

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Varieties of Naturalized Epistemology: Criticisms and Alternatives

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There is a widespread belief among intellectuals that the domain of philosophy shrinks as the domain of the special sciences expands, and that someday, science might swallow up philosophy entirely. Some philosophical naturalists think that this day may have already arrived. These naturalists believe that philosophy's methodology should be the same as that of natural science; they imply that philosophy has no distinctive "armchair" methodology of its own.

To determine whether these naturalists are right, one useful approach is to examine proposals for naturalistic (or "naturalized") *epistemology*, the recent attempt to transform theory of knowledge into a branch of natural science. In Western philosophy, epistemology has long been considered one of the most distinctively philosophic subjects. If even it can be naturalized, there may be little subject matter left for philosophy to call its own.

Traditional epistemologists object to naturalism on the grounds that it dispenses with the distinctively philosophical content of epistemology. In this dissertation, I argue that traditional epistemologists are correct to reject naturalism, but that new arguments are needed to show why they are correct. I establish my thesis first by critiquing two prominent varieties of naturalism—which I call "optimistic" and "pessimistic"—and then by offering a proposal for how a renewed non-naturalistic epistemology must move forward. In essence, I argue that naturalism fails because it neglects the possibility of a form of epistemological foundationalism which most traditional epistemologists have also neglected.

My first chapter presents a new taxonomy of naturalized epistemologies, dividing them first according to the goals they seek to achieve ("optimistic" and "pessimistic"), and then according to the methodologies used to achieve them. The first variety of naturalism, "optimistic naturalism," attempts to use scientific methods to give positive answers to traditional epistemological questions. For example, optimistic naturalists like Goldman, Kitcher, and Kornblith propose using results from psychology or evolutionary biology to refute the skeptic and show that our beliefs are justified. "Pessimistic naturalism"—what I call Quine's view—takes for granted that our beliefs cannot be logically justified, traditionally or naturalistically, and instead offers a pragmatic account of the development of our theory of the world.

In my second chapter, however, I argue that the optimistic project of naturalizing epistemic normativity is more difficult than it might originally seem. In this chapter, I show how some of naturalism's most basic principles thwart the achievement of traditional epistemological goals. Quine's principles—the underdetermination of theory by evidence, the indeterminacy of translation, and extensionalism—are regarded as paradigmatically naturalistic if anything is. Drawing on the example of Jaegwon Kim's critique of Quine, I show how any naturalist (or non-naturalist) taking these principles for granted cannot show our beliefs to be justified.

My third chapter develops a new argument against optimistic naturalized epistemology that is independent of the traditional concern about epistemic normativity. I suggest that a deeper problem is with the naturalists' use of the concept of "belief." I argue that naturalistic philosophy of mind, while perhaps acceptable for other purposes, does not deliver a concept of "belief" consistent with the constraints and needs of naturalized epistemology. I achieve this by offering a taxonomy of different methodologies of naturalizing "belief," and show how they either require appeal to substantive semantic or intensional concepts at odds with naturalism, or fail to deliver a concept of "belief" usable by an epistemology of advanced, scientific beliefs.

In my fourth chapter, I will look at the attempt by pessimistic naturalists to *deflate* the concept of belief, as illustrated by the simulation theory of Robert Gordon. I argue that simulation theory cannot itself be naturalized because it cannot be squared with evidence from developmental psychology or account for the explanatory power of folk psychology without appeal to explicit mentalistic concepts. In particular, I show how implicit belief attributions via simulation rely on explicit theories of knowledge. This helps undermine one brand of pessimistic epistemology (Michael Williams' epistemological deflationism) which relies on the claim that the concept "knowledge" has no pre-philosophical theoretical significance.

My fifth chapter describes the project of the remaining pessimistic naturalized epistemology, Quine's. I examine the debate surrounding Quine's proposal to respond to skepticism by showing that skeptical doubts are themselves scientific. I argue that Quine's strategy is not meant to answer skepticism by showing our beliefs to be logically justified after all, but by showing that they are at the very least pragmatically justified. Naturalized epistemology, then, concerns itself with identifying the various steps (justified or otherwise) by which human subjects develop their current pragmatically successful scientific theory. But I question whether a pragmatic account of justification can handle responses from more radical pragmatists, who see no pragmatic basis for privileging natural science over other forms of human discourse.

Whatever we say about the adequacy of pragmatic naturalism, my sixth and final chapter argues that it lacks adequate motivation. The putative motivation for pursuing a pragmatic rather than a traditional program stems from the alleged failure of foundationalism and the inevitability of indeterminacy of translation (underpinned by the underdetermination thesis). First, I argue that looking at the wider context of scientific practice challenges the underdetermination thesis, because it thesis relies on a crude and scientifically unrealistic hypothetico-deductivist view of confirmation (the view that hypotheses are always and only confirmed by their empirical consequences). I show how this anti-skeptical strategy can be generalized to resolve other skeptical problems (at least in part): whenever skeptics themselves assume points of science for the sake of *reductio ad absurdum*, anti-skeptics have the logical right to make appeal to further science to show how the *reductio* does not go through. I argue, for instance, that the classical problem of induction can be addressed by appeal to a material rather than a formal theory of induction, which recognizes the variety of methods of confirmation practiced by scientists. Second, I show how regress problems about inductive justification can be resolved in light of evidence from psychology regarding perception and concept-formation which point to the possibility of a new kind of foundationalism. At the same time, I argue that skeptical problems

about epistemological foundations are more philosophical and less scientific than Quine seems to allow. This means we cannot fully generalize his anti-skeptical, but it also means that the proposal to make philosophy continuous with natural science is not consistent with the fact that naturalism itself arises as a pragmatic solution to problems generated by non-naturalistic philosophic presuppositions.