

Post-Enlightenment theorising and global polity in the twenty-first century and beyond

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Abstract

In some sense, the period of scholarship we know as the Enlightenment, well-known for its individualistic, binaric and dichotomous theorising, could be largely to blame for the perceived schism between the humanities and the sciences – and, consequently, between humans and humans as well as between humans and the totality of their environment. My paper argues that, the philosophical and scientific achievements of the Enlightenment duly acknowledged (I have in mind here the positive central role that philosophical doubt plays in academic inquiry, for example), its destructive elements, epitomized by its dualistic, individualist, and, consequently, predatory subjectivity, have cast a long shadow on cordial human polity since the 17th Century. In short, strictly speaking, taken to its logical conclusion, the Enlightenment cannot yield us an ontology that would engender cordial relations among humans themselves or between humans and their environment. Post-Enlightenment (by which is meant post-Cartesian) ontological, epistemological and ethical postulations could redress the centuries-old disjunction (which characterises this shadow) between technological or intellectual development and amicable global living.

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Introduction

Pirelli, the tyre-making company, have a motto or an epithet that says: “Power is nothing without control.” What they most likely mean is that even the most powerful vehicle needs good tyres, with good and well-structured treading for sufficient traction, for it to be better driven, or to be driven at all and traction is what they, as Pirelli, provide. Power without control is indeed nothing and it may actually be worse than nothing, much worse in fact: it could be outrightly dangerous, reducing humanity to a Hobbesian scenario of “a war of all against all”. One of the central roles that the humanities have played since time immemorial is to set the ethical platform where matters of how one Subject could relate to another are thrashed out, precisely so that all the advancements in the other fields of inquiry can be enjoyed in harmony; so that we do not needlessly kill one another by using those advancements, or on account of them. Experience has shown that it is not enough to make astounding scientific discoveries; such discoveries require a viable ethical backcloth for them to be utilised meaningfully. So, we will see in this paper that, just as Rene Descartes had created a contrived dichotomy between mind and body, so, too, today do some continue to create a false dichotomy between the humanities and the sciences; the arts and the sciences together are like a well-greased or well-oiled axle. It should always be borne in mind as one reads this paper that in exploding the myth of the contrived Cartesian dichotomy this paper aims to explode the corresponding contrived dichotomy between the sciences and the humanities.

The importance of the foregoing subject matter cannot be overemphasised and is underscored by the fact that scholarship has a long list of intellectuals who have, at one point or another, wrestled with matters of Self-Other relations; some have even made it their lifetime preoccupation. In this regard, ideas in this paper are followed from Rene Descartes and Francis Bacon (and, latterly, from the 19th Century, Social Darwinism) down to their nemeses such as the Frankfurters, among whom are Theodor Adorno and Jungen Habermas, and also the phenomenological theorizing of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and on to

reviewers of the Enlightenment such as Charles Taylor and Patricia Waugh. I will then link these thinkers' ideas to those on Self-Other relations as propounded by Julia Kristeva, W.E.B. Dubois, Franz Fanon, Albert Memmi, C.L.R. James, Paul Gilroy, Stewart Hall, Kwame Anthony Appiah, John Mbiti and Homi Bhabha. The paper also posits my own theoretical postulations that underpin what I have termed a post-binary self-other subjectivity, a philosophical system which comprises a post-Cartesian ontology, epistemology and ethics. The central tenets of this philosophical system revolve around the unitariness and relationalness or indebtedness of subjectivity characterised by consciousness's embodiedness, intentionality and inter-subjectivity.

