

The Case for Reorienting the Philosophical Study of Self-Knowledge

Critical notice of Quassim Cassam, *Self-Knowledge for Humans* (forthcoming in *Mind*)

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With this provocative book, Quassim Cassam aims to reorient the philosophical study of self-knowledge so as to bring its methodology and subject matter into line with recognizably human concerns. He pursues this reorientation on two fronts. He proposes replacing what he sees as the field's standard subject, an ideally rational being he calls *Homo Philosophicus*, with a realistic version of *Homo Sapiens*. And he proposes shifting the field's primary focus from 'narrow epistemological concerns' to issues reflecting 'what matters to humans', such as knowledge of one's own character and the moral significance of self-knowledge. Cassam also contributes to this field, advancing his own accounts of self-knowledge's epistemology and value.

A particular virtue of the book is its unwavering insistence that philosophical views about self-knowledge must be judged by their fidelity to what self-knowledge actually is, namely, an untidy phenomenon in the lives of cognitively limited creatures. Cassam uses this realist standard to challenge extravagant claims about self-knowledge: that we have direct, infallible access to our attitudes; that our rationality guarantees a robust capacity for self-knowledge; and that self-knowledge is essential to an authentic, meaningful life. His accounts of self-knowledge and its value are models for avoiding the excesses he decries. On his view, self-knowledge is typically achieved through fallible inference from diverse kinds of evidence. Its value is instrumental, deriving from the practical and moral goods it (sometimes) promotes.

Cassam's realist outlook is sensible and refreshing, and his effort to bring philosophical attention to neglected issues about self-knowledge is commendable. But I have reservations about the book's framing conceits: that taking seriously how humans actually think amounts to a 'radical reorientation of the philosophy of self-knowledge' (11), and that the choice to focus one's theorizing about self-knowledge on epistemological issues is indefensible. While structuring the discussion as a polemic against mainstream theorizing about self-knowledge may attract a wider audience, this structure is not optimal for advancing scholarship. It leads Cassam to direct most of his critical remarks towards approaches to self-knowledge starkly opposed to his own, whereas critical assessments of closer competitors would yield greater philosophical payoff. And the polemical structure constrains Cassam's discussion of his own promising accounts of self-knowledge and its value, which deserve fuller development than they receive here. Still, the book makes important contributions to an impressive range of philosophical issues about self-knowledge. It is a real achievement.

I begin by discussing Cassam's proposal to dethrone *Homo Philosophicus* (Section 1). I then turn to Cassam's case for shifting the field's focus from relatively technical epistemological questions to issues with broader appeal. I evaluate this case by closely examining his characterization of the contrast between 'trivial self-knowledge' and 'substantial self-knowledge' (Section 2), and considering his inferentialist account of substantial self-knowledge (Section 3).

1. *Homo Philosophicus* vs. *Homo Sapiens*

Of the book's fifteen chapters, six are devoted to challenging overly idealized conceptions of the rational thinker. The choice to discuss rationalism at such length is driven by a somewhat curious objective. Quoting from the book jacket: 'This book tries to do for philosophy what behavioural economics tries to do for economics', namely, to expose the myth of the ideally rational subject. (This comparison is repeated in Chapter 5 and elsewhere.) The analogy seems inapt. Rationalist assumptions are rejected by most self-knowledge theorists, and certainly lack the foundational influence in the field they once had in economics.

These chapters draw on the work of Daniel Kahneman (2011), a pioneer of the shift to behavioural economics, in describing how our cognitive processes fall short of rational ideals. Our cognitive systems often favor economy over scrupulousness, and employ heuristics that sacrifice accuracy for efficiency. So our thought patterns are less than optimally rational: beliefs persevere even after the original evidence for them is eliminated; we place greater weight on evidence confirming a belief than on counterevidence; etc. Cassam argues that these tendencies don't render *us* irrational. Since our cognitive and temporal resources are limited, favoring efficiency and economy is prudent.

