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In the present work, I propose to reconsider one of the most profound but equally perplexing ideas in modern philosophy - 'Critique' which at this stage may be roughly taken to mean 'reason's self-examination with a view to determine the nature of knowledge and reason's contribution to it.'

It is indeed a tautology to call the problem of knowledge a central problem of philosophy. Whatever the conscious focus of interest and attention, a philosopher as a 'lover of wisdom' can't but be interested simultaneously, though not secondarily in the problems of knowledge. That this is necessary can be easily shown by visualizing the idea of 'a philosopher not concerned with issues regarding knowledge.' Hence, despite change in focus on various problems, we witness a parallel undercurrent of epistemological discussions. A philosopher of any field will necessarily be interested in ensuring that his conclusions are not just opinions, views or convictions but have the marks of knowledge - objective validity, certainty, uniqueness.

Therefore, we find philosophers of all periods and places and schools seriously considering the problems of knowledge along with the problems in the field of their interest.

In a sense, the idea of critique as 'reason's self-examination' is not totally new. As will be shown in the next chapter, the critical of tendency is manifest right from the known history of epistemology. Thus we find the pre-Socratic thinkers dealing with the origins of knowledge, the criteria of validity of knowledge etc. But, then
the possibility of knowledge as such and, beyond that, our ability to know was not questioned. It was when the Sophists challenged the possibility of knowledge as such that the dogmatic philosophers were shaken out of their euphoria and tried to defend themselves against the sceptical attack. That is how serious and systematic epistemology began. For the discussion that follows, this point, viz., 'origin of epistemology to counter scepticism' - must be remembered.

The threatening stand of scepticism is based on the phenomenalistic distinction between phenomena and the object that lies beyond. Since this distinction is accepted even by their opponents, defending of the possibility of knowledge is really a tough job. It is, no doubt, a great achievement to demonstrate the impossibility and incoherence of scepticism as a radical position. But a sceptic can't be completely silenced with that. And no amount of 'so-called' knowledge, knowledge that is consistent with other knowledge, knowledge that is not contradicted by experience, knowledge that works, or to use the modern jargon, 'pays' - will silence him. Because what is required is a convincing justification of the fact that we do know. Anything short of this will give a thinker sleepless nights with the thought that after all we may not be really 'knowing'.

The gravity of the sceptical challenge is such that no serious philosopher can afford to ignore it. That is how we find Plato and Aristotle of the classical age and Descartes, Spinoza, Berkeley, and even Hume of the modern era busy formulating the idea of knowledge and the methods and criteria using which knowledge
will be achievable.

But, in spite of all their efforts, what is the result? As many and as diverse views about the reality as one can imagine—or perhaps as one won’t. It is here that the majesty of Kant’s achievement is felt for the first time. For though, as mentioned earlier, critical attitude is present from the beginning, Kant is undoubtedly the first to take up the critical project and give it a thorough and systematic treatment. It is for this systematic treatment that we should be grateful to Kant. Without his exhaustive and rigorous exposition, we would have perhaps never realized the need, nature and importance of critique. This is not to say that Kant did a perfect job. But he is certainly a pioneer who initiated a serious and thorough exploration of a domain till then only cursorily visited.

For a non-philosophical mind it may appear as if the philosophers are creating a mountain out of a molehill. Why, there is a commonsensical solution to this problem—Get hold of the instrument, examine its powers, its scope and limits and then use accordingly. In fact that is the strategy that thinkers like Descartes, Locke or even Hume and Kant adopt.

One only wishes the execution of the programme were as easy as its statement. For no sooner does one turn the critical gaze to the reason itself, the critic—than one stirs a veritable hornet’s nest. No matter how careful the thinker and what the measures he takes to avoid the pitfalls of others, the problems do persist. But the full scale of the consequences of a critique was not realized till Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason made its appearance.

