



Charles Taylor's Critique of Epistemology

Kritik Epistemologi Charles Taylor

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ABSTRAK

Kritik Charles Taylor terhadap epistemologi mempertanyakan dikotomi subjek/objek, yang merupakan pusat epistemologi setidaknya dalam fase modernnya. Fakta bahwa filsafat modern, yang muncul pada abad ketujuh belas, adalah hasil dari pergeseran ke arah keunggulan epistemologi dari Metafisika, yang menambah signifikansi yang sangat besar pada kritik epistemologi modern semacam itu. Karya ini mengkaji kritik Charles Taylor terhadap epistemologi. Kritik Charles Taylor terhadap epistemologi dapat dipahami dengan tepat sebagai intervensi dalam perdebatan kritis epistemologi modern. Karya Taylor, bagaimanapun, tidak dapat dicirikan hanya sebagai kritik terhadap epistemologi modern. Sebaliknya, posisinya juga merupakan kritik terhadap kritik filosofis masa kini terhadap epistemologi modern. Tentu saja, ini adalah kritik menyeluruh terhadap epistemologi modern, tetapi sebagian besar tulisannya dilestarikan untuk menunjukkan bagaimana sebagian besar kritik masa kini tidak ada gunanya atau tidak jelas. Yang terpenting, ia mencoba menunjukkan kepada kita bagaimana berbagai kritik terhadap epistemologi itu sendiri terperjara dalam gambaran epistemologis Cartesian. Artinya, bahkan kritik epistemologi Cartesian menggunakan atau secara luas berbagi poin/asumsi penting epistemologi Cartesian. Berikut ini adalah poin-poin dasar epistemologi Cartesian yang kritik untuk dibagikan secara tidak kritis.

Kata Kunci: Charles Taylor; Epistemologi; Kritik terhadap epistemologi; Foundationalisme.

ABSTRACT

Charles Taylor's critique of epistemology calls into question the subject/object dichotomy, which is central to epistemology at least in its modern phase. The fact that modern philosophy, which emerged in the seventeenth century, was the result of a shift towards the primacy of epistemology from Metaphysics, which adds enormous significance to such a critique of modern epistemology. This work examines Charles Taylor's critique of epistemology. Charles Taylor's critique of epistemology can be rightly understood as an intervention in the critical debates of modern epistemology. Taylor's works, however, cannot be characterized merely as a critique of modern epistemology. Rather, his positions are also a critique of present-day philosophical critiques to modern epistemology. Certainly, his is a thorough critique of modern epistemology, but major portions of his writings are preserved to show how most of the present-day critiques are either pointless or not clear. Most importantly, he tries to show us how the various critiques of epistemologies themselves are imprisoned in the Cartesian epistemological picture. That is, even the critiques of Cartesian epistemology employ or widely share the points/crucial assumptions of Cartesian epistemology. Following are the fundamental points of Cartesian epistemology which the critiques to share uncritically.

Keywords: Charles Taylor; Epistemology; Critique of epistemology; Foundationalism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Taylor's criticism of modern epistemology is that the crisis of epistemology is not sufficiently and deeply explored in the critiques of modern epistemology. "In some circles it is becoming a new orthodoxy that the whole enterprise from Descartes, through Locke and Kant, and pursued by various nineteenth and twentieth-century succession movements, was a mistake. What is becoming less and less clear, however, is what exactly it means to overcome the epistemological standpoint or to repudiate the enterprise" (Taylor 1995, p. 2). One of the key points of the Cartesian epistemology is the primacy of epistemology. Primacy of epistemology means, epistemological doctrines are validating points of metaphysical doctrines and ontological views. That means, metaphysics and ontology significantly depend upon epistemology. But epistemology does not depend upon any particular metaphysical and ontological doctrines. It is this contention which is the starting point of Taylor's critique of epistemology. Taylor is not concerned about whether metaphysics or ontology is dependent upon epistemological foundations. Rather he is concerned about the self-grounding foundation of epistemology. Its self-referential justification is the central feature of pure epistemology. That is, epistemology claims to be an enterprise which does not depend upon anything else (Roth 1983). Modern epistemologists may not say that they do not have any kind of ontological or metaphysical basis. Instead they may only say that their epistemological foundation only makes use of minimal ontological commitments. And the minimal ontological commitments come under self-evident knowledge or certain knowledge. So, modern epistemology claims that it is not founded upon certain ontological commitments. It is apt to say that epistemology is founded on certain self-evident propositions, including self-evident propositions of ontology.

Taylor's position is that ontological knowledge on which epistemology is founded is not at all self-evident. Moreover, the self-evident knowledge presupposes certain ontological commitments. His position is that modern epistemology is founded on mechanistic ontology. According to Taylor, the so called critiques of modern epistemology are premised on the Cartesian presuppositions and hence their critical stance tends to be merely rhetorical. In fact, it is not so clear what exactly they are trying to deny regarding the epistemological tradition they critique.

