An analysis of Alvin Goldman’s naturalized epistemology

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Abstract
This work, “An Analysis of Alvin Goldman’s Naturalistic Epistemology,” aims to present Alvin Goldman’s contributions in an epistemic bent. As a philosophy, epistemology has significantly advanced right from the classic, medieval, modern, and contemporary epochs. The effects of postmodernist thinkers’ radical approach to philosophy are evident in almost all philosophy branches. With the notion of doing epistemology through science championed by W.V.O. Quine, Alvin Goldman, John Kuhn, and some other scholars have raised objections and counter objections to such a deconstructionist mindset within the epistemic circle. Expectedly, these naturalistic epistemologists had discontinuity with one another in their positions. Goldman is concerned with such traditional epistemological problems as developing an adequate theoretical understanding of knowledge and justified belief. This paper shows that in his naturalistic discontinuity with Quine, Alvin Goldman did not conceive epistemology as part of science the same way Quine conceived it.

Goldman’s view that answering traditional epistemological questions requires both a priori philosophy and the application of scientific results. Goldman’s naturalism is the view that epistemology “needs help” from science. His primary concern is in traditional epistemological problems, including developing an adequate theoretical understanding of knowledge and justified belief. In this paper, I see Goldman’s divergence in the opinion of his naturalistic epistemology with Quine and other naturalistic epistemologists not as a problem but as indeed part of epistemic consolidation. In the course of this work, analytic, evaluation, library research, and descriptive methods, and internet materials, were employed.

Keywords:
Epistemology; naturalistic epistemology; epistemic consolidation.

1 INTRODUCTION
Among other branches of philosophy, epistemology seems to have received a lot of differentiation in opinion, which for me, is part of its growth and development. Looking closely at the task Alvin Goldman sets out to achieve with his naturalistic epistemic ideas, one is not left in doubt that Goldman wants us to approach epistemology through science, but not the same way Quine and other naturalistic epistemologists approach it. Therefore, his idea is “scientification of knowledge” not by way of presenting epistemology as an integral part of science, but that it has something to benefit from science (Scheurich et al., 1997, pp. 76). Whether Goldman succeeded or not will be made known as we advance in this analysis. Right from the time of Thales, the Sophists (skeptic’s whose positions were reacted by philosophers to bring about epistemology in a more refined manner) to Plato, Descartes and company, Locke, and his allies up till this contemporary era, epistemologists have not ceased to showcase views that are either contrary to their predecessor’s or close to it with some variations.

It is worthy of note that epistemological naturalism, out of favor at the beginning of this century, is moving towards the center stage of Anglo-American epistemology. As a result, contemporary epistemology is starting to look different. The logical positivism of the 1930s and 1940s and the logical empiricism of the 1950s could be likened to what naturalistic epistemology sets out to do towards the end of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century. More attention is coming from several different fields: mainstream epistemology, philosophy of science, and the social studies of knowledge (SSK), which often result in different kinds of naturalism. Through the course of this research, I will not lose sight of the fact that each of these versions of naturalized epistemology is contrasted (here and elsewhere), implicitly or explicitly, to Quine's naturalized epistemology. It is so because W.V.O. Quine was the forerunner of epistemic naturalism in this century, and, with some audacity, he took his naturalism to an extreme conclusion: the end of normative epistemology.

Looking at Alvin Goldman’s naturalized epistemology at first sight, one seems to conclude that it is anti-foundationalism and, in fact, an attack to foundationalism. With its scientific outlook and undertone, one even more reason that Goldman came to destroy the foundationalism of his predecessors; though he was far from such mindset, especially when one goes through his naturalistic epistemology with its anchorage on his claim that “epistemology needs help from science.” However, having a closer look at it again, one would notice that in his naturalistic epistemist postulates, “Goldman thinks that answering traditional epistemological questions requires both a priori philosophy and the application of scientific results.” This is in sharp contradistinction to Quine, who construed epistemology as an inextricable part of psychology. In his Epistemology Naturalized, Quine argues:

...epistemology still goes on, though in a new setting and a clarified status. Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a psychology and natural science chapter. It studies a natural phenomenon, viz., a physical human subject... my position is a naturalistic one; I see philosophy not as an a priori propaedeutic or groundwork for science, but as continuous with science (1969, pp. 82-85).

