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THE PSEUDO-PROBLEMS OF EPISTEMIC

RELIABILISM

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ABSTRACT

The study identified and characterised reliabilism as a theory of epistemic justification. It identified and examined problems that were raised against reliabilism. It also assessed epistemic reliabilism from the viewpoint of belief-forming processes. This was with a view to presenting reliabilism as a viable theory of epistemic justification.

The study employed both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source comprised a close reading of Alvin I. Goldman's"Process Reliabilism", Earl Conee and Richard Feldman's "The Generality Problem for Reliabilism" , Alvin Goldman's"Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology", JarretLeplin's"In Defense of Reliabilism", Michael Levin's "You Can Always Count on Reliabilism", Kent Bach's "A Rationale for Reliabilism", Peter J. Markie'sGoldman's New Reliabilism", Richard Foley's "What's Wrong with Reliabilism?", Stephen K. McLeod's "Rationalism and Modal Knowledge", Eric J. Olsson's "Reliabilism, Stability and the Value of Knowledge", and Jonathan Vogel's "Reliabilism Leveled". The secondary source included books, journal articles and the Internet. The data collected were subjected to conceptual analysis and philosophical argumentation.

The results showed that epistemic reliabilism was an adequate theory of justification. The study found that bootstrapping, swamping and the new evil demon problem were unfounded when assessed in relation to the belief-formation principle of reliabilism. It also found that in spite of the generality problem and the problem of induction and circularity which raised intense criticisms against reliabilism, a clear identification of the principles of belief-formation, epistemic rationality and the notion of genuine option makes them minimally avoidable.

The study concluded that the swamping, bootstrapping and the new evil demon problems were not sufficient to destroy epistemic reliabilism. It also concluded that epistemic reliabilism was a viable and pragmatic theory of epistemic justification.

INTRODUCTION

In Edmund Gettier's attempt of an analysis of knowledge, he suggested that there is more to having knowledge than what the justified true belief (JTB) analysis provides. In a bid to provide a broader analysis of knowledge, several scholars have focused on the amendment of the justificatory criterion of knowledge with a well-founded assumption that belief and truth are non-pliable criteria of knowledge. Belief-formation processes and the justification they provide are the key objects of discourse in reliabilism. These processes are acquired from physical, psychological and sometimes intuitive object of cognition.

Reliabilism as a theory was first hinted by Frank Ramsey in his sketchy formulation, where he opines that a belief is knowledge if it is (i) true, (ii) certain, and (iii) obtained by a reliable process.[1] Though this does not appear to be a thorough-going theory of justification (as a response to the Gettier problem), it is one of the earliest hints about having reliable processes in the analysis of knowledge. This follows in describing reliabilism as "the view that a subject knows a proposition p if (a) p is true, (b) the subject believes p, (c) the belief that p is the result of some reliable process of belief-formation."[2] It is implicit in this description that the justification condition as required in the traditional analysis of knowledge is embedded in the belief-forming process.

The framework for the formulation of reliabilism as a theory of epistemic justification was elaborated in "Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Thought",[3] where Alvin Goldman affirms that an inquiry into the nature of knowledge without a critical assessment of the subject of knowledge on the preconceived notion of what knowledge should be will make us remain at the

level of epistemic folkways.In other words, knowledge enquiry will remain at folk epistemology which is descriptive in its enterprise.[4]

Goldman suggested a normative scientific epistemology in order to address some issues that arise out of folk epistemology such as, the confusion of the classification of epistemic virtues and vices by epistemic evaluators whose linguistic community portrays a closed circle of knowledge. For him, normative scientific epistemology should follow in the footsteps of folk practice and use reliability (and other truth-linked standards) as a basis for epistemic evaluation.[5]Normative scientific epistemology, for him, identifies the psychological processes of cognition for the epistemic evaluator.In the following is the reliabilist hypothesis that Goldman put forward:

> …the epistemic evaluator has a mentally stored set or list, of
> cognitive virtues and vices. When asked to evaluate an actual or
> hypothetical case of belief, the evaluator considers the processes
> by which the belief was produced and matches this against his list
> of virtues and vices. If the processes match virtues only, the belief
> is classified as justified. If the processes are matched partly with
> vices, the belief is categorised as unjustified. If a belief-forming
> scenario is described that features a process not on the evaluator's
> list of either virtues and vices, the belief may be categorised as
> neither justified nor unjustified, but simply *non*justified,.
> Alternatively, (and this alternatively plays an important role in my
> story), the evaluator's judgment may depend on the (judged)

similarity of the novel process to the stored virtues and vices. In

order words, the "matches" in question need not be perfect.[6]

The first chapter affirms the idea that reliabilism is a theory of epistemic justification rather that a theory of knowledge. The chapter also identifies the belief-forming principle as the nexus of all the versions discussed, though variations occur in the approaches to the formation of belief that is admissible under each version.

The second chapter discusses some of the problems associated with reliabilism as a theory of epistemic justification. Questions of adequacy and sufficiency with regards to providing justification without the involvement of error are examined. Also, some of the problems are identified as being of no threat to the basic principle of reliabilism and therefore are regarded as pseudo-problems.

The third chapter tries to show thatsome of the problems raised against epistemic reliabilismare unfounded in comparison to the more intense problems of generality and the problem of induction and circularity. An assessment of swamping, bootstrapping and the new evil demon problem shows thatthese problems do not in any way put the principle of belief-formation into consideration in their criticisms against reliabilism; therefore they are not genuine problems. Belief-forming processes remain as a basis for the reliabilist standard of justification and the problems should be disregarded as cogent problems against reliabilism.The chapter suggests that epistemic rationality and the notion of genuine option strengthens the reliabilist view of justification.

The thesis concludes that, given the non-forceful attempts of these pseudo-problems against reliabilism, the epistemic community should embrace reliabilism as an

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