



* On Concurrent Being *

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A Concept of Epistemic Methods for Knowing both Exclusively Singular and Inclusively Plural Status

The Manyness of Oneness and a Need for Knowing Variously to Know Inclusively

The variousness of concurrent being and becoming (as exemplified by the manyness in/as oneness of complex selfhood), poses a difficulty for knowing self and reality in any inclusive, contiguous manner. The notion of an intrinsically concurrent manyness to any oneness makes it difficult to know both the separate particularity and the related wholeness of things. The contrast between things as singularities and as pluralities presents consciousness with the task of knowing ‘an entity’ as exactly ‘one way or another’ yet also with knowing it in various ways that are often not easily unified or hierarchically ordered. A book can be ‘a particular copy’ but also one copy of many that are all ‘exactly’ the same book because they contain the same text—though it be set in different type fonts, bound in different covers, and illustrated with different images. Nations are ‘single things’ often composed of people so different that it is hard to consider them actually unified. To know such entities thoroughly is to know their particularities variously and yet somehow inclusively.

Some Epistemological Distinctions between Reductive and Non-Reductive Knowings

Epistemology is the name given to study of how humans know, and thus what is humanly knowable. Epistemologists examine how, and of what, knowledge is actually composed by investigating various criteria used for knowing ‘things’ and for justifying ‘what is known’ as somehow valid. The word epistemic derives from a Greek root for ‘to know.’ Thus an ‘epistemic process’ is one that enables the generation of some

articulated awareness in consciousness. It is a manner or particular mode of ‘coming to know’ or of ‘making knowledge.’ But what are these ‘things’ knowing and knowledge? In a broad view, these are the ‘actions of knowing’ and their results (knowledge) that derive from discerning difference. Thus the most basic element of epistemic process for knowing involve discerning difference. Epistemological study seeks to ‘know about knowing’ or to discern differences about how various ‘actions of knowing’ access and posit difference differently. Epistemology offers various categories of ways difference is noted. Thus ‘perceptual knowing’ by way of sensory experience is distinguished from knowing in reference to memory, the so-called *a priori* mode of knowing exemplified by mathematics, and knowing by way of inductive reasoning. Another category attempts to define knowing as occurring only in reference to fundamental beliefs (“doxastic”). There are various other categories and competing theories of how knowing occurs and is justified or validated.

Whatever its references for making distinctions, this activity of knowing things, phenomena, and concepts appears to involve, in summary, a mental effort to both ‘take things apart,’ so as to know them separately, and also ‘put things together,’ so as to discern their relations or continuities. Capacities for both ‘taking apart’ and relating or ‘putting together’ depend upon discerning and categorizing differences that then allow for relating separated entities by way of likenesses—without differences there are no parts, without parts no relations and likenesses. In this manner general categories of things are established (humans, animals, the living and the dead) that aid in discerning the characteristic differences and thus likeness of and among yet other things.

This concept of knowing readily implies qualities of interpreting or assigning meaning to what is known—most obviously in reference to what is ‘already known’ or what is ‘believed to be true about things.’ The evidently intimate relationship of knowing and interpreting or assigning meaning makes distinguishing just ‘how one knows’ from ‘what one thinks one knows because of how one interprets what one knows’ rather difficult. Nonetheless, knowing and interpreting have been studied in some separation as indicated by the academic specializations of epistemology and hermeneutics. Comment on these topics is similarly separated on this web site, but it is acknowledged that the concerns are regarded quite similarly in these discussions.