Goldman, unlike Quine is concerned with such traditional epistemological problems as developing an adequate theoretical understanding of knowledge and justified believing. He does not see epistemology as a completely part of science, unlike Quine who sees epistemology as part of psychology. For him, “While epistemology and natural science are relevant to, and continuous with each other, the former is not contained entirely in the latter” (Goldman, 1986: pp. 72).
2 A BRIEF PROFILE OF ALVIN GOLDMAN

Alvin Goldman (born in 1938) is an American philosopher who is Board of Governors Professor of Philosophy and Cognitive Science at Rutgers at the Department of Philosophy, Center for Cognitive Science, Rutgers, and the State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick-Piscataway, NJ, USA. He is one of the leading figures in epistemology in the 21st century. Goldman graduated (B.A.) at the Columbia University in 1960 with Summa cum laude (First class honors), and had his masters (M.A.) and doctorate degree (Ph.D.) both in Philosophy at Princeton University in 1962 and 1965, respectively. He worked in the following places and had the following positions: The University of Arizona, 1983-2002 Professor, 1982-2003, Regents’ Professor, 1994-2002 the University of Illinois at Chicago, Professor, 1980-83 the University of Michigan, 1963-1980 Assistant Professor, 1963-69; Associate Professor, 1969-73; Professor, 1973-80, Department Chair, 1977-1979; Visiting Professor Princeton University, Spring 2004; Yale University, Fall 1991 University of Pittsburgh, Summer 1972.

Notable among his contributions to epistemic ideas are The Causal Theory of Knowledge (1967), Epistemology and Cognition (1986), A priori Warrant and Naturalistic Epistemology (1999). Goldman also contributed in the following: The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, Ted Honderich, ed. (1995), Biography in The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 2nd edition, Robert Audi, ed. (1999), Biography in Biographical Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Philosophers, Routledge (2002), and Biography in MacMillan Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2nd edition (2006). Alvin Goldman was the Editor-in-chief of Episteme, A Journal of Social Epistemology, Edinburgh University Press, 2005; Member of Editorial Boards: Nous; Philosophy Phenomenological Research; Oxford Essays in Epistemology; Principia; Ethics and Information Technology; Philosophers’ Imprint (e-journal). Advisory Editor: Philosophical Gourmet Report; Studies in Cognitive Systems Member, Board of Directors: Institute for Law and Philosophy (Rutgers University). To round off this brief bio-data of Goldman, it is important to note that he was the President, American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division, 1991-92; President, Society for Philosophy and Psychology, 1987.

3 AN ATTEMPT AT DEFINING EPISTEMOLOGY

Epistemology is derived from two Greek words episteme (knowledge) and logos (the study of or theory of). This means the study of or theory of knowledge. Therefore, Epistemology is that branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge, its presuppositions and basis, and the general reliability of claims to knowledge (Ozumba, 2001; Ogbar & Edor, 2020). Epistemology is a response to skepticism. Skepticism doubts the possibility of knowledge. Considering different forms of skepticism of Leotini; we have different levels of doubt. There is the absolute skeptic who holds that no form of knowledge is possible. An example here is Georgia’s. We have the relative skeptics like Protagoras, who hold that relative knowledge is possible. Others of the academic disposition who hold that we are still searching and are hopeful of eventual success. It is the bid to counter the skeptics that epistemology has become such an important aspect of philosophy. Epistemology has rowed very hard to sustain the view that knowledge must have absolute status (Ozumba, 2001, pp. 34-35).

4 WHAT IS NATURALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY?

The terms naturalized or naturalistic epistemology was affixed in the philosophy lexicon towards the end of the 20th century and very pronounced at the beginning of the 21st century. Naturalistic epistemology is an approach to the theory of knowledge that emphasizes the application of methods, results, and theories from the empirical sciences Quine regards epistemology as part of psychology, while others like Alvin Goldman and Kuhn think it merely needs aid from the empirical sciences (www.iep.utm.edu¬nat-epi). By implication, scholars of naturalistic bent construe their naturalized epistemology in different ways; and so, they differ from one another in their submissions on the relationship between epistemology and science. Supporting this view, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy has it that, “Because naturalistic epistemologies can differ from one another so much, there is rarely a single or standard “naturalistic” approach to an issue in epistemology. Instead, different naturalists will take different approaches, depending on their precise views on the relationship between science and epistemology” (6). Unlike W.V.O Quine’s version of naturalized epistemology, Goldman retains a traditional focus of justification. Goldman’s view emerged initially as part of the efforts in the 1960s to react to Quine’s view and come up with his own contribution to knowledge. Naturalized epistemology gives epistemic priority to the question, ‘why do people hold the beliefs that they do?’, and it asks us to recognize that we can’t hope to answer this question unless we look at the context in which beliefs are held. Like all epistemic naturalists, I think that the descriptive question about belief acquisition is the most important one, but I don’t think that it is the only genuine one (Freedman 2001, pp. ii).

