ABSTRACT

Explaining the Title

The title contains within it the problematique of the critique of knowledge as developed by Postmodern thinkers like Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida on the one hand and Modern thinkers like Jurgen Habermas. Even though all three of them join in a critique of metaphysical foundations of knowledge as conceived within 'Modern' concept of knowledge, their mode of critique is so different that they derive different conclusions. This creates a problem in appropriating them in a linear-homogeneous comparison and thereby turns it into a task of comparison of mutually incommensurable positions taken by these three philosophers. I divide the thesis in the following seven chapters:


Chapter Two: Richard Forty's Poetics of Knowledge: A Critical Revision.
Configuring 'Knowledge'

Philosophy is the space opened up by our access to the world, a space that explains our knowledge of the world. Philosophical knowledge is 'reflective' and 'reflexive' in character: it is reflective to the extent that it represents the world in the conceptual description that philosophy creates through reflection and it is reflexive to the extent that it comes back to the world with its conceptual description of the world.
Critique of knowledge originates from an interrogation of the concept of knowledge as available within a theory of knowledge. The critique engages itself with 'how' and 'what' of the concept of knowledge, which means the 'concepts' with their 'limits' that go into making a concept of knowledge are analysed in a critique of knowledge. Therefore one can say that critique of knowledge makes knowledge-as-such its subject of analysis by analysing the concept of knowledge embedded in it. Further critique of knowledge locates an explanatory gap in a theory and re-orientes it to overcome that limitation.

This whole terrain of critique of knowledge is a movement from self-certain construction of knowledge to what makes such knowledge possible. Within this terrain, critique turns introspective to check whether the theory of knowledge that explains knowledge has interior consistency and exterior confirmation, but that merely closes it to a certain authoritative claim of knowledge. What happens in this kind of a situation is that (i) knowledge-as-such is constituted by a metaphysical subsumption/sublation of the world under consciousness.
and (ii) there is a phenomenological reduction of the world under consciousness. In both these cases, the question of theorizing knowledge-as-such derives its epistemic explanation from the metaphysical or phenomenological prioritization of human consciousness, which does not allow knowledge an independent alley to conform itself in the world by implying only a guided access to the world. The negative condition that knowledge-as-such shall exclude realm of objects by just taking its representation within human consciousness opens up the avenue for explaining 'human being in the context of a knowledge-situation' in terms of situating being in the world. Situating being in the world as belonging to both being and being of beings shows that it belongs to neither of them as being of beings and being cannot exist both ways. This peculiarity of situation of human being as a being among beings and as a being of the beings both demonstrate the negative conditions of exclusion of one mode from another.

The radical debunking of the human subject and the consequent re-interpretation of knowledge contribute to the focal tension in Rorty, Derrida and Habermas's
critique of knowledge. While Rorty and Derrida formulates an impossibility of knowledge in its authentic and truthful form, Habermas rediscovers knowledge in certain universal 'forms of life'. For Rorty and Derrida meaning of human action and human life cannot be known as a 'whole' but can only be known by setting it in contexts and changing these contexts. For Rorty and Derrida the life-contexts merely demonstrates that one's concept of knowledge can neither itself be fixed and determined nor it can claim its authority to know these concepts. For Habermas, still, life and world can be approached from a vantage that consists in knowing life and world and in this process of acquiring valid knowledge about something one's already ordained theory of knowledge can come into play.

Chapter-II entitled Richard Rorty's Poetics of Knowledge:A critical revision discusses how Rorty takes a certain position upon the traditional view of knowledge. First, grounding a knower on the basis of certain capacity to know, reflect or view is a metaphysical construction giving rise to two different realms: 'subjective' and 'objective', between which a relation of
mutual dependence, one standing upon other is conceived. This mode of construction of knowing subject in Cartesian - Kantian - phenomenological schools of thought, for Rorty, made Philosophy a systematic discipline that appropriates physical reality within mental realm and constructs a mental realm that produces a mirror of the world. This critique of human subject and its image of an Archimedean point of view upon the world removes the 'foundational' concept of knowledge and instead relocates knowledge in the language through which human practices find an expression. Language also is removed from its Cartesian innateness to a field of open-ended and live social interactions that creates the world for the human being and opens the world for the human being who stands upon the 'mental' and 'detached' edifice of linguistic foundations to see the world from outside.

