

Interrogating Kant and Husserl on the Ethico-Political Implications of Transcendental Philosophy

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Abstract

Transcendental philosophy is characterized by the attempt to understand the fundamental structures of our ordinary experience- it is in a sense 'metaphysics of experience'. In the history of western philosophy we find various conceptions of the transcendental. Of these varieties three traditions stand out: The Greek, the Kantian and the Phenomenological traditions. These traditions differ considerably; yet they all contend that philosophy is 'a search for the radical and foundational structures of experience and reality'. This paper focuses on the second and third traditions. Within the Kantian tradition, the transcendental is understood as the objective condition of knowledge and experience. Unlike the Greek tradition, Kant does not take the transcendental to be the object of knowledge rather as 'the immanent structure of knowledge'. Phenomenological transcendentalism discloses a conception of the transcendental which is radically different from the objectivistic approach of the Greeks as well as from the Kantian conception. While the latter takes the transcendental to be immanent to the subject, phenomenology takes it to be both transcendent and immanent. This article examines the two latter traditions to analyze the ethico-political implications of transcendental philosophy. The essentially 'dichotomizing structure' of transcendental philosophy gives rise to a problematic of inter-subjectivity. I shall discuss the problem of intersubjectivity in light of the three ethico-political implications of transcendental philosophy viz. epistemological determinacy, the elimination of the body and the primacy of the theoretical. The analysis hopes to show the essential relation between transcendental philosophy and structures of domination and oppression.

Keywords: Epistemological determinacy, freedom, intersubjectivity, phenomenology, transcendental philosophy

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Introduction

Transcendental philosophy, as articulated by Immanuel Kant and Edmund Husserl, has significant ethico-political implications that extend over various aspects of human life. Although transcendental philosophy aimed at addressing epistemological concerns, its far-reaching impacts on ethical and political thought can no longer be ignored.

Kant's moral philosophy, *inter alia*, is a strong case in point. The categorical imperative, which comprises a universally applicable moral law, provides us with an ethical framework within which human beings treat each other with respect and dignity. More specifically, the principle of *the kingdoms of ends* requires us to avoid treating people as mere tools and instead acknowledge and respect their individuality and autonomy. In the political realm, this transfigures into the need for respect for the intrinsic worth of each individual. This paper examines the profound ethico-political implications (the ethical and political positioning) that transcendental philosophy conveys. Nonetheless, the investigation largely draws on the asymmetrical relation existing between the West and the non-West. It questions whether the *kingdom of ends* can persist without a parallel realm, a *kingdom of means*, whether the presence of a transcendental subject entails a transcendental object.

When recounting the long history of humanity, one might dare to assert, perhaps with slight exaggeration, that it is a compilation of narratives, to some extent, concerning the many acts of atrocity, the shedding of innocent blood, the exploitation, and the oppression perpetrated in the pursuit of freedom and justice. The analysis and questioning of the relation between these concepts and the plethora of terrors committed in their names is long overdue, as neither the political nor the philosophical examination of freedom and justice has been conducted from the standpoint of alterity. Their treatment has largely followed the traditional path of conceptual analysis.

History has been emphatically loud for us to turn a deaf ear. If we have learned anything from history, it is that freedom and justice come at a cost – the cost of lives, the cost of a broken human relation. But who bears the cost? How essential are these costs for the attainment of the ultimate goal? To what extent should the jettisoning of human dignity in the name of freedom be tolerated? These are questions which require serious pondering for anyone who wishes to understand the relation between being and freedom. However, instead of adhering to the customary way of analyzing freedom directly, this article tries to examine the foundational structures on which our conceptions of freedom rely.

This study is not aimed at conducting a direct analysis of freedom. It analyzes freedom considering the theoretical foundation upon which it is based. It attempts to trace the origin of the problem of freedom to the responses given to the fundamental epistemological questions.

I strongly believe that Kant's ethical and political thought (especially his conception of freedom) draws from his response to the problem of knowledge of the external world. To the extent that this response centers on the possibility of the transcendental subject, one can argue that the nature of the dominant conception of freedom advocated by Kant can be deciphered through the analysis of transcendental philosophy.

My interest in the aforementioned epistemological problem (problems associated with the theory of knowledge such as how we come to know the external world) plays second fiddle only to the political issues (the problem of freedom and justice) by which I am troubled. It is because of my profound belief that the ethico-political problem (the problematic of intersubjectivity- understood in terms of the epistemological and ethico-political concerns which arise because of the existence of other human beings) may be addressed, or at least its problems identified, through the analysis of the epistemological problems long debated by modern philosophers rather than by direct analysis of these questions as it is customary to do, that I have embarked on examining transcendental philosophy as a response to the problem of knowledge in general and the problem of the external world in particular.

The methodological approach used for this study involves the analysis of concepts and the formulation of arguments. However, the author conducted the analysis of freedom through the phenomenological approach. To achieve this objective, the article was organized into three parts. The first part involves an examination of the theoretical basis upon which the dominant conception of freedom rests. The examination will be directed at a detailed discussion of transcendental philosophy.

The second part pledges to make a critical appraisal of the implications of transcendental philosophy, which, I will argue, render such ethico-political notions like freedom and justice highly dubious. The third part analyzes the direct relation between transcendental philosophy and the dominant conception of freedom intending to disclose how the problematic of intersubjectivity inevitably ensues from this unholy marriage.

The analysis of transcendental philosophy

Although the idea of emancipation has been lingering for some time before, it was the enlightenment project which embodied one of the most daring emancipatory discourses that we have ever witnessed. Immanuel Kant and his successors have drawn out principles of freedom, justice and equality to ensure the *emancipation of man*. According to Kant enlightenment is understood in terms of “man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage” (1784, p. 1). This statement set the stage for a grand narrative which glorified reason and made it a condition of the possibility of a better life for man. Nevertheless, it was claimed that the emancipation of man (the release from self-incurred tutelage) required the courage and audacity to use one’s own reason, “without direction from another” (Kant, 1784, p. 1). It is clear from this that this emancipatory discourse heavily relied on the highly influential but now questionable premise of the transcendental subject.