2. TAYLOR'S CRITIQUE OF FOUNDATIONALISM

Taylor acknowledges that there are certain powerful criticisms of modern epistemology which are clear about their main thrust. Taylor finds Richard Rorty's critique as one which paved the way for a concrete attempt to overcome epistemology. Rorty formulates his concrete attempt to overcome the epistemological tradition in his work *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. In this work, he identifies foundationalism as the key thesis of epistemology. For him to overcome epistemology is to overcome foundationalism. Taylor finds that the idea of foundationalism emerged and was formulated in an attempt to justify our knowledge systems (Ndofirepi & Gwaravanda 2020). It is an attempt to show that our scientific knowledge or commonsensical knowledge are justified because those knowledge systems are built upon certain foundational premises which are self-evident or which do not need any further justification. Taylor finds certain difficulties in the foundationalists' argument (Margetson 1993). If it is the case that our justifications are self-evident then the question which Taylor raises is: 'What is the guarantee that foundationalism is an adequate justificatory principle?' That is, 'What is the justification of the principle of 'foundationalism' which is used to justify our knowledge claims?' The significant question is 'How did foundationalism emerge as an accepted justificatory principle?' While seeking an answer to the question, critiques find that the edifice of foundationalism stands on pain of circularity. In his work, *A Discourse on Method* (1999), Descartes never concealed his enthusiasm for the foundationalist principle that emerged from the successful practices of the day. He was highly obsessed with the success of mathematics in achieving certainty. And his analysis identifies the method of mathematics as the core of foundationalism.

The present day enthusiasm for foundationalism is also somehow connected with the tendency to extract epistemic justification for other branches of empirical science (E.g. by reduction of chemistry and biology to physics). In short, from the outset, foundationalism is considered as an accepted principle because it has been a part of the accepted practice of science. Critics like Richard Rorty point out that foundationalism can be justified on pain of circularity because foundationalism is formulated to justify/test the present knowledge system or present practices of knowledge (like science).

3. TAYLOR'S CRITIQUE OF NORMATIVISM

Taylor notes that another major attack on epistemology is from Quine's *Naturalised Epistemology* (1969). Quine tries to see the epistemological problem in

a novel way. He tries to shift our focus from normativity to naturality. He claims that earlier epistemologists construed knowledge in terms of a certain essential normative principles. With the help of these norms we ground our beliefs. Quine argues that such foundation/grounding of our knowledge claims will not work. Philosophers wanted to challenge the sceptical position. In doing so the epistemologists felt the need for certain foundations for our knowledge claims. Epistemologists agreed that the success of knowledge claim depended upon this foundation. But Quine argues that the search for such a foundation is itself wrongheaded (Burgess 1983). He claims that instead of searching for foundation for knowledge, what we have to search for is the way in which our beliefs are formed, i.e., the way in which our beliefs are formed as a result of psychological processes involving sensory stimulation. So for Quine knowledge is only a psychological phenomenon. Quine's claim is that it is a waste to spend time searching for norms of our knowledge claims and instead we must analyse the causal connection between our sensory evidence and our knowledge claims. Quine finds that the causal connection of sensory evidence is to our knowledge about nature. For Quine, nature is out there. We can access nature through our psychological processes. Nature is given to us. There is no need for applying any norms for attaining knowledge of the external world. We do not want any mediator to access knowledge. So Quine's attempt is to fill the gap between the subjective world and an objective world. Quine tries to argue that there is no such dichotomy between subject and object. Everything is already given to us. He rejects Cartesian dualism. Taylor argues that Quine's critique of foundationalism and normativism is not sufficient to be qualified as overcoming epistemology (Uebel 1996). Taylor says that Quine's naturalized epistemology can be considered as one of the concrete forms of repudiating foundationalism.

Taylor's point is that naturalised epistemology can be considered as a successful programme in abandoning the project of foundationalism. But yet the tradition of naturalised epistemology can hardly be considered as the one which overcomes epistemology. For Taylor overcoming epistemology in a full-fledged sense means a lot of other things. It is not a rejection of one tenet or thesis of traditional epistemology. It also means bringing down many of the consequences which modern epistemology brought inside and outside the philosophical traditions (Ebong & Shalgwen, 2020). For Taylor, introduction of modern epistemology cannot be viewed as merely one theoretical exercise whose impacts are quite confined within a particular branch of philosophy. Primarily, he assesses the impacts of modern epistemology brought

in the entire tradition of modern philosophy. The most important impact concerns the primacy of epistemology itself as modern epistemology claims. That is to say, the claim of modern epistemology is that epistemological justification is needed for not only for our empirical knowledge but even our philosophical claims. The other underlying thesis of modern epistemology is the ontological thesis, i.e., the thesis that man is a thinking subject and our knowledge claim depends up on his/her thinking capacity. In this thesis we can see the important role of human agency. The chief characteristic of human agency is that it is posed as an independent entity distinct from all other entities. 'Independent' means that the nature of human agency/subject would remain intact even if all other entities cease to exist. The other chief characteristic is that the human agency is mental. Human agency/subject is a disembodied one in the sense it is independent of the body in which it inheres. At best, the body can be understood as carrier or vehicle of human agency which cannot have any kind of influence in determining or shaping the nature of human agency. That is, the nature of human agency is not dependent upon the kind of body or the nature of body which humans have. Such a thesis is obviously a clear fall out of mind-body dualism which modern philosophy upholds. Another impact which modern epistemology brought in is the importance and superiority ascribed to scientific knowledge. Such a conception arises from the notion of scientific knowledge which modern epistemology adheres to from Descartes to Logical positivism. Modern epistemologists project scientific knowledge as the paradigm of knowledge as science exemplifies the most adequate justificatory principles. Taylor notes that such a conception of human agency and scientific knowledge determines and shapes several moral and spiritual ideas of the modern period.

