Naturalism and Norms

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Since Professor Quine published 'Epistemology Naturalized' in 1969, many critical papers have been written. One of the main objections to Professor Quine's project of naturalizing epistemology has been that in his version of naturalized epistemology (hereafter "NE") there is no room for normative elements, that is, norms and normative judgements. However, many critics claimed, the reason why traditional epistemology can be classified as an epistemology is that it deals with normative issues, for example, that it tries to justify the system of our knowledge against sceptical attack. Therefore, NE with no room for normative elements cannot be an epistemology in the true sense of the word. Accordingly these critics concluded that NE, which is a chapter of psychology, is not an epistemology. This kind of criticism of NE still continues notwithstanding the fact that Professor Quine asserts that his NE is an enlightened version of epistemology (enlightened in the sense that NE recognizes the scientific origin of the sceptical challenge) and that NE is an epistemology which examines the relationship between scientific theory and sensory evidence. Moreover, in the 1980s Professor Quine started to explain more explicitly how his NE can accomodate normative elements.

In this paper I would like to explain and examine the validity of his response to his critics. First, I will explain how Professor Quine can defend his project against two main objections. Secondly, I will show my own criticism against Professor Quine's version of NE and try to suggest an alternative version of NE which may offend his taste for more austere language and discourse, but which, I hope, will not differ so much in substance from his own version.

Professor Quine's response consists in interpreting the normativity of cognitive norms as the normativity of instrumental reason. In other words, scientific methodological norms acquire their normativity because they can make a greater contribution to the realization of the purposes of scientific inquiry than other norms. Again, those norms can be said to be accepted as valid methodological norms because they are the best instruments available so far, given the present purposes of science. He says that:

For me normative epistemology is a branch of engineering. It is the technology of truth-seeking, or, in a more cautiously epistemological term, predic-

tion. Like any technology, it makes free use of whatever scientific findings may suit its purpose....There is no question here of ultimate value, as in morals; it is a matter of efficacy for an ulterior end, truth or prediction. The normative here, as elsewhere in engineering, becomes descriptive when the terminal parameter is expressed. We could say the same of morality if we could view it as aimed at reward in heaven.⁽¹⁾

Furthermore, in *Pursuit of Truth* he says that:

I remain occupied..., with what has been central to traditional epistemology, namely the relation of science to its sensory data. I approach it as an input-output relation within flesh-and-blood denizens of an antecedently acknowledged external world, a relation open to inquiry as a chapter of the science of that world. To emphasize my dissociation from the Cartesian dream [of a foundation for scientific certainty firmer than scientific method itself], I have written of neural receptors and their stimulation than of sense and sensibilia. I call the pursuit naturalized epistemology, but I have no quarrel with traditionalists who protest my retention of the latter word. I agree with them that repudiation of the Cartesian dream is no minor deviation.

But they are wrong in protesting that the normative element, so characteristic of epistemology, goes by the board. In so far as theoretical epistemology gets naturalized into a chapter of theoretical science, so normative epistemology gets naturalized into a chapter of engineering: the technology of anticipating sensory stimulation.⁽²⁾

By the way, the purposes of scientific inquiry, according to Professor Quine, are understanding, prediction and truth. But in *Pursuit of Truth* Professor Quine says that:

But when I cite prediction as the checkpoints of science, I do not see that as normative. I see it as defining a particular language game, in Wittgenstein's phrase: the game of science, in contrast to other good language games such as fiction and poetry. A sentence's claim to scientific status rests on what it contributes to a theory whose checkpoints are in prediction.⁽³⁾

In so far as we wish to do a scientific inquiry, we must judge cognitive claims in terms of predictive power. Because the acceptance of prediction as the defining character of science is required for an inquiry to be a scientific inquiry, behaving accordingly is a necessary condition of doing a scientific inquiry. In this sense, the requirement of the acceptance of prediction as the defining character of science is, as

it were, a constitutive rule of science. If you do not obey that rule, you do not do a scientific inquiry and you play a language game different from the language game of science.

