

## **An Analysis of Some Contemporary Alternatives to Traditional Epistemology**

### **Abstract**

In this essay, attempt is made to show that the pre-occupation within traditional epistemology with the search for the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge is inadequate. The assumption here is that traditional epistemologists conceive knowledge as justified true belief (J.T.B). In other words, once these conditions or criteria (i.e truth, belief and justification conditions) are satisfied, then knowledge is obtained or attained. But each of these conditions is fraught with serious problems as pointed out by Edmund Gettier whose three-page article published in 1963 served as a trenchant critique of the traditional (internalist) analysis of knowledge. It is our contention that these initial difficulties and despair with this view prompted some epistemologists to search for an alternative conception which would overcome or ameliorate these problems. These suggested alternatives further reinforce the argument or imperative for intercultural philosophy and/or social epistemology which attempts to integrate philosophical and epistemological traditions into a polylog between various philosophical, epistemological, and cultural systems? such as African epistemology, Japanese logic, Indian thought, and so on. This view is appealing because it is based on the belief that the interdependence of our world? presupposes an adoption of the principle of charity, respect and tolerance for other cultural and conceptual schemes. In other words, no such tradition should claim any privileged or absolute or overarching position over others since they are on a par.

### **Key Terms**

Epistemology, Skepticism, Gettier Problem, Foundationalism, Contextualism.

## **Geleneksel Epistemolojiye Yönelik Bazı Çağdaş Alternatiflerin Analizi**

### **Özet**

Bu makalede, geleneksel epistemolojide bilgiye ilişkin zorunlu ve yeterli koşulların araştırılmasıyla gerçekleştirilen önceki uğraşların yetersiz olduğu

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gösterilmeye çalışılmıştır. Buradaki varsayım, geleneksel bilgi felsefecilerinin bilgiyi, haklılandırılmış doğru inanç (H.D.İ) şeklinde tasarladıklarıdır. Başka bir deyişle, bu ölçüt ya da koşullar (doğruluk, inanç ve haklılandırma koşulları) bir kez gerçekleştirildiğinde bilgi sağlanmış veya elde edilmiş olur. Ancak bu koşulların her biri, 1963 yılında yayımlanan üç sayfalık makalesi ile geleneksel (içselci) bilgi analizinin keskin bir eleştirisini ortaya koyan Edmund Gettier tarafından işaret edildiği gibi ciddi problemlerle doludur. Bizim savımız başta yer alan bu zorlukların ve bu görüşe ilişkin umutsuzluğun, bazı bilgi felsefecilerini bu zorlukların üstesinden gelecek ya da onları iyileştirecek alternatif bir görüş araştırmaya teşvik etmiş olmasıdır. Öne sürülen bu alternatifler, ayrıca kültürler arası felsefeye ve/veya felsefi ve epistemolojik gelenekleri Afrika epistemolojisi, Japon mantığı, Hint düşüncesi v.b. gibi çeşitli felsefi, epistemolojik ve kültürel sistemler arasındaki bir işlev ile birleştirmeye çalışan sosyal epistemolojiye yönelik argümanı ya da buyruğu desteklemektedir. Bu görüş, dünyalarımızın? birbirlerine bağlı oluşunun hayırseverlik, saygı ve diğer kültürel ve kavramsal düzenlere karşı hoşgörü ilkelerini benimsemeyi önceden varsaymasından dolayı çekicidir. Başka bir deyişle, böylesi hiçbir gelenek hepsi eşit düzeyde olduğu için, diğerleri üzerinde mutlak ya da üstün bir konum iddia edemez.

#### Anahtar Terimler

Epistemoloji, Septisizm, Gettier Problemi, Temelcilik, Bağlamcılık.

