Does Epistemic Naturalism vindicate Semantic Externalism?- An Episto-semantical Review*

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ABSTRACT

The paper concentrates how could the acceptance of radical naturalism in Quine's theory of meaning escorts Quine to ponder the naturalized epistemology. W.V. Quine was fascinated about the evidential acquisition of scientific knowledge, and language as a vehicle of knowledge takes a significant role in his regimented naturalistic theory that is anchored in the scientific framework. My point is that there is an interesting shift from epistemology to language (semantic externalism).

The rejection of the mentalist approach on meaning vindicates external that somehow pave the way for 'semantic holism', a thesis where the meaning of a sentence is defined in turns to the totality of nodes and paths of its semantic networks where the meaning of linguistic units depend upon the meaning of the entire language. I would like to relook on Quine's heart throbbing claim about the co-extensiveness of the sentential relation and the evidential relation that point towards an affirmation of meaning holism and semantic externalism. Besides, the knowledge of acquaintance that relinquishes the singular thought from the account of psychological consideration and self-knowledge hypothesis copes up with the testimonial and warrant knowledge entangling by the claims of social-knowledge as anticipated by Alvin Goldman. My conclusion would be nearer to the stance of semantic externalism inculcated by the social knowledge (in epistemic sense) and semantic holism.

W. V. Quine, (I suppose) was the first philosopher who probably used the term 'naturalism' from an empiricist ground holding that the standard paradigm for all knowledge depends on scientific commitments. However, for Quine, 'naturalism' as a mine allege cannot be looked upon as a basis of the sciences. In fact, it is a sort of an assertion about the premise that 'science is all' and something that surpasses science turn out as bungling. Quine's position on science and philosophy seems comprehensively striking. He dislikes obliging science upon philosophy, although he considers in his thesis that philosophical methods ensue pertinence because of the paradigmatic base of natural science and its consequences. We know that Quine in many ways intensely influenced by the thoughts of empiricism and Vienna circle. Lockean empiricism trained him that we want to deduce the truth of nature from the sensory evidences and should describe the truth in terms of the logico-mathematical auxiliaries and observation that can be confirming and also infirming it. Quine also inspired by the Tarskian model of truth. Quine intends to see the problem from the ground of 'understanding a sentence' relying on the epistemic conditions under which the sentence turns true.

Epistemic Naturalism: Quine's Outlook

Quine is mindful about the thesis that we are unable to alleviate all the statements of the world into the same boundary of verificationism. He concerns about the crumple of the radical empiricism, which emphasizes on the instantaneous experiences which could validate our scientific assessments. Quine believes in a reoriented process of 'modern empiricism' that perhaps argues against the two tenets of empiricism. Quine writes,

> Two cardinal tenets of empiricism reminded unassailable, however, and so remain in this day. One is that whatever evidence there is for science is sensory evidence. The other, to which I shall return, is that all inculcation of meaning of words must rest ultimately on sensory evidence.[1]

One may ask, 'What is the fundamental panorama of natural science that Quine hold?' It looks extremely difficult to expose any precise response from Quine's thoughts. He introduced a few ideas about the natural science and its upshots in philosophy. Some of the celebrating thoughts are as follows:

First, Following Ludwig Wittgenstein's 'language game' (a kind of 'evidential paradigm'), Quine introduces a pretty similar 'evidential checkpoint of science' in philosophy. Quine urges, "A sentence's claim to scientific status rests on what it contributes to a theory whose checkpoints are in prediction."[2]

Secondly, Quine takes care for an 'inter-subjective' checkpoint that demonstrates an evidential base from the standpoint of the third person.

Thirdly, Quine believes in the holistic process of 'web of belief' in a 'single language' followed by the same logic. A critic may inquire, 'what is the necessity of this theory'? Gary Kemp, a prominent Quinean clarifies Quine's view from a different level. Kemp argues,

> ...all the evidence point to a single reality, not two or more, it ought to be possible to have a single theory describing it, where each part of it coheres with the rest on the score of explanation, where this in turn is a matter, in the best cases, of subsuming the explanda under maximally general quantified statements.[3]

Quine admits that the naturalism is not just a rigorous science and from the impact on sensory surfaces, one can begin a theory of the external world that may more or less close to the successful prediction. If you (an agent) wish to analysis a theory, then the predictions stand for an evidential checkpoint. An observation that links to an evidence of a theory has two notable features. One is known as 'inter-subjectivity', whereas the other is called the 'correspondence to stimulation'. Observation sentences like 'it is raining' or "that's a dog" are relied on the occasional sentences. In this case, the occasion sensitivity deduces the truth-value of the observation sentences. 'Inter-subjectivity' hypothesis focuses on the evidences which have intertwined link with public sharability. Besides, Quine believes that the observational sentences have some holophrastic sense, i.e. the sentences could be formed out of any conjunction. I think that by this way of holophrastic sense, we can simply tie among an observation and a theory based sentence through predictions. For illuminating the significant characteristics of the observation sentences, Quine himself writes,

