EPILOGUE
EPISODE

On the backdrop of a critical study of the three paradigms of the attempt to comprehend the phenomenon of cognition presented in the three preceding chapters, the following pages are now devoted to a twofold job. The first is to present a synoptic view of the strategies devised by Kant, Hegel and Husserl with a view to bring out certain commonalities with respect to agreements on certain points, problems faced and alternatives explored to solve them. On the basis of such a retrospect, the second job is more of the nature of musing in the light of certain later developments that have taken place in the field of knowledge. In the end, I will attempt to present scepticism in a new perspective.

The preceding three chapters have attempted to present three configurations of critique - Kantian, Hegelian and Husserlian. While giving an account of the specific motivations of each one of these configurations, their inter-relations have also been kept in view. In a sense the Hegelian turn toward the phenomenology of spirit and the metaphysics of absolute is a response to some difficulties in the Kantian project. Similarly, Husserl's programme also can be linked up as a response to difficulties in Hegel. In this sense, there is a certain kind of dialectical relation between the three paradigms. Perhaps, it is because they are so related that they share certain features in spite of their differences. As such they could be regarded as members of the family of critical philosophy. Consequently, we can reasonably expect that they share certain common strengths
and weaknesses.

Each one of the thinkers that were studied in the three preceding chapters have more or less similar views on certain points that may be regarded as the common intellectual background of their attempts at a reconsideration of our cognitive make-up. One of the points is their comments on the past philosophy. With the stringent demands and expectations that they entertain with respect to the ideal of knowledge, all of them are critical of past philosophy. Kant is disgusted with mutual contradictions between different systems, lack of methods and compares them to participants in a mock-battle. Husserl goes to the extreme of not calling any one of them as philosophy at all. Hegel is a bit lenient to accommodate them as moments in the process of realization of the Absolute knowledge, but taken individually none of them would be satisfactory in toto. Perhaps, these lacunae in philosophy are heightened by contrast with the achievements of sciences - natural and formal - with which all the three were very familiar and (this is true especially true of Kant and Husserl) even well-versed. The least thing that these sciences can do is to inspire a belief in the possibility of knowledge and an urge to look for the proper method. In this respect, Kant and Husserl are beyond doubt the protagonists of rigorous methodology but, inspite of his genuine differences on the issue of methodological priority, even Hegel can't be said to be oblivious of the issue. Finally, all the three are keenly anxious to overcome the threat of scepticism, though in their own way. It seems that it is a conjoint result of all these three factors - dissatisfaction with past philosophy, models of actual knowledge and the threat of
scepticism - that is a necessary background of their turning attention to the cogition itself.

A characteristic feature of this turn is the insistence on a distinction between first order empirical cognition and second order reflective inquiry into the conditions of possibility and limits of the first order experience. In Kant, this takes the form of a distinction between objective mode of thought and transcendental reflection. In Hegel, it takes a slightly different form of a distinction between experience and thought within a particular level of the development of Spirit and philosophical reflection from the standpoint of the Absolute consciousness of these stages of development themselves. The latter type Hegel calls phenomenological reflection. In Husserl the distinction is closer to Kant in some respects but also different from him in certain others. At his hands the distinction is formulated in a variety of ways. The most basic distinction within Husserlian phenomenology is that between the natural standpoint and the reflective, phenomenological standpoint.

What is similar in all these projections is the implied distinction between philosophical inquiry as radically contrasted with non-philosophical, common-sensical and scientific inquiry. Using Kant's language, the distinction is between transcendental and empirical objectivity. Although there are differences in the ways of formulation of this distinction, the distinction itself is fundamental to all of them. If so, it may be conjectured that some such distinction is determinative of the notion of critique itself. Therefore, a very important issue is that of articulating the distinction between the empirical and transcendental modes of inquiry. If this distinction
collapses, one can't hope to discover the uniqueness of philosophy as criticism. Not that we must give up the notion of critique as such. What would follow from the impossibility of the distinction is that we would have to understand the distinction between philosophy and common-sense and science in a completely different manner.

