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Knowledge and Human Liberation : Jurgen Habermas, Sri Aurobindo and Beyond

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Abstract

Knowledge and human liberation are epochal challenges now and a key question here is what is the meaning of knowledge and the meaning of human liberation. The paper argues that knowledge means not only knowledge of self, society and Nature as conceived within the predominant dualistic logic of modernity but also knowledge of transcendental self beyond sociological role playing, knowledge of Nature beyond anthropocentric reduction and control, and knowledge of cosmos, god and transcendence in an interconnected spirit of autonomy and interpenetration. Liberation means not only liberation from oppressive structures but also liberation from one's ego and the will to control and dominate. The paper discusses the transformative link between knowledge and liberation through a critical dialogue with Jurgen Habermas and Sri Aurobindo, focusing mainly on their works, *Knowledge and Human Interests* and *Synthesis of Yoga*. The paper does not simply compare and contrast between Habermas and Sri Aurobindo but seeks to create a condition for transformative criticism for both Habermas and Sri Aurobindo. It argues that while Habermas' rationalistic approach to knowledge and human interest can be deepened by Sri Aurobindo's yoga of integral knowledge, Sri Aurobindo's aspiration for creating a spiritual society can be facilitated by formation of appropriate public spheres as in the process both the categories of self and public sphere are fundamentally transformed.

Key words

Knowledge, self-cultivation, liberatory aspirations, social movements, global conversations and human liberation.

The process of inquiry in the natural sciences is organized in the transcendental framework of instrumental action, so that nature necessarily becomes the object of knowledge from the viewpoint of possible technical control. The process of inquiry in the cultural sciences moves at the transcendental level of communication, so that the explanation of meaning structures is necessarily subject to the viewpoint of the possible maintenance of the inter subjectivity of mutual understanding. Because they mirror structures of work and interaction, in other words, structures of life, we have conceived of these two transcendental viewpoints as the cognitive expression of knowledge-constitutive interests. But it is only through the self-reflection of sciences falling within the category of critique that the connection between knowledge and interest emerges cogently. We have chosen psychoanalysis as an example. Here the process of

inquiry, which is at the same time a process of self-inquiry, is bound to the conditions of analytic dialogue. These conditions are transcendental insofar as they establish the meaning of the validity of psychoanalytic interpretations. Yet at the same time they are objective insofar as they make possible the factual treatment of pathological phenomena. The reduction of a transcendental viewpoint to an objective structure and a corresponding cognitive interest is superfluous, because the analytic resolution of distorted communication that determines behavioral compulsion and false consciousness is at once both theory and therapy.

Jurgen Habermas (1971), *Knowledge and Human Interest*, p. 287.

Only a reason which is fully aware of the interest in the progress of reflection towards a full autonomy, which is indestructibly at work in every rational discussion, will be able to gain transcendent power from the awareness of its own materialistic involvements. [..] Science as a productive force can work in a salutary way when it is suffused by science as an emancipatory force, to the same extent as it becomes disastrous as soon as it seeks to subject the domain of praxis, which is outside the sphere of technical disposition, to its exclusive control.

Jurgen Habermas (1973), *Theory and Practice*, p. 281.

The traditional Way of Knowledge proceeds by elimination and rejects successively the body, the life, the senses, the heart, the very thought in order to merge into the quiescent Self or supreme *Nihil* or indefinite Absolute. The way of integral knowledge supposes that we are intended to arrive at an integral self-fulfillment and the only thing that is to be eliminated is our own unconsciousness, the Ignorance and the results of the Ignorance. [..] The liberated knower lives and acts in the world not less than the bound soul and ignorant mind but more, doing all actions, *sarvakrt only with a true knowledge and a greater conscient power. And by so doing he does not forfeit the supreme unity nor falls from the supreme consciousness and highest knowledge.*

Sri Aurobindo (1948), The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 277- 278, 285.

A spiritual idea is power, but only when it is both inwardly and outwardly creative. Here we have to enlarge and to deepen the pragmatic principle that truth is what we create within us, in other words what we become

Sri Aurobindo, *Human Cycles*, p. 326.

The Problem

Human liberation has been a key concern with humanity from the dawn of history and in the contemporary moment, it manifests before us as an epochal challenge as the prevalent guarantors of liberation in modernity—liberalism and socialism—have left us alone in the street. The dead end in which our familiar projects of social emancipation and human freedom are at present urges us to rethink liberation as part of a new seeking, striving, and experimental subjectivity at the level of both self and society. Human liberation means liberation from the oppressive structures of society, from one's ego and urge to control (which is one of the most important sources of social evils, as Teressa Brennan (1995) would tell us), and to be related positively and affirmatively to new schemes of being and becoming and to creation of alternative spaces of self-realization, inter subjectivity and solidarity. In this practice and quest of human liberation, knowledge plays an important role and Jurgen Habermas and Sri Aurobindo, two soul-touching thinkers of our time, help us to understand the multidimensional pathways of linkages between knowledge and human liberation. Their pathways of seeking and striving touch us not only as cognitive schemes but as intimations of a Beyond. Though Habermas is conventionally looked at approaching knowledge only through rational argumentation, there is the suggestion of a beyond in him. It is no wonder then that in many of his works, as for example in *Between Facts and Norms: Towards a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Habermas (1996) talks of the need to proceed with "weak transcendental idealizations" in our practices of communication and acquisition of knowledge (also see Habermas 2002a). Habermas (1990) himself urges us to realize that "cognition, empathy, and agape" must be integrated in our quest of knowledge and "concern for the fate of one's neighbor is a necessary emotional prerequisite for the cognitive operations expected of participants of discourse" (Habermas 1990:). Such a suggestion for a beyond whose full potential however is not fully explored in Habermas (2002) as he is anxious to reduce all transcendence to a "transcendence from within" in the practices of knowledge can be deepened and broadened by a dialogue with Sri Aurobindo.

In his *Knowledge and Human Interest* published more than three decades ago, Habermas brings to the center the significance of self-reflection in knowledge. But at this stage, self-reflection for him seems to primarily emerge from the psychoanalytic situation of dialogue between the doctor and patient though germs of its origin in mutually validating pragmatics of communication are already visible here. In his later works, self-reflection has a broader ground of origin and nurturance, namely in our participation in processes of moral argumentation and public sphere. But this practice of knowledge can be deepened by Sri Aurobindo's pathway of yoga of integral knowledge. In Sri Aurobindo, the yoga of integral knowledge enables one to

have a deeper "self-awareness," "self-consciousness" and "self-realization," discover, know and realize the transcendental dimension in self, society and Nature, and the inherent connectedness between self, other and the world. This dialogue also touches the very core of ontology and epistemology in thinking about and practices of knowledge. In Habermasian knowledge and human interest, knowledge mainly consists of knowledge of self and society but despite Habermasian distinction between ego-identity and self-identity Habermas does not touch the transcendental dimension of self. Habermas does touch upon knowledge of nature through the category of sciences but this knowledge here is mainly one of technical control. A dialogue with Sri Aurobindo helps us to bring the very conception of knowledge into a foundational broadening and cross-civilizational dialogue, for example, thinking about knowledge of self, society, nature and god / transcendence as part of an interconnected field of autonomy and interpenetration. It can help us to understand that the relationship among them is not one of dualism alone and though this relationship has been predominantly thought of and lived in a regime of pervasive dualism within modernity of which Habermas still continues to be a passionate advocate there is a non-dual dimension in their logic of constitution and embodiment characterized by what J.N. Mohanty calls "multi-valued logic" or what JPS Uberoi calls "four-fold logic of truth and method" rather than a binary or a dualistic logic (cf. Mohanty 2000; Uberoi 2002). A dialogue between Habermas and Aurobindo can not only broaden the ontology of knowledge but also help us realize that the distinction between ontology and epistemology as has been valorized in modernity needs to be transcended by embodying what can be called an ontological epistemology of participation, taking cues from recent transformations in both epistemological and ontological imaginations such as "virtue epistemology" and "weak ontology."[1] But here a Habermasian mode needs to be ready for a foundational border crossing as despite Habermasian critique of positivism Habermas is within a modernist epistemological privileging in his conception and method of knowledge and his denial of ontology.[2] Even though this denial has to some extent to do with Habermas's understandable fight with the ghost of Heidegger, Habermas seems now to turn this into a new orthodoxy therefore showing how critical theory is incapable of critiquing its very foundational presuppositions such as valorization of rational argumentations, performative competence, validity claims and linguistic inter subjectivity instead of emotional inter subjectivity (Craib 1998). But the problem of dualism and instrumentalism does not vanish by being part of communicative action and knowledge as human liberation, not only as human interest, calls for developing non-dual and non-instrumental modes of relationships which are not automatically guaranteed even when we shift from positivism to a Habermasian communicative rationality.

