CHAPTER I
THE RECEIVED TRADITION: THEMATIC AND HISTORICAL
PRELIMINARIES

It is rightly said that the fountainhead of all philosophy is the relation between Knowing and Being. Epistemology as an inquiry into the nature and limits of Knowledge has sought to address the question of the relation between Knowing and Being head on throughout its history. However, just as the first half of the twentieth century saw sustained attacks on Metaphysics, the second half of the twentieth century witnessed powerful attacks on Epistemology. As we know, the twentieth century attacks on Metaphysics were preceded by anti-metaphysical trends in from sophists in the classical period for whom man was the measure of the things, to Hume and even to an extent Kant in modern times. Similarly, the twentieth century attacks on epistemology were preceded by anti-epistemological trends like scepticism and relativism. If the pre-twentieth century attacks on Metaphysics called into question the very concept of Reality, the twentieth century anti-epistemological trends are/were less radical in the sense that they called into question the practice of epistemology as traditionally construed. Naturalistic epistemologists like Quine challenged the traditional view that knowledge is a non- natural phenomenon and argued that the approach of epistemology must be descriptive/ empirical/ explanatory. Charles Taylor’s critique of epistemology calls into question the subject/object dichotomy, which is central to epistemology at least in its modern phase. The fact that modern philosophy, which emerged in seventeenth century, was the result of a shift towards the primacy of epistemology from
Metaphysics, which was central to traditional philosophy, adds enormous significance to such a critique of modern epistemology, which is the theme of this thesis.

Hence, it is in the fitness of things to begin our discussion with the received tradition in epistemology. Though the central tenets of the received tradition are most palpably and unambiguously present in the modern epistemological tradition which emerged in the seventeenth century. These tenets are not absent completely in the pre-modern epistemological tradition though their texture may be different. Hence, the received tradition has a history that goes beyond seventeenth century. However, our focus is on the received tradition as it flourished in the modern context since it is the received tradition as contextualized to modern times, which is the object of the critiques studied in this thesis. The discussion of the received tradition must be both pre-modern and modern, both in terms of highlighting its core features as well as a brief treatment of the milestones in its history, the former under the rubric ‘Thematic preliminaries’ and the latter under the rubric ‘Historical preliminaries’. Let us begin with the former.

I.1 Thematic Preliminaries

Normativism is the core feature of traditional epistemology. The concept of normativity however needs to be briefly elucidated.

The central question in traditional epistemology is ‘What must be added to true beliefs to convert them into knowledge’? In other words, ‘What is that which Justifies our true beliefs’? Justification is understood as providing adequate reasons to show that our beliefs are true. Normative epistemology, the historically dominant tradition in epistemology, answers that question by claiming that it is the quality of the reasons for our beliefs that converts true beliefs into knowledge. When the reasons are sufficiently cogent, we have knowledge. The quality of
the reasons is assessed by certain norms. The normative orientation of epistemology consists in its claim that it can discover historically invariant and universal norms that ought to be met by any knowledge claim to be considered as valid. An account is normative when it concerns what ought to be the case. If we take logic, it is a normative discipline and its concern is what ought to be reasoning. It is not an account about how people are actually reasoning/arguing and not even a kind of generalization of the way people are reasoning/thinking. In the same way, normative epistemology claims that epistemology is a normative discipline and epistemological concepts like truth and justification are normative ones. Here, I focus on a normative account of justification. The normativists seek to identify what ought to be the case. That means, according to them, when we make knowledge claims we are applying certain norms. Whether our knowledge claims are genuine or not depends upon whether these norms are met or not. Thus, these norms can justify our beliefs. The purpose of these norms, in other words, is to regulate the justification of our beliefs. In the absence of a normative dimension, the very idea of justification ceases to be epistemic (as opposed to psychological). This is because, everybody will come up with his/her own reasons to justify a certain belief and if we do not have a normative idea of justification, then the distinction between correct and incorrect or valid and invalid justification would be impossible.

The formulation of a normative account does not necessarily depend upon the practices as they are formulated in relation to the goal/purpose of justification. Hence, the correct justification is one which serves the purpose. The purpose of justification is to show that our claims are true. Therefore, the concept of truth plays an important role. According to this account, without reference the goal/purpose it is not possible to formulate certain conditions whose satisfaction makes a belief true. Normative accounts of early modern philosophies mainly
rest on this strategy. In this sense knowledge is a ‘normative concept’ and knowledge is not on par with natural phenomena whose account is non-normative or descriptive.

The following can be held as tenets of normativism: A normative concept is not an evolving one. It is absolute in nature. It is independent of time or context. It is independent of practice, though it can be seen as figuring in practice. Normative concepts are available to an epistemic agent. Traditional epistemologists assume that normative concepts are available to the agent through a priori reasoning. They assume that normative concepts are wholly transparent to our consciousness. In other words, knowledge is a norm guided phenomenon. In this sense, a knowledge claim is what it is because of the justification, which is subjected to certain norms. As Hunter points out:

In epistemology we are using certain criteria for correct justification for our belief. These criteria are general principles that specify what sorts of considerations ultimately confer warrant on some of our beliefs and tend to guide self-reflective persons in checking and correcting their judgement. The criteria must be internally accessible through introspection or reflection without relying on further justified belief. In short, Criteria are internalized norms (rules) about when to make and correct judgments ascribing a concept. (2006:594-595).

Finally, norms/criteria should be precisely formulated so as to be identifiable in any context.

The central question in normative epistemology is: ‘What are the norms that must be met by any knowledge claim?’ In the later sections, I discuss the various norms of justification advocated by traditional and modern epistemologists. Within the normative tradition two views
about the proper structure of norms can be found foundationalism and coherentism. Among the two, the more commonly held view is foundationalism.

Foundationalism is a view concerning the structure of justified belief. Such a structure is divided into foundation and superstructure. Beliefs constituting the superstructure depend on the foundations for their justification. If knowledge is justified true belief, one may think of knowledge as exhibiting a foundationalist structure by virtue of the justified belief it involves. That is, reasons / norms of justifications concern a foundational structure comprised/consisting of ‘basic’ beliefs. ‘Basic’ beliefs are self-justified and derive none of their justification from other beliefs / propositions.

The foundational propositions that are basic beliefs have autonomous justification. Thus, some beliefs are accepted on the basis of other beliefs. So justification of beliefs is like a chain such that a belief constitutes justification of the belief that follows it which in turn is a justification of the one that follows it. Here a question would arise: ‘Is there any termination for this belief chain?’ According to foundationalism, the belief-chain terminates with a particular set of beliefs that are commonly called basic beliefs. These basic beliefs are, as pointed out above, self-evident beliefs. Foundationalists differ among themselves as to what conditions have to be met in order for a belief to be basic and what conditions have to be met in order for other beliefs to be appropriately supported by basic beliefs. The strictest versions of foundationalism require that a basic belief be infallible, indubitable or incorrigible if it is to be self-justifying. A belief is infallible if it is impossible to have (or entertain) the belief and for it to be false; a belief is indubitable if it is impossible to doubt whether it is true; and a belief is incorrigible if it is impossible to have good reasons for thinking that it is false. The strictest versions of foundationalism also impose stringent constraints on the support-relation, restricting it to logical
implication or enumerative induction; a non-basic belief is justified only if it is implied or inductively supported by one’s basic beliefs. Many of the most influential figures in the history of epistemology are strict foundationalists. The basic beliefs can be of several types. Empiricists such as Locke and Hume hold that basic beliefs concern knowledge initially gained through the senses or introspection. Rationalists such as Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza hold that (at least some) basic beliefs are the result of rational intuition.

