

**DISTRUSTING THE “ARCHIMEDEAN VIEW” OF PHILOSOPHY: A PLEA
FOR TOLERANCE IN THE “VOICES AND CONVERSATIONS OF MANKIND”**

BY

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Abstract

It is not uncommon to hear philosophers or even students of philosophy when asked to define their discipline to say that philosophy is the ‘queen of the sciences’, ‘first philosophy’, and so on. These phrases and appellations are often deliberately ascribed to philosophy to denote its centrality to human existence and pursuits as well as its rootedness or connection to other disciplines.

They can attempt to justify this by jokingly saying that after all, the academic degree of Doctor of Philosophy’ (Ph.D), which is usually awarded after some years of research and course work is given in due respect and obeisance to its ancestry and gerontologically prior to all classes of knowledge viz, humanities, social sciences and natural science. At a deeper level, it offers useful insights into knowing the business and preoccupation of philosophers from the ancient through modern to contemporary periods. Here, the main concern of the philosopher is to conceive philosophy and its task as a cognitive enterprise and attempt, to establish through conceptual analysis any claims to knowledge. In this conception, philosophy examines the substructure of issues and raises foundational or second-order questions.

The intent of this paper is to show that philosophy still retains its original image, but its omnibus interpretation and application by some scholars in the present time throws up some problems, one of which is the dictatorial and hegemonic tone implicit in the conception which may inadvertently marginalize and sideline the emergence of other forms of discourses. The paper concludes by making a case for tolerance of other alternative forms of knowledge other than the Western.

Exposition

Our discussion here cannot be complete if we fail to make a foray into how philosophy was traditionally conceived and how it now or at least ought to look with the insights of Rorty's pragmatism, the post-empiricist philosophers of science and post-modernist thinkers, among others. As it is now familiar, philosophy was generally believed to be a foundational discipline with the business of analyzing and clarifying concepts and ideas in other areas of discourse and culture. This conception is based on the assumption that philosophical questions are second-order or conceptual questions as contrasted with first-order or factual questions addressed by other discourses like mathematics, history, sociology e.t.c. Hence, philosophers, apart from looking at the substructure and raising foundational questions in both areas of discourses attempt to set limits to what can be known since they are equipped with the techniques of logical analysis.

This conception of the business of philosophy was championed and propagated by the logical positivists with their twin-sister linguistic analysis, which were a by-product of analytic philosophy. Even though analytic philosophy was a dominant mode of philosophizing in the Anglo- America, its actual origin can be traced to Europe following the works of Frege, early Wittgenstein, Russell, Moore, as well as the activities of the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle fame in the 1920's and 1930's. And going further back in history, one can say that some of the presuppositions and methods of analytic philosophy can be culled from the works of modern philosophers, namely, Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant as well as the writings of Plato and Aristotle in the ancient period.

Since ancient period philosophy has been concerned with the problems of epistemology. Here one recalls the doubts expressed by the sophists particularly Protagoras of Abdera and Gorgias of Leontini to the effect that an absolutely certain knowledge is impossible. The scepticism as expressed by the sophists obviously aroused the interest of philosophers to search for the ultimate foundation for all our knowledge

claims apparently to undermine the sceptic's position and thereby restore confidence on the possibility of knowledge.

Such problems that have traditionally agitated the minds of epistemologists are many and varied and can be categorized into three broad ways. The nature of knowledge or meaning of epistemic terms, the validation of cognition or the criteria of knowledge and the relation between cognitive experience and its objects¹. Thus it is proper to say that epistemology, since its history that dates back to Plato and the modern period, focuses on the origin, nature, scope and justification of knowledge in all its ramifications. Perhaps, this is true of what Michael Williams intends when he says, "Epistemology is concerned with the nature or structure of the justification of our most important beliefs, our belief in the existence of the physical world"².