Taylor Points out that though it is true that the naturalized epistemology abandoned one of the major theses of epistemology, i.e. foundationalism, it cannot be considered as overcoming epistemology as it maintains all the assumptions and consequences of modern epistemology (Koskinen & Pihlström 2006). Naturalized epistemology neither repudiates the primacy of epistemology nor does it refute the conceptions of scientific knowledge and human agency. We can see that in many of the cases, naturalized epistemology only reaffirms the positions of Cartesian epistemology and its contemporary versions. Taylor argues that what critics like Rorty and Quine attack is not the essentials or fundamentals of modern epistemology, but the foundationalist ambitions of modern epistemology that are ultimately (as Quine has shown) detachable from it. Thus Taylor assumes that overcoming epistemology is possible only by refuting the very fundamental thesis of epistemology. It is

representationalism which is the fundamental thesis of modern epistemology. The refutation of that alone can result in the rejection of the basic structure of modern epistemology. How does Taylor proceed doing so?

4. TAYLOR'S CRITIQUE OF REPRESENTATIONALISM

One of the key positions of modern epistemology is its claim that it can explain philosophical concepts like knowledge and justification in mechanistic terms as explicitly admitted by many of the philosophers. Obviously, modern epistemology is highly influenced by mechanistic metaphysics inspired by seventeenth century science. According to the mechanistic view we are only passively receiving the objective world. In this mechanical model we cannot see any active role of human beings. If for empiricists man as a cognitive agent is *tabula rasa*, for rationalists he is only a repository of innate ideas. Taylor says "[We are the passive receptors] of impressions from the external world. Knowledge then hangs on a certain relation holding between what is "out there" and certain inner states that this external reality causes in us. This construal, valid for Locke, applies just as much to the latest artificial-intelligence model of thinking. It is one of the mainsprings of the epistemological tradition" (Taylor 1995, p. 4). The key aim of science is explanation of natural phenomena in terms of mechanical processes. One of the advantages of such an explanation in mechanical terms is that, it provides/facilitates clear and distinct explanations. Such approach is viable to verification or justification. That the mechanistic view impacted philosophy is clear from the fact that dominant philosophical theories of perception seek to construe perception as a mechanistic process.

We have already pointed out that modern epistemology works within a representationalist structure/framework. Descartes sought to delineate the structure of representation. Taylor points out that the picture of representation or thesis of representationalism has undergone various changes over a period of time. However the basic structure of representationalism remains intact. Taylor's main aim in his various works is to challenge representationalism. The basic structure of representation is what is called by Taylor 'picture'. Not only that, the 'picture' penetrates into all theoretical constructions and even shapes and structures our commonsensical knowledge. "It was a structuring framework understanding that guided their questioning and reasoning about these matters" (Taylor 2004, p. 28). Taylor points out that it deeply influences and structures our entire thinking and even the history of thinking or intellectual history. It

has held captive both the followers and critics of modern epistemology. For Taylor, the dominant power of the 'picture' is not that a large number of people subscribe to that. Its domination is not in the way of one of dominant epistemological theory but as structuring framework of all epistemological constructions. More importantly, most of the theoretical constructions adopt it as a framework, though not consciously. But the impact of this 'picture' is so powerful that even the most intensive conscious attempt to overcome the structure lands us back in the framework of representationalism. Taylor elucidates the basic structure of representationalism which hovers around the history of thought. He calls it as the 'representationalist picture' or the 'inside/outside picture' (I/O picture). I/O picture or structure elucidates how we can acquire knowledge and how knowledge claims can be justified. Its basic thrust is that 'our knowledge of reality comes through the representations we have formed of it within ourselves'. That means knowledge of reality / external world can get only through the representations of the mind. In other words, knowledge of reality can be justified only on the basis of the representations which we have about them. When an agent/subject encounters the world, she/he is forming representations about the world. Through representations, subject can have justified knowledge of the world.

Taylor's position is that, in the course of time, various epistemological theories often differ upon various issue like 'nature of representation' and model of 'acquiring/justifying knowledge through representation'. But they all share the basic thesis of representationalism; we get the knowledge about the world through representations. "The basic idea of a mediational epistemology is expressed by the proposition "through". We grasp the world through something, what is outside through something inner" (Charles 2004, p. 26). Descartes introduces the representationalist or mediationalist structure into the epistemological debate. One of the major reasons to formulate representationalism is his passion towards foundationalism. Epistemological foundation should be indubitable. For Descartes, only the knowledge of mental states is indubitable. The rest of knowledge should be rested upon the knowledge of mental states or knowledge of ideas. That's why he declares that he is "certain that I can have no knowledge of what is outside me except by means of ideas within me" (Charles 2004, p. 26). Descartes is vehemently criticized for a number of reasons and even his representationalist model was rejected. But what is interesting is that the basic structure of his representationalist model remains intact. Descartes' representationalist model largely relied upon the mind-body distinction. And he is criticized for making representation a strictly mental

entity.