A dialogue between Habermas and Aurobindo has another potential for a foundational border crossing for critical theory and this has to do with realizing the very limits of knowledge itself. The Habermasian articulation of knowledge and human interest valorizes knowledge and communication and here Habermas's critique of "illusion of pure theory" does not really acknowledge the limits of knowledge itself in a foundational sense. Consider here the following lines of *Ishopanishada*—one of the foundational texts of spiritual universality coming from India: *Andham Tamah Prabishyanti Jo AVidyam Upasate, Tato Vuya Ibate Tamah Jo Vidyaam Ratah*. It means: those who worship ignorance are steeped in darkness but those who are steeped in knowledge are also steeped in darkness. Therefore to be steeped in the valorization of knowledge and communication to the exclusion of other practices of self-cultivation such as listening, silence and self-emptying vis-à-vis one's will to power and will to arguments, and connectedness with the world—not only the human social world but also with the world of nature and transcendence—is to be steeped in blindness and we now need a new critical theory which helps us to understand the limits of knowledge and human interests. Critical theory in its modernist incarnation started with a Marxian critique of valorization of capital to which the proponents of the early Frankfurt school added a much helpful critique of valorization of state and the media. But now, especially in these days of communicative revolutions, we need a new mode of critique and reconstruction which combines a critique of valorization of capital and power with a critique of valorization of knowledge and communication, enabling us to understand the very limits of knowledge.

The paper does not simply compare and contrast between Habermas and Sri Aurobindo but carries out a dialogue with them as fellow travelers in a spirit of "comparison of comparisons" (Giri 1993). In the process, the paper seeks to create a condition for mutual criticism both for Habermas and Sri Aurobindo as well as for their followers. While Habermas's pathway of rational argumentation can be deepened by Sri Aurobindo's yoga of integral knowledge, Sri Aurobindo's aspiration for creating a spiritual society can be facilitated by the Habermasian formation of a public sphere though in the process both the categories of self and public sphere are fundamentally transformed. But such a mutual critical engagement calls for efforts to go beyond the limits of present-day regnant science and society, or as R. Sunder Rajan (1998) would urge us, to seek beyond the crisis of European sciences so that our practices of knowledge do not become only a knowledge of but also knowledge with—a knowing with which inaugurates multiple transformations in self and society.

Knowledge, Human Interest and Human Liberation: A Brief Introduction to the Life and *Oeuvres* of Jurgen Habermas and Sri Aurobindo

Jurgen Habermas is an important interlocutor of our times. Born in 1929 he has continued to fight for a democratic Germany from the ashes of a Nazi past and is an outstanding public intellectual. His first major work, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, was published in Germany in 1962. Then came his other important work, *Knowledge and Human Interest* in 1968 which was translated to English in 1971. In the last forty years Habermas has gifted us with a rich body of work-–*Theory and Practice*, *A Theory of Communicative Action*, *Philosophical Discourses of Modernity, Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action, Postmetaphysical Thinking, Justification and Application, Between Facts and Norms: Towards a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy, Liberating Power of Symbols, Postnational Constellations, Inclusion of the Other and Religion and Rationality*. These works continue to challenge us to rethink our theories and practice in fundamental ways. Just a few illustrations would suffice. In his *Berlin Republic*, Habermas writes: "In unobtrusive ways, we are constantly learning from major traditions, but the question is whether we can learn from events that reflect the failure of traditions" (Habermas 1998a: 12). The following lines from his *Inclusion of the Other* also deserves our careful consideration:

> Equal respect for everyone is not limited to those who are like us; it extends to the person of the other in his or her otherness. And solidarity with the other as one of us refers to the flexible 'we' of a community that resists all substantive determinations and extends its permeable boundaries ever further. This moral community constitutes itself solely by way of the negative idea of abolishing discrimination and harm and of extending relations of mutual recognition to include marginalized men and women. [xx] Here inclusion does not imply locking members into a community that closes itself of from others. The 'inclusion of the other' means rather that the boundaries of the community are open for all, also and most especially for those who are strangers to one another and want to remain stranger (Habermas 1998b: xxxvi-xxxvii).

In his work Habermas embodies not only a remarkable public commitment but also a transdisciplinarity and a border crossing mainly between continental philosophy and American pragmatism.

Sri Aurobindo (1871-1950) is a major seeker and experimenter who along with Gandhi and Tagore can be considered as three important makers of modern India whose strivings also included the goal of a better humanity. Sri Aurobindo was born in 1871. His father wanted him

to become an Englishman and a civil servant of the Raj. He was sent to England when he was very young. Sri Aurobindo had his upbringing and education in England including Cambridge and without being a civil servant he came back to India in the 1890s and worked with the *Maharajah* (King) of Baroda, first as a secretary and then as a professor in Maharajah's college. While he had learnt European literature including the classical languages such as Latin in England upon return to India he set himself on the journey of discovering India. He started learning Sanskrit. But this discovery was soon to bring him in confrontation with the colonial masters. He wrote *Foundations of Indian Culture* countering the colonialist construction of India and also took part in India's freedom struggle. Sri Aurobindo soon became the leader of the newly emerging Swadeshi movement, left his job in Baroda, came to his native Bengal and gave direction to the struggle for freedom. Sri Aurobindo also established a national college for appropriate national education in Calcutta. Sri Aurobindo was the most important leader of India's freedom struggle before the arrival of Gandhi and in many ways can be looked at as having germinated major themes which were to preoccupy Gandhi such as "Back to the villages". During this struggle, he was once implicated in a bomb case and arrested. While in the prison he had a spiritual vision and gained a new calling to strive not only for India's political independence but for a new spiritual dawn for the whole of humanity, for a manifestation of a new evolutionary consciousness. After being acquitted in this bomb case Sri Aurobindo left British India and came to Pondicherry in 1910 which was then being ruled by the French. He there embarked upon a multi-dimensional journey of seeking and creativity. He edited a journal named *Arya* and wrote his major works, *Human Cycles*, *Life Divine* and *The Syntheses of Yoga* as regular columns in this journal. Besides these works, Sri Aurobindo has also written, among others, *Ideals of Human Unity*, *Future Poetry* and the epic *Savitri*, which chronicles the journey of a soul in her quest of overcoming death and suffering, which was nominated several times for a Nobel Prize in literature.