5 EPISTEMIC CONSOLIDATION

Philosophy in general and epistemology, has always advanced in a variety of positions right from the ancient down to the contemporary periods. Epistemology holds sway when there are views and opposing views, opinions and counter opinions, positions, and contrary positions. Discontinuity in the position of epistemologists is not new in the field of philosophy. Just like Aquinas radically deviated from Aristotle and St. Augustine’s positions and synthesized their views which aided in the development of medieval philosophy; in like manner, Alvin Goldman’s contrary opinion to those of Quine and other naturalistic epistemologists is gain to the epistemic branch of philosophy. Better insights and adroit ingenuity, and even native epistemic-intelligence can be elicited in such a situation of views and counter views, which will invariably lead to epistemology growth. The epistemic endeavor would have been stunted in its growth and
development had it been that there are no counter positions, nuances of expressions, and differences in each epistemic construct of individual epistemologists. For me, this experience is epistemic consolidation and not a problem as such.

6 Goldman’s Naturalistic Epistemology

Alvin Goldman’s approach to naturalistic epistemology marks a radical shift from the already existing naturalistic views of W.V.O. Quine, who has been at the forefront of this epistemic strand before Goldman's arrival at the epistemic rostrum. Goldman’s conviction that epistemology should be scientifically approached, but not that it is part of science. Again, Goldman's mindset that epistemology needs some kind of “assistance from science,” therefore, he proposed addressing fundamental and traditional epistemological questions through a priori philosophy and the application of scientific results. What preoccupies the epistemic worldview of Goldman is how to solve traditional epistemological problems. Giving credence to this view, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy articulates: “Unlike Quine, Alvin Goldman is concerned with such traditional epistemological problems as developing an adequate theoretical understanding of knowledge and justifying belief. Also, in contrast to Quine, he does not see epistemology as part of science. Instead, Goldman thinks that answering traditional epistemological questions requires both a priori philosophy and the application of scientific results. As he often puts it, Goldman’s naturalism is the view that epistemology “needs help” from science” (1986, pp. 3). For Goldman to have retained a traditional focus of justification and yet advocating that science has an ancillary role in epistemic affairs is indeed unique (Sarachukwuka, 2012: pp. 12). Indeed, Goldman did not see psychology as part of epistemology in the light of Quine, but he did not completely deny psychology offering generous hands of assistance to epistemology. For him, “The most obvious place of psychology matters in this theory of knowledge is in the identification and evaluation of belief-forming processes. It is the psychology that tells us what processes cause our belief, and it is psychology that enables us to judge their reliability. Goldman goes much further to argue that though philosophy and psychology are not the same, both disciplines cannot but collaborate and corroborate, which he calls philosophical and psychological considerations in determining whether a particular belief is a case of knowledge. Employing the reliabilist, causal approach to justification, Wrenn (2013, pp. 4) writes, “Philosophically, we can say that the belief (if justified and true) is knowledge if it was caused in a suitably reliable way. The question of whether it was caused in a suitably reliable way, however, is a question for empirical science.

In order to clearly understand Goldman’s brand of epistemology naturalized, one must at least grapple with reliabilism as one of the epistemological theories. This is so because epistemology espoused by Alvin Goldman is a form of causal reliabilism. Though our concern is not on reliabilism, it is not out of place to note that reliabilism is an alternative theory of justification to foundationalism and coherentism. According to reliabilism, a belief is justified based on how it is formed (Barry 2016, pp. 19). Advancing his naturalistic epistemic ideas and employing reliabilist theory, Goldman holds that a justified true belief counts as knowledge only if it is caused in a suitably reliable way. To be “suitably reliable,” a belief-forming process must have a propensity to produce reliable processes than unreliable ones. It is on a priori grounds that Goldman basically argued for this view of knowledge. Similarly, this position gives empirical sciences a pride of place in our conception of knowledge. Similarly, it becomes more apparent that it behooves on both philosophical and psychological considerations to determine whether a particular belief is a case for knowledge or not. Expectedly, Goldman took more of a philosophical position in this case and still employed scientific aid intermittently. It must be noted that though Goldman did not integrate psychology as part of epistemology as Quine did, this does not negate the fact that during analysis of his epistemology naturalized, he, from time to time, brought in psychology to drive home his point. Philosophically, following Goldman’s position already noted, a belief, if justified and true, is knowledge if it was caused in a suitably reliable way. Again, it is within the empirical science purview to know whether it was caused in a suitably reliable way.

