

Refuting Epistemological Realism



Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

: Do we have knowledge of the world as the epistemological realists' assumption or impossible in the way sceptics' objects? And if our knowledge of the world is possible in which kinds of conditions and by what kinds of reasons or arguments it is grounded. The epistemological realists do not understand what they are talking about because knowledge of the world is not undefined epistemic concept as they made it unexplained. They did not conceptualize it in a way that we can explain. As a result sceptics attack on the generality of knowledge of the world is inevitable. Michael Williams contends to conclude that there is knowledge of the world as an object of theory but not in a way that epistemological realists assume and it should be understood we believe about the world amounts to knowledge we need a way of reducing our beliefs to order. We need different cases of knowledge of the world as an example or we need to individuate the general knowledge of the world because the method epistemological realist employed is defective.

1. Introduction

Epistemological realists understood knowledge of the world in a general way. But for the sceptics this kind of understanding of knowledge of the world is vague. It would not be an explanation of how we have any such knowledge. But for the epistemological realists; for example Stroud said accepting sceptic position to arrive at this outcome sceptics' use some kind of distortion. And this distortion will never let us see how knowledge is possible after all. Michael Williams himself argued that since sceptics wouldn't come up with how human knowledge is explained they should be rejected (E,Sosa...etl, 2008). Michael Williams contends if Stroud is right; the sceptics are not successful in denying this knowledge in general, and the epistemological realists may have knowledge of the world but they have to explain to themselves how they know unless otherwise it will remain dissatisfying unanswered (Ibid). So according to Michael Williams to explain how anything we believe about the world amounts to knowledge we need a way of "reducing our beliefs to order" (Ibid). In this paper I will argue epistemological realists' assumption of knowledge of the world is flawed.

2. Epistemological Realism

Therefore understanding knowledge in more specific reducible accounts is sound vis a vis the general assumption of epistemological realists of knowledge of the world. Because it is possible to pick out different examples so that they can be framed as knowledge and we can understand the principle. But the epistemological realists (e.g. Stroud) primary task was to say in jargon reasoning about our knowledge of the world. Sceptics (traditional epistemologists) criticize the totality or generality condition of the knowledge of the world. The crucial idea about epistemic priority is forced on us by mere ordinary understanding or justification. No explanation of how we come to have knowledge of the world that depends on our already having some is general. They want to explain how we are able to know anything at all about the external world.

The sceptics plan is to assess all such knowledge at once. Concerning the knowledge of the world there is basic assumption like that depend on "our already having some". But for the sceptics it is general. It would not be an explanation of how we have any such knowledge. Stroud as far as knowledge of the external world is concerned notes that ;what we seek in the philosophical theory of knowledge is an account that is completely general in several respects .We want to understand how any knowledge at all is possible, how anything we currently accept amounts to knowledge. The distinctive philosophical goal is to understand certain kinds of knowledge with complete generality (Williams, 2008, p. 52, cited in E,Sosa...etl, An Anthology).

The counter argument is by sceptics such that these kinds of attempts for epistemological realists are bound to fail because it is not possible to understand human "knowledge in general". Now as we have seen the totality condition requires us to try to trace our knowledge of the world to something more fundamental which can

only be experiential data. But as a sceptical argument (for example Ayer) reveals it is impossible to explain how such data could ever function as evidence. And for the sceptics if we do so the argument will be circular. They cannot be linked empirically with any facts about the world (or because of its generality).The epistemological realists have to avoid the general knowledge of the world for the sceptics' questions of particularity.

The sceptics, in the context of the attempt to assess the totality of our knowledge of the world it seems impossible either to respect or violate the objectivity requirement. Whatever we do we fail to resist the sceptic. If we violate the totality condition; there are individual empirical facts which can link with the knowledge of the world. They cannot be linked empirically with any facts about the world for; in accepting such linkage we would be crediting ourselves with knowledge of the world. This is impossible because the knowledge of the world is understood as it is in general. If we respect the totality condition; there is no hope of understanding human knowledge in general. The totality condition requires us to try to trace our knowledge of the world to something more fundamental, which can only be experiential data (Williams, 2008, p.52, cited in E,Sosa...etl, An Anthology).

However the sceptics (traditional epistemological) project is also problematic or their objection against the generality of knowledge of the world is not properly constituted so as to radically rebut their epistemic position and replace with new and their own fundamental position. Their objection seems merely "undermining" because of the lack of alternatives that can throw away the former position.

Because of the weakness of the argument that sceptics used to attack epistemological realists, their epistemic position is vulnerable for criticism and objection. Therefore epistemological realists like Stroud noted that we cannot ground our knowledge of the world in the way that traditional epistemology has invited us to because of some defect in the ideas about justification involved in the notion (Ibid).

As Michael Williams noted; more specifically if we accept traditional epistemological project (sceptics), it leads inevitably to the conclusion; either we have no knowledge or that if we do; we will never understand how we do (we couldn't explain how we know the world)(Williams,1991). He said even though the epistemological realists understanding of knowledge of the world is not convincing ,but at the same time sceptics objection did not properly formulated so as to consider knowledge of the world is not as epistemological realists noted.

Therefore, Stroud said accepting sceptic position (that we have no knowledge or that if we do we will never understand how we do) to arrive at this outcome sceptics use some kind of distortion. And this distortion will never let us see how knowledge is possible after all. Since sceptics wouldn't come up with how human knowledge is

explained (they did not suggest their own possible nature of human knowledge) this is a powerful objection and we can say human knowledge in general is possible (Williams, 2008, p.54, cited in E.Sosa...etl, An Anthology).

