

# EPISTEMOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** Ever since modern epistemology, with its scientific orientation and foundationalist structure, took centre stage, religion has been on the defensive. Although both these features of modern epistemology have been challenged in the more recent times, it has not yet restored the credibility of religious knowledge. Briefly looking at William Alston's attempt at doing epistemology of religious experience in the changed circumstances, it is seen that diversity (religious and otherwise) poses a serious challenge to his efforts. This paper explores how epistemology of religious experience may be further fine-tuned by naturalizing it. Since public evidence plays a crucial role in the emerging theory of epistemic justification, it is dubbed evidential naturalism. An initial exposition of evidential naturalism is provided.

**Keywords:** Epistemology, Evidence, Justification, Naturalism, Religious Experience, William Alston

## 1. Introduction

Given that both 'religion' and 'philosophy' are all-comprehending in character and difficult to pin down in simple definitions, it would not surprise anyone that their interface could be spelt out in many different ways. At the most basic, philosophy is a reflective discipline and one of the things it reflects upon is religion, understood as the beliefs and practices

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of religious believers. This is known as the Philosophy of Religion, one of the sub-disciplines of philosophy. I make these general remarks about philosophy and religion so that I can narrow down the focus of this paper to just one aspect of religion, i.e., theology, and its interface with philosophy. Theology, like philosophy, is a reflective discipline. But philosophy and theology differ from each other inasmuch as theology is a committed religious activity meant to help the adherents to live according to the tenets of their religion whereas philosophical reflection does not have any specific orientation; philosophy could be religious, a-religious, or anti-religious.<sup>1</sup>

When religion is understood primarily in terms of theology, its relation to philosophy has taken two distinct forms in the past: philosophy as theology (in the ancient world) and philosophy as a preparation for theology. Not only does their relationship keep changing according to the times, but also that they need to keep changing. Unfortunately, this relationship has not been in good health ever since modernity denuded the world of its enchantment.<sup>2</sup> Wrong directions taken by modern epistemology has played a major role in this. But, as the chinks in the armour of modern epistemology came to be exposed, there entered the Reformed epistemologists, most notably Alvin Plantinga, William Alston, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, who argued for an epistemology of religious experience along the lines of perceptual experiences. Being in full agreement with an experiential approach to religious epistemology and apologetics, I shall explore, in this paper, ways of overcoming some shortcomings of reformed epistemology by naturalizing it in a particular fashion. For the sake of brevity, I shall consider only the epistemology of William Alston, that too in its bare

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<sup>1</sup>For more details about the identity of philosophy and theology, see, George Karuvelil, "Philosophy and Theology," *Divyadaan* 24, 2 (2013), 217-238. Even when philosophical reflection is religious, it might be reflection on a particular religion like Christianity or it could be just a sympathetic treatment of religious phenomena in general.

<sup>2</sup>See, George Karuvelil, "Christian Faith, Philosophy, and Culture: The Triumphs and Failures of Wisdom," *Jnanadeepa* 17, 1 (2014), 101-118.

minimum and proceed to its critique before exploring its naturalized alternative.

## 2. Alston’s Epistemology of Religious Experience

The basic contention of Alston is that there is parity between the epistemology of perceptual belief and experience-based religious belief. He makes a distinction between *prima facie* justification and unqualified or ‘*ultima facie*’ justification. *Prima facie* justification is based on a theory of ‘appearing’, which is another name for what goes also by the name of direct or presentative realism.<sup>3</sup> Just as how things appear to me in perception (say, a tomato appearing red) is *prima facie* justification for believing (that there is a red tomato before me), so too, “If one believes that God is P (e.g., loving) on the basis of an experience that one would normally take to involve God’s appearing to one as P, that belief is *prima facie* justified.”<sup>4</sup>

It is not that appearances do not deceive, whether in sense perception or in religious/mystical perception. But occasional deceptions do not overrule the fact of numerous cases of veridical perception. They are bound to yield true results overall, as they are based on well-established “doxastic practices” defined as ways of forming beliefs and epistemically evaluating them.<sup>5</sup> We have a variety of such practices related to sense perception, introspection, memory, various kinds of reasoning, mystical experience, and the like. Concerning such practices, Alston argues that “it is rational to engage in any socially established doxastic practice that we do not have sufficient reasons for regarding as unreliable.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>William P. Alston, “Back to the Theory of Appearing,” *Nous* 33, Supplement: Philosophical Perspectives 13 (1999).

