

Summary

Physicalism and evolutionism in naturalized epistemology

The aim of this book is to reconstruct the theoretical assumptions of the physicalist and evolutionist trends in the naturalistic paradigm in epistemology.

In Chapter One, I define the basic terms I use throughout the book, such as naturalism and naturalization. I also propose that naturalistic epistemological concepts should be analysed regarding their ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions, which largely determine the nature of a given theoretical proposal. Finally, I present a brief outline of the history of naturalism in philosophy.

The second chapter focuses on the physicalist naturalized epistemology. I reconstruct the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions on which the physicalist epistemology is founded. I establish that in ontological terms, it often takes the form of physicalist monism and assumes the deterministic nature of reality, on the epistemological level it recognizes realism and empiric verificationism, and on the methodological level – universalism and reductionism. Next, I discuss in detail issues that play a fundamental role in the attempts to answer questions about the limits of naturalization of epistemology (e.g., apriorism, autonomy and normativity of epistemology, as well as the physicalist characteristics of the epistemic subject). Finally, I argue that the answers to the question of the limits of naturalizing epistemology, as formulated by physicalist naturalized epistemologists, depend directly on their interpretation of the term “natural”. Since many of the concepts discussed in the second chapter assume that there are no entities other than natural ones, to which we have cognitive

access, or may have in the future, as a result of technological progress, and which can be described and explained using the language of empirical science, then there are, therefore, no legitimate limits or barriers to the naturalization of epistemology.

The third chapter is on evolutionary epistemology. I established that the evolutionist trend is founded on completely different assumptions than physicalist epistemology. On the ontological level, it adopts non-reductive emergentism and moderate indeterminism, on the epistemological level – hypothetical realism and epistemic and epistemological constructivism, and on the methodological level – holism and falsificationism. Moreover, I argue that by including cultural factors into the set of elements actively shaping the cognitive structures of the epistemic subject, evolutionary epistemology sheds new light on the classic dispute regarding the nature-culture relation.

In the fourth chapter, I present the most important theses of bio-cultural constructivism and the empirical research supporting it. I demonstrate that its basic assumptions are fundamentally consistent with the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of evolutionary epistemology. Bio-cultural constructivism recognises humans as bio-social beings, co-shaped by culture (understood as a natural but nonreductive process). In this approach, a “natural” person is a person embedded in culture.

The development of the evolutionary trend in epistemology provides both theoretical and empirical arguments against the traditional, dichotomous interpretation of the relation between what is innate and what is learned (nature vs nurture), or between nature and culture. The analysis of the mutual influence of biological and cultural factors and their interactions on the development of cognitive structures is becoming one of the most important tasks in this approach.

The purpose of this book is not to find solutions to all the problems and threads raised in it, but rather to demonstrate that the popular pigeonholing of evolutionary epistemology as a reductionist position is unjustified and misleading.