

**A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN'S
SOCIALISED EPISTEMOLOGY**

BY

OYEDOLA Olaoluwa Andrew

M.A. IFE

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN
PHILOSOPHY, FACULTY OF ARTS, OBAFEMI AWOLOWO
UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE, NIGERIA**

2015

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Author: OYEDOLA Olaoluwa Andrew
Department: Philosophy
Title: A Critical Assessment of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Socialised Epistemology
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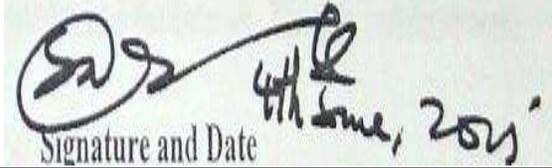
4th April 2015

Date

Prof. Y.K. Salami

Department of Philosophy,

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.



Signature and Date
4th June, 2015

Supervisor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am greatly grateful to my supervisor, Professor Yunusa Kehinde Salami. I cannot but thank Prof. Salami for his immeasurable, progressive and strictly procedural help. Words are not actually enough to express his impact in the success of this thesis.

I also thank my late lecturer, Late Dr. Moses Oke, May his gentle and intelligent soul (if there is one) keep resting in perfect peace. Also, to all my dedicated and brilliant lecturers, starting from Dr. Jare Oladosu, Dr. Victor Alumona, Dr. Williams Idowu, Dr J. Famakinwa, Dr. Gbenga Fasiku to every academic staff of Philosophy Department, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife including my ever-loving brother Mr. David Oyedola, I say thank you all. Learning at this great people's feet has been very fun and enlightening. I cannot but wish them all the very best in all their endeavours.

My sincere gratitude equally goes to my Mother, Pastor (Mrs) Elizabeth Oyedola. How on earth can I thank her enough?! She has been the most loving mother ever. Words are not enough to depict her love, care, affections and guidance for my life. Without her, first degree, let alone second degree, might have been a mere dream. May she keep growing in strength to further enjoy the fruit of her labour, especially on me. I also thank my Late dad, I was just eight years when he died, but one thing I will always thank him for is the great legacy he left for his children in terms of brain, beauty and virtuous character. May his loving soul continue to resting in perfect peace.

Also to all my brothers and my one sister, I say thank you for your love and help in making this Master degree a reality. From the junior dad Pastor Sanya Oyedola (Ohio) to the junior mum Mrs Dotun Oloogunbe (London). Also Bro. Odunayo, Bro. Sunkanmi, Bro. Femi,

and the aforementioned Bro David, I say thank you very much for always being there before, during and surely after this programme.

Also, I say the biggest thank you to all of my colleagues who we started this programme together and who have one way or the other being helpful to the success of this programme. I cannot start mentioning names; everyone has been *really* helpful. Lastly, I say a very big thank you to all the non-academic staff of the department who have not just been accommodating but also labor-saving. To all the mummies in the “general office”, I say thank you. May your children never lack the needed favours anywhere they go. Once again, to everyone I have explicitly and implicitly talked about here, I say thank you.

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ABSTRACT

This study identified and characterised Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology. It examined some arguments against Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology. It also assessed the strength of Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology in light of the arguments against it. This was with a view to redirecting epistemology from its endless attempts in refuting radical skepticism to providing a solid ground for knowledge in Wittgenstein's notion of "forms of life".

The study made use of both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source comprised a close reading of Plato's "Theatetus", Roderick Chisholm's *Theory of Knowledge*, D.W. Hamlyn's *The Theory of Knowledge*, Ludwig Wittgenstein's *The Blue and Brown Books*, Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigation*, and Ludwig Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*. The Secondary source included books, journal articles and the Internet. The data collected were subjected to conceptual analysis and philosophical argumentation.

The results showed that Wittgenstein's epistemology was a rejection of the orthodox epistemology, which assumed a representational relationship between words and objects in providing valid basis for knowledge. The study discovered that Wittgenstein treated knowledge as a product of epistemic community. It found out that in spite of its shortcomings Wittgenstein's epistemology remained a plausible alternative approach to orthodox epistemology. It also discovered that contrary to the criticisms against Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology, there were numerous merits that made it worth adopting as an approach to the problems of knowledge. The study concluded that rather than endlessly seeking to refute radical skepticism, epistemologists should be contented with knowledge as provided by the form of life embedded in an epistemic community. It also concluded that it was in this form of life that the nature of knowledge could be properly understood and attained as a socialised phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

Epistemology, as a theory of knowledge, is mainly concerned with the problems about the source and the basis of propositional knowledge.¹ In other words, epistemology defines what knowledge is in order to establish “what can be known,” and identifies the conditions for knowledge, that is, it determines “how we can know”. From this conception, two facts about epistemology can be noted. First, it is imperative to note that epistemology is necessarily a criteriological discourse.² Any conception or theory of knowledge that leaves out this criteriological task is bound to be inadequate. Second, we can note that the primary task of epistemology is to determine how we can know, not how we can be certain or how radical scepticism can be refuted.³ Thus, any epistemological attempt that is devoid of this fact is also bound to be futile.

The contemporary epistemic discussion can be characterised, in general terms, as a debate between the traditional epistemologists on the one hand and the naturalised epistemologists on the other hand.⁴ Central to the aim of the traditional epistemologists is the “normative” attempt—to establish the criteria through which belief-acquisition and knowing in general can be regulated.⁵ As much as the traditional epistemology recognises the nature of

¹ Klein, P.D., “Epistemology”, in Craig, E., (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 2005), p256

² Kim, J., “What is Naturalised Epistemology”, in Kornblith, H., (ed.), *Naturalizing Epistemology*, (2nd ed.), (Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1994), p33

³ Dame, D., “The Naturalistic Epistemology of Hume and Wittgenstein”, in *Macalester Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.19, Issue 1, (2010): 127-9

⁴ Kim, J., “What is Naturalised Epistemology”, p40

⁵ Kim, J., “What is Naturalised Epistemology”, p33

epistemology as a criteriological discourse, its quest for certainty and for total refutation of radical scepticism makes it futile, because it misses out on the primary task of epistemology. For instance, despite joining in the traditionalist quest for certainty, David Hume eventually points out that whatever is certain cannot give knowledge, and whatever gives knowledge cannot be certain.⁶ If whatever gives knowledge cannot be certain, then, I think epistemologists would be better off by not going beyond the primary task of epistemology, which is the search for knowledge instead of certainty.

On the other hand, naturalised epistemology, as initiated by W.V.O. Quine, recognises the primary task of epistemology as to determine how we can know, rather than how we can be certain. But as much as naturalised epistemology recognises the primary task of epistemology, it is devoid of the fundamental nature of epistemology as a criteriological discourse.⁷ By merely describing the causal relationship between cognitive input and output, it is devoid of the criteriological aspect of epistemology that emphasises the development and application of standards for knowledge. This also amounts to a lack of genuine epistemology.⁸

There have been several modifications by naturalists (including Quine) to the extreme view expressed in his initial naturalist claim, which is referred to as “replacement thesis.”⁹ These modifications, while not advocating the total neglect of the criteriological task of epistemology,

⁶ Dame, D., “The Naturalistic Epistemology of Hume and Wittgenstein”, p128

⁷ Quine, W.V.O., “Epistemology Naturalized”, in Kornblith, H., (ed.), *Naturalizing Epistemology*, (2nd ed.), (Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1994), p20

⁸ Kim, J., “What is Naturalised Epistemology”, p41

⁹ Kornblith, H., *Naturalizing Epistemology*, pp3-4

notes that such a task can be aided by the empirical findings from psychology. Parts of these modifications are represented, for example, in reliabilism¹⁰—a theory which claims that our belief must be produced by some reliable process for it to become knowledge—and Kim’s theory of “epistemic supervenience”— which suggests that epistemic properties must supervene on the factual or naturalistic properties, which are believed to be self-justified.¹¹

However, while he recognises the fundamental nature of epistemology, Kim himself, through his prescription on how we can know, seems to be dragging epistemology back into the endless search for certainty in an attempt to refute radical scepticism in the traditional epistemology. In his theory of epistemic supervenience, the attribution of independent or intrinsic justification to beliefs either through experience or reasoning, or any form of partitioning of beliefs has been shown, by Ludwig Wittgenstein, to be misguided. According to Wittgenstein, what strikes an epistemologist as obvious or convincing are not single axioms but a system, where conclusion and premises give each other mutual support.¹² For instance, in a deductive argument, the conclusion is said to follow conclusively from the premises, because the conclusion is already included in the premises; not because the conclusion is self-justified.

Despite predating Kim and Quine, Wittgenstein has earlier in history suggested the very plausible alternative method of how we can know, which has been largely ignored. As it can be found in his later works, that is, *Philosophical Investigation* and *On Certainty* supported by *The Blue and Brown Books*, Wittgenstein’s suggestion can be interpreted to be socialised

¹⁰ Goldman, A., “A Causal Theory of Knowing”, in Roth, M.D., & Galis, L., (eds.), *Knowing: Essays in the Analysis of Knowledge*, (New York: Random House, 1970), p83

¹¹ Kim, J., “What is Naturalised Epistemology”, pp50-1

¹² Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, Anscombe, G.E.M., & Wright, G.H., (eds.), Anscombe, G.E.M., & Paul, D., (trans.), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), vv196-206

epistemology. In his socialised epistemology, Wittgenstein suggests that, while epistemologists are trying to justify a knowledge claim, the third most important fact about epistemology must not be forgotten, that is, as humans are naturally “rule-following” socialised beings, human knowledge, philosophical or otherwise, must also ultimately be grounded on this natural fact about human beings, and that makes knowledge a socialised phenomenon.

So, what epistemologists should rather concern themselves with is the criteriological investigation of the relations between knowledge and the socialised factors from which the knowledge claim is developed. For him, what is conceivable or not, justified or not, depends on the rules of language-game from which a knowledge claim is built.¹³ For instance, if there is any knowledge problem in the medical field, the physicians cannot call on the accountant for the way out of such problem. And whatever is agreed upon by the physicians in their field as knowledge cannot be justifiably denied by such accountant, for the latter does not have the necessary tool—the physicians’ training and education—to put her in an appropriate epistemic position to deny or validate such knowledge.

Therefore, in order to avoid the continuance of the highlighted endless quest for the refutation of radical scepticism in the traditional epistemology—a quest that is continued in the guise of the traditionalist-naturalist or normativist-descriptivist debate—and to avoid an inadequate investigation, as suggested in naturalised epistemology, it is the aim of this study to rather carefully articulate and assess how Wittgenstein’s socialised view of knowledge is developed in his latter works. Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology investigates knowledge as a socialised phenomenon—an investigation that helps “dissolve” a number of epistemological

¹³ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv196-206

problems, which seem intractable due to the wrong and or inadequate approach they have received. Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology does not only recognise epistemology as a criteriological discourse, but also recognises the primary task of epistemology as to determine how we can know. This makes it to be an adequate epistemological project, while making knowledge an attainable phenomenon.

For a smooth execution of its objectives, this study is in three chapters. The first chapter identifies and characterises Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology. How the concepts adopted by Wittgenstein help in developing his socialised view of knowledge is carefully examined. That is, the concern here is with tracing the development of Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology from his latter works, as an approach to the problems of epistemology. This is done with a view to seeing if Wittgenstein's epistemology is truly a preferable alternative in addressing those problems.

In the second chapter, some arguments against Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology are considered. That is, a critical review of the shortcomings that are noticed in Wittgenstein's approach is undertaken. These include some actual and possible arguments against the unorthodox nature of Wittgenstein's socialised approach to the problems of epistemology. The arguments that are considered include the problem of subjectivism that is raised given its antithetical nature to epistemic naturalism. The problem of relativism is equally examined, likewise Ayer's charge of subjectivism through his defence of "private language", and Hannon's doubt on Wittgenstein solution to skepticism.

In the third chapter, the merits of Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology are examined in light of the arguments against it in the previous chapter. This helps the study to find out whether

the strength of Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology is enough to sustain it in spite of the arguments against it. The task is done in line with some philosophers' arguments. Such philosophers are Richard Rorty, Saul Kripke, Darlei Dall'Agnol and Jason Bridges. This is done with a view to showing that, contrary to the criticisms Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology has received, there are numerous merits in it that make it worth adopting as an alternative approach to the problems of knowledge.

With the aid of these chapters, unlike the traditional epistemology claims, this study concedes that knowledge is not the truth of matters of fact which cannot be empowered with the complete influence of immediate experience. Neither is it an inaccessible supernatural phenomenon. Knowledge, as the study shows, is rather a phenomenon, which cannot be taken out of the factors that inform it. These factors are the socialised factors rooted in the epistemic system from which our knowledge-claim is developed.

CHAPTER ONE

WITTGENSTEIN'S SOCIALISED EPISTEMOLOGY

1.0 Introduction

The main objective of this chapter is to articulate Ludwig Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology. There are some concepts in Wittgenstein's works that characterise his socialised view of knowledge; and these distinguish it from not only other social epistemologies, but also the non-social epistemologies. In other words, these concepts characterize Wittgenstein's approach to epistemology as distinct from virtually every other approach in the history of the discourse. These concepts include "Rule-Following", "Use", "Grammar Investigation", "forms of life" and "language-game". It is not the case that the concepts Wittgenstein adopts are explicitly defined in his works, but how they are adopted and their importance form the socialised direction Wittgenstein's epistemology takes. It must be noted that major parts of Wittgenstein's works (especially *Blue and Brown Books* and *Philosophical Investigation*) focus on the use and construct of language. However, Wittgenstein does this knowing that "any account concerning the limits of meaningful applications of language has an impact on the limits and/or the foundation of what can be known."¹ Thus, I shall carefully discuss these concepts in this chapter and show how they help in developing Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology.

¹ Kober, M., "Certainties of a World-Picture: The Epistemological Investigations of *On Certainty*", in Sluga, H., & Stern, D.G., (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p411

1.1 Socialised Epistemology and Wittgenstein

The term “socialise” means to take part in a society’s activities and conform to the ideals, rules or standard of living in such a society. Epistemology, as a theory of knowledge, is mainly concerned with the problems about the source and the basis of propositional knowledge.² In other words, it defines what knowledge is in order to establish “what can be known,” and identifies the conditions for knowledge in order to determine “how we can know”. Going by this “Socialised Epistemology”, then it means defining what “what can be known,” and determining “how we can know” in conformity or in accordance with the ideals or a set standard of an epistemic society.

Going by socialised epistemology, Wittgenstein sees as needless the representationalist quest of the traditional epistemology, whereby propositions are believed to be grounded on something exterior to it either in an external space as object or inside the mind as mental representation.³ He notes that propositions do not have direct, individual or independent confirmation. So, they cannot be expected to be direct representation of object as claimed in empiricism or mental representation as assumed in rationalism. In his words,

When we first begin to believe anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions...It is not single axioms that strike me as obvious, it is a system in which consequences and premises give one another mutual support...All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less *arbitrary* and *doubtful* point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an

² Klein, P.D., “Epistemology”, in Craig, E., (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 2005), p331

³ Adams, R., “Where Do Our Ideas Come From? Descartes vs Locke”, in Stich S. (ed.), *Innate Ideas*, (Berkeley: California University Press, 1975), p33

argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life.⁴

In these passages we are made to know that issues concerning life, language, belief, and justification must not be thought of as atomic; they are rather organic in nature, and must be treated as such. There must be a generally accepted standard, which forms a system that serves as common ground, and without which our justificatory attempts will only end up in what A.J. Ayer calls “mere abuse”. The person whom we want to convince does not share the same epistemic ideals with us.⁵ Our arguments will not have the life it is supposed to have. An empiricist who is attempting to convince a rationalist would try indefinitely, because there will be no common ground through which they can actually educate each other on the issue at hand. So, rather than be lured into the endless attempt to find what a proposition individually “represents” or “refers to” in the internal or external world, the epistemological task must be to investigate the epistemic system which gives life to each proposition.

In other words, unlike many contemporary epistemologists believe, it is learnt from the above passages that Wittgenstein does not claim that the system must *necessarily* be or imply “natural laws” (where “natural” merely means “physical”) or causal link between our propositions and the external world, a suggestion that itself is another form of empiricism. Instead, for Wittgenstein, the justification of someone’s proposition or claim to knowledge has to do with the test of how much she understands the claim; and this understanding is determined not merely by “physical laws” but, in general, the epistemic rules of the relevant system.⁶ This does

⁴ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, Anscombe, G.E.M., & Wright, G.H., (eds.), Anscombe, G.E.M., & Paul, D., (trans.), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), vv105, 141-2

⁵ Ayer, A.J., *Language, Truth and Logic*, (New York: Dover, 1952), p111

not reflect a claim that confirmation must *merely* be from the external object or mental representation. So, any restriction of the grounding of knowledge to any of the two, as evident in the history of rationalist and empiricist epistemology, is considered needless. Grounding knowledge must be determined by the rules of the language-game concerned or within the epistemic system or community it is made.

It could be argued that the task of a philosophical enterprise like epistemology is much more than mere study of a system which perhaps could be *arbitrary* and *doubtful*. Nothing says we cannot doubt the system itself. The mere fact that there is empiricism shows that rationalism harbours some claims we can doubt, so, saying we must accept rationalist system of justification could be arbitrary and or unjustifiable itself. It is the task of epistemology, as a philosophical enterprise to scrutinize the system itself not just accepting it as a standard of justification. Or are we saying each person should hold on to her epistemic system; the rationalist should and the empiricist should also. However, it must be recalled that this system, as Wittgenstein has noted, “is not a more or less *arbitrary* and *doubtful* point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument.” In other words, it is the essence of our argument to have a ground upon which our enquiry will be based. This ground cannot be arbitrary, because it has been adequately drilled before it is agreed upon; and the agreement does not suggest it cannot take in new discoveries if new realities render its claims suspect. Also, it is the essence of argument for the each side to be willing to shift ground if there are realities that suggest its claims otherwise. As Wittgenstein suggests, justification itself must have a final point, if it has to be meaningful.⁷ So, the rationalist and the empiricist must have a common epistemic

⁶ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv80-3

⁷ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v110

ground, and, as doubts in each other's system of thought have suggested, the ground has to go beyond *merely* internal or external reference or representation, but the willingness to study each other's claims as born out of the epistemic system, in which it is made. This sums the socialised suggestion in Wittgenstein's view concerning how our knowledge could be grounded.

The talk of Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology suggests that there are other epistemologists who, like Wittgenstein, hold the theses that might be seen as socialised epistemology. Thus, there is the need to clarify the Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology in relation to other similar views. Such clarification will help in preventing any confusion that may arise between Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology and some other theories which share similar theses. These theories include "sociology of knowledge", as evident in some Alvin Goldman's works, and "social epistemology", as characterized in some scholars' works which I shall briefly examine in the subsequent discussions.

First, Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology must not be confused with sociology of knowledge. Sociology of knowledge is "the empirical study of the contingent social conditions or causes of knowledge or what passes for knowledge in a society..."⁸ This way, it is far from Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology. For instance, William Alston, while reflecting on Goldman's work, suggests that much of the material in the work "would be rejected by many

⁸ Schmitt, F.F., *Socializing Epistemology: The Social Dimensions of Knowledge*, (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 1994), p1 This type of study is evident in the works like *Knowledge in a Social World* (Alvin Goldman 1999), and *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (Helen E. Longino 1992), which are accused of either being devoid of the primary aim of epistemology as a criteriological enterprise or leading to relativistic knowledge. Taken from Phillips, P.J.J. "Book Reviews (*Socializing Epistemology: The Social Dimensions of Knowledge*)", in *Informal Logic*, 19. 2&3 (1999), pp1-4

contemporary epistemologists as ‘not real epistemology’.⁹ Alston points out that epistemologists would demote much of what is discussed in Goldman’s work to sociology, social psychology, or other fields in social sciences rather than philosophy.¹⁰

Second, Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology must equally not be confused with social epistemology. By social epistemology I mean “the conceptual and normative study of the relevance of social relations, roles, interests and institutions to knowledge.”¹¹ This seems an improvement on “sociology of knowledge.” It recognises the criteriological task of epistemology. Also, many of the social epistemologists, in their works, respond to the challenges their previous works (which are considered to be sociology of knowledge) are faced with.¹² In order to justify social epistemology as a genuine branch of epistemology, distinction has been

⁹ Goldman, A.I., “Why Social Epistemology is Real Epistemology”, in Goldman, A.I., *Pathways to Knowledge: Private and Public*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p138

¹⁰ Goldman, A.I., “Why Social Epistemology is Real Epistemology”, p138

¹¹ Schmitt, F.F., *Socializing Epistemology: The Social Dimensions of Knowledge*, p1

¹² For instance, Goldman, while trying to show “Why Social Epistemology is Real Epistemology” in *Pathways to Knowledge: Private and Public*, is busy responding to Alston’s charges against his (Goldman’s) previous attempt in *Knowledge in a Social World*. Also, Longino in “The Fate of Knowledge in Social Theories of Science” tries to modify and defend certain arguments she put forward in her earlier work *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry*. These arguments in her earlier work has been seriously criticised by Philip Kitcher. Frederick Schmitt’s *Socializing Epistemology: The Social Dimensions of Knowledge*, serves as the large umbrella under which many of these works in social epistemology rest. Taken from Phillips, P.J.J. “Book Reviews (*Socializing Epistemology: The Social Dimensions of Knowledge*)”, in *Informal Logic*, 19. 2&3 (1999), pp1-4

made between the much criticized sociology of knowledge and social epistemology;¹³ this is evident in the definitions of the terms shown earlier.

In spite of their justifications and defences, even if these works were accepted as “bona fide part of the mainstream, and hence ‘real’ epistemology”,¹⁴ the intentions of scholars in social epistemology still fall short of the aim of Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology. Social epistemology is an offspring of “naturalized epistemology”, which believes that epistemic

¹³ A similar justificatory tactics is adopted by Goldman in his work—“Why Social Epistemology is Real Epistemology” in *Pathways to Knowledge: Private and Public*—where he also distinguishes between sociology of knowledge attributed to his earlier work, and the new social epistemology he advances. See: Goldman, A.I., “Why Social Epistemology is Real Epistemology”, p138

¹⁴ Goldman, A.I., “Why Social Epistemology is Real Epistemology”, p139

questions must be answered using the method of natural science. This is not the aim of Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology. There is sharp contrast between Wittgenstein's argument and that of many contemporary epistemologists, who are reluctant to let go of their adherence to empirical science cum naturalism.¹⁵

Similarly, David Bloor's explicit intention in his work further shows that social epistemology shares more affinity with naturalized epistemology than Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology. Bloor intends to give a naturalistic reading of the later philosophy of Wittgenstein.¹⁶ This can at best lead epistemology back to the representationalist assumption in the traditional epistemology. Besides, Wittgenstein has rejected such "scientific" (the belief that all academic questions must be addressed using the method of natural science) approach to epistemology. This even marks the transition from early to later Wittgenstein. The later Wittgenstein can be summed up as an improvement on the early. It amends the scientific dogma noticed in the early.

Lastly, Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology must not be confused with coherence theory. Coherentism is a rejection of the claim that a belief can be individually or independently justified. It rather believes in organic justification of beliefs by claiming that the whole systems of beliefs are justified by their coherence. In other words, to coherence theory, a belief is

¹⁵ This unwillingness to leave empiricism is instantiated in Goldman's attempt, where emphasis is still placed on the "scientific" study of the processes through which individuals acquire their belief in their social relations. See: Goldman, A.I., "Why Social Epistemology is Real Epistemology", p138

¹⁶ Sharrock, W.W., & Anderson, "The Wittgenstein Connection", in *Human Studies*, Vol. 7, No.4 (1984), p375

justified when it coheres with a consistent, cohesive, and comprehensive set of beliefs.¹⁷ Similarly, Wittgenstein socialised epistemology rejects any attempt to partition our beliefs or judgments into “basic/non-basic,” “starred/non-starred”, “terminal/non-terminal”, or any other form of independent justification a belief is endowed with either from “experience” or from “reason.” For Wittgenstein, “it is not single axioms that strike me as obvious, it is a system in which consequences and premises give one another mutual support.”¹⁸ In other words, socialised epistemology, like coherence theory is anti-foundationalism, if by foundationalism we mean an attribution of independent justification to some beliefs. However, we must not take this to mean the coherentist egalitarian view of beliefs that all beliefs share the same epistemic status; a view that is based on a rationalist assumption that justification is necessarily and ultimately inferential. By this, it is believed that justification cannot be anywhere from without but in the being coherent and consistent, and such coherence or consistency is determined by reason or inference, not experience or perception. As much as Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology rejects a total reliance on experience for justification or any attempt to turn justification to a descriptive enterprise, it equally rejects a total reliance on reason or any attempt to “cut justification off from the world.”¹⁹

In other words, we must avoid confusing Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology for either sociology of knowledge, social epistemology or coherence theory, because any confusion

¹⁷ Sosa, E., “The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge”, in French, P.A., et al., (ed.), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Studies in Epistemology*, vol.5., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), p6

¹⁸ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv141-2

¹⁹ Pollock, J., *Knowledge and Justification*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p26

of such will be unwarranted. Wittgenstein socialised epistemology, as the subsequent discussions of the relevant concepts in his works will show, places importance on the standards of an epistemic community in defining what “what can be known,” and determining “how we can know”. In the subsequent sections, I will consider some variants of socialised epistemology, as can be established from Wittgenstein’s works.