Another major strand in traditional epistemology is representationalism. According to the representationalist theory of ideas in Descartes and Locke, what we are directly aware of is not external objects, but our own mental states, but the mental states which represent those objects. By representing them they facilitate description of things existing out in the world. Ideas (in Descartes and Locke) or ‘representations’ (in Kant) thus formed a kind of bridge, both causal and experiential, between the inner and the outer world.

The central idea of representationalism is that there is an independent world, i.e. the world whose existence and nature is independent of our perceptual experience of it. Secondly, knowing about an object located in that mind-independent world necessarily involves a causal connection with that object. Thirdly knowledge is most immediately about the perceptual experience caused in us by the object, and only derivatively about the object itself. However, this derivation is the locus of the representative relation which knowledge has with the external world. Thus knowledge is the representation of the external world. And the representation of reality is what constitutes knowledge.

We now proceed to see how normativism, foundationalism, and representationalism figure in the epistemological theories of Plato, Aristotle, and Modern Epistemologists like
Descartes, Locke and Kant whose works are milestones in the history of pre-twentieth century epistemology.

1.2 Historical Preliminaries

1.2.A. Plato’s Epistemology

It was Plato who first attempted to provide a systematic theory of knowledge. If we look at the pre-Socratic philosophers, we find that their main concern was not theory of knowledge as much as the nature of reality. Through his conception of knowledge, Plato tries to give an account of Reality as well as Knowledge.

In Plato’s terms, norm/criterion lies in providing reasons for our own belief about Reality. For Plato, only if the belief is about the Reality, it can be a true one. “At *Meno* 98a, Plato giving what may be the first explicit account of knowledge in Western thought proposes that knowledge is true belief plus an *aitias logismos*, an explanatory account.” (Fine, Gail. 1999:9) According to Plato, justification of knowledge consists in showing that the belief is about Reality: that is, the object of belief must be real. So the norm which Plato gives for knowledge is that belief should be about Reality. Nicholas White terms it as ‘Metaphysical Epistemology’. And this position is in sharp contrast with modern epistemology. Modern epistemology disconnects itself from Metaphysics. Modern epistemology concerns the method, which leads to knowledge. The contrast between the modern epistemology and Plato’s epistemology can be elucidated as follows:

Now if I want to acquire a collection of flints, and only prehistoric flints, one way is to collect a lot of flints, and then investigate which of them, if any, are prehistoric. This might be inefficient, compared with a method of acquiring them in the first
place which made it more likely that any flints I acquired were prehistoric ones. But the analogous process with acquiring true beliefs would be not just inefficient, but incomprehensible. (Williams, Bernard. 1978: 24)

This is an early version of the still familiar view that knowledge is justified true belief. Plato argues that belief is to be distinguished from knowledge on the basis of justification. His distinction between knowledge and mere belief rests upon the distinction between appearance and reality. Belief (which is false) is about appearance and knowledge is about Reality. Plato says that knowledge is always true belief. Though apparently true belief could be proved as false at a later stage, knowledge could never turn out to be false. In that sense, Plato’s concept of knowledge is a very strict one.

Plato argues that knowledge consists of propositions, which are ‘secure and unshakeable’, and differs from true opinion in its ‘immovability’. Why does Plato insist that knowledge is unchangeable? We can see that it is based on some kind of introspection. Here we can see that Plato’s metaphysical ideas are dependent upon his epistemological notions. As we see, Reality must be non-corporeal or non-material. For him, Reality is distinct from the appearance of the world. He argues that Reality is always perfect and unchanging. So it must consist of a world of Forms or Ideas independent of the sensible world. And the sensible things are the imperfect copies of these Forms or Ideas. In his view, sensible things remain as objects of opinion while Forms function as universal entities. The universal entities cannot be perceived in our sensible world. They do not exist in our sensible world. Reality must be a single, eternal, unchangeable, object of thought, above the realm of the senses, in the world of Ideas. The Ideas are then the real essences and the objects of knowledge. Plato is concerned about these objects of knowledge. He argues that, “Knowledge is only of what is unchangeable” (Moser, Paul K. and
Nat, Arnold Vander. 2003: 25) Plato’s assumption is that we cannot rely upon our sense perception because our sense perception is always changing. So, we have to relegate beliefs about sensory objects to the status of opinion. So according to Plato, justification is related to Forms.

Extending this line of thought, Plato goes on to say that perceptible things reside between being and non-being as they are presenting contrary appearances and hence they are not real. On this basis he argues that perceptibles are not what knowledge is concerned with; rather they are what opinions or beliefs are about. Knowledge has to do with ‘being’ or ‘what is’, namely, Forms, which are distinct from perceptible and which do not present themselves in contrary ways.

One of the key points of Plato’s epistemology is the enquiry about the methods of reasoning which can provide access to Reality. This part of Plato’s view is quite close to Modern Epistemology. It concerns what statements a person is justified in making. Here, there is discussion of the grounds on which a statement might be established or refuted, and of the kinds of arguments that can be given for or against something. In Plato’s works this part is loosely associated with the portrayal of Socrates as practicing a procedure of *elenchus*, scrutiny/refutation. Arguably this procedure is capable only of refuting a statement, never of establishing one. “In the early dialogues Socrates often asks the ‘What is F?’ question: for example, ‘What is piety?’ in the *Euthyphro*; ‘What is courage?’ in the *Laches*; ‘What is friendship?’ in the *Lysis*; ‘What is temperance?’ in the *Charmides*. The interlocutor thinks it easy to answer Socrates’ question, and he readily does so. Socrates then questions him further, and he answers ‘as it seems to him’. Eventually, despite the interlocutor’s initial self-confidence, he is caught in contradiction. This is Socrates’ *elenctic method*.” (Fine, Gail.1999:1) Thus, the method
is for detecting inconsistencies. Socrates seems to believe that if one doesn't know a definition of $F$ (what $F$ is) then one doesn't know anything at all about $F$.

In the Meno, the Phaedo and the Republic he develops what has been called the ‘method of hypothesis’, which seems to be a method by which claims can ultimately be demonstrated, unconditionally. In the Republic, he holds that one can arrive at an ‘unhypothesized’ basic principle, which will work as a basis for demonstrating everything. Here his suggestion is that what is demonstrated thereby will have to do only with Forms. Such positions indicate that he was considering some kind of foundationalist epistemological position.