> The observation sentence is the means of verbalizing the prediction that checks a theory. The requirement that it command a verdict outright is what makes it a final checkpoint. The requirement of inter-subjectivity is what makes science objective.[4]

Quine strictly believes that the observational sentences are considered, as a vehicle of our scientific evidences as well as it seems an entering wedge of language. The amendment of the naturalistic perspective engages language as a social art in Quine's writings. This is definitely a praiseworthy contribution of Quine. Now the question is, 'how could an observation sentence be relative to the linguistic community?' Quine urges that the observational sentences are that on which the members of the community agreed outright on witnessing the occasion. To sum up, the observational sentences are out exactly beyond of any theory-laden premises. Even words in an observational sentence may recur in other sentences anchored in some theoretical contexts. This connection seems to me, is also a germane component of any externalist plea that I will certainly discuss in the coming part of my paper.

The naturalistic conception of language can well ensemble with the Quinean conception of naturalistic epistemology. However, it is amazing that he abhors refusing the application of the conceptual analysis of common sense that is also related to the experience or evidences, though these are slipshod, piecemeal, and comparatively unsystematic ways of knowledge. Quine argues, 'Science is not a substitutive for common sense but an extension of it.'[5]

Quine promises to propose a naturalistic explanation of knowledge that outpaces the 'knowledge of knowledge' proposal. The account is not only considered as mere justification of knowledge, but it actually bestows significance on its explanation and consequences, whereas the conventional epistemology attempts to find out the 'certainty of knowledge' in general. Epistemological inquires have two dimensions. The first side is called the 'conceptual side' whereas the second side is called the 'doctrinal side'[6]. The 'conceptual side' of traditional epistemology defines the various concepts of the phenomenal knowledge. Besides, the 'doctrinal side' copes with the justifications that confirm those concepts that are revealed in the 'conceptual side' of epistemology. Quine's point shows that the 'conceptual side' is much closer to the theory of meaning, whereas the 'doctrinal side' deals with the theory of truth and reference together. In the beginning part of the paper 'Epistemology Naturalized', Quine clarifies that epistemology is worried about the foundations of the sciences. Even he feels uneasy to admit the Cartesian quest for certainty. He suggests that it is a sort of 'lost cause'. However, Kim shows,

In urging naturalized epistemology on us, Quine is not suggesting that we give up the Cartesian foundationlist solution and explore others within the same framework-perhaps to adopt some sort of 'coherenist' strategy, or to require of our basic beliefs only some degree of 'initial credibility' rather than Cartesian certainty...Quine's proposal is more radical than that. He is asking us to set aside the entire framework of justification-centered epistemology. That is what is new in Quine's proposals. Quine is asking us to put in its place a purely descriptive causal-nomological science of human cognition.[7]

Kim moreover advocates on Quine's epistemology that predominantly hints to the decisive issues like 'how does evidence relate to the reality?' Mainly, the structure of knowledge according to Quine needs to be basis on the scientific evidences. This kind of empiricist account tries to explicate the world from the outlook of naturalism, but the fact is that our interpretation of the world is expressed by the set of sentences and words. Here the role of language is to mingle with the naturalized epistemology. It seems to me true that Quine was interested in the eventual acquisition of scientific knowledge, yet language as a vehicle of knowledge takes an imperative role in his regimented naturalistic theory, but that sounds to me as a different interesting issue which can call for an another paper. At this juncture, we locate a shift from talking of reference to talking about words. Quine calls this shift as a 'semantic ascent' by believing that a person who is responsive of the linguistic tricks can be a master of referential language. Perhaps I assume that Quine is in no way denies the dispositional use of reference fixations. Language of reference becomes suitable when an agent says 'my cat' to refer to his/her own cat. Here the relation between language and the world depends on the observational sentences and the reference is just a capacity that is bonded with certain linguistic apparatus (which is complex) that are also conjoined with observation sentences from an externalist's sense.

Knowledge and Externalism

Let me now crack down on the nature of 'acquaintance' as it is doubtlessly the source of epistemic knowledge. The process of acquaintance with an item allows an agent to believe the singular thoughts about it. A singular

