

## Chapter V

### TOWARDS NEW HORIZON

In the foregoing chapters we have made an attempt to understand and evaluate Alvin Goldman's causal account of knowledge and the subsequent modifications proposed by him. We have not so far taken up a question which is lurking in Goldman's causal-reliabilist account. It is about Goldman's manner of determining the traditional approach to epistemology. It has been said that Goldman's approach to epistemology, his manner of doing it, gradually veers towards what is known nowadays as naturalized epistemology. What, then, is naturalized epistemology? What it might be to naturalize epistemology? To naturalize epistemology would be (a) to be specific about what kinds of cognitive processes are at work. This may mean, for example, adverting to aspects of contemporary cognitive theory, such as the computational model of mind, and (b) to show how these specific cognitive processes interact with the context of the epistemic agent.

We owe this conception of naturalized epistemology to W.V.O. Quine who treats knowledge as a natural phenomenon, to be studied by the procedures of science. Most of Quine's own work in epistemology is an articulation and defense of this very general conception. Knowledge consists in tracing connections between theory and evidence in psychologically realistic fashion, to see how our knowledge is, in fact, related to the evidence we have. Epistemology of this kind is thus a branch of psychology.

Let us look back to what the traditional problems of epistemology are. When Plato tried to distinguish in the *Theaetetus* between mere belief and knowledge, as an attempt to answer the skeptical doubts concerning the possibility of knowledge of the external world, he created, we may say, what has come to be known throughout the history of philosophy as epistemology, the main concern of which is to determine the nature, the scope, the sources of human knowledge. These problems, which are known as the traditional problems are to be determined, according to the traditional approach, by using conceptual, logical, definitional analysis, not by any empirical investigation. Such a view of epistemology is rejected partially or wholly in different ways and for various reasons by the recent trend known as 'naturalized epistemology.'<sup>1</sup>

The source of much of the recent interest in naturalized epistemology is W.V.O. Quine.<sup>2</sup> According to Quine, epistemology can be restricted to science. Quine, who is a staunch supporter of naturalized epistemology, holds that it simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence, of natural science. It studies a natural human phenomenon, viz., a physical human subject. A conspicuous difference between old epistemology and the epistemological enterprise in this new psychological setting is that we can now make free use of empirical psychology. To quote his words:

The old epistemology aspired to contain, in a sense, natural science; it would construct it somehow from sense data. Epistemology in its new setting, conversely, is contained in natural science, as a chapter of psychology. But the old containment remains valid too; in its way. We are studying how the human subject of our study posits bodies and projects this physics from his data, and we appreciate that our position

in the world is just like his. Our very epistemological enterprise, therefore, and the psychology wherein it is a component chapter, and the whole of natural science wherein psychology is a component book – all this is our own construction or projection from stimulations like those we were meting out to our epistemological subject. There is thus reciprocal containment, though containment in different senses, epistemology in natural science and natural science in epistemology.<sup>3</sup>

The above implies at least two things: (1) Eliminating traditional epistemology as an inquiry into the nature, the limit and the sources of knowledge in favour of science or psychology. By doing psychology, i.e. by discovering the processes by which we actually arrive at the belief we ought to<sup>4</sup> because the processes by which we arrive at the latter beliefs are just the same as those by which we arrive at the former. After psychology nothing is left for epistemology. (2) The problem of justification is answered from within science, is given a naturalistic account. “We gave up trying to justify our knowledge of the external world by rational reconstruction”<sup>5</sup>. Elsewhere he says, “Justification is not dropped, it is neutralized”<sup>6</sup>

Naturalization in philosophy has a long and distinguished heritage. There have been attempts in philosophy to assimilate problems of philosophy to science. The logical positivists talked of “the unity of sciences”. That science is a unity, for Carnap, means that all empirical statements can be expressed in a single language, all states of affairs are of the one kind, and are known by the same method. Following Otto Neurath, he argues that this fundamental language is the language of physics in which all the propositions of science that are to be tested by reference to experience, can be formulated. The unity of science is, then, due, not only to the unity of the method they

all use, but also due to the unity of the object, i.e., yielding empirical knowledge of the world. Karl Popper also asserted in *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* that the main problem of epistemology is and has always been the growth of knowledge. He seeks to refocus the problem of knowledge as the problem of the growth of knowledge. The recent trend of naturalized epistemology is restricted to doing science. After psychology, nothing is left over for epistemology. As it has been put by Hillary Kornblith, Quine claims that, having encouragement in Darwin, nature has endowed us with a predisposition for believing truths, and that we arrive at belief in just the way we ought to, what we need is only to discover the processes by which we ought to arrive at beliefs, because in this way we discover at the same time the processes by which we ought to arrive at beliefs. Then the epistemological enterprise will be replaced by empirical psychology.<sup>7</sup> Quine does not want the question of justification as the original problem to be dropped from epistemology but only to be naturalized. For Quine, the scientific knowledge is the nature, the scope and the limit of knowledge. Beyond the scientific facts or outside science, we cannot hope to get knowledge. The source of knowledge, as he states explicitly, is the combination of the subjective and the objective, i.e., "The contribution of the world and the contribution of the knowing or perceiving subject". Quine's naturalized epistemology, in this way, seems to give an answer to the traditional question of epistemology: how is knowledge possible?

