TURNER, Stephen P. **Understanding the tacit.** New York: Routledge, 2014. (Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought, 81)

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According to Stephen Turner, "tacit knowledge" has a long existence as a philosophical concept (Aristotle's *Hexis*, Ryle's *know-how*, and Bourdieu's *habitus* are a few examples). The concept of "tacit" has a wide range of definitions, but, in a broad sense, means a sort of knowledge neither explicit nor conscious. The reason to accept it is obvious: the fact that one can engage in some practices without any explicit knowledge of them, that is, the concept is related to certain abilities or skills that individuals learn directly from experience, lacking formal teaching or mastery of explicit rules. Theories of tacit knowledge can be based on individuals (brains or bodily knowledge, for example) or collective (society or even any transcendental realm), allowing the thought that tacit knowledge comes from individual minds to society or culture or from society or culture to the individual minds. They can be based on cognitive concepts (rules, representations, intentions, consciousness, etc.) or pragmatic concepts (skills, know-how, etc.). One concern in relation to explaining the tacit is the need to articulate explanations to the issues of its origin, the relation between implicit and explicit knowledge, the tacit and social relativism, the tacit and causal relations to the world, and so on. In *Understanding the Tacit*, Turner investigates these and other issues about tacit knowledge and the consequences of such investigation to the theory of social practices. To do that, Turner analyzes some theories of tacit knowledge and, especially, dedicates quite a bit of attention to cognitive science, mainly connectionism and mirror neurons.

The book contains an Introduction to the main issues of the tacit knowledge and 11 Chapters divided in three parts. Part I (*Two Key Philosophical Issues: Underdetermination and Understanding Others*) is composed of just two Chapters that

introduce the central philosophical premises of the book. In Part II (*Critiques: Practices, Meanings, and Collective Tacit Objects*), Turner analyses some accounts of tacit knowledge, including Harry Collins' and Polanyi's writings, showing the problems and virtues of these accounts of tacit. Part III (*The Alternative: Tacitness, Empathy, and the Other*) offers an alternative, which is designed to comprehend tacit knowledge in terms of a new understanding of what is collective and appealing to the concept of "empathy". Even though the book is a collection of papers, it presents the main concepts of the tacit knowledge debate, analyses some important accounts, pointing their pros and cons, and, lastly, offers an alternative to the tacit. The result is a very interesting book about tacit that gathers the author's thoughts as they have developed in more than 20 years of research about the tacit.

Part 1 introduces two main issues related to the tacit that Turner discusses all through the book. The first one is underdetermination; the second problem is sharing. By underdetermination, we can think the absence of evidence to support a theory. In this case, the problem is the absence of evidence to sustain the conclusion that the same tacit knowledge exists in different people by appealing to the fact that people reach the same results in common practices. That is, because many people do the same, we could suppose that they have the same internal tacit knowledge behind their actions, thoughts, language, and so on. The argument that Turner offers against this idea is inspired by computer science. The discussion emerges from computational cognitive modeling, very popular when the cognitive revolution started a few decades ago, that had offered models to understand all aspects of human cognition, even tacit knowledge. On the one side, Turner cites the "natural" projects, represented mostly by experts by whom we could attribute tacit knowledge to do a specific task. On the other side, he mentions the "artificial" projects, represented by computational models, and in which very different models can reach the same results. Then, if computers can be made to model the performance of tasks that involve tacit knowledge, there will also be multiple models able to do the same task. The conclusion is that there is not a definitive reason to accept the idea that the same outcome implies in the same source, which, in this case, implies in the same tacit knowledge. If different models can solve

the same problem, the same thing could happen with human beings, that is, different tacit knowledge could produce equal outcomes, and then there is no reason to accept that a fixed, shared tacit knowledge underlies these outcomes. The second issue is the belief that people engaging in communication with each other or understanding each other need to share the same internal mechanisms, premises or structures, in a broad sense. One of most frequent theses of Turner's argument is his denial that communication or mutual understanding requires sharing of the identical structures or frameworks. This is the most interesting discussion in *Understanding the Tacit*.