While Professor Quine asserts that he does not see prediction as the checkpoints of science as normative, I presume that the acceptance of prediction as the checkpoints of science must play the role of a constitutive rule and be the ultimate source of the normativity of norms within scientific inquiry which is defined by that rule. Metaphorically speaking, the scientific inquiry and discourse can be characterized as a magnetic field whose source of magnetic power is the acceptance of prediction as the defining character of science. Even if the ultimate purpose of science is not prediction but understanding, since the necessary condition of the validity of a theory or a cognitive norm is predictive success, players of the scientific language game must, first of all, aim at greater predictive success. Hence, in spite of Professor Quine's assertion that norms are involved with framing hypotheses and not with testing, I think that norms and justification are involved with both framing and testing hypotheses.

Thus, according to Professor Quine, his NE includes two sides: the theoretical and the normative side. The important point is that once the ends are determined, the crucial information for the choice of a theory or a methodological norm is the descriptive fact, namely whether a certain norm is more predictively successful than other alternatives. Hence, the substantive part of a normative inquiry turns out to be descriptive. The description of empirical facts constitutes the substantive part of normative epistemology. Normative epistemology can be naturalized into an empirical inquiry, that is, technology or engineering, so Professor Quine seems to claim. His main example of a cognitive norm is the principle of empiricism, hence, the exclusion of telepathy and clairvoyance as reliable cognitive tools for us.⁽⁴⁾

This way of dealing with normative elements of epistemology sounds familiar to us. In many passages where Professor Quine talks about engineering of truth-seeking and about "the whole strategy of rational conjecture," he seems to focus upon the reliability of belief-forming process. His position seems to have much affinity with so-called reliabilist theory of epistemic justification.

This is not surprising at all, considering that some reliabilists were influenced by Professor Quine's idea of NE. Reliabilism claims roughly that a belief *p* is justifiable if *p* results from a reliable belief-forming process, that is, a belief-forming process with a high truth-ratio. Then, there is one of the familiar objections against reliabilism: that the concept of reliability already contains the reference to truth, although a true belief cannot be identified independently of the way in which a reliable process is identified. Accordingly, a reliable process cannot be identified properly because the identification of a reliable process needs the identification of a true belief which in its turn needs the identification of a reliable process. There is

clearly a vicious circularity. Hence, reliabilists are required to make clearer the connection between truth and reliability.

Nevertheless, Professor Quine's version of NE is not troubled with this kind of a vicious circularity and deals with the problem straightforwardly. The key to the solution of the problem is his naturalism. Professor Quine rejects the possibility and even the coherence of the concept of first philosophy. According to him, there is no external vantage point, hence, what he calls "cosmic exile" is impossible.⁽⁵⁾ Only immanent epistemology and ontology are possible and make sense. Via the mediation of naturalism, his instrumentalistic epistemology leads to his robust realism. In other words, a theory with the best predictive success, or which functions as the best instrument of prediction available so far can be treated as true theory. We must remember that Professor Quine adopts a disquotational theory of truth, according to which to call a sentence true is simply to affirm it. He answers the question 'how can we tell whether to affirm it [a sentence]?' in the following way:

The lazy answer is "That all depends on what the sentence is. In case of 'Snow is white' you just look at snow and check the color.' The more sympathetic answer is a general analysis of the grounds of warranted beliefs, hence scientific method...."⁽⁶⁾

Thus, what the best scientific theory says exist really exists. In other words, because the best scientific theory must have the best predictive success, the best predictive success is one of the main indicators of truth. The best theory is always the best one so far. Even if science is fallible, from within the best present scientific theory we can enumerate true beliefs. The following passage clearly shows the relationship between predictive success, his instrumentalism, naturalism and his robust realism.

