Naturalized Epistemology
Rules for Good Believing

• Three prominent projects in Epistemology:
  1) Giving rules for good believing
  2) Defining knowledge
  3) Defeating the Sceptic

• Focus: Giving rules for good believing

• Three questions about good believing:
  1) How ought we form, maintain and revise beliefs?
  2) How do we form, maintain and revise beliefs?
  3) Do we form, maintain and revise beliefs the way we ought to?

• Note: The first one is a normative question while the second a descriptive.

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Normative vs. Descriptive

• Normative or evaluative claims are about what one ought to.... believe, desire, do, explain, feel, infer, etc.
  ▪ These claims involve reasons for support or justification.
    Examples:
    - We ought to believe in love because it is makes us good people.
    - We ought to help the poor because we have more than we need.

• Descriptive claims are about how we do (actually).... believe, desire, do, explain, feel, infer, etc.
  ▪ These claims do not involve reasons for support or justification.
    Examples:
    - Most people believe in God.
    - Some cultures practice infanticide.
Normative Epistemology

• Descartes asks: Which beliefs are worth having?
• Traditional epistemology seems irredeemably normative for it centres on the justification of beliefs, i.e. the giving of reasons.

Three Dimensions of Epistemic Normativity:

(1) Primary question: How ought we form, maintain and revise our beliefs?
(2) Central epistemic concepts are normative: Justification and Rationality.
   Example: If a belief is justified, then it is taken to be permissible and reasonable to hold it.
(3) Non-epistemic normative concepts appear in epistemological explanations: the right to be sure, intellectual duty, etc.

• Prominent Advocates: Descartes, Kant, Ayer, etc.
Naturalized Epistemology

- The term ‘naturalized epistemology’ (NE) was coined by W.V. Quine in his 1969 paper ‘Epistemology Naturalized’.
- Some central ideas go back to Hume.
- Advocates of NE reject:
  - first philosophy
  - infallibilism
  - internalism
- Advocates of NE accept:
  - Investigation of knowledge via natural science
  - To naturalize epistemology is to make it a scientific theory
- Prominent Advocates: Quine, Goldman, Kornblith, Kitcher, etc.

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Naturalized Epistemology (2)

- Some consequences of NE:
  - Epistemic hypotheses are judged on their empirical merits.
  - Knowledge-producing mechanisms taken to aid survival.
  - Empiricism: Evidence comes from the senses.
  - Externalism
  - Scepticism an issue only in particular scientific contexts

- Returning to the three questions of good believing, NE holds that we should not answer question 1 before (and independently of) addressing question 2.

- It is a matter of priority: We first investigate how we form beliefs and then answer the question how we ought to form beliefs.

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Example: Hume on Induction

- Two interpretations:

  **Hume the Non-Naturalist:**
  1) We **ought not** to use induction (because reason cannot justify it)
  2) We do (as a matter of irresistible habit) use induction
  3) We do not reason (from observed instances) the way we should

  **Hume the Naturalist:**
  1) We do (as a matter of irresistible habit) use induction
  2) We **ought** to use induction because we do use it to good effect
  3) We do reason (from observed instances) the way we should

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Eliminative Naturalism

- W.V. Quine: Eliminate the normative element of epistemology
  - Drops rational reconstruction, infallibility and the normative notion of justification.
  - “The stimulation of his sensory receptors is all the evidence anybody has had to go on” (1969: 75).
  - Epistemology is to be “a chapter of [empirical] psychology”.

- J. Kim: We cannot eliminate the normative element and still call the subject ‘epistemology’.
  - Quine still relies on notions such as evidence and these have an ineliminable normative dimension.
  - To be evidence for a theory just is to “tend to enhance the reasonableness or justification” of the theory.

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Non-Eliminative Naturalism

• Central idea: We should employ results from science whenever we can to address traditional epistemological questions. Some questions, however, cannot be scientifically investigated.

• Many Naturalized Epistemologists accept the notion of justification but try to partly define it in naturalistic terms.

• Prominent Advocates: Virtually all Naturalists, i.e. Hack, Goldman, Kornblith, Kitcher, Stich, etc.

• Question: How much autonomy (from the sciences) does epistemology have?
Food for Thought

Would the philosophical study of knowledge become redundant, if we had a complete scientific understanding of human cognition?
Reading