REFLECTION ON QUINE'S *NATURALISED EPISTEMOLOGY*[*]

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Many contemporary thinkers have attempted to equate Quine's naturalised epistemology with instrumentalism. However, Quine has a strong reservation to think in this way. For Quine, realism is a broad philosophical school and it has various philosophical implications. However, he claims that his understanding of naturalised epistemology may be equated with a very specific form of realism what he calls*robust realism.* Thus, Quine's theory of naturalised epistemology is praiseworthy for philosophical consideration because it not only appears as a rival theory of classical or traditional epistemology but also appears as dogma-free philosophical theory. It thus holds the central position of modern philosophical analysis.

Quine is known as the best analytic philosophers of the second half of 20th century. His position and contribution in the sphere of analytic philosophy is ground-breaking. His celebrated article "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" brings a strong message against the established theories. In this paper, Quine criticises Kant's concept of analytic proposition as well as Carnap's concept of reductionism. Quine also develops conceptual relativism that goes against Kant and Strawson as well. Strawson, with the influence of Kant, talks in favour of a unified core of conceptualism. Quine rejects it. Instead of that, he talks in favour of conceptual relativism. Having said this, his philosophy of language as a whole is either underestimated or misinterpreted. Even many philosophers and commentators have failed to understand how Quine's views hang together to form a coherent whole. Quine's perception of conceptual relativism and his attempt towards developing naturalised epistemology actually set up the trend of contemporary philosophy of language.

There is no question of doubt that Quine's philosophical thinking is wide ranging because Quine has contributed on almost every topic that has engaged analytic philosophers since Frege. Quine's philosophy is very much systematic and works as a single whole in a coherent manner. Here it is worthy to note that Quine's philosophical method has mostly been *scientific, empirical* and *behavioural* in nature.

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While developing in his philosophy, Quine in turn rejects and criticizes so many other well established philosophical theories based on rigid rule and principles, logical rules. In this regard, Quine rejected the so-called traditional metaphysics, the analytic-synthetic distinction as expounded by Kant, logical reductionism, modal logic, essentialism, atomism and any form of scepticism. According to Quine each of these doctrines in diverse ways requires the existence of meanings, propositions, attributes, relations, or numbers. Quine further contends that naturalised epistemology is to be comprehended with regard to commonsense. For him, emphasise should be given on naturalism and physicalism instead of mentalism and phenomenalism. Thus, Quine's naturalised epistemology is directed towards holism in opposition to reductionism and atomism. He thus offers us a pragmatic and indeterministic philosophical approach. Besides, Quine's theory of indeterminacy of translation, radical translation, inscrutability of reference and ontological relativity are the other major concepts prevailing in the realm philosophy of language.

Although Quine focuses mainly on so many philosophical aspects, his philosophy of language is predominantly concerned with naturalised epistemology. In fact, Quine has been regarded as a leading proponent of naturalised epistemology. Naturalised epistemology is the scientific study of man's acquisition of science. Thus, Quine's central theme is naturalism. For Quine, naturalised epistemology is manifested through common sense and science. For him, science is self-conscious common sense. Quine in his "Epistemology Naturalised" (1969) has made an attempt to reply all substantive questions of knowledge and meaning byusing various methods and techniques of natural sciences. Of course, he is not associated with any form of knowledge other than ordinary knowledge. Ordinary knowledge, according to Quine, appeared in common sense and in science. He sees that these are not different in kind. Quine's focus on knowledge, moreover, is based on the idea that scientific knowledge builds up as we try hard to develop common sense. By this he meant that the methods and tools of natural science are the sources of our knowledge of the world around us. Quine's emphasis is chiefly on naturalism that must be based on science. Quine considers epistemology as a part of science as it is practiced by mankind. As he says, "Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter on psychology and hence of natural science. It studies a natural phenomenon, viz. a

physical human subject."[1] Quine, therefore, is important in philosophy of science for his conception of philosophy as continuous with science and that his philosophies are an extension of science. Quine's proposal is that philosophers should reflect on science within science and there is no theory of knowledge distinction from science. According to Quine philosophy as a whole has no standard which goes beyond of our most successful science. Thus, Quine's philosophy is intimately related to human knowledge because while developing his naturalised epistemology, Quine gives over emphasise on common sense and natural science. Both common sense and natural science is the by-product of human knowledge.