Though there are many established theories and specialized terms in the field of epistemology, the approach to knowing taken here is rather unusual. The present investigation of epistemic modes for knowing is concerned specifically with how these involve distinctions between singular and plurally concurrent statuses. Given this contrast of singularity and plurality a related distinction can be made between epistemic modalities, or ways of differentiating differences and subsequently likenesses. Human knowing can be considered as having two contrasting modes: knowing objects and

events as singular and separate versus knowing these as composites of many parts, some of which are parts of other objects and events so that statuses and identities essentially overlap. It is not proposed that there is an ultimate distinction between such singular and pluralistic modes of knowing. Indeed, the two are regarded here as interdependent. However, they will be examined as contrasting elements of knowing, characterized as 'knowing by way of oneness' or singularity and 'knowing by way of manyness' or plurality and multiplicity. That contrast is considered as significant in how it influences human understanding by being more or less reductive. Singularity is here viewed as more reductive of what is 'being known' than is plurality.

Thus, discerning difference as conditions of inconsistency existing between exclusively singular entities is considered *primarily reductive* in that it separates the world into distinct, somehow unitary or self-consistent states of being. Subsequently, emphasis upon singularity tends to promote knowing relationships between things as rather exact or definitive. Furthermore, it facilitates knowing events as progressive, mechanistic, and linearly causal sequences proceeding from one singular status to another. The mode of discerning difference as conditions of inconsistency that exist between separate yet pluralistic or composite statuses tends to be considered *primarily non-reductive* because the basic 'units' of its references are never singular. In the reductive view, the world of phenomena is reduced to singular entities, in the non-reductive view all 'entities' are discerned as 'diversified collectives' or compositions of other entities. In the former view, difference asserts a more simple and final condition between singular statuses than in the latter view where it exists between 'complexes' or 'groupings' of entities that somehow together compose 'an entity.' Difference among composite entities is inherently more complex.

The pluralistic view tends to amplify the diversity of seemingly singular states ('a' book, one person) by differentiating 'component parts' within them, and thereby the complexity of potential interrelationships between the differentiated aspects of those different entities (two books or two persons 'known as' diversified composites). Again, these two modes can be referred to as knowing by 'ones' and by 'manys.' The reductive mode is more exclusive in that it posits identity by way of excluding whatever is not consistent with a singularly distinct or unified identity. It reduces by way of exclusion of seemingly extraneous aspects to establish a singular or hierarchically unified status. The non-reductive mode is more inclusive in that it discerns identity status as inherently pluralistic and not necessarily self-consistent or unified. It even allows for different entities to 'overlap' by sharing some of the same 'parts.' It can include differing entities in a category without asserting they are essentially identical, or associate an entity with differing categories without encountering contradiction. The reductive mode is less tolerant of ambivalence than is the non-reductive one.

However, distinguishing between knowing ‘*a flock* of birds’ and knowing ‘*a group* of different birds,’ each one of which appears composed by diverse qualities that differentiate them, might seem rather futile. One might well conclude that both awarenesses occur together in human knowing. But perhaps this association also suggests there is a third modality, one that emphasizes knowing by both singularity and multiplicity together, concurrently—that is, a knowing by way of many-ness in/of/as oneness. That would be a knowing that is concurrently inclusive of manyness **and** oneness—a knowing that can validate both distinctive particularity and diversified plurality concurrently, as complimentary. This third mode poses some ‘meta-knowing’ of definite singular and plural statuses constituting a diversified totality whose composition would seem likely to be radically complex.

Attempts at dividing processes of knowing into separate and even opposed functions, such as reductive and non-reductive, in effect ‘decomposes’ the radically interactive processes of consciousness. Thus the distinctions suggested here are acknowledged to be artificial abstractions from the radically complicated psychic activity of ‘actual’ knowing and understanding. The purpose of this analysis is not to ‘reduce’ knowing to exclusively separate functions but rather to indicate its complexity as deriving from the interplay of how, when, and where emphasis is placed upon either exclusive reduction or inclusive amplification (non-reduction). Again, this discussion is fraught with overlapping distinctions between ‘knowing’ and ‘interpreting’ because intentions about how to interpret or understand the significance of things can influence how one knows. Tendencies to interpret what is known in reductive terms (such as being necessarily hierarchically ordered) are likely to encourage knowing differences in reductive ways.

