a basis – “the given”.
3. Form the Sellarsian perspective, “the given” passes to by a myth.
4. If “the given” is a myth, then evidence is not found to be appropriately sustained.
5. Therefore, if evidence is not appropriately sustained, the respective attributions of knowledge are illegitimate.

These five points derive from a skeptical problem concerning the legitimacy of attributions of knowledge and “the given”. With the goal of dissipating this skepticism, one can negate (4) and affirm that although it be considered that “the given” is a myth, evidence can be appropriately sustained in “the given”. What would remain pendent is to assess what it means to “be appropriately sustained.” In this line of assessment it is important to note two things: that the appropriate foundation for evidence is sensitive to connect and that not all dogma is irrational. In this sense, “to be appropriately sustained” does not try to establish conclusions concerning evidence, but rather tries to establish conclusions concerning which evidences make attributions legitimate, explaining why a rational subject does what he does.

To concede that there exists a dogmatic relation between “the given” and evidence in order to preserve the legitimacy and rationality of our attributions means that there exists a limit to certain intellectualist aspirations that rule in traditional philosophy. The ideal of critical reflection, from which all belief or presupposition can and, therefore, should be submitted to critical scrutiny that converts the implicit in the explicit, finds itself within the dogmatic margins that carry attributions of knowledge, when these recur to evidence and “the given”. It is possible to debate with respect to determined attributions, but there exists a point in which there is no debate, a common ground that is “given” and on which, ultimately, our evidences are supported; this proves that there are well marked limits for the development and realization of our evidences. One of the principal motivations for evidentialism consists in that evidence allows us to think of how legitimate the attributions of knowledge are and why they are legitimate. This motivation is quite different from that of thinking what more can be done in order to verify or confirm attributions of knowledge. As has been sustained, this can be a path towards skepticism, since one can always think that there is hidden evidence that challenges the attributions of knowledge; the skeptic could accuse us of certain indolence or of an incapacity to question the given.

In the same way that dogmatism has its limit, critical reflection and deliberation also have a limit in the dogmatic relation between evidence and the given, which consists in the approval and disapproval of our conversational partners or with oneself. A large part of the candidates for evidence for the legitimacy of an attribution of knowledge can fail if they are not accepted by the epistemic community in which they are presented. In this sense, the cooperation between epistemic subjects becomes essential for the legitimization of attributions of knowledge.

In this last point there remain several subjects to address. For example, where is there the greatest amount of cooperation between subjects that deliberate over an attribution of

knowledge? Why is the given needed, instead of the simple epistemic cooperation of the attributions of knowledge and the evidence that support them being sufficient? Or, for example, what analysis can be elaborated on non-inferential knowledge, if it is related with cooperation upon deliberating with evidence? In summary, in what sense ought we to talk about evidence and in what sense are the epistemic candidates necessary to produce evidence that allows us to cooperate? Even though they are pertinent, these questions will remain unanswered, and with them, the problems concerning the myth of the given, the evidentialist position and the test of attributions of knowledge, all channel towards a social epistemology.

### References

- Alston, William. 1986. "Epistemic circularity." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 47, no. 1: 1-30.
- Alston, William. 2002. "Sellars and the "Myth of the Given"." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 65, no. 1: 69-86.
- Bonevac, Daniel. 2002. "Sellars vs. the Given." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 64, no. 1: 1-30.
- BonJour, Laurence. 1985. *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brandom, Robert. 2009. *Articulating reasons: An introduction to inferentialism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- . 1998. *Making it explicit: Reasoning, representing, and discursive commitment*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Brewer, Bill. 1999. *Perception and Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chisholm, Roderick. 1964. "The Myth of The Given." In R. M. Chisholm et al., *Philosophy*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall), pp. 261-286.
- Chrisman, Matthew. 2008. "Expressivism, inferentialism, and saving the debate." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 77, no. 2: 334-358.
- Cohen, Stewart. 1999. "Contextualism, skepticism, and the structure of reasons." *Noûs*, 33, no. 13: 57-89.
- Cohen, Stewart. 1988. "How to be a Fallibilist." *Philosophical Perspectives*, 2: 91-123.



- Conee, Earl, and Feldman Richard. 2004. *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology: Essays in Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Foley, Richard. *Working without a net: A study of egocentric epistemology*. 1993. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ganson, Dorit. 2008. "Evidentialism and pragmatic constraints on outright belief." *Philosophical Studies*, 139, no. 3: 441-458.
- Lyons, Jack C. 2008. "Evidence, experience, and externalism." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 86, no. 3: 461-479.
- McDowell, John. 1996. *Mind and world*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Sellars, Wilfried. 1997. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Shah, Nishi. 2006. "A new argument for evidentialism." *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 56, no. 225: 481-498.
- Stroud, Barry. 1984. *The significance of philosophical scepticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tang, Refeng. 2010. "Conceptualism and the New Myth of the Given." *Synthese*, 125, no. 1: 101-122.
- Vinci, Thomas. 1998. *The Myth of the Myth of the Given*. located on the Chrucky website on Sellars: <http://www.ditext.com/vinci/mmg.html>.