What emerges from the above is that epistemologists usually assure that there exists an objective world or physical reality and a person (subject) that knows it. Also there is the notion of truth, which they claim possesses the status of an objective existence independent of the cognizing subject (person). The assumption here is that the cognitive subject is said to be certain or sure of any belief he holds, if and only if such belief is justified and believes that it is justified. In other words, there has to be some sort of interaction between what a person is certain of and truth which objectively exists. When this happens, then a person can ascribe truth to what he is certain of. Hence, knowledge has been defined, according to John Kekes, following Plato, as justified true belief. Here a person can be said to know a proposition if and only if the proposition is true, he believes that the proposition is true and he is justified in believing that the proposition is true³.

Let me state that it is not our business to go into the polemics surrounding the traditional conception of knowledge – especially those raised by Edmund Gettier⁴, who formulated some counter-examples to show that it is perfectly possible for a person to accept a true and justified proposition without necessarily knowing that that proposition is true contrary to the traditional analysis which suggests that a person is said to know

something if and only if it is true, believed and justified – but to say that the justification condition is the root of the search for some basic or non-inferential propositions.

The justification condition simply suggests that merely having a true belief is not sufficient for knowledge. What is sufficient therefore is that such true belief be justified. In other words, there must be sufficient reasons or justification for believing a particular proposition. Put differently, a sufficient reason or justification presupposes that there must be something that supports or provides evidence for the truth of what one believes. This is true because sometimes people worry about whether they actually know what they claim to know. For instance, in a law court, it is certainly not enough to say that an accused person is guilty of a particular crime, it is important that the members of a jury be provided with sufficient reasons or justification to show that the accused person really committed the offence. In this case what the jury wants is evidence that establishes that the accused is actually guilty of the crime. Thus, the belief cannot be guaranteed without sufficient reasons or justification.

But it is argued that however reliable sufficient reasons or justification are in yielding true belief, it is still a matter of dispute amongst philosophers how much is enough evidence or justification is needed? Besides, justification also leads to a regression. This problem occurs because of the assumption of the traditional epistemologist that for a belief to be justified it is not enough for it to be true, nor merely believed, there must be sufficient reasons or justification for believing it. On the basis of this assumption, some beliefs are justified by reference to other. The latter beliefs upon which the justification of the former beliefs are based are thought to be well confirmed. But a problem seems to emerge here, because if every belief were dependent on others for its justification, then no belief would ever be justified. This is so because in order to justify any belief at all, it would require a prior justification of an infinite series of beliefs and thereby leading to some sort of vicious circularity.

It is, however, not proper for knowledge to go on in this circular manner, otherwise nothing is ever justified and consequently no knowledge is attained. Also if this

regress is not stemmed, it will no doubt reinforce the position of the sceptic who argues that we do not or cannot know anything. One of the implications of this is either all systems of beliefs are arbitrary or that there is no rational way of deciding between the merits of conflicting claims of religion and science, science and pseudoscience⁵. Even though scepticism has been charged with self-contradiction from its avowed position, that is, we can know that we cannot know anything, it nonetheless points to the obvious fact that knowledge is not, as it were, a finished business, and that something more ought to be done. The sceptic's strictures also stimulated the philosopher's interest in searching for a position that will not only ground knowledge, but also prove that epistemic claims are possible and justifiable too.

This optimism to ground all epistemic claims on a class of basic non-inferential beliefs and thereby arrest the regress of justification inevitably leads to foundationalism. There is no better way to understand what foundationalism means other than to say that it aims to achieve, among other things, the apodictic certainty upon which all other beliefs rest and to determine whether our search for justification, based on other beliefs will not plunge us into an infinite regress. The strategy of the foundational epistemologist is to divide our beliefs into two categories, namely those which need support from others and those which are non-inferentially justified and provide justification for other beliefs in an ordered, hierarchical system of knowledge. It is not clear what foundationalists meant by non-inferential justification, except that some of them took it to be either infallibly justified when justification precludes the possibility of error. This point is well stated by Anthony Quinton when he says:

If any beliefs are to be justified at all..., there must be some terminal beliefs that do not owe their credibility to others. For a belief to be, it is not enough for it to be accepted, let alone merely entertained, there must be good reasons for accepting it. Furthermore for an inferential belief to be justified the beliefs that support it must be justified themselves⁶.