Disavowing as I do a first philosophy outside science, I can attribute reality and truth only within the terms and standards of the scientific system of the world that I now accept: only immanently. But also, within this system, I can study man at work and appreciate how his theory -mine- is underdetermined.⁽⁷⁾

Thus, Professor Quine's idea of epistemic justification is similar to reliabilism, while it is not bothered with a familiar problem of reliabilism. Hence, we seem to be able to say that Professor Quine has a definite answer to one of the main objection to his NE: his NE can deal squarely with normative issues within its own field.

Another main objection to Professor Quine's NE is that he confuses causation with justification, especially, when talking of the observation sentence as valid replacement of sense-data as the solid rockbottom evidence for science. According to Professor Quine, observation sentences are "vehicles of scientific evidence and as an entering wedge into language."⁽⁸⁾ The validity of the criticism depends on whether what causes assent to an observation sentence can also play a justificatory role. Observation, which is neural intake according to Professor Quine, causes assent to an observation sentence and because of conditioning an observation sentence is associated with ranges of perceptually similar neural intakes. The criticism takes into consideration the fact that ranges of perceptually similar neural intakes with eliciting query prompt assent to an observation sentence. Certainly, an assent may be caused by certain neural intake, but, the objection goes, that is that. That fact does not imply observation sentence can be a vehicle of scientific evidence which plays the role of the final checkpoint and the guarantor of the objectivity. A perceptual state can play a causal but not a justificatory role.

But Professor Quine can defend his NE by reminding us of the significant characteristics of observation sentence. The point is that an assent to an observation sentence and the ranges of perceptually similar neural intakes are related with each other in the form of immediate association by conditioning. The verdict on an observation sentence, which is an occasion sentence, depends upon that particular occasion which consists of a particular pattern of neural intakes and can be judged right or wrong on the spot. An observation sentence requires a verdict on the very occasion and, in addition, the same verdict community-wide. This kind of immediate association with the ranges of perceptually similar neural intakes makes observation sentence have a special place in NE. The association with neural intakes by conditioning is so tight and immediate that an assent to an observation sentence without appropriate neural intake makes that assent inappropriate.

On the other hand, an assent to an observation sentence with an appropriate neural intake makes that assent justifiable. The assent to an observation sentence elicited by a query with an appropriate neural intake is justifiable. Hence, an assent to an observation sentence indicates the presence of solid sensory evidence which justifies that assent. Thus, the ranges of neural intakes which are associated with a particular observation sentence by conditioning can not only cause but also justify an assent to the observation sentence. Hence, observation sentence can be the final checkpoints of scientific theory and the guarantor of objectivity of science. Thus, seemingly Professor Quine can answer the two main criticism of his NE with respect to the place of norm in it.⁽⁹⁾

Now I would like to explain my own problems with Professor Quine's NE. My own dissatisfaction results from the feeling that something significant is missing from Professor Quine's naturalization of normative epistemology. I presume that

epistemic norm presupposes the existence of an epistemic subject which can adjust his or her judgement in accordance with the norm, in other words, a subject who can take epistemic responsibility. Taking this aspect of normativity seriously, I have a great sympathy with internalism with respect to epistemic justification. An epistemically responsible subject ought to explain why one's belief can be regarded as warranted. The subject must have a justifying reason under his cognitive perspective. Otherwise, that person cannot be justified to believe the belief in question. Such a subject would be epistemically irresponsible. Norms are created to help a cognitive subject behave responsibly in the first place.

There are familiar attacks against internalism. One objection is that this kind of position mixes the two different levels of justification, the level of justification of belief and the level of justification of someone to believe something. We can discuss the first level of justification independently of the discussion of the second level, and the first level is more basic than the second. This objection is, I presume, related to the second familiar objection to internalism, what can be called the infinite regress argument.⁽¹⁰⁾

If you have to justify every epistemic claim with clear awareness of justifying reasons, then there will be no stopping place to the justification game. Unless you assume some knowledge claim to be the real foundation, i.e. a self-justifying true claim, as it were, a kind of epistemic unmovable mover, the justification game will never stop. The catch is that it is not plausible that that kind of epistemic unmovable mover exists. Hence, the internalist justification cannot escape infinite regress. So the familiar objection goes.