### I. Introduction

Epistemology (or theory of knowledge) is a core branch of philosophy which studies or focuses essentially on knowledge and justification of beliefs including knowledge origin, scope and certainty. Such questions raised by epistemologists include “what is knowledge”? What is the difference between knowing and having a true belief? What are the criteria for knowledge? What is the relation between knowing and seeing? (Jonathan Dancy 1985:1) It is also a normative discipline which like ethics engages in the business of the evaluation and appraisal of cognitive acts and agent’s beliefs. But epistemology, unlike such disciplines as psychology or sociology which both attempt to describe and explain how we acquire our beliefs?, is primarily concerned with identifying the general principles governing epistemic evaluations and with its meaning and nature (Richard Feldman, 1998: 365)

Evaluation of the agents believes as stated above presupposes that the agent has certain goals or aims. the goal or aim of the epistemic agent or epistemology in general is first the “acquisition of true beliefs and the avoidance of false beliefs. Second, the agent, apart from acquiring beliefs, should be able to provide adequate reasons for thinking that such beliefs are likely to be true”. Thus, According to Jack S. Crumley (1999: xiii – xiv), a general characterization of the aim of epistemology is the identification of the principles of evaluation for our beliefs, with respect to the adequacy of the reason for thinking that beliefs are likely to be true.

Based on this, it is expected that epistemologists should be interested in providing the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge and justified belief”. In

this case knowledge is contrasted with belief or opinion. In other words, beliefs or opinions are ascribed to things for which there is no evidence, while knowledge is backed by evidence or justifiedly warranted. However, a belief is justified and thus becomes a candidate for knowledge if there is good or adequate reason to think that it is true or, at least, likely to be true (ibid: xvi)

## II. Skepticism

Let us consider skepticism no matter how brief because of its importance on the discourse of epistemology. Sometimes we raise skeptical questions in our everyday dealings with other people, especially when we ask such questions: Are you sure that you locked your office? Are you sure that you delivered the message? How do I know that the car will not run out of petrol before getting to the school? These casual sceptical questions relate to the ordinary events or phenomena in the world. Apart from these, there are other skeptical questions in a more technical sense that relate to the concepts of knowledge, justification and rationality as well as beliefs. So skeptical questions predominate in epistemology and has an ancestry that dates back to the pre – Socratic period. There one notices the doubts or reservations expressed by Heraclitus (flux of things), Parmenides (immutability, changeless), Protagoras and Gorgias (relativism), Sextus Empiricus (pyhrronian skepticism). Even within the Socratic period, Plato (world of forms) rejected sense perception as a reliable source of knowledge. In the modern and contemporary times, there emerged Descartes (methodic doubt), Hume (mitigated skepticism, induction) and Gettier (counter – examples) respectively?

Skepticism has many variants and forms, some moderate or liberal?, others extreme or radical. The former grants that certainty in knowledge is attainable if there is good or sufficient reason, the latter denies the possibility of attaining certain knowledge. Thus, skepticism, whichever form, can be defined as a philosophical doctrine which denies that our claims to knowledge, or for that matter, justified belief, are legitimate (Crumley 1999; 1) Now if skepticism is right, then knowledge is atrophied, or as Peter D. Klein (1998: 363) would put it, the requirements for knowledge become so stringent that knowledge becomes impossible to obtain. Since knowledge is the cornerstone or the heart of philosophy, it is necessary to formulate strategies to show that the sceptical position is not wholly adequate and compelling. One way of refuting skeptic's position is to show that it is somehow internally inconsistent. The strategy here is to show that since the sceptic is committed or accepts certain propositions or assumptions, then he cannot consistently deny that we have knowledge or justified belief (Crumley 1999: 20). Another way of putting the same point is to show, following Donald Davidson (1986: 307 – 319) that if we accept that we have beliefs, which the sceptic presumably must concede, then we must also accept that most of our beliefs are true. What these arguments reveal is that a necessary condition of our thinking is that we do indeed have knowledge or justified belief. (Crumley 1999: 20 – 21)

## III. The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge

One interesting thing about the sceptic's position, whether in its early or latter formulation, is to draw the attention of philosophers to the need to strengthen the

concept of knowledge and also separate it from mere true belief, opinion or perception because of their unreliability. Plato is credited to have begun the analysis of knowledge and the need to separate it from other concepts that purport to be knowledge many centuries ago. In his dialogues? and *Theaetetus* (Hamilton and Caines 1961: 1-40) one notices how Socrates, who was asked by his pupil as to why he preferred knowledge to true belief or opinion answered that true belief or opinion is uncertain, unreliable and has the tendency to be false explanation or justification. In other words, there are three elements or criteria noticeable in the traditional (internalist) analysis of knowledge namely; truth, belief and justification.

