UNIT 4   CRITICAL APPRAISAL AND SYNTHESIS

Contents

4.0 OBJECTIVES

Having made the journey of epistemology through the last 15 units, it is time to take stock. In this unit we shall try to get a summary view of the places we have visited in this journey. At the end of this unit you will be able to do the following:

- Briefly summarize the major contents each of the four blocks

- refresh yourselves on the important issues covered

- attain a synthetic perspective on epistemology today

4.1 ORIENTING ISSUES

The four units of the first block introduced you to the discipline of epistemology, beginning with its definition. One of the crucial issues in the definition of epistemology is the distinction between knowledge and knowledge of knowledge; it is only the latter that is epistemology. Since all knowledge involves awareness, epistemology involves an awareness of awareness. My seeing of a tree in front of me is knowledge; it is awareness. The object that is known (the tree) is outside me. But when I become aware of the nature of my awareness of the tree (for example, was the tree the focus of my attention or was it just a peripheral vision?) the object of knowledge is not something outside of me. Similarly, science is an important part of the knowledge we possess; reflecting upon scientific knowledge (which comes in

philosophy of science) is an important part of epistemology. Such is the crucial distinction between knowledge and epistemology.

This distinction is important because it determines the kind of questions that are raised in epistemology and how they come to be answered. In order to know what a *zebra* is I need to find out from reliable external sources such as an encyclopaedia; but do I need to do the same when I am trying to find out what *knowledge* is? That would be a very odd procedure. If I claim that I *know* what a zebra is, then I must be having some understanding of what knowledge is. Unearthing that understanding is reflective task than a matter of gathering information. Similarly, we get scientific knowledge from outside of ourselves; but reflecting on the nature of science (philosophy of science) is not a matter of getting further information from outside. Epistemology, as knowledge of knowledge, has this reflexive character.

From the realization that epistemology is a reflective enterprise we proceeded to reflect on the nature of knowledge. As a result we arrived at the conclusion that knowledge has three characteristics: it is a *belief* that is *true* and there is *reason for believing* that to be true. The activity of giving reasons for believing is called justification. Knowledge, in short, is justified true belief. This tripartite analysis is the second issue that gave an orientation to our course on epistemology. Although questioned by Edmund Gettier, this analysis is intuitively taken to be a correct way of understanding knowledge. Of the three parts that make up knowledge, justification has a special place in epistemology because of scepticism or the denial of knowledge. If epistemology is a matter of truth seeking, scepticism tells us that truth is a chimera; it cannot be had. This is one of the issues that epistemology deals with.

The very fact that we seek to justify a belief to anyone who might doubt its truth demonstrates some unwritten assumptions about truth and knowledge. The first assumption is that the other person can be brought to see the truth; if we did not believe that the contending sides can be brought to agree on truth justification would be a pointless exercise. When we reflect on this we come to see an even more fundamental assumption of all epistemology, namely, the universality of truth. If what is true for one were to be different from that of another, there would be no point in trying to convince anyone that a given proposition is true or not true. The very fact that when a wrong statement is made we disagree with it and try to give the correct version is proof enough for our ordinary everyday assumption that what is true is universally so. Truth, in other words, is not relative to persons or cultures.

Universality of truth, as opposed to relativism, is the third orienting issue we studied in the first block.

Relativism is the philosophical view that holds that one thing (A) is relative to another (B). This one thing (A) may be truth, values, meaning, etc; and the something else (B) may be personal interests, cultural biases, conceptual frameworks, and so on. Relativism of truth is the idea that what is true is true only in relation to the personal interests and biases of an individual, the cultural biases of a society and so on. Negatively, it is the idea that there are no absolute truths, i.e., no truths are independent of such biases. Relativism is not just a matter of fact claim that what one considers true is often influenced by one's personal interests or cultural biases or conceptual frameworks. For example, if a person acknowledges the *possibility* of one's belief being biased and expresses a willingness to correct it, if it is shown to be biased, that person is not a relativist because willingness to be corrected presupposes a standard that is independent of one's bias. Relativism, rather, is the denial that there are any external or absolute standards that are free from biases. Positively, it is the claim that all our standards of truth are immanent to the individual, culture, conceptual framework, etc.

