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 on the other. 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.
Chapter Three: The Play of Presence and Absence: Derrida’s Project of Deconstruction.

Chapter Four: Postmetaphysical Critique of Knowledge: Habermas’ Project of Modernity.


Chapter Six: Critical Polemics-II: Postmodernism’s Inner Subversions: Rorty and Derrida in Crossing.

Chapter Seven: Evaluation and Conclusion.

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.
Therefore philosophical knowledge turns knowledge both into a subject of reflection/representation as well as reflexion. Philosophical knowledge could be distinguished from knowledge of particulars by those special functions of 'reflection' and 'reflexion', because both of these give 'knowledge' an in-built power to account for knowledge of particulars. This becomes evident in the a-priori modes of knowledge, when without even 'knowledge of particulars', knowledge of something could be attained. Therefore 'knowledge' which is able to 'reflect' and 'reflex' is philosophical in character and such philosophical knowledge could be called knowledge-as-such, which makes knowledge of something a subject of description and analysis.¹

An account of philosophical knowledge or knowledge-as-such is constituted by three aspects: (i) the role of human subject as knower, (ii) knowing about the world and (iii) returning to the concrete with what is already known, that is, attainment of a capacity to have an access to the world on the basis of what is known about. All these three aspects empower the human subject to have a grasp upon the world and make a certain claim about the
world. Further these three aspects are co-ordinated and performed in an efficient way if these basic roles and acts are 'theorized'. Such a theorization shall obviously incorporate the role of human subject and her basic drives for knowledge. Theory is meant to first comprehend this whole 'process' of knowledge and then to provide an explanatory support for our claims of knowledge. Again, all these three aspects of knowledge-as-such are theorized in a theory of knowledge. The theorization depends upon the introspection within knowledge-as-such about its own constitution, because such an introspection is engendered not only in understanding the world, but also in assessing its own efficiency. This introspection within knowledge-as-such assumes self-reflexivity and thereby gives rise to a criterion of an internal self-sufficiency, with which it reflects and reflexes upon the world.

1. This introspection within knowledge-as-such is meaningful in primarily two ways: by way of transparency and by way of confirmation. At the first, it provides a criterion to adjudge a theory by its own self-evaluative criterion and secondly,
an exterior criterion is created to place a theory over and against the world that it describes.

2. Principle of reason is confirmed and based upon such interior and exterior criterion of 'transparency' and 'confirmation'. Reason as an exercise of human faculty(ies), later known as 'mind' was given different descriptions by either distinguishing and separating the two criteria or by colluding it in a single theory.

3. The 'interior' and 'exterior' criteria of 'transparency' and 'confirmation' act as presupposition of a theory of knowledge. In applying such a theory to cases of knowledge and claims of knowledge, such criteria themselves are never 'subject' of these cases and claims, rather the cases and claims are 'subject' of these criteria.

4. One implication of this 'subjectivation' of cases and claims of knowledge is that knowledge of something is always already a subject of judging whether it fulfils these criteria or not. This further implies that 'claims' engendering out of knowledge situations require an 'interior' and 'exterior' justification. The task for a theory of
knowledge is to provide that kind of justification by way of mapping claims and cases of knowledge within knowledge-as-such.

5. This justificatory move of knowledge of something within philosophical knowledge is self-critical, which is directed to attainment of truth-value, or the status of truth. Theory of knowledge employs self-critical moves in order to gain authenticity.

**Critique of Knowledge**

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-oriens it to overcome that **limitation**. Critique of knowledge therefore gives rise to a re-oriented and hence a 'new' theory of knowledge by
way of modifying the shortcomings of an earlier theory of knowledge. In other words, themes within a theory of knowledge supply the cues for interrogation for a critique and the critique problematizes those themes by locating an 'explanatory gap' in the theory itself and finally, offer new solutions to the problems embedded in the earlier solution by creating another explanation, ultimately by giving another theory of knowledge.

1. In the case of Cartesian critique of knowledge, the interior self-sufficiency of knowledge and the exterior confirmation of knowledge collapsed into a singular criterion of certitude of the ego-self known through meditations within one's mind. The exterior criterion of confirmation was subjected under the criterion of self certitude giving rise to a bi-polarity between mind(self) and world, in which mind can exclude the world by conceiving an idea of the world. The central thematic of Cartesian critique became an interrogation of the certitude of external reality and a surge for self-subsistent ideas within mental realms that form 'knowledge'.

