

Naturalized Epistemology

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In Jaegwon Kim's article, "What is 'Naturalized Epistemology'?" he examines Quine's article, "Epistemology Naturalized," and argues against naturalizing epistemology by claiming that justification is a normative concept. We cannot conceive knowledge without also considering justification, therefore knowledge is also a normative concept. Since science is dependent on descriptive facts and not normative facts then science cannot be used to explain knowledge. Kim then argues that normative ethics are supervenient and this is proof that justification cannot be taken out of knowledge. In this paper, I will first explain Kim's article and his interpretation of Quine's theory. Then I will discuss why Kim and other non-naturalists are unable to comprehend the scientific facts which underlie all of life. Finally, I will address Kim's major objection to naturalized epistemology - - his concept of supervenience - - and I will argue that his theory of supervenience falls short of providing an explanation for knowledge.

Kim claims that epistemology is a normative inquiry due to epistemology's roots in justification. However, justification has posed to be a problem for epistemologists due to the disagreements about the criteria for justification and what can be claimed to be knowledge with those criteria. Even when epistemologists can answer these questions there are still only few beliefs which will pass the test of being justified true beliefs. However, Kim argues that although there has been a problem of justification it cannot be completely eliminated from epistemology because "justification is the only epistemic component" of the Justified True Belief definition of knowledge (Kim 1988, p. 383). Therefore, justification remains to be the question of epistemology and is central to studying knowledge. Since justification is a normative concept, epistemology is also normative.

Kim discusses the foundationalist strategy which is the target of Quine's critique. The foundationalist uses deduction to arrive at basic beliefs and continues until no more basic beliefs can be derived. Quine asks us to first quit the foundationalist strategy of validation and to then replace classical epistemology with the new strategy of naturalized epistemology. Quine claims that naturalized

epistemology is an “empirical psychological study of our cognitive processes...” (Kim 1988, p. 387). However, Kim concludes that because Quine is criticizing traditional epistemology for its concentration on validation achieved through deduction, Quine is asking us to set aside rationality completely. To consider naturalized epistemology we must set aside the entire framework for justification-centered epistemology and replace it with a causal-nomological science of human cognition (Kim 1988, p. 388). Quine claims this can be done by studying psychology to see how human cognizers develop theories through observation (Kim 1988, p. 398).

However, according to Kim, if justification drops out of naturalized epistemology then knowledge also drops out completely. In traditional epistemology, theories and representations correspond to a system of beliefs. For epistemology to be naturalized we must study how sensory experience leads to the formation of beliefs (Kim 1988, p. 389). However, Quine is not concerned with justification or rationality. Rather, he is concerned with causality. The concern then becomes the causal-nomological relationship of sensory experience and human cognition. Kim argues that this is no longer epistemology.

It must also be considered that a person’s beliefs arise from other beliefs which that person previously holds. This is what regulates what is reasonable for that individual. To study beliefs you must study beliefs in accordance with normative standards of evidence and justification. Kim argues even if the natural epistemologist only studies the “representations” as neural states then the neural states should be discerned and the naturalized epistemologist must still consider their normative concepts.

Kim then considers the psychological approach. Kim claims that naturalized epistemologists and non-naturalists can agree that the criteria for justification rely on naturalistic terms. This is supported by the concept of epistemic supervenience in which epistemic properties supervene on naturalistic properties. However, Kim objects to the idea that if a justified belief can be reduced to “a brute fundamental fact,” there must be rationality which the belief relies upon and this rationality is grounded in descriptive properties. It is possible that values are only consistent with facts. However, this is weak supervenience. Strong supervenience is when there are non-valuational “reasons” or “grounds” for the attribution of values and these reasons are the basis for norms. The argument that beliefs supervene upon fact is fundamental to the concepts of value and valuation. Therefore, epistemological supervenience is what underlies normative epistemology and therefore there is no need to

study the sciences for an answer to the question of epistemology (Kim 1988, p. 400).