Although the influence previously enjoyed by the Kantian conception of the epistemological significance of man manifested through his relation with himself and with the world seems to be on the wane, it still betrays its existence in the emancipatory discourses that are widely accepted in the post-modern world. This is to mean that the emancipatory discourses upon which we entrench the idea of freedom are more or less direct or indirect results of the transcendental conception of man introduced by Rene Descartes and brought to its full fruition by Immanuel Kant and Edmund Husserl. Accordingly, a critique of these discourses will have to allude to the critiques directed at this foundational structure built by modern philosophy.

In this section, I shall endeavor to examine the various models of transcendental philosophy from within the western epistemological spectrum.

Transcendental philosophy is a label generally attached to the philosophies of Kant, Fichte and early Schelling. In this article, however, the expression is used to refer to Kantian critical philosophy and to the Husserlian phenomenological approach to philosophy. The paper examines the Kantian and Husserlian tradition to analyze the essential features which typify transcendental philosophy. Transcendental philosophy is characterized by the attempt to understand the fundamental structures of our ordinary experience- it is in a sense a “metaphysics of experience” (Edie, 1964, p. 53). Transcendental philosophy is a philosophical tradition aimed at examining the nature of knowledge, experience, and reality. Although Kant is credited with developing the idea of transcendental philosophy, the activities associated with it may be traced back to Greek philosophy. The primary focus of this article is on the Kantian version,

which aims to investigate the diverse means through which knowledge of the external world is attained. It involves the attempt to unravel the structures of knowledge in general and knowledge of the world in particular. In so attempting, it identifies the conditions for the possibility of knowledge.

In the history of western philosophy, we find various conceptions of the transcendental. Of these varieties, three traditions stand out: The Greek, the Kantian and the Phenomenological traditions. These traditions differ considerably; yet they all contend that philosophy is a search for the radical and foundational structures of experience and reality.

Although I have limited the focus of this article to the examination of the second and third traditions, I would like to make an observation about the first variety of the transcendental. In the Greek philosophies of essentialism and objectivism, the concept of transcendental is interpreted as an “objective and experiential existence”. Thus, the transcendental is conceptualized as the objective framework of a transcendent existence (Edie, 1964, p. 53).

The Kantian tradition should be appreciated in light of Descartes’ decentering of metaphysics. He was deeply disconcerted by the absence of a certain way of acquiring knowledge. Descartes turned to the thinking subject as the only accessible source of knowledge. It was on this apodictic certitude of the coincidence of self with self that Descartes tried to base certain knowledge. Kant’s project culminated by establishing the metaphysics of subjectivity.

In the Kantian tradition, the transcendental is comprehended as the objective prerequisite for knowledge and experience. In contradistinction to the Greek tradition, Kant does not perceive the transcendental as the object of knowledge, but as the immanent structure of knowledge.

The Kantian transcendental tradition

In the same way that Plato’s division of the world into two realms enabled him to distinguish between the intelligible world of reality and the sensible world of appearance, Kant’s distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds has made the empirical and transcendental selves possible. Plato’s dualism is characterized by a metaphysical and epistemological divide between *The World of Being* and *The World of Becoming*- while the latter pertains to the sensible world of changing objects, the former contains the intelligible world of the Forms. Despite the apparent similarity between Platonic and Kantian dualisms, the latter is much more sophisticated in its structure and far-reaching in its consequences. Kant distanced himself from Plato’s dualism to the extent that he

“abandoned the world of sense and ventured upon the wings of ideas beyond it, into the void space of pure intellect” (Kant, 1781, p. 20).

Within phenomenological discourse, it is a widespread conviction that Husserl’s phenomenology is the point of culmination of the Kantian tradition of transcendental philosophy. The “idea subjectivity is the foundation for objectivity”, for good reasons, has turned out to be a correct and common description for the transcendental style of philosophy (Krijnen in Apostolescu, 2016, p. 280). Kant’s critical inquiry into the faculty of reason and the operations of the mind has laid bare the “pure forms of intuition” which are not only objective conditions of knowledge but transform the subject into the status of the “transcendental”. But Husserl has a slightly different opinion of the beginning of transcendental philosophy.

“It was Descartes who through his meditations founded this modern period, imparted to it its characteristic developmental tendency toward a transcendental philosophy. The *ego cogito* can surely be regarded as the first form of the discovery of transcendental subjectivity” (Husserl, 1974, p. 7). Although Husserl himself was kind enough to attribute the inception of transcendental philosophy to Descartes and his philosophy generally owes a great deal to Descartes, it is an undeniable fact, by his own admission, that his transcendental idealism is a critical appropriation of Kant’s transcendental idealism.

The Kantian justification of knowledge implies two different but complementary analyses: the theme of objectivity in the sense of an *analysis of the object* and the theme of subjectivity in the sense of an *analysis of the act*. It also includes the theme of the subject as a knowing subject, of intentionality (Krijnen in Apostolescu, 2016, p. 286).

Through his transcendental analysis which renders the subject the objective condition of knowledge, Kant has completely altered the Cartesian position that our minds should conform, if knowledge is possible, to the objects of experience. Accordingly, “we know ourselves not only as objects of experience, but also as knowers” (Kosch, 2006, p. 30).

To understand Kant’s formulation of transcendental philosophy it is crucial to examine his analysis of the contrast between the transcendental and empirical subjects. However this distinction cannot be fully grasped without first appreciating the further distinction between two “forms of self-consciousness”: it is within the context of what Kant calls “transcendental apperception” and

“empirical apperception” that the transcendental ego and the empirical ego can be unpacked. While in the first scenario “I am conscious of myself as thinking, and thus in terms of what it is I am thinking (the objects of the sensible world), in the second case I am conscious of myself as an object with certain mental properties” (Kosch, 2006, p. 43).

Zahavi explains this relationship further when he contends that “the distinction is between being aware of oneself as a causally determined known object, as a part of the world, and being aware of oneself a knowing subject as the limit of the world” (Zahavi, 2002, p. 104). Accordingly while the empirical self is part of nature and *ipso facto* an object of knowledge, the transcendental self is the subject whose “apperception” contains not only the condition of knowledge for the empirical subject but most importantly it is the “subject of the categories”.

In his analysis of the two apperceptions Carr aligns the empirical with “direct awareness” and the transcendental with “intentionality” (1999, p. 52). The aboutness or directness of my mental content when I perceive objects outside of me is what he means by transcendental self-consciousness but empirical self-consciousness is limited to my awareness of my relation to the external world at a particular point in time.