The method of hypothesis is earlier offered as something that is used by ‘Dialectic’, the style of philosophizing that takes place through conversational questions and answers. In later works, however, such as the Phaedrus and the Sophist, Plato says that dialectic makes use of the ‘Method of collection and division’, which is a method for constructing taxonomies and definitions. Nothing in his description of this method, however, indicates that it could be used to demonstrate or justify definitions.

Thus, the first claim of Plato is that a belief can be justified only by assuming that Forms are the object of knowledge. Then Plato discusses about methods, which give us access to Reality/Forms. In what follows, we briefly discuss about the intelligibility of Plato’s claim that the world of Forms can be accessed through reason. On what basis does Plato claim that reality is accessible to the enquirer through reason?

Platonic Epistemology holds that knowledge is innate so that learning is the manifestation of ideas concealed deep in the soul. Plato claims that we can know this world of Form through our reason. Plato argues that it must be due to the factors, which are prior to experience. What is
it to be prior to experience? Plato’s answer leads us to his theory of recollection. He discusses this theory of recollection in his dialogue *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Here he gives an explanation that we have achieved our present knowledge before our existence. Plato’s assumption is that at the time of birth, we will lose our awareness of our previous knowledge, but later we repossess our awareness. At birth, we have no consciousness about it, but later we recollect it. According to Plato, “Since our knowledge of the Forms cannot be derived from present sensory experience, it must be due to our prior existence; therefore, our souls existed before embodiment. Such an argument, then, was motivated by Plato’s effort to explain a priori Knowledge of immutable Forms” (Moser, Paul K. and Nat, Arnold Vander. 2003:26) What Plato wants to demonstrate is that knowledge is innate. Perfect knowledge is the knowledge about Form, and such knowledge is in our soul. Soul exists before our birth. So we have *a priori* knowledge. Our learning of something, is a recalling something. For Plato, “...what we call learning is in fact the recollection of knowledge that the soul had before.” (Scott, 2006: 1) But there are difficulties in his notion about recollection of Forms. It is difficult to digest the notion that learning is a kind of recollection. There is uncertainty regarding whether he intends all learning or a specific learning about a specific object of knowledge. But this position assumes that the enquirer knows what is real. Here we can see that Plato’s epistemology is completely dependent on his notion of real. But the other side of Plato’s philosophy is that his metaphysics is also in a certain sense dependent on his epistemological position. “Certainly in Plato there is no such [epistemology and metaphysics] divide. His views about what there is are largely controlled by ideas about how knowledge can be accounted for, and his thinking about what knowledge is takes its character from convictions about what there is that is knowable. As a result his doctrines have a different shape from characteristically modern ones.” (White, Nicholas P. 1992: 277)
Though in *Meno*, Plato discuss about knowledge in detail, the justification part of knowledge is not adequately covered in *Meno*. But in *Phaedo* he talks about causal or explanatory factors of knowledge.

Putting *Meno* and *Phaedo* together, we may infer that, in order to have Knowledge, one must have an explanatory account that mentions forms; more precisely, Knowledge-conferring accounts are definitions of forms. His notion of Form or Universals we cannot locate in sensory experience. Plato gives another realm to Form. In *Republic* Plato introduces a kind of two world theory. One is the sensible world, other is the intelligible world. (Fine, Gail.1999:1)

Following are Plato’s argument for the claim that Form exists. Without Form (universal entity) we cannot explain thinking generally about things of one kind and without Form it would become impossible to attach a meaning to common names. For example, how can we call a particular thing a horse unless it has specific essence, which means horseness? This horseness can be seen in each and every horse. We cannot say ‘This is a horse’ if there is no horseness at all. Here horseness stands for universal entity.

The timelessness of the Forms is more than just a matter of their being the same through all time. So the unchangebality and timelessness are the characteristics of Reality for Plato. Such an account is based on our intuitive notion of Reality. That is, Plato’s account of Reality is not unrelated to the cognitive power of the human. Certainly, he is making an appearance/reality distinction. But certain cognitive powers can have access to Reality. It is true that through perception, a subject cannot have access to Reality but through reason a subject can have access
to Reality. Here it is evident that Plato is not endorsing the strict subject-object dichotomy, which modern Epistemology advocates.

Before we close our discussion of Plato’s epistemological stance it is necessary to point out that his whole enterprise was directed against the sophist view that knowledge is what we as human beings decide it to be- a view, which follows from their first principle, namely, man, is the measure of things. Plato’s central contention is that is that only that is knowledge, which is independent of, not only culture and context even the human situation. Secondly, since the Forms or ideal entities genuine knowledge is about ideal entities. According to Aleander Koyre, Plato’s view is encoded by modern science which seeks to explain what we observe in terms of certain theoretical/unobservable/ideal entities. Thus, according to Historians of science like Koyre the pre-modern science was Aristotelian, modern science in important sense is Platonic.

I.2B Aristotle’s Epistemology

Aristotle’s Epistemology is worked in his theory of science and in his theory of mind and its faculties. Aristotle has comparatively little to say directly about knowledge. But it is clear he too construes knowledge as involving systematic understanding. Like Plato, Aristotle also argues that knowledge is always of Universals. Even though Aristotle accepts Plato’s assumptions about knowledge, he has certain disagreements about Plato’s notion of Universals or Forms. According to Aristotle, Plato sought to build a bridge between the intelligible world, that is, Universals or Forms and the sensible world or Particulars. In his Epistemology Aristotle tries to reconsider the transcendental notion of Form. He argues that Forms are not transcendent but immanent. Unlike Plato, Aristotle’s claim is that Universals inhere in particulars. Both Plato and Aristotle agree that the objects of Knowledge are Forms and not the objects of the sensible world. Plato
concludes that Form must be unchanging and it should be separate from sensible world. But Aristotle denies that Forms of the sensible can be separate from particulars and insists that they exist with matter in the sensible world. The problem is how can Aristotle treat Forms as inseparable from the sensible? Here we can analyze what is philosophically the most significant problem Aristotle deals with.

Surprisingly, Aristotle never specifically addresses the problem of the possibility of knowledge of nature. Aristotle criticizes Plato’s separation of Forms on the ground that they as transcendental entities do not enable us to have knowledge of the sensibles nor do they account for the being and the becoming of the sensible. The important question is: ‘How can Aristotle avoid the Platonic contention that there are no Forms of the sensible and that knowledge of what changes is impossible?’ While he accepts Plato’s unchanging Forms, he criticizes Plato’s theory of separate existence of Forms. Aristotle thinks that his own theory of Forms does facilitate the Knowledge of changing sensibles.