<sup>4</sup>William P. Alston, “The Autonomy of Religious Experience,” *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 31, 2-3 (1992), 68. For the sake of brevity, I leave out Alston’s elaborate and important discussion of doxastic practices.

<sup>5</sup>William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991, 6, 100.

<sup>6</sup>Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, 6.

Is there some way of establishing the rationality of our doxastic practices? He argues that we have no non-circular way of doing this. It is true that we have “strong empirical evidence” for the reliability of sense experience; but such evidence is gathered by relying on sense experience.<sup>7</sup> So too with other doxastic practices. This is epistemic circularity. Epistemic circularity opens up the needed gap into which Alston inserts mystical practices to argue for the justification of those religious beliefs that are based on religious experiences.

Alston recognizes that *prima facie* justification, based as it is on how things appear, has its limitations. It is in such situations that unqualified justification comes into the picture. This is done on the basis of background beliefs. For example, if a person sees a flower in the garden as purple, but has strong evidence to believe that there are no purple flowers in the garden or knows that the lighting in the garden is such as to make white flowers look purple, then these background beliefs are enough to override appearances.<sup>8</sup> Alston calls these background beliefs that make us doubt the appearance “overrider-systems.” This is an important feature that sets apart his theory of justification from classical foundationalist approaches that make some beliefs self-justified.<sup>9</sup>

It is to be noted that Alston distinguishes between “the *state* of being justified” and the “*activity* of justifying” and makes the former his concern because, as he argues, “Unless I *am* justified in many beliefs without arguing for them, there is precious little I justifiably believe.”<sup>10</sup> It is a small wonder, therefore, that he expends almost all of his energy in expounding *prima facie* justification and very little for unqualified or *ultima facie* justification.

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<sup>7</sup>William P. Alston, “Perceiving God,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986), 657-58.

<sup>8</sup>Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, 79.

<sup>9</sup>Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, 80.

<sup>10</sup>William P. Alston, *Epistemic Justification*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, 7; Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, 71.

Prima facie justification, however, is problematic for various reasons. I shall point out only one that is immediately relevant to religious experience in a pluralistic context. Terrence Penelhum argues that while Alston is to be appreciated for showing that there exists parity between perceptual and religious beliefs, parity is not enough to establish the credibility of religious knowledge. He rightly points out that we live in a pluralistic world that boasts not only of many religions but also of many quasi-religious systems of thought (such as Marxism, Freudianism, socio-biology, etc.) each of which “can have their own apparently revelatory experiences and illuminations...”<sup>11</sup> In this situation,

although it is rational to yield to the claims of those religious beliefs that are occasioned by the religious experiences one may have, it is also rational for those who have experiences that occasion incompatible religious beliefs to accept them, and for those whose experiences are intrinsically secularizing ones to reject religion altogether.<sup>12</sup>

This kind of justification, therefore, would force us to live in a “religiously Balkanized world.” He suggests that some kind of natural theology, if it were to be successful, would offer a solution to such Balkanization. Natural theology can do this because of its universal character; “all are obliged to assent” to natural reason, as Aquinas puts it.<sup>13</sup>

In the light of such difficulties about justifying beliefs on the basis of appearing, I propose to abandon prima facie justification altogether and focus only on unqualified justification. Conceiving justification in this way will involve re-conceiving a number of concepts associated with the practice of epistemology. For lack of space, I shall merely list some of them without their accompanying arguments. Traditional definition of knowledge

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<sup>11</sup>Terrence Penelhum, “Parity Is Not Enough” in *Faith, Reason, and Skepticism: Essays by William P. Alston, Robert Audi, Terrence Penelhum, Richard H. Popkin*, ed. Marcus B. Hester, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992, 111.

