

Transition from Epistemology (First Philosophy) to Naturalized Epistemology

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Abstract: *The main contention of this paper is to explicate and examine the philosophical implication of Quine's Naturalized Epistemology. Quine's naturalized epistemology appears as a revolt against the so-called First Philosophy or Traditional Epistemology. By way of criticizing First Philosophy, Quine thus offers us a radical interpretation of philosophy in the name of Naturalized Epistemology. According to Quine, epistemology must be naturalized. Naturalized epistemology is the offshoot of both natural sciences, such as, sociology, economics, psychology, history etc. and common sense. He holds that science is continuous with common sense, with everyday knowledge. He explains the doctrine as the recognition that it is within science itself and not in some prior philosophy, which reality is to be identified and described. His main contention was to develop philosophical theory without presupposing any philosophical dogmas. For Quine, while considering human knowledge, philosophers have no vantage point, no method, no stance, which is different in kind from that of the knowledge which is their subject. He conceives that philosophers are just like sailors who engage to rebuild their boat on the open sea. Thus, for Quine, philosophers do not require any vantage point outside the open sea, i.e., outside naturalized epistemology. There is no such cosmic exile. In this Doctoral research work an attempt has been made to show the far reaching philosophical implications of Quine's naturalized epistemology.*

Keywords: Naturalized epistemology. sociology, economics, psychology, history, a priori, radical interpretation

1. Introduction

Quine's idea of naturalized epistemology is fundamental and philosophically revolutionary. It is supposed to be fundamental because the centrality of Quine's philosophy of language actually hinges on the proper understanding of his concept of **naturalized epistemology**. Again, it may be thought as philosophically revolutionary because it eventually occupied an important position in philosophy by way of encountering the classical epistemology. According to Quine, epistemology (First philosophy) is faulty on many accounts. First, it acknowledges a priori and a posteriori distinction which according to Quine is not tenable. Secondly, it is supposed to be a normative science as it deals with *is-ought* dichotomy. As a result, it goes beyond human knowledge. Precisely speaking epistemology or theory of knowledge, being the first philosophy, does not work on the face of humans need. Philosophy in proper must address or act on human knowledge and this is completely foreign in traditional or classical epistemology or first philosophy. That is why Quine talks in favour of naturalized epistemology instead of epistemology (First Philosophy).

1.1 What then is naturalized epistemology according to Quine?

Naturalized epistemology, according to Quine, is an incorporation of both science and common sense. Quine says, "Epistemology is concerned with the foundations of science. Conceived thus broadly, epistemology includes the study of the foundations of mathematics as one of its departments." Quine intuitively a similarity between the study of mathematics and the study of epistemology. Just like the study of mathematics, Quine divides the foundation of epistemology into a theory of concepts, or meaning and a theory of doctrine or truth. He then says just as mathematics is to be reduced to logic, natural knowledge in some sense or other is to be based on sense experience. This was completely foreign in the first philosophy. According to

Quine, it was the anxiety for traditional or classical epistemologists, namely Hume and others, that they did not incorporate the necessity of science in sensory evidence. According to Quine, there are two cardinal tenets of empiricism remained unassailable of which one is that "whatever evidence there *is* for the science *is* sensory evidence. The other, to which I shall recur, is that all inculcation of meanings of words must rest ultimately on sensory evidence."

According to Quine, it is within science that reality is to be identified and described. By the term, "science", Quine, of course, does not mean the technical science; rather he means the theoretical or natural science. He uses the word "science" in a comprehensive manner as he unequivocally includes psychology, economics, sociology and history under this name. Moreover, his understanding of science is consistent with common sense; with everyday knowledge. There may have different nature of common sense, such as, reflective (thoughtful) and unreflective (not thoughtful). Naturalized epistemology incorporates only reflective or thoughtful common sense and when Quine claims that there remains continuity between science and common sense, he thereby means reflective common sense. In fact, unreflective common sense, Quine claims, has not been enthralled by science. As Quine deals with human knowledge, he accordingly inclines to say that knowledge of any sort should adhere with the term "science". Knowledge of any sort must be accorded with the so-called desired science. In this sense, it can be said that science is the paradigm of knowledge, i.e., our most successful attempt at knowledge. Accordingly, it can be said that philosophy being a part of our knowledge aims at to be successful and this can be happened if it would fulfill the so-called scientific standards.