## II

What is Goldman's connection to this recent trend in epistemology? Goldman focuses on the notion of epistemic justification in terms of psychological processes. His thesis in this respect is known as the thesis of reliabilism. This represents the naturalized epistemologists' answer to the question of justification. And his paper

“What is Justified Belief?” has been printed in a recent anthology on naturalized epistemology, edited by Hilary Kornblith which has been made mention by us. Goldman’s solution to the Gettier problem is a radical one in that it abandons the idea that knowledge requires evidence or justification, and tries to explain knowledge as true belief which satisfies some causal or reliability condition. Reliability is what he adds to true beliefs instead of evidence or justification. Goldman came to hold such a view several years before he published “Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge”. And defends this view in “What is Justified Belief?”

Though Goldman was not explicitly discussing naturalism in this paper, the things he mentions are pointers to the interpretation his theory receives. He suggests that the crucial things about sentences using the terms like ‘justified’, ‘warranted’, ‘has(good) grounds’, ‘has reason (to believe)’, ‘knows that,’ ‘sees that’, ‘apprehends that’, ‘is probable’(in an epistemic sense), etc., seems to do more than merely describing how things are. They say how something is to be evaluated from an epistemological perspective.<sup>8</sup> He provides a list of non-epistemic terms: believes that, is true, causes, it is necessary that, implies, is deducible from, is probable (either in a frequency or in a propensity sense)<sup>9</sup>. He says, “In general, (purely), doxastic, metaphysical, modal, semantic or syntactic expressions are not epistemic.”<sup>10</sup> According to him, if epistemic terms are to make any sense at all, they must be understood in terms of items such as those on the list of non-epistemic terms. This is in contrast to the traditional epistemologists who formulate their analysis using evaluative terms.

In place of evidentiary support for justification, Goldman supplies the causal-reliabilist account. The simplest version of the causal theory says that a belief *p* is

justified when the fact p is causally connected with the belief that p. This theory invokes facts, beliefs and causal connections – all terms acceptable to the naturalist. When he speaks of reliabilism, he speaks of terms which are naturalistically respectable causal terms only and are not committed to any troubling non-naturalism. In fact, Goldman compares his project to naturalism in ethics, in which evaluative terms are defied naturalistically in terms of pleasure or happiness.<sup>11</sup>

The most obvious place where psychology matters in the reliability enterprise is the identification and evaluation of believing processes. It is psychology which tells us what processes cause our beliefs and it is psychology which enables us to judge their reliability. Philosophically, we can say that the belief (if justified and true) is knowledge if it was caused in a suitably reliable way. The question whether it was caused in such a way, however, is a question for empirical science.

Goldman's approach to epistemic justification is also reliabilist and grounded in science. The core of his view is that justification is at least partly a matter of beliefs' being produced by reliable cognitive processes. Goldman has made many modifications of his view and he has worked out its details in various ways at different times. However, in one of his early papers, he comes out vividly on his views on epistemology naturalized. In the concluding paragraph of "A Causal Theory of Knowing" Goldman vindicates the naturalized approach.

The analysis presented here flies in the face of a well-established tradition in philosophy, the view that epistemological questions are questions of logic or justification, not causal or genetic questions. These traditional views, however, must not go unquestioned. Indeed, I think my analysis shows that the question of whether someone knows a certain proposition is, on part, a causal question...<sup>12</sup>

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The causal-reliabilist approach is further pushed forward in “ Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge.” Goldman contrasts his analysis with the Cartesian perspective in epistemology as overintellectualized and thereby leaves open the possibility of naturalization. In a revealing passage of the paper, he says as follows:

The trouble with many philosophical treatments of knowledge is that they are inspired by Cartesian like conception of justification or vindication. There is a consequent tendency to intellectualize or overrationalize the notion of knowledge. In the spirit of naturalized epistemology, I am trying to fashion an account of cognitive life, in connection with which, I believe, the term ‘know’ gets its application. A fundamental facet of animal life, both human and infra-human, is telling things apart, distinguishing predator from prey, for example, or a protective habitat from a threatening one. The concept of knowledge has its roots in this kind of cognitive activity.<sup>13</sup>