Cassam invokes the disparity between our actual attitudes and those that an ideally rational being would have, to criticize the rationalist transparency account of self-knowledge (Moran 2001). On that account, we can normally identify our attitudes by reflecting on our reasons, and thereby determining the attitudes we ought (rationally) to have. Cassam systematically considers the possible readings of the 'normally' in this claim—from descriptive regularities to normative ideals. He argues that, since our actual attitudes often diverge from those supported by our reasons, the rationalist account does not explain how we *actually* achieve self-knowledge, on any of these readings. This is an outstanding critique of rationalism, and may be the most comprehensive such critique in the literature.

Cassam does not address non-rationalist transparency accounts (Byrne 2011, Fernández 2013). This is unfortunate. These positions are immune from his objections to rationalist transparency accounts, and share his own empiricist outlook. It may be that Cassam, an epistemic internalist, regards these positions as nonstarters because they are externalist. But that is conjecture. He discusses externalism only in the context of criticizing the inner sense view: he argues that externalism is incompatible with the analogy to perception that inspires the inner sense view (134-36).

Another source of rationalism about self-knowledge is the idea that critical reasoning requires self-knowledge (Burge 1996, Shoemaker 1994). Cassam deploys an example of Christopher Peacocke's to dispute this idea. A simplified version: Seeing your empty driveway, I judge that you're away. I then remember that you've been having car trouble, and realize that your car may be out for repair; this leads me to suspend my belief that you're away (Peacocke 1998, 276). This seems to be critical reasoning—after

all, it involves reflection on what my evidence supports. But it does not involve my thinking of my belief *as such*. So critical reasoning need not involve self-knowledge.

This conclusion, which seems to me exactly right, contributes to a larger theme in Cassam's sustained campaign against overestimating the role of self-knowledge in ordinary life. One needn't be *aware of* one's attitudes in order for them to play the kinds of salutary roles, in the meaningful life of a rational thinker, that inspire rationalistic approaches to self-knowledge. This point reappears in Cassam's discussion of the value of self-knowledge, as we will see below.

2. Self-knowledge and 'what matters to humans'

Mainstream philosophical study of self-knowledge is driven (at least proximally) primarily by epistemic concerns. For this reason, its discussions center on instances of self-knowledge that appear to be epistemically distinctive: to attain an especially high level of certainty, or to involve a special route to knowledge. Cassam says that the field's epistemic orientation 'to some extent justifies' its narrow focus on what he calls 'trivial' cases, such as my knowledge that I'm now in pain or that I believe that it's raining. But he argues that philosophers interested in self-knowledge should shift their focus to questions such as:

- Is self-knowledge practically or morally valuable? If so, what kinds of self-knowledge are valuable, and why are they valuable?
- How does one achieve knowledge of one's own character, values, and other 'substantial' traits? That is, what is the epistemology of substantial self-knowledge?

The philosophical significance of these questions is plain. More contentious is Cassam's assertion that the choice to leave these questions unaddressed, and to focus one's research exclusively on the epistemology of trivial self-knowledge, is *indefensible*.

There is no excuse for ignoring substantial self-knowledge. (47)

If, as a philosopher and a human being, you are interested in self-knowledge then you really should be interested in substantial self-knowledge; there is no excuse for only trying to account for trivial self-knowledge and its supposed privileges. (174)

This claim is striking. After all, the choice to investigate one set of issues need not reflect any judgment about the relative significance of other issues. A philosopher could focus her research on metaphysical questions about personhood while regarding bioethical questions about personhood as equally—or even more—important.

It's reasonable to ask why anyone would bother investigating how I know that I'm in pain or that I believe it's raining. The epistemological interest in self-knowledge is usually motivated by other concerns, only some of which are epistemological. Whether and how mundane self-knowledge differs from perceptual knowledge bears on issues about perceptual justification, the 'veil of perception', epistemic foundationalism, and skepticism. Many philosophers take the viability of mental content externalism to depend

on disputed questions about mundane self-knowledge. And prominent arguments for mind-body dualism rest on the idea that self-knowledge of sensations differs epistemologically from perceptual knowledge. (This connection between self-knowledge and mental ontology is responsible for the recent explosion of literature on phenomenal concepts.)