The other most important difference between the two apperceptions brings to light the real features of the transcendental subject which I am mainly interested in. Because of the categories, which Kant examines in the Transcendental Deduction and which he considers indispensable together with the “pure forms of intuition”, our relation with the objects of experience takes a sharp turn from what has been portrayed by Descartes.

The laws that constitute nature are laws prescribed by the understanding that stands under the transcendental unity of apperception. Thus, in knowing the sensible world I am represented not only as distinct from it but also as prescribing laws to it. It would seem that I am therefore not subject to its laws but that they are subject to me (Carr, 1999, p. 45).

This subtle description of the relationship between the subject and the external world brings us to the issue we raised above to wit the nature of the transcendental subject.

The first aspect of the transcendental subject is the fact that it can only perceive objects within a framework (Bowie, 2003, p. 21). This framework, as we have seen, involves both the “pure forms of intuition” and the categories

which form essential conditions of knowledge given in intuition i.e. our immediate relation to the objects of experience.

The rift between the two subjects occurs at the precise moment when it is acknowledged that one of them (the transcendental) is a condition of possible experience for *the other* (the empirical). The split indicates

On the one hand, we have an empirical object existing in the world, namely its body. On the other hand, its body obeys laws that are themselves only possible because of the subject's further existence as something that is not in the world (Bowie, 2003, p. 24).

Foucault's description indicates the paradox inherent in such an account by saying "the subject cannot be simultaneously the transcendental condition of possibility of knowledge and an object of empirical inquiry" (Gordon, 1999, p. 5). But this dualistic conception of the subject is essential for the very existence of transcendental philosophy. Despite Foucault's suspicion of its possibility a strong case can be made to defend its historical reality, if not its logical consistency.

In the case of the transcendental, "the self is but a bearer of its representations, sensations, and thoughts, it is the subject of the categories. However the empirical self has personal identity, a history i.e. an individuality that distinguishes it from other persons" (Carr, 1999, p. 44). It is arguable, though, that Kant meant these two subjects to be separate or two faces of the same coin, so to say. According to Bowie, "it is this issue which leads to radically divergent construals of Kant" (2003, p. 24). Carr himself seems to lean to the company of men who prefer to view them as aspects of the same subject.

Regardless of Carr's (or any other philosopher falling to this category) final conclusion that the transcendental subject is not a different self (than the empirical) rather a different description of the same self, we have every reason to believe that Kant is providing us with two different selves. We can reject Carr's final position especially considering the fact that his reason for denying the transcendental subject the status of an independent self while considering the empirical self to be a subject involves Kant's assertion that while the latter "knows itself" the former is merely "conscious of itself".

Instead of dissolving the distinction created by Descartes between the mind and the body, Kant has elevated it to a higher level of abstraction by introducing the notion of the "transcendental". I am not claiming that Kant has

made a wholesale appropriation of Cartesian dualism, my contention rather is that though we might concede that the sort of dualism Kant propounded may be subject to multiple and perhaps contradictory interpretations, we cannot but assent to the often made claim that Kant has maintained the dualism. I further insist, contrary to the prevailing opinion, that Kant upholds both aspects of the dualism: the distinction between the self and the external world as well as the distinction between the mind and the body (it should, however, be stated from the outset that Kant introduces a considerable alteration to this second aspect of the dualism that it is almost unrecognizable).

However the transcendentalization of finitude which aims at transforming the subject into the objective condition of knowledge seems to have an adverse effect on how we relate to *the other*. By Husserl's own admission "the possibility of a transcendental elucidation of subjectivity and world is lost if one follows the Kantian tradition in interpreting transcendental subjectivity as an isolated ego and thereby ignores the problem of transcendental intersubjectivity" (Zahavi, 2002, p. 106). The constitutive capacity of the Kantian transcendental subject does not require the presence of *the other* for its fulfillment. The disregard of *the other* inherent in the transcendental subject has given rise to the formulation of alternative approaches which can supply a better model i.e. one which can accommodate *the other*.

This is manifest, for instance, in the twentieth century turn to intersubjectivity in which the attempt to locate freedom in the transcendental properties of the subject was replaced by the search for emancipatory praxis in the "discursively mediated interaction between subjects" (Nichols, 2009, p. 2). However despite Habermas's insightful analysis, no theory of inter-subjective communicative rationality can "bypass the disclosing function of the pre-reflective activities by which a world of intelligible entities comes into view in the first place" (Nichols, 2009, p. 3). This is to mean that language does not exhaust the whole range of practical, non-cognitive activities.

But the lack of an inter-subjective possibility is not the only problem that the transcendental subject engenders- I have grave doubts as to whether it is even the major problem. The relatively in-depth analysis I have given to the transcendental subject might have shed light on the main problem that emerges out of the Kantian meticulous, yet cryptic description of the transcendental subject. But the subsequent section attempts to throw light on the full implications of such a conception.

Transcendental phenomenology

Husserl was struggling with the same problem that his predecessors have been grappling with- epistemological problem, or to be more precise, the relationship between the subject and the external world. Like Descartes, he was concerned with “the actual experience of the thinking subject, not just with the problem of the validity of knowledge” (Edie, 1964, p. 55). However while Descartes’ reflexive analysis compels him to confine the subject to itself, Husserl’s reflective analysis directed him towards the transcendental field of pure experience.

Although Husserl borrowed Kant’s term “transcendental idealism” for his own purpose, he was keen to distance himself from Kant’s conclusion that “the thing- in- itself” is beyond the reach of our experience. The inaccessibility of the thing-in-itself is the necessary outcome of the fact that “the pure forms of intuition” are the objective conditions of knowledge and operate only within the sensible world of experience.

Phenomenological transcendentalism discloses a conception of the transcendental which is radically different from the objectivistic approach of the Greeks as well as from the Kantian conception which takes the transcendental to be immanent to the subject. Phenomenology takes it to be both transcendent and immanent. This implies that Husserl's subject has the deliberate aim of expanding beyond its own confines - the subject is intentionally directed towards a world that exists beyond itself, but is lived through its experiences.

Husserl credits Descartes with providing “the seed for transcendental philosophy”, yet his misguided conception of the subject had, according to Husserl, led him astray and had given rise to the erroneous notion of transcendence. The study of the meditations, he claims, “acted quite directly on the transformation of an already developing phenomenology into a new kind of transcendental philosophy” (1960, p. 1). He also says “whenever philosophers ask about the possibility of cognition in a way that implies that cognition is a thing apart from its object, they introduce an inappropriate notion of transcendence, which in turn entails an inappropriate interpretation of immanence” (Stevens in Kearney, 1994, p. 15).