1.2 Wittgenstein on “Rule-Following”

In Wittgenstein’s explanation on human tendency to learn convention and adhere to them comes the idea of “rule-following”, a term which further suggests the socialised turn his epistemic view takes. The term suggests activities like how we learn conventions, how we follow them and how we develop the standards which decide if such conventions are followed correctly. Epistemology is not excluded in these types of activities. We learn conventional standards of a particular knowledge field, and how they are employed in acquisition and application of knowledge in such field. It is our task in epistemology to determine the source and basis of these standards. That is, to know whether those standards are internal to us, that is, in our mind, along with a mental representation of the rule, or they are dictated to us through our contact with the external world or they are mere appeal to intuition in their application, or whether they are socially and publicly taught and enforced. However, as shown in Wittgenstein’s arguments, these standards require more objectivity than one subjective human mind can offer. For this reason, they cannot be mental representation. Also, there is nothing much out there that actually represents these standards. For this reason also, the standards cannot be adequately dictated by our experience. Likewise, our intuition is equally too subjective to provide the basis for these standards.

If the standards which we employ in the acquisition and use of knowledge in a particular conventional setting cannot be solely sourced in intuition, mind, or external world, then, we can explore social and public learning, as a proper source of these standards. This is why Wittgenstein notes that,

As children we learn facts; e. g., that every human being has a brain, and we take them on trust. I believe that there is an island, Australia, of such-and-such a shape, and so on and so on; I believe that I had great-grandparents, that the people who gave themselves out as my parents really were my parents, etc. This belief may never have been expressed; even the thought that it was so, never thought...The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes after belief...I learned an enormous amount and accepted it on human authority, and then I found some things confirmed or disconfirmed by my own experience...In general I take as true what is found in text-books, of geography for example. Why? I say: All these facts have been confirmed a hundred times over. But how do I know that? What is my evidence for it? I have a world-picture. Is it true or false? Above all it is the substratum of all my enquiring and asserting. The propositions describing it are not all equally subject to testing.²⁰

Here it is noted that we got to know most of the things we know like facts about the world together with the standards guiding the application of those facts through social and public learning. We do these by following the rules we meet on ground and take them as true. Not by first doubting them, but by trusting those who set those rules. My experience in life may later confirm or disconfirm these rules. A student cannot come into class to learn by first doubting her lecturer. Later in life in such field, her experience or understanding, which is another form of learning, may make her to start doubting or substantiating what she has earlier been taught. However, the rules she has learnt from the lecturer form the basis of her research and whatever knowledge claim she wants to make in such field. To confirm the expertise of the student in such

²⁰ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv159-62

academic field, these claims will be inter-subjectively validated or invalidated by the lecturer, as a veteran in the field, or by fellow students who have received the same training with the student. From this, more and more knowledge is built in such field through a socialised method rather than anything else.

In further clarifying the issue concerning the socialised nature and source of “rule-following”, rather than that which is sourced in human mind or in the external object, Wittgenstein introduces an example. For him,

...we get (a) pupil to continue a series (say + 2) beyond 1000—and he writes 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012... We say to him: ‘Look what you have done!’—He doesn’t understand.²¹

Here Wittgenstein is trying to make us see that if our student has not followed the rules as set in our field of knowledge, we tend to disprove the knowledge of such student because it does not follow the convention. To show that our rule is not sourced in mind or external object, he further asks questions concerning what our reaction would be, and what it will mean to us, if our student, despite our attempt to show him the correct method of arithmetic, responds by saying “But I went on in the same way”?²² In attending to this question, Wittgenstein notes that “it would be no use (for us) to say (to the pupil): ‘But can’t you see....?’ and repeat the old example and explanations.”²³ In other words, if truly external object can solely and adequately serve as the basis of our standard of knowledge, then, we could have been able to convince the pupil by merely showing him the evidence backing our judgement. Rather, Wittgenstein makes us realize

²¹ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, Anscombe, G.E.M., & Rhees, R., (eds.), Anscombe, G.E.M., (trans.), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), v185

²² Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v185

²³ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v185

that the rules we follow in developing our knowledge are developed through socialised means of public learning.

The proposal of “rule-following” suggests to us that in acquisition and application of knowledge, there are standard or rules we employ that, in the final analysis, are not about whether they are absolutely grounded or ungrounded, but are inculcated as a way of life. That is, the rules are that which must be learnt and observed strictly as a member of an epistemic community. Wittgenstein develops a rule-following paradox. He does this by noting that,

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.²⁴

The paradox here is to show us that no matters of fact or external events are enough to establish the rightness or wrongness of the application of a rule. This I consider to be the case, as the pupil example suggests that if there is one, we could have adopted it to convince the pupil. Wittgenstein argues that the same facts could serve as evidence to prove the rightness or at the same time wrongness of the application of the rule. This can be instantiated in a lawsuit where two opposing lawyers (prosecuting and defending counsel) sometimes use the same facts to respectively prove the rightness and the wrongness of the application of rule by the defendant.

Going by Wittgenstein’s rule-following paradox, one may claim that there is a suggestion of arbitrariness concerning our standards. It could be argued, as the sceptics would do, that Wittgenstein is suggesting we adopt a rule whose basis is not in any facts but is merely learnt, adopted and applied based on some people’s discretion. That is merely reaching some bedrock

²⁴ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v201

assumption or unjustified certainty while justifying the following of a rule.²⁵ It sounds absurd to follow a rule which the same fact can prove its rightness and wrongness at same time. We only follow it just because it is a rule.

However, what I believe Wittgenstein only tries to tell with the idea of “rule-following” and the paradox generated from it is nothing over and above the fact that rule-following is the human way of life. By this he means what we grow up to learn. We cannot justify an application of a rule merely by looking at facts can be used to prove the rightness and the wrongness of our application of the rule. This is because, if we do not have adequate training on how to use those facts what appears to be proving the rightness of our application may be used to prove otherwise. Using the same lawsuit example, if a neophyte in legal profession has great number of facts to prove the rightness of her defendant, but lack the training on how to use such facts, a veteran lawyer can use the same facts to prove the wrongness of such defendant. Similarly, in writing, if I have a lot of points to back my thesis, but lack the training on how to relate those points to my thesis, they will just be hanging in vacuum as irrelevant or be used by the readers to judge the whole of my write up as pointless. In other words, what is important here are not just the points or facts serving as proof, but the training on how to use such facts to make them proofs. This training is nothing but a way of socialising an agent, that is, preparing or developing her to become familiar with the ways, rules and norms of the society. It is a way of inculcating, that is, teaching and impressing through frequent repetitions or admonitions the values of the society.

²⁵ Blackburn, S., *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p9

It must also be noted that the rules we follow do not just come from vacuum or from just any person arbitrarily. Rules likewise knowledge and the criteria for knowing are rather determined *in* a community through agreements by experts in such community after repeated confirmation and validation. A veteran would not have problem with what is considered to be a fact in such epistemic community, because he knows it conforms to the generally accepted axiom of such community. Every accepted fact also is fused into this axiom. This reminds us that we need not to seek an absolute ground for the standards in an epistemic community, because we cannot find one outside those facts established through agreement in such community. This is a human way of acting. This does not only tell that knowledge is not absolute, but it also not invariant, because these standards can themselves be reviewed when new realities render the claims in it suspect.

1.3 Wittgenstein on “Forms of Life” and Language-Games

The term “forms of life”, as employed in Wittgenstein’s work refers to a community’s unique and agreed way of responding to their environment. Different communities have agreed to distinctive ways of reacting to the world around them. The distinctive way a community agrees to in addressing and interpreting issues and events that affect their lives is what Wittgenstein refers to as “forms of life”. It is through their unique agreement they determine what each thing is, as it affects them—what is right and what is wrong. In his words,

“So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?”—It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life. If language is to be means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also...in judgment.²⁶

²⁶ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, vv241-2

Here, “forms of life” is used as that organic complexity which enables people to propel themselves about, or to respond to their community in complex ways.²⁷ They determine what knowledge is and they adopt it in organising their life. This point is also made by Quine in his “Two Dogmas of Empiricism.” In fact he goes extreme by asserting that “the totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs...is a man-made fabric...”²⁸ That is, whatever we called knowledge is determined or an agreement by a set of people and this is done to establish a particular way of addressing issues that concern them. In other words, each set of people determine or agree to how they want to respond to their environment and whatever they agree to is their form of life.

Also “forms of life” is that which answers the question about the nature of our convention through which we determine that a rule is followed properly. Wittgenstein, as pointed out in the previous section, argues that there is nothing out there which can solely and adequately justify our rule-following, that we only follow rules as conventionally prescribed. The question that should come to mind should be what is the nature of such convention? In answering this question, Wittgenstein, as employed in his works, characterizes the nature of our convention as “forms of life.” A people’s form of life is their formal way, that is, their rules, norms and convention which the members of the community must follow in order to have a smooth communication in everything that concerns them. “A people” here does not only suggest a cultural community alone, but equally epistemic community, where “what can be known,” is defined and “how we can know” is determined in conformity with the agreed standards—their

²⁷ Hunter, J.F.M., “‘Forms of Life’ in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*”, in Shanker, S., (ed.), *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments*, vol.2, (London: Routledge, 1986), p109

²⁸ Quine, W.V.O., “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, in Rosenberg, F., & Travis C. (eds.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Language*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc, 1971)p79

forms of life. Likewise, the people's enquiries and findings in such community are shaped by their forms of life, which determines their identity as "a people".

If a people's enquiries are shaped by their forms of life, and such enquiries are equally assessed for rightness of direction through such forms of life, then, a people's form of life is what has to be accepted without any form of indiscriminate questioning. For instance, I could remember when I questioned a logical rule Modus Tollendo Ponens (MTP)—the rule that allows for the inference of a side of a disjunctive statement from the negation of the other side—my logic lecturer (Dr. Dipo Fashina) told me I would have to earn my PhD in that field before I can justifiably alter such way of reasoning. This does not mean that my lecturer was trying to tell me that logical rules are subjected to the whims of experts; that once I become an expert I can make my own logical rules. It rather means that when I get to that level of PhD, I must have undergone an adequate training that will make me understand the rules better. In other words, we do not just question a form of life; we accept it because it is the experts' agreement after repeated verification of its truth. Without this agreement, that is, if all we do is keep questioning the rules, then, communication and inter-subjective justification that knowledge requires would be impossible.

It must also be noted that saying a form of life is what has to be accepted does not mean it cannot be questioned at all. Wittgenstein himself has rejected any form of epistemic invariantism—the belief that there are some epistemic standards or beliefs which are absolute, incorrigible, and immune to review. He rather believes that forms of life responds to developments in human knowledge through a critical evaluation of some of its suppositions, especially if those suppositions are rendered doubtful by new realities. What the acceptance of forms of life only means is that we do not gratuitously question standard of knowledge. And we

do not mix a form of life with another, each community, after adequate deliberation, has its unique way of reacting to life, likewise each epistemic community has its unique epistemic standard.

This unique nature of the standards in each epistemic community is why Wittgenstein distinguishes between two epistemic communities like philosophy and physics by claiming that “philosophy is not one of the natural sciences, (physics)”²⁹ but rather “it (philosophy) sets limits to the much disputed sphere of natural science”.³⁰ It is the duty of physics, Wittgenstein argues, to construct genuine propositions with truth-value; such propositions give a picture of the world. Philosophy, on the other hand, creates pseudo-propositions because its task is to clarify of our conceptual framework.³¹ In other words, while physics engages itself with the construction of theories about reality, philosophy is rather an elucidating activity, explaining our theoretical apparatus. As a result of this, the two disciplines are bound to be different both in tasks and methods, and their standards must not be mixed or confused for each other.

The question then is what is in “language-game” that links it closely together with “forms of life” and makes it so important not only to Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology but also his philosophy in general? The metaphor of a game, as attached with the term “language”, is meant to bring us to the idea that there are not only many different types of game (board-games, ball-games, Olympic Games and so on), which are guided by different rules, but also that the meaning of the word “game” is not dependent on naming an element which is common to all

²⁹ Wittgenstein, L., Pears, D.F., & McGuinness, B.F., (Trans.), *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, (1922) 1961), v4.111

³⁰ Wittgenstein, L., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, v4.113

³¹ Wittgenstein, L., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, v4.113

instances of its use.³² The only resemblance among all games is the adherence to rules, but no one-rule is applicable to all games. So, if our form of life is how we react to life around us, the “how” is our language-game which serves as the foundation of our reactions to things. Thus, if we say that a language-game is a form of life, we mean that it is the formalised and standardised aspect of our life. This standard does not necessarily have to be absolute and unchanging. Language-game, like forms of life, evolves. However, at any particular time it is used, just like game, what it is will not be unclear.

So, when Wittgenstein uses “language-game”, like “forms of life”, his attempt is to remind us of the rule-governing character of language. And since language is what we employ in justification of knowledge, each epistemic community, like language, is equally governed by its unique standards as proven and agreed upon by the veterans in it. It would then be out of place to apply, let say, the standards in physics to issues in philosophy. “Language-game” is a term that forms the foundation for much of Wittgenstein’s later work and is responsible for the socialised view of knowledge developed from these works; a view that challenges classical, modern as well as many contemporary notions about language (thus, knowledge) and psychology.

By adopting language-games, Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology draws a comparison between how there are many other ways in which words are meaningful and knowledge justified without any reliance on the representationalist word-object naming relation. The “other ways” here mean making word meaningful or knowledge justified through “unassisted efforts of thought”.³³ That is, we can provide a mode of analysis for a proposition to

³² Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v67

³³ Taylor, A.E., *Elements of Metaphysics*, (London: Methuen & Co, 1903), p7

make it meaningful and justified without any allusion to external object. All we have to do is to employ the background beliefs we have acquired through training and adopt the relevant standard in order to provide a meaning and justification for the present proposition. Other examples of such “other ways”, as Wittgenstein notes, are giving orders and obeying them, and forming and testing a hypothesis.³⁴

Also, it is through the adoption of language-game that Wittgenstein’s rejection of general explanations, and definitions based on sufficient and necessary conditions, is best pronounced. Instead of these symptoms of the epistemologists’ long for generality, he points to “family resemblance”, as the more suitable analogy for the means of connecting particular uses of the same term. “Family resemblance” here points to the fact that there are things which may be thought to be connected to one another by one essential common feature. At the same time, they may be connected by a series of overlapping similarities, where no one feature is common to all.³⁵ This notion of “family resemblance” he adopts in explaining the relationship between games which is in the notion of “language-game”. In his words,

I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances”; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way.— And I shall say: “games” form a family.³⁶

In other words, the best we can get between epistemic standards is similarities as found in a family’s resemblances. There is no reason to look, as done in traditional epistemology, for one,

³⁴ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v23

³⁵ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v66

³⁶ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v67

essential core (reason or experience) in which the justification of a belief is located and which is, therefore, responsible for the justification of every other belief. We should, instead, travel with how and where a belief is used through “a complicated network of similarities, overlapping and criss-crossing.”³⁷

Coming from these explanation of language-game, an important implication of its adoption in Wittgenstein socialised epistemology is that the search for the essence of propositions as the essence of external reality will be overthrown by the idea that language can be meaningful without reference to common elements (objects) of external reality or mental representation. So, one may want to ask that if the naming of objects does not provide the meaning of a term nor the object can serve as an adequate source of justification for the term’s usage, then, what might? To this Wittgenstein has provided answer by saying “for a large class of cases though not for all—in which we employ the word ‘meaning’— it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its *use* in the language.”³⁸ And if meaning the meaning of word comes from its use, then its justification cannot be outside its use. By this, we can say meaning comes from the way in which a word is used, or as Wittgenstein sometimes put it, “our talk gets its meaning from the rest of our proceedings.”³⁹ In the next section, I shall carefully examine how this “use” theory of meaning is developed in Wittgenstein’s works.

1.4 Wittgenstein on “Use”

³⁷ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v66

³⁸ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v43

³⁹ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v229

What does Wittgenstein mean by saying “the meaning of a word is its *use* in the language” or that “our talk gets its meaning from the rest of our proceedings”? To answer this question satisfactorily, it must be noted that there is a shift in Wittgenstein’s mode of thought. This shift is evident in the difference between his early work (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which seems a manifestation of a scientism—the view that every philosophical question must be answered in the way of natural science—by starting with the claim that “the world is the totality of facts...”⁴⁰) and the later ones (*Philosophical Investigation*, *The Blue and Brown Books* and *On Certainty*, which all reject any form of scientism that the early might have developed). In the early work we find what seems like a representationalist view where observation serves as that which *solely* provides meaning for our statements and thus grounds it.⁴¹ In the later, we can find his “use” theory of meaning, where the meaning of our propositions is derived from how it is employed in a language. For instance, in Yoruba language, it is said that “pele l’ako, o l’abo” (“sorry” has both the positive meaning where it denotes care and the negative meaning where it denotes mockery). To identify which is meant, we would have to identify how it is used.

Wittgenstein’s idea of “use” in meaning can be summed up as a shift from seeing language as a fixed structure imposed upon the world to seeing language as a fluid structure that is intimately bound up with our everyday practices and forms of life. For later Wittgenstein, creating meaningful statements is not a matter of mapping the logical form of the world. It is a matter of using conventionally-defined terms within language-games that we play out in the course of everyday life. It underlines a rejection of representationalist theory of meaning and justification, and an elevation of a more humanistic view of meaning and justification. To him, in

⁴⁰ Wittgenstein, L., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, v1.1

⁴¹ Kim, J., “What is Naturalised Epistemology”, p36

an attempt to ground or provide meaning for our propositions, rather than having a representationalist theory of meaning and justification by *thinking* of something exterior which the proposition represents or refers to, we must rather *look* and *see* the variety of uses to which the word is put.

The shift in Wittgenstein's view from early to later is, for instance, evident in *The Blue Book*, which is a criticism of the idea that we can locate the meaning of a proposition in some kind of mental act or external event. Wittgenstein argues that if we see meaning as a "mental" act, we are rather making the matter more difficult to understand. For him, admitting that the meaning of a proposition lies in how it is used will simply make us admit that meaning can be found in the voice box as in the head. Thus, instead of seeing meaning as identified with a mental act or an object, Wittgenstein sees meaning as identified with a way a proposition is used. The way I use a proposition, for him, will accurately determine its meaning. In his words, "if we had to name anything which is the life of the sign (sentence), we should have to say that it was its use."⁴² He continues by noting that "the sign gets its significance...from the language to which it belongs...understanding a sentence means understanding a language."⁴³ In other words, "use" serves as that which gives a symbol—a term or a proposition—its meaning, hence, its justification.

Also, when Wittgenstein said "our talk gets its meaning from the rest of our proceedings", by "rest of our proceedings" he means how we go about in constructing our claims. The meaning and justification we seek do not wholly lie in what, that is, the terms

⁴² Wittgenstein, L., *The Blue and Brown Books*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), p4

⁴³ Wittgenstein, L., *The Blue and Brown Books*, p5

adopted, but mainly *how* they are adopted. The “how” is the “rest of our proceedings”, that is, our practice as guided by our language-games. Similarly, what Wittgenstein means in his idea of *use* is the same as that of “the rest of our proceedings”. They both refer to our practises as guided by the convention we are located in. They equally both imply that meaning and thus justification is not about our statement itself, but *how*, that is, about the way such statement is constructed, and the state of affairs, situation or issue that gives rise to it. Meaning or justification of statements is got from *how* they are *used*. The *how*, that is, its *usage* is our proceedings. Communication, or objective justification on this model, involves using conventional terms in a way that is recognised by a linguistic or epistemic community. It involves playing a conventionally accepted language-game or forms of life. In other words, justification of knowledge is a test of our understanding of an epistemic system within which the knowledge is made. In his words, “the truth of my statements is the test of my understanding of these statements,”⁴⁴ and this understanding is determined by the rules of the language-game concerned.

These contexts—rest of our proceedings—for Wittgenstein, are our practices, these include all human epistemic activities as informed by our forms of life. “Forms of life”, as noted earlier is the same as language-game itself; to investigate a language, to Wittgenstein, is the same as investigating a form of life.⁴⁵ And, “the word ‘language-game’ is here meant to emphasise that the speaking of language is part of an activity or a form of life.”⁴⁶ Language-games are not just what we say but what we do and how it is done. Words are Deeds.⁴⁷ Most relevant in this context

⁴⁴ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v80

⁴⁵ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v19

⁴⁶ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v23

⁴⁷ Wittgenstein, L., *Culture and Value*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), p46

is that language-games are not primarily the representation of the super-order of reality but are the particular practices of ways of life, including our search for knowledge. As our language is fixed not by laws so much as by the social contexts in which language is used, so is the validity of our knowledge determined by the social contexts from which it is made.

The point is that the most fundamental aspect of language is that we learn how to use it in social condition, which is the reason why we all understand one another. We do not understand one another because of a relationship between language and external reality, so we cannot expect our knowledge claim, which is a fragment of our language, to be validated outside the social factors from which it is made. In other words, unlike the representationalist assumes, knowledge is conditioned by factors like the situation, issue, or field which gives rise to it. That is, every knowledge claim can be situated in an epistemic system, within which its justification can be satisfactorily made.

As language functions according to shared norms and forms of life, so is our knowledge claim a show of our understanding of the criteria accepted in the epistemic community. This is why Wittgenstein denies the possibility of a private language. As noted earlier, he believes that “if language is to be means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also...in judgment”.⁴⁸ That is, there must be inter-subjective agreement in determining the meaning of each term in the language. It is through this that we shall be able to identify the right or wrong usage. It is inconceivable that someone could invent a language for his or her own private use that describes his or her inner sensations, and be the sole determinant of whether the

⁴⁸ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, vv241-2

terms are properly used.⁴⁹ Likewise, knowledge cannot be subjective; an individual cannot set the criteria for knowledge for his personal usage. To claim to know something, we must also be able to doubt it, we must have criteria for establishing our knowledge, there must be ways other people, who share the same epistemic training with us, can find out, and so on—all of which is absent when dealing with our inner sensations or subjective knowledge. And all these further show that knowledge is a socialized phenomenon.

1.5 Wittgenstein on “Grammar Investigation”

Grammar is the collection of rules that guide the constructions, utterances, meanings and usage of language. Thus, when we say we want to embark upon a “Grammar Investigation” or we want to investigate the grammar of a language, we are saying we want to investigate the genealogy or the totality of a people’s forms of life and how they communicate in their conventional symbols. And the success of such an investigation means an adequate understanding of the source, basis and limits or problems of what can be known in such language.”⁵⁰ In his words, Wittgenstein notes that,

We feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena...our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. Such an investigation sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language.—Some of them can be removed by substituting one form of expression for another; this may be

⁴⁹ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v243

⁵⁰ Kober, M., “Certainties of a World-Picture: The Epistemological Investigations of *On Certainty*”, in Sluga, H., & Stern, D.G., (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p411

called an “analysis” of our forms of expression, for the process is sometimes like one of taking a thing apart.⁵¹

Coming from the discussions in the previous section, the argument that shows the necessity of a grammar investigation I put forward in the following way:

- i. the meaning of a statement is got from how it used in the language it belongs
 - ii. the test of my understanding such statement through its justification is a test of my understanding of the language,
 - iii. grammar is the rules which guide the constructions, utterances, meanings and usage of language in whole.
- ∴ in order to have a full understanding of the language and thus provide meaning and justification for my propositions in the language, the focus of my investigation must be grammar

I have tried to establish the truth of (i) and (ii) in the preceding sections, while (iii) is true by definition. The conclusion is merely an implication of (i), (ii) and (iii). All I need to do is to elaborate further on the conclusion in relation to the premises.

Going by the above argument, we can note that in epistemology, as well as philosophy in whole, our investigation, unlike it is suggested in the representationalist epistemology, should be something at least more than objects or psychology. Rather, Wittgenstein, as evident in his later works, wants us to take on a more feasible sort of investigation, which directs itself, not to the construction of new and surprising theories or elucidations, but to the assessment of language. This is because he believes that the problems that we are faced with in epistemology (and philosophy in general) are given birth to by “a misunderstanding of the logic of our language.”⁵² These problems, for him, are neither empirical problems nor psychological ones, but are

⁵¹ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v90

⁵² Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v93

misapprehensions which “are solved...by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: in spite of an urge to misunderstand them.”⁵³ This sort of investigation is what he refers to as “grammar investigation.”

Language is, for Wittgenstein, both the source of not only epistemic, but also philosophical problems in general and the means to overcome them. Philosophy, for him, is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language. So atypical seems Wittgenstein’s methodological revolution in epistemology, which explains the difficulty found in understanding his study.⁵⁴ Wittgenstein is equally aware of such difficulty involved in understanding the remarks that make up a work like *Philosophical Investigations*. For instance, he has expressed pessimism as to its being comprehended, while he often talks of our being somehow unwilling to reason or address epistemic (and other philosophical) problems in the way he suggests we do. In his words,

I am trying to recommend a certain sort of investigation...This investigation is immensely important and very much *against the grain* of some of you.⁵⁵

In other words, one of the problems he foresees is that his method of investigation required an unconventional “sort of thinking” to which we are not used to and to which we have not really learnt much about—a sort of thinking very different from what is required in the sciences.