So why does Cassam think that focusing on trivial self-knowledge is indefensible? In a nutshell, he worries that because trivial self-knowledge is unrepresentative, relative to self-knowledge generally, this narrow focus will mislead us about, or blind us to, important features of self-knowledge (46-7).

These worries are linked to Cassam's distinction between trivial and substantial self-knowledge. His official explication of this distinction consists in a list of ten characteristics he associates with substantial self-knowledge. These are not intended as individually necessary or sufficient conditions. Rather:

The point of saying that knowledge of, say, your own character is substantial is to indicate that it has at least some of [these ten] characteristics.... The more of these characteristics it has the more substantial it is. (30)

Cassam's argument seems to be this. Insofar as substantial self-knowledge differs from trivial self-knowledge, in the ways indicated by these ten characteristics, restricting our attention to trivial self-knowledge threatens to leave us with a distorted and incomplete picture of self-knowledge.

All but one of the ten characteristics Cassam associates with substantial self-knowledge are, broadly speaking, epistemic; the remaining characteristic concerns value. Correspondingly, there are two potential dangers of neglecting substantial self-knowledge. One is epistemic, and one concerns value. I'll consider each in turn.

2.1 First danger of focusing exclusively on trivial self-knowledge

First Danger. We will generalize, from the epistemic features of trivial self-knowledge, to conclusions about the epistemology of self-knowledge more broadly. The resulting picture will be inaccurate, since substantial self-knowledge differs epistemically from trivial self-knowledge.

The epistemic characteristics associated with substantial self-knowledge include fallibility, corrigibility, indirectness, and requiring cognitive effort. These are, of course, converses of the epistemic features historically attributed to self-knowledge.

That epistemic characteristics play such a central role in distinguishing substantial from trivial self-knowledge is puzzling. For a major theme of the book is that self-knowledge, of every sort, typically lacks the special epistemic features historically attributed to it. Perhaps the most surprising epistemic characteristic on the list is this: *cannot be achieved by the rationalist transparency method*. But Cassam's arguments against that method have wide application. They suggest that even trivial self-knowledge—such as knowing that one wants a vodka martini (104)—cannot generally be achieved by that method. If those arguments succeed, this characteristic will not help to distinguish substantial from trivial self-knowledge.

This puzzle also arises for the other epistemic characteristics Cassam associates with substantial self-knowledge. He contends that ‘there is no immunity to error even when it comes to self-ascriptions of trivial attitudes’ (44): I can believe that I want chocolate ice cream only to realize, when my order arrives, that I really wanted vanilla. That case suggests that knowledge of my flavor preferences, an example of trivial self-knowledge that recurs throughout the book, has at least most of the epistemic characteristics associated with substantial self-knowledge: fallibility, corrigibility, indirectness, requiring cognitive effort. This skepticism extends to judgments about sensations, since one who has difficulty classifying a sensation as *pain* may benefit from considering the sensation’s cause (164). So even self-knowledge of a sensation may have (at least most of) the epistemic characteristics associated with substantial self-knowledge.

Cassam’s arguments for inferentialism about self-knowledge suggest that nearly all self-knowledge is indirect. In response to the argument that we seem sometimes to know our attitudes directly, he says that such cases likely involve ‘unconscious inference’ (144). More generally, he thinks we should favor a single epistemology of an attitude type such as desire (145), regardless of the attitude’s content—and so regardless of whether knowledge of it qualifies as trivial or substantial. On his view, even access to most occurrent thoughts and feelings is inferential (165).

According to Cassam’s arguments, then, nearly all self-knowledge lacks the impressive epistemic features historically attributed to self-knowledge, and trivial and substantial self-knowledge share a basic epistemology. These conclusions appear to diminish the first danger of focusing on trivial self-knowledge, by minimizing the worrisome effects of using mundane examples as a basis for a general epistemology of self-knowledge.