Exclusively Singular, Literally Positivistic, Reductively Exact, Oppositionally Dualistic, Predictably Consistent, and Conclusively Final Knowing

These terms suggest qualities of knowing differences in reference to oneness or singular status and a related tendency to make absolute distinctions. This mode is most obvious in mathematical representations of difference as abstractly exact distinctions of quantification and measurement. This epistemic method ‘knows’ by ‘exact definitions’ of things and phenomenon—an object is known as its dimensions, weight, volume, velocity, etc. Complexity in this mode of knowing involves precise yet complicated series of sequences, such as mathematical calculations of scientific formula or extended rationales of successive causation between many objects and events. These tend to progress in ‘one direction’ of causation—from beginning to end. Such exact oneness enables one to know ‘a thing’ or ‘a process’ as either a singular state (1 versus 2 inches long) or progression of distinctly singular ones (first cold liquid then hot liquid then vapor). It is useful for mechanical and systematic understanding.

However, this epistemic mode for knowing based in reduction to one-ness is not only associated with measurement and mechanical science. It is characteristic of much of ordinary or habitual identification of things, events, and persons. Ordinary epistemic modes reflexively regard 'things' as static, unified, and positively what each is assumed to be ('the table' is considered as exactly and only 'that table'). Such knowing asserts an unquestioned 'sum of reality.' It tends to ignore contrasts, contradiction, inconsistencies, and anomalies 'within' the entities it has summarily identified. Ordinarily reflexive reduction, when it does acknowledge diversity, tends to regard qualities of difference as existing 'between' categories of entities (black people versus white people) rather than within them. In this sense difference is used to separate and group relatively 'identical' entities rather than in discerning their 'internal composition.' Further, any definition, description, or identification that asserts a final or absolutely positive status is intrinsically reductive of the thing or phenomenon that that definition seeks to represent. Thus even a description that includes various 'parts' can be reductive if it is asserted as absolutely exclusive in the full status of 'an entity.' Overall reduction is exemplified in taxonomic hierarchies that impose rigid orders of priority and inferiority, such as social caste systems.

In one sense, the ultimate extreme of reduction is not perhaps a matter of reduction to numerical measurement but to dualistic oppositions. This form of reduction knows things as either of one category or another, such as true or false, good or bad, which do not logically allow for any valid status other than one of the exact opposites.

Inclusively Concurrent, Irreducibly Diverse, Triangularly Constellated, Indefinitely Amplifying, and Dynamically Bi- or Polyvalent Knowing

These terms suggest qualities of knowing differences in reference to multiple parts or factors having variable relations that compose 'an entity' or status. This epistemic approach to knowing operates in reference to manyness or variably related composite status. It enables knowing of complex dynamic interrelations rather than static conditions in sequential progressions. The multiplicity of composite status, as in the 'parts of a motor,' can be known in a relatively reductive manner if the component parts are discerned as 'fitting together' in an exclusively hierarchical, progressive manner. When those component parts or factors are discerned as interactive or variously related, then the entity they compose is known in a more diversified, concurrent, constellatory, indefinite, and polyvalent manner. This quality of knowing is more typical of how artistic, poetic, and mythic expressions enable knowing through metaphoric and symbolic representations. Symbolic expression tends to assert similarities and difference that are not mechanically ordered or literally exact. Yet such a non-reductive epistemic

mode can also be overtly figured in scientific notions, such as those that involve chaotic elements or unpredictable variability.

The complexity of knowing by way of irreducible many-ness involves intricate webs of relation and interactions that are active concurrently rather than successively. Causality in manyness often goes in ‘both directions,’ is ‘polyvalent.’ It ‘operates’ back and forth or between three or more factors at once in a ‘triangulating’ manner rather than along singular lines of association. It is these interactive qualities that pose the category of concurrent being and becoming. Such status that has multiple, non-linear dynamical relations can be known only as a concurrent set of different yet interrelated activities and states of being. The complexity of such manyness is radical in the sense that it is irreducible, it cannot be ‘reduced’ to a singular, sequential sequence of actions or causes. It has, in this sense, no ‘center,’ no beginning, middle, or end.