The hinge of Alvin Goldman’s naturalized epistemic view is that justification is at least partly a matter of beliefs being produced by reliable cognitive processes. What Goldman did in his naturalistic epistemology has a close similitude with what Ludwig Wittgenstein did in the philosophy of language. Just as we have early and later Wittgenstein, one can rightly say without equivocations that we have early and later Goldman (Ezenwanne 2009, pp. 79). This is so since Goldman updated his positions on justification as part of a reliable cognitive process. Confirming this claim, Wrenn (2013, pp. 4) writes, “Goldman has made numerous modifications to this view, and he has worked out details in various ways at different times”. Going further, Goldman did not only adopt causal reliabilism in his epistemology but also brought in the idea of common sense, though not in the same way it was posited in G.E. Moore’s approach to epistemology. For Goldman, we must necessarily distinguish between a theory of what epistemic justification really is from what common sense takes it to be. Goldman’s naturalized epistemology, especially his account of justification can be said to be of dual dimensions. Upholding this view from another perspective, Wrenn (2013, pp. 4) avers:

The account of justification Goldman now favours has two components. First, he thinks it is an important epistemology task to clarify and describe our “epistemic folkways,” the set of our common-sense epistemological concepts and principles, including the concept of justified belief. The second component is a theory of what justified believing is, based on the principles underlying our common-sense judgments but perhaps departing from those judgments in certain cases.

What is this epistemic folkways enunciated by Goldman’s epistemology naturalized? How can we study our epistemic folkways? It is Goldman’s opinion that it is necessary to empirically examine how we apply and acquire our epistemic concepts to determine the structure of those concepts. In this way, Goldman tries to instantiate his claim that though epistemology is not intertwined with the sciences, it needs help from science just as science invariably cannot do without epistemology. Yes, every science is geared towards the knowledge of something and the study of knowledge domiciles within epistemology as a branch of philosophy (Carol, 2013: pp. 23). Goldman construed that we employ and apply
epistemic concepts to individual cases in much the same way we apply most of our concepts by judging how similar or different a particular case is to stereotypical instances of the concept. On the part of epistemic justification, he argued that we compare the process whereby a person has come to believe something with what we take to be typical justification-conferring, such as perception and deduction. Because we take them to be reliable, Goldman contends that we take such processes to confer justification.

From the foregoing analysis, one can arguably classify Alvin I. Goldman as an externalist-naturalistic epistemologist in the sense that reliabilism is an externalist theory of justification; and he advances causal reliabilism in his epistemic postulates. In general, Alvin Goldman’s naturalistic epistemology cannot be equip rated with science the same way Quine did, but it has a lot to adapt and adopt from science.

7 THE IMPLICATIONS OF NATURALIZING EPISTEMOLOGY

It has already been pointed out from the onset that there are variations in naturalized epistemology. The only point of convergence in the naturalistic epistemologists’ variegated positions is that “epistemology has something to do with science” whether as part of science or as a branch of study needing help from science. The question is: can epistemology be naturalized? This question is indeed of primary significance in so far as we are examining naturalistic epistemology, whether it is the brand espoused by Quine, Goldman, Kuhn, and so forth. As a matter of fact, epistemology remains a branch of philosophy that is so foundational that naturalizing it as part of either natural or social sciences cannot hold. If such is the case, that would mean the end of epistemology. Similarly, “Epistemology remains a critical standard with which the findings of the natural sciences (including cognitive psychology) can be tested as to their truth or falsity, and hence their reliability or otherwise. In short epistemology cannot be naturalized or assimilated into any of the natural sciences. For it is an a priori discipline, one of the core areas of philosophy, not reducible to any natural sciences” (Omoregbe, 2013: pp. 59). From what has been presented above, it cannot but be simply mistaken, that is, the idea of naturalizing epistemology.