Quine's fundamental philosophical doctrine is what he calls *naturalism.* He explicates naturalism as "the recognition that it is within science itself, and not in some prior philosophy, that reality is to be identified and described."[2] As naturalism deals with human knowledge, it requires no method, no stance and more importantly philosophers have no vantage point to deal it. In his first philosophical monograph *Word and Object*, Quine begins an epigraph taken from Neurath: "We are like sailors who must rebuild their boat on the open sea, without ever being able to put into dock and reconstruct it from the best components."[3] The final paragraph of this book starts like this: "The philosopher's task differ from the others' ..... in detail; but in no such drastic way as those suppose who imagine for the philosopher a vantage point outside the conceptual scheme that he takes in charge. There is no such cosmic exile."[4] Thus, for Quine philosophers must confine and work in *themiddle of things,* i.e. in the middle of our system of knowledge. Here Quine mainly focuses on theoretical activity instead of human culture in general.

Quine outlines naturalism within science. But what does he actually mean by science? Quine uses 'science' broadly. By science, he explicitly includes psychology, economics, sociology, and history under the heading. The other distinctive feature of science is that it remains parity with common sense as well as everyday knowledge. According to Quine, science is our most successful attempt at knowledge because

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[1]Quine, W. V., "Epistemology Naturalized", in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays,* Columbia Univ. Press, New York and London, 1969, p. 82.
[2]Quine, W. V. *Theories and Things,* Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 21.
[3]See Hylton, P.,*Quine,* Routledge, 2007, p. 7.
[4] Quine, W. V. *Word and Object,* Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1960, p. 275.

science deals with the theoretical or cognitive aspect of our lives. Quine sees knowledge as *seamless* and science is continuous with common sense. Philosophy should aspire to something like the standards of clarity and explanations found in the most successful sciences. Quine in his *Ways of Paradox* says, "...scientist can enhance objectivity and diminish the interference of language, by his every choice of language."[1] Philosophers are primarily concerned with minimising clarity and objectivity to 'purify the language of science'.[2] It is important to note here that even though Quine is an empiricist, he does not think that experience is all about philosophical and scientific clarification, as Quine elsewhere holds that 'like all those experience is ill suited for use as an instrument of philosophical clarification and analysis'.[3] For instruments of scientific and philosophical clarification, Quine seeks sentences and dispositions, because Quine thinks that sentences are observational and dispositions to assent are fairly accessible through observable symptoms. In this way they are conjecturing causal connections which are basically neurological what Quine calls it *thought* or *belief.*

Thus, Quine in his *naturalism* brings back the relevance of stimulation. He says that language views the world in virtue of the relations to sensory stimulation. That is why Quine in the opening paragraph of "The Scope and Language of Science"[4]calls attention to the physical forces which intrude into one's sensory surfaces. According to Quine, physical forces impinging on appropriate part of the body give rise to stimulations on the sensory nerves which are *aboutthe world* in virtue of their relations to such stimulations. Quine attempts to justify it by saying that the only source of our knowledge of the world around us is energy, i.e., the dispositional power of language. Quine calls it 'stimulus responses' that encroaching on our sensory surfaces and equally stimulating our sensory nerves. Accordingly, the relation of noises to sensory stimulations is central to cognition because it is concurrent with the way the world is around me at that moment. This makes sense to say that the world affects us only through stimulations. Quine says that it is "a finding of natural science itself .....that our information about the world comes only through

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[1]Quine, W. V. *TheWays of Paradox,* Harvard Univ. Press, 1976 (1966), p. 235.
[2]Ibid.
[3]Quine, W. V. *Theories and Things,* p. 185.
[4]Quine, W. V., " The Scope and Language of Science", in *Ways of Paradox,* op. cit., p.235.

impact on our sensory receptors."[1] According to Quine, our system of (putative) knowledge forms a highly interconnected system where there are some observational sentences which are directly correlated with *sensory stimulations* and others are not directly correlated with stimulations but are somehow connected though indirectly with observation sentences. Critiques may raise a quip by saying, how does abstract part of philosophy directly connect with sensory stimulations? Quine's plausible response would be like that as our body of knowledge as a whole is connected with sensory stimulations, the sentences which serve to systematise that knowledge get their point and their claim to be a part of our knowledge. Accordingly, they still count as being related to sensory stimulations in an indirect fashion. Thus, the sentences associated with the very abstract part of philosophy would be the potential part of our knowledge and they would definitely be counted, through indirect fashion, as being about the world.