⁵³ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v109

⁵⁴ Bosanquet, R.G., et al (eds.), *Wittgenstein’s Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge 1939*, (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1976), p103

⁵⁵ Bosanquet, R.G., et al (eds.), *Wittgenstein’s Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics, Cambridge 1939*, p103

It is as if Wittgenstein prophesies, going through the history of epistemology, he seems to be the only one in this camp. The non-Wittgensteinian (before and after Wittgenstein) epistemologists hold the representationalist theory in establishing the relationship between a proposition and its justification or between a theory and evidence, while Wittgenstein holds a socialised view as found in his grammatical investigation, which reveals the relevance of communities to knowledge. For him, what is conceivable or not, what makes sense or not, depends on the language-game concerned. The unwillingness to reason or address issues in the method he suggests has not helped in solving but to complicate the more our age-long and endless epistemic (and other philosophical) problems. I believe it is high time we adopted his method of investigation. Surprisingly, contemporary philosophy still believes in his suggested grammatical investigation as found in linguistic and conceptual analysis, where skills are used in analysing concepts, that is, concepts as a whole (intellectual or substantial) are broken into its elemental parts or basic principles.

1.6 Wittgenstein on Scepticism

Scepticism to Wittgenstein is a necessary element of knowledge acquisition, because it is responsible for the justification of knowledge. For him, one could even say “where there is no doubt there is no knowledge either.”⁵⁶ This is why he thinks Moore’s commonsensical knowledge may not be enough to be called knowledge; it lacks the needed justification. For him,

Upon “I know that there is my hand” there may follow the question “How do you know?” and the answer to that presupposes that this can be known in that way. So, instead of “I know that here is my

⁵⁶ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v121

hand”, one might say “Here is my hand”, and then add *how* one knows.⁵⁷

I strongly believe this to be the case, because if, as I have shown in the previous discussions, inter-subjective justification is at the centre of Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology, then, scepticism is equally imperative in our acquisition of knowledge. If no one is sceptical about Mr. A’s knowledge-claim, there will be no need for him to justify such claim. When a religious leader makes a knowledge claim about God in a religious gathering, he does not need any serious “justification” since he does not expect the congregation to express any form of doubt towards such claim. But a claim without justification is nothing but a dogma, which cannot be accepted in not only a philosophical but also an academic gathering. The object of every knowledge-claim must be intellectual satisfaction. Claims must be made with an adequate respect to human natural desire for reason and caution in making knowledge-claims, the desire for wanting to know “how” and “why”. But, for the sake of this study, the question I want to attend to in this section is how Wittgenstein’s approach to scepticism further develops his socialised view of knowledge.

It could be noted that while engaging in scepticism, Wittgenstein, however, notes that sceptical attitude with no boundary would lead the sceptics back to the dogma she tries to avoid; this thus renders the scepticism pointless. For him, scepticism itself is only meaningful if it has an end. In his words, while noting about an extreme doubt expressed on a language itself, he notes,

“Can you be mistaken about this colour’s being called ‘green’ in English?” My answer to this can only be “No”. If I were to say “Yes, for there is always the possibility of delusion”, that would mean nothing at all. For is that...something unknown to the other? And how is it known to me?...But does that mean that it is

⁵⁷ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v40

unthinkable that the word “green” should have been produced here by a slip of the tongue or a momentary confusion? Don't we know of such cases? - One can also say to someone “Mightn't you perhaps have made a slip?” That amounts to: “Think about it again.” - But these rules of caution only make sense if they come to an end somewhere. A doubt without an end is not even a doubt.⁵⁸

Here it is emphasised that by pointing out the possibility of error in a word like “green” we end up saying nothing. The mere fact that there is possibility of error in such a word would also mean that there is possibility of error in every other word we use in our communication. This makes communication itself impossible. But the need for communication shows that our doubt can only be reasonable if it has a terminal point.

While radical scepticism takes scepticism as an end in itself, Wittgenstein's mode of scepticism, expressed in the above passage, is moderate. Moderate scepticism can be seen as a cautious caution, that is, a scepticism that is sceptical about its own stance by being adopted as a means (method) rather than an end. This is why he asks that “how is it known to me” that there is the possibility or error in the word “green” if it “something unknown to the other”? Unlike in radical scepticism, Wittgenstein's moderate scepticism appreciates the problems that lead to the sceptical positions, the latter does not insist on having reasons for beliefs prior to having them. For instance, it is believed that life has to be lived, even when it is still unclear to any one why (the ultimate reason) life has to be lived; all we have are at best mere speculations. His reasons given, as expressed in the passage, are not necessarily attached to the truth of the knowledge-claim but to the usefulness of the knowledge-claim. I believe this should be the case when engaging in scepticism. When my scepticism is moderate, I would rather claim that it is useful to hold on to a claim, and that is a satisfactory reason to hold on to it, even when I am aware of the

⁵⁸ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv624-5

fact that there is possibility of an error in the claim. For example, I am asked to continue living, because tomorrow is brighter. I believe in “tomorrow being brighter” even when I know there is possibility of error in it. I believe this not because it is true, but just because I know it is the most effective way to survive in life. A scepticism that is moderate sees scepticism as a means to an epistemic end rather than an end in itself; and believes that no matter how strong human doubt is, there must be for it a terminal point.

An example of this Wittgensteinian scepticism could be found in Russellian scepticism. The latter equally shows why there is need to choose a moderate point between superstition and radical scepticism. For Russell, as it is undesirable to make a claim to knowledge when there is no reason whatsoever to justify it, so it is detrimental to seek sufficient reason before such claim can be made. For instance, Pyrrho refuses to rescue his teacher because there is no sufficient reason to think such rescue would be of any good.⁵⁹ Hardly can anyone commend such desire for “sufficient reason”. The desirable scepticism, for Russell, is that which can be summed up only to any of these:

- i. that when the specialists agree on a knowledge-claim in their field, any sceptical opinion on the same claim cannot be held to be certain;
- ii. that when the specialists reject a claim as knowledge in their field, a neophyte cannot be certain on being sceptical about the same claim; and
- iii. that when the specialists conclude that there is no adequate proof to make a claim, a neophyte must suspend judgment on the same claim.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Russell, B., “On the Value of Scepticism”, in Russell, B., *The Will to Doubt*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1983), p11

⁶⁰ Russell, B., “On the Value of Scepticism”, p13

Here, he shows that scepticism is valuable, because it helps in preventing irrational epistemic judgement. However, the best way to “revolutionize” human life is to maintain a moderate scepticism, as contained in any of the three principles above. And each of these principles shows how standards for knowledge are agreed upon in each epistemic system, while no further scepticism is justified against the agreement reached by the community of veterans or reliable observers in such epistemic system.

What seem like a socialised approach to scepticism in Russell’s claim may be interpreted to be a form of epistemic relativism, which is itself a variant of radical scepticism. That is, if human knowledge cannot be universally justified except being based on the agreement or disagreement of some specialists, then it would be possible to have conflicting alternative knowledge from another set of specialists that would be equally legitimate. For instance, some specialists in mechanical science would agree to a knowledge of the absolute determination of every action, whereby action is determined by a series of antecedent action, while some specialists in morality would agree to a conflicting knowledge of the freedom of human choice and reality of human purpose, where every human action is independent of the preceding actions. As the neophyte is advised to stick to the specialists’ agreement, it would be difficult to advise her to abide by these two conflicting agreements from two groups of specialists.

Things can seem conflicting when in the actual sense they are not. Appearance can be self-contradictory, but reality is not self-contradictory.⁶¹ An example of a self-contradictory appearance is the seeming conflicts in the agreements of the specialists in morality and mechanical science on the determination of actions. The phenomena studied by the specialists in

⁶¹ Taylor, A.E., *Elements of Metaphysics*, (London: Methuen & Co, 1903), p19

morality differ in great deal from those studied in mechanical science. The simple phenomena—natural objects—are the objects of study for those in mechanical science, while complex phenomena—human subject and her reactions to the environment around her—are the objects of study for those in morality.⁶² In other words, the agreements among the two groups of specialists are not incompatible. While every action (human action inclusive) is determined by a series of antecedent action, the humans have freedom of choice given the varieties of determining factors.

Similarly, Wittgenstein's approach to scepticism, as moderate, professes a socialized view of knowledge. For Wittgenstein,

If someone *believes* something, we needn't always be able to answer the question "why he believes it"; but if he *knows* something, then the question "how does he know?" must be capable of being answered...If one does answer this (knowledge) question, one must do so according to *generally accepted axioms*. This is how something of this sort may be known.⁶³

Here, we are made to know that while mere belief may not need justification, a claim to knowledge necessarily requires one. That is one can believe whatever she wants, but no one is allowed to know anything without being able to tell how she knows it. However, unlike the radical sceptics might be expecting, he notes that the justification we provide has to be a measurable one. Our justification must be measured by the *generally accepted axioms*, that is, the agreed standards in our epistemic community. The phrase "generally accepted axioms" here shows the socialised direction Wittgenstein's moderate approach to scepticism takes. It points out that at the basis of our epistemic justification or showing "how we know" lie assumptions

⁶² Hayek, F.A., "The Theory of Complex Phenomenon", in Martin, M., & McIntyre, L.(eds.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Sciences*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), pp55-67

⁶³ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv550-1

which are neither true nor false or subject to indiscriminate questioning. These are the precepts agreed to by specialists or veterans in such epistemic community.⁶⁴ The willingness to accept the nature of these accepted axioms differentiate Wittgenstein's moderate scepticism from the radical scepticism.

A radical sceptic may refer to the “generally accepted axioms” in Wittgenstein's socialised approach to scepticism as “arbitrary dogmatism”. That is, the axioms can be categorised as what the sceptic would call bedrock assumptions or unjustified certainties which are merely reached by some people.⁶⁵ However, unlike the radical sceptics would think, Wittgenstein does not think epistemologists have to lose sleep over the tag “arbitrary dogmatism” or that judgement must be suspended on that until we get absolute ground for these bedrock assumptions. He rather notes that it merely is a human “ungrounded way of acting,”⁶⁶ which must be excluded from doubt. This is so because any attempt to doubt these bedrock assumptions is like trying to doubt everything. In his words, “if you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything.”⁶⁷ A physicist does not start her research by doubting the bedrock assumption of physics—that existence is ultimately physical. She will end up doubting everything. Thus, she will end up not establishing anything whether in form of knowledge or doubt.

⁶⁴ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v110

⁶⁵ Blackburn, S., *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p9

⁶⁶ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v110

⁶⁷ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v114

It is not as if Wittgenstein is saying our bedrock assumptions or generally accepted axioms are entirely baseless, because he is aware of the fact that the axioms are reached after repeated confirmations by the veterans in the field. All he is trying to say is that a knowledge-claimer does not need provide justification for the axioms all over again in an attempt to satisfy the insatiable and incautious caution of the radical sceptic. In fact he notes that “the game of doubting itself presupposes certainty.”⁶⁸ When a knowledge-claimer has answered knowledge question—that is, when she has tried to satisfy the relevant scepticism by providing grounds that is in accordance with the generally accepted axioms of the epistemic system in which the knowledge-claim is made—to prove that she actually has the right to such knowledge, any further doubt would be mean that the doubter has a contrary knowledge. That is, the doubter can be said to be saying something like “I *know* for sure that what you are saying is not the case”. The doubt of everything is a needless counter-position to every knowledge-claim. In other words, while Wittgenstein believes epistemologists need to be sceptical in their quest for knowledge, their scepticism must be moderate to avoid holding an inconsistent and needless position.

Like the other aspects of his philosophy, the socialised epistemology which is advocated and adopted in Wittgenstein’s works is not aimed at refuting radical scepticism. It is concerned chiefly with dissolving this and some other similar types of epistemic problems. Like many other philosophical problems, such an epistemic problem, in Wittgenstein’s view, is not an intractable problem for which we need to endlessly seek solution to. Rather, an epistemic problem like radical scepticism is merely a mental ravel which is developed while contemplating on how to ground our axioms rather than trying to develop practical applications of the axioms. For him, to

⁶⁸ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v114

unravel such problem, we need to free our mind from obscurity. For example, he highlighted this type of mental ravel in the representationalist theory, where it is believed that “individual words in language name objects...”⁶⁹ He continues by noting that underlining such representationalist view of language is the assumption that “every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.”⁷⁰ This view can be misleading, as it has misled many epistemologists into endlessly seeking how to ground knowledge-claim in such external object which provides meaning to the claim. For Wittgenstein the best way to unravel the mental ravel this assumption has caused is to show the representationalist that “the meaning of a word is its use in the language”⁷¹ and such use is guided by our generally accepted axioms. To clarify his view he gives example of the word “red” in relation to a red object. For him, “something red can be destroyed, but red cannot be destroyed, and that is why the meaning of the word ‘red’ is independent of the existence of a red thing.” Wittgenstein’s aim here is to dissolve the age-long epistemic problem created by the representationalist view of language. It has always been thought that to refute radical scepticism, we need to build a theory which can provide adequate explanation of the link between our language and the external world. And the failure to do so has only strengthened the radical sceptic’s denial of knowledge the more.

At face value, the dissolution aim of Wittgenstein’s works in relation to epistemic problems may be considered to be a waste of time. This is because almost all epistemologists in the history of the discourse believe that the problem created by the radical sceptic is a serious and fundamental epistemic problem, which epistemologists need to solve rather than dissolve.

⁶⁹ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v1

⁷⁰ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v1

⁷¹ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v43

The major aim of the traditional epistemology is to solve the problem of scepticism (radical scepticism). This also underlines the major aim of the contemporary epistemology, as it is claimed that the ability to solve the sceptical challenges posed in *epistemic regress problem* determines how satisfactory an epistemological theory is.⁷² So, the Wittgenstein's socialised approach to epistemology that does not give us a theory, with which we can address the problem of scepticism is nothing but an epistemic opium and a waste of time. It only attempts to reduce sceptical challenges to pseudo-problems and try to dissolve the attempt in the traditional representationalist theory towards these problems

However, the consideration of Wittgenstein's aim as an epistemic opium would be a show of an inadequate understanding of either Wittgenstein's aim and or the concerned epistemic problem itself. For instance, scepticism, which from its Greek origin *skepsis* means enquiry,⁷³ is itself a conception of knowledge—an approach to epistemology. So, saying the whole focus of epistemology is to solve problems like scepticism would be out of place. The tendency to inquire or question a knowledge claim in order to ascertain its relationship with fact or its effect to human purpose (as an epistemic pragmatist would prefer) is good for epistemology, because it serves as that which sustains and ensures the growth of knowledge. However, to now say the major aim of epistemology is to address the problem raised by those who become engrossed by such enquiry is leading epistemology out of the purpose that gives rise to the enquiry—knowledge. Wittgenstein points out that “a doubt without an end is not even

⁷² Bonjour, L., “Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge”, in French, P.A., et al., (eds.), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Studies in Epistemology*, (vol.5), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1980), p53

⁷³ Blackburn, S., *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, p328

a doubt.”⁷⁴ If we, like the insatiable sceptic, keep asking a knowledge-claimer the question “How do you know?”, we would eventually lead him to a point where the only available answer for her is that “I have learnt English”.⁷⁵ That is, “my training in the language has equipped me enough to make such claim in the language. If you also learn the language, you will understand and confirm my claim. I cannot continue answering your question when you seem not to understand the language”. An endless questioning or enquiry is no enquiry at all, because it has lost touch with the purpose of the enquiry. Thus, all the hyperbolic and ridiculous problems raised as a result of endless enquiry are better done away with.⁷⁶ And as Wittgenstein also notes, they are pseudo-problems, and to say epistemology aims at solving such pseudo-problems would be out of place.

This sort of dissolution of problem of scepticism is seen in Wittgenstein’s creation of what could be referred to as “third way” between the “hyperbolic” scepticism of the radical sceptic and G.E. Moore’s commonsensical knowledge in *On Certainty*. Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty* takes as its starting point his response to a paper given by G. E. Moore, called “A Proof of the External World.” In this paper, Moore tries to prove that there is a world external to our senses by holding up his hand and saying “here is a hand.”⁷⁷ Wittgenstein commends Moore’s rejection of the doubts raised against such claim. He, however, argues that Moore fails

⁷⁴ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v625 (Wittgenstein made further emphasis on this same point in different places of *Philosophical Investigation* as well: “Explanations come to an end somewhere”; “but the chain of reasons has an end”; “justification by experience comes to an end. If it did not it would not be justification.” *Philosophical Investigation*, vv1, 326, 485)

⁷⁵ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v381

⁷⁶ Descartes, R., “Meditation”, in Cottingham, J., et al., (eds.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p73

⁷⁷ Moore, G. E., “A Proof of an External World”, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 25.5, (1939): 273

in his rejection attempt because his claim that he knows he has a hand automatically invites the question of how he knows, a question that would embroil Moore in the sort of sceptical debate he wishes to avoid. For Wittgenstein, the idea of doubting the existence of a world external to our senses gains a foothold from the fact that any knowledge claim can be doubted, and every attempt at justification of a knowledge claim can also be doubted. In his words, “any proposition can be derived from other ones. But they may be no more certain than it is itself.”⁷⁸ This brings about the problem of epistemic regress.

However, unlike the traditional epistemologist attempts, Wittgenstein does not try to refute sceptical doubts or epistemic regress on justification of an external world so much as he tries to dissolve them—showing that the doubts themselves do not do the work they are meant to do. The radical sceptic should remember that doubts are meant to be means to epistemic end, rather than end in itself. Moore also should know that by suggesting that certain fundamental propositions are logical in nature, Wittgenstein gives them a structural role in language: they define how language, and hence thought, works. “Here is a hand” is an ostensive definition, meaning that it tells the meaning of the word by showing an example. That statement only shows us how the word hand is to be used rather than making an empirical claim about the presence of a hand. So, if Moore or the radical sceptic begins to doubt these sorts of propositions, then, the whole structure of language, and hence thought, comes apart.

There has to be a common ground between Moore and his interlocutor who perhaps is the sceptic. That is they have to agree on the sort of proposition “here is a hand” which Moore put forward. If Moore and his sceptic can disagree over whether one of them has a hand, it is unclear

⁷⁸ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v1

whether they can agree on anything that might act as a common ground upon which their debate can meaningfully rest. Wittgenstein notes that the doubt of such proposition even leaves room for further doubt of the meaning of each word involved in the proposition. So, to have meaningful discussion, Moore and his sceptic must agree on some basic propositions like “here is a hand”. In his words,

If I wanted to doubt whether this was my hand, how could I avoid doubting whether the word “hand” has any meaning? So that is something I seem to know after all...But more correctly: The fact that I use the word “hand” and all the other words in my sentence without a second thought, indeed that I should stand before the abyss if I wanted so much as to try doubting their meanings - shows that absence of doubt belongs to the essence of the language-game, that the question “How do I know...” drags out the language-game, or else does away with it.⁷⁹

In other words, the fact that Moore’s sceptic does not doubt the meaning of “hand” before using it means he understands and agrees to the meaning of “hand”. Such statement in which there is the “absence of doubt” will serve as their common ground. For instance, no two physicists would start enquiry with doubting the reality of matter. If they can disagree on such basic statement, it is not likely they will ever agree on anything. Communication and rational thought are only possible between people when there is some sort of common ground, and when we start doubting such fundamental propositions like “here is a hand,” that common ground shrinks to nothing. Our common ground, according to Wittgenstein, is “not an ungrounded presupposition: it is an ungrounded way of acting.”⁸⁰ It is true a “rational” debate includes doubt, which makes the debate rational in the first place, but unlimited doubt undermines rationality itself, thus, undermines the very purpose for doubt.

⁷⁹ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv369-70

⁸⁰ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v110

The purpose of doubting, it must be noted, is to establish better confidence, reliability and a reassurance for our knowledge; endless doubt counteracts this purpose. This is why Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology considers inter-subjective justification as a necessary criterion of knowledge. That is, the ability to answer the *relevant* sceptical question is imperative in our knowledge acquisition. But, as this section has been trying to emphasise, the notion of "relevant" suggests that Wittgenstein's idea of sceptical question does not in any way mean radical or insatiable scepticism. Rather "relevant" tells us that our justification is only to be guided by the standard set in the epistemic community which gives rise to our knowledge-claim. Wittgenstein, as I have been trying to show in the chapter employs different terms like "rule-following", "language-games", and "forms of life" to emphasise how our justification or the attempt to answer the *relevant* sceptical question concerning our knowledge-claim must be guided. In the section that follows, I will round up this chapter by examining the link and differences between these terms in building the socialised nature of Wittgenstein's epistemology.

1.7 A Concise Review of the Development of Wittgenstein's Socialised Epistemology

The development of Wittgenstein socialised approach to knowledge is helped by the adopted concepts like "rule-following", "language-games", "forms of life", "Use" and "Grammar Investigation". The interrelatedness of these concepts helps not only to further explain each other but to also further substantiate the socialised view each manifests. In other words, what they all share in common is the goal of further enhancing the socialised direction Wittgenstein view of knowledge takes. For instance, while the idea of "Rule-Following" tells how language, which is social tool that serves as the source and limit of our knowledge, is governed by standards and criteria that must be followed to determine its right or wrong application, the idea of "Language-Game" tells how we must not expect any standard to be

applicable in all languages, as each game is defined by its unique rule. In other words, the acquisition of knowledge is a rule-following activity, which is carried out in conformity to a particular system. These systems, that is, the patterns the epistemic standards take and how they are applied are what Wittgenstein regards as “Forms of Life”. This is why he says,

the term “*language-game*” is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.⁸¹

That is, using the metaphor of language, *how* we make use of epistemic rules will follow a particular system of thought. Also, the idea of “Use” is that which guides us in identifying the system which a knowledge claim follows and thus its meaning, likewise its justification. The statement “Jingo is a materialist” may be true in the philosophical sense, while false in the economic sense; its meaning and justification will be determined by its *use*. Lastly, the notion of “Grammar Investigation” tells us as epistemologists, the kind of enquiry we should embark on, that is, the careful study of epistemic system, given our adequate understanding of the socialised nature of knowledge. Another major common quality of these concepts is the fact that the information concerning their acquisition and application is only gained through adequate and proper training. A neophyte cannot understand the intricacies for applying the rules of logic, except he has undergone a proper training in it.

However, as interrelated as these socialised concepts are, there remain some distinguishing qualities, although not clear-cut, in not only their characters but also their functions in Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology. These concepts serve as the arms which together form the socialised direction Wittgenstein approach to knowledge takes. But the fact that they are arms suggests that there are some differences in their characters (no matter how

⁸¹ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v23

obscure it may be) and their functions. These distinguishing qualities I shall try to make less-obscure in this section.

The ideas of “Language-Game” and “Form of Life” are closely related, in fact, Wittgenstein is even clear on the fact that what makes the former significant rest largely on its relation to the latter.⁸² However, he does not imply that the two share the same characteristics. For instance, while by our forms of life he means *how* we respond to our environment, that is the unique and formal way we address issues (epistemic and non-epistemic) in life, by our language-game he means *what* our responses are. In other words, “forms of life” majorly answers the question “how?”, and “language-game” the question “what?”. Using the metaphor of a game, each community (epistemic or non-epistemic) has its varying rules, which cannot be expected to be adopted in every other community, given the circumstances that give rise to such rules. Form of life talks about the way in which these rule are used.

Also, there are differences in the functions of these terms as to how they help in the development of socialised view of Wittgenstein epistemology. For instance, while “language-game” tells us *what* each epistemic community has as its unique and inalienable rules, “forms of life” tells us *how* these rules are adopted, “rule-following” is meant to show us *why* these are like how they are. It tells us that we ought to adopt these rules with no mind of an absolute sceptic, because that is how rules are followed; it is in the nature of language to be governed by rule, and we do not learn it by first doubting it. The function of “use” is to tell us where to locate these or identify these rules—in the usage. All these terms altogether tell us the socialised nature of knowledge. They equally direct us towards another important term, “grammar investigation”,

⁸² Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v23

which serves as a guide for us on the form of enquiry we are to take on. That is, an enquiry into the genealogy of a people's language which exhibits their form of life.

A major problem that could be noticed in Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology has to do with epistemic relativism—the view that there are different, incompatible epistemic systems which are all equally valid.⁸³ As developed through the highlighted concepts, a conception of knowledge and justification that depends on varying epistemic community sounds like a relativist conception of knowledge. In other words, socialised epistemology seems to be denying the necessary objectivity of knowledge by reducing its justification to different systems of thought or an epistemic community. And if this is the case, it will not only deny the possibility of interdisciplinary or intercultural discuss, but also deny the existence of mind-independent facts. In other words, socialised epistemology is devoid of objectivity which it agrees to be a necessary characteristic of knowledge.

Reading these implications into relativist conception of knowledge may be true, but reading relativism of knowledge into Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology would be outrightly out of place. This is because, saying the validity of a knowledge-claim is determined *in* an epistemic community does not mean knowledge is relative to such epistemic community, it only means that if S's knowledge claim is actually justified—if “S knows that p”—, then, anyone in the same “social order”⁸⁴, that is, someone who has received the same epistemic education with S will confirm that S is in the right epistemic position to make such knowledge claim; and

⁸³ Glock, H.J., “Relativism, Commensurability and Translatability”, *Ratio*, 20, (2007): 377

⁸⁴ Ayer, A.J., *Language, Truth and Logic*, p111: here, despite being a radical positivist, who rejects ethical terms, Ayer still believes that our expectation of moral agreement from our opponent is still justified if such opponent has received the same moral education as we did and is within the same social order with us.

whoever objects by claiming that “ \sim (S knows that p)” is not in the right epistemic position—the same social context.

