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EPISTEMOLOGICAL NATURALISM, SKEPTICAL THREAT AND THE QUESTION OF NORMATIVITY IN POST-APOCALYPTIC TIMES

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My aim in this paper is to critically deal with two issues confronting naturalist philosophers who want to steer a middle course between radical naturalism and total *a-priorism* in epistemology. These issues are (1) the role of *a priori* in ordinary human knowledge, and (2) who succeeds and who fails in properly dealing with the skeptical challenge. I focus on the views of P. Kitcher and L. BonJour with an aim to display the strengths and weaknesses of the naturalist perspective. My conclusion is that there are prospects for a viable synthesis between a naturalist approach and old-fashioned normativity in epistemology. Moreover, it seems that neither camp is in an inherently advantageous position with regard to skeptical worries or challenges.

1. Introduction. Beginning with the publication of „Epistemology Naturalized“ by Willard V. O. Quine in 1969, the naturalization camp in epistemology has moved forward by an interesting philosophical route.[1] The majority of professional philosophers in the analytic tradition were flabbergasted upon hearing Quine's apocalyptic pronouncements about the fate of theory of knowledge—especially the way it was practiced in the rationalist tradition. With his extreme anti-*apriorism*, Quine famously took the classical empiricist (viz., Humean) criticism to the next level by renouncing the alleged conceptual gap between matters of fact and relation of ideas and by homogenizing the epistemological field in the direction of total *a posteriority*. A considerable number of thinkers thought that this amounted to giving up any sort of normativity and turning to pure description. A more accurate characterization would perhaps be that Quine abandoned a distinctively philosophical theory of knowledge, not norms of scientific enterprise. The epistemologist could still use norms, for instance, for bringing about successful predictions, and, in this restricted sense, such norms could be considered mainly as „engineering norms“ which regulate the anticipation of stimuli.[2] It is abundantly clear that if we heed Quine's advice, we end up in a position diametrically opposite to the Cartesian-Kantian line of theorizing about human knowledge and its underlying dynamics.

In addition to those who enthusiastically applauded Quine's radical stance and those who were either appalled or repulsed by it, a certain group of philosophers have attempted to find a middle position, one that essentially synthesizes Quine's worries about *apriorism*

[1] Quine, W. V. O. „Epistemology Naturalized,“ reprinted in H. Kornblith (ed), *Naturalizing Epistemology*, 2nd ed., Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994. See also his „Natural Kinds“ reprinted in *Naturalizing Epistemology*.

[2] Quine, W. V. O. *Pursuit of Truth*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 19.

and a basic intuition in favor of retaining the normative force of the epistemological enterprise.[3] This latter group, „neo-naturalists" have produced significant ideas about some of the traditional issues of epistemology during the second half of the last century. Two questions that confront them have been about (1) the role of a priori in ordinary human knowledge, and (2) who succeeds and who fails to properly deal with the skeptical challenge. In the rest of this paper, I will critically deal with these questions, focusing mostly on the pertinent debate between P. Kitcher and L. BonJour.

2. The Neo-naturalist Attitude Towards Normativity. To state it in a nutshell, the Quinean „naturalized epistemology" emerges as a reaction to armchair philosophizing—more specifically, to predominantly analytic and apsychological approaches to studying human knowledge.[4] This obviously implies a strong rejection of the (post-) Fregean attitude vis-à-vis *apriorist* justification and intrusions of psychology into formal matters.[5] Many naturalists who sympathize with the essence of the Quinean reaction to the epistemological tradition have yet chosen to adopt a „quasi-traditional" approach to the concept of human knowledge. These philosophers all endorse the—minimal—naturalist tenet that the question of how we *ought* to arrive at our beliefs is not unrelated to how we actually *do* arrive at them.[6] This means, for philosophers like P. Kitcher, admitting the relevance of our psychological and biological capacities in studying human knowledge. Consequently the central aim of neo-naturalists is to reflect on the cognitive enterprise (including the ventures of science), on its history and on the capacities of those who participate in it, to achieve *corrigible* formulations of the goals of the enterprise and *corrigible* accounts of promising strategies for achieving those goals. Epistemology and philosophy of science, thus construed, attempt to fulfill traditional normative functions, and conceive themselves as continuous with the methodological reflections of scientific practitioners.[7]