Thus the epistemological ideal of foundationalism, according to Kekes, is to begin an inquiry with an unassailable foundation, conduct it in accordance with strict rules, and aim to end up with a system which accurately depicts the world⁷.

The history of philosophy (epistemology) is full of attempts to provide basic incorrigible beliefs which provide justification for other beliefs but need no justification themselves. To this extent, the two dominant traditions in philosophy, namely Continental rationalism and British empiricism have tended to provide justification for our beliefs about the external world. Both agree that knowledge is possible and that there is a criterion or foundation that is basic and ultimate enough to serve as the reason for the justification of other epistemic claims. The idea here is that the rationalists and empiricists are foundationalists to the extent that they seek to find a certain, immutable and apodictic foundation which will serve as the basis of other beliefs.

The rationalists claim that knowledge must be absolutely certain and that it comes by a process of reasoning from self-evident first principles. According to them, deductive proof exhibited in mathematics and geometry is the surest way to develop an absolutely certain knowledge, because a valid argument guarantees that its conclusion is true if its premises are true. Rene Descartes, usually regarded as the father of modern philosophy, serves as the paradigm of the group. His aim, among others, is to show that we really do have knowledge and consequently put paid to the skeptical speculations to the effect that knowledge is unattainable. As he says:

It is now some years since I detected how many false beliefs that I had from my earliest youth admitted as true, and how doubtful was everything I had since constructed on this basis, and from that time I was convinced that I must once for all seriously undertake to rid myself of all the opinions which I had formerly accepted, and commence to build a new from the foundation, if I wanted to establish any firm and permanent structure in the sciences⁸.

On the contrary, the empiricist argues that justification resides in sense perception and the inner perception of the operations of the mind itself. It should be noted that the empiricists do not deny that we can reason about our ideas. Rather, they claim that the

relations among our ideas apply to the external world. This argument might seem circular, but it is not. This is because one can demonstrate to a child, for instance, that $2 + 2 = 4$ by bringing two dolls plus another two dolls which equals to four dolls. Although, this is a fact of mathematics which is known *a priori* it nonetheless can be proved empirically. The point here is that the empiricists share the belief that ultimate justification consists in our direct awareness of the object of knowledge. Thus, the basic thrust of their argument is that if one is directly aware of an object of knowledge, what one is aware of will neither be questioned, nor justified in terms of anything else.

Following from what has been stated, we can see that both rationalist and empiricist philosophers were foundationalists to the extent that they seek to ground knowledge on an absolutely certain foundation, although through different approaches. The other feature which characterized the orientation of these philosophers, including Kant, as we shall see shortly, is the distinction they made between subject and object, that is, the distinction between the knowing mind or cognitive subject and the external world that it confronts and seeks to know. It is argued that Descartes' theory provided the ground for this sort of dichotomy since he claimed that the only thing we can be certain or sure of, even by the most radical sceptic, is the existence of the mind itself or consciousness. Here one recalls his famous dictum, *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am) which he took as the foundation of his philosophy. It needs restating that our attempt here is not a full-blown analysis of Descartes philosophy, but only to show that the Cartesian doctrine of the mind as the private inner stage or the inner mirror in which cognitive action takes place may have been influenced by Plato's ideas of truth and knowledge, and thereby inaugurated the Archimedean view of philosophy that is, foundationalism and objectivism.