When all these elements are conjoined, it gives us what is called the traditional analysis or framework of knowledge as justified true belief (JTB) which states that; S (Emeka) knows that P (A. J. Ayer is the author of *The Problem of knowledge*) if and only if,

- i. P is true
- K** ii. S believes that P
- ii. S is justified in believing that p (A. J. Oliver, 1980: 116, R Chisholm, 1977: 1-4)

It should be noted that conditions (i – ii) demand that knowledge should, at minimum, be true belief while condition (iii) stipulates that a necessary condition of knowledge is that the belief be justified or supported by good reasons or evidence. Our concern here is with propositional knowledge (i.e knowing that ) which considers the truth of what a person knows as opposed to other senses like knowing how, which is an ability or skill and knowing by acquaintance, which is familiarity or acquaintance with a state of affairs.

An important feature which should not be shrugged aside in the discussion of the traditional analysis is that it is *internalist* as opposed to *externalism* exemplified by some recent trends in epistemology, particularly those within the naturalistic tradition. By internalism it is meant the view which holds that factors relevant to justification or knowledge must in some way be reflected in the agent's beliefs or cognitive perspective? Such factors, like perceptual experiences, memories, testimony and beliefs must be internal and accessible to the agent by reflection. However externalism, in contrast, reflects the view that the factors necessary for epistemic justification, need not be directly accessible to the agent. In other words, such factors should be external to the agent and capable of "explaining the likely truth of the agent's beliefs". It is the business of epistemology to identify those factors.

The constituent elements namely; truth, belief and justification in the traditional conception when combined yield what is regarded as the acceptable or standard definition of knowledge as justified true belief which, as stated above, emanated from Plato in the ancient period. Interestingly, some modern and contemporary epistemologists like Descartes, Hume and others seem to re-echo that analysis of knowledge with slight modifications though which is further accentuated by Gettier's trenchant critique of the traditional analysis of knowledge as justified true belief.

So, A. J. Ayer's (1956;34) version of the schema of the traditional analysis given above states that,

S knows that P if and only if

- i. P is true
- Q ii. S believes that p
- iii. S has the right to be sure that P

In Ayer's version, we notice a substitution of justification "in condition (iii) in K above for "the right to be sure that p" which seems to strengthen the traditional conception because according to him, the people attributing knowledge to S, are thereby expressing a sort of attitude of approval towards S's belief? (Michael Huemer, 2002: 432).

#### IV. The Gettier Problem

Edmund L. Gettier (1963: 121 – 123) expressed serious doubts about the adequacy of the traditional analysis, in yielding knowledge. In fact, prior to Gettier, the traditional analysis was almost taken as an inviolable or unalterable standard definition of knowledge. However this dogmatic attitude came to a sudden end when Gettier pointed out some loopholes and defects with the traditional analysis arguing that there is nothing sacrosanct about the traditional analysis of knowledge as justified true belief. Gettier provided two counter-examples which are intended to show that the truth condition (i) and justification condition (iii) in K above can be independently satisfied. In other words, "the circumstances that account for an agent's being justified in having a particular belief are not necessarily the circumstances that explain the truth of the belief". (Crumley 1999: 45).

The two counter-examples given by Gettier can be restated thus; suppose that two people applied for a job in a company and suppose that Smith has evidence for the conjunctive propositions,

1. Jones is the man who will get the job and Jones has ten coins in his pocket. Smith is justified in believing (1) since the President or Managing Director of the Company has assured him that Jones will get the job and Smith has counted the coins in Jones pocket to be ten. Now Gettier claims that proposition 1 entails proposition 2 below
2. The man (Emeka) who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket. Gettier further claims that Smith is justified in believing Emeka has ten coin in pocket. However it happens that Smith himself and not Jones will get the job and that he (Smith) has ten coins in his pocket. So Gettier argues that Smith justifiably believes 2 to be true, but that Smith does not know 2 because the case has turned in his favour. What this means is that our justification may be wrong and yet our knowledge is true. According to Gettier justification or evidence is not a sufficient condition for knowledge.

Gettier gave another counter example which is similar to the first one above.