If this latter sort of naturalism can be defended as a viable alternative, it enables us to steer between the two epistemological extremes, between the Quinean distrust of normativity and a robust apsychologism. Despite the fact that the 20th century naturalists share the basic intuitions of Quine, this moderate version pursues in general the aim of formulating „*corrigible* epistemic ideals," being constantly informed by science, especially by empirical psychology. Of course, it is yet to be seen whether a moderately naturalized

[3] This essay is a not intended to be a survey of recent work on the major theses of naturalism. For some particularly enlightening accounts, see Maffie, J., „Recent Work on Naturalized Epistemology," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1990, pp. 281-293; Fogelin, R. J. „Aspects of Quine's Naturalized Epistemology," in Roger F. Gibson Jr. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Quine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 19-46; Kornblith, H. „In Defense of a Naturalized Epistemology" in J. Greco and E. Sosa (eds), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999, pp. 158-169.

[4] See Kitcher, P. „The Naturalists Return," *The Philosophical Review*, vol.101, no.1, 1992, pp. 53-114; Kornblith, H. „What is Naturalistic Epistemology?" in H. Kornblith (ed), *Naturalizing Epistemology*, 2nd ed., Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994; Steup, W. *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996.

[5] See BonJour, L. „Against Naturalized Epistemology," in P. A. French, T. E. Uehling, and H. K. Wettstein (eds), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy: Philosophical Naturalism*, vol. XIX, 1994, pp. 283-284. See also Kitcher „The Naturalists Return," pp. 53-59.

[6] Kornblith, „What is Naturalistic Epistemology?", pp. 1-3.

[7] Kitcher „The Naturalists Return," p. 58.

epistemology can overcome the problems encountered by the radical version.

Kitcher anticipates certain objections to naturalism which, as he admits, seems to „occupy an uncomfortable middle ground between earlier epistemologists and those who campaign for abandoning (or relativizing) normative projects. First and foremost, it is not clear at all what role the empirical (psychological, historical, etc.) studies of our „actual cognitive practices" can play in a normative epistemology. Naturalism does *not* after all seem to assert that „the usual philosophical sources of normative principles" must be replaced with certain other means of investigation; it only gives us „the metaepistemological principle that the deliverances of these sources are not *a priori*."[8] As one might expect, this can satisfy neither the post-Fregean nor the radical naturalist. The former would maintain that naturalism has little substantial to say, and the latter would insist that it is impotent to deal with the problems caused by its opponent.

In order discern the force of this argument against the relevance of empirical factors in normative matters, consider the following. Many epistemological principles (such as the Bayesian theorem) talk about the way an agent *ought to* reason under specified conditions. But, one may ask, in cases where actual instances of those principles fall short of these theoretical requirements, who/what is to be held responsible for such failures? Why should we believe that it is a mistake or inadequacy on the side of the principle that normal cognitive agents are unable to satisfy the requirements put forward by it? Why not think that since it has been actual human agents who successfully formulated those ideal principles, these agents must also be capable of recognizing them? Even in cases of repeated failures to keep up with those high standards, we can still entertain the possibility that it is education or similar peripheral factors that are responsible for the failures. This shows the irrelevance of empirical findings to normative epistemology.[9]

One response to this charge is that our ability to formulate epistemological strategies or principles does *not* imply that we can implement them. To see how this works, consider the requirement of total evidence which demands of an ordinary cognizer to use or consider all the evidence available in his belief system in forming a particular empirical belief. First of all, it is an empirical fact that this condition is totally unrealistic regarding our capacities of information processing. (Compare with the following ethical analogy: The stipulation that an action is morally justified if and only if it would be approved by God would be an unrealistic and perhaps even an absurd principle, despite the fact that it *can* be formulated by a finite human agent.) Secondly, we human cognizers in fact get much better theoretical and practical results in our interaction with the environment by acting selectively and sifting out the relevant information when we are dealing with particular cases. There is little doubt that such a procedure is more preferable because of its salient „superiority" regarding the cognitive efficiency of human agents in actual circumstances. And this gives us a cogent reason to think that