²
2. Hume interrogated this Cartesian meditative process by pointing out that ideas do not have a basis except impressions of the world through our senses and such sense-data can only give rise to naive realization. Hume rejected both the Cartesian claim that the reason can comprehend the world and that the external reality could be known in ideas. Reason for Hume, could only give rise to belief about the external world and nothing more.

3. The Cartesian critique of knowledge producing scepticism about the world, later to be realised only in Ideas and Humean radicalization of Cartesian doubt prevailed over Kant while asking the question, "what is the condition of possibility of experiencing the world?" (paraphrased by me). In discussing the condition of possibility, Kant thematized 'human mind' as the faculty of knowledge with its categories of understanding leaving aside the passive objects of knowledge in the world as 'phenomena' constituted by the 'representations' of thing-in-itself. Such a thematization of human mind domesticated the external world in terms of transcendentally deduced categories that subsume
concepts under it, which further subsumes representations. Therefore Kantian condition of possibility produces a theory of knowledge that presupposes the presence of human consciousness as 'representation in general' endowing the capacity to deduce categories and concepts to have the grasp of the world. This presupposition of an active human consciousness in the act of uniting manifold of representation within an unity of experience. The subject of this unity of experience is a singular 'I' who continues in an consciousness of the representation. Kant closes off his critique of any possibility of multiplicity of experiences of the same object by the same 'self' conditioning its experiences into a unity by being acted upon by a conscious self as a necessity. Kant locates the idea of the 'self' as the centre of consciousness and as a centre, it produces an unity of consciousness. Still, it does not explain within its self-subsistent transparency. The relationship between consciousness and what it endows in the faculty of the human self, is taken to be primitive and given.
4. This givenness of consciousness persists in Hegel’s speculative critique of Kant for his non-thematization of the contradiction between consciousness as ‘form’ and its ‘content’ which is an object ‘x’, sublated in an identity within consciousness. This sublation takes place through abstraction that assumes the form of a contradiction to be dissolved in the Being. Hegel’s critique of Kant goes in the Kantian direction of a theory of knowledge that makes knowledge the speculative reappropriation of ‘Being’ in human consciousness.

5. The ‘explanatory gap’ in Kant’s theory of knowledge is created by the givenness of consciousness as a general form of representation that does not explain its relationship with categorical knowledge. Husserl explains this relationship between consciousness and categorical knowledge by attributing the Noesis (meaning-giving act), that is the directionality of consciousness onto the pure and ideal object extracted through eidetic reduction and/or transcendental reduction to consciousness itself. Participation of consciousness in the ‘meaning-giving’ act is again by an envelopment of the world
within transcendental ego and hence, again a one-sided abstraction for the world.  

6. Heidegger radicalizes this problem of consciousness in his project of overcoming metaphysics in so far philosophically conceived world, a world within consciousness. Heidegger's re-interpretation combined the question of knowing the world with the question of consciousness in a two-fold logic: one, knowledge of world is the knowledge of the being of the world and two, knowledge of being of the world is the knowledge of the being in the world. He introduces the concept of being as something which is neither a concept nor a thing but as something just there, the moment anything is known in the world, it is known by a being, it is being's knowledge of other beings. This knowledge is just a disclosure of other beings, the way they appear but not the way they are. In such a disclosure, one is merely conscious of oneself as a being among other beings neither knowing what there is, nor knowing what constitutes the 'being' in oneself. Therefore, there is a primordial absence of knowledge of being in being's knowledge which is merely a consciousness
of other beings in the way they are disclosed in one's consciousness. This primordial absence of knowledge shows that consciousness does not immediately have the capacity to know the world fully, it is limited to the extent to which the world is disclosed in one's consciousness. This could be considered as a critique of immanence of consciousness that was hitherto treated to be either a given (in Kant) or as a source of transcendental knowledge. Also it could be considered as a critique of condition of possibility of knowledge because it indicates a possibility of impossibility of knowledge.