There is, however, an alternative way to interpret the dialectic. Taking seriously the idea that the ten (mostly epistemic) characteristics *define* the trivial-substantial contrast, the upshot of Cassam’s arguments is perhaps that self-knowledge is rarely trivial. The danger of an exclusive focus on self-knowledge of sensations and mundane attitudes is, then, that our grasp of such states *seems* infallible and direct (etc.), although it is not. If we mistakenly believe that mundane self-knowledge actually has those epistemic features, then using it as a model for self-knowledge will mislead us into concluding that substantial self-knowledge also has them.

Now Cassam does not argue that self-knowledge *never* has impressive epistemic features such as directness. For example, he says that discovering the cause of a sensation can help one to classify it as pain since whether one is in pain ‘isn’t always obvious’. He wisely avoids saying that this is *never* obvious. So his arguments show, at most, that the domain in which self-knowledge could have impressive epistemic features is limited: e.g., my knowledge that I’m in pain is not direct unless the sensation I’m having is *obviously* pain. This is common ground in mainstream theorizing about self-knowledge.

From the perspective of the issues about knowledge and the mind mentioned earlier, the crucial question is not whether *most* instances of self-knowledge have epistemic features distinguishing them from instances of other kinds of knowledge. The crucial question is whether *any* do. For example, prominent arguments for mind-body

dualism rest on the claim that self-knowledge of sensations is *sometimes* uniquely direct. Dualists have developed accounts of phenomenal self-knowledge intended to explain this directness. Physicalists have developed rival accounts, intended to either undermine the claim of directness or block the inference from that claim to dualism.

Trivial self-knowledge is (by definition or just in fact) more likely than substantial self-knowledge to exhibit the impressive epistemic features that bear on, e.g., the prospects for combatting external world skepticism and the viability of physicalism. For a philosopher whose interest in self-knowledge is driven by these issues, focusing exclusively on trivial self-knowledge is an effective strategy. I have not tried to defend the pursuit of epistemology or mental ontology. But insofar as those pursuits are defensible, the exclusive focus on trivial self-knowledge is also defensible.

Let me sum up the discussion of this first danger. That Cassam draws the trivial-substantial contrast mainly along epistemic lines is difficult to reconcile with his emphasis on the idea that trivial and substantial self-knowledge have similar epistemic features and share a basic epistemology. Here as elsewhere, we should follow Wittgenstein's advice: avoid basing general conclusions on a limited diet of examples. But if trivial self-knowledge is epistemically similar to substantial self-knowledge, the danger of using trivial self-knowledge as a basis for a general epistemology of self-knowledge is limited. If, on the other hand, the trivial-substantial contrast is defined by (mostly) epistemic differences, a focus on trivial self-knowledge is eminently reasonable for philosophers concerned with epistemology or mental ontology.

2.2 *Second danger of focusing exclusively on trivial self-knowledge*

Second danger. The resulting accounts of self-knowledge will neglect or misrepresent its value, because substantial self-knowledge is valuable in a way (or to an extent) that trivial self-knowledge is not.

This worry stems from the final characteristic Cassam associates with substantial self-knowledge, the 'Value Condition':

[S]ubstantial self-knowledge *matters* in a practical or even a moral sense. ... [N]ot knowing what will make you happy can result in your making bad choices, and we think of some forms of self-ignorance not just as cognitive but also as moral defects. Being unkind is bad in itself but made morally worse if it is combined with the belief that one is kind. (31-32)

Cassam's main examples of substantial self-knowledge are knowledge of one's own character, values, and substantial attitudes—where substantial attitudes include the desire for a child and racist beliefs. Is such self-knowledge practically or morally significant, in the sense expressed in the Value Condition? He addresses this question in the concluding chapter of the book, where he again casts a skeptical eye on lofty claims about self-knowledge.