Descartes failed to grasp the essence of consciousness because he defined himself, qua inquirer, as a “thinking thing” having the same status as the transcendent things whose existence he had called into doubt. Since the essence of consciousness is intentionality and since intentionality is directed, Descartes apparently made a blunder by drawing a subject-object divide line. The purpose of the phenomenological method is to free us from this incoherent interpretation of transcendence, and consequently to enable us to redefine both transcendence

and immanence (Stevens in Kearney, 1994, p. 16). Husserl saw the need to free not just us but the notion of transcendence from the confinement that Descartes and later Kant had put to it. He also believed that the phenomenological method is capable of going beyond these limits.

Husserl thought that the very idea of trying to prove the existence of an “external” world on the basis of the contents of “inner” experience was, as he liked to put it, nonsense. Descartes had discovered a transcendental perspective in his first two meditations, but then abandoned it in busying himself with such “nonsensical proof”. In Husserl’s view, Descartes should have stayed with his initial discovery and explored it further for such an exploration of pure consciousness from the transcendental viewpoint is the sole concern of the true philosopher (Smith, 2003, p. 19). But instead of becoming “a transcendental self” which it was destined to be “the *cogito*” remained to be nothing more than “a piece of the world”, “a little tag-end of the world”. Husserl points out the flaw in Descartes’ conclusion when he contends

Our considerations have established that the physical thing is transcendent to the perception of it and consequently to any consciousness whatever related to it; it is transcendent not merely in the sense that the physical thing cannot be found in fact as a really inherent component of consciousness; rather the whole situation is an object of eidetic insight (Husserl, 1982, p. 89).

Husserl believes that it is mainly because of their tendency to take the subject as given and the object as somehow hidden or at least one which needed to be inferred from the subject that philosophers introduced inappropriate notions of transcendence and immanence. He says “modern descriptions tend to take immanence as an enclosure containing mental processes and impressions hence a region of indubitable givenness, transcendence is, on the other hand, understood as whatever remains outside of that enclosure- a region populated by unknowable things-in-themselves” (Bell, 1995, p. 185). But the correct way of understanding them would be to describe them in the light of the distinction between the “natural attitude” and the “phenomenological attitude”. “We achieve the transcendental point of view by suspending our natural attitude of belief in the reality of things and the world” (Bell, 1995, p. 185). Thus immanent and transcendent objects are distinguished in terms of their “different styles of

appearing not by appeal to the difference between intra-mental appearance and extra-mental being” (Stevens in Kearney, 1994, p. 16).

Unlike Descartes’ method, the new method aims at uncovering the essence of cognition by suspending our natural attitude of believing in the reality of things and the world. But most importantly it enables us to redefine both transcendence and immanence.

Most epistemological trends confine consciousness to a psychic region separate from the world of things thereby reducing intentionality to representation within the enclosure of the mind. However, Husserl considers the transcendence of things as a mode of givenness within immanence, more broadly understood as the range of intentionality’s transcending power. In his words he claims “there can be no outside for a being whose mode of being is to be open to all things”.

Eventually, the claim of immanence leads Husserl to argue for the ontological priority of transcendental subjectivity, and indeed for a kind of transcendental idealism (Solomon, 2003, p. 122). This has led to severe criticisms from his followers as well as from other philosophers. But it is not the use of the *epoche* that resulted in the identification of Husserl with idealism. But rather his attempt to deduce consciousness from the transcendental ego by making the reality of the world relative to consciousness is the reason for the supposition.

In the spirit of Kant, Husserl distinguishes between the ego which is considered part of the world and the transcendental ego for whom the world itself is a *noematic*. According to Husserl, this capacity to be a transcendental subject allows us to create a reflective distance from ourselves and be able to grasp our natural way of being in the world. Husserl contends that

his phenomenological philosophy is transcendental in the sense that it rejects the absolute interpretation of the natural world endorsed by naturalism, and that it regards the existence of the world as the existence of a unity of meaning constituted by transcendental subjectivity (Philipse in Smith & Woodruff, 1995, p. 244).

In order for the transcendental subjectivity to emerge the ego as well as the rest of the world ought to be bracketed via the transcendental reduction. The bracketing of the ego opens the door for the meaning-constituting and independent ‘transcendental ego’ to emerge.

Husserl describes transcendental idealism as the reversal of our natural ontology. This reversal consists in the ontological relation between the natural position and the transcendental position- while the former is concerned with the mental and the physical, the latter implies a relation of ontological dependence between transcendental consciousness, which exists in absolute independence, and the whole natural world, including human minds, which exists as an ontologically dependent intentional correlate of transcendental consciousness (Philipse in Smith & Woodruff, 1995, p. 250). He explains it vis-à-vis the 'natural attitude' which itself is in need of epoche. Consequently, if the entire natural world is bracketed by the epoche, what remains is transcendental consciousness, with the natural world serving as its intentional counterpart.

Transcendental subjectivity confronts us with the issue I have already alluded to- the question of the other. The independent nature of the transcendental subject throws *the other* into the abyss of irrelevance. This is to mean that since the whole world is bracketed and the only reality left is consciousness and the radical other (other minds and the external world) is a construction, Husserl's approach fails to grasp the essentially embedded nature of man.

I really mean I. I am absolutely singular and individual. Therefore, when Husserl alludes to the absolute uniqueness of the ego and underscores its inescapability, I believe he is merely highlighting the primordial subjective experience of consciousness. I am only self-aware of myself and can never ever be self-aware of anybody else. This singularity, however, is of a kind, which admits of others (Zahavi, 2002, p. 105).

Despite Zahavi's evaluation of Husserl's intention as one which allows for the existence of others, I have reservations as to how an absolutely singular and to use the right word, transcendental ego can admit of another *ego*. In contradistinction to Zahavi's claim that transcendental philosophy has a space for the notion of intersubjectivity- for the possibility of interacting with the other, that it takes due cognizance of the presence of the other, I argue that the fundamentally worldless and disconnected nature of the transcendental subject prevents any chance of individualization and consequently, interaction with others. To appreciate this point one would have to discern the distinction between mere juxtaposition of subjects (what Zahavi called "plurality of transcendental egos") and subjects inextricably intertwined with one another (a relation presupposed by intersubjectivity).