A sketch of the background to academic humanities

It is commonly understood within philosophical circles that philosophy as a discipline of inquiry began as natural science, largely as cosmology, that is, as a study of the nature of the physical universe. According to the philosophers of the time, who are categorised as pre-Socratics, reality was divided into four main elements of existence, namely water, earth, fire and wind. But from the time of Socrates the focus of philosophy shifted from the natural world to an inquiry into the nature of the human being himself/herself both in terms of who s/he is in himself/herself as well as in relation to others – be they fellow human beings or other existents and qualities. This latter aspect constitutes what, broadly speaking, go by the names mores, morality or ethics. We could say that when that shift in focus happened the humanities had formally entered the hard academy – and they had come to stay. But I must hasten to add that the humanities have to constantly be self-critical and innovative to remain valued members of the academy; and in Africa, especially since we are considered – rightly or wrongly – as latecomers to the feast of the formal academy, the humanities, just like the sciences, certainly don't need African practitioners who are only spongers, folks who can only repeat every argument ever posited in the field. Rather, by tapping into indigenous knowledge systems we should strive to be thinkers and innovators in our own right, as well as in partnership with the rest of the world. Research into indigenous knowledge systems, therefore, is of paramount importance to the African Humanities.

In this regard, to underscore the importance of familiarising ourselves with African indigenous knowledge systems, the main postulations in this paper would not have been arrived at if it were not for insights gained from African ontological orientations such as those adumbrated by John Mbiti (1975) which then act as a springboard. It would be far from true to suppose that indigenous knowledge systems have been wholly superseded and that there is nothing to be gained from going back to them. Of course, Colonial Globalisation would want it that way, but that would be going against the spirit of Progressive Globalisation – understood as Derridan post-Modernism or post-structuralism – which, ideally, should aim to look for local praxis and contributions to global polity.

That said, I should point out that the practice of the mixing study of natural science and speculative philosophy can be seen in Aristotelian philosophising and scienticising and these two approaches to philosophy came together again even more definitively during the Enlightenment which mixed speculative philosophy with hard science, epitomised in the two giants of the movement, Descartes and Bacon, respectively. While all the main branches of philosophy have something to say about matters of reality and how it subsists, for purposes of convenience I will focus in this paper on only three branches, namely ontology, epistemology and ethics and show how these can play the role of grease or oil to the axle of our existence.

When it came to inquiry into the nature of the human being and his or her relationship with his or her others as cited above, the ancient Greeks came up with what were known as the three elements of the soul and these were Reason, Good Emotions (such as courage, valour, chivalry) and Base Emotions (sex, food, etc.). Those that excelled in their use of the faculty of reason were supposed to be rulers; those that harnessed good emotions were to become soldiers, while those who excelled at neither reason nor good emotions were supposed to be slaves. Now, let us fast forward to the 17th Century and look at the dawn of the Enlightenment. With the light of reason dimmed during the Dark/Middle-Ages when philosophy sank even lower than being a handmaid to theology, it was understandable for Descartes to declare philosophical doubt as the starting point of a new philosophy. In *The Meditations* Descartes has said about himself that he decided to doubt the

existence and truth of everything received or handed down – this practice is what in phenomenology is called performing an *epoché*, a bracketing out. But he discovered that at least he could not doubt the existence of the doubting self itself and so proceeded to analyse the ontology of this doubting self and posited that it consists of mind and body and all that those two aspects entailed, but he then privileged the mind part of the duo which privilege he summed up in the postulation “*Cogito ergo sum* – I think therefore I am”. While the classical forerunner to Descartes is Socrates himself, whose project of philosophical doubt and questioning of an uncritical subscription to tradition led to his being condemned to death by the gatekeepers of his society, the immediately past forerunner to Descartes was none other than the reformist Martin Luther of Germany whose 95 theses revolutionised European religious thinking.¹

One of the immediate consequences of the aforesaid supposed ontological gap between the Self and the Other as posited by Descartes was that it opened up nature not to nurture but to exploitation, and is believed to have significantly speeded up the rise of scientific experimentation because now the Other had been reduced to an object or a potential instrument – a means to an end and not an end in itself as well. The link here is to science, its chief patron being the English polymath Francis Bacon who propounded the inductive (by elimination) scientific method of investigation. And, to cut a long story short, a sociological analysis of the Enlightenment would posit that it led to the blooming of the Industrial Revolution (the age of the machine, a mechanistic civilisation; the ghost in the machine) which then led to the rise of Global Capitalism which in turn – due to the search for raw materials, markets and cheap labour – led to slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. In all these set ups the Other is reduced to a thing and a commodity (“**thingfication**” and “**commodification**”). Some have also linked the rise of Cartesian ontology to the emergence of some virulent forms of patriarchy and ecological violence, the latter which has resulted into what we commonly know as climate change.