However, even this more radical complexity can be understood to have ‘an ordering,’ in that it does ‘progress’ and result in consequences. But discerning the patterns of interactivity in such manifold process as those associated with concurrent becoming can often only be assessed ‘after the event,’ and even then not with much absolute exactness. In so far as the radical complexity of concurrent being and becoming can be known, a different logic or ‘logos’ of dynamical association and causation is required than is appropriate for knowing difference in reference to exclusive singularity and linearly progressive ordering. What one knows ‘by way of manyness’ is not so much separate states but the complex dynamics of interactivity, a matrix or web of complimentary, though contrasting, mutually modifying associations. Representing such knowing is necessarily more ‘dynamically suggestive’ than mechanistically exact. That is why metaphor and symbolism are so important in expressing ‘knowing by way of manyness’ and inclusivity.

Concurrently Singular and Plural, Contradictorily Complimentary, Radically Inclusive Knowing

Once again, in so far as human knowing is somehow a continuum, a unity of consciousness, these concepts of knowing by way of oneness versus manyness constitute artificial abstractions from it. In so far as it is a contiguous set of processes that entail both singular and pluralistic modes of differentiation ‘simultaneously.’ there must then be some aspect of it that is radically inclusive of these different modes—that knows by way of *both* one-ness and many-ness concurrently. A simple example of knowing by ones and by manys is as follows: Knowing by oneness, a square is experienced as a single, distinct shape that can be *described* as having four equal sides of equal length comprising four right angles. Knowing by manyness, there is square-ness, *composed* of four lines, four angles, the shape of the space ‘inside’ those *and* that

of the space ‘outside.’ In the latter view, these different entities concurrently compose, by way of their various relations, the square-ness that is termed ‘a square’ when we know it as a one-ness. Thus to knowing-by-manyness, this status is actually a concurrent plurality, a dynamical phenomenon of association rather than a static, discrete, separate, singular entity.

Knowing that asserts both the specific particularity of ‘a thing that is a square’ and its manifestation by way of the dynamical relations that compose square-ness ‘all at once’ in consciousness would thus appear to be a more radically inclusive mode of knowing. Such an operation in consciousness that knows by way of both reductive singularity and diversifying plurality might be inherent, might well be the typical ‘background’ character of most human knowing. It could be considered ‘contradictorily complimentary’ in its inclusion of characteristics of status that are in some sense logically incompatible. As such it appears as a ‘meta-epistemic’ mode of knowing. However, it is also evident that the ways identity and reality are habitually approached in ordinary behavior and socialized standards are reflexively reductive. Such a reflexive habit suggests that awareness of this meta-level of inclusive knowing is repressed. Thus there seems a need to ‘bring to awareness’ the more extra-ordinary roles pluralistic and inclusive knowing have in understanding if these are to ‘take part’ in personal and social decisions.

Reasonable Approaches to Knowing the More-Than-Ordinary Many-ness of One-nesses Inclusively—Despite a Tendency to Simplistic Reduction.

As noted, the preceding distinctions between singular, plural, and concurrently inclusive modes of knowing are artificial distinctions in that reductive and non-reductive knowing appear intimately interdependent. If there were no singularly exclusive mode then there could be no diversely plural one. If these two did not exist, there could be no meta-level of radically inclusive knowing either. Yet all three appear to have some degree of differentiated and even antagonistic roles in human knowing. If this view is accurate, then human consciousness relies upon these differences as cooperative compositional elements in its overall epistemic process. However, since there are rather different logics involved, one can readily imagine how difficult such radically intricate dynamical activities in knowing are to consciously acknowledge and validate. It would seem much easier for the ordinarily conscious attitude in the human mind to ‘jump’ from one mode to another—from exclusive reduction to diversified non-reduction to radical inclusion *without acknowledging* these contrasting modes or their overlaps, mutual dependencies, and complementarity.