[e]mpirical studies are relevant to epistemology because we need to understand the cognitively superior ways in which creatures like ourselves could achieve neatly circumscribed problems in the first place.[10]

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

A similar point has been made by Kornblith. He contends that even though we surely can and do formulate certain techniques and principles *a priori*, it would be imprudent not to subject them to empirical test. Answers to epistemological questions may be given independently of relevant experience, but it by no means follows that these epistemological truths are *obvious*.[11] This idea, together with that endorsed by Kitcher, constitutes perhaps one of the strongest motives behind any „naturalized" epistemology, a motive that has obvious affinities with the basic Quinean picture of human beings (certainly including philosophers) as fallible, imperfect agents striving to cope with the outside world, rather than detached minds engaged in an activity of theoretically constructing and/or policing the epistemo-ontological realm from a privileged standpoint.

The opponent of naturalism, however, can press his point by insisting that while it is not altogether incorrect to say that epistemology is informed by empirical matters to a certain degree, a *failure to recognize* the relative *autonomy* (or the experience-independent nature) of the way we form or conceive of the normative categories may lead to a disaster in epistemology. In this respect, the argument goes, naturalism clearly occupies a highly suspicious position. Let us see how this idea can be elaborated.

3. BonJour *contra* Naturalists: The Role and Nature of *A Priori* Reasoning. According to BonJour, who has been a staunch defender of „normative epistemology," Quine's well-known proclamations about the new identity of epistemological enterprise should make us suspect that he is *not* using terms like ‚evidence' in a sense we all do both in ordinary circumstances and in science. Therefore, BonJour agrees with J. Kim in that Quine's naturalist theory cannot do good justice to the inevitably normative character of most of our epistemological concepts.[12] To be more specific, BonJour thinks that when we talk about a piece of evidence or reason for believing something, what we have in mind is basically „reason ... for thinking that some claim is *true*..."[13] The crucial matter here, however, is that *this* cannot be a concept of an empirical discipline like psychology, and Quine's version of epistemology which studies mainly the relation between sensory input and cognitive output must be silent about it. The more provocative claim of BonJour is that the net upshot of this picture is a „thoroughgoing version of skepticism": We, human agents, form beliefs about the world and act upon them; but, if we buy the Quinean picture, we have no cogent reason of any sort for thinking that *any* of these beliefs are true. And if knowledge necessarily involves the possession of such reasons, as most philosophers would still insist, then we also have no knowledge. This may indeed... be „the human predicament". But it is surely extremely unsatisfactory and also intuitively implausible from both a theoretical and a practical standpoint.[14]

Notice that, being an epistemological realist (of sorts), BonJour admits skepticism as a logical possibility. Nonetheless, he is also a philosopher who is striving to show that we can and do know certain things about the world. Besides, skepticism cannot really be

[11] Kornblith, „What is Naturalistic Epistemology?", pp. 12-13.

[12] Kim, J. „What is ‚Naturalized Epistemology'?" in H. Kornblith (ed), *Naturalizing Epistemology*, 2nd ed., Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994.

[13] BonJour, „Against Naturalized Epistemology," pp. 287 (emphasis mine).

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 287.

a position Quine would be pleased to end up with. As a matter of fact, Quine believes that we can combat skepticism (which is in fact a by-product of science), but only within the borders of *scientific* activity. We tend to get skeptical when, for instance, science finds out the illusions that emerge in the process of visual perception. This teaches us not to take what we see with our very eyes as granted. But, of course, talking about some „non-veridical representation," to use a psychological term, must assume the *prior* acceptance of certain „bodies" which are *posited* by science as what is to be perceived „veridically".[15] And, for Quine, it is the scientists' responsibility to investigate those cases where we get conflicting results regarding what science says and what we obtain as sensory evidence. In short, since skepticism arises „only from within science," the latter should treat its own problems and rebuild its boat „while staying afloat in the sea".[16]