<sup>12</sup>Penelhum, “Parity Is Not Enough,” 112.

<sup>13</sup>Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book I, chapter 2.

as Justified True Belief (JTB) will have to be understood as justifiable true belief rather than as beliefs carrying the certificate of justification. In terms of the distinction between the state of being justified and the activity of justifying, the focus would shift to the activity of justifying. Crucial to such activity or process of justifying would be evidence that is inter-subjectively available, as has already been pointed out. Most important of all, the resulting epistemology would be a kind of naturalized epistemology.

### 3. Naturalism and Diversity

Let us begin with some basic clarifications regarding 'nature' and 'natural'. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines 'natural' as "existing in nature," and 'nature' is defined as the "physical world and everything in it (such as plants, animals, mountains, oceans, stars, etc.) that is not made by people." If this is taken as our starting point, 'nature' is 'that which is originally given' to us as opposed to the 'cultural' or 'artificial' which are human products. Thus, stones and trees are natural, but a house made of stones and wood is cultural.

This basic meaning of natural as 'given', however, is not specific enough. Attempts to specify the nature of the given give rise to different specific forms of naturalism. An early answer regarding what is given comes to us from Plato. What is given, according to him, is a readymade world. In other words, nature comes to us prefabricated in a unique manner, with its own joints, so to say.<sup>14</sup> Let us call it metaphysical naturalism. This idea is at work when it is said that something has been discovered rather than invented. Metaphysical naturalism is our default position about the world. After all, we encounter a tomato *as* a tomato; it comes readymade.

Metaphysical naturalism has implications. If we can get to discover all the natural joints of the world, we would have the exact "one and true and complete picture of the world" to use an

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<sup>14</sup>See Plato, *Phaedrus*, 265e.

apt phrase of Hilary Putnam.<sup>15</sup> But metaphysicians have been sharply divided over what this picture is. Diverse views about the nature of reality sits ill with the idea of it having a fixed nature. There are two specific problems that need to be addressed: the problem of coherence and the problem of justification.

### 3.1. Problem of Coherence

The problem of coherence confronts us with the question: if reality has a fixed nature, how could it be reconciled with diverse views of it? The Kantian response to the problem was to forgo talking about the contours of reality-in-itself; the only contours we can talk about are the ones we ourselves impose on nature. He called it empirical realism, according to which although we could not really be sure about reality-in-itself, we could be pretty sure of empirical matters. This was enough to secure the Newtonian science of the day. But matters would get worse as Newtonian science gave way to Quantum science where it was not possible to speak about any fixed contours even of the physical world.<sup>16</sup> The mainline response to this development has been a further tweaking of the Kantian solution. Where Kant had left intact both the possibility of nature having its own contours with his noumenon and accounted for the fixity of ordinary empirical knowledge with his phenomenon, the new solution not only questioned the Kantian bifurcation of reality but also the idea of there being anything fixed even in our empirical observations; all observations are theory-laden. This trend reaches its culmination in Michel

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<sup>15</sup>Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, 49.

<sup>16</sup>Norwood Hanson tells us that his philosophy was an attempt to “make intelligible the disagreements about the interpretation” of quantum theory. Norwood Russell Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery: an Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958, 3.