Another way to raise the issue of individuality is exactly in the context of a discussion of intersubjectivity. If Husserl had really argued that it makes no sense to discuss individuality when it comes to transcendental subjectivity, I don't see

how he could possibly have brought up the notion of a plurality of transcendental egos, or talked of the transcendental other. But of course, this is what he is constantly doing in his discussion of transcendental intersubjectivity (Zahavi, 2002, p. 105). In my opinion invoking intersubjectivity to prove individuality still begs the question. The argument also seems to me to miss the possibility of juxtaposition of egos- the mere existence of plurality of egos does not, by itself, imply a relation among them. Transcendental philosophy lacks the existential space which is a condition of possibility for intersubjectivity.

Descartes and Kant withdrew the subject, or consciousness, by indicating that I could never catch anything as existing except if I most importantly experienced myself as existing in the demonstration of securing it. They presented consciousness as the condition of there being anything at all, and the act of relating as the basis of relatedness. But the relations between subject and world are not strictly bilateral: if they were, the certainty of the world would, in Descartes, be immediately given with that of the Cogito, and Kant would not have talked about his *Copernican revolution* (Ponty, 1945, p. X).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty indicates the essentially dualistic nature of Cartesian and Kantian philosophies but most significantly he accounts for the problematic of alterity which is inherent in transcendental philosophy.

Husserlian dualism is manifested through the distinction he draws between the essence of consciousness and the essence of nature which follows the same pattern as Descartes' distinction between the essence of mind (thought) and the essence of body (extension). However,

whereas Descartes held that no substance can have the attributes of both thought and extension, Husserl argued that the same individual can be both spatial and thinking, that body and mind are not two kinds of individual but instances of the essences of nature and consciousness respectively (Smith & Woodruff, 1995, p. 337).

At least we know that Husserl is not entirely oblivious of the problem associated with the dualistic approach to knowledge for he seemed to take certain measures to minimize its adverse effects. But overall the success or otherwise of such endeavor must be appreciated in light of the whole project of a transcendental philosophy.

Hence the subsequent section tries to lay bare the necessary implications of transcendental philosophy so as to demonstrate the essentially flawed character of transcendental philosophy.

The implications of transcendental philosophy

The essentially dichotomizing structure of transcendental philosophy gives rise to a problematic of intersubjectivity. I shall discuss this problem in light of the three indispensable features of transcendental philosophy viz. epistemological determinacy, the elimination of the body and the primacy of the theoretical-rationale which are themselves direct consequences of the dualistic philosophy of the modern era. The analysis hopes to indicate the essential relation between transcendental philosophy and structures of domination and oppression.

Epistemological determinacy

The first problem in the dichotomizing structure of transcendental philosophy which I want to draw attention to is better explained in Descartes' response to *certain Men of Learning* where he said, the overcoming of doubt marks the end of all inquiry. Once the *cogito* is established, once the clearness and distinctness of the *cogito* is shown then the task is complete- This postulation of a closure does not only imply an epistemological finitude where the object is unilaterally defined but it also indicates the creation of the subject-object dichotomy.

Descartes, Kant and Husserl played a significant role in the decentering of metaphysics and eventual preeminence of epistemology by elevating the subject to the status of *the determining subject*. The transcendental subject decides the objective status of the object- the subject decides whether the object is worth examining, when to examine it and how to examine it. Accordingly the terms and conditions of knowing are dictated by the unilateral act of the subject- a procedure which runs the risk of reducing the object to nothingness, to non-existence. This risk is irreversible and imminent mainly because the transcendental subject is an isolated subject. For Descartes, for instance, arriving at the clear and distinct ideas required what Taylor calls a "disengaged perspective" (Taylor, 1989, p. 146).

Epistemological determinacy refers to the lopsided relation between the essentially hegemonic Western epistemological structure and its non-western counterparts relating specifically to the production and transmission of knowledge. Because of the grammars and categories built into this exclusionary structure, alternative ways of relating to *the other* are totally precluded. This defective relation is manifested at two levels: in the relation between different forms of knowledge and the relation between human subjects. With regard to the first form of oppression, the Western epistemological structure posits itself as *the criterion of validity* to determine the status of other forms of knowledge. The

acceptance, and even the mere existence, of these knowledge forms relies on their alignment with the framework of Western knowledge, upon which the advancement of humanity hinges. The boldness with which the western epistemological structure has pushed all other forms of knowledge to the periphery has led Santos to pronounce that “the understanding of the world by far exceeds the western understanding of the world” (Santos, 2014, p. viii).

The second facet of this asymmetric relation is revealed in the way in which the white man historically viewed its status vis-à-vis other races. The universal-local distinction between the white man’s culture and its non-white counterpart engendered the problematic of alterity. To the extent that the universal subject (which would be the West) determines the object’s (the non-west) level of knowability, the relationship is not mutual. As the condition of possibility of knowledge the transcendental subject obliterates the infiniteness of the finite thereby imposing its image of the object upon the object. *The other* can only view itself from the perspective of *the subject* which it never is and can never be; it exists insofar as it falls within the range of the subject’s ability to know. By depending on the isolated essence of the transcendental subject, transcendental philosophy seeks to diminish *the other* to an object of knowledge—not just any knowledge, but one that can be fully understood and apprehended. This reduction of *the other* to the perfectly knowable object is a central feature of transcendental philosophy and it has been entrenched in the western epistemological spectrum through the obduracy of instrumental reason.

The gradual development of science and technology has finally culminated in the transformation of man and the world into objects of knowledge, or to be more exact into objects of scientific knowledge.

The elimination of the body

The denigration of the body, which characterizes western philosophy since its inception in Greece, was taken to a higher level of abstraction and *ipso facto* to its final culmination by transcendental philosophy. The primacy of reason manifested itself through Greek philosophers’ urge to control and regulate the actions of the body through the rigorous and critical application of the dictates of reason. Plato, for one, likened the body and its operations (which he called appetitive and passionate) to the two horses pulling the chariot implying the need for their strict control. Although Greek philosophy denounced the role of the body in the acquisition of truth it did acknowledge its importance in the relation with the other.