As by the term "science", Quine means the so-called theoretical science, application of science should not be uncritical. Rather, we can say that they rely on ordinary use where emphasize has been laid on clarity and vivacity. Quine is extremely critical about the general term

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“knowledge” that we notice in epistemology or in the first philosophy. He conceives the general term, “knowledge” as elusive and indistinct. Even though knowledge is evidential, but it is not clear just how strong the evidence must be for something. Evidence on the basis of which something has been designated as knowledge fails to provide a clear picture to count it as knowledge in the real sense of the term because in most general cases we are not sure about the evidences we have in support of claiming something as knowledge. In this regard, Quine says that the word, “knowledge” is “useful and unobjectionable in the vernacular where we acquiesce in vagueness, but unsuited to technical use because of lacking a precise boundary.”¹³ True human knowledge must be accorded with the so-called theoretical science and the supporting data or evidence must be backed up by science. Even Quine while seeking the legitimacy of knowledge emphasizes more on the contexts of word rather than precision.

1.2 A priori and A posteriori theory of knowledge

Thus, the genesis of Quine’s **naturalized epistemology** actually hinges on the endurance of science and common sense. According to Quine, the seamlessness of knowledge, so to speak, is the by-product of both science and common sense and it would be determined not on the basis of formal rules and principles but on the basis of the standards of clarity and vivacity. He further goes on to say that there is no fundamental difference of kind within knowledge. We do not find the clear-cut gulf between a priori knowledge and a posteriori knowledge. There is a strong perception or idea that philosophy seeks to understand our theory from within. On the basis of this philosophical perception or presupposition, philosophy draws a priori theory. This in fact makes difference a priori theory from a posterior theory. However, while outlining naturalized epistemology, Quine directly denies the distinct possibility of a priori theory arising out of within. Within the sphere of naturalized epistemology there is no provision of making distinction between a **priori** and a **posteriori theory of knowledge**. According to Quine, the distinction between a priori and a posteriori can only be comprehended in philosophy if we adhere to the distinction between analytic and synthetic proposition. But as all we know that Quine in his “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” denies the possibility of analytic and synthetic distinction in the strict sense of the term. Some commentators have expressed Quine position about the distinction between analytic and synthetic distinction. Some hold that Quine has denied such distinction and some others have held that Quine does not deny such distinction rather he inclines to say that such distinction does not pay any serious philosophical contribution. However, we think Quine denies the possibility of a priori knowledge within the sphere of his naturalized epistemology. We think Quine’s rejection of a priori knowledge within the sphere of naturalized epistemology bears a serious philosophical implication. However, it is clear to us that debate between Quine and Carnap actually links with the distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions. His denial of the distinction between analytic and synthetic is also related with his attitudes towards meaning. As we know that an analytic statement is determined just by looking at the linguistic analysis or of the meaning of the subject and the predicate

terms of the proposition under consideration. Kant offers us two distinctive features of analytic judgment. He says that in an analytic judgment the predicate term is overtly or covertly contained in the subject term and secondly, the denial of an analytic judgment leads to a contradiction. We think that these two distinctive marks of analytic judgment is determined just by looking at the linguistic meaning of the subject and predicate terms.