¹ Despite his revolutionary religious thinking, Martin Luther’s legacy is mixed because he is also on record to have advocated for the persecution of German Jewry, a proposal taken up and acted on by the Nazis in the 20th Century.

What is apparent, if not more than apparent, is that this reduction of the Other into an instrument, utilitarian that the enterprise was, marked the corresponding gap between scientific development and moral development. Indeed, in a scientific and individualistic age, sometimes we are tempted into thinking that being ethical towards our Others is optional, or a matter of charity or generosity. The postulations in the theory I will bring to you should make us think again because it seems that being ethical is in fact an ontological obligation/duty and not a question of mere personal whim.

The Self and the Other

Critical responses to the problems of subjectivity and the power relations attendant on constructions of subjectivity in colonial/postcolonial, gender and ecological literature have emanated from various schools of thought, most notably psychoanalysis. The standard vocabulary here tends to revolve around issues of Selfhood and Otherness. The Self is the mind, that self-determining and self-sufficient autonomous Subject of the Cartesian *cogito*, and the Other is the body, woman, the racialised/colonized or environment/insensate matter. Even though the conception of a Self who is all mind is often regarded as a given, the Other has received considerable attention and, in the process, has thrown some light on the nature of the supposedly autonomous Self.

Some psychoanalytic approaches conceive of the Other as a projection of “the darker side of the Self,” which acts as its counter, and could be demoniacal even (see, for example, Said, 1978; JanMahomed, 1985; and Kristeva, 1991). Such approaches view the Self’s construction in relation to the Other as specular but in a disfigured way. Another conception of the Other (especially the colonized Other) is that of a being ravaged by a split-consciousness through desiring to be in the places of both the coloniser and the colonised (see, for example, Memmi, 1991; Fanon, 1961 and 1968; and Bhabha, 1990 and 1994). Still other conceptions of the Other involve the vagaries of mimicry, with its attendant (and unsettling) menace, a process through which the Other is encouraged to imitate the colonial or dominating Self, but in the eyes of such a Self only ends up as a disfigured Self; that is, the Other becomes “like the Self, but not quite” (see, for example, Bhabha, 1994). Then there is the exploration of the potentials of cultural hybridity in which Self and Other are deemed to begin to merge, but in a relationship in which the Self

does not acknowledge its own Otherness (see, for example, Bhabha, 1990). My paper seeks to contribute to this debate from an angle that interrogates the Cartesian binary or dichotomous logic of “either Self or Other”, and focuses on the intimations in his writing of a logic of “both/and” or “and-or” (see Waugh, 1992a: 163-164) that an embodied conception of consciousness as propagated by the physicalist philosophy of mind affords.

In this regard, as various post-colonial theorists, such as Peter Childs and Patrick Williams (1997) in *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989) in both *The Empire Writes Back* and the various theorists they gather together in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (1995), contend, it is common knowledge that the ultimate aim of the explorations by these various post-colonial scholars is to expose, undermine and invalidate the bases upon which discriminatory and exploitative relations (colonial, gender, ecological, etc.) are founded. Among other proposals for the invalidation of the imperialist drive have been those approaches that deal with multiculturalism such as those advanced by theorists such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy; and those that propose a transcendence of the traditional identity boundaries by questioning the very bases of existential boundaries such as those by Hommi Bhabha and, to some extent, Kwame Anthony Appiah. My own purpose in this paper is to question the ontological bases (by which is meant those to do with the ontology of consciousness itself) of discrimination and the attendant exploitation.