Medieval philosophy dominated by the teaching of the scholastics rejected the importance of the body albeit not in favor of reason. Consistent with the Greek tradition, it saw the body as an obstacle to be overcome, as a defect to be rectified. It taught its subjection and regulation. The subsequent epochs did not improve the lot of the body in any significant way. The Age of renaissance and the age of enlightenment (in short Modern Philosophy) underscored the preeminence of reason once again.

Modern philosophy did not only reject its knowability through Descartes' attempt to limit certain knowledge to our minds but the body was also reduced to obscurity by transcendental philosophy. We owe the glorification of the mind at the expense of the body to the dualistic philosophy of Descartes and his predecessors.

The Cartesian Method of Doubt requires a disembodied mind which in turn means that the attainment, nay even the search for truth depends on the complete separation of the two substances though not in the Platonic sense since "the Cartesian soul frees itself not by turning away (like Platonic dualism) but by objectifying embodied experience" (Taylor, 1989, p. 146). Taylor points out the irrelevance of the body vis-à-vis the mind which characterizes Western Philosophy at least since Plato. He also underlines the distinction between Plato's (who advocated the control and subjugation of the body as an obstacle to the pursuit of truth) and Descartes' whose rejection of the body transformed it into an object of knowledge denying it any role in the process of knowing.

For Descartes discerning *the ontological cleft* between itself and the object is a crucial step in the realization of the subject's distinct status:

The material world including one's body should be seen by disengaging oneself from the usual embodied perspective. We have to objectify the world, including our own bodies, and that means to come to see them mechanistically and functionally, in the same way that an uninvolved external observer would. (Taylor, 1989, p. 145)

Such objectification of the body puts it in a position of inferiority vis-à-vis the mind ultimately paving the way for its control. The universalist and essentialist character of modernity (expressed in such claims as "my method would reveal every truth for the knowledge of which human reason is adequate") can be traced back to Descartes' seemingly innocent search for absolute certainty. The result of this instrumental rationality drawn out of "the cogito" is the

complete obliteration of the possibility of mutual relation between the subject and the object.

It is absolutely essential, besides, that the subject is not transformed into an object of knowledge if the lopsided relation between the subject and the object is to be maintained and Descartes ensures that this is so when he says that the “I itself cannot be imagined, in the way that we are able to have sensory images of, or to form ‘in the imagination’ a concrete image of a body” (Hatfield in Emmanuel, 1993, p. 15). This is a clear indication that the relationship between the subject and the object is not even one of mutual objectification. As we can gather from Kant’s transcendental philosophy our experience is shaped solely by the objective conditions of the mind. Similarly the subject (represented by the mind) is the only condition for the possibility of knowing the object (the body). When Kant said the subject is the objective condition of knowledge he meant what we know and what we can’t know ultimately depends on the structure of our minds. It is essential to this dualistic philosophy that the positions are inflexible.

The laws that constitute nature are laws prescribed by the understanding that stands under the transcendental unity of apperception. Thus, in knowing the sensible world I am represented not only as distinct from it but also as prescribing laws to it (Carr, 1999, p. 45).

The contrast Kant draws between the transcendental and empirical subjects perfectly captures the relationship between the mind and the body. The mind is not only the point of departure in the act of knowing but, much like the transcendental subject, it is also a condition of the possibility of any knowing. The ineptness of the body is crucial to its elimination i.e. its elimination involves this situation of being subject to the laws of another’s making.

So *the other* is eliminated together with its body. The objectification and eventual elimination of the body is crucial for the objectification of *the other* to the extent that *the other* appears mainly through her body.

It is only by recognizing the other’s own body that we can allow the shift “from the solipsistic frame of reference to that which relies upon inter-subjective experience. This makes possible a series of analyses devoted to the constitution of intersubjective objectivity” (Macann, 1991, p. 90). The possibility of an inter-subjectively constituted world – the possibility of “a shared world” withers away as the body is transformed into insignificance. With the help of the third

feature of modern dualistic philosophy which I will be discussing presently, intersubjectivity gives way to a subject-object relation.

The primacy of the theoretical/rationale

In Socrates and Plato, we find the idea of the mastery of the self through the instrument of reason. A harmonious relation between the various aspects of the soul is taken to be a necessary condition for the order and health of the individual. This harmonious relation is implied by the ascertainment of the rule of reason over the passions/senses. Hence reason is the ruler, it is the master; and the mastery of the self which is a *sine qua non* for the just individual can be attained only through man's conscious choice of the rational life.

Aristotle also proclaimed reason to be the highest faculty in human beings-assigning to it the same task of ruling over man's bodily processes of sensation, feeling, and impulse which he shared with the animals. The role of reason extended from the speculative (the attainment of truth) to the more practical one (as a guide to the good life). In both cases reason is involved in the process of mastery in the sense that reason's capacity to dictate the surrounding circumstances happens to be the condition of possibility of the attainment of truth and the good life.

The incorporation of this connection between rationality and mastery into the dichotomizing structure of modern philosophy (to be more specific into the heart of transcendental philosophy) has been vital for the successful subjugation of the other.

"If my existence is revealed by my activity of thought, if my thought is my being, and the converse, if in me thought and existence are identical, then I am a being whose essence consists in thinking" (Macann, 1991, p. 90). This is to mean that the extent of the knowability of the object is determined by the unknowable subject in whom existence and thinking are merged. To the extent that existence depends on thinking (or more broadly on rationality), the irrational as well as the non-rational is non-existent (or existent only as an object of knowledge).

Descartes goes a long way to convince his readers, especially in his replies to the objections mentioned above, that the *cogito* is not a result of deduction rather being self-evident it is merely grasped through intuition.

The proposition I am, I exist, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind. In other words, the

proposition that I exist is self-verifying. I cannot assert it or think it without its being true (Scrutton, 1995, p. 29).

This simply means the proposition, “I think, therefore I am,” is not to be considered a deduction from the major premise, “Whatever thinks exists”. On the contrary, the latter is directly inferred from the former. In the words of Kant “I think” is a fully reflexive, fully awakened judging consciousness; it is an intellect inserted in a sense-world to which it must by nature give a sense or a meaning without ever experiencing this world in itself. The subject for him is not ultimately “an experiencer” but a “pure thinker” (Edie, 1964, p. 54). Kant’s distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds has underscored the finiteness of man. The “pure thinker” does not understand the world as it is in itself which for Kant is beyond the limited capacity of the human mind but it has access only to the appearances- “the things as they appear to us”. Yet this “thinker” needs to impose her own categories of understanding to make sense of the experience i.e. the object is defined in terms or rather by the terms of the categories of the subject.