For example, how do we come to know that the statement, such as, “All red roses are red” is analytic? Here we can determine it as analytic just by looking at the very linguistic meaning of the term „red-rose“. If a rose is red, it must be red. We have this linguistic meaning just by looking at the use of language. Our point at this juncture is that the analyticity of a statement is determined just by looking at the linguistic meaning of the statement under consideration. Interestingly, Quine equally denies the possibility of analytic judgment on the background of apriori intuition just by looking at the analysis of the meaning of the judgment. According to Quine, in the process of analysis of the meaning of the statement, we can take the help of translation manual, but the very fact is that the mechanism of translation manual is indeterminate in the true sense of the term. Thus, we can say that in Quine’s philosophy of language, his attitude towards meaning plays an important role. Even some commentators would say that Quine’s attitude towards meaning is supposed to be the centrality of his philosophical outlook. We have already hinted that within the sphere of Quine’s naturalized epistemology, there we do not find any significant distinction between a priori and a posteriori. This does not make sense to say, after Quine, that in the process of having knowledge we cannot accept any distinction whatsoever. There are, of course different sort of knowledge, that can be acquired differently. For example, my knowledge of the mobile phone is somehow different from my knowledge about P. F. Strawson. Quine, of course, does not rule out such differences. One may also talk of observational knowledge arising out of observational sentences and such kind of knowledge is somehow different from non-observational knowledge. Quine, however, thinks that all kinds of knowledge fall under the same very general account. The very distinctive mark of such general account of knowledge is that it rules out nothing or in other word, nothing can be ruled out from the general account of knowledge. Even, it does not rule out a priori knowledge. Even though Quine opines that there are differences among different sorts of knowledge or between a priori and a posteriori knowledge, but what he denies is that there is a single clear cut distinction between a priori and a posteriori knowledge. Thus, it seems to us that Quine’s understanding of knowledge within his naturalized epistemology is exceptionally intangible in the sense that even though Quine conceives that there are differences among various kinds of knowledge, none of the differences actually matters to him at the level of *abstraction* at which he is working. As a physicalist Quine, of course, finds various differences among various kinds of knowledge, but such superficial differences cannot bear any conceptual significance in abstraction. Quine says, “I am physical object sitting in a physical world. Some of the forces of the physical world impinge on my surface. Light rays strike my retinas;

molecules bombard my ear drums and fingertips. I strike back, emanating concentric airwaves. These waves take the form of a torrent of discourse about tables, people, molecules, light rays, retinas, prime numbers, infinite classes, joy and sorrow, good and evil.”¹⁴ The remarks within the quotation clearly reflect what is philosophically most significant about human situation generally. It seems that Quine does not have any intention to begin with absolute certainty in philosophy like Descartes and others; rather he finds comfortable to start with our theory of the world from general perspective. He does not find any relevance to place philosophy at the beginning on a priori foothold; nor does he think that philosophy as such demands cognitive accomplishments.

Thus, it appears that Quine’s naturalized epistemology goes against many earlier philosophical theories. The question naturally arises: -

- Why does Quine prefer to develop such theory?
- What philosophical advantage he notices in his naturalized epistemology?
- Why does he prefer physicalistic approach in philosophy?

In this regard, it can be said that Quine actually tries to develop the theoretical or cognitive aspects of our lives. In this regard, he inclines to say that human knowledge is personified in language. He conceives language as the concentric air waves through which human knowledge in the desired sense is manifested. He further claims that language is just like waves through which the so-called cognitive activity of humans is made possible. Quine elsewhere claims that our knowledge in general is *seamless*, unbroken, i.e., all in one. Such unified human knowledge is the by-product of science and common sense. According to Quine, naturalized epistemology is a process of philosophical revelation of the continuity of science with common sense. They are in the same line of business, the only distinction between science and common sense is that unlike common sense science is more self-conscious and more successful. Science gives clarity and vivacity of knowledge. Quine says, “...the scientist can enhance objectivity and diminish the interference of language, by his very choice of language. And we [i.e., we philosophers], concerned to distill the essence of scientific discourse, can profitably purify the language of science beyond what might reasonably be urged upon the practicing scientist.” What Quine says here is that there remains a part of philosophy which is concerned to “purify the language of science” in order to have maximum clarity and objectivity. However, Quine feels that not all linguistic vocabularies those have been used in philosophy do meet his (Quine’s) standard. He rejects such vocabularies as insufficiently clear.