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have articulated Wittgenstein’s epistemology, where knowledge is seen as an attainable social phenomenon; a view which serves as an alternative to the representationalist view of knowledge found in the traditional and some contemporary theories. The chapter carefully examined some concepts that are important to the development of this socialised view of knowledge as found in Wittgenstein’s later works. The concepts examined include Wittgenstein’s notion of “Rule-Following,” “Language-Game”, “forms of life”, “Use” and “grammar investigation”. As interrelated and complementary to each other, I have been able to show how the concepts help in developing Wittgenstein socialised view of knowledge. It is pointed out that issues concerning life, language, belief, knowledge and justification must not be thought of as being atomic; they are rather organic in nature, and must be treated as such. Organic in the sense that, every knowledge-claim made is connected like a web to other epistemic factors within the epistemic community in which it is made and that any justification we seek for such claim must take into account those epistemic factors. So, rather than the endless search for the relationship existing between our propositions and objects or mind to ground the propositions, the epistemological task must be that of “grammar investigation” and epistemologists must not be lured into thinking of what a proposition individually “represents”.

CHAPTER TWO

ARGUMENTS AGAINST WITTGENSTEIN'S SOCIALISED EPISTEMOLOGY

2.0 Introduction

My objective in this chapter is to undertake a critical review of some possible and actual arguments against Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology. The arguments I will examine in the chapter include the claim that the socialised nature of Wittgenstein's approach to knowledge inevitably leads to epistemic relativism and thus radical skepticism, because it denies knowledge of the necessary objectivity.¹ There is also the argument that facts about the socialised character of ideas are irrelevant to epistemological questions on truth,² perhaps because it is not in line with naturalism which establishes the truth-value of statements through scientific method. I will equally examine the argument that Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology suggests subjectivism because its consequential denial of "private language" is equally a denial of "epistemological realism", which takes knowledge as independent of any mind whether an individual or a group of people. In this chapter also, I shall carefully examine the claim that Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology is no way better than Moore's because they both merely evade skeptical questions. My objective in the chapter shall be carried out with a specific focus on how these arguments are presented in the works of scholars like Richard Rorty, A.J. Ayer and Michael Hannon.

2.1 Epistemic Naturalism and Wittgenstein's Epistemology

Epistemic naturalism (especially the science-driven contemporary one) is the claim that an epistemological question is a mere cognitive output generated from our sensory input and thus

¹ Rorty, R., *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1979), p34

² Sayer, S., "Knowledge as a Social Phenomenon", *Radical Philosophy*, 52.(1989): 33-6

must be addressed with the standard or method of the natural cum cognitive science. This is because in the phenomena studied in natural science lies the “independent course of observable nature”³ and thus the true objectivity which knowledge requires. Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology, on the other hand, is the claim that an epistemological question is rather a criteriological creation generated from a particular system and must be addressed through an understanding of the standard of judgment in such system. The former sees an epistemological issue as a fixed and invariant empirical structure which rests absolutely on observation, while the latter sees it as fluid structure that is closely bound up with our forms of life and rests on human interpretations. Due to the dissent it exhibits in relation to epistemic naturalism, Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology, it may be argued, does not aid the naturalistic aim of contemporary epistemology and thus denies knowledge of its true objectivity. The point here, that is, the argument against Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology in the light of epistemic naturalism could be summarised as follow:

- i. Natural science is the study of independent observable, thus truly objective, phenomena.
 - ii. Epistemic naturalism provides epistemology with the link to natural science by emphasising the natural method in addressing epistemic issues.
 - iii. Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology is non-natural by prioritising human judgement over independent observable phenomena in validating knowledge.
- ∴ (a) Wittgenstein socialised epistemology denies knowledge of its true objectivity
(b) Wittgenstein socialised epistemology will also lead us back to the sceptical problem of infinite regress, while justifying others judgement.

³ Quine, W.V.O., “On the Nature of Moral Values”, in Quine, W.V.O., *Theories and Things*, (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1981), p63

I shall carefully explain each point, as noted in the premises, show the relationship between them and show how they altogether lead to the two conclusions that follow.

On the first premise, it must be noted that the constructive “scientific” idea motivating epistemic naturalism into natural science is that natural causes can be investigated empirically through scientific method. Through this method, we can establish facts which can hardly be denied by any observers. That is, such fact can command the verdict of all observers, hence, give us the true objectivity which knowledge requires. In supernatural or non-natural causes, on the other hand, such investigation is impossible. Hence, all we have are some values which are merely dictated by some people’s opinions. Besides, presuming that an event has a supernatural or non-natural cause, further investigation to achieve objectivity is denied. All we have to investigate is what such people agree on. This is not the case in natural science. Natural science rather leaves room for further investigation into truth about its findings. This gives room for every observer to affirm the truth of such findings.

On the second premise, it must equally be noted that the major reason scholars like A.J. Ayer then W.V.O. Quine rejects ethics is because the terms of the discourse lack natural content, where “natural” is taken from natural science, which does not only emphasise but also *entirely* depends on *empirical* processes in knowledge acquisition. Moore even states it categorically that ethical terms are non-natural, and thus unanalysable, although he is unwilling to reject ethics because of that. From this view, it could be noticed that naturalism, like science, is an attempt to reject any non-empirical reality. For instance, naturalism has been defined as “the hypothesis that the natural world is a closed system” in the sense that “nothing that is not a part of the natural

world affects it.”⁴ In other words, naturalism is the denial of the existence of supernatural or non-natural causes. In rejecting the reality of supernatural or non-natural terms, events, forces, or entities, naturalism is the antithesis of supernaturalism or “non-naturalism”.

With this naturalist attitude, epistemic naturalism advocates a scientific approach in addressing all epistemological issues. It is noted that an epistemic issue like “justification”, for instance, is non-natural and non-empirical in nature, thus, needs to be naturalised. In other words, epistemology needs to adopt the methods of the natural or empirical sciences in investigating and resolving questions that arise in the discourse. This is because we cannot resolve those epistemic issues when they are still non-natural, given the difficulty in objectively validating the non-natural judgement.

In showing us the scientific way to resolve epistemic issues, Goldman, for instance, argues that the major aim of a theory of knowledge is to assign epistemic status to proposition in non-epistemic terms.⁵ This is why he believes that someone’s claim can only be seen as knowledge if there is causal connection between the truth or fact of such claim and the person’s belief of the claim.⁶ Here, he substitutes the task of justification for being able to establish causal connection between truth and belief. He believes that there is the need to substitute the epistemic terms, which are non-natural, with the natural ones. This is because, as noted earlier, we cannot resolve such non-natural problems. Besides, Quine even crowns it all that,

⁴ Draper, P., “God, Science, and Naturalism”, in Wainwright, W., (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp56-8

⁵ Goldman, A., “The Internalist Conception of Justification”, in French, P.A., et al., (eds.), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Studies in Epistemology*, vol.5, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), p34

⁶ Goldman, A., “A Causal Theory of Knowing”, in Roth, M.D., & Galis, L., (eds.), *Knowing: Essays in the Analysis of Knowledge*, (New York: Random House, 1970), p69

to endow the truths of nature with the full authority of immediate experience was as forlorn a hope as hoping to endow the truths of mathematics with the potential obviousness of elementary logic.⁷

In other words, the whole process of justification is a futile effort. Rather, since all we have is how our beliefs are constructed through experience, and it is the duty of science of psychology to research into how humans arrive at their beliefs about the external world in relation to the sensory stimuli they receive; normative or non-natural epistemic enterprise must give way for the natural, scientific and descriptive psychology⁸—a suggestion referred to as that which initiates “naturalised epistemology”.

On the third premise, the socialised aim of Wittgenstein’s epistemology, as evident in his arguments in *On Certainty*, it could be argued, is non-natural. This is because, to validate knowledge, it lays more emphasis on human judgement in various epistemic systems rather than independent observable phenomena in natural science. This, it could be argued, only leads us back to the futile activity of justification rather than giving us objective truth which knowledge requires. For instance, as highlighted in the previous chapter, part of the factors that define the direction Wittgenstein takes concerning epistemic naturalism becomes more evident in his major aim in *On Certainty*—to disprove Moore’s “defence of common sense.” That is, the former’s aim is to disprove the latter’s claim to know for sure, without adequate justification, a number of empirical propositions, such as “I have a hand”, and “The earth existed for a long time before my birth.”

It could be argued that Wittgenstein’s non-natural aim is evident when he claims that,

⁷ Quine, W.V.O., “Epistemology Naturalized”, in Kornblith, H., (ed.), *Naturalizing Epistemology*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1994) p19

⁸ Quine, W.V.O., “Epistemology Naturalized”, p20

if it (*experience*) is the ground for our judging like this, and not just the cause, still we do not have a ground for seeing this in turn as a ground...No, *experience* is not the ground for our game of judging. Nor is its outstanding success...Under ordinary circumstances I do not satisfy myself that I have two hands by (merely) *seeing* how it looks...Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;-but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game.⁹

The “acting” rather than “seeing”, it could be argued, is not in line with the doctrine of the contemporary epistemic naturalism, and thus non-natural. While “seeing” is about experience and how it links us to the observable phenomena, “acting” is about forms of life which inform our epistemic judgement. Such “acting” highlights Wittgenstein’s socialised aim. The aim equally underlines the generality of his later works.

Moreover, Wittgenstein thinks that answering to the sceptic’s challenge by looking for further evidence in experience is futile; it is to fall into the sceptics trap, because experience itself is subject to many interpretations. In his words,

One wants to say “All my *experiences* show that it is so.” But how do they do that? For that proposition to which they point itself belongs to a particular interpretation of them. “That I regard this proposition as certainly true also characterizes my interpretation of *experience*.”¹⁰

In other words, if we really want to answer sceptic’s challenge, we need more than mere experience. Rather, we will just have to remind him that “justification by experience comes to an end. If it did not it would not be justification”¹¹, and further remind him that “the end is not

⁹ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, Anscombe, G.E.M., & Wright, G.H., (eds.), Anscombe, G.E.M., & Paul, D., (trans.), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), vv130-1, 204

¹⁰ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v145

certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game."¹² This language-game, as noted in the previous chapter, he explains, using the metaphor of language, to be the varying patterns of judgment or the different accepted precepts *agreed* to in different epistemic systems. Thus, he notes that "to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life."¹³ That is, this is our agreed way of grounding knowledge.

On the first conclusion, it could be noted that the view of judgement as agreement in Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology does not help the aim of epistemic naturalism in the contemporary epistemology, where all forms of "non-natural" cum "non-empirical" conceptions of reality are rejected. It is believed that, for us to establish knowledge, a knowledge-claim has to be observational. That is, the truth of the claim is not just based on the truth of another statement or one subjective mind, but it is rather taken from a direct observation—this is called an observation sentence. In order to understand the observation sentence, no previous belief is needed.¹⁴ But in the case of judgment by agreement in Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology, the truth of a statement depends on the language-game from which it is made, that is, the accepted precept of a particular epistemic system which is itself an agreement of some people. This, it may be argued, makes the truth mind-dependent or man-made rather than mind-independent, thus denies knowledge its needed objectivity.

¹¹ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, Anscombe, G.E.M., & Rhees, R., (eds.), Anscombe, G.E.M., (trans.), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), v485

¹² Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v204

¹³ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v19

¹⁴ Quine, W.V.O., "Epistemology Naturalized", pp26-7

On the second conclusion, it may also be noted that the failure to appreciate the necessity of mind-independent observable phenomena as the basis of our knowledge runs Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology into sceptical problem of infinite regress, where in order to determine the truth-value of a given statement he has to determine the truth-value of each recessive statement, upon which the previous statement's truth depends. We will need to further justify those judgements lying at the base of our language-game. In doing so, we continue endlessly in justification. Such endless justification could have been avoided if we choose the observable phenomena which do not depend on any mind for its truth, and thus open to the verification of every observer.

However, while I cannot disagree with premise (ii) which talks about the task of epistemic naturalism, I find it difficult not to deny the premises (i) and (iii) and the two consequential conclusions. Reacting to the premise (i), as much as it is true that scientific method is purely empirical, it must be noted that it will amount to nothing but dogma to restrict all forms of objectivity to empirical phenomena studied in science alone. This assumption is what underlines the claim in premise (iii), where "experience" is taken to be identical with "natural". Even Quine, who is a foremost advocate of scientific method, has, in his earlier work, rejected any radical view of observation. He does not only reject the claim that the truth of a statement is taken from a direct observation, but also rejects the assumption in the claim that "experience" is the same as "natural". This is because there are statements which are natural but cannot get a direct link to experience. In fact, he notes that statements do not have or individual link to experience. For instance, if I say "Jingo has proven his claim *beyond reasonable doubt*", such statement is conventionally meaningful but lacks empirical content. We can only reject its naturalness if we want to claim that convention is not natural to humans. To Quine, the truth of

statement “cannot depend on present stimulation to the *exclusion of stored information*.”¹⁵ Rather, he (Quine) argues that

our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but as a corporate body...My present suggestion is that it is nonsense, and the root of much nonsense, to speak of a linguistic component and a factual component in the truth of any individual statement. Taken collectively, science has its double dependence upon language and experience; but this duality is not significantly traceable into the statements of science taken one by one.¹⁶

There is no fundamental difference between this statement and Wittgenstein’s claim that,

When we first begin to believe anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions...It is not single axioms that strike me as obvious, it is a system in which consequences and premises give one another mutual support.¹⁷

Going by the two statements, it could be noted that the two scholars are stating a bold rejection of direct or individual verification. Like Wittgenstein, Quine regards the theory rather than the individual sentence as the primary bearer of verifiable content. He prefers a holistic picture of verification to the notion of direct sentence—an organic confirmation, whereby statements serve as help to each other in the process of confirmation. For Quine, “no particular experiences are linked with any particular statement...”¹⁸ Any statement stands in a logical relation with every other statement that can be made in a particular language. That is, we cannot in anyway expect each statement to have an independent verification. A statement does not have any direct link to the external world without the aid of the background statements, that is, the

¹⁵ Quine, W.V.O., “Epistemology Naturalized”, p27

¹⁶ Quine, W.V.O., “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, in Quine, W.V.O., *From a Logical Point of View*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), pp41-2

¹⁷ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv141-2

¹⁸ Quine, W.V.O., “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, p43

beliefs acquired prior to the present one we intend verifying. Statements are justified in relation to each other, likewise each statement is expected to be verified with the help of other statements. This is even the more reason we should not expect any belief to be self-evident, or self-justifying.

Above all the two of them make similar suggestions on how we should go about verifying statements. They both agree that our verification must be with “agreement”. This is because while Wittgenstein notes that “all testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system”¹⁹ and all knowledge claims from this system conforms to a “generally accepted axiom”²⁰, Quine notes that our verified statement or, using his word, “observation sentence” must be—“occasion sentence that commands the same verdict for all witnesses who *know the language*”.²¹ These can both be referred to as a form of socialised view of verification, which is a form of justification. If verification is truly a process of establishing an *evidential relation* between evidence and hypothesis,²² that is, an attempt to discover the extent at which evidence from the external world proves or disproves our claims, then, it is equally a form of justification. On this verification or justification, Wittgenstein only differs from Quine on the latter’s unwillingness to allow for a non-empirical verdict even if it “commands the same verdict for all witnesses who *know the language*.”

¹⁹ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v105

²⁰ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv550-1

²¹ Flanagan, O.J., “Pragmatism, Ethics, and Correspondence Truth: Response to Gibson and Quine”, in *Ethics*, 98.3, (1988): 544

²² Kim, J., “What is Naturalised Epistemology”, in Kornblith, H., (ed.), *Naturalizing Epistemology*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1994)p42

Unlike Quine, Wittgenstein is not too restrictive in his own notion of “justification”. While he accepts empirical verdict, he equally does not reject non-empirical verdict. This is because he believes that human knowledge, in the final analysis, has its basis in natural facts *about* human. By “natural facts”, he means facts about how humans “naturally” have *rule-following* tendency in making epistemic judgement. These facts include empirical and non-empirical verdicts. Terms like “justified belief”, “sufficient ground” “good reason” and “beyond a reasonable doubt”²³ are non-empirical but natural epistemic verdicts. It is because even an epistemic naturalist like Goldman understands what they mean, that is why he attempts to translate them to empirical terms.

Also, Quine himself has noted that sentences of a language form what he calls a “web of belief” such that some of them are on the periphery and so connect the web with experience, while some are in the centre and thereby keep the web together. The former are in a more or less direct relation to sensory events and therefore are highly prone to infirmation by recalcitrant experience, while the latter are extremely secure. The majority of sentences, however, lie somewhere in between and exhibit transitional behaviour. The difference between any two sentences is that of degree, not of kind. Quine writes:

Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system. Even a statement very close to the periphery can be held true in the face of recalcitrant experience by pleading hallucination or by amending certain statements of the kind called logical laws. Conversely, by the same token, no statement is immune to revision. Revision even of the logical law of the excluded middle has been proposed as a means of simplifying quantum mechanics; and what difference is there in principle between such a shift and the shift whereby

²³Kim, J., “What is Naturalised Epistemology”, pp33-4

Kepler superseded Ptolemy, or Einstein Newton, or Darwin
Aristotle?²⁴

Thus, if in epistemic naturalism we agree with Quine that “no particular experiences are linked with any particular statement...”²⁵ and statements stand in logical relations to each other, then I see no reason why we should consider as a problem Wittgenstein’s own rejection of individual verification, where it is noted that the act of justification “is a system in which consequences and premises give one another mutual support.”²⁶ Here, Wittgenstein is equally pointing out that issues concerning language or belief must not be thought of or treated as atomic; they are rather organic in nature, that is, we must not be lured into thinking of what each proposition in isolation “represents” or “refers to” in the external world, but their relationship with other propositions in the same system. Similarly, if we can equally agree with Quine that “science has its double dependence upon language and experience”²⁷, then, we should also consider as justified the Wittgenstein’s claim that “understanding a sentence means understanding a language.”²⁸

By “understand a language”, Wittgenstein means justification is test of our comprehension of the use of a proposition in a form of life, that is, the agreed way of grounding knowledge is a particular epistemic system which gives rise to that statement.²⁹ This underlines the transition from his early view of language as a fixed structure imposed upon the world—where we can always determine what each statement “refers to” in the external world—to his later view of language as a fluid structure that is intimately bound up with our everyday activity

²⁴ Quine, W.V.O., “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, p43

²⁵ Quine, W.V.O., “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, p43

²⁶ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv141-2

²⁷ Quine, W.V.O., “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, p42

²⁸ Wittgenstein, L., *The Blue and Brown Books*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), p5

²⁹ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v19

and forms of life. Unlike the early, the later Wittgenstein believes that creating meaningful statements is not a matter of mapping the logical form of the world; it is a matter of using conventionally-defined terms within language-games that we play out in the course of everyday use of language.

Lastly, on the problem of mind-(in)dependence, in a similar spirit to Wittgenstein's socialised view of knowledge, Quine also asserts that "the totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs...is a man-made fabric which impinges on experiences only along the edges..."³⁰ If truly all human knowledge is "man-made" (mind-dependent), then we do not have any justification for claiming that Wittgenstein's epistemology is devoid of objectivity merely because it emphasises the "rule-following" nature of a proposition and its justification—the role of agreement in judgement rather than *mere* observation. At the same time, if knowledge is "man-made" (mind-dependent), then, we cannot consistently claim that a body of knowledge like epistemic naturalism is mind-independent, unless we are claiming that such body of knowledge (epistemic naturalism) is not a body of knowledge—contradiction.

A constant reference to Quine—in order to justify Wittgenstein socialised view of knowledge may sound like *tu quo que* or using Quine as paradigm of epistemic justification. First, the purpose of using Quine, who is an epistemic naturalist, is not to make him a paradigm, but has to do with the major aim of this section, that is, to see shortcomings in Wittgenstein's epistemology in the light of epistemic naturalism. Second, even if it is *tu quo que*, it is an effective one. This is because the reference to Quine reminds us that we cannot justifiably reject Wittgenstein's epistemology as antagonistic to the aims of epistemic naturalism on the mere

³⁰ Quine, W.V.O., "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", p42

basis that the latter rejects exhaustive dependence on observation, except we view epistemic naturalism as suggesting such exhaustive dependence on observation that Quine has rejected. This makes it rather puzzling why Quine himself is not socialised epistemologist rather than suggesting that epistemologists need to join the psychologists in merely studying the human cognitive process. Such study excludes the role of background beliefs, which are guided by pre-established standards in acquisition and application. This same surprise is expressed by Owen Flanagan, who laments that “I read Quine as speaking in much more naively positivistic tone about science (naturalism) than I thought him allowed.”³¹

The question that may be asked next is that if our propositions do not rest on those “independent course of observable nature” against which the truth-value of our statements can be tested, then, how do we achieve objectivity that knowledge requires in this less-empiricist socialised epistemology? In answering this question we will note that in order to avoid a step backward into extreme empiricism and still achieve objectivity, rather than a total reliance on object-word relation, we, as Wittgenstein suggests, go by inter-subjective verdict of a statement, that is, judgement by agreement. And this type of judgement is equally expressed by Quine, who, while giving a more robust definition of observation sentence, notes that our verdict should be that which “all members of the epistemic community will agree (on) under uniform stimulation.”³² But, unlike Quine is unwilling to admit, our “stimulation” may not *necessarily* be empirical. What stimulates us to making a claim may be a non-empirical but same epistemic training or education we have received. We may have both been trained on how to identify a

³¹ Flanagan, O., “Pragmatism, Ethics, and Correspondence Theory of Truth: Response to Gibson and Quine”, p542

³² Quine, W.V.O., “Epistemology Naturalized”, p28

good or bad ground independently of any empirical means, that is, through “unassisted efforts of thought.”³³ In other words, our objectivity shall be achieved through “inter-subjective tribunal”³⁴ of epistemic claims, empirical or non-empirical.

2.2 Pritchard on Epistemic Relativism and Wittgenstein’s Epistemology

Epistemic relativism is the claim that there are more than one epistemic standard because epistemic standards are products of different epistemic systems. It is a rejection of epistemic absolutism, which claims that there is one absolute and universally applicable epistemic standard through which all knowledge-claims can be assessed.³⁵ Wittgenstein socialised epistemology, on the other hand, adopts the metaphor of a game, to mean in our language-games we are guided by different epistemic standards. As each game has its varying rules and no rule is common to all games, there is no standard which is common to all epistemic systems.³⁶ This implies is a rejection of any form of invariant view of epistemic standards. As Duncan Pritchard notes, it has been argued that there is no fundamental difference between Wittgenstein’s claim here and the view held in epistemic relativism. So, Wittgenstein socialised epistemology is considered to be a form of epistemic relativism. As a consequence of epistemic relativism, Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology is also said to encourage scepticism. The charge of epistemic relativism against Wittgenstein socialised epistemology can be stated in the following way:

- i. Epistemic relativism is a denial of one universally applicable epistemic standard.
- ii. Wittgenstein socialised epistemology claims there are varying epistemic standards for different epistemic system.

³³ Taylor, A.E., *Elements of Metaphysics*, (London: Methuen & Co. 1903), p7

³⁴ Quine, W.V.O., “Epistemology Naturalized”, p28

³⁵ Luper, S., “Epistemic Relativism”, *Philosophical Issues*, 14, (2004): 271-2

³⁶ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v67

- iii. The claim in Wittgenstein socialised epistemology is no essentially different to the claim in epistemic relativism.
- ∴ (a) Wittgenstein socialised epistemology is a form of epistemic relativism.
(b) Wittgenstein socialised epistemology promotes scepticism.

As noted in each premise, I shall carefully clarify each point. This will help in showing the relationship they have with one another and how they altogether lead to the two conclusions in the argument above.

Focusing on first point, Pritchard notes that, there various forms of relativism in various discourses. The one that concern knowledge is what he calls “epistemic incommensurability”. Epistemic incommensurability is the claim that it is possible for two epistemic agents to have opposing beliefs which are rationally justified to an equal extent where there is no rational basis by which either agent could properly persuade the other to revise her view.³⁷ The two agents are guided by various epistemic principles in developing their opposing beliefs. Pritchard points out that an example of this type of epistemic incommensurability could be found in a disagreement like the one between the creationist and the evolutionist concerning the age of the earth. The creationist believes that the earth is at most 10,000 years old and the evolutionist claims it is at least 2.5 billion years old.³⁸ That is, according to the creationist the world, at most, is not older than 10,000 years, while the evolutionist believes that the world is far much older than that; it is over 2 billion years old.

³⁷ Pritchard, D., “Epistemic Relativism, Epistemic Incommensurability and Wittgensteinian Epistemology”, in Hales, S.D., (Ed.), *A Companion to Relativism*, (London: Blackwell, 2011), p279

³⁸ Pritchard, D., “Epistemic Relativism, Epistemic Incommensurability and Wittgensteinian Epistemology”, p276

The two opposing claims are products of different standards. While the creationist's developed from the biblical discovery, as guided by the spiritual laws, the evolutionist's belief is developed from scientific discovery as guided by physical laws. These two epistemic standards are incommensurable we seem to be short of any rational basis through which we can satisfactorily convince one to give way to the other. While the evolutionist insists on physical laws, she does not have any convincing reasons to tell the creationist to abandon her spiritual law and take up the physical law. This is the type of view expressed in epistemic relativism by denying the existence of an epistemic standard which is absolute and valid in all epistemic instances where we can adopt it to measure the correctness of every knowledge-claim.