Taylor's contention is that unlike ancient epistemology, modern epistemology is chiefly characterized by the decisive influence of science. For Taylor, overcoming epistemology is pinpointing the decisive influences of science. As the decisive influence of science is the hall mark of modern epistemology, any attempt to overcome epistemology which leaves the impact of science untouched is incomplete. Foundationalism is not the principle which evolves solely from the influence of science, though the foundationalism of modern epistemology is closely connected with the practices of science. There are several traces of foundationalism in ancient epistemology too. According to Taylor, in a wider and a deeper sense modern epistemology is representationalist epistemology and not a mere foundationalist epistemology. Taylor articulates how representationalist epistemology can be considered as a formation or a principle which is deeply influenced by modern science (Dreyfus 2015). The chief characteristic of modern science is the mechanistic explanation of all phenomena. The framework of mechanistic explanation is an input-output framework. The phenomenon to be explained (for example fire) would be considered as output in the framework. The explanation of a phenomenon is the account which states that phenomenon (output) follows from the input. For example, fire comes from short circuit. The main component of the mechanistic explanation is the process which connects input to output. In modern science often, the process (input/output) is characterized by a series of cause and effect relationships. Whether it is a cause - and-effect relationship or logical relationship, the chief characteristics of mechanistic science is that the relationship is construed as a step- by- step process and it can be shown that steps are connected in a series. Taylor's point is that the adoption of mechanistic explanation has resulted in representationalism. In other words, representationalism in epistemology can be explained in a better way by considering the adoption of mechanistic explanation in science as paradigmatic. Modern epistemology considers knowledge as output which can be explained in terms of certain inputs

Objectivity is the chief characteristic of scientific inquiry. According to Taylor, attainment of objectivity is the driving factor of Cartesian epistemology and specifically of representationalist thesis. Taylor notes that the purpose of the sense data theory of perception is the attempt to show that agent or subject receives the information which constitutes the objective representation of external world. Our body or senses only work as a tool or means to capture or record the information which are objective

representations of external world. Taylor thinks that modern epistemology does not have any difficulty in accepting that the perceiving agent is embodied in that sense. It is true that embodiment limits our perception. But if we consider the perception of the front side of bus itself (that is, consider our object of perception is not the bus as a whole but only the front side of the bus) then does our embodiment shape or influence our perception? Suppose human beings and other embodied agents perceive the front side of the bus. Do we have any substantial reason to think that the agents perceive the front side of bus in different ways? In short, modern epistemologists' point is that critics might be right in saying that embodiment and culture shape our perception but only in an insignificant way. That is, shaping or influencing of the culture is ultimately detachable from the perceptual content. Taylor's point is that such a kind of insignificant influences or shaping is not what Heidegger meant when he introduces engaged agency to counter the notion of disengaged agency.

Taylor's point is that cultural or embodiment elements are not something which are attached to perception which is ultimately independent of agent's background. Background shapes perception; it does not mean merely that perception only occurs in the background (cultural background etc.) of the agent. Instead, perception itself occurs only through the background and the body of agent. Independent of such elements perception would be impossible. That is, the relation of culture and body to the perception is not a contingent relation; instead it is a necessary condition of the occurrence of perception. Taylor points out that especially body is a necessary condition of perception, not in the sense that bodily organs are needed in perception but in the more basic sense that the nature of perception is formed by the particular constitution of the body. Taylor (1995) argues that the above example points out that embodiment necessarily shape our perception. To say that this world is essentially that of this agent is to say that the terms in which we describe this experience make sense only against the background of this kind of embodiment. "To understand what it is to 'lie to hand' one has to understand what it is to be an agent with the particular bodily capacities that humans have. Some creature from another planet might be unable to grasp this as a projectable term. Of course, the creature might work out some descriptions that were roughly extensionally equivalent. But to project this term the way we do, one has to understand what it is to be human" (Taylor 1995, p. 319) Taylor's major position is that perception becomes intelligible only if we take the elements of body into account. The conceptual framework and the language through which we experience are crucially dependent upon the embodiment and background (Ebong et al., 2013). That

there is a pen in front of me would not be intelligible for a creature whose body is spherical in shape and has revolving eyes. "The ways in which our world is so shaped define the contours of what I am calling engaged agency - what Heidegger sometimes referred to as the "finitude" of the knowing agent" (Taylor 1993, p. 319).

When an engaged agency captures the world, it captures the world as something. That is the process of perception itself is an 'intelligible one'. That means, while perceiving I ascribe meaning to the perceptual content or to the object of perception. The perception itself is an intelligible process to me. That is, in perception it is not the case that after perceiving something I am identifying it as something. Critics of modern epistemology, including Taylor and Heidegger insist that it is not that we are perceiving something and later identifying it as something intelligible. Instead, while perceiving itself the agent identifies it as something intelligible. Perception itself is perceiving *as* something intelligible. Intelligibility is therefore not an after effect of perception but the pre-condition of perception itself. Certainly Cartesian epistemology with its representative thesis acknowledges the active role of agent but in a very limited sense. More significantly, the active role of the agent comes only after the reception of the information. That is, till he/she receive the information, the agent does not have a role different from that of a machine. But later, the agent processes the information which it receive to come up with a picture. At the stage of processing, the agent combines all information in a particular fashion. Representative theory assumes that atomistic information, which the agent possesses or receives, is objective and by processing it the agent then forms a picture of the world. "This offers us the picture of an agent who in perceiving the world takes in "bits" of information from his or her surroundings and then "processes" them in some fashion, in order to emerge with the "picture" of the world he or she has; who then acts on the basis of this picture to fulfil his or her goals, through a "calculus" of means and ends" (Taylor 1993, p. 319).