It is important to point out here that Quine, by his own account, is an empiricist and his very idea of naturalized epistemology even talks in favour of it. This does not, however, make sense to say that being an empiricist; Quine takes the notion of experience as absolutely fundamental. All philosophers who emphasize on common sense or rely on experience are in some sense or other regarded as empiricists. We think Quine is not a blind empiricist; rather he would be treated as refined empiricist. His understanding

of common sense is continuous with science. Even though, Quine elsewhere in his book *Theories and Things* admits that experience like meaning, thought and belief is a worthy object of philosophical and scientific clarification and analysis, but this does not make sense to say that it is all about of philosophical analysis and clarification. Even experience like others may at times be *ill-suited* for use as instrument of philosophical clarification and analysis. Even for better philosophical and scientific clarification, Quine has given more emphasized on sentences which are observable and fairly accessible. Humans “thought or belief, though loosely, is made possible by way of linking observables to observables along with conjecturing causal connections. Quine has strong reservation on the many linguistic terms philosophers have taken for granted in developing their philosophical theories. According to Quine, many such terms by their own standards are not sufficient. They even suffer from lack of clarity and vivacity. Quine does not claim that terms such as, „means“ or, „understands“ are senseless; nor even he suggests that such terms should be ousted from the domain of language; rather he sets the standard of the terms and in turn deserves that such terms do meet the standards of clarity and vivacity.

1.3 Stimulations and Science are the basic contents of Naturalized Epistemology

The very objective of naturalized epistemology is to show the relationship between language and reality. Of course, it is true to say that the main function of any linguistic analysis is to show the relationship between language and reality. When Quine raises the question: how does language come to be about the world, it is indeed at par with the question: what is the relationship between language and reality? Different linguistic philosophers have given different interpretations about the relationship between language and reality. For, example, early Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus* has introduced his celebrated picture theory where he has conceived every picture as a model of reality. Wittgenstein in this regard has introduced the logical interpretation of language. Many other semanticists have adopted referential method for showing the relationship between language and reality. Their point of view is that language invariable refers; there is no question of doubt and the referential aspect of language in some sense or other does foothold on reality. The conceptualism of Strawson, Putnam, Davidson, the speech acts theory of Austin, Searle, etc., are the different approaches through which the relationship between language and reality has been portrayed. Our point of contention at this juncture is that among many different functions of language, the main function is to make a relationship between language and reality.

Quine, of course, takes a scientific approach to show in what sense language comes to be about the world. According to Quine, language comes to be about the world in virtue of its relations to sensory stimulation. Quine in his “The Scope and Language of Science” has emphasized more on physical forces which impinge on the sensory surfaces. For Quine, physical forces impinging on appropriate parts of the body which give rise to stimulations of the sensory nerves and in turn produced noises about the world in virtue of their relations to such stimulations. Accordingly, Quine’s theory

may be termed as "stimulus response theory" which is the byproduct of both stimulations and science. In this regard, Quine goes on to say that the real source of human knowledge is energy encroaching on our sensory surfaces and also stimulating our sensory nerves. As a result, sensory stimulation according to Quine holds the centrality of human cognition or human knowledge. This is mainly for the reason that sensory stimulations in some sense or other are correlated just the way the world around me at a particular moment. In this sense, the world affects me only through such stimulations. But how do we reveal it? What helps us to have a sense of such correlation? According to Quine, stimulation or sensory stimulation can be grasped within natural science itself. This is how our information about the world can be materialized. Thus, in a sense our information about the world is passing through our sensory receptors. Such inquiry, Quine claims, is purely an empirical inquiry that has been materialized through science and common sense.