Sri Aurobindo is one of the very few modern Indian thinkers who does not reject reason outright rather accord it a primal place in human development and evolution both phyologenetically and ontogenetically. Sri Aurobindo also does not reject modernity outright rather his *Human Cycles* puts reason and modernity in perspective. When we read this we find a lot of similarity between Sri Aurobindo and a modernist European thinker such as Habermas. Sri Aurobindo here points to the crucial significance of reason in understanding the validity of traditions: "Reason can accept no tradition merely for the sake of its antiquity or its greatness; it has to ask, first whether it contains the best truth available to man for the government of his life" (1962: 183). Sri Aurobindo also stresses the need "to universalize first of all the habit of

reason" but "the reason which is to be universally applied, cannot be the reason of a ruling class: for in the present imperfection of the human race that always means the fettering and misapplication of reason degraded into servant of power to maintain the privileges of the ruling class. *It must be the reason of each and all seeking for a basis of agreement*" (ibid: 184, emphases added).

Like Habermas's plea for undistorted communication, Aurobindo also sensitizes us to the distortion that power can introduce in the working of a rational discourse and the realization of even its inherent emancipatory potential. But for Aurobindo even though reason is so important for moral development and evolution (both phylogenetic and ontogenetic) it cannot be a sole foundation of morality. Aurobindo accords this role to spirit, not to reason. For him, both order and evolution in life involves "interlocking of an immense number of things that are in conflict with each other" and discovering "some principle of standing-ground of unity" (Sri Aurobindo 1962: 201). Reason cannot perform this function because "The business of reason is indeterminate...in order that it may do its office, it is obliged to adopt temporarily fixed view points"(ibid). When reason becomes the sole arbiter of life and morality, "every change becomes or at least seems a thing doubtful, difficult and perilous...while the conflict of view points, principles, systems leads to strife and revolution and not to basis of harmonious development" (ibid). For Aurobindo, harmony can be achieved only when the "soul discovers itself in its highest and completest spiritual reality and effects a progressive upward transformation of its life values into those of the Spirit; for they will all find their spiritual truth and in that truth their standing-ground of mutual recognition and reconciliation..." (ibid).

For Aurobindo, the inadequacy of reason to become the governor of life and morality lies in man's transitional nature--half animal and half divine. He believes that "the root powers of human life, its intimate causes are below, irrational, and they are above, suprarational." It is for this reason that "a purely rational society could not come into being and, if it could be born, either could not live or sterilize or petrify human existence" (Sri Aurobindo 1962: 114). He (1962: 206) argues, "if reason were the secret, highest law of the universe...it might be possible for him by the power of the reason to evolve out of the dominance of the infrarational Nature which he inherits from the animal. But his nature is rather transitional; the rational being is only a middle term of Nature's evolution. A rational satisfaction cannot give him safety from the pull from below nor deliver him from the attraction from above." Aurobindo uses reason but unlike Habermas does not take it as the be all and end all of life. For him, "The solution lies not in reason but in the soul of man, in its spiritual tendencies. It is a spiritual, an inner freedom

that alone can create a perfect human order. It is spiritual, *a greater than rational enlightenment*, that can alone illumine the vital nature of man and impose harmony on its self-seeking, antagonisms and discord" (ibid; emphasis added).

An ideal society, for Aurobindo, is not a mere "rational society" but a "spiritual society." A society founded on spirituality is not governed by religion as a mere social organisation where society uses religion "to give an august, awful and...eternal sanction to its mass of customs and institutions" (Sri Aurobindo 1962: 211). A spiritual society is not a theocratic society but a society guided by the quest of the spirit. A spiritual society regards man not only as a "mind, a life and a body, but as a soul incarnated for a divine fulfillment upon earth, not only in heavens beyond, which after all it need not have left if it had no divine business here in the world of physical, vital and mental nature" (Sri Aurobindo 1962: 213).

Sri Aurobindo's idea of the highest stage of morality is close to the Kohlberg-Habermas idea of the post-conventional stage of moral development. Like the Habermasian idea of post-conventional stage of morality, Aurobindo's idea of morality is not an extension of the collective egoism of a particular society. But what distinguishes his idea of morality is invocation of God not only as a tertiary factor but also as a constituting factor in the dyadic relationship between the self and the other, as constituting the moving ground of mid-points of relationships as it were. For him (1962: 136), "the seeking for God is also, subjectively, the seeking for our highest, truest, fullest, largest Self." This conception and realization of God is not within the conventional boundaries of religion, philosophy and theology. God here is the symbol of the best possible in man while being not reduced to anthropocentric formulations. Sri Aurobindo (1962: 143) argues that, "ethics is not in its essence a calculation of good and evil in action of a laboured effort to be blameless according to the standards of the world--these are only crude appearances--it is an attempt to grow into divine nature."

Both Sri Aurobindo and Habermas are passionate critics of systems which deny human flourishing. Much of Habermas's passion can be attributed to his struggle for radical democracy and his fight against Nazism in his native Germany. Sri Aurobindo was also a critic of Nazism and contributed in his own ways as a *yogi* to the fight against the Nazis. While Habermas speaks of the colonization of the life world Sri Aurobindo uses a much more passionate language of criticism such as barbarism going beyond the familiar distinction between civilization and barbarism. Habermas is now a critic of marketization of the globe and his critique can be deepened by the critical perspective of economic barbarism that Sri Aurobindo outlines in his

Human Cycles: "Just as the physical barbarian makes the excellence of the body and development of physical force [..] so the vitalistic or economic barbarian makes the satisfaction of wants and desires and the accumulation of possessions his standard and aim" (Sri Aurobindo 1962: 94).

While there are similarities between Habermas and Aurobindo there are some major differences. One of this has to do with Habermas's theses of linguistification of the sacred—the sacred has now lost its aura and is part of ordinary language. As is well-known Habermas makes a shift from philosophy of consciousness to philosophy of language and looks at the sacred linguistically. This is related to the issue of poetry and prose in thinking about language, and also critique and reconstruction. Habermas is critical of any poetic use of language as he is afraid any such can dislocate humans from their reason and make them servile followers of tyrannical crowds such as the Nazis. Habermas is a critic of the poetic use of language though in his own work we find a poetic dimension. Consider here the following lines of Habermas: "This ontology fetishizes words, bows down before their roots, believing words to be pure only in their venerated origins.." (Habermas 2002: 65). Habermas directs his energies here against Heidegger but poetry in Heidegger was not only a poetry of glory, it also embodied a deep "pathos of shakenness" (Shanks 2001). Sri Aurobindo, much like Heidegger, has a broader conception of language and dialogue which can be understood by reading what Derrida writes about his conversations with Levinas: "..we often addressed to one another what I would call neither questions nor answers but, perhaps a question-prayer, a question prayer that would be anterior to all dialogue" (Derrida 1999: 13). For Sri Aurobindo, poetry is a *mantra,* an invocation of self, social and world-transformation. Writes Sri Aurobindo in his legendary epic *Savitri*:

> A lonely freedom cannot satisfy
> A heart that has grown one with every heart
> I am a deputy of the aspiring world
> My spirit's liberty I ask for all.[3]

Knowledge and Human Interest: Habermas's Agenda

Habermas's *Knowledge and Human Interest* is one of the earliest master pieces of Habermas which lays the ground work for his subsequent meditations. It contains Habermas's rich and multi-faceted dialogue with Hegel, Kant, Marx, Fichte, Dilthey, Nietzsche, Pierce and Freud. The main concern here is how knowledge and human interest has been conceptualized in these thinkers. But while carrying on careful dialogue with these masters, Habermas develops a point of view of his own concerning knowledge and human interest. In this we find a tilt

towards both psychoanalysis and pragmatism. Regarding the later, it becomes clear in the following lines of Habermas: “The non-arbitrary character of the broadly normative content of the unavoidable presuppositions of communication can be established neither ontologically, nor epistemologically. In other words, it cannot be shown with reference to the purposive character of being, or with reference to the rational endowments of subjectivity. It can only be made plausible through the lack of alternatives to a practice in which communicatively socialized subjects always already find themselves engaged. I have adopted this formal-pragmatic approach in my work in order to reveal a mutual understanding. This rational potential can provide the normative basis for a critical theory of society” (Habermas 2002a: 118). Habermas tells us how he was attracted to pragmatism in his quest for radical democracy: “The anti-elitist, democratic, and thoroughly egalitarian attitude that shapes and penetrates the work of all the pragmatists was far more important than the *contents* of any particular essay on politics or democracy” (2002b: 228).