As noted by Pritchard, Wittgenstein's epistemology has been accused of expressing something similar to epistemic incommensurability. For instance, in *On Certainty*, he argues that,

...if Moore and this king (a king who has been brought up in the belief that the world began with him) were to meet and discuss, could Moore really prove his belief (Moore's empirical belief that the world started long before his birth) to be the right one? I do not say that Moore could not convert the king to his view, but it would be a conversion of a special kind; the king would be brought to look at the world in a different way...I can imagine a man who had grown up in quite special circumstances and been taught that the earth came into being 50 years ago, and therefore believed this. We might instruct him: the earth has long... etc. - We should be trying to give him our picture of the world. This would happen through a kind of persuasion.³⁹

Here, Wittgenstein sees knowledge as a product of the education or training we receive within the epistemic system our knowledge-claim is made. This seems to mean that Wittgenstein allows for the tendency of two incompatible claims with equal epistemic strength. This suggests that

³⁹ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv92, 262

Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology exhibits a form of epistemic relativism, the doctrine that all criteria of judgment are *relative* to the individuals, group of individuals or situations involved.

The charge of epistemic relativism against Wittgenstein's epistemology has been further buttressed by Wittgenstein's claim that,

Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic...I said I would "combat" the other man, - but wouldn't I give him reasons? Certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes persuasion. (Think what happens when missionaries convert natives.)⁴⁰

Here, we see a situation where there are two incompatible epistemic systems and the claim generated in one cannot be accommodated in the other.

While assessing Wittgenstein epistemology, Duncan Pritchard has noted that there is this tendency to read epistemic relativism into Wittgenstein's argument. He notes that the statements Wittgenstein's argument appears to be committed to can actually push one into concluding that it allows for a situation where a kind of disagreement ensues between epistemic agents whose most fundamental commitments are radically different.⁴¹

Pritchard formally summarises Wittgenstein's argument on the structure of reasons, that is, how we go about grounding our knowledge-claim. For him, Wittgenstein's argument makes us to believe that for either our belief or doubt to be rational, there must be some grounds for it. For such grounds to be considered good enough to establish our doubt or belief, they must be epistemically stronger. That is, our grounds must be more certain, than what they are establishing. So, the fact that we consider such grounds as more certain than what we are using them for, shows that we naturally do not express any doubt in the grounds. If we do doubt our

⁴⁰ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv611-2

⁴¹ Pritchard, D., "Epistemic Relativism, Epistemic Incommensurability and Wittgensteinian Epistemology", p275

grounds, it would be unreasonable to use them as a ground for our believing or doubting.⁴² In other words, Wittgenstein's argument shows that our belief-system necessarily must have assumptions which we consider to be optimally certain, and is free of any further rational review.

Going by this summary, Pritchard notes that Wittgenstein's epistemology presents us with a conception of how human reasoning should be thought-out in epistemic justification. Human reason-giving practices suggest the commitment to a set of fundamental assumptions which are by their nature immune to rational evaluation. Pritchard notes that this type of view, as evident in Wittgenstein's epistemology concerning the structure of human reasons, appears to immediately imply the epistemic incommensurability thesis, hence, a form of epistemic relativism. This, he argues, is because it follows from this picture that any dispute where the parties to that dispute have different underlining assumptions, in Wittgenstein's epistemology, cannot be settled by appeal to reason.

This underlining assumption is what Wittgenstein characterises as "language-games", that is, the diverse rules which inform the point of view that each statement is made and does not take rational evaluation. In his words,

The language-game...is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there - like our life...And the concept of knowing is coupled with that of the language-game.⁴³

Here, we are made to know that if I am a creationist, for instance, there is no amount of grounds that may suffice to justify my belief in the spiritual law that guides creationism. This is because there is no need for such grounding in the first place. I will likely share the same view on let say

⁴² Pritchard, D., "Epistemic Relativism, Epistemic Incommensurability and Wittgensteinian Epistemology", pp276-9

⁴³ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv559-60

the age of the world with someone who has the same education with me in spiritual law. My language-game, which is the spiritual law, by its nature, “is not based on grounds.” The freedom Wittgenstein’s epistemology grants me to be completely justified in being a creationist or evolutionist allows me to justifiably make my claim about the age of the world despite being incompatible with the evolutionist’s claim or vice versa. This, in Wittgenstein’s argument, invites the reading of epistemic relativism.

Similarly, in the same *On Certainty* some further points are made and these bring further relativist reading of his socialised epistemology proposed in Wittgenstein’s works. In his words,

I have a world-picture. Is it true or false? Above all it is the substratum of all my enquiring and asserting. The propositions describing it are not all equally subject to testing... (Everyone) has got hold of a definite world-picture - not of course one that he invented: he learned it as a child. I say world-picture and not hypothesis, because it is the matter-of-course foundation for his research and as such also does unmentioned...If a child asked me whether the earth was already there before my birth...In answering the question I should have to be imparting a picture of the world to the person who asked it. If I do answer the question with certainty, what gives me this certainty?...I can imagine a man who had grown up in quite special circumstances and been taught that the earth came into being 50 years ago, and therefore believed this. We might instruct him: the earth has long... etc. - We should be trying to give him our picture of the world. This would happen through a kind of persuasion.⁴⁴

Here it is shown that if our language-games are neither supported by grounds nor can be said to be true, they cannot be rationally held and it would be possible, at least *de jure*, to have alternative ones, which would be as legitimate as ours. Hence, it would be possible, at least in principle, to have different world-pictures.

The legitimacy that Wittgenstein’s notion of language-games gives to alternative epistemic standard which are opposing to ours makes his epistemology to be equally inviting

⁴⁴ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv162,167,233,262

scepticism. If each standard are equally valid, then, each epistemic agent can easily deny any other epistemic standard by claiming that since her own is valid, she does not have to accept the other agent's epistemic standard. If the evolutionist believes, according to his findings which are guided by physical law, that the world is over 2 billion years old, then, I as a creationist can legitimately deny such claim. All I need to say is that my own findings of 10,000 years, which is guided by spiritual law, prove that wrong. Conversely, the evolutionist can embark on a similar legitimate denial. That is a denial of any objective or interdisciplinary or intercultural accepted knowledge, and thus an exhortation of scepticism.

However, reality, as Edward Taylor notes, is not self-contradictory,⁴⁵ and Wittgenstein must have been very well aware of this fact. He must have been equally aware that it is the duty of philosophy to identify which is mere appearance and which is reality. Pritchard tries to differentiate between what “appears” to be the case and what “really” is the case in Wittgenstein's epistemology. It is noted that the idea in play in Wittgenstein's argument which emphasises the role of “language-games” in our justificatory activity, can only be said to imply epistemic relativism if it also allows for a further claim like “it is possible for different epistemic agents to be committed to a *radically different* set of underlining principles.”⁴⁶ It is only when we actively have this additional premise or can read it into Wittgenstein's works that we can attribute to his epistemology an epistemic relativist conclusion like:

It is possible for two agents to have opposing beliefs which are rationally justified to an equal extent where there is no rational

⁴⁵ Taylor, A.E., *Elements of Metaphysics*, (London: Methuen & Co, 1903), p23

⁴⁶Pritchard, D., “Epistemic Relativism, Epistemic Incommensurability and Wittgensteinian Epistemology”, p291

basis by which either agent could properly persuade the other to revise their view (epistemic incommensurability).⁴⁷

Without this type of relativist outcome, there seems to be no genuine reason why one can say Wittgenstein's notion of "language-games" implies the epistemic incommensurability thesis. Wittgenstein's claim that "our belief-system necessarily must have assumptions which are, to us, optimally certain and is free of any further rational review "is as it stands entirely compatible with the idea that there will always be a shared set of beliefs to appeal to so as to rationally resolve conflicts to people with different language-games.

For instance, Wittgenstein, while noting what appears like incommensurability in our language-games, even points out that such incommensurability can still be reconciled. In his words, while he reminds Moore, who believes that everyone ought to know an empirical proposition like "The earth existed for a long time before my birth" he holds to be certain, that,

...we can ask: May someone have telling grounds for believing that the earth has only existed for a short time, say since his own birth? - Suppose he had always been told that, - would he have any good reason to doubt it? Men have believed that they could make the rain; why should not a king be brought up in the belief that the world began with him? And if Moore and this king were to meet and discuss, could Moore really prove his belief to be the right one?⁴⁸

This passage shows what appears like an irreconcilable form of incommensurability between the language-games or the accepted precepts informing the opposing views of Moore and the king. However, in the same passage, Wittgenstein reminds us that he does not necessarily claim that such language-games cannot be reconciled; neither does he suggest a relativism of knowledge between the two men. In his words,

⁴⁷Pritchard, D., "Epistemic Relativism, Epistemic Incommensurability and Wittgensteinian Epistemology", p279

⁴⁸ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v92

I do not say that Moore could not convert the king to his view, but it would be a conversion of a special kind; the king would be brought to look at the world in a different way. Remember that one is sometimes convinced of the correctness of a view by its simplicity or symmetry, i. e., these are what induce one to go over to this point of view. One then simply says something like: "That's how it must be."⁴⁹

In other words, the purpose of a rational debate is to provide relevant evidences to show why an opposing view is wrong. And with the presence of such genuine evidences, we cannot rationally hold on to our view merely because it is our view; there must be the readiness to let go of our views of life, especially when evidences emerge to prove, beyond reasonable doubt, that our position is false.

Similarly, going back to the example of creationist-evolutionist debate concerning the age of the earth, if each party knows that the purpose of her debate is not just to confuse people, but to provide relevant evidences on why her position is the right one, there should equally be at least in principle the willingness to change their respective beliefs should appropriate evidence come to light.⁵⁰ That is, if there is any evidence that the world has been in existence for over 2.5 billion years as against the creationist assumption, the rationality in a debate suggests then that there should be willingness on the part of the creationist to shift in her belief, or the evolutionist as the case may be. Donald Davidson has even famously pointed out that "belief is in its nature veridical."⁵¹ Thus, beliefs cannot be allowed to be contradictory, since reality is not contradictory,⁵² and there cannot be evidences provided in reality to support two contradictory

⁴⁹ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v92

⁵⁰Pritchard, D., "Epistemic Relativism, Epistemic Incommensurability and Wittgensteinian Epistemology", p279

⁵¹Davidson, D., "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", in Henrich, D., (ed.), *Kant oder Hegel?*,(Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1983), p432

beliefs. Reality cannot provide evidences to show, for example, that the world has been in existence for “over 2.5 billion years” and at the same time just “10000 years”. Therefore, having diverse language-games does not necessarily mean there cannot be a point to reconcile them. So, Wittgenstein’s epistemology which emphasises the role of “language-games” in our epistemic judgement does not necessarily suggest relativism of knowledge or scepticism.

2.3 A.J. Ayer’s Defence of “Private Language” against Wittgenstein

The notion of “private language”, as made famous by Wittgenstein, suggests a language which its acquisition and usage is determine solely by the user. In *Philosophical Investigations*, it is noted as that wherein “individual words...are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking...”⁵³ Wittgenstein rejects this sort of language as not genuine. As a result of his socialised view of language and knowledge, he argues that a word in a genuine language can only be useful if we can publicly judge whether it is correctly applied. To him, “the use of this word stands in need of a justification which everybody understands.”⁵⁴ In Wittgenstein’s argument against “private language”, Ayer notices a prioritization of judgement over what is actually judged. This he considers to be a form of epistemic subjectivism, where knowledge depends on judgements of some people rather the independent facts. And being a core “epistemological realist” who believes that knowledge must be immune to people’s judgement, Ayer tries to defend the possibility of a “private language”. He simply argues that “whatever I have to identify, whether it be an object...or a sign, I have *only* my memory and my current sensation to rely on.”⁵⁵ For him, Wittgenstein is wrong for trying to substitute verification with

⁵²Taylor, A.E., *Elements of Metaphysics*, p23

⁵³ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v243

⁵⁴ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v261

public judgement. In verification, if I cannot trust my memory and the present data I get, then there is no guarantee that others' can be trusted.

The explicit and implicit aims of Ayer's argument can be summarised as follows:

- i. Epistemological realism sees knowledge as independent of any judgement
- ii. Epistemic subjectivism sees knowledge as dependent on judgement
- iii. The notion of "private language" suggests that an individual can independently determine the right application of language.
- iv. "Private language" in epistemic context means an individual can solely establish knowledge, without depending on any other person's judgement.
- v. The idea in epistemological realism is compatible with the idea in "private language"
- vi. Wittgenstein's epistemology sees knowledge as dependent on the judgement of some observers in the system.
- vii. Wittgenstein's epistemology is incompatible with "private language" both in epistemic and linguistic context.
- viii. Wittgenstein's epistemology is compatible with epistemic subjectivism
- ∴ (a) Wittgenstein socialised epistemology discourages epistemological realism
(b) Wittgenstein socialised epistemology promotes epistemic subjectivism.

I shall carefully elaborate on this argument; likewise how the premises in it relate with each other and how they support the conclusions that follow.

Epistemological realism is a doctrine that the facts which ground our epistemic judgement exist independently of it. It is taken to be a version of objectivism, which in turn is a claim that truths must not depend on an individual's viewpoint. Ayer is a prominent example of a scholar holding this position. In fact his is prominent for being an epistemological realist twice

⁵⁵ Ayer, A.J., *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, (New York: Pelican, 1986), pp75-6

over in terms of epistemology and semantics. To him the external and independent facts serve as the source of both the justification and the meaning of our propositions.⁵⁶ The advantage of epistemological realism is believed to be numerous. A major example is the belief that it has the ability to address the intractable sceptical challenge posed in epistemic regress. That is, regressive justification we always provide, in which each ground we provide for a judgement is considered a judgement itself. So, such ground is said to require further justification, *ad infinitum*.⁵⁷ The reason for this is that it is believed that we cannot assume justification for such ground, except we end up in arbitrary dogmatism where the certainty for our ground is only assumed, thus, remain unjustified. However, the external and independent facts emphasised in epistemological realism is believed to provide us with grounds which are not from anyone's judgement, hence, does not need or take any justification.

Epistemological realism is in sharp contrast with epistemic subjectivism. Unlike the former, the latter is the claim that "our own mental activity is the only unquestionable fact of our experience."⁵⁸ In other words, in epistemic subjectivism, there is the belief that our knowledge is merely a product of subjective judgement. It is believed that what we call independent or objective facts will remain meaningless and perhaps useless at least to humans without human judgement. This position reaches its peak in Berkeley's epistemology. According to Berkeley,

⁵⁶Kim, J., "What is Naturalised Epistemology", 2nd ed. in Kornblith, H. (ed.), *Naturalizing Epistemology*, (Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1994), p33

⁵⁷Bonjour, L., "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge", in French, P.A., et al., (eds.), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Studies in Epistemology*, vol.5, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1980), pp53-4

⁵⁸Richardson, A., & Bowden, J., *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, (Salisbury: Rosemary Pugh Books,1983), pp.552-3

Properly and immediately nothing can be perceived but ideas. All material things therefore are in themselves insensible, and to be perceived only by their ideas.⁵⁹

Here, he is even unwilling to give what we call independent facts the ability to be perceived without human judgement. Perhaps, given the subjective nature of Berkeley's reduction of everything in existence to idea, it is believed that whoever rests justification, like Berkeley, on human judgement is equally an epistemic subjectivist. This does not exclude Wittgenstein whose socialised epistemology rests the whole of justification on the judgement of some people.

Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology, it must be noted, majorly emphasises inter-subjective justification as a necessary criterion of knowledge. This is why he emphasises that,

If someone *believes* something, we needn't always be able to answer the question "why he believes it"; but if he *knows* something, then the question "how does he know?" must be capable of being answered...If one does answer this (knowledge) question, one must do so according to *generally accepted axioms*. This is how something of this sort may be known.⁶⁰

In other words, whatever I claim to know, I must be ready to answer the questions "how do I know?" My answer must be in line with the "generally accepted axioms" of the epistemic system my claim is coming from. By this I already know that, while claiming to know something, I have some explanations or reasons to give not to myself but to people who have an adequate understanding of the rules guiding the epistemic system which gives birth to my claim. All these are necessary because if it is just to myself, then, it would be needless to give any reason or answer "how do I know?" Similarly, Wittgenstein believes that the establishment and the use of language, which is the medium through which knowledge is acquired and communicated, must

⁵⁹Pappas, G., "Berkeley's Assessment of Locke's Epistemology", *Philosophica*, 76. (2005): 95

⁶⁰ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv550-1

also be inter-subjectively justified. The notion of “private language” is rejected by Wittgenstein as not genuine because it suggests a language acquired and used without any form of inter-subjective justification.

However, this rejection and Wittgenstein’s consequent socialised view of knowledge does not sound compatible with the doctrine of “epistemological realism”. This is because, in epistemological realism, knowledge is seen as independent of any mind whether that of an individual or a group of people. But Wittgenstein’s view seems to lay more emphasis on people’s judgment than what is judged. He believes that knowledge depends on the verdict of the observers in the system. In his words,

One wants to say “All my *experiences* show that it is so.” But how do they do that? For that proposition to which they point itself belongs to a particular *interpretation* of them. “That I regard this proposition as certainly true also characterizes my *interpretation* of *experience*.”⁶¹

While an epistemological realist like Ayer takes my present sensation got from *experience* of the independent fact as the basis of my knowledge-claim, Wittgenstein, in the passage above, claims that such *experience* still requires my *interpretation* through the words used to qualify them. This *interpretation* comes in accordance with the *generally accepted axioms* guiding my epistemic system. This philosophical attitude leads Wittgenstein into his rejection of “private language.” He believes that an individual cannot solely determine the meaning of symbols all because she has access to some independent facts.

Wittgenstein believes that one of the major problems battling with the objectivity of knowledge is the possibility of a “private language”. He tries to show the impossibility of such language. For him, “Private language” makes language subjective. Likewise, justification of

⁶¹ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v145

knowledge, which is produced or communicated through language, will equally be a subjective affair. Thus, Wittgenstein explains “private language” in the following way:

The individual words of this language are to refer to what can be known only to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language.⁶²

Wittgenstein understands that language in general is a veritable tool for forming, acquiring, analyzing, verifying, evaluating, and communicating our knowledge-claims such that without it we can neither think nor acquire knowledge. And he is equally aware of the fact that the existence of “private language” will undermine not only these functions but also his proposed socialised view of language and knowledge. Thus, Wittgenstein rejects such language. He argues that it is both arbitrary and pointless to name a sensation after a word. If the name has no function beyond being a sound emitted in the presence of the sensation, it cannot really be seen as a word. We cannot say the word names the sensation just because it occurs at the same time as the sensation. It is worth noting, however, that Wittgenstein does not deny that there can be private sensation, he rather, concludes from his argument that even if we can have a language of private sensation, it will still be in the terms of public language. Thus, a private sensation will be identified by a public description. The *experience* establishing the sensation will equally be *interpreted* in propositions guided by some *generally accepted axioms*.

In rejection of this emphasis on *interpretation* or *judgement* rather than the independent facts that is interpreted and as strong believer in those independent facts as sufficient grounds for establishing knowledge and meaning of symbols, Ayer provides a defence of “private language.” He argues that if, for example, every individual is unable, on her own, to establish a meaning for

⁶² Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v243

a symbol by only appealing to her sensations, then, there is no assurance that having many people would help. Wittgenstein's unwillingness to allow every individual the ability to solely verify the correctness of a symbol renders other individuals equally impotent for such inter-subjective verification. Also, "inter-subjective" no matter the amount of the people involved is still subjective because whatever verdict generated will still depend on the mind of those people involved. Objectivity only applies to independent facts whose truth is independent of any judgement. We cannot prioritise inter-subjective judgement over independent facts in verification. In his words,

Wittgenstein is wrong in taking the corroboration of one memory by another, or that of a memory by an item of sense experience, as an inferior substitute for some other method of verification. There is no other method. Whatever I have to identify, whether it be an object, an event, an image, or a sign, I have only my memory and my current sensation to rely on...I think it is very important to note that it makes no difference to my present argument whether it is applied to the use of signs to refer to what are counted as public objects or to their use to refer to so-called private experiences.⁶³

Ayer notes that there are really two different ways for a language to be private. The first is a language in which the objects of the terms in the language are only subjectively accessible, a language of private sensation. This is the sense of private language he feels most philosophers have taken in the debate over the possibility of private language.⁶⁴ The way Ayer wishes to interpret private language is as a language which is developed and used by a single speaker, where the terms can refer to objects which are externally observable as well as to objects which are only subjectively accessible. This he refers to as descriptive language; the language that describes objects. To distinguish this sense of a private language, I shall call it a solitary

⁶³ Ayer, A.J., *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, (New York: Penguin, 1986), pp75-6

⁶⁴Ayer, A. J., "Can There Be a Private Language?", in Shanker, S., (ed.), *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments*, vol. 2, (London: Routledge, 1986), p240

language and oppose it to a language with more than one speaker, the Wittgenstein's socialised language. Ayer argues that a solitary language is logically possible and extrapolates from this that a language of private sensation is also logically possible.

Emphasising “logical possibility” does not mean he is unaware of “material possibility”, that is whether solitary language is materially possible. For instance, he categorically states that solitary language, in an ordinary sense, is materially possible. Perhaps that is why he is arguing for, in the philosophical sense, its logical possibility. In his words, “that there can be, because there are.”⁶⁵ An example of such is thieves' slang, which he notes is not private in the philosophical sense of it. He deliberately ignores this because Wittgenstein's argument is actually directed at the logical possibility of such language. This is because it is on such philosophical sense that Wittgenstein's emphasis is. While Wittgenstein agrees with Ayer's extrapolation that language of private sensation is logically possible the former denies the logical possibility of solitary language, because the two terms have no logical connection. In the philosophical sense of it, language for Wittgenstein necessarily requires public criteria. This is where Ayer takes on Wittgenstein.

To show the incorrectness of Wittgenstein's argument, Ayer gives an example that an individual such as Robinson Crusoe, if he were to shipwreck before having acquired a language, would be in a position to develop a language capable of describing publicly observable objects without Wittgenstein's requirement of a public criteria. Thus, Robinson Crusoe would speak a solitary language which would only have meaning for him. According to Ayer, Crusoe's language could become a social language; it just happens to be solitary because there is no one

⁶⁵Ayer, A. J., “Can There Be a Private Language?”, p239

else around to speak it.⁶⁶ In fact he believes that not only is such descriptive language need not be validated by the public, the language does not also need the observation of the originator either.⁶⁷

If we take Ayer at his word, then for a solitary language to exist it must meet the criteria for a social language, yet be created and used by only one individual. We can take a language to be a set of terms or symbols and rules which are attached to meanings and referents in a way that allows a speaker to express her beliefs about experience. The epistemic criteria for such a language is that a speaker must be able to use the terms and rules correctly and be able to verify that she has done so. Here, like Wittgenstein, Ayer's solitary language does not intended to cover (easily imaginable) cases of recording one's experiences in a personal code, for such a code, however obscure in fact, could in principle be deciphered. What they both had in mind (if the same) is a language conceived as necessarily comprehensible only to its single originator because the things which define its vocabulary are necessarily inaccessible to others.

However, elaborating on Wittgenstein's view that language functions according to shared norms and forms of life, the possibility of private language becomes epistemically impossible. That is, it is inconceivable that someone could invent a language for his or her own private use that describes his or her inner sensations and must still be able to verify it. In such a language, there would be no criteria to determine whether a word had been used correctly, since the creator is the only user, it would not make any sense to answer the knowledge question "how do we know" or ask oneself whether "I am right according to my own law". Such question requires other people's verdict. Thus, the language would have no meaning.

⁶⁶Ayer, A. J., "Can There Be a Private Language?", pp243-4

⁶⁷Ayer, A. J., "Can There Be a Private Language?", p247

If the use of a term or sign cannot be checked, verified or justified to be correct, then the term's use is indeterminate. A language which comprises wholly of indeterminate terms simply does not qualify as a language. In a language there is a clear inter-subjective way of determining the correctness of a speaker's use of the language, namely, being corrected by other speaker according to the conventions of the language. Likewise, the correctness of a knowledge-claim must be determined in an inter-subjective way in accordance with the knowledge standard or "generally accepted axiom" guiding knowledge acquisition of the epistemic community concerned. Wittgenstein's point here is not that we cannot make up terms for or talk about private sensations or subjective experience. Rather, his point is that so long as language or experience is "kept to oneself" as it were, there is no way for linguistic connections to arise which could stabilize the language and save it from indeterminacy.