The unilateral act of the rational subject makes experience possible; the absence of mutuality much less intersubjectivity from the structure of transcendental philosophy can, at least partly, be viewed as a consequence of the dichotomy between the rational and the irrational- reason experiences and the irrational is experienced; the rational dominates and perfects the irrational. The exclusion of *the other* through the criteria of reason which began in Descartes reached its peak in the transcendental philosophy of Kant and Husserl.

So long as we are by definition confined to one world, getting to *the other* is equally by definition impossible (Balz, 1918, p. 203). The epistemological determinacy, the finitude suffered by the object (the other) narrows down the horizons of possibilities that would otherwise have allowed for self-expression ultimately culminating in the complete denial of the experiences and practices of *the other*.

Kant’s analysis of the characteristically sensible subject (the empirical subject) and the inherently rational one (the transcendental subject) illumines the otherwise obscure role of the rational in the exclusion of the possibility of intersubjectivity and subjugation of the other. The difficulty of many commentators to understand the presence of two mutually exclusive characteristics in Kant’s transcendental philosophy (the transcendental subject with its disengaged and disembodied attributes and the historically and culturally situated empirical subject) in a single self, which I have already touched upon, is

entirely groundless. In my opinion the double-faced depiction of the subject, which we find in Kant's distinction between the transcendental and empirical subjects, is not only a consistent and coherent picture but it also goes a long way to solving the difficulty I have been struggling with for some time regarding the problem of internal and external relation between humans as cultural and historical beings.

By internal relation I mean the relationship between various persons within the same race- say for instance one white person with another white person. The external relation, on the other hand, implies how one person of a specific race is related to a member of another race- the historically questionable relationship between a white person and a black person illustrates this second relation. The way "rational beings" relate to one another and to an "irrational" or still worse to a "non-rational being" cannot be the same to the extent that rationality is the criteria by which the relation is formulated. But reason is not merely the standard of validating "normal" relationships but it is also the means by which the subject-object relation is maintained. The white man cannot condescend to relate to the black man in much the same way as the transcendental subject cannot lose its disengaged status except as the empirical subject where it'll meet another empirical subject in the person of another white man.

Nonetheless the advancement of science and technology which ensued from the unrestrained use of instrumental reason must be viewed as the highest stage in the gradual unfolding of the self-constituting subject with all its pretense for rationality, autonomy and transcendentality, but most importantly with its claim for universality by which I mean anonymity.

It is evident that the overemphasis on theoretical-rationality at the expense of the practical or pre-theoretical overlooks the entirety of human experience, just as a monologic relationship cannot accurately depict the human condition in its original form.

The dominant conception of freedom and its relation to transcendental philosophy

Despite the fact that the problem of freedom has been at the center of many philosophical works within the history of philosophy, it still continues to elude proper and complete understanding. Previous discussions on freedom have largely focused on the conceptual analysis of the term without really addressing neither its conceptual elusiveness nor the essential but vague relation between being and freedom.

The enlightenment project and its critiques, from within the western epistemological sphere as well as from without, have invariably albeit sometimes unintentionally, endorsed freedom as a possession i.e. the property of the subject. Modern philosophy's identification of freedom with the autonomous individual conceives of man as a subject who is capable of determining her own ends.

This dominant discourse pertaining to freedom is the Kantian conception of freedom. Kant identified freedom with the autonomy of the will which, as we shall see subsequently, ultimately boils down to a willful mastery of oneself and others.

The will is a kind of causality belonging to living beings in so far as they are rational. Freedom would be the property of this causality that makes it effectively independent of any determination by alien causes. Similarly, natural necessity is the property of the causality of all non-rational beings by which they are determined to activity through the influence of alien causes (1981, p. 49).

One of the difficulties Kant had to grapple with in the "Critique of Practical Reason" as well as in the "Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals" involved addressing the following problem: in a world where objects are governed by physical law, how can there be free will? In other words he was trying to overcome the problem of understanding the existence of two mutually exclusive beings: the deterministic realm of the physical world and the free realm of the human world.

With a view to addressing this problem Kant argues as follows:

Laws and causes are inseparable. This principle is absolutely central; were it given up, the claim that freedom and the moral law reciprocally imply one another would likewise have to be given up, and there would be no argument for the reality of freedom (Kosch, 2006, p. 35).

The connection between laws and causes is crucial not just for understanding the deterministic physical world but also for coming into grips with the free human world to the extent that this freedom is aligned to the autonomous will of the self-legislating subject.

Bowie also takes the central focus of Kant's moral philosophy to be the attempt "to reinforce the separation between the determinism of the appearing natural world, and the intelligible world of human freedom" (2003, p. 35). Kant believes that our consciousness of the moral law as supremely authoritative leads us "directly to the concept of freedom" (Walsh, 2018, p. 36).

In the "Critique of Practical Reason", Kant states the relationship between freedom and morality:

Freedom among all the Ideas of speculative reason is the only one whose possibility we know a priori. We do not understand it, but we know it as the condition of the moral law which we do know. The ideas of God and immortality are, on the contrary, not conditions of the moral law, but only conditions of the necessary object of a will which is determined by this law, this will being merely the practical use of our pure reason (1788, p. 3).

Kantian thought has provided a strong ground for endorsing the often made claim that freedom is the necessary precondition of moral action. We can agree, together with Bielefeldt (1997, p. 528), that the belief moral action must be something more than mere passive compliance with given standards of behavior and that ethical reflection in general grounds morality on the agent's inner free will is a long standing one. Yet it was Kant who put forth an apparently strong case for it. However this belief in the capability of the moral agent to make free decisions presupposes the possibility of a self-constituting subject- a subject which can make self-initiated choices.

The idea of the autonomous subject is an outcome of the Kantian thesis, set against the empiricists' tendency to posit the mind as *tabula rasa*, that "the mind actively organizes and orders reality so as to make rational determination possible". However, it is solely when we have successfully correlated this abstract cognitive process with positive autonomy that we can genuinely appreciate the Kantian conception of freedom.