The subsequent history of criticism on and reformulation of
the concept of critique may be roughly summarized at this stage by saying that though few have denied the possibility and need of critique, the alternative proposals forwarded to overcome the lacunae in the Kantian conception have their own lacunae; and the goal of 'the perfect critique'- pre-suppositionless, unproblematic and exhaustive - seems to be as elusive as the ever-receding horizon.

Particularly, after the futility and vanity of the Hegelian project of showing how through reflection one may reach an absolute understanding of the world was demonstrated by way of actual achievements of sciences, the positivists and the positivistic sciences did have a hey-day and philosophy was condemned to the subservient role of sciences.'

It is on this background that I undertake the present study of the concept of critique. It is confined only to the epistemological role of the critique, regarding it as a significant fact that the genesis of the concept is in the cognitive context; though I am also aware of the important role critique is playing in the social cultural and political spheres in contemporary philosophy.

Naturally, I have taken into consideration the views of Kant, Hegel and Husserl - the three exponent of the concept of critique in their own peculiar ways; yet each one of them giving primacy to its cognitive aspect

I believe that such a study is necessary and justified for the following reasons.

1) Each one of the three thinkers, mentioned above, has given considerably thorough treatment to his own idea of critique and the latter two have even criticized their predecessor's concept
of critique. On this background an exploration towards the formulation of the concept of critique as it should be is very much necessary.

2) In spite of the claims of being presuppositionless, the concepts of critique of each one of these thinkers under consideration seem to be grounded in several presuppositions. It is, therefore, necessary to inquire into two issues:

   a) Whether there can be a presuppositionless critique? and b) If not, which and of what nature should be the pre-suppositions?

3) The other claim about the critique is with respect to its achievements. Especially after the miserable failures of the historic attempts to realize their claims, it is necessary to reconsider - a) Whether the claims were reasonable and hence justifiable even within the frameworks of the respective critiques. b) What are the reasons for the failures? and c) What legitimate expectations can one make from the critique.

4) As mentioned earlier, the failure of critical philosophy led to the establishment of the positivist way of sciences as the proper way of knowing. This is accompanied by relegation of philosophy to the secondary, justificatory role of philosophy of sciences. While the first change is understandable, the second is bound to cause worry, because it implies equation of knowledge with science - Scientism. But is this equation justifiable, even in the interests of science?

Modern science, characterized by emphasis on experience, experimentation, and verification of its conjectures can be said to have started evolving since Galileo. In all these years, it has made such a tremendous progress that one is inclined to regard it as the
only form of knowledge. But, I want to argue that a subtle understanding of the very essence of science will prevent us from such a rash and unwarranted conclusion.

The progress of science to which we referred above consists, in my view, of three types:

a) There is addition to our knowledge of the already known fields—knowledge of new facts and new laws. We may call this progress with respect to content.

b) In this case, new fields are opened as a result of more sophisticated instruments. Access to genetics as a result of electron-microscope or to the remote corners of the universe as a result of radio-telescopy can be examples here. We may call this expansion of the field of science.

c) Partially as a result of the problems posed by the above two types of advances and also due to the efforts of scientists to give a more satisfactory, consistent and simpler account of reality, a third type of progress is achieved. Though not as spectacular and 'relevant' to common man, it is of supreme importance to the scientists. I would brand this as progress in our understanding of the concept of science itself. Such a progress is not possible just with the earlier two progresses. It requires that the scientists reflect and critically reconsider their notions of knowing, understanding, satisfactoriness etc. In short, it is nothing but a critique of our cognitive faculty. So it is not scientific methodology but a critique of science that leads to the progress of science on this level.

Equation of knowledge with science implies that the 'present science' is knowledge while our experience in the past has demon-
strated that along with the increase in content and newly opened fields, our concept of science also is undergoing progress.

