

Naturalized Epistemology

Rules for Good Believing

- Three prominent projects in Epistemology:
 - 1) Giving rules for good believing
 - 2) Defining knowledge
 - 3) Defeating the Sceptic
- Focus: Giving rules for good believing
- Three questions about good believing:
 - 1) How *ought we* form, maintain and revise beliefs?
 - 2) How *do we* form, maintain and revise beliefs?
 - 3) Do we form, maintain and revise beliefs the way we ought to?
- Note: The first one is a *normative* question while the second a *descriptive*.

Normative vs. Descriptive

- Normative or evaluative claims are about what one *ought to*....
believe, desire, do, explain, feel, infer, etc.
 - These claims involve *reasons for support or justification*.
- Examples:
 - We ought to believe in love because it is makes us good people.
 - We ought to help the poor because we have more than we need.
- Descriptive claims are about how we do (actually).... believe, desire, do, explain, feel, infer, etc.
 - These claims *do not* involve reasons for support or justification.

Examples:

- Most people believe in God.
- Some cultures practice infanticide.

Normative Epistemology

- Descartes asks: Which beliefs are worth having?
- Traditional epistemology seems irredeemably normative for it centres on the justification of beliefs, i.e. the giving of reasons.

Three Dimensions of Epistemic Normativity:

- (1) Primary question: How ought we form, maintain and revise our beliefs?
 - (2) Central epistemic concepts are normative: Justification and Rationality.
Example: If a belief is justified, then it is taken to be *permissible* and *reasonable* to hold it.
 - (3) Non-epistemic normative concepts appear in epistemological explanations: the right to be sure, intellectual duty, etc.
- Prominent Advocates: Descartes, Kant, Ayer, etc.

Naturalized Epistemology

- The term ‘naturalized epistemology’ (NE) was coined by W.V. Quine in his 1969 paper ‘Epistemology Naturalized’.
- Some central ideas go back to Hume.
- Advocates of NE reject:
 - first philosophy
 - infallibilism
 - internalism
- Advocates of NE accept:
 - Investigation of knowledge via natural science
 - To naturalize epistemology is to make it a scientific theory
- Prominent Advocates: Quine, Goldman, Kornblith, Kitcher, etc.

Naturalized Epistemology (2)

- Some consequences of NE:
 - Epistemic hypotheses are judged on their empirical merits.
 - Knowledge-producing mechanisms taken to aid survival.
 - Empiricism: Evidence comes from the senses.
 - Externalism
 - Scepticism an issue only in particular scientific contexts
- Returning to the three questions of good believing, NE holds that we should not answer question 1 before (and independently of) addressing question 2.
- It is a matter of priority: We first investigate how we form beliefs and then answer the question how we ought to form beliefs.

Example: Hume on Induction

- Two interpretations:

Hume the Non-Naturalist:

- 1) We ought not to use induction (because reason cannot justify it)
- 2) We do (as a matter of irresistible habit) use induction
- 3) We do not reason (from observed instances) the way we should

Hume the Naturalist:

- 1) We do (as a matter of irresistible habit) use induction
- 2) We ought to use induction because we do use it to good effect
- 3) We do reason (from observed instances) the way we should

Eliminative Naturalism

- W.V. Quine: Eliminate the normative element of epistemology
 - Drops rational reconstruction, infallibility and the normative notion of justification.
 - “The stimulation of his sensory receptors is all the evidence anybody has had to go on” (1969: 75).
 - Epistemology is to be “a chapter of [empirical] psychology”.
- J. Kim: We cannot eliminate the normative element and still call the subject ‘epistemology’.
 - Quine still relies on notions such as evidence and these have an ineliminable normative dimension.
 - To be evidence for a theory just is to “tend to enhance the reasonableness or justification” of the theory.

Non-Eliminative Naturalism

- Central idea: We should employ results from science whenever we can to address traditional epistemological questions. Some questions, however, cannot be scientifically investigated.
- Many Naturalized Epistemologists accept the notion of justification but try to partly define it in naturalistic terms.
- Prominent Advocates: Virtually all Naturalists, i.e. Hack, Goldman, Kornblith, Kitcher, Stich, etc.
- Question: How much autonomy (from the sciences) does epistemology have?

Food for Thought

- Would the philosophical study of knowledge become redundant, if we had a complete scientific understanding of human cognition?

Reading

- J. Kim ‘What is “Naturalized Epistemology”’, in Kim and Sosa (eds.) *Epistemology: An Anthology*.