Kim begins his argument against naturalized epistemology by discussing the traditional concept of justification which we rely upon with our beliefs. He criticizes naturalized epistemology by claiming that what Quine is proposing can no longer be called epistemology. Kim's belief that Quine wants to remove justification from epistemology is due to the fact that he cannot conceptualize knowledge without justification. Kim only recognizes justifications as being normative. Kim does not consider the objective, factual justifications which are prevalent in science and provide answers to questions. According to Kim, it appears that justification is some kind of filter where input enters and those concepts which pass the test of rationality succeed as beliefs. Quine, on the other hand, is presenting the idea that justification is measurable in our natural world. He claims that by studying psychology and what drives people (purely scientific reasoning, such as survival, release of hormones, etc.), we can define this concept of justification in a causal-nomological sense. Therefore, in naturalized epistemology, causality does not replace justification. Rather, it becomes the basis for justification.

The major problem this serves to epistemologists is that the justification is no longer internal. Rather, justification is removed from the "soul" of the person and placed in the external world. However, it is this inability to view justification as an external concept that has barred epistemologists from an objective interpretation of our knowledge. Quine is arguing that if we can find these justifications in the external world and expose their workings through science then the question of knowledge will finally be answered. Thus, Quine does not lose justification, he only presents an objective manner in measuring and applying justification.

Kim then argues that Quine must continue to study beliefs in naturalized epistemology because by studying theories in the traditional sense we are still studying beliefs. If Quine must study beliefs then he is forced back into considering the normative aspects. However, Kim considers the concept of a theory in the traditional sense. Quine is proposing to replace the traditional scheme with an integration of science and philosophy. Therefore, I argue that the traditional views of a "theory" and "belief" must also be replaced. The naturalized epistemologist is not forced to consider either of these concepts as normative concepts. Although the question of knowledge remains, there is no doubt that our understanding of the natural world has evolved and that has affected our understandings of ourselves.

In the history of science and philosophy scholars have considered physics, mathematics, astronomy and biology when conducting experiments. Philosophers today even account for science when they consider the natural limitations of the world on ourselves. Although there is a separation of science and philosophy, both disciplines affect our knowledge. Quine is stressing that through naturalized epistemology the dichotomy can be integrated and each discipline will aid in the development of our understanding. It is Kim's inability to see past the traditional notions of epistemology and philosophy that bar him from fully grasping naturalized epistemology.

There is hesitance among scholars for new theories which threaten to replace what is a familiar and traditional way of thinking. It is not only difficult for us as humans to grasp new concepts, but it is even more difficult to ask a person to forget what they think they know and replace it with a different way of thinking. Kim's criticism and skepticism of naturalized epistemology is nothing more than this. If Kim's argument is simplified the following is the basis for his objections to naturalized epistemology: "Naturalized epistemology is not plausible because that is not the way things are." If we, as scientists or as philosophers or both want to continue to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves, the world and all that lies between, then we must find new ways of making future discoveries so that we can come closer to the truth. If scholars adhere to a way of thinking because it supports beliefs that we already have then we would make no progress.

Throughout Kim's article he discusses epistemology and continues to claim relentlessly that it is a normative discipline and cannot be conceived otherwise. Kim briefly discusses "epistemic supervenience" (but claims there is a "detailed defense" thereto) in support of his claim that epistemology is in fact normative (Kim 1988, p. 399). Kim states that there are factual bases for beliefs but refuses to associate these bases to anything besides reason. I argue that Kim's idea of supervenience falls short - - the bases of beliefs are actually rooted deeper than Kim will recognize. With Kim's supervenience he is unable to get to the root of knowledge because as soon as he approaches this area where no more explanations can consistently be argued with pure philosophy he simply attributes the justification to reason. He relies on reason to provide justification for values, but does not attribute reason to nature's biological will to survive, thrive and nurture. Kim argues for supervenience in norms and argues that they are completely independent of any "brute fundamental facts" (Kim 1988, p. 400). However, I argue that our natural tendencies in our bodies and in our minds can be studied

and measured through psychology and the other sciences. Kim's hesitance in recognizing the ability of science to objectively observe and explain epistemology is based on the following: if it can be proven that the causality of our ethics can be attributed to nothing more than neural action then it can be construed that we are no more ethical than animals. The non-naturalist's tendency to attribute rationality and ethics to something great in humanity and humanity alone goes back throughout the history of philosophy.

REFERENCES

- Kim, J. (1988). "What Is 'Naturalized Epistemology'?" *Philosophical Perspectives, vol. 2: Epistemology*, pp. 381-405.