His target here is the idea that self-knowledge is intrinsically valuable because it is indispensable for an authentic or unified life. He allows that authenticity and unity may be valuable, and that self-knowledge has derivative value insofar as it facilitates these. But he contends that authenticity and unity don't strictly require self-knowledge. I can be

authentic, and live a life that expresses my character and values, without being guided by *knowledge of* my character and values: generosity (as a character trait and/or a value) may guide my actions and decisions without my thinking of myself *as* generous, or *as* valuing generosity. This point nicely complements his grounds for denying that critical reasoning requires self-knowledge, and strengthens his larger case against inflated conceptions of the significance of higher-order reflection.

Cassam denies that self-knowledge is always valuable. He cites psychological research suggesting that moderate self-*ignorance*—usually, a slightly more positive self-conception than what is warranted—can foster well-being. When self-knowledge is valuable, he thinks, its value is instrumental. ‘Self-knowledge derives whatever value it has from the value of what it makes possible’ (227). For instance, realizing that I’m timid has instrumental value if this realization prompts me to take an assertiveness course. This measured position about self-knowledge’s value is clearly in keeping with Cassam’s broader outlook, and his case for it seems to me convincing.

Let’s consider what this position means for the Value Condition. If even substantial self-knowledge has only instrumental value, why think that ‘Being unkind is ... made morally worse if it is combined with the belief that one is kind’ (32)? Perhaps the unkind person’s mistaken belief is morally problematic because it decreases the likelihood that he will strive to become kinder. Of course, it decreases that likelihood only if he *values* kindness. And surely knowing that one is unkind, and celebrating that fact, is at least as morally problematic as mistakenly believing oneself to be kind (while valuing kindness). Realizing that one is kind, when one values unkindness, may have negative moral consequences, since it may lead one to strive to become less kind. As Cassam observes, ‘We clearly don’t want people like Stalin and Hitler to be true to themselves’ (223).

The moral value of self-knowledge’s consequences will thus depend on the knower’s motivations or values. This is arguably a feature of knowledge generally. Since knowledge typically facilitates the achievement of one’s goals, the instrumental moral value of any kind of knowledge (with the exception, for motivational internalists, of moral knowledge) will depend upon the knower’s motivations or values.

So is substantial self-knowledge generally more valuable than trivial self-knowledge, as the Value Condition implies?

Trivial self-knowledge has obvious practical value: e.g., it enables me to order the proper dessert. (Here, I’m assuming that self-knowledge of sensations and mundane attitudes is trivial self-knowledge.) And it is sometimes morally valuable. If I’m participating in a research study investigating side effects of a new medication, knowledge that I’m feeling pain rather than nausea may carry morally significant benefits for others.

But the morally significant consequences of trivial self-knowledge are probably sparse in comparison to those of substantial self-knowledge. Character traits and values involve stable dispositions, likely to shape morally significant behavior. By contrast, much trivial self-knowledge is knowledge of states that are short-lived: fleeting sensations, passing thoughts, momentary urges. And trivial self-knowledge of more

stable states, such as banal geographical beliefs, is perhaps unlikely to shape morally significant behavior.

Granting that substantial self-knowledge has greater moral value than trivial self-knowledge, does this establish that ‘there is no excuse’ for focusing one’s research on trivial self-knowledge? I don’t think it does. For as even this brief discussion about the moral significance of self-knowledge demonstrates, in assessing the value of self-knowledge we move quickly into the ethical realm. My point is not that subdisciplinary boundaries should be strictly enforced. Rather, it’s that the moral significance of self-knowledge essentially depends on ethical issues—the nature and value of authenticity, whether willful or negligent self-ignorance is a vice, and even the truth of consequentialism. It is natural that those self-knowledge theorists whose interests center outside of ethics and moral psychology, and who have limited expertise in those fields, would not take up these issues. Interest in the value of self-knowledge might inspire a philosopher to educate herself in the relevant fields. But the choice not to pursue questions about self-knowledge’s value seems entirely legitimate, and does not amount to dismissing them as unimportant. Ceding these questions to those well-versed in value theory is arguably one way of registering their importance.