Thus Cartesian epistemologists combine an atomism of input with a computational picture of mental function. The cognitive process so construed in a certain sense is agent-dependent as it is related to the nature of the agent but that does not undermine the representative nature of the picture/claim which we have formed through this process. It is because, at the end, the picture which the agent has formed is somehow related to the objective pieces of information which the agent has. So, the picture is the product of the process. To claim that the picture or the propositional claim is representative, it

is sufficient to claim that it is related to the objective pieces of information in a particular way, given that the process can be characterized in a systematic and clear manner. The idea of representation does not imply that mental images which we have are replicas or pictures of the external world. Rather, the idea is that mental images or the agent's propositional claims are somehow related to the external world. The crucial question which the modern epistemologists face in their representative frame work is the question of ensuring the representative character of the mental picture. How can we claim that the picture we have formed about the external world from the 'objective' information is a representative one? In one sense, it is a question about the rationality of human thinking which generates knowledge claims. The question is of rationality because of the following reasons. According to Modern Epistemology, the purpose of the knowledge-generating process concerns forming a picture of external world from the objective information which we have. So, knowledge-generating process would be rational only if it provides optimal chance to attain the purpose. That is, human knowledge-generating activity would be rational only if we can show that the picture which we have formed represents the world. But the question is 'How can we show that the picture which we have formed from 'objective' information is the representation of the external world?'

Taylor argues that the purpose of 'the reflexive turn' in modern epistemology is to show that the images/claims (pictures which we have formed) represent the external world. One of the possible ways to ensure that the picture (mental images/propositional claims) which we have represents the world is the following: compare the external world and the 'picture' and based on the similarities conclude that one represents another. According to Modern epistemologists such a way is not feasible. This is because they believe that we do not have any direct access to the world. What we have is only an indirect access to the world through representations. Moreover, even if we have direct access to the external world, the comparison and determination of similarities is not sufficient to support the representationalist claim. That is, the similarity between the mental images and the world is not sufficient to support the representationalist thesis. Similarity relation only shows that there is a contingent representative relation between world and mental states. Modern epistemologists' claim is that there is a necessary representative relation between mental images and external world.

Taylor notes that in ancient epistemology, concept of Knowledge was very close to the notion of Understanding. In Plato's theory, knowledge is about the 'Form' or forming belief about 'Form' (Sasa 2020). Plato's 'Forms' provide the best explanations of certain

phenomena. To explain the world or phenomena, Plato's formulated the theory of 'Form'. In a certain sense, his theory of 'Form' is the best tool for understanding. In that sense, we can see that in ancient philosophy, 'having an understanding' and 'having knowledge' are very close notions. But when it comes to modern epistemology, Taylor argues, knowledge acquired an entirely different form. Modern epistemologists believe that knowing means capturing the external world as it is. Here knowing becomes synonymous with having an objective belief. That is, objectivity becomes the crux of modern epistemology and the idea of 'Representation' comes from the urge for objectivity i.e. for capturing the world as it is. For Taylor, mechanical procedure or dualism would not be controversial, if we see it as a model of understanding or analysis. Taylor notes as follows: "The fateful step was not so much its formulation, but rather what I earlier called its ontologizing, that is, the reading of the ideal method into the very constitution of the mind." (Taylor 1995, p. 64).

As an understanding model of our belief formulation, we could consider sense-data theory as one of the legitimate theories. But the claim of modern epistemologists is that it is the description of reality. So, Taylor's objection is not to any particular version of the modern account of knowledge. But his objection is to the very idea of knowledge propounded by modern epistemologists. His point is that the notion of knowledge (i.e. having an objective belief) is sensible only within the framework of dualism and certain other assumptions. If we can give up those assumptions, it is not intuitively clear what it means knowing the world, or describing the world as it is. It is this point which makes his position on epistemology a 'critique' in the Kantian and Marxian sense of 'showing the limits of' by uncovering the hidden assumptions. The notion like knowing or understanding or explanation must be intuitively clear irrespective of the assumptions we hold. To formulate an account of knowledge or understanding, it is legitimate to hold certain assumptions. But, in the case of knowledge to have intuitive idea of knowledge itself, we need to hold some assumptions. Taylor's point is that notion of knowledge is something which is absent in the human discourse. Being disengaged or being mechanical is not a particular feature of an account of knowledge. These are essential characteristics of a knowing agent in any account of knowledge as per modern epistemology. It is not meaningful to assume that we form a belief without engagement.

Taylor's points out that the notion of knowing is a highly distorted one in the modern epistemological scenario which treats the concept of knowledge on par with any other phenomena like

'rain' or 'fire' etc. The phenomenon 'fire' can be explained or understood by relating the phenomenon to its causes. In the same way, modern epistemology too treats knowledge as a phenomenon which can be explained by its causes. Cause is the external world or the sense-data we receive. The crucial mistake is the carelessness in distinguishing the first-order inquiry from second-order inquiry. The phenomena like 'rain' or 'fire' are the objects of first-order inquiry but when we speak of knowledge or understanding or belief they are not phenomenon like rain or fire. They are the concepts about the first-order inquiry. That is why we use the world like 'knowledge of fire' or 'knowledge of rain' or 'understanding of rain' etc. So, knowledge or understanding or belief is *about* the first-order inquiry (He & Wei 2009). In that sense, they belong to second-order inquiry. Taylor's point is that the two modes of inquiry are different. But modern epistemology provides a kind of first-order principle to explain a second-order concept.