As a result of the tremendous progress in technology which has enhanced and supplemented man's perception of the world around, the modern sciences - 'theoretical' or 'pure'in particular - have come to grapple with problems such as the nature of matter, nature, scope and origin of the universe, origins of life - the very problems with which the classical philosophers dealt, of course only speculatively. But even now the very nature and magnitude of these problems forces the modern scientists to speculate, to theorize. And sometimes, their conflicting utterances, e.g., steady state vs. expanding universe theories, make us wonder whether we are once again entering the slippery province of transcendent metaphysics. In these circumstances too, it will be in the interest of science not to be self-complacent and to subject itself to critique of knowledge though actually science may be the only form of knowledge. Towards this goal also, a proper reconsideration and reformulation of the concept of critique is necessary.

It is with these issues in mind that I have chalked out the following plan of the present thesis:

-In chapter 1, I have undertaken a brief survey of the concept of critique as a theory of knowledge as it occurs in the history of philosophy. The general line of argument for this chapter is that though philosophy dealt with problems of knowledge from the beginning, it became self-conscious only after the sceptical attacks of the sophists. But even though the germ of critique is found in the thoughts of many philosophers, none presented a full-fledged
critique. I have attempted an analysis of this failure.

Behind the serious attempts to defend human knowledge and determine its nature and scope, there seem to be some common underlying pre-suppositions. I have tried to uncover them.

Particularly, in the context of Hegel’s critique of Kant, Kant’s stand shared by most of his predecessors and even by several modern philosophers comes under heavy fire. This stand termed ‘Foundationalism’ by David Lamb—is stated to explain its nature, merits and the problems involved in it.

The second chapter deals with the first full-fledged attempt at critique viz., the Kantian magnum opus—Critique of Pure Reason. The chapter begins with a selective philosophical biography with the aim to show that a profound knowledge of contemporary sciences and a serious concern with preserving moral autonomy of man were the two forces that must have shaped Kant’s critical philosophy. While the influence of natural science as the model of knowledge is conspicuous, morality is subtly responsible for several features characteristic in Kant such as the choice of deduction in the legal sense of establishing a right, the distinction between phenomena and noumena necessitated by a need to reconcile a deterministic sphere of nature with autonomy of the moral subject and a consequent distinction between empirical and transcendental.

This chapter is chiefly concerned with bringing out the salient features of the methodology, with which Critique of Pure Reason is chiefly concerned, in contrast with the attempts at critique discussed in the earlier chapter. I have argued that the most
important feature of Kantian thought is his bold and firm acceptance of the radical finitude of man and it is this realization that makes him to turn totally to the self and begin only from that sphere.

The next section deals with the drawbacks in the Kantian programme. One of them is his refusal define categories. I have argued that if he had chosen to pay attention to the content of the categories, the subsequent blunders like that of deriving categories from logic under the influence of a pre-set formal goal of completeness could have been avoided.

Yet, after all is said and done, the fact remains that Kant belongs to the tradition of the foundationalists, though he may be regarded as the most consistent among them, and hence shares with them certain common pre-suppositions in addition to his own peculiarities. This forms the theme of the first section of the third chapter that, through Hegel’s criticism of Kant in particular and all traditional epistemology in general brings out the artificiality of the critique as an examination of reason from an external point of view and, most importantly, brings out the fact that in spite of its determination to remain ontologically non-committal, the critique surreptitiously pre-supposes a dualistic ontology and thus isn’t as critical as it claims to be.

But the uniqueness of Hegel’s criticism lies in being critical not of this or that epistemology but of epistemology as a whole. It is in this sense that I have distinguished him from the predecessors by arguing that all the earlier turns including the Copernian turn were turns within epistemology whereas the present turn - ‘Hegelian Turn’ as I have called it - is a turn on epistemology.
Hegel's own contribution, on this background is to be understood, therefore, not as a rival epistemological theory but a meta-view about epistemology as such and is based on a consciously accepted absolutistic ontological foundation that according to Hegel leaves no scope for scepticism at all. Section III of this chapter is devoted to this task of laying out the preparatory background of Hegelian phenomenology through a discussion of the typically Hegelian themes such as identity of reason and reality, purposiveness of reason, determinate negation as the moving principle of reality. It is only on a proper understanding of this framework of such an ontology that Hegel's denial or 'relativization' of knowledge and his faith in absolute knowledge can make sense.