So far as Derrida is concerned, chapter-III highlights how continuing the notion of human subject as 'knower' produces a 'closure' in knowledge, which means holding back the never ending play between world and human being by positing a certain finality and by returning to a certain origin, ground, truth or logos.
Derrida calls this an ethico-theoretical decision to bring the play of oppositions to an end in order to produce a singular meaning effect by deferring the opposition that constituted the decision. Human subject as 'knower' assumes that kind of a power to make its self the subject of such an ethico-theoretical decision that goes along with the centrality of human subject and opens up both knowledge and human subject to an open ended play of knowledge and world represented in a medium of knowledge.

Exploring both these styles one can see that there is a common ground between Rorty and Derrida in the matter of dislodging the human subject by making a critique of its Archimedean point of view (in Rorty) and by making a critique of ethico-theoretical decision to project such a view (in Derrida). His abandoning of the human subject as a knower with an autonomous self-endowed warrant to reflect and to take a decision leads to a greater emphasis on language as a medium that acts as constitutive of and constituted by human practices in such a manner that there is an ongoing and live interplay between language and human practice. For Rorty, such an
interplay both limits and opens up the meanings attributed to the human practice and life so that it is neither universal nor final at a point. For Derrida, language is a possibility and he transposed this possibility of infinite structural play within knowledge itself. Again, for both Rorty and Derrida, the metaphysical and phenomenological description of human knowledge is a damp squib as it essentializes, determines and fixes knowledge. Rorty abandons the human subject as a knower altogether and redescribes human subject in term of possibilities within language, while Derrida analyzes the Heideggerian move, to ontologize the human subject in Being and finds a closure that comes through its manifestations and determinations that makes Being 'a denial of its own possibilities' and a fulfilment in an absolute abundance. Both these extreme possibilities of Ontology, for Derrida, represents a metaphysical calling of the other side and hence produces a closure. So, Derrida denies Ontology by way of exploring its possibilities and exploring such possibilities in an Ontology constitutes a crucial step in Derridean restriction of the play of Being.
Chapter-IV discusses how for Habermas, 'the paradigm of philosophy of consciousness' represents a metaphysics of essential ground/nature of experience and an omniscient subjectivity, which needs to be forsaken in order to attain knowledge. The paradigm of philosophy of consciousness puts an idealistic demand to the knower to self-referentially incorporate the conditions of knowing in theory which justifies all its formulations about the world. Abandoning such theoretical moves within philosophy makes Habermas start from the 'life-world' of societies, which ironically leads him to theorize the universal structures of life-world in normative terms which indicates a possibility of universal and uninterrupted communicative action. The normative foundations of communicative action are derived in a neo-Kantian a-priori forms of cognition that explains what is there in the world and the society.

Chapter-V entitled, *Critical Polemic-I: Habermas’ Critique of Rorty and Derrida: Response, Counter-Critique and Counter-Response*, brings out Habermas’ modernist critique of Rorty and Derrida primarily directed to their abandonment of criteria of validity and their
occultation of meaning in language. Rorty’s response to such critique reaffirms a non-dualistic and non-reductive coherentism between belief, language and world, while Derrida’s counter-response shows up an interminability of the play of meaning.

Chapter-VI entitled, Critical Polemics-II: Postmodernism’s Inner Subversions: Rorty and Derrida in Crossing reproduces mutual critiques between Rorty and Derrida. It shows a coincidence between them in their abandonment of metaphysical circle of Reason and acceptance of a discursive idea of Reason. But they diverge in explicating the role of language. The critical difference between them, which comes through Rorty’s critique of deconstruction as self-subversive and Derrida’s critique of Pragmatism in terms of a simultaneous critique of determinacy of decisions and the undecidability involved in it. But the chapter hails Pragmatism’s ever renewing possibility of arriving at some positive decisions.

Chapter-VII entitled, Conclusion & Evaluation discusses how Rorty and Derrida generate
incommunicability through their refusal to common
devices to using language. Summing up the thesis the
chapter affirms that postmodernism prioritizes language
as constitutive of human subject and gets embroiled into
representation of the Subject, while modernism develops
an inter-subjective character of language that serves the
omnipurpose of knowledge, culture and society.