As I have hinted at above, what I propose is an understanding of an embodied subjectivity that is in keeping with physicalist conceptions of consciousness. For the physicalists, the mind must be *with* the rest of the body and be *of* it for it to escape the fate — one born of Cartesian illusion — of existing as “a pea rattling around in a shell” (see J.M. Coetzee, 1999), countering consciousness’s supposed alienation from the natural world, thereby. Such a physicalist or embodied view of consciousness as posited here also lends credence to the standard objection, as that advanced by Patricia Waugh (1992: 134), to Cartesianism’s “fetishization of pure reason as the locus of subjecthood”.²

² Waugh (1992: 134) notes as follows regarding this intersubjective consciousness: “Parts of other people, the parts we have had relationships with, are parts of us, so the

Additionally, among others, Theodor Adorno, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jurgen Habermas and Patricia Waugh could be said to be proposing that we not abandon reason altogether, but rather that we revise and redefine Enlightenment's concepts of reason and subjectivity. Indeed, most socially conscious philosophers will find intellectually problematic those wholesale attacks on philosophy as a discipline that do not discriminate between the various schools of thought within it; those that do not isolate those schools of thought that could be useful from those that are destructive and possibly illusory. In this revisionist project, Waugh (1992: 134) especially, also points to the existence of a rationality that admits of both intersubjectivity and also the lack of absolute intersubjectivity between the Self and the Other. The present paper argues that there is space within rational argumentation to account for a conception of consciousness as embodied. My view, in this paper, is that these revisionists want us to develop what Adorno has called an "affective" conception of reason, a kind of reason that, as part and parcel of an embodied subjectivity, will be able to feel, first and foremost, but, beyond that, it should be the type of reason that, realising its lack of autonomy, will come to acknowledge its own indebtedness to sources of its content, at the same time that it feels itself implicated in the Other's subjectivity, doubling its lack of autonomy thereby.

Having teamed up with the neurosciences, the physicalist strain within the philosophy of mind has posed the most formidable challenge to Cartesian binaric ontology. I want to expound the tenets of physicalism and then move

self is both constant and fluid, ever in exchange, ever re-describing itself through its encounters with others. It seems to be this recognition of mediation as that which renders total self-determination impossible which so many male modernists and postmodernist writers find unacceptable". But even on such a view, self-determination is possible because ultimately it is the Subject who organises the material so encountered and apprehended. Waugh (1992: 164) further points out, in this regard, that "perhaps the most positive lesson of Postmodernism is that to see existence in terms of such an aesthetic model may be to recognise that "autonomy" can still be achieved but in ways which do not necessarily assert self by annihilating other". In my paper I am trying to demonstrate how this kind of subjectivity as gestured towards by someone like Waugh here would be like in ontologically demonstrable terms.

on from there to postulate a physicalist philosophical system that demonstrably takes Descartes to task. Physicalism posits that the mind is a physical entity. From this postulation I have worked out a philosophical system whose central tenets revolve around the unitariness and relationalness of subjectivity characterised by consciousness's embodiedness, intentionality and inter-subjectivity.

The system starts with the nature of consciousness as a basis: It is commonly understood within philosophical circles that the building blocks of consciousness are concepts: that consciousness is constituted by concepts. A concept is a two part entity consisting of **form** and **content**. While **form** is innate to the individual, consisting of both structure and possibility, **content** is not *sui generis* and not obtained *ex nihilo*; rather, it is externally derived as the subject interacts with its Others and that is where Descartes comes in for some chastising. At this point let me throw a challenge at you: Can any of you tell us which concept you have whose content was generated from your own resources without contact with your Others?

Since physicalism contends that the mind is physical, by which is meant embodied, consciousness, too, must be an embodied entity. If consciousness is constituted by concepts its content must also be physical. So the argument is that the mind exists on a continuum with the body; that in fact the entire body is mind: mind suffuses or is constituted by the entire body – herein comes Theodor Adorno's concept of Subject-Object relations as he urges for "nonviolent *felt contact* with one's others" (1944), or Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological concept of the Body-Subject (1962 & 1968).

