

Concluding Remarks

Section I

In the context of this dissertation our objective has been to address the foremost problem in epistemology, the issue of justification. Even after all most a death blow suffered by epistemology from what is called the “Gettier-problem, epistemology has arisen from the ashes. That truth, belief and justification are the necessary conditions of knowledge, even when their sufficiency is called into question. That is testified by the profusion of literature on justification itself..

Ours is the issue of justification mainly but in a different fashion. There are different concepts and theories of justification. In the context of the present work, our principle quest has been attempting a reconciliation of the competing claims of foundationalism and coherentism as theories of epistemic justification.

Foundationalism has an ancient lineage having its origin in the philosophy of Aristotle. It regards some beliefs as ultimate or foundational. The rationale is to avoid infinite regress and vicious circularity. It conceives knowledge on the metaphor of a building with a base structure and the super structure. A discussion of the nature of the basic beliefs and how they support the non-basic beliefs is an inalienable part of any foundational theory. Coherentism also has its origin in the British and German idealism. Interrelations and interconnections of beliefs within a system is the key feature of coherentism. The former falls back on experience as grounding

our basic beliefs and the latter speaks of the justification of beliefs by other beliefs only. Nothing can be a justifier of beliefs except other beliefs. This has become a bone of contention between the foundationalist and coherentists today. These have given rise to other problems. Hence, in the contemporary scenario, there is no need to understand foundationalism along Aristotelian, Cartesian, or Classical empiricist lines, any more than coherentism must be taken to be a kind of idealism. Both are rooted partly in these traditions, but each has outgrown its initial confines.

The two theories of justification as we have studied them are needless to say, opposed to each other. Yet, the basic contention of each remains quite plausible. This we have undertaken to show. There is a strong lure to forge a compromise between the two. We have been motivated to articulate an intermediate style of theory. Philosophers have dropped hints and suggestions but a fully articulated theory incorporating the insights of both did not emerge on the scene until the publication of Susan Haack's book, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*. In my reflections on the position I have concentrated on what the position is and on the extent to which it stands in need of further articulation and defence. What is important in her venture is the causal role of experiences, in the causal production of beliefs which seems decisive for their status as evidence. The causal role of beliefs has been derided by non-foundationalists, not necessarily of the coherentist persuasion. By accommodating the causal factor in justification she has taken a step towards reconciliation between these two rival theories. It is also to be noted how Haack's attempt at transcending the classical dichotomy in the theory of justification is interwoven with issues in general theory of content. Haack, of

course, did not really discuss deeply what experiences are, and what use we can make of them when justifying beliefs, and whether or not experiences can be justified by a perceptual belief which again is justified by a general belief about the functioning of one's sense organs. However, that may be, Haack makes a great number of distinctions between the various possible positions within the two main camps, and she gives a number of good arguments against the various positions. The argument she exhibit is what she recognizes as adequacy condition on a theory of justification, be it foundationalist, coherentist or any other sort. Her approach is not guilty of parochialism or "tribalism" because her concern is not limited to develop a double-aspect theory incorporating what is good and leaving out what is not so good in foundationalism and coherentism, but to address some basic issues in philosophy. As human beings we are prone to react in a similar manner when we are exposed to the world, however minimalist that similarity in reaction might be. We do not confront the world as a foundationalist or a coherentist. The two tendencies are mixed up in our commerce with the world. In the climate of many recent and contemporary positions in epistemology developed by views of Dennett, Stich, Rorty, the Churchlands, and several other writers, Haack's purpose is to defend "the legitimacy of epistemology". Epistemology is no longer confined to the classroom but has become a vital subject of concern in many academic and intellectual quarters. In the humanities and social sciences, in literary, historical, and political theory, issues of justification, of objectivity and truth, evidence and belief reverberate among the contesting points of view. What Haack has tried to achieve is not merely bringing the two contesting positions closer, but a larger reconstruction in epistemology, involving basic epistemic questions regarding a reconstruction in epistemology in an

extended sense, a deeper defense of rationality and of inquiry of attaining and understanding knowledge. Justification is not attributed to individual beliefs or to persons but to the working of a belief-habit or rule as productive of a warranting of true beliefs. She draws a line between the concepts of “the conduct of inquiry” and “criteria of justification”. Her defense of the “truth-indicative” criteria of foundherentism seems to me to be a solution of the problem faced by the coherentists, whether justification is truth-indicative.

Section II

Epistemology as we study it today is overwhelmingly dominated by the Anglo-American philosophers. Consequently, the issues in epistemology revolve around the problems conceived and developed by them. The theory of knowledge developed in the continent is hardly taken notice of. The theories of justification we are familiar with are sometimes personal/subjective relating to the preference or acceptance systems of the subject. Or it may be impersonal, the issue being, when a belief is justified, it being divorced from any context or individual. The belief is regarded as an objective entity. I am tempted to demure if giving justification can be regarded as an inter-personal affair. One justifies or gives justification when he enters into an argumentative discourse. Giving justification or justifying is not exclusive a logical process but is part of a communication. In the actual world and in any possible world, where there are human beings they will enter into argumentative discourse. The evidence in epistemology is evidence accompanying judgments, e. g., perceptual judgments, intuitive judgments, etc. in some individual consciousness. But it is not possible to

conceive evidence as evidence for an individual consciousness. I may hold something to be evident that, in fact, is nothing but a whim on my part. Therefore, justification requires inter-subjective evidence.

Although the evidential consciousness that is always mine does not guarantee the inter-subjective validity of knowledge. Still the argumentative redemption of claims to validity must refer back ultimately to that evidence which can, in principle, ultimately be validated by every single member of the interpretation community in his or her evidential consciousness.

What I am wondering at is whether there is possibility of developing a theory of justification within the broad framework of communicative action developed by Habermas in his theory of communicative action. In communicative action the actors coordinate their actions and pursuit of individual goals on the basis of a shared understanding that the goals are inherently reasonable and meritworthy. It makes cooperative action plausible. The concept of communicative action cannot be elucidated unless we take speech as a model. To understand one another is possible only when we know what kind of reason the speaker has for convincing his hearer. In other words, the speaker and the hearer understand one another when the validity of the utterances each engage in is accepted. Tying up speech acts to the process of reason-giving means claims are open to justification and criticism. In everyday speech we, as speakers, tacitly commit ourselves to explaining and justifying. Indeed one should have some sense of the response that would justify one's speech act, were one called upon to do so. When the hearer takes on affirmative position towards the claim of the speaker we succeed in reaching understanding. When the offer made in the

speaker's claim fail to secure uptake the speaker and the hearer can shift from the level of ordinary language to discourse.

Discourse involves processes of argumentation, and dialogue in which the claims implicit in the speaker's utterance are tested for their rational justifiability as true, correct and authentic. Our utterances as speakers have a rational force. The speaker, in performing a speech act, is able to 'motivate' the hearer to accept the offer contained in his utterance, and thereby to accede to a rationally motivated binding force. That means to explain what it means to understand an utterance is to explain the communicative intent of the speaker. And as we understand a speech act we know what makes it acceptable. I think justifying or giving justification may be treated as speech acts.

We conclude these remarks with the expectations that a theory of justification can be formulated in consonance with inter-subjective understanding through the use of language.