As Edward Halper points out “…Aristotle’s account of the possibility of knowledge of changing things relies on recognizing regularities in the changes…Aristotle’s insight is that even though the sensible world does constantly change, the changes are regular. Constantly changing in the same way, the sensible world is always the same. In a sense it is unchanging.” (1984:814)

In this way, Aristotle endorses Plato’s notion of Forms. In order to resolve the problem of Knowledge, Aristotle introduces the sharp distinction between actualities and motions. We can see that Aristotle’s definition of motion is in terms of actuality. Actualities and motions are closely connected. Aristotle describes motion as incomplete because its ends do not belong to it. In contrast, actualities have their ends present within them. While motions are always incomplete until they attain their ends, actualities are complete at any time. The Form of a sensible substance
is an actuality. Since there is no difficulty in knowing an actuality, there is no difficulty in knowing the essence of a sensible. Because the Forms of the sensible are actualities, the Platonic objection to knowledge of them vanishes. In short, the possibility of knowledge of sensibles rests on the identification of motions that are proper to and characteristic of the nature of each sensible. Aristotle’s argument is that since the natures are knowable, their attributes are knowable through them. Aristotle gives justification of our knowledge through the changing sensible world, where the unchanging Forms are situated.

The argument that Aristotle puts forth is that even though the sensible world is in the process of changing, the changes cannot affect the unchanging actualities or Forms. The objects of knowledge contain changeless Forms. Through his claim about motions or changes Aristotle tries to overcome Platonic hurdles. The important contribution of Aristotle to the theory of knowledge is his convincingly established claim that we can have the knowledge of changing things. And he gives a new picture about the very idea of motion.

However, while Aristotle discusses justification, his purpose of epistemic justification is completely different from the epistemic justification of Modern Epistemology. In Modern Epistemology, justification is mainly intended to counter the sceptical challenges. But such challenges were only peripheral concerns of Aristotle’s Epistemology though he was aware of the sceptical challenges. “On the whole, he does not seek to argue that knowledge is possible, but, assuming its possibility, he seeks to understand how it is realised in different fields of mental activity and how the states in which it is realised in different fields of mental activity and how the states in which it is realized relate to other cognitive states of agent.” (Taylor, C.C.W.1990:116) Though Aristotle often talks only about scientific knowledge, his account includes knowledge in general. In the Posterior Analytics Aristotle provides explicit conditions
for knowledge. This is Aristotle’s major work on the structure of scientific knowledge. A scientific theory that expresses genuine knowledge must be demonstrative. A demonstrative science has a rigorously deductive structure; it is arranged in terms of demonstrative syllogisms which present the theorems of the science as deductions from first principles that are necessarily true and that are prior to and better known than the conclusions. They explain the conclusions derived from them.

Though Aristotle enquired into the nature of various kinds of knowledge theoretical, and practical, he considers scientific knowledge as paradigmatic. Though he did not use the word ‘Science’ which came into parlance only in the nineteenth century, his reference is to that field of paradigmatic knowledge that we start with observation on the basis of which we arrive at definitions using what we call the ‘method of induction’. Definitions according to Aristotle are descriptions of the essential nature of things and induction is the method of arriving at them. (Thus definitions were not stipulative definitions but what he called ‘Real’ definitions). However, arriving at a definition using the method of induction was only one half of the arc of knowledge. The other half is made up of demonstrations, which tell us why things must be what they are as given to us in observation. These demonstrations are arrived at by the method of deduction from definitions, which constitute the first principles. Thus, the paradigmatic knowledge has the shape of an arc whose initial point is observation and end point is demonstration. Hence, the epistemic journey is from ‘is’ to ‘must’ via definitions that describe the essential nature of things. Therefore the paradigmatic knowledge which we today call ‘Science’ has definition-cum-demonstration as its aim and induction-cum-deduction as its method. It is clear that his theory of knowledge which has its locus in his idea of the paradigmatic knowledge is normativist, and foundationalist. Aristotle continues with the normativist notion of knowledge which he inherited
from Plato though he altered the connotations of the term ‘normativity’. The normative character of knowledge that Aristotle construes is reinforced by the centrality he accords to deductive demonstrability. Also he located the foundation in what he called definition which being descriptions of the essential nature of things functioned as the first principle or foundation. Similarly, knowledge, according to him, is about the real but reality is not exclusively changeless. This brief account of Aristotelian Epistemology can be ended by reiterating the normativist dimension of his account of knowledge.

As Irwin points out, “Aristotle assumes that if I know that \( p \), then (1) I can justify my belief that \( p \), and (2) I know the justification \( q \). He insists on (2) because it does not seem satisfactory if I can simply state \( q \); it seems reasonable to demand that I should also know why \( q \) is true and why \( q \) justifies \( p \)” (2010: 241) The justification \( q \) must be on the basis of first principles. Aristotle’s account of the nature of axioms is based upon his conception of the nature of knowledge; for a science is meant to systematize our knowledge of its subject-matter, and its component axioms and theorems must therefore be propositions which are known and which satisfy the conditions set upon knowledge. “According to Aristotle, ‘we think we know a thing (in the unqualified sense, and not in the sophistical sense or accidentally) when we think we know both the cause because of which the thing is (and know that it is its cause) and also that it is not possible for it to be otherwise’.” (Barnes, 2000:53) This first condition set upon knowledge is the condition of causality. The word ‘cause’ must be taken in a broad sense. Some scholars prefer to invoke the concept of explanation. To cite a ‘cause’ of something is to explain why it is so. “It is the final condition in Aristotle’s list, that the axioms be ‘prior to and causes of the conclusion’, which is linked most directly to his account of what knowledge is. Our knowledge of the theorems rests upon the axioms, and knowledge involves a grasp of causes: hence the
axioms must state the ultimate causes which account for the facts expressed by the theorems.” (Ibid: 54). The foundationalist orientation of Aristotle’s Epistemology is self evident.

As we have seen above, Aristotelian epistemology is foundationalist and also normativist though scholars hold that his linking an explanation with cause and his characterization of one condition of knowledge in terms of causality dilutes the normativistic character of his epistemology. Even his naturalistic bend of mind, unlike that of Plato such a dilution of normativism is not surprising. However, the representationalist thesis of the received tradition of epistemology is absent or at least has a weak presence. According to Aristotle, as Taylor points out,

When, we come to know something, the mind (nous) becomes one with the objects of thought. Of course this is not to say that they become materially the same thing; rather, mind and object are informed by the same eidos. Here was a conception quite different from the representational model, even though some of the things Aristotle said could be construed as supporting the latter. The basic bent of Aristotle’s model could much better be described as participational: being informed by the same eidos, the mind participates in the being of the known object, rather than simply depicting it (1995:3)

Modern Epistemology

I.2C. Descartes’ Epistemology

Descartes is widely regarded as the father of Modern Philosophy. The radical change, which he brought about in philosophy, gave the epistemological questions an unprecedented primacy. Though his metaphysical theories are often used in support of his epistemological claims, his
general approach is that any philosophical theory or investigation must be based on sound epistemological foundations. A sound or valid metaphysical theory is determined on the basis of epistemic criteria or norms. Thus, epistemology works as bedrock of all philosophical inquiries.

