Truth and Openness: An Epistemology for Interpretive Systemology

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Both an ontoepistemology for reductionist modern science (counter-ontoepistemology) and an ontology for interpretive systemology have been outlined in the two preceding papers in this special issue of Systems Practice. In the present article, the notion of "truth" is interpreted in terms of both the ontoepistemology of "reductionism" and the ontology of interpretive systemology. Both interpretations are discussed. Such a discussion represents the objective of this paper, that is, to outline the epistemological "face" of the ontoepistemology of interpretive systemology. In order to design that "epistemological face," the relation between ontology and epistemology must be clarified. Such a relation is seen from the standpoint already provided by the ontology. After the discussion on the notion of truth, the general shape of a systemic-interpretive inquiring process is outlined.

KEY WORDS: interpretive systemology; systems philosophy; soft systems thinking; critical systems thinking.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE RELATION BETWEEN ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY UNDER A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PURVIEW

Merleau-Ponty distinguishes four different moods which drive intentionality: the perceptual, the cognitive, the affective, and the practical. Although all of them occur in varying degrees in any situation, one or two of them might be clearly dominant. They might be so dominant that the others are relegated to a blurred background (Mallin, 1979, p. 15). In the cognitive mood, two subtypes can be distinguished: a mood in which knowledge is not purposefully searched for and one in which it is purposefully searched for under a pretension of validity. The first one is called "spontaneous cognitive" mood, and the second

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2For a discussion on intentionality see Fuenmayor (1991a).
In situations concerned with scientific and philosophical activities, a cognoscitive mood is dominant.

The Systemic-Phenomenological Ontology of Interpretive Systemology (Fuenmayor, 1985, 1991a) is concerned with how what-ever-is-the-case is holistically manifested. Therefore, it is thus concerned with how what-ever-is-the-case comes to presence. As such, the ontological purview is concerned with gaining knowledge about the general structure of presencing, i.e., the timefull structure of any "situation." On the other hand, the epistemological purview is concerned with gaining knowledge about the possibility of gaining true knowledge with regard to specific phenomena. Hence, whereas the ontological purview is interested in gaining knowledge about any possible situation, the epistemological purview is interested in gaining knowledge about situations which are driven by a cognoscitive mood in their intentionality. This viewpoint from which the relationship between ontology and epistemology is seen concedes a hierarchical priority of ontology over epistemology. While ontology deals with any possible situation independent of which intentional mood is dominant, epistemology deals only with situations whose dominant mood is the cognoscitive. From this viewpoint epistemology is based on ontology.

If another point of view is taken to see the relation between ontology and epistemology, it is discovered that ontology is based on epistemology. Witness the argument that supports this second viewpoint:

The ontological attempt to describe the timefull structure of any situation is itself embedded in a situation where the cognoscitive mood is dominant. In other words, when we are trying to understand and argue about any possible situation we are living a particular situation. Such a particular situation—a very peculiar one indeed—is intentionally dominated by a cognoscitive mood. The cognoscitive mood is thus at the base of any ontological thinking. In this way, epistemology seems to gain hierarchy over ontology. However, there is something particular about this kind of ontological thinking which introduces noise in the last assertion. Under a phenomenological attitude, although a cognoscitive mood is dominant in ontological thinking, such cognoscitively driven thinking attempts to mirror itself beyond itself. Indeed, it is a thinking that attempts to transcend the frontiers of cognoscitively driven situations to any possible situation—not necessarily cognoscitively driven. This strife to mirror itself beyond itself is precisely the core of ontology within interpretive systemology. It is a strife for understanding the possibility of what-ever-is-the-case, not merely in cognoscitively driven situations, but in "everydayness."

The former arguments show that ontology and epistemology cannot be separated; each one makes sense only in the merging with the other in an onto-epistemology. Once this point has been discussed the question of truth can be considered.