Another important issue that was seen in the first block was truth. The word "true" is one of the most commonly used words. We say things like "It is true that the Taj Mahal is in Agra", "It is not true that Char Minar is in Agra". But what is meant by saying that a proposition is true or not true? This is the question that is dealt with in the unit on truth. Intuitively we tend to think of truth as a correspondence between what is affirmed or denied in a proposition and what the case is really. But this theory runs into the problem of having to compare what is captured in the proposition (or mind) with reality. The difficulty arises because whatever is captured in a proposition is no longer reality-in-itself and therefore there can be no real comparison. All such attempts will only lead to an infinite regress, argue the critics of correspondence theory.

Supporters of correspondence theory say that other theories like coherence theory and pragmatic theory run into even more serious problems than correspondence. Nicholas Rescher's distinction between a theory (or definition) of truth on the one hand and a criterion of truth on the other, help us realize that there are at least two different questions that are often confused. According to him correspondence is a theory of truth, coherence is the criterion. If there is clarity as to

the problem that one is concerned with, then much of the difficulties of the different theories may also be resolved. While Rescher has a point here, it remains an open question as to whether the criteria and theory can go in their separate ways. If correspondence is accepted as the definition of truth, it would seem to fit most of our uses of the word "true"; but some uses like "being true to oneself" or "God is truth" do not seem to be matters of correspondence at all. In spite of these difficulties correspondence could be considered as an appropriate definition.

4.2 SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

The second block of our program dealt with the sources of our knowledge. Although as individuals most of our knowledge comes to us from testimony (of parents, teachers, scholarly books, newspapers, and so on), this is not our only or even the most primary source of knowledge. Ultimately all such indirect knowledge must have come from some direct source. For example, I know quite a lot about polar bears. And the source of my knowledge is the BBC documentary on them. This is testimony because it is based on the knowledge someone else has. But how did BBC gather information about polar bears? They could have collected some of it from other sources, but no amount of such second hand information would suffice to make the kind of magnificent documentary they have made. Someone has to go to the poles and film these bears in action. That is direct knowledge, knowledge by perception.

Perception is ordinarily defined as sense knowledge or immediate knowledge in western philosophy. Defining it in terms of the five senses can be quite problematic if you believe that there is something like Extra Sensory Perception or (ESP) whereby one can know events happening at a distance, or something that happened in the past and so on. It is for this reason that many prefer to define perception as immediate knowledge and divide this kind of immediate knowledge into sense knowledge and intuition. This is similar to some schools of Indian philosophy that would not restrict perception to sense experience but consider sense experience as ordinary perception (*laukika pratyak a*). Apart from ordinary perception, they would also acknowledge extra-ordinary perception (*alaukika pratyak a*). Those who rule out even the possibility of such knowledge, of course, would not face any such problem in defining perception in terms of sense knowledge. Without ruling out the possibility of extra-sensory perception, we limited our considerations to ordinary perception.

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After such preliminary considerations we proceeded to examine the different theories of perception found in Western Philosophy. They can be broadly divided into realist and constructivist theories.

Western theories of perception, for the most part, have been realist theories. Realism, in this context means that (1) the object of perception or reality exists independently of the perceiver; (2) perception is caused by that perceiver independent reality; (3) truth of perception consists in correspondence between what is perceived and the outside object. Realist theory, in this form, faces some serious difficulties. An important difficulty is this: If our perceptual knowledge is caused by the object, how could we ever mis-perceive objects, as we doubtlessly do on occasions? In order to avoid such difficulties, some thinkers made some modifications to this view. They suggested that we do not perceive the objects directly. What we directly perceive are not the objects; objects have the capacity to produce some effects on us which are called variously as "sensations", "ideas" and the like. It is these effects that we directly perceive and on the basis of these we infer to the object. This view is called indirect realism.