Descartes’ Epistemological enquiry is also primarily concerned about justification of knowledge. Like his predecessors, he sought to answer the question ‘How can knowledge be qualified as valid or justified’. Undoubtedly, Descartes is a normativist as his concern is with the question of justification. For Descartes the primary and absolute criterion of justification is that the truth of the knowledge claim must be beyond any doubt. That is, indubitability emerges as the absolute criterion of justification. Thus, he employed the method of doubt. He analysed all our knowledge claims and found them to be dubious. In the First Meditation he says, “It is now some years since I detected how many were the 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 sciences”(Descartes, R. 2007:7) For Descartes knowledge should be indubitable and certain. To attain genuine knowledge one needs to bring in a new method. Then only we can establish foundations for our knowledge. That is why he brings in a method in philosophy, which he calls the ‘method of doubt’. In common sense, what we regard as certain is what we get through our sense organs. Descartes argues that it is reasonable to have doubt on the knowledge claims of sense experience. His argument about the unreliability of sensuous knowledge is known as ‘argument from illusion’. And through the demon argument he claims that there is no legitimate distinction between what we acquire through sense perception and through hallucination or imagination or dreams.
Thus through his method of doubt, Descartes excluded almost all propositions from the realm of knowledge. He too knew that the criterion of absolute justification (indubitability) is too stringent to be considered as a criterion of knowledge. Indubitability is not a general criterion of Descartes’ Epistemology. He employs the stringent criterion (i.e. method of doubt) in search of an epistemological foundation.

By employing his method of doubt, he finds that the knowledge claim ‘I think’ is an indubitable one. This is the proposition, which he considers as foundation / basic belief of the epistemological enterprise. Thus, he introduces a version of foundationalism. His foundationalistic approach can be considered as normativist in the following way: Only if a claim can be deducible from a basic belief it can be considered as a justified one. The criterion/norm propounded by his foundationalism is the deducibility from the basic belief. His foundational enterprise is primarily inspired by this methodology and conceptual rigor of mathematics. So he thought that it was good to bring in the same kind of approach in philosophy which prompted him to take mathematics as a model for all his thinking. Descartes desired that philosophy and science should have foundations as firm as those of mathematics. In mathematics we can see each problem being solved step by step. And each step is guided by theorems. And all such theorems are derived from axioms. Descartes applies this procedure to philosophical thinking and takes our previous beliefs and reformulates them step by step. This is a kind of sceptical technique. This was a new and very radical move ever seen before.

Descartes proceeds, in effect, to mount a challenge regarding whether we are justified in asserting the real, extra-mental, existence of any particular object, which we perceive via senses. He believes that, a norm like clarity and distinctness can distinguish knowledge from mere beliefs. We cannot doubt clear and distinct knowledge. This led Descartes to argue that the
requirement of knowledge is perfect certainty. In many cases, the grasp of the senses is obscure and confused. In order to achieve a reliable grasp of the nature of physical reality Descartes urges that we must systematically disregard the confused deliverances of the senses, and rely instead on the ‘clear and distinct’ concepts of pure mathematics. The world of the senses, the qualitative world of smells and tastes and colours and sounds, is thus excluded from the domain of knowledge.

Certainly, in specifying norms and thus formulating foundationalism, Descartes’ theory is radically different from traditional epistemology. This radical difference is due to the major position which is nowadays known as ‘Representationalism’. For Descartes, the foundation of the epistemological enterprise must be beyond any doubt. Descartes finds all knowledge claims regarding the physical world to be vulnerable to the sceptical attack. But knowledge of internal mental states is certain and beyond doubt. But interestingly, even the sceptics too did not challenge the position that knowledge about internal or mental states is not possible. They may not be ready to qualify it as knowledge. It might be just ‘awareness’ for them. However, there is no sceptical argument to show that my knowledge or awareness about mental states (like, ‘I think’ or ‘I feel pain’ or I am sad’ or I’ see red colour’) are wrong or could be wrong.

Descartes takes those operations of the mind to be immediately obvious to the thinker, and the thinker to have immediate access to them. In our terminology, he regards some propositions about such states as both incorrigible and evident, and the states as being necessarily present to consciousness. It may seem artificial to treat matters such as this in the terminology of ‘propositions’: it may seem more natural merely to speak of the states that he is in, and of the fact that he is certain that he is in
those states, and this is indeed how Descartes puts it in the *Second Meditation.*

(Williams, Bernad. 2005:65)

We need to explain how Descartes deduces his knowledge of the external world from the basic beliefs. Along with the belief in God, the knowledge of the external world can be deduced from basic beliefs. Descartes has separate arguments for the existence of God. Once God’s existence is assumed, we can claim that God is not a deceiving being since deception is incompatible with divine perfection. Our propensity to believe that many of our ideas have corresponding external objects is a true belief. By using God’s existence and His divine perfection, Descartes argues that ideas or sensations provide knowledge of the external world. Otherwise, a divine perfect being would be no better than a deceiving demon.

Irrespective of the point whether the argument in favour of God’s existence is valid or not, the point is that, ideas provide knowledge about the external world. Ideas are the representation of the physical world. So, Descartes’ attempt was to deduce or infer other knowledge (Knowledge of external world) from self awareness or knowledge of mental states. He deduced knowledge of the external world by arguing that ideas are the representations of the external world.

Descartes’ project charted a new course for Epistemology. Normativity, representationality, and foundationality acquire a new connotation and traditional knowledge and knowledge as traditional philosophy construed fell on the roadside. It should also be noted that the valorisation of the mental states in epistemic terms made the subject the epistemic centre of gravity. For the first time a clear cut distinction was made by Descartes between nature and man on the lines of object and subject and subject was construed only as mind with its states as lying
beyond doubt. This subject centred idea of knowledge was to be challenged by the main actors in the empiricist tradition before Kant resuscitated the subject.

I.2 D. Locke’s Epistemology

The major aim of Locke’s Epistemology is to establish the fundamental role of experience in the justification of knowledge. He holds that all knowledge is ultimately based on experience. Locke’s Empiricism is chiefly characterized by his rejection of innate ideas or innate knowledge which was propounded especially by Descartes. The claim of the theory of innate ideas is that not all knowledge is acquired through experience; instead many ideas are innate to human mind or consciousness. By rejecting the central claim of the innateness theory, Locke holds that all our knowledge is founded on and ultimately derived from experience. In his own words, the ‘Fountain of knowledge’ is experience. But Locke is very cautious in explaining how knowledge is founded on experience. To say that all knowledge is founded on experience does not mean that all knowledge comes from experience. That means Locke’s position is not that experience directly generates Knowledge. He makes it clear in his work Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding that it is not the case that “All Knowledge is made out to us by our senses”. (Woolhouse, 1994:149) Here he brings out the crucial distinction between ‘Ideas’ and ‘Knowledge’. What we get directly from experience is not knowledge but ideas, specifically simple ideas. Origin of simple ideas is experience. But ideas are not knowledge. Ideas are only materials of knowledge. Ideas are mental entities and they are the objects of understanding. All simple ideas come from experience and by applying reason on those ideas we get knowledge. Prior to experience, the mind is ‘White paper’. Locke calls it as ‘Tabula-rasa’. That is, prior to experience the mind is devoid of all ideas.
Thus, for Locke the criterion of knowledge is whether it is derived from ideas or not. If knowledge is derived from ideas then it is a justified knowledge claim. Locke’s epistemology is thoroughly normativist as it employs an empiricist criterion to justify knowledge claims. Moreover, it is foundationalist in nature because it holds that the justification of all knowledge claims is derived from the basic beliefs. For Locke, basic beliefs constitute knowledge gained through the senses or introspection.