BonJour believes that this line of reasoning is seriously flawed for two main reasons: First, the source of skeptical doubts are certainly *not* restricted to our noticing a few illusions during perception. One genuine reason for being skeptical is, for example, Hume's argument concerning our inductive inferences. Another one may be our suspecting that the justification or evidence available in favor of a particular empirical proposition fails to be adequate in showing that the proposition is in fact *true*. These examples clearly show that there are epistemological issues (causing skeptical doubts) which evidently have nothing to do with the problem about the way we perceive things. It goes without saying that Quine (and his science) must be silent about *such* skeptical challenges. A second, and closely connected, problem is that Quine misses what is really at stake here in the face of the skeptical threat. The skeptic, BonJour says, actually need *not* challenge the idea that there are causal relations between the world and our beliefs (or that an account about the causal origins of the beliefs we hold can be given within our current scientific repertoire). What the skeptic questions is the justification of particular beliefs which are, without doubt, caused in most cases by factors outside us. Let me try to clarify this with an example. Suppose *S* believes, due to certain superstitious convictions, that whenever she sees a black cat, her immediate guess regarding the president's whereabouts unmistakably turns out to be true. Let us also assume that she has been, from a purely statistical point of view, very successful in her guesses on that matter using this odd method. *S* is also told (by reliable sources) that her success in correctly guessing where the president currently is simply a fluke which can be adequately explained by rational (e.g., scientific) means. In one particular case, *S*, having seen a black cat, forms the belief that the president is in Rome just when she hears on the radio that he is visiting London. Despite the presence of strong counter-evidence, *S* ignores all of them. Even if she happens to be right about the president's being in Rome in this particular case (because of, say, some extraordinary circumstances related to the president), most of us would think that *S*'s beliefs about it would be unjustified. Moreover, she would *ipso facto* fail to „know" that the president is currently in Rome. The interesting point for the purposes of our discussion is, of course, that it seems clearly possible for science to give a cogent account of the complicated chain of physical occurrences and psychological processes that allows us to explain how,

[15] Here I am borrowing certain terms from cognitive psychology which Quine would definitely not welcome given his behaviorist tendencies. Still, I guess, these descriptions are not against the general spirit of what he wishes to say.

[16] BonJour, „Against Naturalized Epistemology," pp. 287-288.

starting with certain sensations and perceptions, *S* comes to produce that particular theory and that particular belief about the president's whereabouts. However, such an explanation obviously *cannot* tell us what is wrong with this entire process *S* has gone through. The conclusion is straightforward: Quine's theory results in a disastrous skepticism regarding what we ordinarily take as „normative" (or, non-descriptive) aspects of epistemology, viz., justification and truth of our beliefs.

Let me now turn to Bonjour's response to Kitcher's version of naturalism. Briefly, the gist of the neo-naturalist argument is that empirical (especially psychological) studies and considerations are relevant and perhaps decisive at every stage of doing epistemology. BonJour's concedes that psychology does enter into epistemological matters, but only tangentially, not centrally. These „tangential" or „peripheral" relationships are as follows: First of all, it is beyond any doubt that epistemic justification (remembering BonJour's coherentism and internalism) demands more than just logical relations among propositions. Second, „the application of the philosophical results to actual cases will have to make reference to psychological facts about, e.g., the causation of belief".[17] And, finally, any attempt to improve our cognitive success must, at some stage, pay attention to, say, the limitations of actual doxastic agents. Nevertheless, BonJour believes that all these points are related to the *application* of our epistemic principles or assessments; they are *not* about „how those assessments are themselves arrived at and justified". Therefore, such a „psychologism" cannot lend support to any „significant" sort of naturalism.

Let us now turn to BonJour's second argument *against* the naturalist (*à la* Kitcher) tenet „that significant epistemological principles or premises can [not] be established on an *a priori* basis..."[18] If BonJour's counter-argument succeeds, it will, he believes, constitute a significant alternative to (sorts of) naturalism. BonJour's treatment of the matter begins with an observation: the immensely influential arguments put forward by Quine against *a priori* justification seem to assume „that if there *were* any a priori justified claims, they would have to be analytic".[19] Given Quine's strong arguments against the latter, one seems to be left with the conclusion that *a priori* justification is out of question. BonJour thinks that this is an obvious fallacy and that there is still a case to be made for *a priori* justification *per se*.