This view has the advantage that perceptual errors can be attributed to the second stage of perception, the process of inferring. As far as the sensations or ideas are concerned, they cannot be mistaken. But the difficulty is that these ideas are in us; what we are said to perceive are objects outside our mind. So how can we ever know that these sensations or ideas really represent the objects? There comes about an unbridgeable gap between the mind and the object. This is called the problem of the bridge. This is the starting point for such philosophical theories as phenomenalism and solipsism.

Constructivist theories can be said to originate in Kant. It arises from the realization that perceptual knowledge is not simply a matter of receiving sensations from the objects outside. Rather, perceptual knowledge is conceptualized knowledge. As such, concepts in the mind are as important as sensations from the objects outside. This Kantian insight is developed further and contemporary hermeneutics insists that all knowledge (including perceptual knowledge) is a matter of interpretation. John Hick, for example, would say that all our conscious experiencing is an "experiencing-as". He gives the following example. When we see a fork we recognize the cutlery for what it is and say "It is a fork" whereas a primitive who has no familiarity with forks might see the same object, but instead of recognizing it as cutlery might consider it a

weapon. The point is that all our perception involves an interpretation; this interpretation is done in terms of some prior knowledge that we already possess.

This difference between realist and constructivist theories of perception might seem confusing at first sight because when we look at them individually, both seem reasonable. On the one hand we know that there is an interpretative element in our perception and our prior conceptions do influence what we perceive; on the other hand our perception would be true only if it is linked in some manner to the world outside. Both the constructivist and realist theories tell us something true about perception. To put it differently, although our perception involves an interpretation, it is not only a matter of interpretation: there must be some information that is gained in the process of perception. W.V. Quine holds these two together by talking about "degrees of observationality" where some observations are relatively free of interpretations than others. These relatively "pure" observations are "directly keyed to the world" according to him.

The second most important source of knowledge is inference. Inference is also studied in logic. But the perspective of the study of inference in epistemology is not the same. Formal logic is concerned with the form of arguments to see if the arguments are valid; in epistemology the concern is with the truth of the statements involved in inference, not only with validity. When the concern is with truth there arises the difficulty as to how we can come to know the truth of universal statements. This is known as the problem of induction. Universal statements are important because every inference (whether inductive or deductive) contains at least one universal statement. Therefore if truth of universal statements is problematic then all knowledge we have from inference is also problematic.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) Briefly explain the four orienting issues that guided our course in epistemology?

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2) What are the respective insights of the constructivist and realist theories of perception? How does Quine hold them together?

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4.3 METHODS AND JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE - I

We noted that justification has a special place in epistemology because of the sceptical context of this discipline. But not all theory of knowledge begins with scepticism. The epistemology of metaphysical thinkers (like Aristotle and Aquinas) differs in this respect from the epistemology of modern thinkers like Descartes, Hume or Kant. Whether or not one takes scepticism as the starting point of epistemology plays a major role in how justification is done and the shape epistemology takes. In the third block of our course we dealt with this.

The metaphysical thinkers did not, as a rule, begin with scepticism. Rather, they begin with the assumption that we possess knowledge and on that basis ask the question: "Given that we do have knowledge, what should we (the knowers) and the world (the known) be like if this is to happen?" When the question is posed in this manner, it calls for an answer in the form of descriptions: description of the knower as well as the knowable world. And this is what the metaphysical thinkers do: they describe both in a manner that coheres with each other. For example, the knowers have senses and the knowable world has sensible qualities. The knowable, however, is not exhausted by its sensible qualities: it has also a structure that cannot be grasped by the senses. In a corresponding manner, the knowers possess not only the senses but also an intellect that can go beyond sensations to grasp the intelligible structure of the world.

The metaphysical method can be used only as long as there are no serious questions about our capacity for knowing the world or ourselves. And this is what comes to be questioned during the modern period. Descartes, the father of modern

Western Philosophy, took scepticism very seriously and could not begin with any descriptions. He refused to accept as knowledge anything that comes from the senses or even the testimony of his teachers or parents. Thus all descriptions become questionable for him. But it is in and through that very process of doubting that he arrives at the *cogito*, one thing that he found he could not doubt. Using this indubitable truth as the foundation he attempts to build up the rest of his beliefs.