Habermas wants to establish a transformative link between knowledge and human interest through the practice of self-reflection as for him “in the power of self-reflection knowledge and interest are one” (Habermas 1971: 313). For Habermas, “The concept of ‘interest’ is not meant to imply a naturalistic reduction of transcendental-logical properties to empirical ones [..] Knowledge-constitutive interests mediate the natural history of the human species with the logic of its self-formative process [..] I term *interests* the basic orientations rooted in specific fundamental conditions of the possible reproduction and self-constitution of the human species, namely work and interaction” (ibid: 197). Self-reflection plays an important role in knowledge and human interest. For Habermas, “The experience of reflection articulates itself substantially in the concept of a self-formative process. Methodically it leads to a standpoint from which the identity of reason with the will to reason freely arises. In self-reflection, knowledge for the sake of knowledge comes to coincide with the interest in autonomy and responsibility. For the pursuit of reflection knows itself as a movement of emancipation. Reason is at the same time subject to the interest in reason. We can say that it obeys an emancipatory cognitive interest, which aims at the pursuit of reflection” (Habermas 1971: 198).

Habermas develops three crucial points: the link between knowledge and human interest manifests itself in cognitive interest, emancipatory interest and in interest of reason where there is “an inherent drive to realize reason” (ibid: 201). Habermas wants to reinterpret “the concept of interest of reason” materialistically: “The development of interest of reason from Kant to Fichte leads from the concept of an interest in actions of free will, dictated by practical reason,

to the concept of an interest in the independence of the ego, operative in reason itself [..] As an act of freedom interest precedes self-reflection just as it realizes itself in the emancipatory power of self-reflection. This unity of knowledge and the interested employment of reason conflicts with the contemplative concept of knowledge" (ibid: 209).

For Habermas, "self-reflection is determined by an emancipatory cognitive interest" (p. 311).[4] "However, only in an emancipated society, whose members' autonomy and responsibility had been realized, would communication have developed into the non-authoritarian and universally practiced dialogue" (p. 315). Thus, for Habermas, "..the unity of knowledge and interest proves itself in a dialectic that takes the historical traces of suppressed dialogue and reconstructs what has been suppressed" (ibid). Habermas here urges us to realize that "Sciences lack the means of dealing with the risks that appear once the connection between knowledge and human interest has been comprehended on the level of self-reflection" (ibid). Understanding the transformative links between knowledge and human interests also calls for a new philosophical vocation whose interest is no less than working for "mankind's evolution toward autonomy and responsibility": "Only when philosophy discovers in the dialectical course of history the traces of violence that deform repeated attempts at dialogue and recurrently closes off the path to unconstrained communication does it further the process whose suppression it otherwise legitimates: mankind's evolution toward autonomy and responsibility" (ibid).

Habermas's Self-Critique

Habermas himself says that overcoming anthropocentrism is a key challenge now and in discourse ethics cognitive distantiation must be accompanied by emotional integration. Despite Habermasian valorization of linguistification of sacred Habermas himself acknowledges the limits of it. Consider here the following lines from his *Postmetaphysical Thinking*:

> In the wake of metaphysics, philosophy surrenders its extraordinary status. Explosive experiences of the extraordinary have migrated into an art that has become autonomous. Of course, even after this deflation, ordinary life, now fully profane, by no means becomes immune to the shattering and subversive intrusion of extraordinary events. Viewed from without, religion, which has largely been deprived of its worldview functions, is still indispensable in ordinary life for normalizing intercourse with the extraordinary. For this reason, even postmetaphysical thinking continues to coexist with religious practice - and not merely in the sense of the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous. This ongoing coexistence even throws light on a curious dependence of a philosophy that has forfeited its contact with the

> extraordinary. Philosophy, even in its postmetaphysical form, will be able neither to replace nor to repress religion as long as religious language is the bearer of a semantic content that is inspiring and even indispensable, for this content eludes (for the time being?) the explanatory force of philosophical language and continues to resist translation into reasoning discourses (Habermas 1992: 51).

In his most recent collection of essays, *Religion and Rationality*, Habermas also writes: "It must also remain open from the viewpoint of the philosopher who appropriates tradition and who in a performative stance has the experience that intuitions which had long been interested in religious language can neither be rejected nor simply be retrieved rationally.." (Habermas 2002a: 79).

The Limits of Habermasian Self-Critique: Towards Critical Dialogues

Once we read closely these lines several foundational issues arrest us. Habermas relates to tradition in a manner of "philosophical appropriation." This is part of a "post-traditional telos" in sociology and "postmetaphysical thinking" in critical philosophy where the only proper mode of life and form of inquiry is to ask tradition to defend itself and to lead a post-metaphysical and post-traditional life.[5] But is it a proper mode engagement? Does not philosophical appropriation, or for that matter any appropriation, suggest arrogance and even violence? Furthermore Habermas does not realize that one way of coming to terms with the problem of religion is to open oneself to spiritual dimension within religions in particular and spiritual seeking in general which while using a language of beyond is not trapped within a logic of religious systems and traditions.

Despite Habermas' self-criticism what we find in his engagement with other modes of knowledge is precisely only one of appropriation, appropriating these to his encompassing agenda of rational argumentation and communicative validation. This appropriation begins with his translation of Kant. He finds Kant's actors solitary and wants to redeem this by making them part of a public discursive formation of will. Then comes his dialogue with Kierkegaard. He finds Kierkegaardian inwardness of interest but does not want to leave it at that and wants inwardness to emerge from its participation in the public sphere (cf. Matustik 1997). Similar is his translation of theologians such as Johannes Baptist Metz. Habermas deeply appreciates Metz's effort to create a politically responsible polycentric church and theology (Habermas 1997). Metz does this with his articulation of a pathway of what he calls "anamnestic reason," a reason which remembers the memory of struggle and resists forgetting. For Metz, "through the philosophical reason of Greek origin, a Hellenized Christianity has become so distanced

from its own origin in the spirit of Israel that theology has become insensitive before the cry of suffering and the demand of universal injustice" (Habermas 1997: 244). But to Metz's critique of loss of critical edge in Christianity as part of it incorporation within Greek reason, Habermas argues that the Greek logos has been transformed. In his words: "In the course of an evolution that leads from the intellectual contemplation of the cosmos to a linguistically incarnated reason, passing through the self-reflexivity of a knowing subject, the Greek logos has been transformed. Today, it no longer centers only on the cognitive relation with the world—on beings and beings, on the knowing of knowing, or on the meaning of sentences that can be true or false. What has also unfolded within philosophy, making possible that argumentative reason be receptive to practical experiences of historically existing yet threatened identities of being, is the idea of an alliance of the people of God and of a justice in a history of suffering. It is the idea of an alliance that links freedom and solidarity in the horizon of an undamaged subjectivity" (ibid: 246). While in these lines Habermas points to the need for argumentative reason to be open to the threatened identities of being no where he suggests what it can learn from Metz's "anamnestic reason." Habermas asserts a one-way approach rather than a genuine border crossing: "The tension between the spirit of Athens and the inheritance of Israel has had profound consequence in philosophy as well as theology. But if philosophical thinking is not resolved simply in the synthetic labor of idealism then the critique of Hellenized Christianity cannot direct itself against argumentative reason per se [..] It is argumentative reason itself, which in the deepest layers of its pragmatic presuppositions, discloses the conditions for the appellation of an unconditional sense and, with that, maintains open the dimension of the validity claims that transcend the social spaces and historical time" (ibid: 247-248).