Now consider the well-known Kuhnian argument against the plausibility of seeking *a priori* justification of epistemological principles.[20] According to this, sociological and historical considerations lead us reasonably to the conclusion that we ought to „abandon the *a priori* status of methodological claims and use the performances of past and present scientists as a guide to formulating a *fallible* theory of confirmation and evidence".[21] But this idea overlooks, for BonJour, another possibility: that of formulating *a priori* assessments or principles, reconsidering them in light of scientific findings and, if necessary, abandoning them in favor of the new ones. The crucial point here is that the *acceptance* of any such precept can only be an *a priori* matter. Consider the example of „theoretical reasoning," viz., the sort of reasoning which, starting with observational statements, ar-

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 290.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 292.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 292.
[20] Kuhn, T. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970.
[21] Bonjour, „Against Naturalized Epistemology," p. 294.

rives at a conclusion about entities or happenings which cannot be observed directly. BonJour believes that this kind of reasoning provides us with a plausible candidate for *a priori* where the conclusion, in a definite sense, „transcends" the information given in the premises. Consequently, the Kuhnian argument fails to establish what it is intended to, that is, „the ideas of *a priori* justification and *a priori* epistemology should be abandoned".[22]

BonJour's aim in his paper is not restricted to showing the possibility of *a priori* assessments or, generally speaking, of *a priori* epistemology. More strongly, he aims to convince the reader that „naturalized epistemology in general and the rejection of *a priori* justification in particular leads directly to epistemological disaster".[23] It seems that the key to understanding his argument is an appreciation of how we „go beyond" simple observational knowledge in various contexts. BonJour asserts, in connection with the argument given in the previous paragraph, that transition from observational or experiential beliefs to any of the following *requires a priori reasons*:

(1) The belief that Aristotle was born in Stagira
(2) The belief that the world will come to an end in the year 2100.
(3) The belief that God exists.
(4) The belief in the survival of the fittest.

Take any of the sentences above. It should be clear, BonJour thinks, that the reasons one can give for accepting it as true necessitates transcending the level of plain observations and experiences. This is because

[i]f we are to have any reasons for thinking that these... beliefs to be true, such reason must apparently either (i) dependent on an inference of some sort the directly observational beliefs or (ii) be entirely independent of direct observation.[24]

Since reasons associated with (ii) are unproblematically *a priori* for BonJour, he turns his attention to (i). A reason of the latter sort can be accepted only if the *conditional* of the form $(o_1 \wedge o_2 \wedge \ldots \wedge o_m) \supset n$, where each o_i is the propositional content of an observational belief and n is the propositional content of the non-observational belief held on the basis of those given in the antecedent, is one we can have *reason* to take to be true. Of course, the reason to accept this conditional statement as true cannot be, BonJour believes, other than *a priori*. This brings us to the striking conclusion that if, as the naturalist claims, there are no a priori reasons for thinking anything to be true (or, as Kitcher sometimes seems to suggest, none of any epistemological importance), the inevitable result is that we have no reason for thinking that any of our beliefs whose content transcends direct observation are true.[25]

And, once again, the natural upshot of all this, BonJour maintains, is skepticism.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 295.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 295.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 296.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 296.

It may be interesting at this point to see how Kitcher himself entertains one possible skeptical objection to the naturalist position. The objection goes as follows: The thesis of naturalism—which comes with an inevitable normative component—can be rendered plausible „only if we can arrive at principles that would properly guide inquiry in any world and which can be validated *a priori*...“[26] Otherwise, if adequate epistemic principles *depend* largely on the contingent information coming from empirical sciences, we face the serious problem of having to employ „contaminated“ or „flawed“ input to our normative mechanisms. To put the problem in a slightly different manner, if proper or adequate epistemic recommendations and principles are to emerge only at a later stage in the process (as would be demanded by naturalism), they must be based on a picture of nature obtained by using error-prone strategies. Consequently, the apparent information used in formulating our epistemic recommendations is likely to be misleading, with the result that what we take to be correct epistemic recommendations are infected with mistakes.[27]