Foucault who tends to reject the category of the 'natural' altogether, in favour of the political and the historical.<sup>17</sup>

It is at this point that I want to introduce a second meaning of 'natural'. As against the "ill-conceived" views of Hanson, Feyerabend, and others who are the masters of theory-laden observations, W. V. Quine held that there is a class of observations that are not theory-laden.<sup>18</sup> He called the outcome of such observations "pure" observation sentences. They are not theory-laden because they are the human counterpart of animal cries, an evolutionary heritage.<sup>19</sup> As far as this class of observations are concerned, there exists a "pre-established harmony" between the human knower and the known world,<sup>20</sup> making them natural *to us* where 'natural' means 'innate' or 'spontaneous'. This understanding retains the basic idea of 'natural' as that which is found or given rather than made, but what is given in this case is not the world (as in metaphysical naturalism) but a human endowment, an innate human capacity.

This understanding of 'natural' is found in the common sense tradition of Thomas Reid, G. E. Moore, and others.<sup>21</sup> Even David Hume held that some beliefs of our naïve common sense are such that we have an innate disposition to believe them. I shall

<sup>17</sup>Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London: Routledge, 2002, xvi.

<sup>18</sup>W. V. Quine, "In Praise of Observation Sentences," *The Journal of Philosophy* 90, 3 (1993), 107.

<sup>19</sup>Quine, "In Praise of Observation Sentences," 109.

<sup>20</sup>W. V. Quine, *From Stimulus to Science*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995, 21; W. V. Quine, "I, You, and It: An Epistemological Triangle" in *Knowledge, Language and Logic: Questions for Quine*, eds. Alex Orenstein and Petr Kotatko, *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000, 1, 2, 408. Robert Audi explicitly uses the word 'natural' for similar instances of knowledge. See, Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 2nd ed., New York: Routledge, 2003, 237.

<sup>21</sup>Noah Marcelino Lemos, *Common Sense: A Contemporary Defense*, Cambridge Studies in Philosophy, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.



refer to this innate capacity as cognitive naturalism, where “cognitive” does not imply truth; it merely means certain of our experiential beliefs (such as, “It’s raining”, to take one of Quine’s own examples) are innate to us. The significance of cognitive naturalism is that it gives the best account of cognitive diversity without going either the anti-realist way of claiming that we make reality or the metaphysical claim that the world comes uniquely pre-divided. It might as well be that different creatures have different ways of dividing up the world. For example, the manner in which we humans delineate the contours of a thing (say, a flower) may not be the same for butterflies or honeybees. There is clear evidence to show that there are animals that can sense the magnetic fields or ultraviolet rays; it is their natural endowment, not ours. Even with regard to human beings, Quine’s “pre-established harmony” applies only to a small fraction of our cognitive interaction with our environment, a fraction that results in “pure” observation sentences. Beyond these pure observations lie vast realms of knowledge, including the knowledge given to us by modern science. Such knowledge is our “free creation.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, cognitive naturalism agrees with the idea that we cut up the world into objects to suit our interests and needs, except that it would add a clause to say that our interests are pretty much universal as far as that subclass of our perception is concerned which is innate.

### 3.2. Diversity and Justification

Cognitive naturalism offers an excellent account of how the common sense view of nature as something given to us in a fixed way could be reconciled with the idea of reality not having such fixed contours beyond its limits. Since cognitive naturalism, by

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<sup>22</sup>W. V. Quine, *The Roots of Reference*, LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1973, 3. It may be noted that Reid anticipates Quine when he distinguished “orginal” or primitive perceptions from the acquired ones. See, Lorne Falkenstein, “Nativism and the Nature of Thought in Reid’s Account of Our Knowledge of the External World,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, eds. Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 159.

definition, does not wear the badge of justification, how are we to judge the truth value of pure observation sentences? With the awareness of cognitive diversity, the problem gets accentuated. How to connect our representations and interpretations – reality as we experience it – to the reality that is independent of us? This is really the hard problem of epistemology.