The stimulus response theory of Quine is popularly known as *behaviourism*. It is also known as *holism*. While developing his naturalism, Quine does not make any distinction between common sense and science. By science, Quine means natural science. Natural sciences have a close proximity with common sense. Common sense becomes an integral part of knowledge if it is backed up by natural sciences. That is why, while illuminating the concept of naturalised epistemology, Quine talks in favour of both common sense and natural sciences. Moreover, both common sense and natural science are integral parts of behaviourism. According to Quine science is "refined common sense."[2] Science, for Quine, is not a substitute for common sense but an extension of it. There remains parity between science and common sense. Science in this sense is a continuation of common sense. Quine says, "The scientist is indistinguishable from the common man in the sense of evidence, except that the scientist is more careful. This increased care is not a revision of evidential standards, but only the more patient and systematic collection and use of what anyone would deem to be evidence."[3] Quine further contends that our information about the world comes only from stimulations as a paradigm of his naturalism, i.e. of his method of

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[1]Quine, W. V. *Pursuit of Truth,* Harvard Univ. Press, 1992 (1990), p. 19.
[2] Quine, W. V. "Posits and Reality", included in *The Ways of Paradox,* op. Cit. p. 253.
[3]Quine, W. V. "The Scope and Language of Science", included in *The Ways of Paradox,* op. cit. p. 233.

working from within. A system of beliefs which successfully predicts sensory experience counts as *knowledge*. It is through sensory experience, and only through sensory experience, that we know anything at all about the world. But how do we know that it is through sensory experience that we know anything at all about the world? Quine replies that we know this in the same way in which we know anything else. This is made possible because Quine's understanding of knowledge is based on conceptual relativity. Being a conceptual relativist, Quine does not accept any stringent dogma within the realm of philosophy. He speaks in favour of relative knowledge based on common sense and natural science where human stimulus is deeply been involved. Thus, his understanding of knowledge is stimulus knowledge.

So far we have been envisaging the role of sensory stimulation in Quine's view of knowledge. He tells us that knowledge is no more than a means of predicting stimulation. He does not think that objects which count as real are independent of us. Quine calls his view of realism as *robust realism*. Even Quine's view has something in common with *instrumentalism or functionalism* because scientific theories are simply instruments as they are not real entities at all. Like natural objects they do not really exist for making predictions. However, there is also a crucial difference. Instrumentalism or functionalism presupposes a contrast between two kinds of entities of which one is real and other is fictional. Fictional entities are postulated by scientific theories to help us attain knowledge of ordinary physical objects, which are counted as real. In this sense instrumentalism is anti-realism. Quine is no instrumentalist; for him there is no point of contrast between naturalism with instrumentalism. One cannot say concurrently that our sensory surfaces are real and that physical objects are mere fictions. For Quine, sensory surfaces are physical objects; sensory stimulations are physical events on par with any other. It distinctly indicates the importance of Quine's naturalistic approach to knowledge. Secondly, unlike functionalism, there is nothing *given* in Quine's naturalism. In this sense Quine's naturalism is *presuppositionless*. For Quine the concurrence of stimulations is independent of theory, but we do not know about them independent of theory. Even though Quine advocates epistemic naturalism and deviates from the *logistic interpretation of naturalism* advocated by Ayer, Chisholm and Carnap, but he does not advocate a detachment of his own epistemic naturalism from the word 'real'.

Quine says, "We cannot significantly question the reality of the external world, or deny that there is evidence of external objects in the testimony of our senses; for, to do so is simply to dissociate the term reality""[1] What we can do, suggests Quine, is that we always plea for a *better revision*. Better philosophy would be relative, transitional, because there remains indeterminacy of translation in philosophy of language. Indeterminacy can be overcome through constant revision. We do revise our philosophical theories on the basis of our previous foundation, i.e. on the basis of our *conceptual scheme*. There is no alternative to working from within some conceptual scheme. As it is our own, we know no better than this. Therefore, there is no sense to the idea of some wholly extra-theoretical reality with which our theory could be compared. For Quine, our theory must be judged primarily by its ability to make correct predications. Therefore, we can ask no more of our theory of the world besides our theory. Accordingly, Quine claims that there is no notion of the world or reality that would far more authentic behind our theory. Quine says, "Our talk of external things, our very notion of things, is *just aconceptual apparatus* that helps us to foresee and control the triggering of our sensory receptors in the light of previous triggering of our sensory receptors. The triggering, first and last, is all that we have to go."[2]

Quine's attention is that our knowledge is a human artefact and is compatible with accepting the objects it tells us about as fully real. Knowledge is our own creation. Knowledge is the theory building process. It is within science that reality is to be identified and described. Quine uses the word 'science' broadly. He explicitly includes psychology, economics, sociology and history under the heading science. He then says that science is continuous with common sense, with everyday knowledge. Thus, Quine's naturalised epistemology acknowledges that science is our most successful attempt at knowledge. Hence philosophy, as part of our knowledge, which aims to be successful, will aspire to scientific standards. Our philosophical endeavours are the varied results of our reflecting on the theory from within.

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[1]Ibid, p. 229.
[2]Quine, W. V. *Theories and Things,* op. cit. p. 1.