thought holds the hypothesis that no object no thought and different objects different thoughts. Besides, the truth of that thought depends *essentially* on what ways that very object is. So, for an example, the thought that 'Chomsky is a philosopher' can be made true (or false) only by the existence and reference fixation of the subject 'Chomsky'. Note that the idea so far is not that the acquaintance is such-and-such, and that allows you to think (relevant) singular thoughts, but just that acquaintance is whatever it is that allows you to think singular thoughts about an object. My attempt is not to show how acquaintance turns out to be a constraint on singular thought, but here I might distinguish sharply between the content of singular thought with their psychological trepidation. As you are aware, this is a delicate approach, and I do not have any full theory that satisfies me on this score. Here I attempt to crack down on this from the standpoint of psychological understanding of an acquaintance; an approach to look at the 'internal' objects of acquaintance, especially if the objects of acquaintance are supposed to be what underwrites the knowledge of the external world. The Cartesian line of reasoning summarizes the idea of indubitability or infallible knowledge of the individual's thoughts, which are not based on the empirical knowledge. Besides, self-knowledge hypothesis relies on the observation of our inner side; we can also know that self-knowledge is not empirically corrigible by others, so it becomes an incorrigible knowledge. The statement 'I have a 'toothache'' is regarded as a '*phenomenal avowals*' while the statement 'I hope the weather continues cool' is regarded as '*attitudinal avowals*'. Here three alternative characters interconnect with the concept of *avowals* or self-knowledge[8]. These are authoritative, non-inferential, and self-ascription where we found that it is possible for a third person to familiar with all the pertinent facts of first person's behaviours, but the third person cannot be competent to grasp the basic psychology of the first person. Well, I would not like to focus on the intricate claims, as I am more concerned about the testimonial knowledge of a third person or social knowledge and would like to see that whether the social knowledge preserves the demands of externalism or not.

My consideration turns towards externalism from the essence of semantic holism and Quinean idea of observational sentences. It looks true that in 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' Quine tries to decline the mentalist theory of meaning by denying the traditional analytic-synthetic distinction. The first dogma as Quine puts it is the cleavage between the analytic propositions that are

grounded independently of matters of fact and the synthetic propositions that are grounded only on facts or empirical contents. Critics consider that this rejection of mentalist theory defends the thesis of externalism, which paves the way to semantic holism. One thing is noteworthy to point out that the heart of semantic holism rests on the meaning of a sentence that can be defined in favour of the totality of nodes and paths in its semantic networks. Here the important query is that how could 'meaning holism' be compatible with externalism. Meaning holism seems allied with semantic externalism hypothesis. It is an acceptable fact that we can have holistic externalist semantics. Let me try to understand what I mean by holistic externalist semantics. It particularly means two things-

First, the meanings are not in the head (externalism) and *secondly*, the meanings of linguistic units rely on the meaning of the entire language (semantic holism). Let us take a simple example of the determination of the meaning of a predicate. Suppose we have a sentence that uses a natural kind term in its predicate, viz. the sentence 'Jimmy is a tiger'. In order to understand the sentence we have to know the particular thing (may be subject or object) is denoted by the name 'Jimmy' and which property or bundle of properties are denoted by the predicate 'is a tiger'. Further, we need to know if 'Jimmy' is indeed an instance of those properties. How do we settle on which properties will be denoted by the predicate. Here we must have to depend upon the socio-linguistic practices of the community in which this sentence is uttered. We are looking at the socio-linguistic practices of a community and so the meaning cannot be located 'in the head' of the speakers. Besides, the meaning of a single predicate depends upon the entire socio-linguistic practices (or we call it social knowledge in Goldman sense) that are related to the entire language. This hypothesis illustrates the ground of semantic holism. In this way, I would like to illustrate how a *holistic externalist semantic theory* could work. Actually here the contribution of the theoretical sentences is relied on the corporate bodies of the other sentences. The progression doubtlessly looks for the 'web-of-beliefs' system.

Externalist plea evidently shows that the content of the beliefs depends upon the external environment and obviously, it is not in the head of the speaker. Now the point is that any kind of knowledge about the content of one's belief would be the knowledge of the external environment or society. It would be not possible for the agents to know that 'water is wet' or 'twater is wet' without

knowing the external world or environment where the terms 'water' and 'twater' are located. This sort of knowledge based on the empirical knowledge about contents discards any kind of introspective knowledge that leads to the self-knowledge or direct authoritativeness hypothesis. We know the Quine's dictum that 'No entity without identity'[9], therefore, the identification of an empirical term could be promising in a knowledge system only if an agent is able to make differentiation of a term with quite similar alternative terms . For an instance, in this case one agent should be acquainted with the context and the criteria that a glass of soda water in a bar and a glass of water in a hospital are not the same. Even in the case of identifying the knowledge of X (a substance), one must have to exclude the appropriate alternative of X. For Quine, the empirical implication of a sentence is important to get its meaning as no sentence can insist to generate meaning on its own. Meaning is nothing but a property of the community of sentences that is indubitably man made procedures. This is a holistic approach of meaning that structure of the thesis of empirical evidence of meaning to rebuff the mentalist appeal and the corporate body of sentences. Here the identification of thought relies on the objects and events, which are causally and referentially related to the object of the thought. Following Putnam's *Twin Earth Thought* experiment, one can aptly claim that the truth-value of a term like 'water' or any referent object rests on the world in which speaker utters the sentence.