While this obviously invites skepticism, Kitcher is rather unwilling to play the game the skeptic offers. The latter poses challenges by questioning what must be presupposed in any sort of empirical inquiry. The naturalist, on the other hand, must insist that human knowledge is possible only on the basis of a huge amount of world knowledge inherited form our ancestors and that we can hope to develop progressively better representations and strategies by improving upon such heritage. But why should we hope that we are in fact capable of making such a progress? Having recourse to Darwin and company will not help much here because our cognitive structures have evolved arguably to fulfill relatively simpler tasks or problems encountered in nature, and it is not certain that human agents actually do possess accurate systems of representations which can deal with complicated scientific problems. Kitcher advises agnosticism rather than pessimism in the face of this predicament. But he hastens to add that there is hope on this matter *so long as* the naturalist's aim will be to show that the case for continued divergence [between rival systems] and indefinite underdetermination [of alternative systems by input from nature] has *not* been made out. ... *All* that... naturalism needs to show is that resolution is ultimately achieved, in favor either of one of the originally contending parties or of some emerging alternative that somehow combines their merits.[28]

Of course, BonJour believes that Kitcher's naturalist strategy is totally misguided. First of all, he sees no reason to accept the claim that there is nothing greatly worrisome about relying upon our „epistemological heritage“. That is, BonJour thinks that skeptical issues and other epistemological problems can legitimately be raised for our ancestors too, and, hence, what we have received form earlier generations cannot play the comforting role naturalism attributes to it.[29] More specifically, he believes that „whether and why we ever have any reason to think that a conclusion that goes beyond observation is true is far too fundamental and inescapable to be dismissed as a clever dialectical trick“.[30]

[26] Kitcher, „The Naturalists Return,“ p. 79.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 79.
[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98, emphases mine.
[29] BonJour, „Against Naturalized Epistemology,“ p. 297.
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 297.

4. A Critique Over the Debate. I am inclined to think that we have now reached an impasse in the debate between the friends and foes of naturalism. There is, I submit, a substantial clash of *basic intuitions* in the present situation vis-à-vis the exact nature of the normative enterprise in epistemology. In this last section, I will broaden this point by dwelling further on the BonJourian misgivings about naturalism.

Recall that according to BonJour all the empirical factors which are alleged by the naturalist to be relevant to the normative enterprise in epistemology are actually related to the *application* of our epistemic principles or assessments; they are *not* about „how those assessments are themselves arrived at and justified". Regarding the latter issue, BonJour thinks that such assessments inevitably go, in a crucial sense, beyond empirical or observational factors. Hence, it is not reasonable to argue, for example, that those given below are empirical or observational in any reasonable sense:

beliefs about the remote past, beliefs about the nature, beliefs about the present situations where no observer is present, beliefs about general laws, the vast majority of the beliefs that make up theoretical science, and perhaps others.[31]

BonJour's conclusion is that our reasons for thinking that such belief-contents are *true* cannot be other than *a priori*.

What causes the conflict here is, of course, BonJour's peculiar understanding of the concept of *a priori*. The controversy about the nature of *a priori* knowledge is one I cannot broach here. But let me point out that we can conceive the notion of *a priori* in epistemology in at least two ways. On the one hand, we have the traditional way of defining it as knowledge independent of all relevant experience. On the other hand, we have the BonJourian claim that the assertion of any belief going beyond immediate experience or observation is an *a priori* matter.[32] Needless to say, these two approaches are to yield rather different judgments with regard to the status of simple humdrum instances of knowledge. For example, right now I know that I have a personal copy of *Being and Time* resting on a shelf in my office. I call my office mate from home and request that he confirm the location of the book. Upon getting an affirmative answer, I form the belief that „My personal copy of *Being and Time* is currently in my office," which happens to be genuine knowledge. From the traditional perspective, it is unintelligible to claim that there are *a priori* reasons (or knowledge) involved in this particular case whereas, from the BonJourian perspective, I have moved towards the field of *a priori*.[33]

Despite the fact that many epistemologists will certainly have difficulty in digesting this charming but nonetheless quaint account, I tend to think that BonJour actually has a philosophical point there. One way to resolve the issue may be to concede to BonJour what he wants regarding the *a priori* (*à la* BonJour!) nature of reasons and, at the same time, to pursue the naturalist project, which has undeniable attractions, as described and

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 296.

[32] Compare BonJour's claim with Aristotle's argument that the first such principles of any branch of natural sciences are grasped by an instant act of *nous*, not by inductive reasoning—though the latter is admittedly helpful „along the way".