1. Jones owns a Ford car. Smith's justification for believing 3 is that Jones drives a Ford car and that Jones once gave him a ride. Assuming that Smith has a friend called Brown whose where about is unknown to Smith. What Smith did was to propose three disjunctive propositions as follows;
2. Jones owns a Ford car or Brown is in Boston
3. Jones owns a Ford car or Brown is in Barcelona
4. Jones owns a Ford car or Brown lives in Brest-litovsk. Gettier claims that Smith will accept the propositions to be true since the first disjunct, "Jones owns a Ford car" is common to the three propositions. But it was discovered that proposition 5 is correct not because the first disjunction is true but by mere chance. "In this case, Gettier argues that Smith does not know the proposition, 'Jones owns a Ford car or Brown is in Barcelona' even though he believes it, it is true, and he is justified in believing it (Huemer, 2002: 436).

#### **V. Post Gettier – Fourth Condition, Defeasibility Analysis and Causal Theory**

Gettier's refutation of the traditional analysis of knowledge as justified true belief using his hypothetical counter examples spurred philosophers to rise in defence of the traditional conception. There is on the one hand, a group of epistemologists who propose a supplementation of the traditional analysis with the addition of a fourth condition and on the other hand, there are those who propose a replacement of the traditional analysis with something else.

This group of philosophers notably Michael Clark (1963: 46-48), Keith Lehrer and Thomas Paxson (1969: 235 – 237) Marshall Swain (1974: 15 – 25) among others, propose what is now regarded as defeasibility theory". What counts as defeasibility is still begin disputed but roughly speaking, defeasibility theory" holds that the felicitous coincidence in Smith's claim, that Jones owns a ford or Brown is in Barcalona" can be avoided" the reasons which justify the belief are such that they cannot be defeated by further truths" (Peter Klein, 1998: 363)

According to Lehrer and Paxson, a defeater? for S's justification for believing p means, a true proposition that if added to S's evidence, would render S no longer justified in believing P. Essentially, Lehrer argues that whenever justification is defective it is so because it is defeated by some false belief. Hence he formulated his fourth condition as a supplement to the one stated in K above as follows;

- iv. There is no true statement (d) such that if it were to become part of x's justificatory reasoning x would not be completely justified in believing that p? (Lehrer 1970: 125 – 127)

Apart from this, other strategies aimed at reconstructing the traditional analysis include what Dancy (1985: 327 – 36) and Crumley (1999: 49 – 60) call reliability, indefeasibility theory, conclusive reasons, non-false premise view, among others, which require that an agent's justified true belief should be derived from a reliable process and

should be indefeasible. They also demand that the justification for a person's knowledge should not be based on false premise but should rather be based on conclusive reasons. According to Dretske (1978: 11- 13) conclusive reasons simply means that an agent's knowledge should not contain any mistaken belief. For instance, if someone, S, knows a certain proposition P, on the basis of another, K, then K becomes a conclusive reason for S's knowledge of P if and only if K cannot be mistaken. In other words, it is not possible to say that S knows that P is true when in fact K is false.

Now it is something like heroic the attempt to remedy or repair the traditional analysis in order to contain Gettier type cases, but the requirements particularly conclusive reasons, tend to be too stringent such that "knowledge may become a rare phenomenon or commodity", according to Dancy. Again, it is a controversial matter, what constitutes adequate reason for the justification of a belief. Thus disputes and interpretations of "adequacy" or justification condition have torn epistemologists into different camps leading to a formulation of different theories of epistemic justification which will soon become obvious.

## VI. The Regress Argument/Problem

The issue here is that my belief in a certain proposition P is justified only if there is some evidence for it. For example, my belief that the train will not run today is based on the evidence that it rained last night and that whenever it rains the train will usually not run because the tracks will be wet. The regress problem begins to emerge because my belief that the train will not run today, P, should be supported by other justifying beliefs, that it rained last night and that train does not run on wet tracks, Q. Also it is expected that this latter justifying beliefs, must be supported by other justifying beliefs, R, and so on *ad infinitum*. It is assumed that this is what constitutes the regress problem because it moves in a dialectical or circular manner. If the regress problem is allowed then no belief will ever be justified and by extension no knowledge will be attained. This is obviously dangerous for epistemology because it then means that the skeptics are right in denying the possibility of attaining certain knowledge. But implicit in the regress is, that "no belief can be justified unless there is some principled way to end the regress" (Robert Audi, 1988: 86, Richard Fumerton, 1995: 3)

## VII. Foundationalism Versus Coherentism

It is argued that one of the ways to end the regress of justification is the adoption of foundationalist or coherence theories. It is proper then to say that the regress problem is the motivating factor for foundationalism and coherentism. The strategy of foundationalists is to categorize our beliefs. According to foundationalists, basic beliefs are taken to be self-justified and as such do not require support or justification from other beliefs. In other words, basic beliefs are epistemically independent of other beliefs. Non-basic beliefs do require support from other beliefs which are themselves self-evident.