This method or the manner of justifying beliefs has come to be called foundationalism. Foundationalism holds that all our knowledge is made up of two kinds of beliefs: (1) basic or foundational and (2) non-basic or non-foundational. Having divided all our beliefs into these two classes, foundationalism says further that there is an asymmetrical relationship between the two classes. The relationship is asymmetrical because it is always the basic beliefs that support the non-basic beliefs and not *vice versa*. Both empiricists and rationalists, in fact the whole of modern epistemology, follow the foundationalist method in justifying knowledge. The only difference consisted in what is counted as basic. If rationalists like Descartes took truths of reason (like the *cogito*) as foundational, the empiricists took the truths of the senses (perception) as foundational. Apart from a few indubitable truths like the *cogito* or sense experience, the vast body of our knowledge is called into question until they are shown to be supported by these self-evident basic beliefs.

Whether empiricist or rationalist, foundationalist standards of justification were found to be too stringent to be viable. Is it possible for us to justify any of our beliefs without relying on a lot of the other beliefs we possess? Even if we have some beliefs that are held to be self evident, it has been found to be impossible to build the whole world of our knowledge on such meagre foundations. We only have to think of the problem of induction to realize that we cannot be completely sure of even simple universal statement like "All crows are black", much less of more complicated scientific theories!

From the realization that the foundationalist standards are too stringent comes an alternative method of justification called coherentism. The classic imagery used to convey a sense of this method comes to us from Otto Neurath. The imagery is that of sailors in the open sea who find that their boat has developed leaks. They cannot discard the boat or go to the shore to repair the leak. All they can do is to repair or replace the damaged beams by standing on beams that are in relatively good condition. The idea is that the ship of our knowledge cannot be rebuilt from the start

as the foundationalists wanted. We can always replace beliefs that are problematic, but not replace all beliefs at once. In other words the strategy of putting all our knowledge in doubt and starting from the beginning is not a viable option, say the coherentists.

These three methods can be summarised in this way: scepticism is not the starting point of the metaphysical method, as it is for foundationalism. Accordingly the metaphysical method can begin with descriptions, but the foundationalists cannot. The metaphysicians aim at coherent descriptions but the foundationalists aim at justifying non-basic beliefs on the basis of non-basic beliefs. This kind of one way relationship between beliefs is repudiated by the coherentists. They hold that there are no privileged beliefs that can be considered basic. All beliefs mutually support one another.

4.4 METHODS AND JUSTIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE - II

Wittgenstein's "language games" is not primarily about justification of knowledge. Primarily, it is about the rule governed nature of language. It is a corrective to the early philosophy of Wittgenstein that took the meaning of language to be dependent on the world. As opposed to that early view, "language games" is the view that meaning depends, not on linguistic referents, but on the rules that govern its use. In this respect, it is similar to games. What makes a given game a game of "football" or "cricket" or "chess" is not anything outside the game but the rules by which the game is played. To know a game is to know these rules that constitute the game. We know something to be a "king" in chess when we know the rules whereby that piece is moved or affected by the moves of other pieces. Similarly we know what is said in language, not by looking for its referent outside the language but by the rules that constitute the given use.

Secondly, just as there is a variety of rules that constitute different games, each independent of the others, so too, there is a variety of language games, each of which is autonomous. To ignore this autonomy and to use the rules that are applicable in one language game in another would lead to linguistic muddles and confusion. To use one of Wittgenstein's own example, when we talk about human eyes, it makes good sense to talk of someone's eyebrows being "thick" or "bushy". But just because religious believers often talk about God seeing us, it would not make sense to ask how

thick God's eyebrows are! The rules that govern the use of "seeing" or "eyes" in the one context is very different from the other.