This understanding of the dialectical situation defuses the second danger. As long as self-knowledge theorists are clear about their projects, the focus on trivial self-knowledge will not have the effect of downplaying the importance of ethical issues about self-knowledge or misrepresenting self-knowledge’s value.

3. Cassam’s inferentialist account of self-knowledge

Cassam’s account of self-knowledge is mainly concerned with substantial self-knowledge, but he has interesting things to say about some kinds of trivial self-knowledge as well. He argues that most self-knowledge of any stripe is inferential, where in his parlance this means ‘based on evidence’.

Cassam argues that the normal way to know one’s substantial attitudes is through what Krista Lawlor (2009) calls ‘inference from internal promptings’. He endorses Lawlor’s example, in which someone infers that she desires another child from finding herself fondly remembering the feel of a newborn in her arms and feeling envy upon learning that an acquaintance is pregnant. The resulting knowledge is doubly inferential, in that access to these internal promptings is itself inferential. To identify what I’m feeling as *envy at her pregnancy*, I must exploit my knowledge of contextual factors: what topics have recently occupied me, and perhaps my behavior. (This picture of interpretive access is partly drawn from Carruthers 2011.)

Self-knowledge of character traits is similarly inferential. In one example, Woody comes to realize that he is fastidious by the following route. He finds that he feels irritated when imagining various untidy scenes; on remembering that he left his desk in disorder, he decides that his first order of business in the morning will be to tidy up. ‘On the basis of his thoughts, imaginings, and emotions Woody is in a position to conclude that he cares about cleanliness and attention to detail’ (177). But that conclusion does not entail that he is fastidious: he might not care enough about tidiness to be fastidious, or he

might have obsessive compulsive disorder rather than merely being fastidious (*ibid.*). So an additional inferential step, involving a conception of *fastidiousness*, is needed to reach the conclusion *I'm fastidious*.

There is evidence that this sort of process sometimes works. Studies by Schultheiss and Brunstein (1999) suggest that 'people can detect their nonconscious dispositions and motives by vividly imagining a future situation and attending to how it would make them feel' (Wilson and Dunn 2004, 17.15).

Still, Cassam's account implies that self-knowledge of substantial attitudes and character traits is 'hard-earned' (177), and may be quite rare. This implication dovetails with results of psychological studies, which show that self-assessments of character traits are prone to biases. Emotional investments in one's self-conception sometimes impede clear-eyed appraisal of one's own character or attitudes (30). Moreover, conscious reflection on one's own attitudes or motives may not provide reliable evidence about deep-seated character traits, which are largely unconscious. (For useful overviews, see Wilson 2002, Wilson and Dunn 2004.) While internal promptings can shed light on attitudes and emotions, self-understanding of more deeply-seated drives and proclivities is often improved by *ignoring* such evidence in favor of evidence about one's own past behavior and, even, information about one's peers (Gilbert et.al. 2009). Cassam's view accommodates this point, since he includes behavioral evidence in the inferential basis for substantial self-knowledge. Yet as he also notes, difficulties loom even there: the self-attribution of attitudes on the basis of behavior is subject to well-established biases. We tend to overlook the influence of external factors, which often shape our behavior more directly than stable traits do (Bem 1972), and to confabulate the reasons for our actions (Nisbett and Wilson 1977).

In discussing substantial self-knowledge—how it is achieved, and our general accuracy—I've invoked empirical psychological studies, just as Cassam does. This is for good reason, since the non-ethical questions Cassam urges us to consider generally lend themselves to the research methods of social psychology. These non-ethical questions include: How reliable are our judgments about our own character traits? What are the special obstacles to substantial self-knowledge? Are we good at affective forecasting, that is, 'knowing what will make you happy'? (32). Does self-knowledge promote well-being? To echo my earlier point: the choice to leave such questions to those with expertise in psychological research methods—experimental design, statistical analysis, etc.—seems unassailable, and is arguably one way of registering their importance.