What emerges from these, is that the mind-body problem which has engulfed modern philosophy is based on Plato's acceptance, as it were, of the 'optical metaphor of an eye of the mind' in an attempt to explain our knowledge of universals and eternal truths, which the Greeks, following the Platonic insights, thought of the mind as a sort of

mirror concerned mainly with the eternal things. No doubt, Descartes appropriated this Platonic idea because he (Descartes) saw the mind as a mirror held up to nature and truth as the achievement of accurate representations. This is the idea behind presenting philosophy as an ‘inner eye’ inspecting and passing judgments on the credentials of the various specific branches of knowledge. In other words, the Cartesian attempt was to metalize the Platonic doctrine of knowledge as inner representation of outer reality. But the distinction between the inner representation and outer reality or ‘states of consciousness’ and ‘physical events’ was unknown to the Greeks before Descartes’ invention. That is to say that the mind-body problem was alien to the ancient Greeks prior to Descartes’ philosophy because as Wallace Matson says why the Greeks had no mind body problem is that it is difficult, almost impossible, to translate such a sentence as what is the relation of sensation to mind (soul) into Greek and this is due to the problem in finding a Greek equivalent of sensation in the sense philosophers made it bear⁹. The point then is that with Descartes’ philosophy, the problem of consciousness became a central problem for philosophy. Also it is claimed that Descartes appealed to indubitability as a criterion of the mental thereby paving the way for the transformation of the mind-body problem into an epistemological issue. This point is well taken by Rorty when he says:

Whereas previous philosophers had more or less followed Plato in thinking that only the eternal was known with certainty, Descartes was substituting clear and distinct perception that is the sort of unconfused knowledge gained by going through a process of analysis for indubitability as a mark of eternal truths. This left indubitability free to serve as a criterion of the mental¹⁰.

What is stated here is that the Cartesian metaphor of mind as mirror which accurately gives us a representation of reality lies at the root of epistemological foundationalism since this representation is taken to be accurate once the knowledge we have of reality is privileged, that is, guaranteed as reliable and indubitable.

The same problem is noticeable in the empiricist philosophy and Kant’s ‘transcendental philosophy since they started their theorizing on the same subject-object dualistic framework, and mentalistic model to the problem of epistemology. The

difference between their positions and those of the rationalist is that instead of following the pathway which Descartes and others have threaded, that is, reason, they appealed to the 'data of sense-experience as the basis for determining any claim to knowledge'.

It is worth stating that it is not our business to give a detailed elaboration of Kant's critical philosophy, but only to show that his ambition to reconcile the extreme views of rationalists, whose position commits them to holding analytic (*a priori*) judgement, and empiricists, whose position leads to synthetic (*a posteriori*) judgement, forced him to introduce a third kind of judgement which he calls synthetic *a priori* which he claims overcomes the pitfalls of the two traditions since synthetic *a priori* judgement, though necessarily true can neither be based wholly upon a mere logical analysis of the concepts they contain nor upon observation and the way things happen to be in the world. According to Kant science and propositions of mathematics exhibited such judgement because certain propositions like $2 + 2 = 4$ and 'every event has a cause', although are endowed with the necessity of analytic judgement still possess the novelty of synthetic *a posteriori* judgement.

Following from this, Kant is still committed to the subject-object dualistic scheme; that is, the same mentalistic orientation of his predecessors in the modern period such that even his most unapologetic admirers as Sellars and Strawson, especially the latter have criticized what they regard as Kant's fictitious mental machinery and his imaginary subject of transcendental psychology¹¹. In other words, Strawson noticed some sort of quasi-psychological images and metaphor in Kant's epistemological doctrine akin to the Cartesian inner representation and Lockean psycho-physiology which he attempted to overcome. This point is well stated by Rorty when he says:

We are now inclined to say that Kant still shared too much with the Cartesian tradition he tried to overcome. Specifically, he sometimes seems to have done little more than substitute a description of a mysterious non mental cognitive faculty for a physiology of the human understanding or for a dogmatic metaphysics, thus once again reducing the *quaestio juris* to a *quaestio facti*¹²