A problem that arises on the basis of the distinction - transcendental and empirical - is about the mode of access to the transcendental level itself. For Kant this is hardly a problem. He presumes that consciousness can by spontaneity undertake an exhaustive examination of itself. But in both, Hegel and Husserl, this problem is a serious issue. According to Hegel we can reach the transcendental level only by internalizing the long journey going through the stages of ordinary experience. This is what Hegel's 'Phenomenology' attempts - a retrospective recovery of its own objective formulation. It is a kind of historical experience in which the consciousness plunges itself. In Husserl, the access to the transcendental level is not by way of history but by a discipline of bracketing. Phenomenology can be attempted by means of suspending the realm of natural standpoint.

Another issue related to this context is that of characterizing the nature of this kind of reflection, because critique is essentially an exercise of thought. But what kind of thought is this? Kant notices this problem but does not argue it in depth. He makes a distinction between knowing and thinking. Here, thinking is not used in the sense of objective mode of thought - we can think of unity of apperception but it is not and can't be an object of experience. In these terms the cognitive process in the critique can be called
thinking. In Hegel the specificity of reflection is clearer. It is a phenomenonology of consciousness. In Husserl, too, the transcendental mode of inquiry is demarcated from cognition of the natural standpoint.

It is, however, in this sphere of transcendental consciousness that we meet the most critical problem - the problem of method. Depending upon how we look at the issue, the three philosophers studied can be grouped variously. If it is a matter of prior determination of method, Hegel stands opposed to both Kant and Husserl. On the other hand, if it is seen as the problem of intrinsicality of method Husserl is in agreement with Hegel as against Kant. Particularly, with respect to the concern over methodology which all three of them share, we find that whatever their attitude towards it - insistence on prior determination of the rigour of the method or its determination in course of investigation - neither succeeds. As Quentin Lauer has remarked 'There is ...no substitute for methodological rigour, but excessive insistence on method is found to leave philosophy standing still.' That is what happens with Husserl who got stuck-up in methodological issues till the end. But the Hegelian alternative of making a head-way and keeping an eye on method as we go along is no better, for with all its retrospective interpretation of the journey of consciousness, we are at a loss to see where precisely we are going. It is in this spirit that Lauer feels like asking Hegel where and how we are going and Husserl whether we are going. In this respect, I would say, Kant stands apart from the two - wholly preoccupied with method, he also manages to create an illusion that we have reached the goal.
But, I believe, these problems are really the superficial symptoms of a basic difference underlying. Though all the three thinkers agree over certainly or perfect adequacy as the hall-mark of knowledge, they are divided over what should be the source of such certainty. For Kant, with the models of mathematics and geometry before him and with his preoccupation with the justification of our 'right' to claim knowledge, it is reason and the rational process of deduction. For Hegel, too, though he speaks of 'phenomenology' of spirit, the level of direct apprehension immediately gives way to conceptual grasping. On the contrary, Husserl, from beginning to end, insists on intuitive seeing, evidence. Initially, it appears that Husserl is one up. But, soon, this impression weakens when we see him fumbling with more and more adequate formulations of the results of his inquiry. The question here is: why should both the parties suffer the same fate in spite of their divergent approaches?

For explaining this peculiarity, we have to enter a totally unsuspected field, the field of language, because these problems can be explained only by referring the peculiarities of language and the requirements of knowledge that we are trying to achieve.

Whether the mode of reflection is intuitive or thinking, we find that in some way or other language is related to it. In case of thinking, hardly anyone will doubt that it requires language as its medium. The case of intuition is quite disputable and there can be claims that intuitive knowledge is non-verbal. But even granting that for sake of argument, the fact remains that, after the act of cognition has taken place, a language is a must to incorporate and
to communicate the results. And since language is intersubjective, it must involve the intersubjectively valid concepts. But, in this process of couching the 'vision' in words, is the original preserved? Husserl himself was aware of this trouble when he observed - 'The evidence that is present in 'seeing' is not present when something is not given but represented through symbols, words etc.' In fact, Fink has questioned whether a language of the natural attitude can be suitable for expression of phenomenological results. By implication this may suggest a quest for a new ideal language. From the point of view of intelligibility and communicability of philosophical discourse the proposal is worth pursuing and nothing about its viability can be said in a summary way. I only feel that this may require some sort of interface between intuition and reason.