While Hume and Reid agreed that we possess some beliefs that are innate to us they differed on whether these innate beliefs must be counted as rational or justified. Reid held natural beliefs to be rational; Hume disagreed.<sup>23</sup> Reid's justification of his position is that our natural beliefs are a divine gift, a position that is dependent on the Design argument of natural theology that Hume rejected, says Penelhum. The Reformed tradition, to which Alston belongs, differs from Reid inasmuch as it considers Reid's dependence on natural theology unnecessary; Reid should simply have claimed that our natural beliefs are justified on the basis of appearing and, then, extended the claim to theistic beliefs arising from theistic experiences.<sup>24</sup> It is this strategy of relying on appearing that leads to the unacceptable conclusions we have seen. The question that confronts us is this: is it possible to resolve this dispute between Reid and Hume without relying on appearances? For the purpose, I want to introduce the idea of evidential naturalism.

Evidential naturalism is a version of naturalized epistemology. Naturalized epistemology builds on the most basic sense of 'natural' as given but it takes the empirical sciences as given. It contends that empirical sciences and epistemology are continuous with each other.<sup>25</sup> There are various kinds of continuity that could be affirmed. There are three that are important for our purpose. One is contextual

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<sup>23</sup>This view of the difference between Reid and Hume is due to Terrence Penelhum. See, Penelhum, "Parity Is Not Enough," 102-103; A more detailed view of Reid's theory of perception can be found in Falkenstein, "Nativism and the Nature of Thought," 156-179.

<sup>24</sup>Penelhum, "Parity Is Not Enough," 109.

<sup>25</sup>James Maffie, "Recent Work on Naturalized Epistemology," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27, 4 (1990), 281-93.

continuity. This means that just as sciences build on past knowledge, so too epistemology begins with some descriptions (about ourselves and our knowing process) and not by giving up all current beliefs, as modern epistemology attempted to do. This kind of naturalism can be traced as far back as Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics.<sup>26</sup> Seen in these terms what cognitive naturalism does is to describe a set of beliefs that are inescapable for us human beings.

A second sort of continuity has to do with the normative character of epistemology. Since empirical sciences are descriptions of reality, how to relate them to epistemic prescriptions? Here the dominant view seems to be what is known as “cooperative naturalism” or the view that epistemological prescriptions must take empirical descriptions seriously. Again, there is something of a consensus that the imperatives arising from empirical descriptions will be conditional rather than categorical in nature.<sup>27</sup> This may be illustrated, at its simplest, in the following way. “Fire burns” is an empirical description. From this follows the imperative that “Anyone who wishes to avoid getting burned must not touch fire.”

A third kind of continuity between sciences and epistemology is methodological. In speaking about methodological continuity, one need not assume that sciences have any one masterly method as the logical empiricists thought. Knowledge-seeking of human beings (of which science is a part) is as complex as human life itself. Therefore, various methods may be appropriate in different contexts. But there is one insight from Karl Popper’s hypothetico-deductive method that is immediately relevant to the kind of inter-subjective evidence

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<sup>26</sup>See, Stephen Everson, ed., *Epistemology: Companions to Ancient Thought*, vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 6; Barry Maund, *Perception: Central Problems of Philosophy*, Chesham, Bucks: Acumen, 2003, 3.

<sup>27</sup>See, Ronald Giere, “Modest Evolutionary Naturalism” in *Naturalized Epistemology and Philosophy of Science*, eds. Chienkuo Mi and Ruey-lin Chen, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007, 25.

that is required for resolving cognitive disputes. The concerned insight is the distinction between discovery and justification,<sup>28</sup> or what I shall call genetic and evidential factors involved in justification. The idea of genesis-justification distinction is that the genesis or how one comes to entertain an idea, a theory, or a hypothesis, or even a perceptual belief is a contingent matter related to psychology, sociology, etc., even biology, of the one who makes the discovery. However, justification or testing of that theory or belief is a matter of logic and publicly available evidence.