Thus, in this model freedom is equated, not only with the transcendental subject (the free will which chooses), but also with the active removal of the external impediments that stand in the way of full self-determination- be they societal obstacles "outside" the empirical subject or non-rational features of the self like the passions (Nichols, 2014, p. 9).

But such an understanding of freedom proves to be highly presumptuous of the possibility of a self-constituting and self-legislating subject.

Despite Kant's failure to make explicit reference to the notion of the "transcendental subject" in the second critique or in the grounding, I believe that it is in the autonomous, self-legislating moral agent that the "transcendental subject" raises to the summit of its power.

Hence the overcoming of our finitude for which Kant is particularly credited does not consist in a Platonic denial of the senses nor in the religious anticipation of evolving into a more advanced and infinite being. First and foremost it requires embracing our finitude in such a way that it draws our attention to the objects of knowledge which are located within the bounds of human reason. But still its limited success in the theory of knowledge has not been replicated in the ethico-political world of freedom i.e. though we may attribute the recognition of "the subject's" ability to attain knowledge to Kant's transcendentalization of finitude, we must take note of its contrary effect upon "the object" i.e. it has led to the epistemological determinacy of the object which transposed into the ethico-political realm results in nothing other than domination and subjugation.

This dominant discourse on freedom is problematic for at least two reasons: first the conception of freedom as free will has given rise to the treatment of nature in general and human relation in particular as a field of battle wherein various processes of objectification have been perpetrated. The second and equally distressing problem pertains to the resulting emancipatory discourse i.e. the enlightenment project. Contrary to its professed objective of liberation the project played a significant role in justifying and solidifying the oppressive system produced by the dichotomizing structure. This overly-hyped significance attached to mastery, I believe, is the direct consequence of the subject-object dichotomy which was born out of the Cartesian *cogito* and culminated in Kant's transcendental subject.

The causal conception of freedom has its roots in Descartes' articulation of the problem of knowledge. Although the dualistic approach can be traced back to the philosophy of the ancients, it gained high currency in Cartesian philosophy since the time of which it continued to have a significant impact upon subsequent thought. Besides its epistemological significance, or rather precisely because of this significance, this dualistic approach has been transported into the realms of the ethical as well as of the political in the form of the autonomous, self-legislating subject.

The transcendental subject which is the supreme condition of possibility in the arena of knowledge claims to do the same in the ethico-political realm of freedom. The autonomous, self-legislating subject is the ethico-political analogue

of the transcendental subject. Isaiah Berlin's examination of positive and negative liberties is testament to the transcendentalist propensity of the dominant (Kantian) conception of freedom.

In his "two concepts of liberty" Isaiah Berlin elucidates the implications of the dominant conception of liberty when he says "I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity. If I am prevented by others from doing what I could otherwise do, I am to that degree unfree" (Berlin, 1958, p. 169).

It has generally been taken for granted that freedom involves the absence of impediments and the subject's capacity to act in accordance with her own conception of the good.

The "positive" sense of the word "liberty" derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men's, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside (Berlin, 1958, p. 179).

The process of subjectification which entails freedom to act is possible to the extent that the subject is articulated as autonomous.

While positive libertarians advocate mastery of a transcendent self through collectively mediated, self-given law, negative libertarians advocate mastery of an empirical self over a private domain. Despite the differences between positive liberty and negative liberty, the identification of freedom with mastery remains central to all (Thiele, 1994, p. 281). Transcendental philosophy provides the foundational structure for the possibility of the dominant conception of freedom by rendering the notion of mastery central to it. The causal conception of freedom which dictates not only our theoretical articulation of freedom but also and most notably guides the practices of freedom has ironically been fundamental to the continued existence of systems of oppression and subjugation.

There's a need for a radical critique of the dominant notion of freedom. This critique must take into account the relation between transcendental philosophy and the causal conception of freedom. A phenomenological inquiry into the ontology of freedom does exactly that. It problematizes freedom vis-a-vis the transcendental subject by analyzing its background assumptions.

The ontology of freedom cannot ignore the problems of knowledge and the responses given to them to the extent that the responses evince a certain mode of being and to the extent that these responses imply a certain positioning of human beings in relation to the external world and to other minds. The ontology

of freedom proceeds by acknowledging Heidegger's insistence that 'the question of freedom is ultimately the question of being in as much as freedom is a way of being'. Hence it aims at the formulation of a conception of freedom which is cognizant of the problematic of intersubjectivity associated with a conception of freedom.

Conclusion

Needless to say that by turning the focus of philosophy from metaphysical speculation about the nature of reality to a critical examination of the nature of the thinking mind, Kant has really made an enormous shift in the way we think of ourselves and our relation to the world. Whether the shift is for the better or for the worse is a question that this paper has partly been dedicated to.

Although the Kantian "transcendental subject" merely ousted the Cartesian *cogito* and although the subject-object distinction is attributed to Descartes, it was really Kant who elevated it to a higher level of sophistication through his transcendental philosophy. There's no denying that *the cogito* has influenced Kant's transcendental subject but the project was actually completed by Kant and after him by Husserl- the modernity project of using instrumental reason for the subjugation and complete control of the other.

It is not clear as to whether Kant meant this meticulous analysis of the possibility of knowledge in general and metaphysics in particular to serve as a guideline for the domination of one race by another. Despite Kant's disparaging remarks about "other races" in his anthropology, it seems highly unlikely that he intended his work to be used as a weapon of oppression and subjugation especially given the fact that he was mainly, if not solely, concerned with the problem of knowledge. Yet my previous discussion goes a long way to indicate how his examination of the problem of knowledge has resulted in the uncalled for consequence of providing the intellectual basis for the hegemony of the West.

Transcendental philosophy formulates the system of oppression and domination through the categories of elimination of the body, epistemological determinacy and the primacy of the rational. These categories in turn give rise to the problem of *the other* by promoting a subject-object relation. Such ethico-political concepts as freedom and justice are worked out within this system of domination and oppression making them irrelevant to the purpose for which they're in the first place required. The notion of freedom articulated within a system of oppression is self-defeating to say the least. So what we need is a critique of freedom which delves deep into the structure that begot such a suspect notion of freedom.

The ontology of freedom takes due cognizance of the essential relation between the problems of knowledge and the responses given to them and the ethico-political bearing these responses have to the extent that the responses evince a certain mode of being and to the extent that these responses imply the ethical and political positioning of human beings in relation to one another.

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