In his book *The Theory of Social Practices*, Turner claims that the tacit knowledge is neither transcendentally fixed nor collective shared knowledge. According to him, one of the common difficulties to understand the tacit arises when it is taken in analogy to the explicit knowledge. The standard view about the tacit accepts the existence of a set of theoretical, explicit knowledge that people acquire by experience and then accepts that tacit knowledge is the internalization of such explicit knowledge, in a not explicit, not individual, not conscious way. In other words, the tacit is a collective, shared knowledge. And then, the traditional mode to comprehend communication and mutual understanding is claiming that people share the same internal structure (frameworks, categories, rules, schemas, presuppositions, premises, and so on), which is to say that they share the same tacit knowledge. But, Turner asks, why should we accept the existence of such shared structure? One of reasons to deny this sort of shared tacit knowledge is what Turner calls the "transmission" problem, to explain how the same – the unique, in fact – collective tacit content is conveyed between individuals: "To share a presupposition, for example, is to share the same presupposition. But what means of acquiring a presupposition guarantees sameness? There is none, I argued" (p. 103).

Nonetheless, Turner is not denying the existence of tacit knowledge, but the idea of sharing. He argues that traditional ways to understand communication and understanding, appealing to sharing, took historically two main forms, a transcendental one, represented by Kant, and a causal one, represented by adepts of theories of habits (as the idea of sharing mentioned before). Both have in common the

fact that they are explanations based on the idea of shared knowledge. However, the first one appeals to metaphysics, the second to collective knowledge and processes of internalization.

We have said that the argument for the tacit, in the transcendental form, is this one: to do the same things people need to share the same framework (or the same rules, schemas, etc.), therefore, they share the same framework. It means that if people engage in the same practices they share the same framework (the same tacit knowledge), and the philosophical task is then to explain which mechanism can satisfy these conditions. According to Kant, the conditions of possibility of the knowledge are the concepts (categories) shared by everyone. Individuals are human beings since they share the same cognitive structure. Nevertheless, how to explain that the innate framework reaches the external world? If human beings have, inside their heads, the principles needed to acquire knowledge, how to justify that these concepts are related to external world? The alternative is to defend the sharing account in terms of a theory of habits, that is, individuals learning from their experience. In this case, the social knowledge would be interiorized as a habit. The problem, Turner argues, is how to explain that what is sharing is a collective knowledge reproduced in every individual who shares such knowledge. According to Turner, there is actual empirical evidence supporting "noncollective 'social' claims".

Thus, Turner claims that the idea of shared tacit knowledge is a profound mistake, since there is no mechanism able to explain how tacit knowledge can be reproduced in different individuals. The transmission thesis is "little sort of magical". Then, Turner denies tacit knowledge conceived as shared and he denies collective modes of to understand it. Moreover, the Kantian and neo-Kantian alternative has a well-known problem with idealism. Turner's own account is an alternative that dispenses with such concepts as "frameworks", "presuppositions", "schemas", "premises", and so on. Tacit knowledge, he claims, is better understood as individual, not shared, and is learning-based knowledge. This is why connectionism is a very important topic to Turner, once he thinks that connectionism teaches us new forms to understand knowledge respecting these premises. Tacit knowledge is individualized in

every human being's brain; therefore, we should not expect to find the same physical or psychological structure in every person that is able to engage in common practices. Furthermore, Turner also analyzes "mirror neurons", to verify if they can be an alternative to the issue of learning and transmission of tacit knowledge. According to him, mirror neurons fit well with individualism because the explanation is based on emulation of the knowledge of other's minds.

Finally, Turner defends the thesis that tacit knowledge is a condition of interaction and communication between people. Denying the shared theory, he concludes that the best alternative is the defense of the capacity to understand each other or a "mind reading", based on the idea of "empathy". According to him, the concept of "empathy" has changed as a consequence of mirror neurons research, which has changed our comprehension of human interaction. Then, Turner discusses empathy considering some consequences of mirror neurons, focused in the "pre-conscious" level of empathy. To him, the "empathists" – different from theorists that defend a shared framework – claim that the explanation of mutual understanding depends on emulations and inference to the best explanation. Empathy, Turner argues, as a sort of understanding, was discussed by authors as Weber and Brentano and means a sort of immediate or self-evident understanding of other beings. Empathy means that something is self-evident, then, empathists do not need to appeal to such concepts as "collective" or "shared". Turner's original or primal understanding of other individuals and empathy is an alternative to the tradition based on shared frameworks and schemas.

Understanding the Tacit is a significant book to everyone concerned with social practices, normativity (rule-governed practices), and cognitive studies on mindness and behavior. It offers an unusual perspective of all these topics, different from traditional perspectives we can often find in contemporary authors as John McDowell, Robert Brandom or Pierre Bourdieu.

References

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