As there is just a disclosure of the being of the world in the form of being of other in being's knowledge, which is also a disclosure of the being of the self in knowledge, knowledge can never be complete and unitary, but always fractured between being of the 'other' and being of the 'self'. This chasm within being's knowledge reveals being as aporetic in being's knowledge, which it recognizes to be knowledge of the 'self' and the 'other' as well. Heidegger sees this state of knowledge as
forgetfulness of being, which is forgetting of the being of all beings. The forgetfulness appears in its current form due to exaggeration of being's knowledge as authentic and complete. Therefore Heidegger prescribed a method of destruction of knowledge which identified being's knowledge as drawing an identity between being and claims knowledge of being in various human sciences. This destruction is directed at knowledge claimed to be knowledge of being as claimed by beings. It is directed in this way to reveal the ignorance of being about being to itself, so that being searches out its authentic face with an authentic understanding of being. It is interesting here to note that destruction reveals that being's knowledge of the world is incomplete and this incompleteness is revealed from being's knowledge itself. This is why destruction belongs to construction of that incomplete knowledge by the being and hence falls within the same logic of construction which can never know the being. At the level of destruction, being of the incomplete knowledge is revealed in the form of beings who know it and from this the being could only be further distant. Therefore, destruction is a method of knowing the being, it is concealed as soon as knowledge of being
as being's knowledge of itself and others is disclosed. Knowledge of being remains perpetually concealed in being knowledge. This shows that the attempt of knowing or having knowledge of the world is never complete as it is constituted by the very possibility of impossibility of knowledge. This is what Heidegger calls 'Being' under erasure and designates it by a 'cross' in the world. Being in this form as a possibility of impossibility simply means that the impossibility of full and total realization of Being by being in the existential-temporal conditions of its possibility, i.e., the possibility of Being. The absolute impossibility is its ultimate possibility and this is how Being is to be realized by beings. Only when the absolute impossibility of Being takes over the possibility of Being, there is death, the most authentic event that makes possible a simultaneous possibility and impossibility of Being.  

'Problems' in the Critique of Knowledge

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. It utilizes the concepts available within the theory for the ratification of the theory, but an interrogation of those concepts from within and without remains open. From within, the relationship of knowledge-as-such with the given is a source of explanatory gap, retaining which the theory of knowledge fulfils its purpose. From without, the claim of confirmation of knowledge appears problematic once the claim is placed against the realm of objects. A critique of knowledge, therefore, brings a consistency within theory by utilizing the internal tools, which it opens up to an exterior realm of objects lying beyond. A Cartesian - Kantian - Husserlian critique manages to subside this exterior realm by closing a theory upon objects appropriated within it. Heideggerian critique demonstrates that an appropriation of being in knowledge is possible only by abandoning the claim of completeness of knowledge and Being remains not only as a surplus over knowledge, but also as an exterior.
Therefore, certain problems could be located within a critique of knowledge. Phenomenality of the phenomenon can only be described within a theory, of which a critique is possible on the condition that the knowledge of the phenomenon does not include the perspective from which it is known. Kantian-Husserlian prioritization of the consciousness leads to knowing how consciousness takes a grasp upon the world without knowing what the consciousness is. This only shows that knowledge-as-such is compared on the negative conditions that the critique cannot subject consciousness under its analytical focus. This may re-establish that both the theory and its critique are subjects of the negative conditions that consciousness can’t be brought under their purview. 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. This peculiarity of human beings is expressed in knowledge and specially in philosophical knowledge embodying theories and their critique. It implies that human knowledge is merely situational and contextual and Being as the ultimate ground of human knowledge is only partially retrieved, rather it is put under 'erasure' in knowledge-situations. Therefore, Being as the being of all beings is an ontology that makes human knowledge subject to its ontos without even allowing its realisation within the limits of knowledge. So this question of knowledge becomes the
question of Being which only partially reveals the Being of what is in the form of knowledge.