From the embodied epistemological considerations in the framework developed in this paper, I can say, following Kant especially, that, ontologically, the appearances or representations are the link between the Self and the Other and, indirectly, also with the other-in-himself/herself/itself from whom the appearances as intuited representations necessarily issue. The question is: Is it possible for there to be a radical (that is, absolute) gap between appearances and the things that are represented by those appearances? Can appearances be totally unconnected to that from which they derive? Surely, even the shadow on the wall of Plato's cave will reflect some aspects of the object of which it is a shadow. A spherical object, for instance,

will not, unless another medium intervenes — which intervention would then act as an explanation of the change so effected — cast a rectangular shadow on the wall. This aspect, in addition to constituting the content part of the Subject's consciousness, in itself provides a link, even if tenuous (because mediated), between the Subject and that from which the appearances emanate. Though a constructivist to the core, Kant (1929) himself admits the existence of this link through his acknowledgement of the existence of “objective” or “brute” reality, although he bemoans the fact that we cannot know such objective reality-in-itself. He notes that without objective reality there would be no appearances or else “we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearances without anything that appears” (27). Indeed, if the content of a Subject's consciousness is derived from sources external to him or her it means that the Subject is not just contiguous with those external sources but he or she is in fact co-terminal with them.

As further proof of this co-terminousness between a Subject and his Others is an aspect of consciousness that is technically known as “intentionality” which means consciousness's *aboutness* or *directedness*. In other words, the reach of consciousness is always *about* something or *directed towards* something both in terms of its sources and its imaginative properties. It is this aspect, more than anything else, which connects the subject to its others; which demonstrates the connection between the Subject and his or her Others. The subject then is both ontologically indebted (as to the content of his or her consciousness) as well as inseparably connected to its others (as to the operations of the intentionality of consciousness) and so all talk of the validity of individualism or physical alienation - whether from oneself or one's others or the environment - is actually a figment of the imagination. Postulations such as John Mbiti's construction of an African ontology as “I am because we are and since we are therefore I am” (1975) are closer to how things are on the ground than the disembodied and divisive Cartesian formulation of ‘I think therefore I am’, especially since Descartes hubristically believes that the content of his thoughts is *sui generis* and obtained *ex nihilo*. Of course the Other becomes a part of the self as a *phenomenon* (a representation) and not as a *noumenon* which fact preserves our individuality, the irreducibility of our consciousness and which also constitutes the *quale/qualia* of our concepts and individual consciousnesses.

The admission by Kant above has at least two important consequences: firstly, the argument that there cannot be appearances without anything that appears gives pride of place to the existence of objective reality in its own right, independent of any constituting Subject. The second consequence is that we derive our material knowledge from appearances which represent something, even if we cannot and, indeed, need not, apprehend that something-in-itself, it being the preserve of the Other, its irreducible otherness. These points are cogent enough to dismiss the possibility of the autonomous Subject of Descartes and lay the foundations instead for the possibility of the overcoming of the schism between a Self and its Others while preserving as “sacrosanct” the otherness of our Others.

The above set up renders the link between the mind and the appearances that constitute the content of its concepts organically co-extensive, as I have pointed out, not just by way of being contiguous but by being coterminous and “inter-subjective”, while remaining individuated and subjective, because mediated. Of course, these appearances which constitute the content of concepts are mediated through the Self, that is, from the Self’s point of view, from its embodied cognitive apparatus. But, that said, without these appearances the Self would not know the Other at all and also not know itself, that is, it would not be a conscious Self in the first instance. To the extent that the Self is involved in an embodied epistemological or cognitive relation with any Other, that Other (even if it is only at the level of the appearances) to the same extent, becomes an integral part of the Self. And, reciprocally, the same situation obtains for the Other Subject. The Self, then, is not alienated from the Other nor is the Other from the Self. The Self is “the Self-in-and-with-the-Other” and the Other is the “Other-in-and-with-the-Self”. This is the case for both because the *content* of their consciousness is constituted by material from each other which renders each dependent on the other for the source of the content of its consciousness, and thereby interdependent rather than autonomous. All the relevant notions of intersubjectivity (such as those we find in the *Ubuntu* philosophy and other kindred or cognate philosophies) and those of hybridity, liminality or the rhizomic (such as those of Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, Stewart Hall, Kwame Anthony Appiah and others) converge here and, through my theorising here, are given their possible onto-rational basis.