What we can cull from Rorty's deposition is that Kant's view connects with those of Descartes' and Locke's. Such views, and those of other philosophers who share Kant's transcendental argument must obviously argue that there is a thing as philosophical criticism of the rest of culture and that the philosopher can say something which science cannot about the claims of objectivity and rationality to which various parts of culture are entitled¹³. Now the structure of Kant's transcendental argument which we reject in this essay can be stated thus:

The legitimating of such knowledge without the aid of absolute principles is only possible as a demonstration of the lack of alternatives to that knowledge. It can only be demonstrated that in this and in no other manner is knowledge possible, and this can only be demonstrated in that alternative forms of knowledge are ruled out. This is the way of legitimation open to Kant¹⁴.

From Kant's view, philosophers see themselves as standing in a vantage position and identifying the goal of philosophy as critique of culture, and as legitimator of claims to truth, rationality, or objectivity on the part of other disciplines'. In an apparent attempt to build the Cartesian quest for certainty, for legitimation, for guarantees of rationality into philosophy's self-image, Kant professionalized and thereby inaugurated the belief which is at the root of the epistemology-centred conception of philosophy- a conception which sees philosophy as a kind of cultural overseer', as an all-encompassing discipline which legitimizes or ground the others. In other words, this view takes the proper business of philosophy as that of investigating the foundations of the sciences, the arts, culture and morality, and adjudicates the cognitive claims of these areas.

Thus philosophy as epistemology claimed to be an objective tribunal, one to which all other descriptions of reality, and types of discourse were brought for assessment. This is the view of philosophy as the "Queen of the sciences', since it is presumed that the sciences are ignorant of their own presupposition and the rationale of their method and that it is the proper business of philosophy to articulate these presupposition and adjudicate their validity¹⁵. Besides making philosophy- as-epistemology to become self-conscious and self-confident, Kant also takes everything we

say to be about something we have constituted and as such makes it possible for epistemology to be thought of as a foundational discipline capable of discovering the conceptual characteristics of any area of human knowledge. As Rorty puts it, “He (Kant) thus enabled philosophy professors to see themselves as presiding over a tribunal of pure reason, able to determine whether other disciplines were staying within the legal limits set by the structure of their subject matters”¹⁶.

What Rorty seems to be saying here is that Kant provided the framework for viewing philosophy as an objective tribunal, one to which all other discourses have to be brought for assessment. Also, it is argued that with Kantian transcendentalism, philosophy branches into different directions, prominent among them were the Anglo-Saxon and Continental phenomenological traditions. Needless to say, that it is within this broad framework that such perennial philosophical questions such as mind-body dualism, word-world relationships, the analytic-synthetic fact-value and necessary-contingent distinctions, among others, were discussed¹⁷.

Paradigm Shift

Here, we shall examine some contemporary attempts to evolve an alternative discursive conception to the above view. Beginning with Quine, who in his *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* criticized and rejected the existence of the analytic-synthetic distinction. His denial of this distinction has obviously touched on a fundamental doctrine which some philosophers especially the empiricists have accepted as a dogma that is taken for granted and therefore cannot be challenged.

W.V.O. Quine

The two dogmas, which Quine treats in his seminal work, include on the one hand the cleavage between truths which are analytic or grounded in meaning independently of matters of fact and truth which are synthetic or grounded in fact, and on the other reductionism, that is the belief that each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construction upon terms which refers to immediate experience¹⁸. It will be

recalled that the root of the distinction lies in the Humean bifurcation of *relations of ideas* and *matters of fact* which he used to categorize all objects of human reason or knowledge. No doubt, Kant accepts this Humean fork and insists that analytic *a priori* propositions are true or false simply as a matter of the meanings or definition of the terms contained in them, while synthetic *a posteriori* are true or false by a recourse to matters of fact in the world. Again, Kant introduced a third kind of proposition or judgement synthetic *a priori* as we showed above, whose truth can neither be based wholly upon the mere logical analysis of the concepts they contain nor upon sense experience, but on a combination of both. The doctrine of reductionism seems to be well expressed by the positivist principle of verification which is used to demarcate between significant and insignificant statements. To be sure, the doctrine of reductionism simply is the view that statements have a meaning by being reducible to statements about sense-experience¹⁹. We have had to explain in brief the main points of analytic-synthetic distinction and the doctrine of reductionism in order to provide a background of Quine's critique.