Experience includes not only sense but also reflection, reflection of our own mental operations. That is, experience has two forms: one is sensory perception of the material world and another is the reflection on the operations of our own minds.

Though what we get from sense experience are only simple ideas, knowledge depends on complex ideas too. The ideas which are given through experience are simple ideas. Simple ideas are unanalysable and indefinable. Complex ideas are mentally constructible out of simple ideas. Complex ideas are of various sorts – substances (e.g. gold, lead, horses) which represent things in the material world, modes (e.g. triangle, gratitude) which are ‘dependences on or affections of substances’ and relations (e.g. parent of, whiter than). Ideas of relations result from comparing ideas. Simple ideas are necessarily given in experience, whereas complex ideas can be constructed by enlarging or compounding simple ideas. Complex ideas are not directly generated from experience. Through certain operations on simple ideas, complex ideas can be derived. Enlarging, compounding and abstracting are the mental operations. Complex and simple ideas are the materials of knowledge.

The question is ‘How does reason produce knowledge from ideas’? “Knowledge is defined as the perception of the connexion and agreement or disagreement and repugnancy of
any of our ideas” (Woolhouse, 1994:152). Some ideas are connected with others. And for Locke, knowledge is an act of understanding or perceiving those connections. Consider the following two ideas:

1. Ideas of a triangle.
2. Ideas of right angled triangle.

The knowledge that the three angles of triangle equal to two right angles comes from perceiving the connection between ideas. So, Locke defines knowledge as understanding or comprehending the connection between ideas. Some of the connections can be understood immediately as the connections are much more direct or obvious. Such knowledge is called ‘Intuitive Knowledge’. “We have intuitive knowledge when the mind perceives the agreement or disagreement of two ideas immediately by themselves, without the intervention of any other”. (Ibid: 153).

But in the case of demonstrative knowledge, the connection between two ideas cannot be understood without the help of other ideas. Comprehension of connection is indirect and mediated by other ideas. Where we can perceive such connections we have certain and universal knowledge; where we cannot, we lack knowledge, and, at best, have belief or opinion. This account fits well with our knowledge in a priori subjects such as mathematics and geometry.

While the first two categories of knowledge (intuitive and demonstrative Knowledge) fit well with Locke’s definition of knowledge, the third category of knowledge (that is, perceptual knowledge) does not fit well with Locke’s definition of knowledge. Perceptual knowledge is the knowledge which we get through sense perception. That is, perceptual knowledge is knowledge of the existence of particular external objects. “Perceptual knowledge is not a knowledge of
some connection between two ideas, but knowledge of the existence of something in the world corresponding to our perception or ideas” (Woolhouse, 1994:154).

Locke developed an account of perception to formulate a theory of perceptual knowledge. Intuitively perception is reliable (being perceived is the criterion of justification) because what we perceive is an external object. That means that through sense perception, we have direct access to reality. Locke rejects such an intuitive theory of perception. For Locke, what we perceive is nothing but our own ideas. What we perceive through sense perception is not the external world. Perception is reliable because perceiving ideas or representations provides a good reason to hold that they are the representations of the external world.

The hypothesis of the external world is the best explanation of the course of our sensory experience. In Hallucination also we perceive a lot of ideas. But we consider sense perception as different from hallucination because what we perceive through sensation is considered as a representation of the external world. The fact that we perceive through our senses, provides a good reason to claim that it is a representation of the external world. Jackson summarizes Locke’s theory as follows:

[Representative theory of perception] is a ‘veil of perception’ doctrine, in Bennett’s phrase. Locke’s idea was that the physical world was revealed by science to be in essence colourless, odourless, tasteless and silent, and that we perceive it by to put it metaphorically throwing a veil over it by means of our senses. It is the veil we see, in the strictest sense of ‘see’. This does not mean that we do not really see the objects around us. It means that we see an object in virtue of seeing the veil, the sense-data, causally related in the right way to that object. (1992: 446)
In the case of perceptual knowledge Locke faces stiff challenge from the sceptics. He concedes that testimony of eyes or sense organs cannot be considered as certain. He was aware that sensory knowledge cannot be held to be as certain as the knowledge that comes from intuition or demonstration. But yet he holds that it deserves the name of knowledge. Locke’s response to scepticism is mainly based on pragmatic grounds.

In this connection, it is necessary to note the fundamental difference between rationalists and empiricists regarding the relation between experience and knowledge. According to empiricists who repudiate the very idea of innate or *a priori* ideas, all knowledge is or ought to be formulated in terms of *a posteriori* ideas which are abstracted from experience. Hence, experience and only experience is constitutive of knowledge. Against such a view the rationalists maintain that ideally all knowledge must be articulated in terms of *a priori* ideas which are independent of experience as they are not derived from experience but are innate to reason, that is, wired into our thinking prior to experience. In that sense it is reason and reason alone which is constitutive of our experience. Do rationalists think that experience is irrelevant to knowledge? Experience, according to them, can provide occasion to produce knowledge but does not constitute the content of knowledge. In this sense the rationalists maintain that experience is related to knowledge only externally, whereas the relation is internal according to the empiricists.

As noted earlier, rationalists and empiricists share their commitment to the normativist and foundationalist approach to epistemology though they might differ about what constitutes the foundations. Added to this is their commitment to the same conception of knowledge which one may call the deductive ideal of knowledge. That is to say, all knowledge must exhibit a deductive pattern so as to embody some kind of certainty. This is not surprising in the case of the
rationalists who explicitly stated their commitment to the deductive ideal, thanks to their zeal for mathematics as the paradigm of all knowledge. But it must be noted that such a view was shared by the empiricists also.