Ethics of an embodied, “intersubjective”, Self-Other subjectivity.

What kind of Ethics can we derive from the above Ontology-cum-Epistemology? From the preceding argumentation and demonstration, it should be clear that the need for an embodied Self-Other Subject to be ethical towards its Others – whether that Other be a fellow human being, an animal, a tree or a stone – is not, at the barest minimum, a question of charity or generosity; rather it is a fundamental requirement of the embodied Self-Other Subject’s very ontology of its embodied and intersubjective consciousness.³ On my model, being ethical towards the Other is a question of the embodied Self-Other Subject’s validation of herself or himself and acknowledgement of his or her Others that are an integral part of his or her consciousness while taking into account their otherness. In short, the cornerstone of the embodied Self-Other ethics is an act of Self and Other-validation, through an acknowledgement of one’s ontological indebtedness to one’s Others and implication in their consciousness.

If it can be demonstrated that the embodied Self contains within it aspects of the Other, that alone could do more than all the sermonising about what ethical conduct ought to be. Talk of love, sympathy or empathy remains empty where the rationale for such phenomena is not provided. In fact most humans are very sceptical about the validity of the aforesaid phenomena due to their being prone to sleight of hand or fallacious application as in emotional arm-twisting, or in the appeal to pity (*argumentum ad misericordiam*).⁴ In my

³ Generosity starts from a point where the Self-Other knowingly reaches out to the other Self-Other more than she or he is indebted to that Self-Other and that is not always a positive step because in some cases it becomes a case of patronage. But the concept “charity” has such negative connotations that I prefer to avoid it and opt for the concept “generosity”. When the Subject knowingly reaches out to the Other less than he or she owes the Other, it is called meanness and shows a defect in that Subject’s conception of indebtedness.

⁴ Kant’s ethics of duty, especially his categorical imperative, coupled with his “kingdom of ends”, points towards a Self-Other ethics but it does not provide a rationale that would bind one to apply them to oneself on clearly rational grounds. The appeal to duty, unless properly motivated or accounted for, can very easily lend itself to a charge of ‘charity’, where the other is not within the self but wholly exteriorised. If duty arises from one’s acknowledgement of one’s ontological indebtedness to the

theory I try to strip these phenomena of their ontological mystique and present them as they could be like and so save them from the appeal to pity or sentiments. Sentiments come in only depending on the value that the Subject attaches to the Other whose aspects have become an integral part of himself in the overall Self-Other subjectivity.

The failure to acknowledge one's ontological debt towards Others could be wilful or out of ignorance. If it is out of ignorance the subject could be said to be suffering from ontological blindness and if wilful, the subject could be said to be guilty of ontological thievery: so you are either ontologically blind or an ontological thief. No problem with being ontologically blind as it is usually not by conscious choice and blindness can be cured but if your ignorance is wilful there is a more serious problem. Either way relational problems ensue as a consequence of the un-acknowledgement of one's ontological debt to one's Others. Examine any case of conflict with or exploitation of the Others and what will emerge is that either one or both of the subjects involved did not calculate very well what their ontological debt and hence obligation was towards the Other or they failed to take into account the otherness (the *noumenon*) of the Other. Of course, there is also the question of the place and role of the imagination in ethics to account for ethical acts that go beyond the call of ontological indebtedness to one's others (such as in altruism) or of being ethical towards one's others despite oneself (such as in tolerance).

While the embodied Self-Other Subject is her or his own ethical standard, it so happens that she or he really has no choice but to be ethical towards other embodied Self-Other Subjects. For the embodied Self-Other Subject, ethics is not charity, it is a matter of her or his own validation and that of Others, and the price of being unethical is high: the price is a kind of schizophrenia – a split Self-Other subjectivity, that is, the Self-Other Subject divided against its embodied Self-Other subjectivity. This makes sense of Patricia Waugh's (1992: 121) contention that the Self cannot destroy the Other without at the