Quine contends that there is no clear distinction between analytic and synthetic statements and as such it is, unreasonable for anybody to say of synthetic statements as true because it matches up with experience or by appealing to any analytic statements to legitimize our assertions since they are not susceptible to empirical confirmation. However, Quine claims that our assertions cannot be legitimated by any appeal to sentence meanings that is analyticity. Rather such legitimacy or justification is possible because of the stimulus response to which all members of the community assent to most of the time. Hence any justification of our beliefs by the invocation of analyticity is, to say the least, circular. Such arguments that have been posited by those who attempted to reformulate analyticity in order to avoid the circularity, are, according to Quine highly dubious since such attempts normally use terms or notions like synonymy, that are in the same family with analyticity, to define it. Based on this, Quine submits that, "For all its *a priori* reasonableness, a boundary between analytic and synthetic statements simply has not been drawn. That there is such a distinction to be drawn at all is an unempirical dogma of empiricism, a metaphysical article of faith"²⁰.

The other aspect which attracted Quine's critical search light is the belief that analytic propositions are immune to revision that is irrefutable. That is to say that all analytic statements must be confirmed no matter what the world is like. But Quine dismisses this, arguing that there are no propositions that are immune to revision and that any proposition would be revised in response to recalcitrant experience. Quine generalizes his revisability thesis even to the principles of science and laws of logic that were hitherto taken as well entrenched. It is Quine's claim that we tend to think of the principles of science and laws of logic as irrefutable and irreplaceable simply because it is pragmatically reasonable for us to hold them at present, but once an alternative is found, we have no good reason to cling to them.

If Quine's position is allowed them, we must reject the so-called distinction between analytic or necessary truths and synthetic or contingent truths. Following from this blurring of the distinction between analytic-synthetic, necessary-contingent, fact-value e.t.c Quine argues that our ontological schemes describe phenomena in different ways since they distribute predicates over a whole range of sentences which are held true by all members of the community most of the time. On this Quinean holistic account, which, as it is now familiar, derives from Duhem's epistemological holism, sentences can be assigned determinate truth values as a function of their role within the community²¹. Now the acceptance of this fact compels us to reject such notions as 'necessity' or 'universality' as vacuous. Again if this point is acceptable, there must be on principle a strict 'ontological parity' between different conceptual schemes (Western and African, for example), and one's preference of any is purely a matter of personal choice and pragmatic considerations, rather than on any over-arching principles or criteria. I am aware of the objections²² raised against Quine's critique of the empiricist dogmas by Grice and Strawson and Putnam, among others, but I will not get into the controversy here except to say that their objections are not fatal to Quine's position. Whether or not any one believes it, the rejection of the analytic- synthetic distinction has serious consequences for analytic philosophy and the foundationalist epistemological enterprise because following from Quine's revisability thesis it is no longer reasonable for us to

cling to the image of an empirically neutral epistemology providing *a priori* criticism or justification of science and the rest of culture.