I.2 E. Kant’s Epistemology

The Epistemological breakthrough in modern philosophy associated with the names of Descartes and Locke is somewhat outdone by the radical transformation that epistemology underwent in the hands of Kant. One of the main planks of Kant’s radical departure from the tradition he inherited lies in his attempt to reconcile rationalism and empiricism. The main thrust of Kant’s enquiry was to show how ‘Though all Knowledge begins experience, all Knowledge does not arises out of experience’. The first half of the quoted remark of Kant namely ‘All Knowledge begins with experience’ is pro-empiricist and anti-rationalist in its force, whereas the second half of the remark namely, ‘All Knowledge does not arise out of experience’ is anti-empiricist and pro-rationalist. So is the case with Kant’s dictum ‘Percepts without concepts are blind; concepts without percepts are empty’. By ‘concepts’ here Kant means ‘non-mathematical’ a priori concepts called ‘categories’ whose application is a necessary condition for the objectivity of experience. The first part of the dictum is anti-empiricist and pro-rationalist whereas the second part of the dictum is anti-rationalist and pro-empiricist. However, Kant does not stand equidistant from rationalism and empiricism. The synthesis of the two rival theories of knowledge however tilted towards rationalism. The pro-rationalist tilt of the balance is too obvious to be missed by even a preliminary survey of the critical philosophy of Kant. After all, Kant himself claims that his Epistemology brought about a Copernican revolution in philosophy by replacing the object-centred view of knowledge by a subject-centred view of knowledge. That the former is the core of empiricist epistemology with its idea of mind as tabula-rasa is self-evident. Though the
rationalists did not accept the object-centred view of knowledge by claiming that the mind is equipped with innate ideas that decided the shape of knowledge, they did not elaborate upon the precise mode of such a shaping. It is Kant who came to their rescue. But in the process of rescuing rationalism Kant subjectifies knowledge. However, this subjectification is sought to be limited by him in a manner which is consequential. If the subject applies the categories to objects not given in experience or indulges in applying ideas to alleged but not genuine objects of experience the subject is guilty of misuse of categories and ideas. Such a misuse or spurious application produces theoretical hallucinations which constitute an illegitimate enquiry called ‘Metaphysics’ as it is traditionally practiced. In fact, Kant goes one step further. According to him, knowledge in this strict sense constitutes cognitive experience which involves the application of categories whose legitimate employment concerns their application to what is given to us in experience that is, perception or intuition. Hence, moral experience or aesthetic experience cannot be cognitive and moral judgments and aesthetic judgements are not knowledge claims strictly speaking. Though, they may be so in a broad and loose sense. Moral judgements and aesthetic judgements are not purely subjective either in the sense of being expressions of personal likes and dislikes as Hume thought, nor are they objective in a strict sense. Thus the fact-value dichotomy which was erected by the twentieth century movement called ‘Positivism’ as a philosophical principle has been considered by the critics of such a dichotomy as a product of Kantian or neo-Kantian legacy. Such an accusation against Kant is understandable though it may not be easy to justify it.

The normative thrust of Kantian Epistemology is all too palpable as the above discussion shows. However, such a normative thrust is given enormous force by what Kant considers to be the central question of epistemology which is ‘How is knowledge possible.’ By raising this
question Kant gave a radical turn to epistemology. This question as well as the way Kant articulates it, and consequently the character of his solution constitute the second and major plank of Kant’s radical departure from tradition. The novelty and the radical potential of this question can be appreciated better when we compare it with the standard question that epistemology till Kant centred itself around, namely ‘What is the source of knowledge.’ By the question, ‘How is knowledge possible.’ Kant means ‘What are the *a priori* conditions [that is, conditions distinct from empirical conditions such as physical, physiological and psychological factors necessary for the production of knowledge] of the possibility of knowledge.’ The discovery of the *synthetic a priori* principle of pure understanding, Kant claims, ought to facilitate the identification of such *a priori* conditions. Kant’s approach to knowledge is normative in a thoroughgoing sense. Our knowledge claims remain genuinely so only if they are the results of the application of categories as dictated by or governed by the *synthetic a priori* principles of pure understanding whose discovery is a task of an *a priori* enquiry or transcendental enquiry. The recognition of the normative character of knowledge on one hand and the recognition of the need for non-psychological and therefore non-empirical, that is, an *a priori* enquiry into knowledge on the other are the two sides of the Kantian approach to knowledge. According to Kant, epistemology prior to Hume lacked sufficient focus on the normative character of knowledge and hence such an epistemology was not pure *ora priori* or transcendental and it compromised with psychologism.

By Kant’s assertion that his enquiry into the possibility of knowledge is pure or transcendental or *a priori*, Kant implies that his predecessors in general and empiricists in particular did not adopt a completely non-empirical approach to the nature of knowledge. To that extent, they did not recognize the purely non-natural dimension of knowledge. In short, their
commitment to the normativist ideal of epistemology was a diluted one. In the language of contemporary epistemology, their approach to knowledge tended to be descriptive rather than normative and they willingly adopted a naturalistic perspective towards knowledge. Kant’s uncompromising normativism and total refusal to treat knowledge in a naturalistic way is organically related to the very notion of a critique. Kant used the locution in the sense of ‘Showing the limits of” and even after Kant it carries the same sense. In the hands of Kant, ‘Critique’ concerns showing the limits of reason which has a tendency to trespass the limit and tends to indulge in a spurious enquiry. The task of the critical philosophy was to identify those limits so that the operations of reason remain legitimate. It is this concern with the legitimacy of our knowledge that gives Kant’s epistemology a strong normativist dimension. In fact, it does so to such an extent that it can be said that normativist epistemology could never be pre-Kantian.

Equally conspicuous is the foundationalist character of Kantian Epistemology. The synthetic a priori principles of pure understanding constitute the foundations of knowledge (apart from providing axioms of a pure science of nature on one hand and Metaphysics of Nature on the other) as they underlie cognitive experience as its presuppositions. They constitute the framework of knowledge as representation. Kant’s representationalism is also unprecedented. Though the idea of knowledge as representation is shared by Kant and his predecessors and in that sense he stands within the received view of epistemology, nevertheless he re-works the notion of representation itself in a fundamental way. This is the consequence of his view that what is represented has its locus in the subject itself. But that does not make representation itself subjective. This is the thrust of Kant’s transcendental deduction of categories according to which there is an ‘It’ because there is an ‘I’. In Kant’s own terms the ‘transcendental unity of apperception’, that is, self-consciousness is a necessary condition of the application of the
categories which is the necessary condition for the experience of object, that is, objective experience. However, the application of categories ensures that the condition called ‘transcendental unity of apperception’ is realized. The distinction between noumenon and phenomenon in no way affects or dilutes the representationalist core of Kant’s Epistemology. After all ‘Noumenon’ according to him, is a limiting concept and a negative concept. It is impossible to represent it. It does not even make sense to attempt to do it. It is only the phenomenon that can be represented because it alone is Knowable. That means, what is knowable is representable. This point is reinforced by Kant when he says that his position is one of empirical realism, that is, the position that objects of knowledge are given to us immediately and he is a transcendentalist idealist only in the sense that according to him what we know are things in themselves. He rejects empirical idealism as either dogmatic or problematic.

The normativist, the foundationalist and the representationalist dimension of Kant’s epistemology are seen by some contemporary philosophers to be the height of the intellectual arrogance of philosophy. For instance, according to Rorty Kant only construes knowledge as a product of mind’s mirroring of nature but also that only the philosopher with the knowledge of synthetic a priori principles can understand the mechanism of such a mirroring. Thus one of the well known critics of the received view of epistemology considers Kant’s work to be the climax of the traditional epistemology which took for granted the validity of its normativist, foundationalist and representationalist pretensions.

I.2F. Logical Positivists’ Epistemology

The twentieth century philosophical movement called positivism traced its anti-metaphysical stand to Hume. The Positivists explicitly stated their commitment to empiricism. They called
themselves ‘neo-empiricists’. And they differentiated their position from the classical empiricists on the ground that, the classical empiricists articulated their epistemological position in terms of psychological locutions like ‘sensations’, ‘impressions’, ‘ideas’, ‘judgments’ etc. The Positivists instead sought to use neutral or logical locutions to characterize their position such as ‘sense data’, ‘concepts’, ‘propositions’ etc.