Other Subject it is appropriate. As I have noted above, unlike an attitude of generosity, an attitude of charity is not only patronising, it is also ontologically mistaken as it connotes an autonomous Subject performing a benevolent act *on* and *for* the Other; I prefer not to use it.

same time doing violence to itself: “[t]he destruction of the other [...] cannot be accomplished without an accompanying effect of fragmentation of the self”. In the same connection, in an essay titled “Africa Within Us”, Douglass Livingstone (1976), paints an even more graphic picture of such Other and Self destruction for those who try to deny or get rid of the Other part of themselves:

A living body is of course subject to certain immutable laws. A body divided against itself, as someone I’m sure said, dies – as in various types of cancer for instance, where some cells, not content with their orderly dissimilarities yet underlying unity of purpose with the blokes over the road, differ yet again from their associates, and in trying to impose their ways on the others, destroy the whole world they occupy. Dying too in the process, of course: the inexorable final goal of which they are no doubt mindlessly aware while the heady process of Antigone-like resurrection ensues. (qtd. by Brown, 2002: 97)

The point here is that each time the embodied Self-Other Subject fails to acknowledge the Other in its own constitution of subjectivity it suffers a kind of “small death” or ontological stuntedness or deformity, in that area and if such rejection becomes a tendency the web of “small deaths” leads to an absolute ontological short-circuit as is the case with the misanthrope (such as a pre-meditated or serial murderer) or, more generally, the psychopath – which refers to the death of conscience, that ability to recognise oneself in the Other and the Other in oneself.

What needs to be borne in mind, though, is that the Subject is not just in a relation of indebtedness to the other embodied Self-Other Subjects; the embodied Self-Other Subject is also ontologically owed by them. The embodied Self-Other Subject stands in a relation of both responsibilities towards, and rights from, the other embodied Self-Other Subjects. Since I have observed that the notion of the “autonomous subject” is ontologically illusory, the embodied Self-Other Subject has a right to demand that it be recognized and acknowledged by the other embodied Self-Other Subject because it is owed a debt of having ontologically contributed towards the latter’s embodied Self-Other subjectivity. In that regard, it is quite possible

that even a Self-Other who entertained the illusion of being an “autonomous” and “disembodied” Subject would doubt himself or herself if there was no validation whatsoever of his/her being in some way.

While the Self-Other Subject is his or her own ethical standard, a group of Self-Others can, by provisional consensus, determine how a Subject could understand his or her ontological indebtedness to the group and what modes of action are expected from a specific Subject in acknowledgement of such a debt — the dialogic imagination comes in here. Ultimately, though, it is left to the individual Subject to work out the specifics of her or his own ontological indebtedness. In this sense, ethical conduct, all of ethics, revolves around the Self-Other approximating a balance between what and how much she or he ontologically owes and what and how much she or he is owed.

To reiterate the point, ethics cannot be prescribed for the Subject. All that Others can do is simply make promptings and press on the Subject claims of being owed. Such claims are important to enable the Subject properly assess its closest “approximate” indebtedness. “Approximate” because no Self-Other Subject can properly repay its ontological debt because, due to the otherness of the Other as well as its own otherness, there will always be something over and above what the Subject can both know and, in turn, do based on such mediated and impartial knowledge of both its Self-Otherness and of the Other. But the other Self-Other Subject can also be either generous or mean towards the Self-Other Subject; generous when, out of choice, she or he does not press claims for what she or he is convinced is owed by the Subject or gives out more than he or she owes, and mean when he or she demands more than she or he knows is due to her or him. Ultimately, though, each Subject has to work out his or her own “golden mean”.