2.4 Michael Hannon's Doubt on Wittgensteinian Solution to Scepticism

Scepticism is the claim that it is impossible to ground our knowledge-claims, that we only hit some bedrock assumption or unjustified certainty when claiming we have grounds for our claims.⁶⁸ G.E. Moore rejects scepticism. He claims that he at least knows some empirical propositions like "here is a hand" and "the world has existed for more than five minutes" because their truth is commonsensical.⁶⁹ Moore's move is considered inadequate by Wittgenstein. The latter claims that before we can actually claim to know we must be able to attend to the question "how do we know?", and this is lacking in Moore's commonsensical knowledge. Instead, Wittgenstein suggests that we address scepticism or the question about our knowledge in

⁶⁸Blackburn, S., *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (2nd ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p9

⁶⁹Moore, G. E., "A Proof of an External World", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 25.5, (1939): 273

accordance with the “generally accepted axioms.”⁷⁰ That is by only meeting the necessary requirement of the epistemic system which gives rise to our knowledge-claim and ignore any scepticism that goes beyond this. However, Wittgenstein’s type of solution to scepticism, according to Michael Hannon, does not seem better than Moore’s. They both merely evade skeptical questions by ultimately accepting some unjustified certainties. To him, while Moore’s assumes certainty for his commonsensical knowledge, Wittgenstein assumes certainty for his “generally accepted axioms”.

Hannon’s argument can be put thus:

- i. Scepticism is the view that knowledge is impossible, we only assume certainty for what we claim to know.
 - ii. Moore rejects scepticism by assuming certainty for commonsensical knowledge
 - iii. Wittgenstein rejects both scepticism and Moore’s commonsensical knowledge by assuming certainty for his “generally accepted axioms”
- ∴ Wittgenstein’s solution to scepticism is in no way better than Moore’s solution it rejects, as he, like Moore, merely evades skepticism by assuming certainty for his alternatives.

This section shall be devoted to showing how this argument from Hannon is arrived at and how fair it is in its assessment of Wittgenstein’s solution.

Scepticism is the claim that our knowledge-claim lack grounds. What we refer to as ground to our claim is either a mere circularity, or that which requires further justification *ad infinitum* or mere accepted precepts or unjustified certainty.⁷¹ To show the genuineness of their

⁷⁰ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv550-1

⁷¹As evident in Agrippa’s trilemma, there are only three options when trying to ground a knowledge-claim. The first option is that the ground provided would be circular, in which a

ground, it is concluded that epistemologists have to solve these sceptical challenges. It has been emphasised that the ability to solve such sceptical hypotheses determines the adequacy of an epistemological theory.⁷²

Moore attempts a solution to the sceptical challenges. Moore argues that, despite the initial plausibility of the scepticism, he is significantly more certain of some empirical propositions like “Here is a hand.” In other words, however convincing scepticism may be, it is more rational to insist that we do in fact know some claims. Thus, scepticism does not possess the appealing conviction to override our knowledge of some claim we usual hold.⁷³ Moore insistence on the knowledge of his empirical propositions is based on the argument that there is a paradox arising from holding both scepticism and such empirical propositions. Moore shows satisfaction with accepting the empirical propositions at the expense of scepticism because they possess persuasive and intuitive plausibility.

On the other hand, Wittgenstein in *On Certainty* shows how unsatisfactory Moore’s argument is, based on the fact that Moore’s willingness to choose in favour of his empirical propositions immediately suggests the question of how he comes about such propositions. This takes him back into the sceptical debate. Moore’s inability to explain how he comes about his

proposition and the evidence grounding it mutually support each other. In other words, tautology occurs at some point in justification. The second option is to provide regressive evidences, in which each evidence provided requires further evidence, *ad infinitum*. In other words, while trying to prove each point made another proof is given, and the proof itself requires another proof presumably forever. The last option is the axiomatic evidence, in which the ground provided rests on accepted precepts or arbitrary dogmatism. In other words, while justifying a claim some bedrock assumption or unjustified certainty is reached. Taken from Blackburn, S., *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (2nd ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p9

⁷² Bonjour, L., “Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge”, p53

⁷³ Hannon, M., “Ascribing Knowledge in Context: Some Objections to the Contextualist’s Solution to Skepticism”, pp57-8

empirical propositions leads to his failure to show how scepticism is false. Thus, Wittgenstein observes that “Moore’s view really comes down to this: the concept ‘know’ is analogous to the concept ‘believe’”.⁷⁴ In other words, Wittgenstein shows us that Moore only resorts to picking and choosing which he likes without adequately justifying his choice.⁷⁵ Knowledge requires some activities which go beyond merely picking or believing.

However, Hannon argues that Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology can only be said to stubbornly believe it knows without justification. This leaves us in no better position than Moore’s commonsensical argument.⁷⁶ For him, Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology only seems to succeed because it accords with our ordinary intuitions, which provides the elbowroom required to satisfy those already unconvinced by scepticism. He notes that Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology shows that our claim to knowledge can have different truth-values as determined by our differing language-games. This is because different language-games call for different standards of truth. We can claim to know some propositions if we can satisfy the relevant standard.⁷⁷

Against the Wittgensteinian approach to scepticism, Hannon develops some objections. “Most significant” among these objections is the claim that, like Moore’s commonsensical argument, Wittgensteinian approach begs the question against scepticism. He claims that if we are indeed deluded, as the sceptic claims, then we do not know “I have hands” according to *any*

⁷⁴ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v21

⁷⁵ Hannon, M., “Ascribing Knowledge in Context: Some Objections to the Contextualist’s Solution to Skepticism”, p58

⁷⁶ Hannon, M., “Ascribing Knowledge in Context: Some Objections to the Contextualist’s Solution to Skepticism”, p66

⁷⁷ Hannon, M., “Ascribing Knowledge in Context: Some Objections to the Contextualist’s Solution to Skepticism”, p60

standards. Citing the open confession of Stewart Cohen, who also shares some of Wittgenstein's socialised epistemic view, Hannon notes that even Wittgensteinian approach begs the question and that Cohen has admitted that he does "not think either side of this dispute (the dispute between the sceptic and the anti-sceptic) can demonstrate the correctness of its view to the other side."⁷⁸ In other words, it appears the sceptic and the anti-sceptic are both trapped on different hilltops, where they are unable to reconcile their conflicting views. Thus socialised epistemologist can only acknowledge the fact that she adamantly believes that she knows, thereby leaving us in a position no better than Moore.

It must be noted that, like Ayer (who even wrote a whole book titled *Wittgenstein*) and many other critics, Hannon is a Wittgensteinian. Hannon, like many other critics, takes the reading that suits his aim into Wittgenstein's works. I only hope I am not doing the same here, because, as I have shown in this essay, I only see Wittgenstein as professing socialised view of knowledge. Wittgenstein has himself categorically rejected any non-socialised reading of his work,⁷⁹ so far it contains "scientism"—the call for total reliance on natural science for all answers to all academic problems (philosophical problems included). It is also worth noting that Hannon's criticism sees Wittgenstein as professing epistemic contextualism—the doctrine emphasizing the significance of context in addressing many epistemic problems. He keeps making reference to Wittgenstein's work in relation to Moore and coming back to say

⁷⁸ Hannon, M., "Ascribing Knowledge in Context: Some Objections to the Contextualist's Solution to Skepticism", p66

⁷⁹ Wittgenstein, L., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Pears, D.F., & McGuinness, B.F., (Trans.), (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, (1922) 1961), 4.111- 4.115; here Wittgenstein sets a demarcating point between philosophy and natural science. This is why, in his later works, he thinks *Philosophical Investigation* "is directed not towards phenomena (which is the object of investigation in natural sciences)...Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. Such an investigation sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away." (see Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v90)

contextualism is no way better than Moore. This can only suggest two things. First, he, like many other scholars, sees Wittgenstein's epistemology as espousing epistemic contextualism. Second, he takes it that as his objections affect epistemic contextualism, it affects Wittgenstein's epistemology as well. The issues concerning such contextualist interpretation of Wittgenstein I shall fully address in the next chapter.

However, even if Hannon's objections affect other epistemic contextualism, it does not affect Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology. First, a closer look at Hannon's objections, one would notice that, in spite of its recency, it, like many epistemologists, assumes that epistemological theory must necessarily refute radical scepticism before it can be regarded as satisfactory. This is why he claims that "to *fully* refute the skeptic one must do it on one's own grounds."⁸⁰ As he rightly points out, Wittgenstein's aim is not to refute scepticism, radical especially. His aim is to rather show it as irrelevant in relation to our knowledge acquisition. That is, we do not need to answer *all* (both the actual and possible) sceptical challenges to our claim before we can be said to know it. Also, as Hannon's final remark shows, a Wittgensteinian either needs to solve his criticisms or show them irrelevant. Thus, I, like Wittgenstein would, will choose the later—show his criticism irrelevant, rather than solving them.

Wittgenstein's works is concerned chiefly with "dissolving" rather than solving an epistemic problem like radical scepticism. Scepticism, in Wittgenstein's view, is not a problem for which we need to endlessly search an answer for. This is not only because nobody has got any answer, but also because we cannot get one. Rather, it is a mental ravel which we develop through our theoretical thought. Unravelling it, we need to free our mind of obscurity. An

⁸⁰ Hannon, M., "Ascribing Knowledge in Context: Some Objections to the Contextualist's Solution to Skepticism", p66

example of such self-developed mental ravel is the belief evident in Hannon and many other epistemologists' claims that an epistemic agent must refute *all* sceptical challenges, both the actual and possible ones, relevant and irrelevant, existing and non-existing, before she can be said to know.

It is not the purpose of epistemology to refute a doubt like radical scepticism that Hannon has in mind. Epistemology aims to establish knowledge, not to battle with imaginary and endless doubts. Radical scepticism is a type of doubt Wittgenstein refers to as endless doubt. It is also the type of doubt that traps the sceptic on a different hilltop to that of anti-sceptic. The aims of the two people differ. Such conflicting aims can only be reconciled if the sceptic is ready to do away with her radical and endless scepticism. Such endless doubt Wittgenstein refers to as pseudo-doubt, because it is no doubt at all; all proper doubts must come to an end.⁸¹ It contradicts human reason to embark on enquiry with no end. It is equally unnatural to embark on an enquiry that will not generate the desired end. It is not the aim of epistemology either to embark on such enquiry. This is why Moore decides to pitch his tent with the anti-sceptics, at the expense of the opposing tent of the sceptics.

However, unlike Hannon claims, Wittgenstein's socialised knowledge leaves us in a better epistemic position than Moore's commonsensical knowledge. The former equally is more plausible and more appealing than the latter. This is because in Moore's commonsensical knowledge, if we are asked how we know we have hands, we likely will be told something like "are you blind, can't you see these two things attached to my body?!" This cannot be the most

⁸¹Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v625; Wittgenstein reiterates this fact at many points of his other works: for instance, in *Philosophical Investigation*, he notes that it is imperative "explanations come to an end somewhere."(see: Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v1)

appropriate way to justify our claim to knowledge. This is what Wittgenstein points out in Moore's claim. To Wittgenstein, rather than merely flaunting our claim without justification, we must remember that our knowing, in the language-game, counts as knowing when others who have adequate understanding of the point of view we are coming from can see how we have arrived at our conclusion and attest to our claim. In his words,

“I know” often means: I have the proper grounds for my statement. So if the other person is acquainted with the language game, he would admit that I know. The other, if he is acquainted with the language-game, must be able to imagine how, one may know something of the kind.⁸²

When we give for our knowledge claim proper grounds, others can know how we arrive at our conclusion. This is lacking in Moore's commonsensical knowledge. “Proper grounds” here means grounds that are relevant to our claim and do not necessarily have to satisfy an insatiable doubt like radical scepticism. These sorts of grounds will prove our claim beyond all “reasonable doubts”. So, I think Hannon is right by claiming that Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology does not aim to solve radical scepticism, but to dissolve them. That is, it tends to show them irrelevant. But Hannon is wrong for criticising this Wittgensteinian approach based on this. This is because, Hannon himself allows for such options against his own criticism. That is, rather than solving a criticism we can show it irrelevant. Thus, like Wittgenstein has shown radical scepticism irrelevant, I believe I have equally shown Hannon's criticism irrelevant.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined some arguments raised against Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology. The arguments examined include the problem of epistemic relativism developed

⁸² Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v18

from Pritchard's reading of Wittgenstein's epistemology; Ayer's defence of the possibility of private language in order to disprove Wittgenstein's socialised view of language and knowledge by showing that language or knowledge does not depend on any mind be it an individual or a group of individuals, and that an individual can acquire either so far he has the independent observable facts to establish it; and Hannon's scepticism on the Wittgensteinian solution to scepticism. On relativism, it was argued that given its emphasis on language-games as the determinant factor in grounding our knowledge and the fact that language-games vary, Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology left us with having variant and perhaps conflicting epistemic standards, and thus, conflicting kinds of knowledge. However, I showed in the chapter that pointing out the nature of difference in our language-games which informs our knowledge does not necessarily mean relativism. On Ayer's attempt to defend the possibility of private language, I showed in the chapter that such language is epistemically impossible because it lacks epistemic properties consisted in a proper language, and even if the individual has the independent observable facts to establish it, the relationship between the facts and her claim must be established inter-subjectively in accordance with some guiding principles. Lastly, on Hannon's scepticism, I showed that his scepticism is irrelevant because we do not need to satisfy insatiable doubts like the sceptical hypotheses (SH). I will conclude this chapter by stating that Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology, in spite of the shortcomings noticed in it, remains a plausible alternative approach to the problems of knowledge.

CHAPTER THREE

ARGUMENTS FOR WITTGENSTEIN'S SOCIALISED EPISTEMOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

My major aim in this chapter is to carefully consider the strengths of Wittgenstein's socialised view of knowledge in reaction to the objections raised against it in the previous chapter. This shall be done in line with arguments on the view by some scholars. That is, rather than the negative side the previous chapter takes, this chapter shall try to be constructive by concentrating on the arguments provided so far in favour of Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology, in the light of the highlighted negative construct. This will include the assessment of Richard Rorty's positive view of Wittgenstein's epistemology against the charge of epistemic relativism. It is claimed that Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology leaves us with variant and perhaps conflicting epistemic standards. Also, I shall examine Saul Kripke's defence of the socialised nature of Wittgenstein's knowledge against the possibility of "private language". Also, I will assess Darlei Dall'Agnol's defence of the non-scientific nature of Wittgenstein's Epistemology. Lastly, I will consider Jason Bridges' attempt to clarify Wittgenstein's epistemology in order to free it of some latter readings of epistemic contextualism. My aim in this chapter, if achieved, will enable us to see that, contrary to the criticisms Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology has received, there are numerous merits in it that make it worth adopting as an alternative approach to the problems of knowledge.

3.1 Epistemic Relativism: Richard Rorty on Wittgenstein's Epistemology

As noted in the previous chapter, the problem of epistemic relativism is one of the major problems that could be read into Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology. But as this chapter intends, this section shall focus on Rorty's response to such relativist reading of Wittgenstein's

philosophy. Wittgenstein's philosophy can be seen as anti-theoretical. That is, it is "against substantive philosophical theorizing", where it does not aim to build any philosophical theories with which he can substitute earlier ones for.¹ Despite its anti-theoretical nature, it has in general many scholars, whom it has helped to build philosophical theories. In other words, the major issue is not of that there are many who actually reject his view, but that there are many who have read what he might not have intended into his works. The various interpretations his works have generated have led to debates concerning which interpretation is accurate and which one is not.

For instance, a theorist like Colin McGinn comes as a proponent of the individualistic reading of Wittgenstein.² By "individualistic" I mean pointing out Wittgenstein's advocacy of the relevance of each person being self-reliant and independent in determining how a rule is followed. It is argued that since there is no specific way a rule should be followed, Wittgenstein's philosophy allows every individual to determine how rule should be followed. Saul Kripke, on the other hand, gives what I will call a socialised reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy. This socialised reading I agree with because it sees Wittgenstein as saying knowledge depends largely on public or inter-subjective confirmation rather than an individual judgement. Similarly, Richard Rorty, whose philosophy is largely influenced by Wittgenstein, gives what has been interpreted to be a relativist reading of Wittgenstein's epistemology; and this has served as a means of rejecting Wittgenstein's epistemology rather than the strength Rorty intends for it. However, as it will be shown here, Rorty's intended strength is still the case when

¹ Fogelin R.J., "Wittgenstein's Critique of Philosophy", in Sluga, H., & Stern, D.G., (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp35,45(Wittgenstein emphasizes this point when he notes that while it is the duty of the natural sciences to propound theories, all philosophy does is to clarify those theories [see *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, vv4.111- 4.114])

² Verheggen, C., "The Community View Revisited", *Metaphilosophy*, 38.5, (2007): 612

reconsidering his interpretation of Wittgenstein's epistemology in relation to Wittgenstein's arguments.

3.1.1 Relativism and the Non-Representationalism in Wittgenstein's Epistemology

These days, most relativists and anti-relativists alike do not have problem in seeing Wittgenstein as an epistemic relativist.³ This is associated with his rejection of representationalist epistemology which consists of the traditional assumption that words and thoughts correspond to or represent mental or physical facts that make them meaningful, true and or justified. This relativism manifests itself most in the Wittgenstein's emphasis on "use" theory of meaning where the meaning of a word is determined by, and can be explained in terms of, its different usage. Such suggestion further shows that the proposition which is constructed through the word must also be justified through this various use. "Use", as shown in the previous chapters, means how users follow some specific rules in their usage. This makes Rorty to gladly conclude that Wittgenstein's philosophical attitude is Anti-Cartesian and Anti-Kantian. He notes that the importance of Wittgenstein's later thinking lies in this philosophical attitude. In his words,

(The Philosophical Investigations) is the first great work of polemic against the Cartesian tradition which does not take the form of saying "philosophers from Descartes onward have thought that the relation between man and the world is so-and-so, but I now show you that it is such-and-such."⁴

³ For instance, Hintikka, M., and Hintikka, J., *Investigating Wittgenstein*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p21; Boghossian, P., *Fear of Knowledge. Against Relativism and Constructivism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

⁴ Rorty, R., "Keeping Philosophy Pure: An Essay on Wittgenstein", in Rorty, R., *Consequences of Pragmatism Essays: 1972-1980*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp33-4

Rorty equally emphasises that the later Wittgenstein's approach to issues like ostensive definition, private language, and rule following is paramount in the latter's thought.⁵ He believes that Wittgenstein anticipates the arguments of some scholars like Quine and Davidson after him against the language-fact distinction as well as arguments from scholars like Sellars' and Brandom against the idea of knowledge by acquaintance. Nevertheless, Rorty seems to be majorly concerned with how later Wittgenstein addresses representationalism in epistemology and semantics. Rorty's concern here and how he approaches it further fuel the popular relativist reading of Wittgenstein. In Rorty's view,

To drop the idea of languages as representations, and to be thoroughly Wittgensteinian in our approach to language, would be to de-divinize the world. Only if we do that can we fully accept the argument I offered earlier – the argument that since truth is a property of sentences, since sentences are dependent for their existence upon vocabularies, and since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths.⁶

In the above passage, Rorty notes that his major thesis—that is, truths, in plural form with a lower case “t”, are man-made—accepts a Wittgensteinian approach towards language. In reaction to this, some anti-relativists⁷ believes that it will only take someone who accepts the later Wittgenstein's approach to language to accept this sort of antirealism in Rorty's view of truth. Hence, it is believed that it is not enough to merely reject representationalism. For one to follow his view, there is the need to somewhat reject his approach to language that is “thorough Wittgensteinianism”—that is, his approach which completely exhibits Wittgenstein's view of

⁵ Rorty, R., “Wittgenstein and the Linguistic Turn”, *Philosophical Papers*, 4, (2007): 165

⁶ Rorty, R., “Wittgenstein and the Linguistic Turn”, p165

⁷ For instance, Larry Laudan and Istvan Danka as pointed out in Danka, I., “A Case Study on the Limits of Ironic Redescription: Rorty on Wittgenstein”, *Pragmatism Today*, 2.1, (2011):

language. Wittgenstein's view of language, as contained in his rejection of representationalism and taken up by Rorty, has been summed up in the following two major claims:

- i. Atomism of meaning (the assumption that words can be individually meaningful) is untenable.
 - ii. Language cannot be used Individually.
- ∴ (Following from the two claims above) representationalism is false.

If representationalism is false and words cannot be individually meaningful or have a direct link to the mind or external world, then we cannot expect the propositions made from it to be individually justified. This rejection of representationalism together with the uplifting of human-dependent truth in Rorty's interpretation has called for a relativist reading of Wittgenstein's epistemology. As Danka notes, if notions like meaning, reference, and truth are constituted contextually, and contexts are constituted by social rule-following activities, Rorty's argument is conclusive that humans construct truth. Otherwise the notion of truth would be open to be understood in terms of correspondence and representation. And such a notion of truth could not be seen as a human construct without falling into relativism, subjectivism and scepticism of which Rorty is nonetheless often accused.⁸

3.1.2 Rorty on Relativism

Relativism is the concept that points of view have no absolute truth or validity, but have only relative, subjective value according to differences in perception and consideration. The rejection of Cartesian and Kantian epistemology, as part of the traditional epistemology, is seen as an attempt towards anti-representationalism. In the same vein, such anti-Cartesian reading of Wittgenstein by Rorty is seen as leading epistemology to relativism. This is further buttressed by

⁸ Danka, I., "A Case Study on the Limits of Ironic Redescription: Rorty on Wittgenstein", p74

some of Wittgenstein's claim, in *On Certainty*, that at the foundations of our language-games and, in particular, of our epistemic ones—those in which we provide reasons for and against certain propositions or theories, and are interested in assessing their truth—lie on propositions which are neither true nor false; grounded or ungrounded; rational or irrational.⁹

The relativist reading of Wittgenstein's epistemology also gets its support most especially in passages which says:

But isn't it experience that teaches us to judge like this, that is to say, that it is correct to judge like this? But how does experience teach us, then? We may derive it from experience, but experience does not direct us to derive anything from experience. If it is the ground for our judging like this, and not just the cause, still we do not have a ground for seeing this in turn as a ground...The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing.¹⁰

Here, the “groundlessness” of our knowledge-claims either in experience or in reason is pointed out. It is noted that we could only persuade or convert others to adopt our system of justification. We appeal not to grounds and reasons—as there are none that could support one system over the other—but to altogether different considerations, in effect to aesthetic ones, such as its simplicity and symmetry. The fact here is that certain kinds of explanations are less complex than others and can be extended from one domain to other, different domains.¹¹ These passages and the claims in the earlier work like *Philosophical Investigation*, as aided by Rorty's interpretation of human-dependent truth, has led to relativist reading of Wittgenstein's epistemology.

⁹ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, Anscombe, G.E.M., & Wright, G.H., (eds.), Anscombe, G.E.M., & Paul, D., (trans.), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), vv110,130,559

¹⁰ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv130, 166

¹¹ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv92,262,612

On the other hand, some scholars¹² do not just believe Wittgenstein's epistemology leads to epistemic relativism, they equally believe that its relativism has academic advantage. A scholar like Steven Hales tries to provide a consistent relativism with Wittgensteinian justification.¹³ But this cannot be the case as long as the charge of self-contradiction in any form of relativism among other charges still exists. For instance, it is now a common argument against relativism that it inherently contradicts, refutes, or stultifies itself. The claim that "truth is relative" is classed either as a relative statement or as an absolute one. If it is relative, then this statement does not rule out absolutes. This means the statement is saying some truths are absolute, while some are relative. On the other hand, if the statement is absolute, then it provides an example of an absolute statement, proving that not all truths are relative. This means the statement itself is taken as an absolute maxim. That is, the statement serves as an example of absolute truth. So, there is at least one truth that is absolute.¹⁴ In other words, by using Wittgenstein's work to defend relativism, we are already saying it contains some contradictions or self-defeating claims.

However, the contradiction in relativism, it must be noted, only applies to a theory which actually holds a relative view of truth in epistemology or any other discourse. Such charge of contradiction does not apply to Wittgenstein or Rorty's interpretation. Rorty, it must be noted, denies that his form of pragmatism—the view that practical consequences are the criteria of

¹² For instance, Heckel uses Wittgenstein's argument to defend cultural relativism see: Heckel, E., "A Wittgensteinian Defense of Cultural Relativism", in *Macalester Journal of Philosophy*, 19.1., (2010):5-26

¹³ Hales, S.D. "A Consistent Relativism", *Mind*, 106, (1997): 33–52

¹⁴ Dixon, K., "Is Cultural Relativism Self-Refuting?", *British Journal of Sociology*, 28.1, (1977): 75-6

knowledge—as developed from Wittgenstein, is a form of relativism. As he sees it, relativists claim either that “every belief is as good as every other” or that “true” is indexed to cultures or conceptual schemes. Like the anti-relativists, Rorty also deems the first view “self-refuting” and the second “eccentric”. The fact that “true” recommends different beliefs in different cultures does not make it indexical.¹⁵ To distinguish his pragmatism from relativism, Rorty calls the former “ethnocentric”. The core of ethnocentric form of pragmatism is the thesis that “there is nothing to be said about either truth or justification apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society uses in one or another area of inquiry.”¹⁶

Rorty also gives a definition of relativism and shows why it does not apply to his philosophy or Wittgenstein’s. In his words,

“Relativism” is the view that every belief on a certain topic, or perhaps about any topic, is as good as every other. No one holds this view. Except for the occasional cooperative freshman, one cannot find anybody who says that two incompatible opinions on an important topic are equally good. The philosophers who get called “relativists” are those who say that the grounds for choosing between such opinions are less algorithmic than had been thought...¹⁷

Here he makes it known that it is not only that relativism in the strict sense is incompatible with his or Wittgenstein’s view, it is equally incompatible with nobody’s view. So, we cannot justifiably attribute it to Wittgenstein’s epistemology.