Representationalism is a kind of first order principle (Haselager et al., 2003). Taylor comes to the crucial point that the second-order inquiry is substantially different from the first order inquiry. In other words, the concept of knowledge is substantially different from natural phenomena. It seems the first crucial distinction is that the explanation in first-order enquiry is independent of an agent. If I explain fire it does not matter which agent sees or which agent knows fire. But that kind of independence cannot be sought in the case of second order enquiry since it is crucially dependent on the agent. It is about what it means to say that the agent knows something or the agent understands something. So these concepts are not something produced or created or caused. These concepts are about employing my perspective or conditions to make something intelligible. So, it is basically about the enquiry into the conditions of intelligibility.

5. TAYLOR ON NATURAL SCIENCE AND HUMAN SCIENCE

Taylor distinguishes between natural science and human science (Martin 1994). By distinguishing them Taylor wants to show the important role of human beings in constructing knowledge. In natural science, objects of study are things and in human science objects of study are human beings. The point is that the modern epistemologist tries to treat everything as object. Modern epistemologists consider Philosophy too as science. Modern epistemologists consider human beings as objects. Natural science objectifies everything and quantifies it for accurate prediction. Quantification of objects is an important aspect of natural science. Consider a phenomenon like heat; natural science handles the phenomenon in terms of degree of

temperature and devises the tools like thermometer to measure the temperature. But Taylor points out that in the case of human beings, prediction is not possible. We do not have anything to measure human beings' behaviour. Taylor aims to show the limitations of natural science. He wants to show the problems faced by human sciences when they objectify the human being.

Reality itself does not have the capacity to provide us knowledge about it. For example, a tree cannot interpret/say that it is a tree. Human being ascribes certain meaning to a phenomenon and acquires knowledge accordingly. In natural science we can see some kind of prediction of a phenomenon. In natural science once we predict a phenomenon, it has the capacity to survive and meaning of the phenomena will not vary. Human science does not have these kinds of prediction. Prediction is not possible in human science because human beings themselves provide interpretations of things. When they interpret things meaning of a phenomenon will change. There is no absolute meaning of things. It depends upon the person involved in it. Each person comes up with his/her own explanation about a phenomenon in terms of his/her cultural context. For Taylor, the crucial distinction between human beings and objects concerns the self- interpreting capacity of human beings. Taylor has argued that there is a double hermeneutics at work in human sciences compared to the natural sciences. This is due to one of the ontological features he ascribes to persons. Human beings are self- interpreting animals. So any attempt to explain their behavior must take this into account. Taylor asks 'Who is making the knowledge claim'. Human beings are making knowledge claims. When human beings are making knowledge claims what we have to keep in mind is that human beings are self- interpreting animals (Connolly 1985). Taylor gives two reasons for this:

1. Understanding themselves and their world is a primary property of their existence, not one that can be bracketed out in the quest to explain them.
2. Humans' self-interpretations influence their actions and behavior; any account that excludes this variable cannot be adequate. So appreciating how the persons under study view their situation is an essential component of understanding them. Taylor points out that "If a group or society change their self-interpretations in the future, then a modified or perhaps markedly different explanation of them will be required; new concepts and terminology will probably be needed to explain this changed vocabulary" (Smith 2004, p. 157)

In his response to Taylor's celebrated paper "Interpretations and the science of man" (1973), Thomas Kuhn questions Taylor's way of drawing the

line between natural and human sciences. No doubt Kuhn too recognizes the line between them but Kuhn's line is different and quite thin. According to Kuhn, Taylor's view that objects of natural science are culture-neutral unlike those of human sciences is highly questionable. According to him, the objects of natural sciences are not independent of the lexicon which specific science at a specific time deploys along with the taxonomy which goes along with the lexicon. When the lexicon changes the objects also undergo change. As Kuhn says the lexicon that is, a "Set of concepts is a historical product embedded in the culture to which current practitioners are initiated by training and it is accessible to non- members only through the hermeneutic technique by which historians and anthropologist come to understand other models of thought" (Kuhn 2000, p. 221). Hence it is in the fitness of things that Kuhn calls such a set of concepts "The hermeneutic basis for the science of particular period" (Kuhn 2000, p. 221). Thus though natural sciences, unlike human sciences, are not hermeneutic enterprises they enquire a hermeneutic base. Since "No more in the natural than in the human sciences is there some neutral, culture-independent, set of categories within which the population- whether of objects or actions- can be described" (Kuhn 2000, p. 220). Of course, Kuhn does not seek to dig into the foundations of modern epistemology to show why that hermeneutic base of natural science was blacked out to facilitate the received image of science. Taylor could have taken note of this and related it to certain aspects of modern epistemology in which case his critique of epistemology would have become even deeper.

Taylor's critique of modern epistemology does not imply that natural sciences cannot have major role in our epistemological reflection. What he is questioning is the claim that natural sciences constitute the paradigmatic case of knowledge. By setting themselves as the ideals to which our other epistemic activities must seek to approximate, what is called scientism has been the butt of attack in recent times. But Taylor while attacking it brings in the contention that scientism has its philosophical moorings in the very framework of modern epistemology with the result of epistemology itself was made to become, to use an expression of Habermas, 'a scientific self- understanding of the sciences'. This has resulted in a radical shrinking of our epistemological canvas itself and constricted our epistemic practices. In fact, those epistemic practices which do not fit into the model of natural science are considered to be inferior kinds of knowledge or no knowledge at all. Thus modern epistemology questionably starts with the naturalistic assumption that knowledge is a phenomenon and ironically lands up in an equally questionably normative prescription.