Thirdly, language games are rooted in "forms of life". Meaning may not be fixed by how the world is; it might change from one language game to another. But it does not mean that meaning is arbitrary. Not only is the use of language governed by rules, but they are also linked to certain ways of living our lives ("forms of life"). Wittgenstein often used "forms of life" in the plural to indicate that there are different language games and different forms of life. But he also uses this in the singular as "form of life", the "common behaviour of mankind".

These two ways of talking about "forms of life" reflects exactly the kind of differences we saw in connection with perception. On the one hand, the realist theories of perception tell us that what we perceive is somehow "directly keyed to the world" or caused by the world, and on the other hand, the constructivist theory makes us aware that our perceptions involve also an interpretative dimension. Just as there are some relatively "pure" cases of observation that are common to the human species, so too, there is a certain "common behavior of mankind" which is "the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language" (*PI* 206). But neither our language nor our "forms of life" are limited to this common heritage. The best human achievements –that which make human behaviour different from the instinctual behaviour of animals— may consist in these different and distinctly human forms of life.

The idea of "language games" and the related concept of "forms of life" have wide ranging application, including the method of epistemic justification. It tells us that justification of beliefs must take into account the particular language game in which it occurs. In this respect, the implication of language games for justification is similar to the coherentist method of Neurath. But it differs from the boat metaphor of Neurath in two respects. First, there is an explicit acknowledgement in Wittgenstein that there are different language games, and the rules of one language game do not apply in another; such misapplication comes from a "craving for generality" that refuses to look at how our language actually functions. Second, our language games (as well as epistemic justification) are rooted in forms of life. Our knowledge can be said to be existentially rooted. It is not made up of free floating theoretical balloons that are unrelated to concrete human ways of living.

The fact that language games and forms of life are used in the plural, and coherentist method in general, would seem to have relativistic implications. It is here that naturalized epistemology, in the form in which James Maffie has explained, come into the picture. There we saw that naturalised epistemology retains some of the coherentist features of justification without making justification merely a matter of coherence with already accepted beliefs. Non-controversial observational data play a critical role in justification. In this respect it is similar to the metaphysical method. Applying it to language games we can say that just as observation has a special role in naturalized epistemology, so too, the fact that we have not only different language games and forms of life, but also some kind of a universal form of life, prevents the different autonomous language games from being completely cut off from one another. It tells us that there are continuities between different language games. No language game, therefore, is identical with another; nor are they completely cut of from one another. There are continuities and discontinuities between them. Only detailed examination of each language game would reveal what these continuities and discontinuities are.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) How do the metaphysical, foundationalist and coherentist methods differ from one another?

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2) Understood as methods of justification, what are the similarities and differences between Neurath's coherentism and Wittgenstein's language games?

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4.5 THE KNOWING SUBJECT

The last block of this course was about the human knower. Western epistemology, at least modern epistemology, conceived the human knower as a transparent entity who can know itself merely by looking within. For example, we saw Descartes, after his discovery of the *cogito* coming to the conclusion that he is thinking thing for whose "existence there is no need of any place, nor does it depend on any material thing …" And he knows it just by looking within himself and meditating over it. The empiricists follow suit. For John Locke the knower is a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate until it receives impressions from the objects outside. Thus, whether empiricists or rationalists, modern philosophers thought of the human knower as transparent to itself. Richard Rorty graphically called this kind of knower as a "glassy essence".

There is another idea that is related to the idea of the transparent knower. It is the idea that truth is an achievement of a neutral, disembodied mind, "devoid of passions, committed solely to truth". Some would trace this tendency all the way back to Plato, and not merely to modern philosophy. Irrespective of when it began, it is clear that Western philosophy thought of the knower as self-lucent and truth as the reflection of unchanging, eternal entities that are mirrored in the neutral medium of the knowing mind.