Indeed, it is proposed that, for the most part, though knowing involves all three modalities, ordinarily habituated conscious attitudes tend to ‘reduce’ these diversified characteristics to a relatively literalized, positivistic, singular set of assumptions about identity and reality. In other words, it is ordinary and typical for humans to emphasize simplistically reductive difference and singular status as the primary references for knowing things and phenomenon *even when* their minds are actually engaging more pluralistic forms of knowing. Such a reductive tendency in ordinary or ‘superficial consciousness’ appears both somewhat ‘empirically intuitive,’ in that ‘things appear as separate, singular things,’ and socially necessary, as a concession to the creation of standardized thus readily shared identification and understanding. Reductive simplification is generally practical. However, such reflexive reduction actually proves to be impractical, in so far as it deludes people about intrinsic complexities and the ways ‘things are different in different contexts.’ In a natural world that can be reasonably assessed as radically complex, simplistic reductions can prove extremely dangerous to the survival of both individuals and societies.

There is then an essential tension between reductive and non-reductive knowings. On one side is a need to differentiate things and phenomena in a concise and consistent manner so as to create socially shared knowings and have some sense of predictable control over events. Yet emphasizing that perspective readily obscures more subtle, complex, various, and inclusive modes for constituting awareness and thus understanding. Humans tend, however ‘unconsciously,’ to repress the manyness of onenesses, the complexities of their own knowings, from ordinary awareness. Thus, the way empirically pragmatic and socially necessary reduction limits overtly conscious awareness of the implications and values of knowing variously and inclusively generates a need to foreground the latter, more extra-ordinary modality if it is to be accessible to conscious decision making. How then can the dominance of ordinarily reductive attitudes be countered?

The reflexive precedence granted to more reductive modes of knowing creates an imbalanced awareness of the range of overall epistemic processes. Important aspects of more pluralistic and inclusive knowing tend to be ignored. The rather spontaneous emergence of the relatively extra-ordinary forms of artistic, ritualistic, and mythical representation in societies thus can be viewed as a form of ‘unconscious’ response to ordinary reduction. The metaphoric and symbolic character of these categories of expression are more suited to ‘figuring’ the dynamical character of concurrent being and becoming. Though the more-than-ordinary modes of representation associated with art and myth tend to be resisted by more ordinarily reductive attitudes, they persistently manifest even in the most reductive cultures. In order to be effective in contrasting the reductive mode, the pluralistic must provoke awareness through some more-than-ordinary references for ‘how things concurrently *are*.’ Thus ordinarily habitual ‘ways of

seeing' and 'ways of telling' must be challenged by perceiving and representation that are more dynamically inclusive if the reflexive dominance of reduction is to be disturbed. In general, artistic' expression is characterized by such a departure from 'ordinary seeing and telling.'

In addition to representation that challenges habitual assumptions about identity and reality, enhanced awareness of concurrency requires adequately complex logical models. Emphasis upon continuity and control in socialized contexts causes ordinary awareness to resist random, chaotic, indeterminate, and radically complex models for identity and reality. Understanding that derives from more inclusive and radically complex references thus requires extra-ordinary logical models for 'how things really really are.' (Understanding the origins of logical models for 'making sense' of what is known, and for validating how one knows what one knows, is approached in the study of interpretive methodologies termed hermeneutics.)

Reductive, pluralistic, and radically inclusive modes of knowing well might be intrinsically inherent aspects of how human minds differentiate awareness. However, specific models for interpreting the meaning of what is known thusly appear to exhibit more specific cultural origins. It is often proposed, for example, that Western European cultural attitudes emphasize mechanistic models for understanding what is knowable about phenomena as the most important and valid ways of understanding them. Other cultures often demonstrate little interest in mechanical models as the basis for understanding phenomena. Thus there are hermeneutic or interpretive models for understanding what is known that favor reductive and positivistic designations, just as there are those more suited to affirming valid meaning for more diversified status.