The above shows that what cases of knowledge, whether perception or inference or reasoning has in common in a relational process, it has to do with how our beliefs are produced. Epistemology is not so much concerned with coming forward with adequate defense, good reason, or justification in favour of belief. “Instead, what

is required is a certain sensitivity to features of the environment. Our cognitive processes result in knowledge when they manifest a stable disposition to produce beliefs which are an accurate reflection of the agent's environment."<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps, because of this in Goldman's view, it is necessary also to construct a theory of what epistemic justification really is, as opposed to how commonsense takes it to be. The theory will be grounded in our psychological understanding of how beliefs are formed and it will include assessment of these processes in terms of reliability. To be 'suitably reliable' a belief-forming process must have a greater propensity to produce more true beliefs than false ones and the process' own causal ancestry must have a greater propensity to produce reliable processes than unreliable ones. Though Goldman argues for this view of knowledge on primarily a-priori grounds, e.g., by considering how well it captures our intuitive classifications of beliefs as cases of knowledge or not, the theory itself gives empirical science an important place in our understanding of knowledge. Goldman's naturalism is the view that epistemology need help from sciences, specially psychology. He says:

...to find out whether we know, we need to ascertain the properties of our cognitive processes. This is where psychology enters the picture. Psychology can (in principle) tell us about the nature of our cognitive processes. When these processes are spelled out, we can try to determine their possibility.<sup>15</sup>

Again,

... psychology is needed not merely to tell us whether we do know. The reliability-process theory of knowing entails the logical possibility of knowledge, but it does not entail that knowledge is humanly possible. It is humanly possible only if humans have suitable cognitive equipment. And this is something which we can best be appraised only with the help of psychology.<sup>16</sup>

The important point that Goldman says is that knowledge is regarded as a human phenomenon and not something of purely conceptual concern. However, unlike Quine, Goldman is concerned with such traditional epistemological problems as developing an adequate theoretical understanding of knowledge, justified belief, and truth. Also, in contrast to Quine, He does not see epistemology as part of science. Instead, Goldman thinks that answering traditional epistemological questions requires both *apriori* philosophy and the application of scientific results. To distinguish his position from Quine, he says:

In saying whether we do or can know depends on psychological facts, I partially concur with Quine when he says that "skeptical doubts are scientific" doubts. But my agreement is only partial. Some routes to skepticism arise from concern over the propriety of crediting someone with knowledge if certain logically possible alternatives cannot be excluded. The best way to counter this skeptical maneuver is through a satisfactory analysis of knowledge, not through psychology or other branches of science<sup>17</sup>

Hence we cannot perhaps say that he was an unmitigated naturalist in epistemology. However, in his later works like *Liaisons: Philosophy Meets the Cognitive and Social Sciences*, he has engaged himself with the relation of cognitive sciences to philosophy and sociology of epistemology.<sup>18</sup> It is relevant in this connection the words of Kornblith:

It seems that investigation into knowledge must take place at a number of different levels. We must examine the various psychological mechanisms by which knowledge is produced and retained in order to see what, if anything they have in common. ... In addition, as many have argued, there seems to be an important social element in knowledge. In many of the most central cases, social factors play a role in the production, retention, and dissemination of knowledge. Investigation of these social factors is likely to reveal features of knowledge that are easily overlooked in the investigation of the psychological mechanisms of individual knows.<sup>19</sup>

## Notes and References:

1. A very good detailed survey of naturalized epistemology has been that of J. Maffie, "Recent Works on Naturalized Epistemology", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 27, No. 4, 2002, pp.281-293.
2. W.V.O.Quine, in "Epistemology Naturalized", 1969, reprinted in *Naturalizing Epistemology*, ed. H. Kornblith, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1985.
3. *Ibid.*, pp.23-24.
4. *Ibid.*, p.5
5. *Ibid.*, p.25.
6. Quine, "Reply to Lauener", in *Perspectives on Quine*, eds. R. Barret and R. Gibson, Basil Blackwell, 1990, p.229.
7. Hilary Kornblith, ed. "Naturalizing Epistemology", in *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, Cambridge, MIT press, 1985, p.5.
8. Alvin Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?", in *Justification and Knowledge*, G. Pappas ed., D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1979, pp.1-2.
9. *Ibid.*, p.2.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p.1.
12. Alvin Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowing", *The Journal of Philosophy*, 24, 1967, p.372.
13. Alvin Goldman, "Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge", *The Journal of Philosophy*, 73, 1976, pp.790-791.
14. Hilary Kornblith, "In Defense of a Naturalized Epistemology", in Greco and Sosa, eds., *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, 1999, p.162.

15. Alvin Goldman, "Knowledge" in *Epistemology and Cognition*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1986, p.57.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Liaisons: Philosophy Meets the Cognitive and Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992.
19. Hilary Kornblith, *op.cit.*, p162.