The distinction between basic and non-basic beliefs is well stated by Jonathan Dancy (1985:53) thus;

Our basic beliefs are beliefs which concern the nature of our own sensory states, our own immediate experience such beliefs are able to stand on their own feet, without support from others. Other (non basic) beliefs need support and hence must get it from our beliefs about our sensory states.

Although there is no easy way to define foundationalism, but what is common to all types of foundationalism is the intuition that “certain beliefs are epistemically prior to other beliefs” it is assumed that these basic beliefs do not require support from any other beliefs, but nonetheless serve as the “ultimate doxastic source of the justification of other beliefs (Crumley 1999: 117). In other words, foundationalists attempt to achieve, among other things, the apodictic certainty upon which all other beliefs rest.

The difference between basic or non-inferential and non-basic or inferential beliefs is well stated by Anthony Quinton, (1973:119) when he says;

If any beliefs are to be justified at all... there must be some terminal beliefs that do not give their credibility to others, for a belief to be, it is not enough for it to be accepted, let alone merely entertained, there must be good reasons for accepting it. Furthermore for an inferential belief to be justified the (non-inferential) beliefs that support it must be justified themselves.

Similarly, John Kekes (1977:89) thinks that the epistemological ideal of foundationalism is to being an enquiry with an unassailable foundation'. The history of philosophy (and epistemology) is replete with attempts to provide basic and incorrigible beliefs which provide justification for other beliefs but need no justification themselves. Thus, both rationalism and empiricism are inclined to foundationalism since they tend to provide justification for our beliefs about the external world. In other words both traditions-rationalism and empiricism are foundationalists to the extent that the former argues that justification must be absolutely certain and is derived from a process of reasoning, and the latter claims that justification comes from sense perception.

Rene Descartes (1596 – 1650), a representative of the rationalist school doubted all beliefs he acquired right from childhood, but could however not doubt his existence. He expressed it thus, *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am) Apparently, Descartes' real intention was to establish a permanent foundation for knowledge which is infallible, indubitable, certain and incorrigible. (Descartes 1968: 144–145). Unlike Descartes who was suspicious of every belief, David Hume (1711-1776) a representative of the empiricist tradition, believes that certain features of the external world are indeed true. He argues that our reasons and the methods by which we acquire those beliefs about the world must be adequate (Hume 1975: 54 – 44). Barry Stroud (1977: - 60) maintains that Hume can be interpreted as saying that a belief is justified only if there is some justifying reason to think that the belief is true. However this justifying reason must be supported by other justifying reasons, that are adequate and derived from sense experience.

So the rationalist and empiricist philosophers were foundationalists to the extent that they seek to ground knowledge on an absolutely certain foundation, although through different routes. The strongest criticism against foundationalism is the denial of the notion of basic beliefs which are thought to be infallible or self-justified and in need of no further justification. Most critics namely; W.V. O. Quine (1953); Wilfrid Sellars (1963); Karl Popper (1963) have argued that there are no basic beliefs? that are immune



to revision. And once the notion of basic beliefs which are “epistemically independent of other beliefs” is rejected, then foundationalist structure of justification collapses.

Opposed to foundationalism is the coherence theory of justification which is simply the view that the justification of a belief derives from the coherence of an agent’s beliefs’ (Crumley 1999: 121). Although coherence theorists quarrel amongst themselves in specifying, what exactly ‘system of beliefs’ mean, but a key feature of their theory is first the denial that any beliefs are epistemically independent of other beliefs, and second the acceptance of the view that justification derives from the mutual support among an agent’s beliefs (ibid). It is important to remark that there is a subtle difference between Laurence Bonjour’s and Keith Lehrer views on this. The former holds a more global or holistic view of coherence and the later construes coherence as a relational property?. According to Bonjour, an agent should be epistemically responsible. By epistemic responsibility or legitimacy, he meant the ability of the epistemic agent to adduce reasons for thinking that his belief is true or is likely to be true, failing which, according to Bonjour, is;