Albertino (2014) in his Fundamental Approach to Epistemology, argues that Quine and other naturalistic epistemologists must be appreciated for their boldness to improve on what their predecessors did, but that does not preclude the fact that epistemology cannot be done the way natural sciences or social sciences are done. As it were, the subject matter of philosophy that houses epistemology as one of its branches differs from the subject matter of both natural sciences and social sciences (2014, pp. 47). Another essential implication of naturalizing epistemology is that if the naturalists succeed in their quest to naturalize epistemology and intertwine it with science, it can be likened to the postmodernist thinkers’ deconstructionist approach philosophy. It is this type of outlook in an epistemic inquiry that Richard Rorty would describe as anything goes style of philosophizing or Godfrey Ozumba’s sporadic shooting, thereby wasting the epistemic bullet of systemic and constructive cognitive exercise.

Because Quine’s naturalism, for instance, is non-normative, he claims that he can rely on scientific techniques in an unproblematic way. But as some of his critics pointed out, this response ignores the key question of whether science itself is justified. This question relates to the problem of the unverifiability of the logical positivist’s principle of verifiability. One of those critics, Harold Brown, replies to this objection by claiming that science does not demand an ultimate justification. He argues that even if there is no non-circular way of justifying science, we must acknowledge that today we know a great deal more than our pre-scientific revolution ancestors (Brown 75). However, Brown’s reply raises more concerns than it answers, for what it shows as the problem of circularity runs deeper than originally thought. What perspective can Brown conclude that science has proved to be a successful enterprise?

In recent years philosophers of science have argued against the traditional twentieth-century conception of science, dominant with certain logical positivists, of science as unified. This view of science was popular with both Carnap and Otto Neurath and was canonized in their Encyclopedia of Unified Science (1938). The unity of science movement had many adherents, and although varied and occasionally opposed in their ideas of how ‘unity’ was best understood, the positivists’ consensus on unification was not merely nominal. It was a matter a philosophical orientation, one that saw science as a unified enterprise with one method - the scientific method.’ That orientation has now shifted, and the current trend has it that the sciences are disunified. A glance at the articles in the recent book The Disunity of Science: Patrick Suppes (1978), is often cited is the forerunner of this shift in orientation (Freedman 2001, pp. 47-50). From what has just been articulated, it is obvious that even scholars from the same scientific bent vary in their positions. Epistemology cannot be holistically naturalized because experimentation and justification done in science are more empirical in nature, unlike epistemology that can at times, fall back on the human ratiocinative acumen for the result.

8 CONCLUSION

Naturalized epistemology, just like other epistemological theories, is understood and approached by naturalistic epistemologists in diverse ways. From the above analysis, naturalized epistemology is best seen as a cluster of views according to which epistemology is closely connected to natural science. Some advocates of this epistemist bent emphasize methodological issues, arguing that epistemologists must use results from the sciences that study human reasoning in pursuing epistemological questions. The most extreme view along these lines recommends replacing traditional epistemology with the psychological study of how we reason. Quine is, indeed, the anchorman in this epistemic mindset.

A more modest view recommends that philosophers use results from sciences studying cognition to resolve epistemological issues. This is so because their methods, commitments, prospects, views, and aspirations differ because of their lack of uniformity in their submissions on the relationship between science and epistemology. It is this latter view that Goldman subscribes to. That notwithstanding, the naturalist epistemic thinkers unanimously seek an understanding
of scientifically oriented knowledge and integrated with the rest of our understanding of the world. Alvin I. Goldman’s naturalized epistemic ideas are in contradistinction with W.V.O. Quine, Thomas Kuhn, and other naturalists. For Goldman, epistemology is not part of science; it only needs help from science.

I see Goldman’s radical shift from Quine's position, the front-line naturalist epistemic thinker, as epistemic consolidation. It is considered so because it is in a counter position to an already existing view that better insights and what I call native epistemic intelligence and adroit ingenuity are elicited from epistemologists. This, in turn, leads to unprecedented advancement often experienced in the field of study. It is observed that Goldman’s primary concern in his epistemology naturalized is that justification is at least partly a matter of beliefs being produced by reliable cognitive processes. He thinks in this direction because his approach to epistemic justification is also reliabilist and scientifically bent.

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