On this problematic of language, Kant is silent apart from suggestions in the section on schematism where he entertains the idea of thinking not dependent on schematization. In Hegel, there is a clearer awareness of the use of language involved in phenomenological consciousness. It is because of the peculiar nature of language that the essence of a particular is recovered.

Lastly, all the three forms of critique in some sense make a distinction between empirical self and transcendental self and also don't drastically separate the two. In Kant the transcendental subject is not another entity although some think it to be so. In Hegel, the picture is clearer. The Absolute is in empirical consciousness; the transcendental ego is in a sense the individual. Thus the issue is of difference in unity or vice versa but the two egos is a common legacy.
We have seen that mathematics and geometry have served as the models of apodeictically certain knowledge from the days of Pythagoras. After the rise of science as a sure way of grasping the sure, universal features of nature, particularly after Newton, physics too joined this group. Even for Husserl who doesn’t regard them as sciences in his own rigorous sense of the term, they continue to serve at least as provocations for a search of their counterpart.

Now in the light of developments that have taken place in both these fields, formal and natural - it will be interesting to reconsider this relation and to figure out the possible implications.

Almost till the last century, mathematics was regarded as concerned not just with certainty but with truth, and with its success in natural sciences, its protagonists advocated application of mathematical methodology in philosophy, aesthetics or sociology. But the nineteenth century demonstration of strange geometries and mathematics gave a severe jolt to this myth and fored us to concede that maths as such is not concerned with truth. As Morris Kline has put it, “The current predicament is that there is not one but many mathematics... It is now apparent that the concept of a universally accepted, infallible body of reasoning - the majestic maths of 1800 and the pride of man-is a grand illusion.”

In a still shorter period the Newtonian picture of the world as existing independently of mind, substantive and uniquely describable has come to be challenged in the last hundred years or so as a result of man’s attempts to grasp the world on both a macroscopic and microscopic level. A few quotations from some eminent...
physicists are enough to convince us-

John Wheeler, Einstein’s colleague at Princeton, says: ‘May the universe, in some strange sense be ‘brought into being’ by the participation of those who participate? ‘Participator’ is the new incontrovertible concept... It strikes down the term ‘observer.’

Werner Heisenberg goes on so far as to claim that space and time are nothing but ‘the contents of our mind.’ This is also reminiscent of Gary Zukow’s remark in ‘The Dancing Wu Li Masters’ that ‘what we perceive to be physical reality is actually our cognitive construction of it.’ Similarly, Henry Strapp holds that ‘If the attitude of quantum mechanics is correct, in the strong sense that a description of the substructure underlying experience more complete than the one that it provides is not possible, then there is no substantive world.’

Now, if the above two developments i.e. in mathematics and physics - are put together an interesting picture emerges. The world is describable not as something apart from our consciousness but as one related with it. If so, our consciousness becomes a pole in this inquiry. Thus, the distinction between the object and the subject and, by implication, between the sciences of objective nature and sciences concerned with man will have can’t be as radical as is thought and, therefore, will have to be reformulated.

‘But, besides, there is also an important insight that challenges the uniqueness and irreversibility as the criteria of ultimate knowledge. It seems that in our quest for the ultimately satisfactory comprehension of the universe our knowledge must change not just by way of additional information but also by way of reconsideration of the
conceptual framework of our knowledge - either by way of redifini-
tion of a concept or introduction of a new concept or by regrouping
of concepts already in our possession. Without going into detail,
I may point it out here that some of the substantial developments in
our understanding of some basic concepts such as matter, energy,
causality, space and time etc. belong to this class.

It was remarked earlier that all the three configurations of
critique dealt within this work share a certain basic motivation of
coming to terms with the challenge of philosophical scepticism and
attempting to move beyond the sceptical impasse without denying
the value of that challenge. Here, we must make a distinction
between ordinary doubt and philosophical doubt. This distinction is
made by Husserl but is also present in different forms in Kant and
Hegel. To have a common basis for situating all the three configu­
rations, we can make this distinction so as not to prejudice any one
position as against others. This distinction can be put as a
distinction between doubting a statement of matters of fact and
calling into question the warrants presupposed in making all such
statements in brief, a distinction between fact-challenging doubt
and warrant-challenging doubt. Fact-challenging doubts are
empirical and question the admissibility of a statement or a set of
statements within a frame of reference. They are first-order doubts and
a necessary part of any enquiry. Because they are functional for
inquiry by making us alert to inadequacies of observation of
phenomena or their conceptual description, they are therefore of
positive value. In this sense, science is critical and self-corrective.
But philosophical scepticism is warrant-challenging. What a sceptic calls into question is the very framework that we employ in all first-order inquiry. Once the nature of philosophical scepticism is seen in this way, it is easier to understand the responses from the three configurations of critique.