To neglect the pursuit of truth... my contention here is that the idea of avoiding such irresponsibility, of being epistemically responsible in one’s believing, is the core of the notion of epistemic justification. (Bonjour 1985:8)

We now turn to Lehrer’s account of coherence theory of justification. Here the three elements in his account are acceptance, an acceptance system, and comparative responsibility which, taken together, describe a situation when

A person accepts a proposition if he is in a certain kind of functional state which typically arises when a person reflectively judges that P with the objective of judging that P if and only if P. (Lehrer, 1974: 10)

Thus Lehrer’s theory of justification boils down to saying that justified acceptance arises when, relative to what else a person accepts, a proposition is comparatively, more reasonable than any of its epistemic competitors (Crumley 1999: 141). The main criticism against the coherentist theory of justification is that is too liberal or tolerant and at the sametime too conservative or rigid. According to the theory “a belief is justified so long as it is related in a certain way to the agent’s other beliefs.” The problem here is that any belief could qualify as justified so long as it is connected or “related to the agent’s other beliefs”. Again it may be asked; how is it possible to distinguish between beliefs held by a scientific community from those held by charlatans? Besides, it might be difficult for a person to readily drop or accept fresh evidence in the face of conflict with already held beliefs (ibid:146).

### VIII. Alternatives

One deep problem with the traditional normative account of knowledge, as some critics have suggested, is that there are no invariant rules or criteria of knowledge contrary to the claims of? traditional epistemologists. In other words, there is “no fixed set of conditions” that an epistemic agent must satisfy in order to count as knowing a proposition. What is needed, according to some philosophers, is to search for an

alternative epistemological framework that would either replace or take care of the pitfalls of traditional normative (internalist) account of knowledge. Some philosophers, like Quine and Goldman, have proposed theories within the naturalistic (externalist) tradition as alternatives to traditional epistemology. Yet others have suggested that justification which is a key but problematic element of knowledge, be contextualised and socialized.

The issues here are that questions of knowledge and justification can no longer be addressed within the normative tradition, but are better tackled within the naturalistic tradition. Roughly speaking, naturalism here simply suggests that questions which are central to epistemology can now be constructed as natural objects. In other words, there is an attempt to understand epistemology and questions of justification in a descriptive form as continuous with science. Thus epistemology in this new naturalised formulation is what Hilary Kornblith (1980: 601) refers to as “psychological turn”. In other words, those who propose this new approach, particularly W.V.O Quine and Alvin Goldman, argue that questions about the justification of belief cannot be treated in isolation to questions about a belief’s causal ancestry.

### **IX. W.V.O. Quine – Epistemology Naturalised**

The starting point of Quine’s (1969:84) critique of traditional epistemology is his now celebrated essay “Epistemology Naturalised” where he rejected the pretensions of traditional epistemology to be what he calls first philosophy – a term Quine took to mean the attempt by traditional epistemologists to identify principles or rules with which to justify our beliefs about the world independently of the empirical sciences. Quine claims that the three key features of traditional epistemology namely; autonomy, a priori and normative characters as well as the assumption that they are basic beliefs which infallibly justify our knowledge of the world are misleading and ill-motivated.

According to Quine the functions, subject matter and methodology of epistemology can be appropriately served if we naturalise epistemology and conduct it from within accepted scientific theory (Papineau 1982: 128-142). On this, Quine States;

...epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science. It studies natural science. It studies a natural phenomenon, viz; a physical human subject. This human subject is accorded a certain experimentally controlled input – certain patterns of irradiation in assorted frequencies... (Quine 1969: 75 76)

The point here, on Quine’s view, is to abandon the image of traditional epistemology as the foundation of knowledge as it is expressed by Descartes and to reconstruct it instead using the resources of cognitive psychology. The consequence, according to Quine, is a kind of “reciprocal containment” of science and epistemology within each other. In other words, the tools of science are deployed to construct an epistemological framework, which can afterwards be used to criticize and evaluate science. This seems to plunge Quine in a sort of vicious circularity. However he defends his position by using “Neurath’s metaphor of sailors” who have to repair their boat

while afloat. In other words, “ we have to keep the boat of science generally intact while we examine it and repair such parts as we find defective” (Dancy, 1985:234).