Thus in his dialogue with theologian Metz instead of using Metz's formulations of "anamnestic reason" to broaden and deepen argumentative reason, Habermas asserts its primacy. However Habermas retains Metz's terminology of "Hellenized Christianity" which unfortunately soon degenerates into a quick judgmental category. This is, for example, how Habermas terms some of the foundational questions that Dallmayr raises. In his reflections on critical theory, Dallmayr raises the issue of reconciliation. For Dallmayr, "Ever since *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas has stipulated a sharp distinction between understanding and empirical sciences, constantly maintaining (against Marcuse and others) that the only cognitively 'promising' way of dealing with external nature is that of technical control. *This acceptance of control, however, cannot readily be confined or isolated from other domains: it certainly as such is not mitigated by communicative rationality*" (Dallmayr 1992: 141: emphases added). For Dallmayr, and this is an important issue, "..the contagion of control can be traced to the

dubious character of the proclaimed paradigm shift: from consciousness to language" (ibid). For Dallmayr, this shift has two effects: a) Habermas does not realize that language reverberates with its own silence; b) it leads to a series of divisions which then makes the task of reconciliation urgent: "..the continued invocation of subject-philosophy gives rise to various splits or divisions (other terms of 'demarcations')—between human beings and nature, ego and alter, ego and id—which in turn promote various modes of mastery and control" (ibid: 142). In response, Habermas writes: "I hope to have learned much from Kant, and still I have not become a Dallmayrian Kantian. [..] Linguistic intersubjectivity goes beyond the subjects without putting them in bondage. [..] It is not a higher-level subjectivity and therefore, without sacrificing a transcendence from within, it can do without the concept of an Absolute. We can dispense with this legacy of Hellenized Christianity as well as any subsequent right-Hegelian constructions upon which Dallmayr still seems to rely" (Habermas 2002a: 91).

Thus Hellenized Christianity becomes a term of labeling in Habermas. But it is unfair to throw this at Dallmayr because Dallmayr works within a liberative tradition within Christianity and his conception of God and Absolute emerges out of his deep participation with the emancipatory spiritual heritage of humanity as he has personally taken part in new spiritual strivings in Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity (Dallmayr 1998; 2001; 2002). But compared to this, Habermas has an ethnocentric approach to knowledge and human interest, and though speaks of post-conventional morality and post-metaphysical thinking, his metaphysics comes from Kant on the one hand and Judeo-Christian tradition on the other though he himself does not integrate his own opening to Jewish mystical thought to his post-metaphysical mode.[6] In a recent interview, "A Conversation About God and the World," Habermas tells us: "Unlike the range of early mythic narratives, that is, the idea of the unified, invisible God the Creator and Redeemer—signified a breakthrough to an entirely new perspective" (Habermas 2002a: 148). Thus it is not just an accident that Habermas dismisses contemporary growth of new age religions as "neo-pagan" because he is Judeo-Christian to the core when it comes to looking at the massacre of pagan religions and terming Christianity as a "breakthrough" even though he himself acknowledges his limits: "And sociologically speaking I have not studied any of the new, de-institutionalized and de-differentiated forms of religiosity" (ibid: 151). As far as his approach to other religions are concerned, Habermas says:

> My impression is that Buddhism is the only other world religion that achieved a comparable level of abstraction [..] But [..]cultural and social modernization has not been completed in the regions dominated by Buddhism. In the West, Christianity not only fulfilled the cognitive initial conditions for modern structures of

> consciousness; it also demanded a range of *motivations* that were the great theme of the economic and ethical research of Max Weber. For the normative self-understanding of modernity, Christianity has functioned as more than just a precursor or a catalyst. Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of a critical reappropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day there is no alternative to it. And in the light of the current challenges of a postnational constellation, we must draw sustenance now, as in the past, from this substance. Everything else is postmodern talk (ibid: 148-149).

Therefore it is no wonder that Habermas also writes: "The West now encounters other cultures in the form of the overpowering scientific and technological infrastructure of a capitalist world civilization [..] We no longer confront other cultures as alien since their structures still remind us of previous phases of our own social development. What we *do* encounter as alien within other cultures is the stubborn distinctiveness of their religious cores" (Habermas 2002a: 156). Habermas also says: "..overcoming Eurocentrism demands that the West make proper use of its own cognitive resources" (ibid: 154).

Habermas writes: "In communicative action, we orient ourselves to validity claims that, practically, we can raise only in the context of *our* languages and forms of life, even if the convertibility [..] that we implicitly co-posit *points beyond* the provinciality of our respective historical standpoints. We are exposed to the movement of a transcendence from within, which is just little at our disposal as the actuality of the spoken word turns us into masters of the structure of language (or of the Logos). But this does not enable us to ascertain the countermovement of a compensating transcendence from beyond" (Habermas 2002a: 80). But there are many different conceptions of transcendence possible and Habermasian agenda of "transcendence from within" suffers from the modernist anxiety to imprison transcendence within a familiar language and the public sphere. Consider here the following lines of Luc Ferry who writes in his *Man Made God: The Meaning of Life*: "..When I hear a musical passage, it does not reduce to a series of related notes with no connection between them (actual immanence). On the contrary, it contributes—in an immanent way, apart from any rational operation—a certain structure that transcends this actual immanence, without being imposed on me from the outside like an argument from authority. This 'immanent transcendence' contains within itself, par excellence, the ultimate significance of lived experiences" (Ferry

2002: 26). In post-metaphysical and secular moments, God is referred to not to "ground truth, but comes after it, to give it a meaning" (ibid: 31).

Some Further Posers

The above discussion has prepared the ground for raising some further questions about Habermas's fundamental presuppositions concerning knowledge and human interests. Knowledge is linked to human interest, mainly cognitive and emancipatory interest, and is not a domain of pure theory. The significance of *Knowledge and Human Interest* lay in initiating a break away from not only idealism but also positivistic science and epistemology, a positivistic self-understanding of science as "the sciences have retained the character of philosophy: the illusion of pure theory" (Habermas). In breaking away from the illusion of pure theory Habermas unfortunately leaves aside the whole vision and practice of theory as a mode of ideal participation (Neville 1974). This constitutes a major problem. Habermas tries to deal with this challenge by weak transcendental idealization but we should not forget that even in weak transcendental idealization there is a work of idealization not only in a genealogical sense that first there is idealization and then there is a communicative interaction to realize this but in a permanent constitutive sense. Idealization is an important part of practice itself. Therefore the way out of the illusion of pure theory is not to oppose theory and practice but to understand how they are mutually constituted. Mutual constitution does not mean that there is no disjunction between them; in fact there is a disjunction between them which is not external to their relationship but lies at the very core of it. But to acknowledge disjunction is not to accept it as fate and not accepting anything as fate is a Habermasian insight *par excellence* and the calling here is to cope with this disjunction in a creative manner. One creative mode of coping is striving towards reconciliation, and in striving towards reconciliation, not suppression of difference, a perspective of beyond is helpful. In a recent reflection, Habermas says that what has been at the core of his strivings is to lay the foundations of what he calls a Kantian pragmatism (Habermas 2002b). But this Kantian pragmatism in thinking about ontology and epistemology now needs a radical supplement of foundational self-critique and border crossing. Fallibilism as an epistemic project is dear to Kantian pragmatism of Habermas as well as of Putnam (2001) but does it require some ontological self-cultivation such as practice of humility? Habermas himself has embodied a border crossing between Kant and pragmatism and what is called for now is a transcultural border crossing and a transcivilizational dialogue on knowledge and human interest, ontology and epistemology. This is unfortunately a major problem with Habermas as with his pragmatic allies from the other side of the Atlantic such as Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam (Giri 2002). Though Habermas speaks of inclusion of the other, he wants to include the other, from the

point of view of Kant, albeit a reformulated Kantianism, i.e., Kantianism with a pragmatic face. But there are some problems in the way Habermas has appropriated the pragmatic tradition, especially of Dewey. While practices of knowledge are too disembodied in Habermas, this is not so in Dewey and knowledge and public sphere in Dewey are nourished by an aesthetic ecology and the agents here are not only rational but also cosmogenic, to borrow a term from Herbert Reid and Elizabeth Taylor (Reid & Taylor 2002: 10).