Both of these assumptions have come to be questioned. Nietzsche was most forceful in questioning the transparency of knower. According to him, "We remain of necessity strangers to ourselves, we do not understand ourselves, we must mistake ourselves, for us the maxim reads to all eternity: 'each is furthest from himself,' - with respect to ourselves we are not 'knowers'." Regarding the neutral character of truth, we saw how Kierkegaard insisted on the passionate inwardness of the knower. The postmoderns and the feminist trends in epistemology, in a special way, raise serious doubts about the dispassionate, neutral character of the knower as well as of knowledge. They insist that that neutrality of truth is only a façade for unconcealed passion. This, of course, has led to some extreme positions that deny all objectivity to truth. It is said that a matter of parochial interests, social domination, money and power. As Richard Rorty put it, truth is "what society lets us say". Once this character

of "truth" is recognised, there is a need to repudiate it and other "truths" to be brought to prominence: truth as seen by the feminists and the subalterns, for example.

Such relativism of truth, of course, is destructive of epistemology. While dealing with the orienting issues in epistemology we noted that the assumption regarding the universality of truth is its driving force. Thus we are in another relativistic quandary. On the one hand, there is enough evidence to show that truth is much more than the result of dispassionate contemplation; the interests of the knower do play a role in the attainment of knowledge. On the other hand, if truth is the product of parochial interests of different sections of society, it would undermine epistemology itself.

It is in this context that Habermas's theory of cognitive interests offers a viable way out of the morass. We saw his contention that no knowledge is neutral. All knowledge is informed by certain interests. But these are not parochial interests that set one group of people against another, but universal interests that we share as human beings. He has identified three such interests and accordingly three kinds of knowledge. First, there are the natural sciences that are guided by the technical interest that is oriented to the control nature. Second, there is the practical interest in communicating with our fellow human beings that guides the hermeneutic sciences, and third, there is the emancipatory interest that guides the critical sciences. If the technical interest is tied to instrumental action and practical interest guided by communicative action, emancipatory interest is built on the activity of reflection. The first two interests of Habermas could be understood in terms of the human need for being in nature and being with others. The third is a little more difficult to characterize as it is something that enables us to recognize the limits and to go beyond. It is the emancipatory interest that enables us to recognise the power games and narrow interests operative in knowledge production and go beyond them in a dialogical, inter-subjective manner.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

Epistemology, we saw, is knowledge of knowledge. The realization that the human knower is not a glassy essence or truth a mirror image of reality in the mind enables us to conceive of knowledge in a more realistic manner. We begin to realize that human knowledge is more like maps than mirrors. Maps are limited models of a given

area. Not everything found in a geographical area gets into a map. What gets into a map and what gets omitted depends on the interests of the map maker. Moreover, we can have different maps of the same geographical area –say a political map, an industrial map, an agricultural map, and so on. In a similar manner we can say that not everything that is there in reality becomes a matter of human knowledge. What comes to be known are only those dimensions of reality that are linked to the human interests of being with nature, of being with others, or the emancipatory interest of wanting to overcome the limits we encounter.

This way of understanding human knowledge is especially true of our perceptual knowledge. Evolutionary theorists have come to the realization that each kind of creature comes to possess knowledge of their surroundings in a manner that is appropriate to them. There are animals who can sense the electro-magnetic waves, but we cannot; things that we can sense which other creatures cannot. In other words, different kinds of creatures have their own cognitive niche. The cognitive niche of human perception is known as mesocosm. Although the idea of mesocosm is primarily about our perceptual knowledge and we can go beyond our perceptual knowledge in various ways, it does bring to our attention that our knowledge remains basically human. We are neither divine beings who can see everything, nor animals led by their instincts, but human beings who can know their surrounding world in a typically human way, that is appropriate to who we are.

4.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) How does Habermas help us overcome the destructive kind of relativism that makes truth into a matter of power and money?

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2) Explain the difference between old and new ways (as mirrors and maps) of understanding human knowledge.