Quine's outlook as stated above is complicated and in some cases preposterous. It seems that in some cases his position is sound and in some other cases his position lacks clarity. Some would say that Quine's claim that our utterances are about the world in virtue of their relation to stimulations of our sensory surfaces may appear untenable. Quine, in fact, was fully aware of this point. According to Quine, our putative knowledge forms a highly interconnected system. Some observable sentences are directly correlated with sensory stimulations while some others are not directly correlated with stimulations. Those sentences which are not directly correlated with stimulations, of course, be indirectly connected with observation sentences which are directly connected with stimulations and thus maintain a link in human cognition or human knowledge. Such sentences are called *non-observation* sentence. Thus, when we increasingly deal with the abstract aspects of knowledge, it would be very difficult to dig out exactly what sentences are in stake. Even though there is knowledge, such as, mathematical and logical, which are very much abstract and conceivable in nature, but such kind of acceptable knowledge is no longer associated with sensory stimulations. There is a strong perception in philosophy which goes in favour of mathematical and logical knowledge because of their authenticity and acceptability. According to them, mathematical and logical knowledge is far more acceptable than sensory knowledge or knowledge arising out of stimulations. Even though Quine has a sense of mathematical and logical knowledge like other, but unlike the others, Quine does not anticipate subtle distinction between mathematical and logical knowledge with sensory knowledge.

According to Quine, all acceptable and incorrigible knowledge becomes the part of human knowledge and such kind of human knowledge must be accredited by science and common sense and hence becomes the part of naturalized epistemology. Quine contends that even the knowledge of mathematic and logic is indirectly associated with sensory stimulations and hence is counted as part of our knowledge. Thus, the form of human knowledge Quine desires to have is philosophically known as *holism* in the sense that by way of conceiving human knowledge within the sphere of

naturalized epistemology, Quine approaches towards the **unification of human knowledge**. This does not, however, make sense to say that Quine's perception of human knowledge is obscure; rather it is a matter of ordinary fact because it is the by-product of both science and common sense. Thus, for Quine one can have putative knowledge when sentences which are a potential part of our knowledge are somehow connected with sensory stimulation. This indeed is the very definition of putative knowledge. Quine immediately conceives a difficulty perhaps arising out of the "prediction of stimulation" However, he tells us that one can easily overwhelm the apparent difficulty if predictions of observation sentences are directly interconnected with sensory stimulation. In fact, Quine's cognitive language plays a crucial role in prediction.

According to Quine, a sentence can be termed as cognitive if it is supposed to be the necessary constituent in a significant body of sentences in some sense or other as a whole issue in prediction of observation sentences. Having said this, Quine, of course, homogenizes the prediction of observation sentences to be something like a definition of science. In this regard, Quine recalls later Wittgenstein's metaphor "language-game". Quine, in fact, uses predictions of observation sentences as the *frontiers of science*. Here Quine contrasts the language game of science with other language games, such as, fiction and poetry. Wittgenstein says, "A sentence's claim to scientific status rests on what it contributes to a theory whose checkpoints are in prediction." In this regard, Quine does not offer us any notable distinction in kind between common sense knowledge and scientific knowledge. According to Quine, science is nothing but is "refined common sense". Quine says, "Science is not a substitute for common sense but an extension of it. The quest for knowledge is properly an effort simply to broaden and deepen the knowledge which the man in the street already enjoys, in moderation, in relation to the commonplace things around him." As science is a continuation of common sense, the scientist himself is indistinguishable from the common man in the sense of evidence. The only difference between a scientist and a common man is that unlike a common man, a scientist is more vigilant in his approach. However, this does not make sense to say that over vigilant requires some revision of evidential standards in the part of common sense, but what it requires is to pay more patient and systematic collection of evidences. Quine then claims that characterization of science is warranted by the fundamental fact that it is only through the waves of energy on our sensory surfaces along with consequent stimulations of our sensory nerves that we can discover anything about the world.