But speaking of Kant, in these days of overflow of boundaries, there is need for a genuine global conversation on knowledge, human interest and human liberation and here the challenge is not to valorize either Kant and Dewey but to make them fellow partners in a transcivilizational dialogue on human liberation and Enlightenment, namely around what Habermas calls justification and application. In this cross-civilizational dialogue, we realize that what enables justification as a mode of persuasion and frees it from the problem of self-justification is not only rational argumentation or even mutual validation but a new ethics of argumentation embodying love and suffering—the willingness to undertake suffering for the sake of love and truth. The capacity to undertake suffering hand in hand with and looking up to the face of the other is crucial not only for communicative validity but also for realization of justice, both at the intersubjective as well as societal and global levels. This calls for not only a pragmatic translation of Kant but also a transcivilizational dialogue with him, say from the strivings and aspirations of a Gandhi (Giri 2002). A transcivilizational dialogue between Kant and Gandhi can help us realize the significance of not only rational arguments but also self-suffering which is different from sadism or inflicting suffering on others for the realization of communicative validity and justice. A transcivilizational dialogue between Kant and Gandhi can radically transform the very foundation of justification and application and by establishing intimate links between not only suffering and justification but also between suffering and hope, i.e, to realize how self-suffering for love, truth and solidarity is crucial for generation and nurturance of spaces of hope.[7] This also can provide new aspirations of achievement and interest to us beyond Rorty's "achieving our country" and Habermas's continued imprisonment within a Western tradition which can only relate to the other through its own cognitive strength. The challenge here is one of "achieving our world," as Dallmayr puts it. As Dallmayr (2001a: 64) outlines a Gandhian path here: "When asked his view of Wetern civilization, Mahatma Gandhi famously answered: 'It would be a good idea.' His reply reminds us that 'civilization' is not a secure possession but a fragile, ever-renewable endeavour; grammatically it has the character of more of a verb than a noun." Dallmayr further urges us to realize:

> [..] the notion of 'achieving' [and here we might think whether we can supplement Habermasian notion of human interest with human achievement] does not suggest a form of technical construction or social engineering; rather the term has the connotation of practical labor or engagement—a lobor in which the 'achieveing' agents are continuously challenged (or called into question) by what needs to be achieved. Far from designating a linear-strategic design, achievement hence carries a roundabout or mediating significance, operating steadily in the 'middle voice' (between speaking and listening, moving and being moved). This significance carries over into the sense of 'our'—which in no way should be taken as a possessive pronoun. If the goal of 'achieving' involves the simultaneous transformation of achieving agents, then the world to be rescued from slippage cannot simply be the target of managerial appropriation. Despite the need to resist slippage into automatic self-regulation, the world can be 'ours' only in a highly complex and mediated way—assigning to human beings only the task of responsible guardianship rather than mastery.." (Dallmayr 2001b: xi-xii).

In this spirit of a global conversation and aspiration to achieve a new world for all of us, and not only for fortress Europe or fortress America, a key question here is whether the vocabulary of interest is adequate here and to ask ourselves whether Habermasian knowledge and human interest faces the problem of not only instrumentalism but also anthropocentrism. Habermasian knowledge and human interest work within a model of mastery, performative competence and performative valorization and here a key challenge is "exceeding the performative" and realizing our responsibility (Derrida 2001). In his *Discourse and Knowledge: The Making of Enlightenment Sociology* Piet Strydom (2000) tells us how both the rights and justice frames of modernity are at a cross-road now, and how knowledge and human interest now need to have a frame, and what I would add, a mode of responsibility. Here a key question is within which frame Habermasian knowledge and human interest is located? It is undoubtedly the justice frame emerging from a frame of rights. Another foundational problem is how does human interest relate to the world of transcendence and the world of Nature and in this multi-path relationship is the language of human interest which valorizes mastery enough? In place of mastery we now need a new ethics and aesthetics of servanthood but any notion of supplication arouses deep antipathy in Habermas (Giri 1998). Consider here the following lines from one of Habermas's most recent self-reflective essays in which he shows his unease with any notion of supplication and preference for mastery:

> Heidegger binds the privileged access to truth, reserved by him for poet and thinker, to the 'commemorating' destinings of a higher power. In contrast, Dewey begins his investigation with the bifurcations of two paths along which man 'seeks certainty in a world full of dangers.' Opposite the 'praying supplicant' who is brought to

> mind by the fatalistic thinking of being, Dewey posits the activity of inventors: 'The other path consists of inventing arts and with their help making the powers of nature useful" (Habermas 2002b: 232).

It is probably for this reason that Dallmayr raises the problem of humanism in Habermas but Habermas does not want to listen as he is still deeply preoccupied with understandable and to some extent admirable fight with the ghost of Heidegger. Habermas reduces listening to "the 'Yes' or 'No' response of a potential hearer": "The hearer must take the position of a second person, give up the perspective of an observer in favor of that of a participant.." (Habermas 2002a: 90). Thus listening here is reduced to hearing and both of them are thought of in the frame of a valorized model of communication which does not realize its own inherent silence. Habermas is weary of auratic silence and reduces all silence to non-auratic silence "which draws from the specific context of a more or less unmistakable meaning" (2002a: 90).

Habermas makes much of the linguistic turn but his conception of language, as he himself admits, is formal-pragmatic and misses not only its integral dimension of silence but also what Vincent Crapanzano (1992) calls its dramaturgical character. Moreover, the apparent shift from philosophy of consciousness to philosophy of language does not solve all problems, much less issues of consciousness and ontology, as it just inaugurates a new vistas of self-cultivation and understanding the world. Consider here the following lines of J.N. Mohanty:

> Is not 'consciousness' itself a word having its original home in a language game? Is not language—primarily as the act of speaking—a modality of consciousness? Cannot the first reduction come under the scope of the second reduction? At the same time, is it possible that in each of the two reductions—of consciousness to language as well as language to consciousness—there is a surplus of what is sought to be reduced, and so a failure of the project? When consciousness is situated within a language-game, there is an *awareness* of it being so situated; when language is reduced to consciousness of speaking, the history of language, its diachronic aspect, escapes the presence to consciousness. [..] Linguistic meaning and the meaning things have for consciousness seem to be but two aspects of one and the same discourse [..] are not consciousness and language both unified in a third something? It is Heidegger's *Dasein* or is it Hegel's *Geist*? (Mohanty 2002: 112).