**Distinction between ‘Post-Modern’ and ‘Modern’ Critique of Knowledge**

We can read in the previous discussion, a clear distinction of styles of critiques. In Cartesian-Kantian-Husserlian kind of critique, knowledge itself is not problematized, but what is problematized is the ways and means of knowledge. In other words, 'how' of knowledge is problematized, which 'what' of knowledge has left out. As a contrast, Heidegger not only problematizes the relationship between consciousness and knowledge by way of setting in the context of Being, but sets Being as the ground of knowledge, which makes both the ground of knowledge and knowledge as aporetic and impossible in character. This ontological move dissolves both the metaphysical problem of accommodating knowledge within consciousness and the phenomenological problem of advancing knowledge through an envelopment of the world in consciousness. But it does not dissolve the problem of knowledge altogether, rather it brings out the incomprehension of knowledge in knowing the Being.
A theory that does not problematize the concept of non-problematization of knowledge basically aims at extending its scope and attaining certitude by way of accommodating it within the field of consciousness. This extension of the possibility of knowledge in terms of greater role of human consciousness develops a synthetic theory of knowledge that acclaims universality infallibility and authenticity in it. A critique of knowledge that fulfils this kind of an epistemic telos is Modern in character which goes for having full justificatory devices within its fold. The truth-claims attached to such a fulfilled state of knowledge is global, as theoretically speaking, it can fulfil the goal of knowing the world in consciousness. What marks a positive description 'Modern' in a theory of knowledge is a theory of claiming authenticity and truth of knowledge by virtue of its objective and foundational basis. Two distinct theoretical possibilities arise here: one, its support and secondly, it's need to distinguish the claim and its support as two different realms as in mental-physical distinction. But the efficacy of the theory in crucially bridging up the two realms reduce a claim,
singular by nature, without allowing the human subject to
dissociate herself from knowledge rather in relation to
the immediate object of knowledge, it stands as a mediate
subject. The claim I know 'p' in the modern sense,
therefore represents the iron rule that knowledge can't
be disjointed from the knower and further knowledge of
'p' bears within it a self-present subject in a close
proximity. The knower returns to 'p' with the already
acquired knowledge of 'p' in this indissociable self-
presence. The ontological commitment of such a theory of
knowledge lies in ascribing knowledge to a human subject,
who knows by an access to the world. Ironically
ontological commitment of such a theory to human subject
also aims at having a 'world totally independent of our
knowledge' as a condition of having 'human' as the
subject of the world or the ontos.

Problematisation of knowledge can begin with its own
resources by setting them in the context of world. The
way Heidegger sets knowledge in the context of world is
by asking the question about Being of what is and an
answer to the question cannot be exhaustive as being of
what is lies beyond thematization within knowledge. As
Being of knowledge stipulated as Modern cannot be determined within itself, so it transgresses the limits of a theory of knowledge and emanates an explanatory gap. What emerges through the gap is the knowledge that knowledge of Being can't be fully exhausted, as being of knowledge can't thematize the Being of knowledge within itself. Being of knowledge overcomes the being of knowledge and the knowledge of being as well. This unthematizable knowledge of Being problematizes knowledge of being and inaugurates a radical undecidability about claim of knowledge. One can say that the ontology of knowledge can't be thematized within knowledge itself and it inaugurates a difference between ontic knowledge and ontology of knowledge. This problematization demonstrates the ontological impossibility of knowledge which gives rise to the very possibility of the knowledge of the ontic. Further, this problematization of knowledge problematizes the whole Modern project of expanding the universe of knowledge by making it collateral with human consciousness, as it shows the radical impossibility of the knowledge of the Being leading to non-comprehension of Being in human knowledge. Unless Being is comprehended, how can the project of Modern knowledge in
knowing the world be completed? One can tell this mode of problematization of the limits of human knowledge as 'Post-modern' as it inaugurates possibilities of Being as the other of knowledge that escapes knowledge.

One cue for problematization of knowledge, therefore, is asking the question about ontological commitment of a theory of knowledge. For example, the ontological commitment of Cartesian and Kantian theory of knowledge is to attain self-evident knowledge of the world, while the ontological commitment of a Heideggerian critique of knowledge lies in recovering the Being from knowledge-as-such. Deciphering the ontological commitment of theories of knowledge helps one to understand the limits of critique involved in such theories and whether the critique problematizes knowledge or not. Ontological commitment of a theory of knowledge by referring to concepts and objects can be known by the subject of its critique and how it relates that subject in its description of knowledge. Such description of knowledge gives rise to specific language in which the theory of knowledge is inscribed and a critique of knowledge can
reveal its ontological commitment by making the language used in the theory as its subject of critique.