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 296.

propounded by neo-naturalists like Kitcher. This principally means carrying out the business of formulating and improving *corrigible* recommendations and assessments as usual, *and* admitting that each new individual assessment is an epistemic act that requires transcending the level of raw (empirical) material.[34] Accordingly, the naturalist admits that there is a non-empirical dimension in our „epistemological struggle" with nature. On the other hand, it is to be agreed that such an endeavor is possible or meaningful *only* against a huge background of world knowledge and epistemic practices which we have inherited form our ancestors and share with other human beings. I believe that such a compromise position is not entirely impossible because Kitcher seems to concede to BonJour some of the latter's most central points, and *vice versa*.[35]

Let me turn to the question of skepticism. One strong objection to naturalism was that it leads directly to skepticism by making epistemology dependent upon „empirical nurturing" which, as admitted by naturalism, is itself in need of checking out and improvement. Kitcher attempts to respond to this difficulty by arguing that the chief aim of naturalism is to come up with *corrigible* formulations and recommendations. While this does not seem to help much in alleviating the worries of a rationalist philosopher like BonJour, it is interesting to note that the latter is not necessarily in a much better position with respect to the threat of skepticism. If a significant portion of the epistemological task is independent, as BonJour maintains, of the empirical elements or considerations, then we arguably ought to have good faith in the reliability of the „rational" processes and mechanisms we ordinarily use in our doxastic actions—unless skepticism is to be declared triumphant. But, faith aside, the issue about reliability makes empirical matters and naturalistic themes obviously relevant, and we seem to come back to the point repeatedly emphasized by the naturalists. So, skepticism looks like a knife that cuts both ways. It seems unlikely that either the devoted *apriorist* or the devoted naturalist will be able to send the skeptic away for a philosophical holiday. The resolution of this issue lies, I think, beyond the particular controversy investigated here.

A different sort of question is about which philosophical tools will be available to the parties of the debate on skepticism. Some epistemologists rightly argued that the (staunch) naturalist may ultimately find herself in a fairly awkward position—despite her intentions to the contrary—vis-à-vis one's ability to deal with, or even address, the very problem of skepticism. While the radical naturalist seems to retain a sanguine hope about fighting skepticism by means of naturalism's native resources (e.g., scientific methods and tools), few people would follow Quine in thinking that the legitimate domain of „skeptical issues" is the empirical realm where, say, a stick immersed in water appears to be bent—a harmless illusion that can eventually be exposed through empirical investigation. The critics seem well justified in insisting that radical naturalism fails spectacularly in dealing with this matter because the *traditional* issues of skepticism, which apparently

[34] Notwithstanding that each assessment of this sort gets informed and fashioned by the empirical side of the matter.

[35] See especially Kitcher, „The Naturalists Return," p.58 (about the need for normativity) and BonJour, „Against Naturalized Epistemology," pp. 289-201 (about the role of certain psychological elements in epistemological assessments).

cannot be done away so easily, can only be addressed within normative epistemology.[36]

There are, of course, some good prospects for a viable marriage of a basic naturalist approach and normativity in epistemology. To give one common example, a number of philosophers have offered convincing accounts of *supervenience*,[37] and argued that both description and prescription are legitimate concerns of epistemological endeavor.[38] As Kitcher puts it, „[t]he goal of... inquiry is to produce a structured account of nature *insofar as that is possible for limited beings like ourselves*".[39] This statement evidently smacks of Kantianism, and perhaps not accidentally: A crucial philosophical message that emerges from the debate scrutinized above is that epistemological principles totally ignorant of empirical facts are empty, and empirical studies without norms and epistemic values are blind.

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[36] For a lucid discussion of this point, see Fumerton, R. „Skepticism and Naturalistic Epistemology," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, XIX, 1994, pp. 321-340.

[37] See, e.g., Goldman, A. I. *Epistemology and Cognition*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986; Kim, J. „What is ‚Naturalized Epistemology'?" in H. Kornblith (ed), *Naturalizing Epistemology*, 2nd ed., Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994; Armstrong, D. M. *A World of States of Affairs*, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

[38] See especially Goldman, A. I. „Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology" in H. Kornblith (ed), *Naturalizing Epistemology*, 2nd ed., Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994.

[39] Kitcher, „The Naturalists Return," p. 107. See also Kitcher, P. *The Advancement of Science*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.