### **X. Alvin Goldman – Reliabilism**

Goldman, like Quine discussed above, claims that questions about the justification of a belief cannot be addressed independently of natural order or facts. Goldman took his causal theory and reliabilism as ways of accounting for knowledge and justification thus a belief is justified if it is a consequence of a reliable belief forming process . Goldman (1967: 369; 1979: 1-2 ; 1988: 63 – 64;; 1992: 10 – 13) is committed to a naturalistic epistemology in that he believes that epistemic evaluations are not autonomous, that is, are not independent of the natural order or environment.

Crumley (1999: 210) summaries Goldman’s naturalistic epistemology thus;

Common to Quine... and Goldman is the claim that epistemic properties are not some special sort of property independent of the natural order. Justification enters the world by way of natural properties whether these are causal relations, types of cognitive process or some other natural factual property.

One problem with Goldman’s view is that epistemic properties seem to be complex and again the question of how to connect the epistemic and natural properties may arise. But despite this, there is a sense in raising the issue of naturalised epistemology, one of which is to understand “our epistemic activities within a generally naturalistic out look” (ibid; 216).

### **XI. Contextualism – David Annis and Others**

Another emerging theory of justification is contextualism. Contextualism as a theory of justification arose in opposition to foundationalist and coherentist theories discussed above, because they tend to invoke universal and invariant rules which would account for all beliefs.

David Annis (1978: 213 – 219) a strong but not necessarily the only advocate of contextualism, argues that foundationalism and coherentism fail as theories of justification because they ignore “the actual social practise and norms of justification of a culture or community of people” relevant to justification. The contextualists seem to anchor their argument on the fact that man is a social animal? according to Aristotle and as such the socio-cultural parameters within the contours of his existential situation should be taken into consideration in the justification of a belief. This point is summarized thus;

Man is a social animal, and yet when it comes to the justification of beliefs philosophers tend to ignore this fact. But this is one contextual parameter that no adequate theory of justification can overlook. According to contextualist model of justification ... when asking whether some person S is justified in believing h, we must consider this relative to some specific issue –context which determines the level of understanding and knowledge required. (Annis, 1993: 282)

The point here then is that justification of a belief cannot proceed independently of the norms, social and cultural practices of the epistemic community. The basic objection to this theory is the charge of relativism. That is an important issue like knowledge and justification cannot be left to the judgment of the community which sometimes is erroneous. The key features of contextual theory have been stated before by scholars like Thomas Kuhn-philosopher of science and now championed by post-modernist thinkers.

## **XII. Richard Rorty-Pragmatism and Social Consensus**

Another contemporary philosopher whose writings cannot be ignored in any discussion of epistemology is Richard Rorty. The starting point of his critique of philosophy is the foundationalist epistemology which he traced to Plato and culminating the writings of Descartes and Kant amongst others. According to Rorty (1980: 58 – 59) the essential features of their writings is the image of philosophy as a cultural overseer whose task is the investigation and adjudication of the cognitive or knowledge-claims of the sciences and other disciplines. The attempt by these philosophers to essentialise and universalise the notions of rationality, justification and belief is a misguided venture because knowledge has no essences. Rather knowledge is contingent on the community. Thus, Rorty argues, adopting a pragmatist position, that truth is relative to societal agreements. In other words, someone's belief is justified if and only if it is warranted by the epistemic norms of the community. The idea here is that justification is not an abstract and universal property, but a matter of social consensus and practices prevalent in a society. In other words an epistemic agent does not need to invoke any rules in order to justify a belief but only sees how his belief coheres with a certain social practice, a language game, world-view within a particular community.

The usual objection against Rorty is akin to those leveled against relativism. It is alleged that cross-cultural communication and dialogue is almost impossible if Rorty's position is allowed. However, Rorty counters this charge by saying that,

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 ... (Rorty 1980<sup>b</sup>: 727 – 728)

What emerges from our discussion of Rorty is that there is no one way of explaining the world, but different and diverse ways.

## **XIII. African Epistemology**

Some African philosophers have proposed that there is an African epistemology. By this, it means that there is a way of knowing that is uniquely African: This view is criticised and rejected by some analytic African philosophers who argue that ascribing a unique epistemological 'mindset' to the Africans does not pulsate with the lived experiences of Africans (Udefi 2006, 74).