Wilfrid Sellars

Similarly Wilfrid Sellars's attack on 'the myth of the given' forces us to rethink our belief in the epistemological foundationalism. The myth of the given is simply the view that there are certain kinds of self-authenticating, non-verbal episodes, which consist of direct encounters with objects, and the authority of such encounters is somehow transmitted to the verbal performances which express them"²³. What this boils down to is that there are facts that are non-inferentially known and which each instance of knowledge of them presupposes no other knowledge and as such serves as ultimate court of appeal for other claims. But Sellars argues that it is unreasonable to claim that there is no kind of knowledge which presupposes no other knowledge since for him justification is a holistic phenomenon which implies that the legitimacy of any belief at all demands *ipso facto* the legitimacy of others. Thus the claim that there are facts that are 'given' and which are based on some pre-linguistic entities like 'I am in pain or this is red' is, according to Sellars, mistaken, and arguing that knowledge begins with the ability to justify and since language is public and intersubjective, all 'given' elements which purportedly ground knowledge are simply a part of our overall social practice.²⁴

Also it is worth remarking that the insights of the post-empiricist philosophers of science tend not only to undermine our belief in science as the only paradigmatic mode, but also that "there can be other forms of knowledge other than the natural science". In this regard, Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend and Mary Hesse, among others, are united in arguing for alternative discourses or conceptions²⁵. One consequence of this view is that the search for an Archimedean point or objective criteria with which to evaluate the rationality of a belief is, to say the least, misguided. They contend that a peoples' beliefs and the status of such beliefs can only be judged rational within the totality of the society's culture, since other forms of knowledge and belief have their truth-value embedded within the context of the society from which they spring.

Richard Rorty

At this point, it is important to note that our discussion so far ties in one way or another with Rorty's anti-foundationalist position which will pre-occupy us now. As we intimated earlier that Rorty seems to be fascinated by the anti-epistemological stance of Quine and Sellars because they have been able or shown how to subvert the image of philosophy as a foundational discipline which legitimizes or grounds the claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art or religion. As Rorty puts it,

When Sellars's and Quine's doctrines are purified they appear as complementary expressions of a single claim; that no account of the nature of knowledge' can rely on a theory of representation which stand in privileged relations to reality. The work of these two philosophers enables us... to make clear why an account of the nature of knowledge can be, at most a description of human behaviour²⁶.

Even though, Rorty agrees with Quine's and Sellars's arguments, he nevertheless expresses some reservations about the result of their inquiry. The point here is that whereas some critics accuse them of taking an extreme position in their attack of the analytic-synthetic distinction and the myth of the given respectively, Rorty accuses them of not being sufficiently radical since according to him., they should have drawn the unpalatable conclusion of the death of epistemology rather than saying that epistemology can be replaced by a legitimate scientific inquiry ; that is attempting to evolve a new epistemology, apparently referring to naturalized epistemology proposed by Quine, According to Rorty, both of them are still caught up in the empiricist dogma they attempted to subvert. Consequently, Rorty describes this attempt as a form of metaphysical realism, a reactionary development, a last-ditch attempt to hold onto the a temporal, Kantian scheme-content distinction in a desperate attempt to avoid Hegel and historicism²⁷. In spite of these few critical remarks on the project of Quine and Sellars, Rorty acknowledges that it is still their project that culminated in the eventual collapse of the Cartesian-Lockean-Kantian legacy of epistemology, and thereby opens an alternative way of perceiving knowledge²⁸.

Post-Modernism

Meanwhile, let us examine however briefly the connection of views of the philosophers treated above with that of the post-modernist thinkers like Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard, among others. It is necessary to do this because their views share in a remarkable way with post-modernism which is characterized mainly by a distrust of human reason⁷ and the metarrative privileged positions arrogated to philosophy and scientific knowledge. The term post-modernism, like modernism, is not susceptible to easy definition because it has become a catch-word for philosophers, sociologists, literary theorists, Marxists, artists, architects, media pundits, feminist theorists e.t.c. This problem is further complicated by what is now fashionable in contemporary thought to ascribe postness to such terms as post-structuralism, post-colonial, post-marxism, post-industrial even posthuman which as Niyi Osundare says has kicked up temporal, spatial, even epistemological problems²⁹. In spite of this difficulty however, an attempt is made to delineate what it means in a broad sense. The prefix post, in ordinary sense, implies that which comes after a rupture with the earlier period-modern³⁰. In other words, the term is taken to mean an epochal break not only with the modern era but also with various traditionally modern ways of viewing the world. Still, post-modernism, following the writings of Foucault and Norman Brown, implies not only the deconstruction of man and the end of the humanist credo, but also the epistemological break with genitality and the dissolution of focused sexuality into the polymorph perversity of oral and anal pleasure³⁰. What emerges from this is that no matter how one defines post-modernism, it must include a rejection of the established order or orthodoxy. In philosophy and literature, according to Kwame Anthony Appiah, post-modernism is against foundationalism and a rejection of the high seriousness of modernist writers as well as the stable meanings found in modernist writings respectively³².

