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ON KNOWING: WHETHER ONE KNOWS

ABSTRACT
I will start with a poem, which I intend to tie up to this poem firstly in response to one of my frequent lamentations concerning the lack of imagination common to most of us and secondly of Kant for the lead he gave the Romantic Idealist by refusing the possibility of knowing the realm of physical noumena. I have since regretted that, I do not do a good job of defending my criticism of the transcendental philosophy, confining myself rather to pointing out some of the unfortunate consequences of that approach, as rendered explicit in the evil of Hegel’s teaching. I would take the opportunity offered by this article to amend this failing by offering an internal criticism of the conception of knowledge on which the transcendental philosophy apparently rests. I will try to bring out the connection with the poem.

INTRODUCTION
The words of the Persian poem translate roughly to the following effect:

• Applaud and adore the one who knows, and also knows that he knows, for he has undoubtedly attained God’s blessing;
• Alert and make aware the one who knows, but does not know that he knows, for he is missing the pleasure the most valuable treasure can give;
• Do not despise or deride the one who does not know, but at least knows that he does not know, for he can conduct his lame as whither he will;
• But beware and feared of the one who does not know, and also does not know that he does not know, for he is verily the worst curse of God.

Kant’s theoretical philosophy seems to be based on the following two main premises: (1) The consciousness processes the data which reaches it directly from the realm of physical noumena and transforms this data into a product which is empirical knowledge. What is known is this product, not the source of the raw data; the realm of noumena is not knowable at all. (2) We know the truth of synthetic a-priori propositions because these are true in virtue of the way in which the processing consciousness is constituted; at least some of us, including Kant himself, can attain detailed knowledge concerning the structure of the consciousness, as a consequence of which it transforms the data from the realm of noumena into phenomena in the particular way it does. Oizerman argues
that while Kant did often relate the noumena to things in themselves, noumena are objects of pure reason, and have no relation to our sense perceptions. As such they lie outside the realm of knowledge and are unable to be proved. Things in themselves, however are not objects of pure reason, they affect our sensibilities through phenomena, or the world of appearances.\footnote{Because we perceive these appearances, there must be something that is appearing. Since they are linked to the world of appearances, things in themselves are subject to categories of unity, plurality, causality, community, possibility, actuality and necessity. This assertion is exactly why many people object to the idea of things in themselves. Kant states that we can have no knowledge of them, yet Oizerman says that we can think of them in terms of those categories. Shaper discusses the thing in itself as a philosophical fiction. By this she means that Kant was not advancing the thing in itself as a truth that is evident from what he had proven in his theories, but a useful tool to understand phenomena. The thing in itself is a theoretical limit on noumena.} The thing in itself, or the object, as opposed the phenomenon, the subjective effect produced in our consciousness.

These two assertions are not immediately compatible, since while (1) says only phenomena, the products of the consciousness, can be known, (2) quite transparently implies that the consciousness, and the way it transforms data from noumena, can also be known, although knowledge concerning the structure of the consciousness is not itself among the items of knowledge produced by consciousness. One way of reconciling this tension is to introduce a distinction between directly phenomenal knowledge, which consists exclusively of the immediate deliverances of the consciousness, and obliquely phenomenal knowledge, which is attained through investigation of the pervasive relevant features of such immediate deliverances. Once some such distinction is introduced, it may consistently be maintained that (1) and (2) are about directly phenomenal knowledge, while they are themselves prima examples of obliquely phenomenal knowledge. While admitting such meta-empirical knowledge, as it were, may well go against the grain of radical empiricism, such an admission seems to be an unavoidable premises of the transcendental philosophy, and may be the most satisfactory way of harmonizing the claim that some synthetic truths may be known a-priori with the basic empiricist tenet that all knowledge is ultimately based upon experience of phenomena. Once the possibility of obliquely empirical knowledge is admitted, there seems to be little sense in restricting the knowledge obtainable by its means to the structure of the consciousness, for continuing to hold that the realm of noumena is not accessible to knowledge. For if knowledge of a processor is obtainable at all, say through investigation of its products, there