The starting point or premise on which those African philosophers, particularly K.C. Anyanwu, I. C. Onyewuenyi and others based their argument for a distinctive or

unique African epistemology is the proposition that each race is endowed with a distinctive nature and embodies in its civilization, a particular spirit (Abiola Irele, 1981; 70)

Since, according to them, there are different mindsets, namely; Western mindset and African mindset, it would be presumptuous to assess African thought on the criteria developed within the context of Western cultures. They seem to reject any kind of cross-cultural analyses, rather it is their contention that how each culture interprets experiences can be explained by uncovering those assumptions and concepts which underline its experience and world-view.

For the protagonists of African epistemology, the dichotomy or lacuna that is said to exist between the epistemic subject and the object in the Western philosophy is absent in African thought. In fact there is some kind of interdependence and interpenetration of the self (man) and the external world, such that what happens to the one, happens to the other. This point is stated by Anyanwu thus;

The self vivifies or animates the world or mind so that the soul, spirits or mind of the self is also that of the world. The order of the world and that of the self are identical. What happens to the world happens to the self. (Ruch and Anyanwu, 1981; 87).

According to Anyanwu the relation is not accidental, since in African culture, there is no sharp distinction between the subject and object. He argues, instead, that within the African cultural or historical situation, the self is the center of the world and hence every experience and reality are personal experience unlike the impersonal and scientific experience of the West. The kind of personal experience which Anyanwu alludes to here transcends reason, imagination, feeling and intuition in the sense in which Descartes used them as sources of knowledge. However, African epistemology, according to him, embraces all experiences derivable from different sources of knowledge namely; sense perception, imagination, intuition, reason, among others. The inability of Anyanwu to separate or categorize experience with reference to the source of knowledge even when the subject and the object remain the same exposes him to attack (Roy; 1986: 3).

But the anticipated problem is ameliorated since Anyanwu holds a holistic view of knowledge which presupposes a unity of experience and in tune with African cultural assumption where “reality depends on personal experience and the world has meaning, order and unity by virtue of the living experience of the ego” (Anyanwu, 1983, 60).

The notion of epistemological monism implicit in the views of the protagonists of African epistemology might create the impression that the African cannot draw a line between himself and other objects in the external world. But on the contrary, the African knows that there is a distinction between him and other objects like trees, mountains, stones and wood. On this point, Anyanwu says;

Because everything is a vital force or shares in this force, the African feels and thinks that all things are similar, share the same qualities and nature. (But) it does not mean that the African does not know the distinction between a tree and a goat, a bird and a man. (Ruch and Anyanwu; 1981; 90)

Also, it is important to note that both the experiencing self, the object of experience and the cluster of forces intervening in the act of knowing in Africa is governed by the law of causation. Even though the African may not attempt to seek a rational explanation in all things like the Western man with a scientific cast of mind, he (African) is not impervious to such rational causal explanation. For instance, the African adduces a physicalistic explanation to explain the cause of a certain illness just like the Western man. However, in some cases he supplements these explanation with a reference to divinities, magic, witchcraft and other mystical powers.

The advocates of a unique African epistemology, it should be noted, anchored their argument on a prior conception of philosophy which they view more contextually, that is, as expressions of the world-views and thought patterns of specific cultures. (Van Hook, 1999; 12) In other words, they discountenance the notion of a single philosophy which is commonly or universally valid for all societies and cultures at all times. Put differently they contend that the historical – cultural moorings of philosophical ideas and proposals are sufficient evidence of their particularity and of the inappropriateness of applying them universally to other cultures or societies (Gyekye, 2004; 21).

#### XIV. Conclusion

Let us tie together our discussion so far by saying that the traditional epistemologist's attempt to invoke a set of rules or criteria for the justification of a belief is inadequate. The problems of the justification condition and the vicious circularity associated with foundationalism generated some frustration and suspicion amongst epistemologists. This perhaps motivated the interest of others to search for alternatives to traditional epistemology. Beginning with Quine and culminating in Rorty, there is need to reformulate epistemology or to abandon it altogether. One consequence of a rejection of the traditional picture of knowledge is that there are no trans-cultural criteria of knowledge and rationality. Rather what counts as knowledge, justification and rationality is what any particular epistemic community approves. A further implication of this is that some "marginalized" and sparsely treated concepts like feminist epistemology, social epistemology, Indian theory of knowledge, African epistemology can now be reasonably and fruitfully discussed.

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