Thus, Quine's naturalized epistemology being the central idea of empiricism is an amalgamation of both science and common sense and it has been materialized both by low level empirical trials and by inference from independently well confirmed theories. It is by reference to this idea that one can come across to the understanding of the world by sensory experience. We think that Quine's general view of knowledge within the sphere of naturalized epistemology is a sort of biological phenomenon. It has been clearly reflected by the very opening sentence that takes place in his book *From Stimulus to Science*. Here Quine says, "We and

other animals notice what goes on around us. This helps us by suggesting what we might expect and even prevent, and thus fosters survival." Knowledge of both men and animals actually starts from stimulus, i.e., stimulus is the starting point of knowledge. However, in the course of development, human knowledge differs from knowledge of other species because unlike other species, humans do have a vast and bewildering growth of conceptual and linguistic organs.

According to Quine, there underlies a necessary prediction both in the case of men and also in the case of animals. However, unlike animals, the prediction of men is dependable. This is all about of natural science. Human learning process of knowledge is biologically better than animals. Everyone begins with ordinary elementary knowledge which locus is stimulus ; but the very fact is that for our own survival ordinary elementary knowledge must be taken seriously. Ordinary language cannot be terminated in any point of human life. We must engage with ordinary knowledge. Even though our survival actually hinges on so many other extraneous factors besides ordinary human knowledge, but ordinary knowledge is supposed to be the defining and essential characteristic of our survival because without ordinary knowledge we do not come to know in a proper and desire manner what is happening around us.

Thus, for Quine, ordinary knowledge in the true sense of the term is indispensable and fundamental. Even though there we notice various forms of knowledge, putative or non-putative; scientific or non-scientific, but not all kinds of knowledge has survival value. Quine's naturalized epistemology emphasizes more the survival value of humans. Quine admits that in the most general level, we notice a triangular fusion among knowledge, survival value and the prediction of stimulus. However, humans' biological propensity is to enhance the survival value. In the early period, survival value is pre-requisite. However, once we have in place a conception of the world as enduring through time, questions about the remote past and future will arise, and in turn their answers will count as putative knowledge. Thus, it can be said that ordinary knowledge has been recognized as putative knowledge through the ages of baptismal ceremony. Quine though seems in favour of survival value, but he does not think that survival value alone is the main goal of science. It is only the general propensity of human that they do prefer survival value simply for their biological necessity. The goal of science is, of course, secure humans' survival value because it indirectly helps to the growth of knowledge. Thus, it seems that ordinary general knowledge both for man and animals starts from stimulus and then the process continuous in the form of refinement. In this process humans take the help from science which animals cannot do. As a result, humans' ordinary knowledge turns into putative knowledge unlike animals. Thus, it can be said simplistically that the centrality of general knowledge is stimulus and hence stimulus has been treated as a paradigm of Quine's naturalism. In this sense, it can be said that Quine's naturalized epistemology is the by-product of both stimulus and science.

2. Conclusion

Thus, the main objective of Quine's naturalized epistemology is to set up the whole status of philosophy. According to Quine, the status of philosophy, at large, would be directed towards its contribution to our overall system of theory of the world. In this regard, Quine, as we have already observed, emphasizes more on understanding and prediction as the major aim of science. Knowledge, according to Quine, may be originated in a concern with prediction. Therefore, the point or status or objective of philosophy must be naturalized in the sense that it would bring its direct role in prediction of sensory experience. Philosophical understanding, Quine claims, must incorporate in some sense or other sensory experience what Quine termed it as "prediction". Quine's naturalized epistemology thus attempts to design a kind of philosophy where knowledge can be accomplished with the collaboration of science and stimulus and the language through which knowledge can be attained would be a referential in nature and this referential form of language can be obtained with the help of the syntax of logic what Quine termed it as "canonical notation". Thus, it seems to us Quine's naturalized epistemology is nothing but an enterprise of *a theory building process* through which different standards are being developed on account of different situations to have acceptable rudimentary common sense knowledge. Thus, the very distinctive aspect of Quine's naturalized epistemology is to develop a theory from within. Here conceives epistemology within epistemology. The method he adopts the constant revision of epistemology within epistemology. In this process he finds epistemology as *naturalized epistemology*.

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