It is important to remark that those who propagate this view may have been influenced by the Nietzschean suspicion of the tradition of Western philosophy which claims to be a grand totalizing and metanarrative theory providing answers to problems posed by other discourses. Post-modern discourse does not only reject this, but also seeks to subvert and transcend the logic of oppositions like logical or pre-logical, civilized or

savage, masculinity or femininity, etc., which the West had constructed in order to categorize phenomena differently and thereby place one in a sort of pedestal position over the other. The position of the post-modernist thinkers especially Derrida, is that the binary opposition is an arbitrary one since there is no objective, transcendently valid reason to relate one to the other or even relegate one to a condition of dependence on the other³³.

Now if we tie together the views of Quine, Sellars, Rorty and the post-modernist thinkers, among others, we will notice that the attempt by some philosophers to ground philosophy on a foundational plank is illegitimate. If, as Quine has shown, that truths of language and factual truths are interdependent and inseparable, then there can't be any talk of conceptual propositions which are separate from empirical ones. Again if this is accepted, then the analytic-synthetic, necessary-contingent grid breaks down, and with it the foundationalist search for *a priori* philosophy, that is, a philosophical system which stands apart from other cultures or knowledge systems. Following the collapse of the scheme-content grid other cultural or epistemological systems (including African epistemology once held captive by philosophy) are fully liberated and allowed a conceptual space to air their 'voices in the on-going conversation of mankind a voice which commands no special authority over the right of others to say what they want, and whose pronouncements rest upon no special insight into the nature of knowledge'³⁴.

The point of discussion so far is that there are no trans-cultural criteria of knowledge and rationality for all human discourses and cultures because rationality is an essentially contested concept. Put differently rationality and epistemic justification are explainable by reference to the collective beliefs and practices of a particular epistemic community since every culture or community has its own way of ordering reality, its own world-view.

Conclusion

We can conclude the easy by reiterating the basic thrust of our argument here by saying that it is difficult to sustain the argument that there are fixed immutable (Archimedean) point in philosophy as posited by some philosophers as noticeable in the writings of Descartes, Locke and Kant, among others, that there are trans-cultural criteria of rationality. But it has been shown that rationality is an essentially contested concept. If this is granted, then it is reasonable to argue that rationality is explainable by reference to the collective beliefs and practices of a particular epistemic community since every culture or community has its own way of ordering reality, its own world-view. The moral of this dispersed view of philosophy is to argue for tolerance and accommodation of other cultures, beliefs, religions and civilizations of the marginalized or subaltern peoples of Africa, Asia and Australia.

End Notes

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3. John Kekes, Recent Trends and Future Prospect in Epistemology in *Metaphilosophy* vol. 8, Nos. 2 & 3 (1977) p.88.
4. E.L. Gettier, Is Justified True Belief Knowledge? In *Analysis* Vol. 23 (1963), pp. 121-123.
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10. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980) pp. 58-59 (authors emphasis).

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19. Bernard Harrison, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* (London: The Macmillan Press,. Ltd, 1979), p.97.
20. W.V.O. Quine (1953), op. cit, p.37.
21. For Duhem-Quine holism of scientific discourse see Sandra U. Hardina (ed.) *Can Theories be Refuted? Essays on the Duhem-Quine Thesis* (Hingham, Mass; Reidel, 1976), p.10.

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