However, being an internalist with respect to epistemic justification does not mean not being able to be a naturalist in the sense of rejecting first philosophy. I do not find any conceptual obstacle to being an internalist naturalist or naturalistic internalist in so far as naturalism can depend not upon natural scientific method and knowledge in the narrow sense of the word but upon empirical method and knowledge in general. If you take that position, you can use the result of scientific inquiry to justify your claim. It goes without saying that you can justify it with more or less clear consciousness of the justificatory connection between the claim in question and the scientific explanation of the justifying ground of the claim. You can fully participate in the justification game as a responsible epistemic subject who can carry the burden of being a epistemic subject.

Even if you believe in a particular sentence without a clear awareness of relevant justifying reasons, you can afterwards understand the justifying ground by means of your own or another's inquiry. One can, as it were, retrospectively justify one's belief. Or at least someone as a responsible part of the community must be able to understand justifying reasons. Otherwise, some cognitive judgements float without justifying ballast.

Let us take the case of an observation sentence. As I showed above, observation sentence can be vehicles of scientific evidence. The ranges of perceptually similar neural intakes can contribute to the justification of an assent to a particular observation sentence. Nevertheless, the person who assents must believe that a particular neural intake belongs to the appropriate set of perceptually similar neural intakes. More detailed justification needs more sophisticated scientific knowledge. But an ordinary person must be able to say, however inarticulately, something about the appropriateness of sensory stimulation to an assent to the observation sentence.

Let us think about how children learn observation sentence. As Professor Quine says, "Language is a social art which all acquire on the evidence solely of other people's overt behavior under publicly recognizable circumstances."⁽¹¹⁾ Here, children use other people's overt behavior under publicly recognizable circumstances as the evidence for their fledgling linguistic theory. Nevertheless, it is implausible that children in transition from the prelinguistic to the linguistic stage have a clear awareness of the justifying reasons for their theoretical moves. This theoretical awareness will come later.

However, if we change focus from learners to teachers, the picture we have of the place of norm and awareness in language acquisition is certainly different. The point is that even the acquisition of observation sentence needs training by grown-up persons. The teacher does not train fledgling members of the linguistic community mechanically. The teacher trains children in order that their behavior conforms to the behavior of community as a whole, appropriate behavior under appropriate circumstances. Here, "appropriate" implies the involvement of normative elements. Because the teachers somehow understand relevant norms, they as responsible members of the community can encourage or correct children's behavior. The trainee may not have a clear awareness of norms involved, but the trainer has an awareness of the norm, or at least the trainer can say something to justify what he does to train the trainee. Thus, the concept of the acquisition of observation sentence has already a normative element. The verbal disposition related to observation sentence is characterized as appropriate assent or dissent under appropriate circumstances. Appropriate means not just conforming to the community-wide pattern but also deserving to be reinforced by the full-fledged members of the community.

Professor Quine says that language is "a matter of fluency and effective dialogue." Success in communication is the main purpose of language and communicative success "is judged by smoothness of conversation, by frequent predictability of verbal and non-verbal reactions...."⁽¹²⁾ Predictive success plays an important role here, too. From these purposes arise normative pressures to conform to the verbal behavior of the community as whole. The trainers are the agents for this normative force of linguistic norm who deliberately inculcate norms into the trainees.