In place of the Hegelian Master-Slave paradigm which is adversarial and characterised by acrimony, the relation adumbrated here is closer to Paulo Freire’s (1971) Subject-Subject relation, which is most likely a reworking of Hegel’s Master-Slave paradigm. Freire insists (regarding intersubjectivity) on the difference between the dialogical and anti-dialogical human relationships:

The dialogical theory of action does not involve a Subject, who dominates by virtue of conquest, and a dominated object. Instead,

there are Subjects who meet to name the world in order to transform it. If at a certain historical moment the oppressed [...] are unable to fulfil their vocation as Subjects, the posing of their very oppression as a problem (which always involves some form of action) will help them achieve this vocation. (1971: 148)

All in all, my personal point of view is that, whatever its uncertainties, possible dangers and the trauma that is attendant on the process, the encounter between the Self and its Others (beyond the basic and unavoidable stage of initial encounter) is a risk worth taking. This is because, for the most part, the more any Subject encounters the Other the more rounded Self-Other Subject he or she becomes, contributing to the Other as much as gaining from her/him in the exchange and thereby expanding his or her ontological horizon. Each *encounter* is potentially both an imprisoning and, paradoxical though it sounds, liberatory “prison house”. Either way, to know is not to master the Other, but to be indebted to him/her/it. So, ultimately then, knowledge is indeed power but not in the traditional Baconian or Foucauldian sense of the knower mastering and potentially imposing himself on the known (see Nethersole 2005: 256). Rather, knowledge entails an expansion of one’s ontological horizon but which involves indebtedness to one’s Others and a due acknowledgement of this indebtedness would benefit both the knower and the known, reciprocally. It is when acknowledgement of this indebtedness is ignored that the Subject becomes a force in its own right — often, a force for destruction.

Via epistemology, then, the ontology adumbrated in this paper has led us on to an ethics, a Self-Other ethics. Such an ethics posits that it is failure to acknowledge one’s ontological debt and one’s connectedness to one’s Others that lead to relational problems between one subject and its Others, both on an inter-personal and inter-group levels. What happens during what is known as the *encounter* – and subsequent encounters – as the case may be – is what seals our ethical indebtedness. Indeed, I daresay that if each one of us acknowledged our ontological indebtedness and our connection to our Others,

and also took into account their *noumenon*, that would make for smoother, better-oiled global polity in the twenty-first, of all centuries – and beyond.⁵

Conclusion

As we have noted in this paper, the scholarly mixing of natural or physical science and speculative philosophy can be seen in Aristotelian philosophising and “scienticising”. It is evident that Aristotle saw no contradiction in this approach – which is as it should be. At the time of the Enlightenment, Descartes himself, besides being a mathematician of note, was an amateur scientist in his own right who is famously said to have once observed the dissection of a human cadaver – if only to look for the point at which the mind and the body meet. Descartes’ English counterpart, Francis Bacon, supplied the hard science angle to that new age. And, as I have demonstrated in this paper, even in our time there are, increasingly, very fruitful alliances being forged between speculative philosophy and hard science, especially in the field of Philosophy of Mind, some of whose approaches tap from the neurosciences to lend credence to long-held suppositions in the philosophical study of consciousness. Further, there are close links between fiction and science in a literary genre called sci-fi. The mixing of art and science in practices such as video gaming and cartooning is also vibrant and demonstrates this indissoluble union between the sciences and the humanities. Further, industry is increasingly tapping into aesthetics to come up with products that are not just functional but which are also pleasing to the eye and other refined senses. Artistic manifestations in the areas of architecture and the

⁵ I need to mention that the theory outlined above is, arguably, quite versatile and dynamic and its tenets can be applied to a wide range of issues including those of gender, ethnicism/tribalism/regionalism, racism and those to do with identity, generally. One can also deploy it to provide an ontological basis for rights and duties, for another example. To illustrate this assertion one could say that we have DUTIES towards others primarily because we are indebted to them ontologically at the level of consciousness. At the same time we have RIGHTS both because they, too, owe us an ontological debt and also because of the irreducible aspects of our ontogeny, that is our *noumenon*: the us-in-ourselves. Already I have applied this theory to the fiction of the 2003 Nobel Laureate J.M. Coetzee and you can apply it to a wide range of scholarship and praxis.

built environment are yet another field that attests to this fruitful alliance. All these examples expose the supposed gap between the sciences and the humanities as only sleight-of-mind and dangerous, and this danger is being made manifest in very real ways in the environmental degradation that results from humanity's unethical exploitation of the natural resources putting the entire humanity at great risk in a myriad of ways.

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