With the rise of linguistic philosophy, the critique of language, that is the concept used in a theory of knowledge are made subjects of critique, through which the ontological commitment of that theory could be registered. Critique of concepts used in language involves the semantic presentation of these concepts and what they refer to. Semantic presentation of these concepts makes proposition about the world that needs to be interpreted. Interpretation of proposition in a theory of knowledge by understanding what they refer to provides an understanding of the ontology that is in view in the theories. A critique of knowledge that accepts the semantic meaning as it is and identifies the reason behind framing certain proposition ends up by merely analyzing the structure of the theory of knowledge. Such an analysis confined within the semantic of theory does not displace the theory but brings out its ontological commitment in semantic term. This kind of a critique could be termed as a critique within the 'given' theory of knowledge and hence it reproduces the theory in its
own terms. The ontology of the theory is merely interpreted in such critiques and this is what would be termed as 'Modern' as it runs contemporary with the theory itself.

Another kind of critique that interrogates the semantic structure of theory of knowledge by way of relating the references of such a theory to the context, which gives rise to the theory or analyse the references in newer contexts, crosses the already determined descriptive context laid in the theory. This kind of critique brings out the reason for using certain concepts within the theory and interprets it as a construction of that theory. The critique figures out how the theory presents itself and interrogates in the theory. Such a positioning of critique in what the theory excludes, even though such and excluded domain constitutes the possibility of the theory, makes the critique overcome the limits of the theory that it critiques. Such overcoming of the theory-laden meanings conferred in the concepts open up the possibility of new interpretation and reformulation of the ontology or argues a new ontology altogether. This is what in its style presents
postmodern critique of knowledge. Such a critique thwarts the Modern character of the theory by enacting a problematique within the theory that displaces it, while 'Modern' characteristic would have been to retain the framework of the theory even in the case of rejecting a particular theory.

Styles of Problematization in Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida and Jurgen Habermas

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.

1. 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.14

2. So far as Derrida is concerned,15 continuing the human subject as 'knower' produces a 'closure' in knowledge, which means holding back the never ending play between world1 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.

3. 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.

Formulation of the 'Problem' of the Thesis

At a general level, the critique of knowledge in Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida and Jacque Habermas is aimed at abandonment of the human subject as a knower. Rorty and Derrida problematizes the concept of knowledge even after abandonment of human subject. Both of them develops an alternative concept of knowledge, which is close to a concept of play than to truth, finality and determinacy. Rorty advocates a concept of language which is culturally bound and which does not lay any claim of knowledge in traditional sense but articulates the needs of 'self' and 'community'. Contrarily Derrida's concept
of language is an interpretative move that overcomes limits sets by our knowledge of the world. He problematizes 'knowledge' by locating how language interlopes into the construction of human knowledge to extend it beyond its professed closure. Both Rorty and Derrida prioritizes the role of language in making the 'self', 'community' and the 'world', which involves, for Rorty, a matrix of social relationship; and for Derrida, an interminable interplay between the concepts within language that give rise to a new meaning, interpretation and description of the world. Therefore, critique of knowledge in Rorty and Derrida is a problematization of the relationship of human subject with its knowledge-claims in terms of language that acts as a medium for representation. As we have characterized such a problematization of knowledge by problematizing its ontological commitment and characterized the problematization as 'post-modern', Rorty and Derrida’s problematization bears this problematization of ontological commitment of knowledge, and hence, it is 'post-modern'. 
Contrarily, even though Habermas accepts this radical capability of language, he favours neither a culturally bound concept of language nor an infinite possibility of meanings within language. He begins from the mode of usage of ordinary language, in which speech-acts presuppose certain universally shared presuppositions of meaning and communication. Habermas reconstructs these presuppositions. Therefore, critique of philosophy of consciousness is directed by him towards rediscovering the pragmatic presupposition in ordinary speech-acts. Knowledge is constituted by the possibility of uninterrupted communication provided by pragmatic presuppositions of speech acts. Habermas links up these pragmatic presuppositions of communication with the tripartite structural division of modern society in spheres of cognition, morality and aesthetics giving rise to three kinds of validity claims in knowledge. Therefore Habermas based his critique of knowledge upon language that mediates between knowledge as communicative action and spheres of modern society. He establishes a horizontal relationship between communication, language, knowledge and society in an integrated theory of
modernity in which any one of the elements wholly bear
the structure of the other.