Williams here concluded by neglecting the sceptics objection as, if Stroud is right; the sceptics are not successful in denying this knowledge in general (knowledge of the world), and the epistemological realists may have knowledge of the world but they have to explain to themselves how they know unless otherwise it will remain dissatisfyingly unanswered. In other words he says it seems like; we may know things about the world but we will never know that we know them or our knowledge of the world is not sufficiently justified (Ibid).

Therefore I argue that the epistemological realists understanding of knowledge is one sided. Because it is Michael Williams who made it a full flagged concept, unless it will remain misguided conception. The reason is they could not illustrate the necessary characteristics or features of knowledge of the world in addition to their assertion that there is knowledge of the world. Furthermore, sceptics' objection is pointless because either they could not understand knowledge of the world as it is or they could not come up with some new epistemic explanation of knowledge of the world. So Michael Williams' illustration of knowledge of the world includes its right nature and its extent (i.e. they are various unrelated, disintegrated).

Knowledge as an object of theory is therefore possible after this characterization of knowledge of the world. Williams said; to raise these questions (that the epistemological realists may have knowledge of the world but they have to explain to themselves how they know) is to begin to examine objects of epistemological enquiry (E.Sosa...etl, 2008).

Even Stroud who thinks our most pressing need as epistemologists is to understand how sceptics' inquiry misinterprets our epistemic position seems not to doubt the existence of its objects. For the idea that there is something called "our epistemic position" is just another aspect of the idea that there is a thing as "human knowledge" or "our view of reality" (Williams, 2008, p.54, cited in E.Sosa...etl, An Anthology).

Williams said; do we have any reason to suppose that there is a genuine totality of knowledge; aren't they more or less unrelated cases? Even the epistemological realists did not pose any reason for the totality of knowledge. they could not pick out a single example for their theory of knowledge. So he said the totality condition is far more problematic. There would be any systematic way of enumerating all the things we believe. And phrases like "our system of beliefs" and "our view of reality" are so vague and we can't be confident they refer to anything (E.Sosa...etl, 2008).

Therefore according to Michael Williams to explain how anything we believe about the world amounts to knowledge we need a way of reducing our beliefs to order or in to different individual examples of knowledge. We have to bring them under principles so that we can survey. If we can do this human knowledge is a possible object of theoretical investigation. Otherwise it will remain vague and unclear in the job of epistemology.

As a result he underlined that our beliefs then do not amount to a single integrated view of reality. And he develops a good framework or method to easily apprehend the knowledge of the world. They are not topically integrated. But this need not be difficult to the project of understanding human knowledge in general. Even if our beliefs are not topically integrated, they might be epistemologically integrated (E.Sosa...etl, 2008). Michael Williams try to mention the work of Descartes in epistemology (i.e. his method of doubt) to employ in understanding of the totality of knowledge of the world.

Thus for example Descartes ties his pre-critical beliefs together,

thereby constituting their totality as an object of theoretical inquiry, by tracing them all to "the senses". No matter how topically heterogeneous, and no matter how unsystematic, his beliefs have this much in common. Only by tracing our beliefs about the world to a common source which is to say a common evidential ground, can we make "beliefs about the world" the name of a coherent kind. In the absence of topical integration; we must look to epistemological considerations for the theoretical integrity we require (Williams, 2008, p.55, cited in E.Sosa...etl, An Anthology).

Another example to contrast whether our knowledge about the world is general or not is explanation or deflation theory of truth. To approach truth in a deflationary spirit; what is involved in a given sentence being true is exhaustively captured by the sentence itself. However the traditional theorist sees things quite differently. According to them truth is the name of an important property shared by all true sentences. This property may be correspondence to incorporability in some ideally coherent system of judgement. No proposition will have an epistemic status it can call its own (Ibid).

"Foundationalists" presuppositions are buried very deeply in the Cartesian project. The foundationalist ideas are something they should be assessed for their totality condition. Foundationalism is the view that justification depends on the availability of terminating beliefs or judgements. They are beliefs or judgements which amount to knowledge without needing support from further empirical beliefs. Foundationalism is sometimes thought to contrast with coherent theory of knowledge or justification. The totality condition that the sceptic (or the traditional philosopher) imposes on a philosophical understanding of our knowledge of the world is what forces us to see that knowledge as somehow derivative from experience. No other way of seeing it permits an assessment, hence a legitimating explanation, at the proper level of generality. We are now in position to see why this argument does not prove what it needs to prove. All it shows is that the doctrine the priority of the experiential knowledge over knowledge of the world is a methodological necessity of the traditional epistemological project. By the sceptic's own standards, there is no inference from the fact that we must take experiential knowledge to be generally prior to knowledge of the world. The argument from methodological necessity is fallacious (E.Sosa...etl, 2008). We have to shift the methodology towards Cartesian (Descartes method of doubt) so as to attack the epistemological realists methodology which is unsound and we should not give attention for the sceptics at same time because of the fallacies of arguments having positions.

3. Conclusion

In the understanding of knowledge of the world; sceptics have posed legitimate oppositions for epistemological realists understanding of knowledge of the world. But they are undermining defeater (i.e. without suggested possible epistemic position) which merely criticize others position. However pointing the failure of the epistemological realists' arguments enables the later thinkers (for example Michael Williams) to easily conceptualize the knowledge of the world. Therefore the sceptics' criticism by itself serves as a spring board for further investigation in the works of the nature of knowledge of the world. Hence knowledge of the world is not general as Stroud uses but we need specific manifestations so that we can refer individual units of knowledge or to speak through Michael Williams the knowledge of the world encompasses different unrelated cases which are epistemically integrated.

Further Reading

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