Human interest in Habermas is mainly cognitive interest and emancipatory interest but there is need for broadening in both the domains. Cognitive interest in Habermas is isolated from body and emotion (cf. Connolly 1999, 2002). Emancipatory interest now faces the

challenge of acknowledging the limits of emancipation, of going "beyond emancipation" (Laclau 1992). A key question here is whether knowledge and human interest are entrapped within a logic of empowerment and is a servant to a will to power? In his critique of Foucault, Habermas himself has challenged us to understand the distinction between technology of power and technology of self but apart from the key issue whether self is amenable to a technical metaphor, the question is whether Habermas encourage us to develop appropriate self-cultivation to empty ourselves from a will to power, namely power as domination. Habermas here makes an admirable move as he suggests a break from a purely Weberian conception of power and urges us to understand power as enabling mutual understanding and establishing what Hannah Arendt calls covenant. Habermas writes: "Within the boundaries of the public sphere actors can acquire public influence, not political power" (Habermas 1996: 371). But despite this break from a logic of empowerment, Habermas covers only a few steps as he does not face the issue of power and self-cultivation, i.e how human beings achieve a "power-free" state (cf. Dallmayr 2001)? They key challenge is what kind of self-cultivation we should be engaged in so that in pursuing knowledge and human interest we do not use power to coerce and dominate, or in the Habermasian vocabulary, create a communicative pathology (cf. Habermas 2001)? Habermas take this for granted as he is confident that being part of communication we can solve this problem automatically as doing otherwise would be an act of performative "self-contradiction." But performative self-contradiction is a very narrow aspect of self-critique and here building on the expected shame of participants that they would suffer from the shame of self-contradiction if they do not reach out to the other in their communicative foundation is too simplistic a move. Habermas completely neglects this aspect of self-cultivation as a multi-dimensional engagement in self-critique and transformation. One important calling here is to empty ourselves vis-à-vis our will to power, develop self-emptying or kenosis, and develop "self-restraint" vis-à-vis use of power and realize a "power-free" state? Both the later Foucault and later Heidegger urged us to be attentive to such calling (Foucault 1996; Dallmayr 2001b).

Once we understand the limits of an emancipatory interest especially as it is faced with the calling of self-cultivation then we realize other limits of the very language of emancipation. The discourse of emancipation has focused primarily on social emancipation and now this can be deepened by emancipation from ego, in fact liberation of self from ego. In fact, understanding the limits of an egological mode seems to be a key concern of Habermas. Habermas himself writes: "I think all of us feel that we must be ready to recognize the interests of others even when they run counter to our own but the person who does that does not really sacrifice himself but becomes a larger self" (Habermas 1987: 94). But despite this rich suggestion, Habermas

does not have much resource for thinking further about liberation as liberation from one's ego as he lacks a pluridimensional conception of Being (cf. Connolly 1999; Giri 2002c) such as the existence of a transcendentally real self in individuals. Habermas talks about universalization and this project is facilitated by the work of transcendentally real self in our lives which help us realize the integral connectedeness that lies between self and others. Liberation then consists of overcoming both self-alienation and social alienation. Overcoming self-alienation is enriched by what Roy Bhaskar writes below which is in tune with the perspective of Sri Aurobindo: "The dialectics of de-alienation (of retotalisation) are all essentially the dielectic of love: of Self (>Self), of each and all (>Totality) and in both inner and outer movements, both as essentially love of God. The essence of liberated man therefore is love of God, and God, we could say, is not only love but essentially to be loved" (Bhaskar 2000).

Knowledge and Human Liberation: Sri Aurobindo

For Sri Aurobindo, the need for a deeper knowledge requires us to be self-conscious and not only self-critical: "In this process the rationalistic ideal subjects itself to the ideal of intuitive knowledge." Self-reflection is an important concern in Habermas and Sri Aurobondo accords this to self-knowledge but self-knowledge here has a much deeper and broader meaning which includes the knowledge of Self as different from ego and knowledge of God, God not as a fixed structure but a creative becoming embodying and symbolizing the highest human possibility. For Sri Aurobindo, "..our knowledge is not integral if we do not make this self in the individual one with the cosmic spirit [..]" (p. 347). Habermasian distinction between ego identity and self-identity gets a deeper calling in Sri Aurobindo's pathways of liberative knowledge: "Enlightenment brings to us the knowledge that the ego is only an instrument [..]" (Sri Aurobindo 1992: 53). Furthermore, "As we gain in clarity and the turmoil of egoistic effort gives place to a calmer self-knowledge, we recognize the source of the growing light within us" (ibid: 56). Acquisition of self-knowledge "brings us face to face with the extraordinary complexity of our own being" but a seeker here does not "solve arbitrarily the conflict of his own inner members. He has to harmonize deliberate knowledge with unquestioning faith; he must conciliate the gentle soul of love with the formidable need of power [..]" (ibid: 68, 71). The goal of knowledge here is a radical transformation of self, world and nature. Sri Aurobindo writes: "What we propose in our Yoga is nothing less than to break up the whole formation of our past and present which makes up ordinary material and mental man and to create a new center of vision and a new universe of activities in ourselves which shall constitute a divine humanity or a superhuman nature" (ibid: 66). Furthermore, "Life has to change into a thing vast and calm and powerful that can no longer recognize its old blind eager narrow self or petty impulse and

desire. Even the body has to submit to a mutation and be no longer the clamorous animal or the impending clod it now is, but become instead a conscious servant and radiant instrument and living form of the spirit" (ibid). Furthermore, "Life is the field of a divine manifestation not yet complete: here, in life, on earth, in the body" (ibid: 68).

In his reflections on knowledge, Sri Aurobindo does not look at it only as an epistemic project. For him, "The seeker of the integral state of knowledge must be free from attachment to action and equally free from attachment to inaction" (ibid: 332). It also faces the challenge of overcoming our desire mind. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

> Equality, not indifference, is the basis. Equal endurance, impartial indifference, calm submission to the causes of joy and grief without any reaction of either grief or joy are the preparation and negative basis of equality; but equality is not fulfilled till it takes its positive form of love and delight. The sense-mind must find the equal *rasa* of the All-Beautiful, the heart the equal love and Ananda for all, the psychic Prana the enjoyment of this rasa, love and Ananda. This, however, is the positive perfection that comes by liberation; our first object in the path of knowledge is rather the liberation that comes by detachment from the desire-mind and renunciation of its passions (ibid: 339).

Overcoming the desire mind in the yoga of knowledge is accompanied by realization of Gnosis. Gnosis has the power to overcome the duality between subject and object: "Reason or intellect is only the lower *buddhi* (intellect); it is dependent for its action on the precepts of the sense-mind and on the concepts of mental intelligence. It is not like gnosis, self-luminous, authentic, making the subject one with the object" (ibid: 458). Furthermore, the intuitive reason "acts in a self-light of the truth" which "proceeds not by intelligent but by visional concepts: it is a kind of truth-vision, truth-hearing, truth-memory, direct truth-discernment" (ibid: 455).

For Sri Aurobindo, in the yoga of self-knowledge, "The old philosophical quarrel between Being and Becoming" is not helpful and in it "Our sense of separate existence disappears into a consciousness of illimitable, undivided, infinite being" (ibid: 420). But Sri Aurobindo himself makes clear that realizing oneness is "our essential fact of self-knowledge" but this "unity works itself everywhere and on every plane by an executive or practical truth of duality" (ibid: 418).

In his reflection on knowledge, Sri Aurobindo makes a distinction between higher

knowledge and lower knowledge: the lower knowledge is the knowledge of the apparent world while higher knowledge is the knowledge which "seeks to know the truth of existence from within" (ibid: 492). But in making this distinction Sri Aurobindo is not within the conventional scheme of hierarchy of knowledge as he writes: "Science, art, philosophy, ethics, psychology, the knowledge of man and his past, action itself are means by which we arrive at the knowledge of the working of God through Nature and through life" (p. 492). Thus in this scheme of interconnected integral knowledge, knowledge of society is not inferior to knowledge of God or spiritual knowledge rather it holds the key to the later. In his work Habermas urges us to realize the significance of empirical[8] studies of our world, especially current transformations for striving for a more dignified society and this has an important place in Sri Aurobindo's pathways of integral knowledge as well.

In contemporary critical theory whether it starts from Habermas or from Foucault knowledge is almost always a subservient to either power or mastery but Sri Aurobindo urges us to understand the integral connection between knowledge and love: "Perfect knowledge indeed leads to perfect love, integral knowledge to a rounded and multitudinous richness of love" (ibid: 522). But at the same time Sri Aurobindo tells us that knowledge has equal power as love but their method of arriving at is different" (p. 524). This suggests that Sri Aurobindo is open to acknowledging the differential autonomy of knowledge and love as the two domains are also interconnected.

