INTRODUCTION

Although there are many different classifications of philosophical problems, the division of philosophy into ontology (or metaphysics), epistemology, and axiology (ethics and aesthetics) still seems the most efficient and general one. Thus, epistemology belongs to the main parts of philosophy. However, the terms which now denote this field, namely 'epistemology' and 'theory of knowledge', appeared not very long ago, later than terms indicating metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics or even ontology. As late as in the 17th century there was no single word referring to epistemology. At that time as well as in the 18th century, epistemological problems were considered in books like (I give the English titles) Rules for the Direction of Mind (René Descartes), An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (John Locke), A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge (George Berkeley), An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (David Hume), New Essays on Human Understanding (Gottfried Leibniz) or Critique of Pure Reason (Immanuel Kant). Kant placed his central epistemological views under the label 'transcendental aesthetic', following the meaning of aisthesis as referring to cognition by senses. As a matter of fact, Kant also used (in his Critique of Aesthetic Judgement) the term 'aesthetics', more precisely, its German counterpart Aesthetik, in a more contemporary fashion, i.e., to denote matters of beauty. Earlier, Alexander G. Baumgarten in his Sciagraphia encyclopaediae philosophicae (1769) proposed the word gnoseologia, which gained some popularity and is sometimes employed even now. The German word 'Erkenntnistheorie' (theory of knowledge) became popular after Eduard Zeiler's influential paper "Bedeutung und Aufgabe der Erkenntnistheorie" (1862), but this name and its cognates were used earlier. Thomas Krug's, Allgemeine Handwörterbuch der philosophischen Wissenschaften (1827) proposed the label 'Erkenntnistheorie'. Ernst Reinhold (the son of Karl L. Reinhold, a leading post-Kantian philosopher) in Versuch einer neuen Theorie der menschlichen Vorstellung-svermögen und Metaphysik (1832) had the term "Theorie der Erkenntnis". It was James E Ferrier who introduced the label 'epistemology' in his Institutes of Metaphysics (1854). Other words were also proposed to baptize our field: 'Wissenschaftslehre' (Johann G. Fichte, Bernard Bolzano), 'Wissenschaftstheorie' (Eugen Dühring), 'criterology' (Neo-Thomists), and 'noetics' (also Neo-Thomists). However, the words 'epistemology' and 'Erkenntnistheorie' (as well as their translations into other languages) are most popular nowadays.

The terminological variety noted above is not incidental and displays different ideas attached to epistemological concern. If epistemology is understood extensively, it covers everything that focuses on knowledge or cognition:
psychology, sociology, logic, history, physiology, pathology, axiology, metaphysics, and several other things. On the other hand, epistemology conceived more restrictively investigates the sources, values (cognitive), principles, and limits of knowledge. This general characterization can be made more detailed by further explanations, for example:

"[Epistemology] [...] The theory of knowledge. Its central questions include the origin of knowledge, the place of experience in generating knowledge, and the place of reason in doing so; the relationship between knowledge and certainty, and between knowledge and the impossibility of error; the possibility of universal [...] scepticism; and the changing forms of knowledge that arise from new conceptualizations of the world. All of these issues link with other central concerns of philosophy, such as the nature of truth and the nature of experience and meaning. It is possible to see epistemology as dominated by two rival metaphors. One is that of building or pyramid, built on foundations. In this conception it is the job of the philosopher to describe especially secure foundations, and to identify secure modes of construction, so that the resulting edifice can be shown as to be sound. This metaphor favours some idea of the 'given' as a basis of knowledge, and of a traditionally defensible theory of confirmation and inference as a method of construction [...] The other metaphor is that of a boat or fuselage, that has no foundations but owes its strength to the stability given by its interlocking parts. This rejects the idea of a basis in the 'given', favours ideas of coherence and [...] holism, but finds it harder to ward off [...] scepticism." (S. Blackburn, The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1994, p. 123).

The typical epistemological problems are like the following: What is knowledge?; Is knowledge based on senses or reason? Is certainty attainable? What is truth? Are there ultimate limits of knowledge? Although it is difficult to delimit sharply both ways of understanding epistemology, classical epistemological questions form a relatively stable tradition which can be sufficiently identified through history.

This chapter is intended as a historical survey of epistemology, basically in its restrictive understanding, but taking into account its relationships with other philosophical disciplines and fields outside philosophy. Since the size of this text is limited, the history of epistemology given here must be concise. I will try to stress those facts from the history of epistemology which had a real historical significance, especially for contemporary discussions, in particular within the analytical turn of philosophy. Hence, I must omit many interesting details as well as positions belonging to other philosophical traditions (this restriction is perhaps the most relevant with respect to the last chapter). However, it does not mean that non-analytical epistemological thinking is entirely neglected, also because the borderline between analytical and non-analytical philosophy is imprecise in many respects. I will particularly focus on post-Cartesian philosophy. Here is the reason: One can ask which part of philosophy should be taken as the starting point for the whole philosophical enterprise. According to the tripartite division of philosophy into ontology, epistemology, and axiology, three possibilities appear, and, in fact, each of them has been executed in the history of philosophical thought. Leaving aside axiologically oriented philosophy (although, as we will see, it was sometimes very important in the history of epistemology), the development of philosophy can be divided into two periods. Roughly speaking and admitting some exceptions which I will not mention here, pre-Cartesian philosophy was definitely ontologically oriented, but post-Cartesian thought became largely preoccupied with epistemology. In this sense, Descartes is the father of modern philosophy. In fact, cogito, ergo sum, whatever it is (a principle, inference or performance), clearly suggests that an