For the purpose of comparing the three distinct
critiques of knowledge, I propose to compare ‘Postmodern’
and ‘Modern’ positions with reference to knowledge as
available in the texts of these three philosophers and as
discussed above. The comparison shall take each
philosopher at a time and shall identify these strands
within everyone’s writing separately.

1. As a specific problem, Rorty’s abandonment of
Philosophy in conversation and poetry creates a
critical tension within philosophy. On the one hand,
Rorty suggests creation of culturally specific
criterion of knowledge and interprets language with
such a criterion and on the other, he is suggesting
an exploration into ‘genres’ of literature for
overcoming the bind of ‘final vocabulary’ in a
‘poetics of self making’. Such a dichotomy in Rorty
ultimately keeps ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres
strictly separate and by implication, separates
‘philosophy’ from ‘literature’. The thesis advances
the thesis that a search for 'common human nature' shall allow us to continue with this apparent dichotomy.

2. In case of Derrida, Deconstruction as a means to overcome presence as logos and opening up a play of 'presence' and 'absence' produces a central tension in his project. On the one hand, Deconstruction opens up new possibilities of meaning and on the other, it operates within the metaphysics of presence. Therefore the thesis raises the question, does deconstruction as critique confine itself within the circularity of presence? If it is so, does deconstruction turn against itself? The thesis shall explore into this problematique.

3. In Habermas, structuration of communicative action in terms of pragmatic presuppositions of speech-acts and its later interpretation in construing a 'discourse ethics' provides a holistic explanation of the relationship between human subject and communication. The central tension in such constructivism of Habermas is his derivation of normative foundation of communicative action from the life-world context, which is gradually
integrated into the spheres of modernity and thereby transformation of life-world into public sphere is increasingly developing its own transformed norms. In such a situation, does Habermas's theory of communicative action and discourse ethics explain this transformation or impoverishes its theoretical tools?

Such specific problems further opens up two distinct levels of comparisons. At one level, specific problem accruing from individual philosopher's explication could be brought in parallel. At another level, critique and debate between these three philosophers provide an exhilarating fulcrum to the problem of critique of knowledge.

1. Rorty's advocacy of a culturally rooted knowledge system closely interlinked with the use of language inaugurates a liberal community. Derrida's 'community of interpreters' who shares protocols of reading and Habermas's communicatively structured community share a common ground, but don't their ways of explanation mutually problematize each
other? Rorty's grounding of a liberal community goes opposed to Derrida's deconstructive practice of ongoing radicalization of language and knowledge situated in a community and vice versa? Habermas's normative structuration of communicative action presents the picture of a society that subdues differences into a consensus and hence reproduces the structures of status quo. The comparison shall explore the incommensurability of epistemic explanation between them.

2. At another level, mutual debates between Rorty, Derrida and Habermas bring out the irresolvable problems between these perspectives. Especially, Habermas philosophical allegation about Derrida's retrogression of enlightenment into mysticism of monotheistic Being and Rorty's critique of systematicity in Habermas's notion of consensus and Habermas response to it by terming Rorty as 'conservative' provide cues to one another's philosophy for the other point of view. The thesis shall demarcate the area of convergence and difference between them.
This comparison on the above stated aspects shall bring about another set of question: What happens to knowledge and critique of knowledge in postmodernity (as in Rorty and Derrida) and in modernity (as in Habermas)? The thesis shall present an overview that is arrived at after this comparison and provide an openended answer to the question. ¹⁷
NOTES


5. One can read here the beginning of a critical disfiguring of Kant. A philosophical-hermeneutic account could be read in de Man, "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant" in Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica (eds.), Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects, Univ. of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1984, pp. 121-44.


17. The thesis leaves the problems in a loose and disentangled relationship without a final conclusion and only attempts at culling some tentative conclusion that are revisionary in nature.