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4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check your progress I

1) The four orienting issues are:

i) The reflective character of epistemology: epistemology as knowledge of knowledge is a not a matter of gaining further information from outside, but of reflecting upon and making explicit what we already know.

ii) The tripartite analysis of knowledge: When we reflect upon knowledge we find that our understanding of knowledge has three dimensions. They are believed by us; they are true and we must be able to justify them as and when needed.

iii) Universality of truth: The very fact that when a wrong statement is made we disagree with it and try to give the correct version shows our ordinary everyday assumption that what is true is universally so. Truth, in other words, is not relative to persons or cultures.

iv) Theory of truth: Although there are various theories of truth that have been proposed by philosophers, correspondence theory seems to be what most people intuitively understand when they speak of truth. Moreover, Rescher's distinction between definition and criterion shows that most objections to correspondence theory comes from confusing definition with criterion.

2) The insight of the cosnstructivist theories is that there is an interpretative element in our perception and our prior conceptions influence what we perceive. The insight of the realist theories is that our perception would be true only if it is linked in some manner to the world outside. Both tell us something true about perception. Together they make us aware that although our perception involves an interpretation, we indeed perceive something in the world. Otherwise it could not be called a perception at all. To put it still differently, although our perception involves an interpretation, it is not only a matter of interpretation: there must be some information that is gained in the process of perception. W.V. Quine holds these two together by talking about "degrees of observationality" where some observations are relatively free of interpretations than others. These relatively "pure" observations are "directly keyed to the world" according to him.

Answers to Check your progress II

1) How do the metaphysical, foundationalist and coherentist methods differ from one another?

The difference between these three methods can be summarised in this way: scepticism is not the starting point of the metaphysical method, whereas it is the starting point for foundationalism. Accordingly the metaphysical method

can begin with descriptions, but the foundationalist method cannot. The metaphysicians aim at coherent descriptions but the foundationalists aim at justifying non-basic beliefs on the basis of non-basic beliefs. This kind of one-way relationship between beliefs is repudiated by the coherentists. Coherentists hold that there are no privileged beliefs that can be considered basic. All beliefs mutually support one another.

2) Understood as methods of justification, what are the similarities and differences between Neurath's coherentism and Wittgenstein's language games?

The implication of language games for justification is similar to the coherentist method of Neurath. Both tell us that justification of beliefs must take into account the particular context in which a belief occurs. Wittgenstein's analogy differs from the boat metaphor of Neurath in two respects. First, there is an explicit acknowledgement in Wittgenstein that there are different language games, and the rules of one language game do not apply in another; such misapplication comes from a "craving for generality" that refuses to look at how our language actually functions. Second, our language games (as well as epistemic justification) are rooted in forms of life. Our knowledge can be said to be existentially rooted. It is not made up of free floating theoretical balloons that are unrelated to concrete human ways of living.

Answers to Check your progress III

1) How does Habermas help us overcome the destructive kind of relativism that makes truth into a matter of power and money?

Habermas acknowledges that all knowledge is informed by certain human interests. But these are not parochial interests that set one group of people against another, but universal interests that we share as human beings. He has identified three such interests and accordingly three kinds of knowledge. First, there are the natural sciences that are guided by the technical interest that is oriented to the control nature. Second, there is the practical interest in communicating with our fellow human beings that guides the hermeneutic sciences, and third, there is the emancipatory interest that guides the critical sciences. The first two interests of Habermas could be understood in terms of

the human need for being in nature and being with others. The third is a little more difficult to characterize as it is something that enables us to recognize the limits and to go beyond. This emancipatory interest enables us to recognise the power games and narrow interests operative in knowledge production and go beyond them in a dialogical, inter-subjective manner.

2) Explain the difference between old and new ways (as mirrors and maps) of understanding human knowledge.

Earlier human knowledge was understood more as a mirror image of reality. But now we have come to realize that human knowledge is more like maps than mirrors. Maps are limited models of a given area. Not everything found in a geographical area gets into a map. What gets into a map and what gets omitted depends on the interests of the map maker. Moreover, we can have different maps of the same geographical area –say a political map, an industrial map, an agricultural map, and so on. In a similar manner we can say that not everything that is there in reality becomes a matter of human knowledge. What comes to be known are only those dimensions of reality that are linked to the human interests of being with nature, of being with others, or the emancipatory interest wanting to overcome the limits we encounter.