3.1.3 A Review

¹⁵ Rorty, R., “Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth”, *Philosophical Papers*, Vol.1, (1991): 23

¹⁶ Rorty, R., “Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth”, p23

¹⁷ Rorty, R., *Consequences of Pragmatism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp166-7

In my opinion, if relativism as defined by Rorty means that two opposing views have equal epistemic status, then, not only is it wrong to attribute relativism to Rorty's pragmatism. It is equally wrong to read relativism into Wittgenstein epistemology or use it to defend relativism in any form. Why I said this is that the passages in *On Certainty* that emphasise the difficulty in reconciling some conflicting principles only tell us that it will be impossible to reconcile conflicting beliefs when the concerned agents have received different educations. That is, we always need to consider people's backgrounds when assessing their beliefs. His claims in *Philosophical Investigation*, "that how do I know that this colour is red?—It would be an answer to say: 'I have learnt English'",¹⁸ or in *On Certainty* that "so we learn first the stability of things as the norm... And the concept of knowing is coupled with that of the language-game",¹⁹ among others, only show us that certainty itself and knowledge are acquired through education and training in a society. This does not in any way mean that knowledge is relative to such society. For instance, assessing the answer that "I have learnt English", this simply means that if you have not learnt English, then, you may not know what "red" means; you have to pass through the same training and education I receive and this would make you not to doubt my knowledge claim about "red". This does not in any way mean my claim or knowledge about "red" is relative to me or the other English users alone.

To further explain this point, for example, a Yoruba person would claim that she knows that "'ewe' is a leaf", while an English person would say that the claim is false "'ewe' is a female sheep". From Wittgenstein epistemology, it will be noticed that it is not the case that the truth of the two claims is relative to each language, which cannot be known by anyone outside

¹⁸ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v381

¹⁹ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv473, 560

the language. The two persons can actually attest the truth of each other's claim if one can decide to undergo the type of training and education the other has. In his words,

The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself...²⁰

²⁰ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v97

In other words, perspectives may differ based on the time and space, all we need do in resolving such conflicting perspectives is to study or train ourselves in the language games underlining such perspectives. Similarly, undergoing the same training an epistemic agent has undergone in her epistemic community will put us in an appropriate epistemic position to judge whether the claim such epistemic agent makes is true or not, justified or not. This is why Wittgenstein notes that “the teaching of language is not explanation, but training.”²¹ This is exactly one of the major emphases of Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology.

3.2 Epistemological Realism: Saul Kripke on Wittgenstein’s “Private Language” Argument

Saul Kripke is another scholar that can be seen as a Wittgensteinian. As the title of this section suggests, I intend examining the strong rejoinder he provides for Wittgenstein’s argument on “private language” against Ayer’s criticism. He provides a “sceptical challenge”—the way in which he says he understands Wittgenstein’s “private language” argument—against Ayer’s attack. But before going to Kripke’s rejoinder, I need to briefly reintroduce the aim of Wittgenstein on the “private language” issue in relation to how it is addressed by Ayer and what the latter intends achieving through it. This would help in understanding and appreciating Kripke’s response.

3.2.1 Ayer’s “Epistemological Realism” and “Private Language”

Ayer, we must recall, given his positivism—a form of empiricism which grounds all knowledge on experience and rejects any idea that does not have direct link with or cannot be reduced to experience—implicitly aims, in his defence of the possibility of “private language”, to

²¹ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v5

eliminate from epistemology any form of subjectivism, which itself is believed to be a form of scepticism that may arise from Wittgenstein's "private language" argument. It is believed that Wittgenstein's rejection of "private language" will deny the possibility of a view implied in his positivism, namely "epistemological realism", where knowledge is seen as independent of any mind whether an individual or a group of people. It is also believed that such rejection will equally further establish an anti-representationalist socialised view of knowledge rooted in Wittgenstein's epistemology, whereby knowledge is seen as grounded on communal standard rather than external world.

Wittgenstein's argument shows a socialised view of knowledge, whereby any solitary, individual, atomic or independent justification of knowledge is denied. Wittgenstein epistemology is a rejection of the positivist or many other epistemologists' attempts to partition our beliefs or judgments into "evident/non-evident", "basic/non-basic", "starred/non-starred", "terminal/non-terminal", or any other form of independent justification a belief is endowed with either from "experience" or from "reason." For him,

We do not learn the practice of making empirical judgments by learning rules: we are taught judgments and their connexion with other judgments. A totality of judgments is made plausible to us...When we first begin to believe anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole)...It is not single axioms that strike me as obvious, it is a system in which consequences and premises give one another mutual support.²²

We also learn from these passages that we must not be lured into thinking of what a proposition individually "represents", "corresponds to" or "refers to", but to find how such proposition or judgment connects with other judgments. In the same vein, he argues that a genuine language is a

²² Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, vv140-2

product of some conscious and or unconscious sets of rules which dictate or govern the way a certain language is used in a certain situation. These sets of rules neither come from external vacuum nor from any *private* mental state; they are rather consciously and or unconsciously established by the community of users. So, no individual must claim to have rules of epistemic or linguistic justification made by himself and for himself or to *solely* determine the justification of her knowledge as found in the idea of “private language.” This negates Ayer’s view that an individual can solely determine the meaning of words so far she has access to the facts to which those words refer to.

In an attempt to defend his view and defeat what he considers to be “subjective” community-mind-dependent knowledge, Ayer provides a defence for the possibility of a form of “private language.” By this he means an individual can have a language which the objects of the terms in the language are only discovered by such individual and does not necessarily have to be validated by others before she can be said to know it. He, thus, rejects the socialised view of knowledge or language in general. He argues that if, for example, every individual is unable, on her own, to establish a meaning for a symbol, using her sense data received from the object and her memory, then, having many people equally impotent does not help. That is having others who have also been denied the ability to individually determine the meaning of words cannot help. Zero multiplied by a hundred is still zero. Wittgenstein’s unwillingness to allow each individual the ability to solely determine meaning of symbols leaves each person impotent. In other words, if each person has been denied the confidence in her ability to make “an act of primary recognition”—judges that they can no longer rely upon “corroboration of a memory...by

an item of sense-experience”—then no amount of cross-checking by others (otherwise known as inter-subjective justification) will assist. “Everything hangs in the air”.²³

Ayer’s defence of “private language” can be said to have failed on some reasons. First, one of the arguments Wittgenstein uses to show the unintelligibility of the term “private language” is in the term’s failure to serve as a language not only for the language inventor, but as a possible medium of communication for others. Wittgenstein argues that the “rules” of the “private language” cannot be adopted and used by anyone else, since the “objects” (the sensations or private experiences that are the *designata* of the names of the privately established ostensive definitions) cannot be accessed by others. Such “rules” cannot be learned by anybody, as genuine language is learned. If there are a number of such private languages, none of these can serve as a basis for inter-subjective communication. In such “private language”, there could be no linguistic community. If no sharing of a language is even possible, then it is meaningless to use the term “language” at all to describe what is so “constructed”.²⁴ This shows the necessity of not just humans but also the inter-subjectivity among epistemic agents in the establishing knowledge or language, as the case may be.

Second, Ayer’s epistemological realism generated from his defence of the possibility of “private language” cannot solve Kripke’s “sceptical challenge” which is how Wittgenstein’s “private language” argument “strikes” him. He rather presents a Wittgensteinian “sceptical solution” to the “sceptical challenge”. Kripke notes that Wittgenstein’s argument on private language presents some sceptical challenges which can only be addressed with a Wittgensteinian

²³ Ayer, A. J., *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, (London: Penguin, 1986), p76

²⁴ Munitz, M.K., *Contemporary Analytic Philosophy*, (London: Macmillan, 1981) pp307-315

approach rather than what Ayer presents. For Kripke, like Wittgenstein, the debate on private language and language in general starts with issues about rules and how it is followed. Kripke starts the debate initially like mathematics.²⁵ That is, bringing in examples from the rules of addition in arithmetic. He created an arithmetic question like “what is $57+68$?” that if we follow the rules of addition, how do we answer it?

3.2.2 Kripke’s “Sceptical Challenge” and other Possible Problems in Ayer’s Arguments

Kripke’s debate is created like a dialogue. There is a sceptic who challenges the basis of our rule-following. The sceptic is an interlocutor who challenges the ground for what we believe we know in following rules, while Kripke is the knowledge-claimer who replies the sceptic. The sceptic asks the question “what is $57+68$?”, and Kripke just answers that it is “125”. He gives reasons for this answer that the “+” sign means addition, and the rule of addition can only give “125” as the answer. In his reaction, the sceptic asks again how he knows that he is supposed to apply the rule of addition whenever he comes across the “+” sign. That is, if the same rule is applied each time he comes across “+”, then how does he know that it is actually the rule of addition he ought to apply rather than a rule like *quaddition*?²⁶

Kripke explains *quaddition* as closely similar to addition. The only difference is that in the former, any number that is above 57, its calculation result will be 5. In other words, the answer to the question “what is $57+68$?” should have been given as 5, rather than 125. The sceptic argues that since the rule of addition applies to an infinite amount of calculations. Human on the other hand, is finite in nature. She can only perform a limited amount of calculations. She

²⁵ Kripke, S., *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p12

²⁶ Kripke, S., *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, pp11-2

cannot examine the previous applications of the rule to know which rule is actually applied. The sceptics equally note that “perhaps when I used the term ‘plus’ in the past, I always meant *quus*: by hypothesis I never gave myself any explicit directions that were incompatible with such a supposition.”²⁷ Kripke notes that there are two parts to the challenges posed by the sceptic. First we are challenged to show we have some fact concerning our current application of the rule that can establish the rule we are really supposed to use. Second, we are challenged as to whether we are really sure that addition rather than *quaddition* is that is actually applicable. To Kripke, these two parts are interdependent. That is, assurance we have concerning which rule is really applicable mainly depends on the rule of addition actually being the one we are supposed apply.²⁸

Kripke also notes that our answers to the sceptical puzzle perform two tasks. First, it has to clarify the fact of our mental states that tells us the rule that is applied. Second, it has to prove how such fact justifies our answer to the sceptical puzzle. Kripke equally specifies that we have no fact in the external behaviour that can provide us justification for believing that the application of the “+” sign means addition. This renders as inadequate to solve the sceptical problem a theory like epistemological realism, which Ayer’s positivism is a version of. This is because the independent matters of fact emphasised by Ayer as that which justifies our right application of rules cannot be employed to answer the sceptical puzzle. There is nothing out there that we can point to justify why we apply the rule of addition rather than *quaddition*. He also notes that we have no inner fact which can provide us the justification for our belief, not

²⁷ Kripke, S., *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, p13

²⁸ Kripke, S., *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, pp13-4

even if some omnipotent spirit were to journey into our mind and examine the case.²⁹This equally renders as inadequate to solve the sceptical problem mentalism (subjective or objective), which Cartesian epistemology is a version of. As an alternative, Kripke tries what he calls Wittgensteinian “sceptical solution”.

Kripke develops a Wittgensteinian attempt to meet the sceptic’s challenge by replying the sceptic that of course there is only a finite amount of calculations that one has done. But learning the meaning of the “+” sign is learning the “rule” of addition. This is an algorithm that can perhaps most simply be described by stating that when adding two numbers one takes two heaps of marbles, the amount in the first is x and the amount in the second is y , put them together and count the result. That is what one does when calculating $x+y$. The sceptic responds to this by asking again that how do we know that what we call counting is not actually *quounting*.

In attending to the new sceptical puzzle about *quounting*, Kripke proposes a new solution. This he calls “dispositions”. He brings this as a possible way to interpret Wittgenstein. According to Kripke’s “dispositions”, the ground for the answer we gives lies in the fact that for every question we are asked, there is an answer which we have a disposition to give. The idea is that this disposition is in fact the rule which one intends to follow. Kripke gives a description of “dispositions” by noting that “the point is not that, if I meant addition by ‘+’, I will answer ‘125’, but that, if I intend to accord with my past meaning of ‘+’, I *should* answer ‘125’.”³⁰

Kripke’s idea of “dispositions” is also expressed in W.V.O. Quine’s “holism” where it is pointed out that a belief cannot be understood or justified individually except in its relation to the

²⁹ Kripke, S., *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, pp14-5

³⁰ Kripke, S., *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, p37

whole,³¹ where “whole” means the large “web of beliefs”, which gives rise to the said belief. In his words, “our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but as a corporate body”.³² The beliefs we have acquired through learning of the rules guiding the “+” sign will help our current belief about the result of our addition, “125”. In other words, the denial of the possibility of “private language” and its products like epistemological realism is rather a strength for Wittgenstein’s epistemology, because while epistemological realism and many other epistemic theories would fail in solving the sceptical problems that may arise from it, Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology would serve as an appropriate means to solving such problem, because it sees knowledge as emanating from the public or inter-subjective agreement in an epistemic society rather than an individual coinage or non-social source.

So, according to Kripke, Ayer’s attempt to defend a possibility of a private language is futile because it falls prey to a sceptical paradox whose force is to question the very intelligibility of any language, public or private. But the possibility of a public language is restored by means of what Kripke characterizes as a Wittgensteinian sceptical solution to the paradox. As earlier highlighted, this is done by distinguishing between two kinds of solutions to sceptical problems—straight and sceptical. To him, a straight solution “shows that on closer examination the scepticism proves to be unwarranted.”³³ A sceptical solution concedes that the sceptical hypothesis cannot be refuted and argues instead that our ordinary belief or practice can be justified without refuting the sceptical hypothesis. To illustrate this distinction he cites Descartes

³¹ Quine, W.V.O., “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, in Quine, W.V.O., *From a Logical Point of View*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), p41

³² Quine, W.V.O., “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, p41

³³ Kripke, S., *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, p66

and Berkeley. Descartes offers a straight solution to the problem of our knowledge of bodies by directly attacking the sceptical hypotheses which seem to stand in the way of such knowledge. Berkeley, in contrast, offers a sceptical solution. He concedes to the sceptic that there can be no bodies existing independently of the mind, but denies that this interferes with our claim to know that bodies exist.

According to Kripke, Wittgenstein offers a sceptical solution analogous to Berkeley's to solve his sceptical paradox. A straight solution to Wittgenstein's paradox would be to show that our responses can indeed be justified because the sceptic is mistaken in thinking that we cannot determine the type of infinite number of tokens. A sceptical solution concedes to the sceptic that we cannot determine the type of a finite number of tokens, but proceeds to find another foundation for language.

The foundation for language proposed by Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein is, in a nutshell, agreement in responses. Even though there is no fact of the matter which justifies one response over another, the mere fact that we agree in our responses is sufficient to make language possible. Any attempt to doubt Wittgenstein means "you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either."³⁴ For the mere fact that the sceptic agrees with us that she and I understand her words, then there is something agreed upon. Thus we can tell the sceptic that a wrong response is one that does not go in line with rule agreed on, a correct response is one that goes in line with the rule agreed on. If there were no common consensus, there could be no language; and there will not be any communication between me and the sceptic. Although agreement of responses is possible in a community of speakers, according

³⁴ Wittgenstein, L., *On Certainty*, v114

to Kripke's argument cum Wittgenstein's, there can be no such agreement in responses of an individual considered in isolation, as Ayer's defence suggests.³⁵ Thus private language is impossible, while public language is possible.

3.2.3 Hoffman's Response to Kripke's Rejoinder

There are definitely some disagreements with the Kripke-proposed Wittgensteinian solution. A solution Kripke believes will address the sceptical paradox which he designs from Wittgenstein's argument against "private language". For instance, Paul Hoffman does not seem to agree with such solution. As far as Hoffman is concerned, the sceptical solution is a dismal failure and it cannot do the work of distinguishing between a private and a public language. He concludes that in attributing this solution to Wittgenstein, Kripke's interpretation fails the test of charity.³⁶ One of the problems he believes the solution faces is that it underestimates the power of Wittgenstein's sceptical hypotheses. Going by Kripke's interpretation, the hypotheses generate the paradox that there is no justification for responding one way or another to a problem such as "68 + 57". To Hoffman, what Kripke fails to admit is that the hypotheses support equally well the more powerful paradox that *there is no such thing as responding one way or another to a problem such as "68 + 57"*. To him, the point here is that the sceptical hypotheses which support the view that "125" is no more justified than "5" as a response to the problem "68 + 57" support equally well the view that there can be no such thing as the response "125" being different from the response "5" to the problem "68 + 57".³⁷

³⁵ Kripke, S., *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, p89

³⁶ Hoffman, P., "Kripke on Private Language", in *Philosophical Studies*, 47, (1985): 23

³⁷ Hoffman, P., "Kripke on Private Language", p25

Kripke actually admits the equal epistemic power the hypotheses give to either way of “125” or “5” as an answer to the problem “68+57”. This is why he introduces the theory of *quaddition* which could generate “5” from the same problem as against the common idea of *addition*, which generates “125”. He only concludes that our choice of “125” is due to our agreement to learn and adopt the rule of addition (“+”). However, Hoffman notices further problem for “agreement”. To him, the fact that *there is no such thing as responding one way or another to a problem such as “68 + 57”* suggests that there can be no such thing as “agreement” in responses, and hence, no public language also. Therefore, the sceptical solution Kripke attributes to Wittgenstein is no solution at all, because it is subject to the very sceptical hypotheses it is designed to circumvent. This, he argues, differs sharply from Berkeley’s sceptical solution. The sceptical hypotheses which lead us to doubt the existence of bodies when they are considered to be mind-independent entities lose their force once it is realized that bodies are mind-dependent.³⁸

While helping Kripke find response to his objection, Hoffman notes a possible response to be that public language can still stand even if we have no external facts that correspond to our responses. Our merely judging them through “agreement” should be enough to ground them. This type of reply, according to Hoffman, falls short in two ways. One way is that we can use the same sceptical hypotheses to show that there is no justification for Kripke’s attempt to differentiate between judgments of agreement and disagreement. Another more problematic way is that if there are no external facts to which our responses correspond, then there cannot be any justifiable difference between public and private language³⁹—whatever rejection happens to the

³⁸ Hoffman, P., “Kripke on Private Language”, p26

private language, also applies to the public, which Kripke tries to establish. Hoffman notes that as far the public language is concerned language users are seen merely to act vagarious, or, citing Kripke's term, "act unhesitatingly but *blindly*", with emphasis on "blindly".⁴⁰From this argument, Hoffman believes that anything that makes a public language possible, as far as it appears to us that our responses agree, will equally guarantee the possibility of private language. This is because the mere fact that my present responses seem to be in accord with my past responses should be enough to guarantee that. In other words, the Kripke-proposed sceptical solution does not have the ability to carry out the philosophical task Kripke intends with it. In extension, Wittgenstein's attempt to reject private language equally fails, likewise his socialised solution to sceptical challenge. A rejection of private judgement will equally mean a rejection of public justification as a necessary criterion of knowledge.

3.2.4 A Review

In my opinion, Hoffman's attempt to bridge the gap between private and public language is not only taking us back to Ayer's positivism, it is equally a misrepresentation of the purpose of language. It must be noted that language is a means of communicating information only between persons, so it cannot in anyway be private. The term "private language" Wittgenstein considers to even be contradictory, because what is private cannot be language, while what is language cannot be private. In extension, the term "public language" is even tautologous, for "public" is already contained in the term "language". Language is thus guided by a rule "agreed" to by some people, that is, the users. That is how I know "125" not "5" is the correct response to the problem "68+57".

³⁹ Hoffman, P., "Kripke on Private Language", p26

⁴⁰ Hoffman, P., "Kripke on Private Language", p26

If the problem of *there is no such thing as responding one way or another to a problem such as "68 + 57"* is solved, then Hoffman's second problem is with "agreed", which he considers to be a form of acting "unhesitatingly but *blindly*". This is why he later wonders "why public agreement should succeed in a way private agreement cannot". And "if proceeding blindly is good enough for public language, why is it not good enough for private language?" In answering this question, in my opinion, the reason simply is because, like knowledge, language is guided by rules, and a rule made by an individual will simply be arbitrary, which is a worse form of "blind" followership than the public (that is if the public rule can at all be called "blindly"). Just like subjective justification of a knowledge claim, in a "private language" (if there is anything like that), no criteria can be said to exist that will help in determining whether a word is correctly used or not, since the language belongs to only one user.

In other words, one cannot reasonably ask oneself a question like "am I right according to my own rules?". Asking whether one is right presupposes an existence of a rule, and it will not be logical to ask whether I am right since I am the sole legislator and user of my rule. So, in such world everything is right and everything is wrong—this would be a contradiction in itself. Similarly, one cannot claim to know something according to one's rule, whatever one knows must at least be capable of being inter-subjectively validated. What one knows that no one else can understand is as good as unknown. Whatever one claims to know requires justification, account, or confirmation of its truth to identify whether it is actually known. In a nutshell, knowledge requires public not private justification. And this is simply why, in answering Hoffman's puzzle, "public agreement should succeed in a way private agreement cannot." Private agreement is no agreement at all, because I cannot disagree with myself without contradicting myself. This is why, like Wittgenstein, Quine does not only reject the positivists'

thesis of determinate semantics, where we have to determine the meaning of a word individually, but also their radical epistemological reductionism, where beliefs are taken to tribunal of observation individually, because no meaningful justificatory success (whether semantically or epistemologically) can be achieved individually. Rather, all confirmations are done inter-subjectively. This is “why public agreement should succeed in a way private (individual) agreement cannot”.

3.3 Epistemology Naturalised: Darlei Dall’Agnol on Wittgenstein’s Non-Scientific Epistemology

Like the previous chapters and the tail end of last section suggest, both Quine and Wittgenstein seem to believe in “agreement” in validating a claim. In this section, I intend to clarify the difference between the two scholars’ “agreement”. That is, using Darlei Dall’Agnol’s explanation, I want to show the difference between Quine’s *scientific* (otherwise known as “naturalized”) “agreement” and Wittgenstein’s *non-scientific* (which I call “socialised”) “agreement”. This attempt will help in further understanding the direction Wittgenstein’s epistemology takes in relation to the naturalized epistemology which is prominent in contemporary philosophy. It will equally help in justifying such direction.

3.3.1 On Scientism

To begin with, as pointed out by Dall’Agnol, underlining the belief in the necessity to naturalise epistemology is the belief that philosophy, which epistemology is a branch of, is continuous to science. This belief itself is a variant of scientism—a belief that all academic questions (philosophical ones inclusive) must be addressed with methods and principles which are typical to empirical science. Viewing the rate and the inclination towards scientism in

contemporary scholarship, even Descartes will be wondering whether he was actually wrong in claiming that the stimulation of our sensory receptors, as studied in psychology, is not enough as knowledge if it is not founded on any ground. It is really alarming if we consider the rate at which there is the advocacy for total reliance on science for academic answers—the exhortation of scientific method as the only way to resolve all academic problems, including philosophical problems.

The alarming rate at which scholarship is moving towards this exhortation of science as found in scientism is what makes Brian Josephson and Beverly Rubik lament that “we feel that the attitude that predominates in science at present is arrogance, which has fostered dogmatism and scientism.”⁴¹ Almost every part of philosophy has been afflicted with this scientism. First on the list is metaphysics. For Ayer, “I call this (the attempt to reduce metaphysical propositions to pseudo-propositions) a demonstration of the impossibility of metaphysics because I define a metaphysical enquiry as an enquiry into the nature of the reality...transcending the phenomena which the special sciences are content to study.”⁴² Next on the list is ethics, to Ayer still, “it appears, then, that, as a branch of knowledge, (ethics) is nothing more than a department of psychology...”,⁴³ similarly Quine notes that “...one regrets the methodological infirmity of ethics as compared with science. The empirical foothold of science in the predicted observable

⁴¹ Josephson, B.D., & Rubik, B.A., *The Challenge of Consciousness Research*, (Philadelphia: The College of Information Science and Technology, Pennsylvania State University, 1992), p32

⁴² Ayer, A.J., “Demonstration of the Impossibility of Metaphysics”, in Edwards, P., & Pap, A., (eds.), *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, (London: The Free Press, 1973), pp760-1

⁴³ Ayer, A.J., “Critique of Ethics and Theology”, in Ayer, A.J., *Language, Truth and Logic*, (New York: Dover, 1952), p112

even; that of moral code is in the observable moral act.”⁴⁴ We cannot even talk of political philosophy since ethics, from which the political concepts like “rights” is imported, is itself “a department of psychology” or “methodologically infirm”. The theory of knowledge, epistemology is eventually not spared from this scientific affliction. Epistemology is finally given a new setting. According to Quine, “epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science.”⁴⁵

Meanwhile, I do not believe it would have been a problem if “science” advocated for is that which is an activity of careful and systematic study of problems. In fact, in this case, philosophy of science is sufficiently philosophic. This is because philosophy in whole, including Wittgenstein’s, is scientific in this sense by being systematic in its approach to problems. But when natural science is viewed as the study of the physical world *merely* by using systematic observation and experiment, then it is imperative to ask what scholarship is turning human being into. That is, whether human being is merely a sense-driven animal like every other lower animal. I do not think so, because, there is actually something more than animality that distinguishes humans from other lower animals, and I would want to think that the thing is human rationality, or call it consciousness.