There are two things to be said about the kind of evidence used in science. First, it is the theory or hypothesis that tells the scientist as to what counts as evidence for it. While the hypothesis guides the search for evidence, nothing can be said beforehand as to whether the sought evidence would be found. Evidence, therefore, is found or received from mind-independent reality rather than manufactured by the investigator. This is the heart of evidential naturalism. Evidence, so to say, is the green signal given to the concerned hypothesis or knowledge-claim by mind-independent reality. Second, the relevant evidence has a public character, in the sense that it is available, in principle, to all who understand the link between the sought evidence and the belief or hypothesis being tested. It is the absence of this kind of evidence that prompted us to abandon the appearing approach to justification.

It seems that, if evidence of this kind can play the justificatory role in determining the truth of any cognitive claim, including the natural beliefs of the kind recognized by Quine, Hume, Reid, and others, then we would be able to get beyond the positions of Hume and Reid. Thus, in making the genesis-justification distinction and making evidence crucial to justification, we side with Hume's rather than Reid's view regarding the rationality of natural beliefs. But evidential naturalism differs from Hume's in claiming that it is possible to

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<sup>28</sup>Karl R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, London/New York: Routledge, 1992, 7.

justify our natural beliefs whereas Hume held it to be just a brute fact that we have natural beliefs; they cannot be justified or given reasons for. If it is indeed possible to justify natural beliefs in this fashion, then evidential naturalism can be considered an advance over available theories of epistemic justification.

#### 4. Is Evidential Naturalism Viable?

There are serious difficulties with the genesis-justification distinction and, therefore, with evidential naturalism based on that distinction. I shall merely indicate one substantive difficulty with evidential naturalism and a possible solution to it without elaborating.

The difficulty is the following: The genesis-justification distinction is possible in science, it would seem, because the object of justification in science is a theory or hypothesis, and the evidential support is experiential or observational. But how can we draw such a distinction when we are dealing with a basic mode of knowing like perception (which, Alston wants to extend further to religious experience)? What can justify our experiential beliefs? The modern claim that such knowledge is self-justified, incorrigible, etc., ends up as a dogmatic assertion as far as the sceptic is concerned. The problem becomes acute when there are rival claimants to the experiential throne (the problem raised by Penelhum) which prompted us to abandon Alston’s reliance on appearing as the basis of justification. How else are we to justify the experiential beliefs of cognitive naturalism?

As far as justifying cognitive naturalism is concerned, we need to be clear about whether (a) we are asking for a justification of the thesis of cognitive naturalism that a fraction of our empirical beliefs is natural to us or (b) the justification of any individual belief that is produced through this innate mechanism. As far as the justification of the thesis of cognitive naturalism is concerned, it is best considered as an instance of Inference to the Best Explanation.<sup>29</sup> It explains at least two

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<sup>29</sup>See, Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation*, 2nd ed., London, New York: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group, 2004.

undeniable facts about human cognition: (1) that an absolute stranger with zero background knowledge of another language or culture can begin to master that language or culture with some conscious effort, without the help of any bilingual intermediary;<sup>30</sup> (2) findings from cognitive psychology and history of science, which too, show that the influence of theory on observation is limited.<sup>31</sup> These facts seem best explained by considering some of our cognitive interaction with the world as innate and spontaneous to us, as a result of our evolutionary past.

The real challenge to evidential naturalism is in the justification of individual perceptual beliefs (that fall under the innate category). In order to achieve this task, we need to make a methodological innovation. The innovation I suggest is to bring Wittgenstein's grammatical-empirical distinction into the description-prescription relationship accepted by cooperative naturalism. This might seem impossible given that in Wittgenstein grammar has priority over the empirical in the same way as rules of a game provide the norms for judging the conduct of the game whereas in naturalized epistemology empirical descriptions have priority over prescription. But this seeming contradiction disappears when we realize that grammatical-empirical distinction is logical one that does not rule out the material link asserted in the description-prescription distinction. To confuse the two would be to become a victim of

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<sup>30</sup>There can be a legitimate difference of opinion on the process of achieving it. See, Hans-Johann Glock, "On Safari with Wittgenstein, Quine, and Davidson" in *Wittgenstein and Quine*, eds. Robert L. Arrington and Hans-Johann Glock, London: Routledge, 1996, 144-172. But the possibility of such learning is an undeniable fact, as it has been done by many pioneering explorers and missionaries in the past.