Now, in order to make my internalism more realistic, I qualify my position. I do not wish to claim that one always has to be aware of norms explicitly formulable to be justified in having a certain belief. As Professor Quine shows in "Truth by Convention," there is the level on which a regress of rules must be stopped.⁽¹³⁾ On that level people behave in a certain regular way. That pattern of behavior cannot be justified by any explicit norm. I find this part of Professor Quine's theory very similar to later Wittgenstein's idea. If I may use a Wittgensteinian expression, on this level one can only say that this is how the language game is played. In other words, here people agree not on judgement but on action. On this level cognitive moves depend on primitive actions about which there is no room for the justificatory talk. This is the ground-level on which the justification game can be established. This is the extreme end of the continuum of cognitive moves about whose justification we cannot speak. From this level-zero to the level of sophisticated scientific justificatory talks, there is a continuum. Hence, I admit the existence of the level on which justification does not make sense. Here, there is no justificatory talk whether external or internal. But on other level we can reasonably ask justificatory reasons from the person who makes a cognitive claim. It may be important to know where to stop, but that does not mean the underestimation of the importance of human desire to know the justificatory reasons. While it is a disease to ask for evidence and justificatory talk on every level, it is another disease to adopt as the model for the justificatory talk on other levels the absence of the justificatory talk on the level-zero which is beyond justification. I presume that internalism with the qualification fits better with our understanding of cognitive norm and justification and, above all, of human beings as self-reflective animals than the position which denies the significant role played by the subject's cognitive grasp of justifying reason in the cognitive justification game.

Professor Quine accepts Professor Donald Davidson's anomalous monism and the practical indispensability of intensional discourse. If Professor Quine tries to develop normative epistemology, even if it is a naturalized version, had consciousness better be given a more respectable place in his system?

Professor Quine may answer that his normative epistemology deals only with the factual question of which norms are better at realizing adopted purposes, i.e. that his normative epistemology is in a sense, not normative but factual. In addition, he may say that norms and rules are not causally effective but merely expository devices. Whether certain patterns of research behavior tend to lead to certain purposes is what his normative epistemology seeks for. Normativity in the substantive sense is not within his naturalized epistemology. In short, normativity is naturalized. Hence, while Professor Quine claims that normative issues are taken care of by his naturalized epistemology, what he truly means is that naturalized normativity, not normativity in the substantive sense, but expository devices for

summing up the empirical facts of the matching of the result of certain behavior patterns, is accommodated by his epistemological inquiry.

However, if we are interested in making the more whole and integrated picture of human cognitive activity, we had better, I presume, have give normative and intentional discourses a more respectable place in epistemology. The half-hearted accommodation of normativity could be an obstacle towards the more whole and integrated understanding of the dynamic and multi-dimensional character of human cognitive activity. As Professor Quine talks about purposes of science, there is more than merely logical possibility of agreement about norms, hence objectivity, hence reality.⁽¹⁴⁾ The purposes and norms shape the styles of research, hence the results of the research, and vice versa, the more wholehearted accommodation of normativity would promise more productive results in our epistemological inquiry.

Note

- (1) W.V. Quine, "Reply to Morton White" in *The Philosophy of W.V. Quine*, L.E. Hahn and P.A. Schillp, eds., La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986, pp. 664-665.
- (2) W.V. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 19.
- (3) W. V. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth*, p. 20.
- (4) W.V. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth*, p. 19.
- (5) W.V. Quine, *Word and Object*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960, p. 275.
- (6) W.V. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth*, p. 93.
- (7) W.V. Quine, "Reply to Harold W. Lee" in *The Philosophy of W.V. Quine*, L.E. Hahn and P.A. Schillp, eds., La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986, pp. 316.
- (8) W.V. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth*, p. 5.
- (9) My idea expressed in the preceding two paragraphs was stimulated in the direction by Roger Gibson, "Quine in the Naturalizing of Epistemology" in *On Quine-New Essays*, eds., Paolo Leonardi and Marco Santambrogio, Cambridge University Press 1994, p. 98.
- (10) For a perceptive criticism of internalism, see W.P. Alston, *Epistemic Justification*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- (11) W.V. Quine, *Word and Object*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960, p. IX
- (12) W.V. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth*, p. 43.
- (13) W.V. Quine, "Truth by Convention" in *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays*, New York, enlarged ed., Harvard University Press, 1966. pp. 77-106.
- (14) I have a great sympathy with the idea of "more relaxed realism" which Christopher Hookway discussed in his *Quine: Language, Experience and Reality*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1988. p. 216.