This rationality is what is re-echoed in Wittgenstein’s non-scientific socialised epistemology, rather than mere experience. He prioritises human judgement in knowledge acquisition and justification. He believes that knowledge, in the final analysis, has its basis in

⁴⁴ Quine, W.V.O., “On the Nature of Moral Values”, in Quine, W.V.O., *Theories and Things*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p63

⁴⁵ Quine, W.V.O., “Epistemology Naturalized”, in Kornblith, H., (ed.), *Naturalizing Epistemology*, (2nd ed.), (Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1994), p25

natural facts *about* human. But by “natural facts”, he does not mean mere observation. Rather, he is referring to the facts about how humans “naturally” have the tendency to follow rules while making epistemic judgement. What seem like conflict between the mere observation in scientific epistemology and the inclusion of rationality in socialised epistemology and some other relevant issues prompts, through Dall’Agnol, this contrast attempt between the Quine’s notion of “agreement” in judgement and that of Wittgenstein’s. This will help in knowing whether the re-introduction of rationality in socialised epistemology is justified.

3.3.2 Quine and Wittgenstein: Dall’Agnol on Scientific Epistemology

According to Dall’Agnol, on the one hand we have Quine’s scientific view, which claims that philosophy is continuous with science, based on the assumption that science is all the real knowledge there is.⁴⁶ On the other hand, we have Wittgenstein socialised view, which draws a sharp distinction between philosophy and natural science (where science means physics) because the two disciplines differ in terms of their goals, tasks and methods. The fundamental difference between these two scholars, makes Dall’Agnol to refer to Peter Hacker suggestion that “if Quine is right, then analytic philosophy, (as constructed by Wittgenstein) was fundamentally mistaken.”⁴⁷ This is because analytic philosophy, especially under Wittgenstein’s influence, maintains a clear-cut distinction between philosophy and science.

The question that may be asked then is “what if Quine, like other naturalists, is the one who is right and Wittgenstein wrong?” Dall’Agnol answers this question by showing why, *pace* Quine, scientism is a view which is on the wrong side of scholarship. For instance, he notes that

⁴⁶ Hacker, P. M. S., *Wittgenstein’s Place in Twentieth-Century Analytic Philosophy*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p195

⁴⁷ Hacker, P. M. S., *Wittgenstein’s Place in Twentieth-Century Analytic Philosophy*, p195

while Quine wants to follow analytic philosophy in line with Wittgenstein, he misinterpreted Wittgenstein's "meaning is use". This is what Dall'Agnol tries to point out in Quine's quote that,

Wittgenstein has stressed that the meaning of a word is to be sought in its use. This is where the empirical semanticist looks: to verbal behavior. John Dewey was urging this point in 1925. "Meaning...is primarily a property of behavior."⁴⁸

In other words, Quine is himself some sort of behaviourist. Dall'Agnol, however, notes that Wittgenstein, considering his argument, would obviously reject a semantic behaviourism. An instance of Wittgenstein's argument on this goes thus:

Let me ask this: what has the expression of a rule –say a sign-post– got to do with my actions? What sort of connection is there here? – Well, perhaps this one: I have been trained to react to this sign in a particular way, and now I do so react to it. But that is only to give a causal connection; to tell how it has come about that we now go by the sign-post; not what this going by-the-sign really consists in.⁴⁹

Taking a second look into this argument, it would be noticed that Wittgenstein considers as unacceptable the behaviourist account of the relationship between rules and behaviour. In stating the reason for this, Dall'Agnol notes that according to the behaviourist we are naturally inclined to react in a specific way, while Wittgenstein rejects such explanation because that merely gives us a causal nomological science of human behaviour. That is, we do not need a scientific explanation in this context; instead we need what can actually explain to us the *normative* phenomena existing between our actions and the rules.⁵⁰ In other words, unlike Quine, for Wittgenstein, to talk about "meaning is use" is not to merely talk about the empirical behaviour, but to also talk about the *normative*, that is, rule-governing or rule-following human

⁴⁸ Dall'Agnol, D., "Quine or Wittgenstein: The End of Analytic Philosophy?" *Principia*7.1, (2003): 81

⁴⁹ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v198

⁵⁰ Dall'Agnol, D., "Quine or Wittgenstein: The End of Analytic Philosophy?", p81

behaviour. This must not be taken to mean that Wittgenstein rejects an empirical explanation of human behaviour, it rather means that there is more to such explanation than merely being empirical.

Dall’Agnol further notes that, going by Wittgenstein’s explanation, rules are not merely empirical propositions, but what give us a *standard* or a *criterion* of correctness.⁵¹ In other words, since rules are not mere empirical propositions, then it goes beyond the scope of study for physics or empirical science. And for him, pace Quine, this is the more reason a sharp distinction must be maintained between *necessary* (analytic) and *empirical* (synthetic) propositions, as done in Wittgenstein’s epistemology.⁵² For instance, Wittgenstein points out that the duty of science is to construct genuine propositions which exhibit truth-value.⁵³ Propositions like these “represent the existence and non-existence of states of affairs.”⁵⁴ They are, thus, empirical and synthetic. Epistemology, like all other branches of philosophy, on the other hand, tasks itself with the clarifications and justification of our conceptual framework. Without the first part of this task, namely clarification, our framework will remain “cloudy and indistinct”.⁵⁵ Also, in the process of the other part of the task, namely justification, philosophy creates some pseudo-propositions, that

⁵¹ Dall’Agnol, D., “Quine or Wittgenstein: The End of Analytic Philosophy?”, p84

⁵² Dall’Agnol, D., “Quine or Wittgenstein: The End of Analytic Philosophy?”, p84

⁵³ Wittgenstein, L., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Pears, D.F., & McGuinness, B.F., (Trans.), (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, (1922) 1961), v4.11, p49

⁵⁴ Wittgenstein, L., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, v4.1, p47

⁵⁵ Wittgenstein, L., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, v4.112, p49

is, propositions that are not capable of exhibiting truth-value. Such propositions contains terms like “justified belief”, “sufficient ground” “good reason” and “beyond a reasonable doubt”⁵⁶

So, to Wittgenstein, epistemology cannot be a “chapter” or a “department” or anything beside the natural sciences, rather the term “epistemology” denotes something like “the philosophy of psychology.”⁵⁷ As we cannot say philosophy of law means a branch in law, but to say it is the application of philosophical tool to clarify some legal issues, thereby creating criteria through which those issues can be addressed, so also, we can only say the philosophy of psychology is the application of philosophical tools to clarify issues arising from the human acquisition of beliefs and creating criteria for such acquisition in the process. Likewise, Wittgenstein argues that the term “philosophy” in general must signify “something whose place is above or below the natural sciences not beside them.”⁵⁸ That is, it is left for us to determine which is more important between the creation of those propositions and their clarification, but we cannot say the two are the same in tasks and goal. In other words, while natural science engages itself with the construction of theories about reality, philosophy is rather an elucidating activity, explaining our theoretical apparatus.

Wittgenstein’s view of philosophy and its branches, which epistemology is a part of, perhaps is what makes Alfred Taylor, while defining the task of philosophy, to argue that,

What the philosopher needs to know, as the starting-point for his investigation, is not the specialist’s facts as such, but the general

⁵⁶ Kim, J., “What is Naturalised Epistemology”, pp33-4

⁵⁷ Wittgenstein, L., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Pears, D.F., & McGuinness, B.F., (Trans.), (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, (1922) 1961), 4.1121, p49

⁵⁸ Wittgenstein, L., *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, v4.111, p49

principles which the specialist uses for their discovery and correlation. His study is a “science of sciences”.⁵⁹

As a result of this, Dall’Agnol notes that the two disciplines are bound to be different both in tasks and methods, and thus it would be gratuitous to ask epistemology, as a branch of philosophy, to become naturalised, where “naturalised” means to go the scientific way either as a branch or as a dependant studying mere belief-acquisition process.⁶⁰

3.3.3 A Review

On the issue of whether epistemology has to be scientific as suggested in Quine’s view or socialised as suggested in Wittgenstein’s view, I must admit I’m apt to follow the line of argument Dall’Agnol develops against scientism. Epistemology has to be non-scientific, as suggested in Wittgenstein’s view. In addition to Dall’Agnol’s arguments, it is worth recalling that, even Quine had once rejected positivism as “dogma” based on the fact that its attempt to abolish everything that could not be translated directly into observational sentences is scientific. He declares that “the totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs...is a man-made fabric which impinges on experiences only along the edges...”⁶¹ Here, “man-made” knowledge means propositions that “commands the same verdict for all witnesses who know the language.”⁶²As the *necessity* we attach to the truth of analytic propositions has been exposed by Quine himself, every human knowledge is a product of the agreement of one group of people or the other. This sounds more like a socialised view of knowledge than the scientific or naturalised one.

⁵⁹ Taylor, A., *Elements of Metaphysics*, (London: Methuen, 1903), p48

⁶⁰ Dall’Agnol, D., “Quine or Wittgenstein: The End of Analytic Philosophy?”, pp76-7

⁶¹ Quine, W.V.O., “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, p42

⁶² Flanagan, O.J., “Pragmatism, Ethics, and Correspondence Truth: Response to Gibson and Quine”, in *Ethics*, 98.3, (1988): 544

Regretfully and inconsistently,⁶³ Quine later becomes unwilling to allow for any non-empirical verdict, even if all the witnesses who know the language agree to it; this prompts him to denigrate ethics as “methodologically infirm,” because ethical terms lack empirical content.⁶⁴ Also, while faced with the task of bringing epistemology into the naturalist world, Quine displays “yet another remnant of positivistic (scientistic) dogma.”⁶⁵ It is rather puzzling how the same person, who has earlier rejected such positivist scientism as dogma, later wants epistemology to *merely* study belief-formation process, merely because its criteriological task cannot be achieved through a *purely* empirical method of science. The effect of this is scientism pervading the heart of the contemporary scholarship, where many epistemologists now believe that epistemology must be an empirical study of the belief-acquisition process.⁶⁶

One common fundamental defect in a scientistic cum “naturalist” epistemology is in its attempt to turn the whole of epistemological discourse into a discourse about “belief” and “truth”. This view deliberately ignores the fact that neither belief nor “true belief” (formed reliably or not) can equate knowledge. So, the study of belief-formation process is rather a task for one of the sciences (psychology) and not epistemology. Like Wittgenstein’s non-scientistic epistemology has shown, epistemology is necessarily criteriological, a point that is at least

⁶³ Quine’s academic inconsistency is further shown by scholar like Owen Flanagan, Morton White and others (see: Flanagan, Owen [1988] and White, Morton. *From a Philosophical Point of View*. [1986])

⁶⁴ Quine, W.V.O., “On the Nature of Moral Values”, in his *Theories and Things*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p63

⁶⁵ Flanagan, O.J., “Pragmatism, Ethics, and Correspondence Truth: Response to Gibson and Quine”, p549

⁶⁶ Goldman, A., “A Causal Theory of Knowing”, in Roth, M.D., & Galis, L., (eds.), *Knowing: Essays in the Analysis of Knowledge* (New York: Random House, 1970), pp67-87

rightly made in the traditional epistemology. While the contemporary “naturalist” epistemology misses this fact, the traditional theories, in spite of their diversities, maintain and do not fail to establish this point. The concern of epistemology cannot be to build a “nonstandard” account of knowledge, if “nonstandard” means the neglect of its criteriological task. Epistemology cannot be particular to the extent of identifying whether the belief-formation process of a scientist or historian is adequate enough to make the belief knowledge. Each field has its specialists who have access to relevant facts to validate the knowledge-claims made in such field.⁶⁷ Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology respects this verdict, once the criteria for knowledge have been met.

The traditional epistemology would have been better off if it had done away with the belief that the major aim of epistemology is to develop a theory that is immune to sceptical challenge. This belief is newly represented in the scientific naturalised epistemology’s attempt to also take the external world as that which provides us with an independently justified belief. Hoping to find a belief that is totally immune to sceptical challenges or that can refute scepticism or that is independently justified, as Quine has rightly pointed out, is “forlorn”. We must rather concern ourselves with searching for the factors that inform our knowledge; and these factors include the situation that calls for such knowledge, the epistemic community from which it is made and other human or social factors. All these are what inform the non-scientific but socialised direction Wittgenstein’s view of knowledge takes.

3.4 Epistemic Contextualism: Bridges on Wittgenstein’s Epistemology

⁶⁷ Hamlyn, D.W., *The Theory Of Knowledge*, (London: Macmillan, 1971), p4

The Wittgensteinian approach to knowledge, which, rather than going the *purely* empirical way of scientism, emphasises “situation”, “issues” and “social factors” that gives rise to knowledge, in grounding such knowledge has been considered as an attempt to merely evade sceptical hypotheses found in contextualism—the doctrine which emphasises the importance of the context in solving epistemic problems or establishing the meaning and justification of a proposition. Hence, in this section, as it is implied in the title, I shall show, through Jason Bridges’ arguments, that the aims of Wittgenstein’s epistemology differ from that of a contextualist. I shall equally show why, unlike contextualism, Wittgenstein’s epistemology still remains a very plausible alternative in addressing the problems of knowledge.

3.4.1 Epistemic Contextualism

Epistemic contextualism can be seen as a doctrine which emphasises the importance of the epistemic context in establishing or solving problems about knowledge; and this “context” could be based on group, situation, discipline or issue.⁶⁸In other words, the contextualist would argue that ascriptions of knowledge are context-sensitive, and that the truth-values of utterances involving the word “know” (and its cognates) depend on standards that are contextually determined. On the skeptical challenges against knowledge, the contextualist would argue that skeptical arguments only succeed because they exploit the conversational context in which words that have epistemic significance are uttered. However, in ordinary conversational contexts where there is no possibility of skeptical error, it is perfectly appropriate to ascribe knowledge to subjects who make an empirical statement like “I know I have hands”. Therefore, we can in ordinary contexts be said to know such an empirical statement. Going by its epistemic aim, as

⁶⁸ Hannon, M., “Ascribing Knowledge in Context: Some Objections to the Contextualist’s Solution to Skepticism”, *Aporia*, 17.1, (2007): 56

evident in its highlighted view, contextualism has been accused of merely being a form of question-begging epistemic theory.

3.4.2 Bridges on Wittgenstein and Contextualism

As shown in Ayer's assumption, there is the belief that a rejection of epistemological realism will lead epistemology to relativism or contextualism. This is because if we cannot accept that what grounds our knowledge exists in the external world independently of any mind whether an individual or a group of individuals, then, we are saying in essence that the ground for our knowledge relatively rests on one mind or the other, or rests on a context or the other. And since Wittgenstein's socialised view of knowledge is a rejection of epistemological realism by not believing in experience or mental fact as the sole ground of knowledge, then, it is generally believed to be a version of epistemic contextualism. In other words, Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology is more or less a question-begging epistemic theory.

However, in response to the interpretation of Wittgenstein's epistemology as contextualist, Jason Bridges argues that any attempt to read contextualism back into Wittgenstein's work is not only unsupported, it equally gets Wittgenstein's epistemic intent precisely backwards. He claims that reading epistemic contextualism back into Wittgenstein's writings, "we will end up ascribing views to Wittgenstein that he not only does not endorse, but which are in active opposition to his intent."⁶⁹In justifying his position, Bridges considers contextualism as claiming that "the content of an utterance is shaped in far-reaching and

⁶⁹ Bridges, J., "Wittgenstein vs. Contextualism", in Ahmed , A. M., (ed.), *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: A Critical Guide*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p109

unobvious ways by the circumstances, the context, in which it is uttered.”⁷⁰In other words, the same proposition uttered at different times might vary in “content”; a claim which is far from the Wittgenstein’ epistemic intent. Focusing on Wittgenstein’s treatment of explanation, understanding, proper names, and family-resemblance concepts, Bridges tries to show why Wittgenstein’s aim is directly opposite to the contextualist reading it has received so far.

One of the major passages that call for a contextualist reading of Wittgenstein’s works could be found in *Philosophical Investigations*. An example is where Wittgenstein is explaining about the polysemic nature of a name like “Moses”. In his words,

We may say...the name “Moses” can be defined by means of various descriptions. For example, as “the man who led the Israelites through the wilderness”, “the man who lived at that time and place and was then called ‘Moses’ ”, “the man who as a child was taken out of the Nile by Pharaoh’s daughter” and so on. And according as we assume one definition or another the proposition “Moses did not exist” acquires a different sense, and so does every other proposition about Moses.⁷¹

Scholars can give a contextualist interpretation of this passage (like Charles Travis and Michael Hannon has done) to mean what we state to be so of a term or a name, let us say “Moses”, will vary from occasion to occasion or context to context. The varying features of different activities that collectively define “Moses” will themselves determine the different “understandings” and will surely accompany the different applications of the name.

A contextualist interpretation of the above passage renders Wittgenstein’s view weak. It makes Wittgenstein’s view appears to be claiming that terms can have different and conflicting meaning based on the context it is used. However, as Bridges once again argues, Wittgenstein aims at establishing the opposite. This is because what is being applied from case to case context

⁷⁰ Bridges, J., “Wittgenstein vs. Contextualism” p109

⁷¹ Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigation*, v79

to context or occasion to occasion is the same concept.⁷² Each person describes the concept based on the information available to her, and it does not mean the new information contradicts the other ones, where contradiction happens, then some information is missing or denied. Saying “Moses” is “the man who led the Israelites through the wilderness”, does not negate saying “Moses” is “the man who as a child was taken out of the Nile by Pharaoh’s daughter”. Saying “General Olusegun Obasanjo is the man who led Nigeria under PDP” though appears contradictory with, yet does not really contradict saying “General Olusegun Obasanjo is the man who as a common citizen rejects PDP-led Nigerian government”. It all depends on the information available to us.

In other words, the polysemic nature of words—that a word can have more than one meaning given where or what gives rise to it—Wittgenstein points out does not suggest contextualism, if by contextualism we mean terms having conflicting meaning given different contexts. It rather gives strength to his socialised view of knowledge that, in understanding and grounding a claim, we should consider what gives rise to such claim. Saying *Jingo is a materialist* because he believes that nothing exists outside matter does not necessarily negates the claim that *Jingo is not a materialist* because he has no obsession for wealth and material possessions. Instead all Wittgenstein’s epistemology suggests we need do is to consider where and what gives rise to each claim, in order to have full understanding and fair evaluation of each claim. This is because, with such understanding, we would be able to appreciate the non-contradictory nature of those statements.

3.5 Conclusion

⁷² Bridges, J., “Wittgenstein vs. Contextualism”, p110

In this chapter, I have tried to examine some arguments which could serve as strength to Wittgenstein's epistemology, in addressing some criticisms that have been or could be raised against it. Through these arguments, it was discovered in the chapter that many of the problems raised against Wittgenstein's epistemology can rather serve as strength to it than the weakness it is thought to be. For instance, in the chapter, I have been able to show that Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology is a rejection rather than being a form of *epistemic relativism*. This is because it does not claim that two incompatible claims are equally valid. It rather tells why there is need to understand the perspectives from which the claims are made in order to discover and appreciate their compatibility. I also showed that it is a rejection rather than being an account of views like epistemological realism through its rejection of "private language", *scientism* through its socialised view of knowledge, *epistemic contextualism*, because it does not claim that the same proposition uttered at different context (time, or occasion) can vary in "content". These findings has helped in concluding the chapter that in spite of the arguments raised against it, Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology still stands as a very plausible approach to addressing the problems of knowledge. In other words, socialised epistemology still provides us with an alternative means of address some problems of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This study consisted in a critical assessment of Wittgenstein's socialised approach to epistemology, as found in his later works. Through a proper study of these works, the study has challenged the orthodox representationalist view of knowledge that the ground for our knowledge is consisted in something exterior to the knowledge either in external object or mental representation. The study challenged the view that this something can provide us with strong basis to refute all sceptical challenges including radical scepticism. The study stated that no basis can be enough to refute *all* sceptical challenges.

Alternatively, the study stated that *all* claims to knowledge are generated from one epistemic community or the other. Thus, when grounding knowledge, the impact of such epistemic community on our claim must be taken into account. On the problem of scepticism, the study stated that while it is one of the duties of the epistemic agent to satisfy the relevant doubts in this epistemic community, it is not the duty of an epistemologist to refute or satisfy such an insatiable doubt like radical scepticism. Rather the task of epistemology is to establish knowledge.

In an attempt to justify its claim, the study was distributed into three chapters. In the first chapter, I articulated Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology. As found in his later works, some concepts that are responsible for the development of Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology were identified and characterised. I carried out detailed discussions of Wittgenstein's concept of "Rule-Following," "Language-Game", "Forms of Life", "Use" and "Grammar Investigation", as interrelated and complementary to each other. It is stated that matters concerning life, language, belief, knowledge and justification must not be approached in isolation. Such approach is what is responsible for the representationalist assumption that claims individually represent objects and must be justified through this object. Rather, I showed that such matters are interdependent, and

we must address each of them with others serving as background knowledge. By organic, the chapter meant that, all knowledge-claims are linked like a web to other epistemic factors within the community, so, any justification for the claim must take into account those factors. In other words, rather than the endless search for the relationship existing between our propositions and objects or mind to ground the propositions, the epistemological task must be that of “grammar investigation”. Epistemologists must resist the temptation of thinking that a proposition individually “represents” or “refers to an object.”

In the second chapter, I studied some actual and possible shortcomings that could be traced into Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology. The problem of subjectivism that may be raised against Wittgenstein epistemology given its antithetical nature to epistemic naturalism was carefully examined. Rather, I showed why such antithesis cannot be enough to render Wittgenstein epistemology subjective. The most common problem associated with Wittgenstein’s epistemology, as consisted in epistemic relativism was equally studied. Here, I concentrated on the version of the problem developed from Pritchard’s reading of Wittgenstein’s epistemology. I assessed the claim that given its emphasis on socialised factors as the determinant factors in grounding our knowledge and the fact that such factors vary from one epistemic system to the other, Wittgenstein’s socialised epistemology could only leave us with conflicting kinds of knowledge. On the contrary, it is found out that the varying nature of such factors does not necessarily amount to relativism. Ayer’s attempt to defend the possibility of private language was also assessed. Against this, I showed that such defence fails because a private language is epistemically impossible. Such language is devoid of a necessary epistemic property like intersubjective justification that is consisted in a proper language. Lastly, in this chapter, I assessed Hannon’s doubt on Wittgenstein solution to scepticism. This doubt was

shown to be irrelevant. This is because it is not the duty of epistemology to satisfy such an insatiable doubt like the radical scepticism.

In the third chapter, I examine some strengths or merits of Wittgenstein's epistemology through the arguments of some scholars. It is discovered that some of the arguments raised in the previous chapter can serve as strength to the socialised epistemology rather than the weakness it is thought to be. In proving this claim, it is shown that Wittgenstein's socialised epistemology is rejecting rather than advocating epistemic relativism. The theory only showed why we have to take into account the *perspectives* from which a claim is made in order to discover and appreciate their compatibility. In the chapter, I equally showed that this study rejects rather than advocates epistemological realism. By rejecting "private language", the chapter showed that language, by its nature, cannot be individually or subjectively developed and the propositions in it cannot be individually or independently validated. I equally showed that this study is a rejection rather than a promotion of scientism in epistemic naturalism. Unlike the latter, this study takes epistemology as necessarily criteriological. Lastly, in this chapter, I showed that this study rejects rather than advocates epistemic contextualism. It is not claimed in the study that one statement uttered at different time or place can vary in "content". The study only reveals to us that such statement only seems different but actually establishes the same truth. We can only make a claim based on the information available to us. This does not translate to contradiction in the new information.

With the aid of these chapters, I strongly believe that the major aim of this study has been successfully carried out. The aim, as shown in the chapters, is to advance a socialised view of knowledge, as found in Wittgenstein's later works, in which knowledge is defined as good information, which is an attainable social phenomenon. In other words, contrary to the orthodox view, knowledge is not an unattainable "transcendental" phenomenon. It is also not mere a

matter of fact. Knowledge, as this study has shown, is rather a phenomenon, which cannot be taken out of the factors that inform it. These factors are the socialised factors that give birth to our claims and the epistemic system from which it is made. In other words, knowledge, is not something based above human that we try fruitlessly to go into Platonic world to attain. Neither is it non-social that we need to dig very deep into the world to find. Knowledge is based in natural facts *about* human, and this is why it is a socialised phenomenon. Here, the term “natural facts” denotes facts about how humans naturally follow some conventional standards in developing and justifying their epistemic judgements.

So, as Wittgenstein suggests, Moore and other representationalist epistemologists, who try to establish an invariant and scepticism-proof form of knowledge, fail because an attempt to establish a self-justification for knowledge through experience or reason automatically invites the sceptical question of how one becomes certain of such self-justification or develops such scepticism-free type of knowledge; a question that would embroil an epistemologist in the sort of sceptical debate he wishes to avoid. For Wittgenstein, the idea of doubting the existence of a world external to our senses gains a foothold from the fact that any knowledge claim can be doubted, and every attempt at justification of a knowledge claim can also be doubted. So, instead of engaging in the futility of seeking an endless justification or refuting scepticism while trying to build a representationalist form of knowledge, we should rather concern ourselves with the language games which inform our knowledge and see how we are strongly influenced by them in developing such knowledge. This will help greatly in understanding, explaining and justifying “what we know” and “how we know”.

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