<sup>31</sup>William F. Brewer and Bruce L. Lambert, "The Theory-Ladenness of Observation and the Theory-Ladenness of the Rest of the Scientific Process," *Philosophy of Science* 68, 3 (2001), S176-S186; see also, Carl R. Kordig, "The Theory-Ladenness of Observation," *The Review of Metaphysics* 24, 3 (1971), 448-484; "Observational Invariance," *Philosophy of Science* 40, 4 (1973), 558-569.

“category mistake.” Gilbert Ryle gave the example of a university and its constituent elements; ‘university’ is not one more constituent like the library, classrooms, and so on, but the way in which all the constituent elements are organized.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Wittgenstein’s grammatical-empirical distinction is a logical one and not a material distinction. ‘Trees’ and ‘forests’ are logically distinct categories; but that does not warrant the conclusion that forests exist independently of trees.

Once the grammatical-empirical distinction is brought to bear on description-prescription relationship of cooperative naturalism, it is no longer difficult to apply the genesis-justification to experiential knowledge. Then such descriptions of cognitive naturalism as enjoying a pre-established harmony between mind and extra-mental reality, its evolutionary roots, etc., can yield certain grammatical rules for perception. These rules would prescribe the kind of evidence that is relevant for the justification of those experiential beliefs that fall under the innate category of perceptual beliefs. However, demonstrating it will take another article.

## 5. Conclusion

This article set out to explore the possibility of overcoming the shortcomings of Alston’s Reformed Epistemology. Since his appearing approach to epistemology poses severe difficulties in a world of cognitive diversity, it was abandoned in favour of a kind of naturalized epistemology dubbed as Evidential Naturalism that can hold together diverse interpretations of reality without making knowledge only a matter of interpretation. Taking the need to resolve cognitive disputes as the primary task of epistemology, evidential naturalism considers evidence that is accessible to all sides of the dispute as the key to justification. This is significant because the epistemologies prevalent today tend to either identify

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<sup>32</sup>Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, New York: Routledge, 2009, 6.

epistemology with hermeneutics and neglect justification,<sup>33</sup> or confine itself to justification, neglecting the role of interpretation. The continental tradition and those under its influence take the former route whereas most epistemologists in the analytic tradition tend to take the latter. This article has proposed a way of combining the two so that the human contribution to knowledge can go hand-in-hand with hardnosed realism. This is made possible by the finding that there is a small class of perception that is more or less universal to our species, named “cognitive naturalism.”

A second significance of evidential naturalism is its ability to maintain the cause-reason distinction advocated by different philosophers. This is done by modifying Popper’s discovery-justification distinction into genetic and evidential factors to make it applicable not only to high-level scientific theories and hypotheses but also to the humble everyday perception. The result is the possibility of justifying perceptual beliefs not on the basis of antecedent experiences leading to beliefs but on the basis of subsequent experiences based on the “grammar” of perception. This important claim, however, remains to be illustrated.

Evidential naturalism has implications for the justification of beliefs arising from mystical experience. If we can identify a set of mystical experiences that is comparable to “pure observations” of Quine, then it would open up a new way of doing natural theology or something in place of natural theology. The universality of this kind of experiences would prevent religious Balkanization arising from religious diversity. Just as pure observations make room for cognitive diversity, so too, this kind of mystical experiences would leave abundant room for diversity of religious experiences.

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<sup>33</sup>Merold Westphal, “Hermeneutics as Epistemology” in *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, eds. John Greco and Ernest Sosa, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, 415-35.