Conclusion

In a New York Times forum, Cassam wrote:

There has to come a point at which philosophy has to address wider concerns, and if self-knowledge is not the kind of thing which philosophers can think about in ways that resonate with the world at large then one fears for the future of the subject. (Cassam 2014b)

Questions about self-knowledge of character and the value of self-knowledge do ‘resonate with the world at large’. Philosophers with the relevant interests and expertise should pursue these issues, exploiting the results of empirical research and contributing to work in ethics.

Fortunately, philosophical theorizing is not a zero-sum game. And some of the issues motivating mainstream self-knowledge theorists also ‘resonate with the world at large’. Plenty of non-academics are interested in the mind-body problem; and to judge by the popularity of the *Matrix* movies, external world skepticism fascinates a broad audience. Self-knowledge theorists could, of course, do more to articulate to the public how their work engages with these compelling topics.

My reservations about Cassam’s polemic against mainstream theorizing notwithstanding, I highly recommend this book. Its powerful critical arguments and refreshingly level-headed approach to a wide range of questions about self-knowledge make it a must-read for specialists. Because the writing is accessible and highly engaging, nonspecialists and scholars in other fields will profit from it as well.¹

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----- and Elizabeth W. Dunn 2004: 'Self-Knowledge: Its Limits, Value, and Potential for Improvement'. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55, pp. 17.1–17.26.

The philosophy of self is the study of the many conditions of identity that make one subject of experience distinct from other experiences. The self is sometimes understood as a unified being essentially connected to consciousness, awareness, and agency. Most philosophical definitions of self—per Descartes, Locke, Hume, and William James—are expressed in the first person. A third person definition does not refer to specific mental qualia but instead strives for objectivity and operationalism. Keywords: qualitative research, case study, theoretical paradigm, methodology, multi-level analysis.

2. Introduction. The goal of this investigation is the development of idiographic knowledge affixed to natural and social science experience (Outhwaite 1987) so as to comprehend the deeper structures and meanings of the internal management operations of an RDB. The philosophical assumptions that support these theoretical paradigms relate to A case study strategy provides data for building theory (Glasser & Strauss 1967) that contributes to existing knowledge by analysis from another perspective using the self as a research instrument. Model building is the logical stage in scientific discovery when it is critical to illuminate and raise the possibility of new perceptions (Bhaskar 1978). Freedom is the key philosophical problem, the crown of all the efforts of theoretical thinking, the culminating moment of any mature philosophical system. Idealism, which maintains the positions of indeterminism, regards the will as an immanent, autonomous, self-contained spiritual force, supposedly generating certain actions from its depths. For example, the existential notion of absolute freedom has no objective roots. According to Nietzsche, "the will to power" has more need of lucky errors than the truth for which we strive. Why, he asks, is falsehood, the unknown, even ignorance I shall summarize this case study below. In the second, main part of this chapter, however, I wish to debate, that is, justify or defend rather than do, the sociology of philosophical knowledge. 19 Husserl's question of self-evidence, posed the most explicitly in his "Logical Investigations" (Logische Untersuchungen (1900) -LU), reveals the deeply problematic character of any justification of what we may call adequacy -the upright character of our cognitive references to the world. In third place, I study how sociology permits to improve the philosophical reflexivity from a thick description of the hierarchy that organizes the philosophical field: so, sociology of philosophy appears, not as an attack to philosophy, but as an increase of the philosophical work critical capacities. Contributions from all philosophical approaches and traditions are to be found in this volume, and there is an emphasis on the implications of the philosophical accounts of lifelong learning for a synthesis of theory and good practice. Authors tackle the task of identifying, analysing, and addressing the key problems, topics, and issues relevant to Lifelong Learning that are internationally generalizable and, in times of rapid change, of permanent interest to the scholar and practitioner.