6. CRITICAL REFLECTION TAYLOR'S CRITIQUE OF MODERN EPISTEMOLOGY

As we have seen, one of the major planks of Taylor's Critique of Modern Epistemology is his attack on representationalist thesis. It must be noted that many opponents of representationalism seek to attack it by linking it with realism and realism with correspondence theory of truth. Thus, according to them representationalism/realism is one side of the same coin whose other side is correspondence theory of truth. Hence, they deem that attack on the correspondence theory of truth is sufficient to demolish Representationalism. However, Taylor's repudiation of representationalism does not follow this course. This is because according to Taylor the framework of representationalism is much deeper than what we might often think. We usually consider that the thesis of representationalism is similar to the correspondence theory. Correspondence theory of truth advocates that truth of a proposition or belief lies in the connections we draw between the world and our proposition. A proposition is true if and only if it corresponds to a fact in the world and the thesis of representationalism makes clear what correspondence means. Indeed, correspondence theory of truth includes an obvious manifestation of representationalist thesis. But mere repudiation of correspondence theory does not mean the end of representationalism. Representationalism is much a deeper thesis than correspondence theory.

Taylor notes that even the coherence theory of truth is also as much representationalist as correspondence theory. As per coherence theory, what justifies a belief or a proposition is another belief or proposition. Taylor notes that for coherence theory, the justification of knowledge claim is dependent upon other knowledge claims. But such a position clearly maintains the dualism of the world and the belief which is the crux of representationalism. That is, coherence theory also claims that our knowledge of things in the external world is based on the belief which we form about them. It only claims that justification for the claim (beliefs are about representations of external world) does not derive from drawing a relation between a belief and world but drawing a relation between the beliefs and already established other beliefs. Thus, coherence theory too states that knowledge is solely based on the beliefs. "...the crucial point about the mediational picture (representationalism) is that it sees our knowledge of the outside coming through certain elements, call them "representations," on the inside... To buy into the picture (representationalism) is to hold that our knowledge is grounded exclusively in representations and that our reasoning involves manipulating

representations. To speak the language of Sellars and McDowell, it is to hold that the only inhabitants of the space of reason are beliefs" (Guignon & Hiley 2003, p. 28).

In the sense above described, the coherentist claim too is at heart a representationalist claim. Coherentist claim is that what justifies our one particular belief is another set of beliefs or claim. As per the coherence theory, when I am testing a belief, I am comparing the belief with other set of beliefs, and drawing a meta-relation between the beliefs and on the basis on that meta-relation, I justify the knowledge claim. Meta-relation could be coherence relation or something else, but that meta-relation is what makes a claim justified. Therefore, the comparison between beliefs and the meta-relation, which we form, provide the grounds of justification. Taylor's position is that another belief is not the one which justifies a particular belief. Instead, agent's unmediated touch with the reality justifies my knowledge claim or belief. However, Taylor claims that our justificatory practices never invoke such meta-relation. Taylor cites the following example to elucidate his point. Someone tells Johnny that 'Johnny, go into the room and tell me whether the picture is crooked.' "Johnny does as he is told. He doesn't check the (problematized) belief that the picture is crooked against his own belief." (Guignon & Hiley 2003, p. 29). Taylor's point is that here the agent is asked to test or check the belief. However, he/she is not checking the belief or comparing the belief with other sets of beliefs. Instead, he/she checks the belief by forming another belief, which has unmediated link with reality. That is, he/she tests the belief by forming another belief by going and looking on reality, not by comparing, and drawing a meta-relation among beliefs. But the important question to be asked is 'How is a particular belief linked with the reality'. Since they are ontologically, different categories there cannot be any direct link between belief and the outer world. Taylor notes that this is the standard challenge to representationalism. "We can't get outside. This is the basic image of the I/O. We are contained within our own representations and can't stand somehow beyond them to compare them with "reality"" (Guignon & Hiley 2003, p. 29). Taylor puts forth the notion of 'embedded knowing' against representationalist thesis. The representationalist position is that knowledge of the external world comes through something which is purely mental. "This means we can understand our grasp of the world as something that is, in principle, separable from what it is a grasp of" (Guignon & Hiley 2003, p. 33).

Taylor argues that our grasp of the world or our understanding of the world or our belief about the world cannot be separated from the world or reality. In a sense, Taylor attempts to formulate a thesis of

holism where belief/understanding/meaning cannot be analysed or understood without speaking of what it is about. In other words, a certain holism gets in the way. Taylor realized that our grasp of reality has to be addressed holistically. Taylor's holistic notion is different from Quine's and Davidson's. The thesis of holism of Quine and Davidson is basically about verification. Their claim is that a proposition cannot be verified in isolation. A proposition can be verified only in conjunction with a set of propositions. In that sense, it is the thesis about meaning too. Meaning of a proposition cannot be determined in isolation, but only in relation with other set of propositions. But Taylor notes that the holistic thesis of Quine-Davidson's is not sufficiently radical as it is compatible with the atomistic account of the input we receive from the world. In that sense, it is an account of meaning which works within the framework of Cartesian epistemology. That is, Quine-Davidson holism too admits that beliefs or propositions are aggregate of certain basic elements like sensations. But in order to verify or get meaning of those propositions we need to place it in the context of larger whole. But Taylor claims that holism which he invokes is more radical as it undercuts the atomistic nature of the input. In Cartesian epistemology and in Quine-Davidson thesis meaning is the production of certain basic elements or its aggregate or the collection of such aggregate. That is, in a sense, meaning of a proposition or a belief is defined by a certain aggregate.