It is psychologically naïve, however, to approach hermeneutic analysis of logical models for interpreting the meaning of what is known without attending to the reflexive human preference for knowing by way of reductive singularity and how that establishes an inherent suspicion of the non-reductive and inclusive modes. That preference ensures that non-reductive and inclusive knowings always tend to be regarded as secondary to, and even transgressive of, ordinary attitudes and assumptions. The trap implicit in this reflexive hierarchy of the reductive over the non-reductive involves a tendency to perform both epistemological and hermeneutic analysis in reflexively reductive manners. Knowing and interpretation that derive from the more non-linear, polyvalent interactive dynamics of radically complex composition (concurrent being/becoming) require interpretive hermeneutic models with recursive logics and metaphorical expressions.

Thus the most overt awareness of the contrast and interplay of reductive and non-reductive knowings derives not from quantification and mechanistic models, but

necessarily from psychologically philosophical ones of ‘how the mind works’ in generating consciousness by way of psychical re-presentation of ‘actual’ phenomenal occurrences. Knowing and understanding might be ‘of literal things’ but it is constituted in psyche-logical dynamics of consciousness—those ‘acts of knowing’ that actually involve diverse aspects of intellect and brain functions. ‘Feeling’ and ‘imagination’ are essential elements of what constitutes valid knowing and understanding. Thus a more complete, overt awareness and understanding of the interplays of reduction and non-reduction in knowing and interpretation require more than a ‘shift in logical perspective’ Significant repositioning of awareness about ‘how we know’ appears to involve both a radically ‘alien’ form of (psyche-logical) self-reflective analysis on ones own experiences of knowing *and* some aesthetically experiential basis for validation of ‘being more than one way all at once.’ For ordinary attitudes to accept the more-than-ordinary status of concurrent plurality they seem to require confrontation with its ‘being felt.’

Knowing as an Activity of Consciousness that Knows Things in a Thingless Manner that Resembles Diversified Concurrency

Knowing the actuality of phenomena or ‘things’ obviously requires empirically experiential references—such as the ‘data’ of sensation and measurement. But the conscious awareness that results is not ‘the things known.’ Rather, it is constituted in mental re-presentation of perceptions of those things as feelings, images, and thoughts. These constituents of knowing are, from a positivistic view, ‘thingless’—they have no tangible substance, cannot be objectively isolated and measured. Thus things are known in/as this ‘thinglessness of thought.’ Even reductively singular knowing, though it asserts exact identities for things, knows by way of these ‘psychical acts of consciousness.’

However, from the perspective of concurrently diversified being in which things manifest as manyness in/of oneness, things exist as both ‘one way and another’—their ‘thingness’ is dispersed, existing as a consequence of many interactive, mutually modifying, and contextually dependent parts, factors, and relations. Thus there is a sort of inherent thinglessness to ‘things having pluralistic status’ in that their ‘thingness’ is defuse, dynamical rather than static or material. They are not ‘one way only.’ Such a condition of indefinite or dispersed ‘thingness’ is given a sort of appropriate reflection in the dynamical composition of knowing variously or inclusively. It appears then that the ‘thinglessness of thought,’ by way of which actual things are known, is appropriate to knowing the radically complexity of concurrent being and becoming—especially when its psychical character of diversified re-presentation becomes overtly conscious.

Knowing by way of reductive singularity in which things appear to be exactly and literally known 'as they are' (rather than as 'activities of consciousness' that re-present dynamical relations among multiple references) has its practical uses. But to know in a genuinely inclusive manner, the complexities of diversified concurrency must be engaged. That would seem to require a knowing that knows its knows by way of diversified re-presentations of the 'thinglessness' of concurrently manifesting 'things.'

Additional elaboration of these concepts in Chapter One of text **Manifesting the Many in the One**

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