For me the externalist turn towards semantic holism escorts to the social nature of knowledge, where the knowledge of the subjects does not only depend on the identification of the empirical terms, but on the causal reliable and testimonial knowledge of the others or society. The contention here is nothing but the social practices regarding language uses, where the agents get the meaning of the concepts or terms from the experts or the other members of the society. Hilary Putnam as a prominent externalist introduces the idea of 'division of linguistic labor', i.e. the experts who have specialised background knowledge in a specified field. We are common people have an epistemic reliance on the experts and non-experts too. It may be well possible that a person whom we considered as an expert has partial knowledge (i.e. no comprehensive grasp of the concept in respects to composing the content) about the specific object (like Diamond). Putnam does not consider that the experts have the comprehensive grasp of the meaning of the refereed terms, yet he accepts that they know or understand better than the ordinary people understand especially about its

chemical formulas like its allotrope of carbon composition or its atomic number like 79. Though both the experts and the common people refer to the same metal as they have same stereotype, but the experts have a better description of the extension of the terms from a scientific stand. But the naturalistic outlook of semantic externalism depends on its shared paradigm hypothesis that gives prominence of the public sharability of meaning and content of our beliefs. I write elsewhere,

> I think that the most attractive part of semantic externalism, as argued by Putnam, is its naturalistic outlook towards human beings in the world.[10]

If we would like to see Alvin Goldman's position (that highly impressed me), then we will notice that he also admires the position of communication and social knowledge as a hallmark of human culture by shielding on externalism. Through communication, we can exchange the effective knowledge and it seems true that not every person of the society can personally discover the sincere veridical report or the certain knowledge about a particular thing, so testimony takes a pertinent role in the case of successful communication. The process of social knowledge distribution relies on the fourfold criterion like – discovery, transmission of message, message reception and message acceptance. One can easily argue against trustworthy of testimonial knowledge because of the wrong interpretation or misleading information of the testimonial person. A group of philosophers tries to answer this question from different levels. We know some of them like Burge's epistemic default position, Richard Foley's thought of 'Epistemic Non-egoism' that puts forward the idea of whether one should allow the elemental epistemic authority to others by rejecting the inductive evidence of other people's reliability. Harman's approach that is called 'negative coherentism' talks about the innocent epistemic beliefs, until it goes wrong or unjustified by the reason of doubting. Goldman defends the position of 'reliablism' and urges:

> In its simplest form, justificational reliabilism says that a belief is justified if and only if it is produced (and/or sustained) by a reliable belief-forming process or sequence of processes. For testimonial belief to be justified it suffers that the general process of accepting the reports of others mostly yield truths. Accepting the reports of others is really a specific patter of inference,

> where inference is constructed as a process that takes some beliefs as inputs and generates new beliefs as outputs.[11]

Goldman believes in 'reliabilism' in the sense that it produces some reliable beliefs depending upon the prevalence senses (concern about what is going on in the actual world) and propensity senses (concern about what is going on in the actual and possible world) that invoke to discard any type of wishful thinking and confused reasoning. Here we attain justified true believe on the basis of *truth ratio* (reliability). This reliabilist turn may be compared with his social epistemology, where he quests for epistemic paternalism that talk about the reasonable amount of control provided by relevance evidences as necessary conditions of the testimonial knowledge. The truth indicator of reliabilism in no way linked with cognitive accessibility. These are yield to the *second order evidence* relying on evidence and justification. In his earlier writing[12], we know that he stimulated by the causal theory and tried to find out the evidential based causal connection between beliefs and facts. I like to accept that there are ample numbers of concept and thought that are indescribable but exist in the head of the speaker without associated with words. For me, all thoughts have a relation to the world in the following sense: there is a potential condition in which these have an effect (may be causal or conceptual linkage) to the world. Here the stance of social knowledge depends on the 'warranted epistemic reliability' and testimonial sources intervening with externalism instigates beliefs and meanings as world oriented or socially constructed. Externalist who believes in the social knowledge configures our beliefs from the perspective of the believers or says beliefs are sited where the believers are i.e. the society or world. I think here the concern is not about beliefs itself, but about the content of beliefs where the social and the linguistic practices are embedded with our knowledge of the content of beliefs. Actually, all thoughts are caused by the world, as these are the states of the brain embedded by the causal histories that involve many factors including the world, evolutionary forces, etc. There are some thoughts that are not conjoined to the matter of the facts and have idiosyncratic efforts on agent's behaviour. This is possible because the kind of situation in which they would affect behaviour will not as it happens to arise. The striking point preserves here the mental images as well have some causal powers of the contents that help all these to relate to the world and objects.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

* **This paper is dedicated to my father Sri Sunil Chakraborty, a silent inspiration of my struggles.**

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