However, Taylor argues that meaning defines any element by placing it in the context of a larger whole and the larger whole cannot be divided into simple and basic elements. Taylor elucidates his point that the elements of our belief (which are bits of explicit information) like 'it is red' and 'it is a horse' can be defined or can be meaningful only in the background of world or reality which we have. The elements or bits of information like 'it is a horse' acquire the sense that they have only in the background of the understanding of the world. Suppose we spot an entity in the sky with exact features of 'a horse'. But we could not call it 'a horse'. At best we would call it an entity which is similar to 'a horse'. This is because a certain entity like a horse acquires the sense of the 'horse' only in the background of certain prior understanding. We are hesitant to call a sky-entity 'horse' because the background of the world which usually accompanies the sense of term 'horse' is not compatible with the background of the sky-entity.

Taylor's point is that the background information is not some pieces of information like 'Horse is a terrestrial animal' and it cannot be spotted in sky etc. Background is not a piece of certain explicit information. Taylor further argues the point as follows:

I notice the rabbit, because I pick it out against the stable background of those trees and this open space before them. Without having found my feet in the place, there could be no rabbit sighting. If the whole stage on which the rabbit darts out were uncertain, say, swirling around as it is when I am about to faint, there could be no registering of this explicit bit of information. My having found my feet in this locus, however, is not a matter of my having extra bits of explicit information – that is, it can never just consist in this, although other bits may be playing a role. It is an exercise of my ability to cope, something I have acquired as this bodily being brought up in this culture (Guignon & Hiley 2003, p. 31).

Taylor notes that our ability to cope involves our overall understanding of our world and ourselves. In addition, our understanding of world involves our different abilities. Any particular understanding of our situation blends our explicit knowledge and unarticulated know-how.

What is to be noted is that Taylor's rejection of the standard version of correspondence theory of truth is only one aspect of his attacks on representationalism. Secondly, the former is not completely grounded in the latter. Taylor has many planks of attacks on representationalism and his attack on the standard correspondence theory of truth is only one among them. Further he attacks even coherence theory of truth which also, according to him is organically linked to representationalism, though; correspondence theory of truth is germane to Realism or representationalism proper whereas coherence theory of truth is germane to Idealism whose commitment to representationalism, at least for a realist, is not so complete. Of course, Taylor need not reject the correspondence theory of truth or coherence theory of truth as false. All that he needs to assert is that these theories of truth as normally construed are too crude to do justice to the richness of our cognitive relation to the world. Attacking the reference theory of meaning at the beginning his *Philosophical Investigation* Wittgenstein says that reference theory of meaning is a crude theory of meaning or a theory of meaning fit for a crude languages / language-games, which have hardly anything to do with our day-to-day cognitive experience. Taylor can say the same thing about correspondence theory of truth or coherence theory of truth or any theory of truth that locates itself in anything like mediation.

A couple of critical points may be made regarding Taylor's otherwise convincing stance. Firstly he is not clear about his attitude towards pragmatic theory of truth which is not linked to

representationalism. It is clear that the pragmatic theory of truth is at least consistent with whatever Taylor has said about our cognitive relation to the world. If he is not happy with the pragmatic theory of truth he has not explicitly put forth his own alternative to the standard theories of truth. It is not even clear whether he considers the notion of truth as either redundant or remnant of modern epistemological tradition which is being put on defensive. Finally, Taylor is indifferent to the post-positivist developments regarding scientific knowledge. These developments which are articulated in the works of Kuhn and Feyerabend have called into question, on the basis of 'Incommensurability Thesis', the idea of one to one correspondence between scientific theory and what they are about. According to philosophers of science like Kuhn the idea that our theories correspond to the world outside perfectly or approximately is a myth. Kuhn and other philosophers like Mary Hesse have argued that the relation between our theories and the world they putatively describe is less like a mirror and the object mirrored than a metaphor and the situation described metaphorically. The relation between a metaphor and the situation is not one of the correspondence but of the aptness.

7. CONCLUSION

One of the main contributions of Taylor's philosophy is that he tries to combine two well-known traditions of Philosophy called 'Analytic Philosophy' and 'Continental Philosophy'. He is handling both these traditions in a mature way. In the formulation of his critique of Cartesian epistemology, he mainly relies on the works of Heidegger and Merleau Ponty. But their views are formulated in response to the specific questions, which they pursue. So, often such debates do not sound significant beyond the debates on such questions. For example, Heidegger's entire philosophical pursuit revolves around the question of 'being'. In addition, for analytic philosophers who pursue the question of meaning or question of knowledge hardly find such debates of continental philosophy significant. Taylor's significance lies in abstracting out the debates of continental philosophy from the specific contexts from which they evolve. Primarily, he specifically articulates how such questions are clear responses to modern philosophy up to Kant. Then he formulates continental debates as a response to the debates of analytic philosophers like Quine, Davidson, and Rorty etc. And, more importantly he exhibits conceptual clarity which is the hallmark of the debates within analytic tradition. In that sense, Taylor blends analytic approach with the idiom of continental philosophy.

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