So as to avoid both physicalism as well as psychologism, however, they sought to work out a normativist and foundationalist epistemology by working out an organic relation between sense datum statements which they thought indubitable and our empirical claims. Such a relation was supposed to be quasi-deductive and hence with their rationalist and empiricist predecessors they accepted whole heartedly the deductive ideal of knowledge.

It is obvious that the acceptance of the deductive ideal reinforces their normative orientation which they inherited from the tradition. Ironically, notwithstanding their valorisation of science as the paradigm of all knowledge, their perspective in epistemology does not have any relation to the actual practice of science which is anything but normative.

The deductive ideal became a guiding principle in the philosophy of science. Because Positivists are empiricists their theory of scientific method is inducivist. However, they were acutely aware of the need for solving Hume’s problem. That is, the task of providing rational justification of the principle of induction. The Positivists sought to do so by showing that pure observation statements constituting the sub-structure of science are quasi-deductively related to the super-structure of science constituted by scientific theories. It is a different matter that they failed to establish the purity of observations and thus the indubitability of observational statements. And hence, the Positivist project to solve the problem of induction fell like a house of
cards. However, the project itself falls squarely within the normativist, foundationalist and deductivist thrust of the epistemological position of the Positivists.

I.2G. Popper’s Epistemology

Karl Popper put forth a widely appreciated epistemological theory which he calls ‘Critical Rationalism’. Though critical rationalism is normativist in its orientation, it differs from previous versions of normativism. First of all, he rejects not only traditional empiricism but also traditional rationalism. According to him, both traditional rationalism and traditional empiricism were answers to the time-honoured question in Epistemology namely, ‘What is the source of knowledge’ -a question, which, according to Popper, is both presumptuous and dangerous. It is presumptuous because it presupposes that there is something called the sources of Knowledge such that whatever that emanates from it should be accepted as knowledge -a fallacy which he calls ‘Knowledge by pedigree’. It is dangerous because such a view leads to dogmatic acceptance of certain knowledge claims. In its stead epistemology, therefore, must address a new question, namely, ‘Given anything to be the source of knowledge, how can we check our mistakes?’ According to Popper this change in the character of Epistemology is analogous to the desirable change in political theory. According to Popper, until now political theory has focused on the question ‘Which is the best class to rule.’ Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle identified the intellectual class and the middle class respectively to be the best class to rule and Marx found the working class to be such a class. However, the question presumes that only one class has been ordained by History or God to be the best class for this purpose. Apart from being questionable such an assumption encourages blind acceptance of the rule of such a class resulting in autocracy. Hence, political theory must reject this question and now onwards must grapple
with the question ‘Whoever be the rulers and whichever class be the ruling class; how can the ruled avoid misrule by putting in place institutional checks and balances’.

Thus, Popper’s Epistemology is rationalist only in the sense that he is not an empiricist since according to him the mind is not a bucket collecting experiences as empiricists thought but it is more like a search light. Therefore, his rationalism is quite removed from traditional rationalism because unlike the rationalists he does not believe that reason is the source of Knowledge (just as he does not accept experience to be the source of knowledge).

It is easy to see how Popper’s Epistemological approach is different from that of the positivists who, as we have seen, by calling themselves neo-empiricists distinguish their position from that of the traditional empiricists. Though Popper is normativist like the positivists in so far as he believed that there exist abiding norms that must be satisfied by a genuine Knowledge claim, he rejected the foundationalist orientation of the positivists. This is very well brought out in his attacks on the notion of pure observation, which is the corner stone of the positivist philosophy of science. Nor does Popper share the rationalist version of foundationalism which identified foundations with some indubitable a priori truths, wired into reason and hence have their locus in the subject. Against such a view Popper claims to have worked out in his epistemology the idea of ‘Knowledge without a knowing subject’. Thus, Popper is a normativist without being a foundationalist.

The normativist spirit of the Popperian position in epistemology is well brought out in his idea that the objectivity of our Knowledge consists in its inter-subjective testability/criticizability. This norm is most perfectly met in the case of scientific knowledge wherein falsifiability acts as the criterion of scientificity. In this connection it must be noted the Popper’s
Epistemological canvas is broad. Though according to him, scientific theories are the paradigm cases of genuine Knowledge since they are falsifiable, Metaphysical claims are, nonetheless, cognitively significant. He even goes to the extent of saying that if there was no Metaphysics there would not have been science, since scientific problems are Metaphysical problems transformed in such a way as to provide them falsifiable solutions which are tentative and at best corroborated solutions. Thus Popper does not deny cognitive significance to Metaphysical claims and in this sense he rejects the fundamental contention of the positivists according to whom Metaphysical claims have no cognitive content since they are not verifiable even in principle.

However, the question is ‘What is the basis of accepting criticizability/testability/falsifiability as the norm in epistemic matters?’ Popper sometimes suggests that our choice of criticizability/testability/falsifiability is a matter of convention since no deeper epistemic basis can be provided for such a choice. This amounts to accepting conventionalism with its own baggage of problems such as relativism, subjectivism etc. As if to avoid such a predicament Popper sometimes speaks of the acceptance of such a norm as a biological requirement of human species. But such an attempt to anchor the norm in our biological nature weakens the normativist orientation, which Popper himself espouses.

Popper’s rejection of foundationalism comes out very effectively in his construal of theory–observation relation in science. As is well known, the positivists construed that relation in terms of a unilateral dependence of observation on theory. As against this, Popper construed the relation in terms of interdependence. To avoid the problem of circular justification he maintains that the observations that justify a theory do not depend upon the very theory they justify but the earlier theory which in turn depends up on a theory which is earlier than that. Thus observations and theories have inter-dependence arranged in a linear way, so that though no
observation is absolutely theory independent, every observation is independent of the theory which is tested in its terms. Popper thus construes our most primitive observation to be dependent upon our primitive theories which are nothing but our inborn beliefs and expectations. But neither inborn beliefs nor the observation based on them can be said to constitute the foundations of our knowledge. That is, they do not perform the test of either pure experience of the empiricists nor the \textit{a priori} tricks of the rationalists. Popper’s Epistemology thus has a distinction of being normativist without being foundationalist.

The aim of this chapter was to understand the broad contours of traditional epistemology, which constitute the received tradition in terms of three meta-epistemic concepts, namely, normativity, foundationality, and representationality as they figure in the theories of major philosophers whose works constitute the milestones in the history of epistemology. Such a bird’s eye-view facilitates our discussion of the various critiques of traditional epistemology or the received tradition in epistemology which is the theme of the subsequent chapters.

It may be noted that in the thesis following Taylor sometimes we use ‘epistemology’, ‘epistemological tradition’, and similar locution. By those locutions, we mean ‘modern epistemology’, ‘modern epistemological tradition’, and other cognitive expression, though some concepts, themes, and tenets of modern epistemology might be found in pre-modern epistemology too.