But, before we elaborate, it may be relevant that the above mentioned distinction carries with it the distinction between criticism and critique. Critique in the sense we intend it to be is not concerned with statements within a frame of reference but with the demonstration of the necessity and unavoidability of such a framework itself. Using Carnap's distinction between internal questions and external questions, we may say that criticism is a response to internal questions whereas critique is a response to external questions. Having thus distinguished between the two kinds of doubt, it is necessary to remind ourselves that in the natural movement of inquiry, criticism may turn itself into critique. This is why, we should understand the relation between science and philosophy in a manner that is neither totally identificatory nor totally exclusive.

Coming back to the issue of the possible responses to philosophical scepticism, I will attempt to trace what is common to all the three attempts we have studied. For each one of them, scepticism is a moment in the way towards an adequate philosophy and, as such, can't be sidestepped. At the same time, they also agree that the problem of scepticism arises, out of certain necessity, from the previous modes of philosophizing. For example, according to Kant, the scepticism of Hume necessarily follows upon the
empiricism of Locke and the overambitious pretensions of rationalism. Hence, for Kant, a proper response to scepticism can't go back to the previous modes of philosophizing. We must rethink, in a new way, the nature and method of philosophy.

For Hegel, too, scepticism is a dialectical counterpart to the earlier forms of consciousness. Scepticism, as it were, stands as an unavoidable interlude between the classical and modern forms of consciousness. In Husserl also, one of the stimuli that compel us to embark upon radical phenomenological turn is the sceptical outcome of earlier philosophies.

In short, therefore, for all of them an encounter with scepticism is unavoidable and, paradoxically, even needed because it lifts the thresholds of philosophizing to higher level.

Given this common general understanding of the place and significance of scepticism as a necessary stage in the way to genuine philosophy, the three thinkers differ in the actual particular strategies of their response. For Kant, the reply to scepticism takes the form of a dilemma - either the categorial framework is accepted as the necessary presupposition of all intelligible thought, or we must embrace total incoherence and, as a result, scepticism too ends in unintelligibility. In short, Kant's response is - critique or incoherence.

Hegel's response is more dynamic. What phenomenology and Logic teach us is the power of negation. Scepticism is the antithesis to the earlier thesis of dogmatism. But, as per Hegel's dialectics, the antithesis is not eliminated but preserved in a more adequate form on the level of synthesis. So in a subtle way Hegel, too
Husserl sees the value of scepticism still differently. For him, by calling into question the natural standpoint, scepticism prefigures *epoche*. It checks the naturalistic tendency of our thought and thereby, opens up the domain of consciousness. Thus, scepticism is one of the roads to grasping the apodeictic certainty of consciousness.

Apart from this methodological instruction that scepticism gives, Husserl also appreciates the special value and significance of Humean scepticism. Hume's greatness, as Husserl puts it, is in the insight that it is in my own subjectivity that every objective phenomenon appears as a modification of my consciousness and it is in terms of subjectivity that all my assertions should be grounded and justified.

Therefore, we may conclude that the three configurations of critique that we dealt with, show an awareness of the philosophical necessity of scepticism. Paradoxically, as Husserl would put it, it is only when we move beyond scepticism into a truely genuine philosophical point of view that we can appreciate the value of scepticism.

This is the ultimate response provided to us, namely, a deeper understanding of scepticism is possible only from a post sceptical point of view.
Epilogue

References

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2. Ibid, p.196
3. Husserl, Idea of Phenomenology, p. 48
4. Quoted by Sinha Debabrata in Phenomenology and Existentialism, p.79
5. Kline Morris, Mathematics: The Loss of Certainty, p.6
6. For this and the earlier quotations I have made use of ‘Idealism and A Note on New Physics’ in ‘In The Spirit of Hegel’ by Solomon R.C., p.186 ff.