Section IV deals with Hegel's own panoramic view of the subject-object dialogue as a reflection of the ongoing dialectical process of reality. Alongwith emphasis on 'internal' criterion, a crucial step against scepticism is 'phenomenalization' of the object. About method, I have argued that Hegel can't be against method but he has dynamized the concept of method.

The last section deals with certain problems in Hegel's programme e.g. his claim to the knowledge of Absolute which violates Hegel's own views. I have argued that Hegelian 'Absolute is not substantially different from Kant's noumena.

After the chapter on Hegel, I found it necessary to have an interlude explaining the transition to Husserl, because Husserl, like Hegel vis-a-vis Kant's does not begin specifically as a reaction to Hegel.

The last chapter begins with Husserl's development from his
early interest in mathematics and its psychological account, through Brentano’s influence to his preoccupation with philosophy as the rigorous science. I have also brought out Husserl’s close links with Plato, Descartes, Kant etc. as well as his divergences with all of them.

In many a respect Husserl has affinities with Kant, more than they are with Hegel, and yet he represent a distinct advance over both of them in carrying his phenomenology to its logical culmination of disontologization. Moreover, he is also distinct from both of them in insisting on ‘seeing’ as against thinking. But, in spite of its earlier descriptive tendency, phenomenology is nothing but an attempt to grasp the essence of knowledge; the underlying belief is that if that is grasped, knowledge of objects isn’t a problem. It is for this purpose that Husserl is presented as getting over-engrossed in the issue of reductions as the steps to ‘seeing’ the essence of knowledge.

The next section aims at showing that inspite of radical differences in approach Husserl, too, faces some perennial problems such as the problem of circularity involved in ‘seeing the essence of ‘seeing’, problems in the use of language as the medium of knowing and communicating. In the end, I have attracted attention towards an inherent tension between the intuitive and categorial (rational) ways of knowing though both of them are necessary in their own ways.

The concluding chapter opens up with a synoptic presentation of the strategies devised by Kant, Hegel and Husserl with a view to bring out the commonalities with respect to certain problems, alternatives explored to face them and arguments on certain points.
In a way the three paradigms can be regarded as dialectically related and hence as members of the same family. As such, they agree on certain points such as their criticism of past philosophy; the models of apodeictic knowledge or anxiety to overcome sceptical challenge in a non-conventional way. I have argued that their turning upon the self is the joint result of these similarities. As a consequence, all of them are similar in making a distinction between first-order empirical cognitions and second-order reflective inquiry. Yet, as in none of them this distinction is not well clarified, I have argued for the need of going to the basis of this distinction as a precondition for the existence of philosophy as critique.

Similarly, it has been pointed out that all of them are aware of the problem of clarifying the need to specify the mode of access to the transcendental level as well as that of characterizing reflection as a distinct act of consciousness.

However, there is found to be a radical divergence on the issue of the method of critique. But, as I have shown, in spite of resorting to different conceivable alternatives - using external criteria or one internally developed; priority of method versus simultaneity; reliance on intuition or reason - a satisfactory critique fails to emerge. I have argued that perhaps this failure must be traced back to certain inadequacies in our language which must be used by both the camps - intuitionist or rationalist - for incorporating and communicating the results of their inquiry. I have questioned whether an adequate language that is ontologically non-committal and that does justice to both intuition and reason is possible. Lastly, I have drawn attention to the common feature of two egos in all the
paradigms.

In the next section, I have dealt with the radical changes in our understanding of the very nature of mathematics and physics in the last century and claimed that not only that the two disciplines cannot serve as models of our knowledge, but due to the new emergent picture of the world, we need to reconsider the relation between subject and object.

In the last section, I have brought out certain common features in the three paradigms of critique in relation to the challenge of scepticism and have shown how each one of them takes scepticism positively as the gateway to a higher level of philosophizing and thus appreciates the value of scepticism.