In his *Human Cycles*, Sri Aurobindo laments that the modern European idea of society is founded upon the primacy of vital dynamism and has "neglected the spiritual element in man which is his true being" (1962: 277). Sri Aurobindo is for a spiritual vitalism and spiritual realism: "[spirituality will not try to slay the vitality in man by denying life but will rather reveal to life the divine in itself as the principle of its own transformation" (ibid: 286); furthermore, "Our idealism is the most rightly human thing in us, but as mental idealism it is a thing uneffective. To be effective it has to convert itself into a spiritual realism" (ibid: 301). Like Habermas Sri Aurobindo stresses on learning from our failures: "Failures must be originally numerous and difficult but the time comes when the experience of past failures can be profitably used [..]" (ibid: 330).

Sri Aurobindo writes: "The central aim of knowledge is the recovery of the Self, of our true self-existence, and this aim presupposes the admission that our present mode of being is

not our true existence" Sri Aurobindo also makes it clear that when he talks of knowledge and human liberation it is not individual salvation alone: "..an individual salvation in heavens beyond, careless of the earth, is not our highest objective; the liberation and self-interest of others is as much our own concern,— we might almost say, our divine self-interest,—as our own liberation. Otherwise our unity with others would have no effective meaning."[9]

Knowledge and Human Liberation: Transformations and Beyond

Habermas speaks of practical discourse. Communicative interaction is the most important part of this practical discourse. This practical discourse can be part of a practical spirituality and Sri Aurobindo's perspective of spiritual realism is a significant part of it (Metz 1970; Vivekananda 1991). Practical spirituality, as Swami Vivekananda[10] (1991: 354) argues, urges us to realize that "the highest idea of morality and unselfishness goes hand in hand with the highest idea of metaphysical conception." This highest conception pertains to the realization that man himself is God: "You are that Impersonal Being: that God for whom you have been searching all over the time is yourself--yourself not in the personal sense but in the impersonal" (Vivekananda 1991: 332). The task of practical spirituality begins with this realization but does not end there: its objective is to transform the world. The same Swami Vivekananda thus challenges: "The watchword of all well-being of all moral good is not "1" but "thou". Who cares whether there is a heaven or a hell, who cares if there is an unchangeable or not? Here is the world and it is full of misery. Go out into it as Buddha did, and struggle to lessen it or die in the attempt" (Vivekananda 1991: 353). What practical spirituality stresses is that the knowledge that one is Divine, one is part of a Universal Being, facilitates this mode of relating oneself to the world. This knowledge is however not for the acquisition of power over the other; rather it is to worship her as God. In the words of Vivekananda: "Human knowledge is not antagonistic to human well-being. On the contrary, it is knowledge alone that will save us in every department of life, in knowledge as worship" (Vivekananda 1991: 353).

This plea for practical discourse being part of a practical spirituality has to be understood in the context of emergent contours of religious evolution of our times which point to a new direction. In this direction exists not only religious fundamentalism but also an urge for spiritual realization on the part of the believers which is not confined to the religions to which they belong (Giri 2002c). People of faith also now realize that spiritual realization is possible only through addressing the concrete problems of man and woman who live in their midst. As E.H. Cousins (1985: 7) tells us in his *Global Spirituality*: "people of faith now rediscover the material dimensions of existence and their spiritual significance."

The realization of practical spirituality in the dynamics of self, culture, and society is as much a normative ideal as the building of a rational society or realization of a state of undistorted communication (Giri 2002c; Wuthnow 1998, 2001). The coming of a spiritual society requires both the "reflexive mobilization of self" (Giddens 1991) as well as building up of alternative communities which are founded on the principles of practical spirituality. According to Aurobindo, the coming of a spiritual society begins with the spiritual fulfillment of the urge to individual perfection but ends with the building of a "new world, a change in the life of humanity or, at the least a new perfected collective life in the earth - nature" (Sri Aurobindo 1950: 1031). "This calls for the appearance not only of isolated evolved individuals acting in the uninvolved mass, but of many gnostic individuals forming a new kind of beings and a new common life superior to the present individual and common existence. A collective life of this kind must obviously constitute itself on the same principle as life of the gnostic individual" (ibid).

We find the glimpses of emergence of such spiritual communities in the integral education movement in India which is a grass-roots social movement at work in building spiritually inspired integral education schools. In the state of Orissa there are now nearly 300 such schools and these schools have been a product of an earlier study circle movement. In these spaces we find the glimpses of emergence of a new connection between knowledge and human liberation through the mediations of love, labor and mutually shared time (see Giri 2003).

Sri Aurobindo's gnostic individuals are seekers and bearers of the multi-dimensional transformation of practical spirituality. But these gnostic individuals are not the Nietzschian supermen driven by the will to power; they are animated by a will to serve and desire to transform the contemporary condition and to build a good society. They don't form a type or a caste of chosen people to dominate this world and interpret its urge for meaning. What Connolly (1991: 187) writes below so aptly sums up the aspiration for knowledge and human liberation embodied in these seekers:

> But this typological differentiation between man and overman no longer makes much sense, if it ever did. For the overman--constituted as an independent, detached type--refers simultaneously to a spiritual disposition and to the residence of free spirits in a social space relatively insulated from reactive politics. If there is anything in the type to be admired, the ideal must be dismantled as a distinct caste of solitary individuals and folded into the political fabric of late modern society. The 'overman' now falls apart as a set of distinct dispositions concentrated in a particular caste or type, and its spiritual qualities migrate to a set of dispositions that may compete for presence in any self. The type now becomes (as it actually was to a significant degree) a voice in the self contending with other voices including those of resentment.

But this seeking nonetheless faces the challenge of what Roy Bhaskar calls the prehistory of spirituality (personal communication). Bhaskar says that we are now at a prehistory of our existence viewed from this challenge of integral knowledge and human liberation. We are also at a prehistory of spirituality as spiritual seekings in the past have not always embodied collectivist struggles for human emancipation. Spiritual seekers and movements continue to face the challenge of overcoming their egoism and the will to assert and here participation in mutually validating discursive argumentation is a crucial step in overcoming this problem of intractable egoism and authoritarianism. Therefore if Derrida (1998) says that we cannot authorize ourselves in the name of religion the same is true of spiritual quest as well: We cannot authorize ourselves in the name of spirituality. In critique of authority including acknowledging what Gianni Vattimo (1999) calls "the contingency of the whole" there is a continued significance of a Habermasian critical perspective. This critical perspective for realizing its own inherent potential can learn from the pathways of a Sri Aurobindo and in the process of learning we can use these two intertwined pathways of knowledge and human liberation for creating a more beautiful world for all of us.

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Endnotes

1 While in virtue epistemology there is a recognition of ontological preparation involved in epistemological engagement (cf. Greco 2001), in weak ontology as formulated by Vattimo and suggested in the works of Connolly there is a deep recognition of a danger of an essentialist fixed ontology. See, Vattimo (1999)

2 Habermas writes: "[..] as long as philosophy remains caught in ontology, it is itself subject to an objectivism that disguises the connection of its knowledge with the human interest in autonomy and responsibility" (Habermas 1971: 311). But why this should necessarily the case? On the other hand, consider here what an uncritical primacy of epistemology does to human sciences and human action:

> The primacy of epistemology short-circuits ontological issues by assuming that once the right procedure for attaining truth as correspondence or coherence or consensus is reached, any remaining issues will either be resolved *through* that method or shown to be irrelevant. The primacy of epistemology thereby treats the ideas of subject, object, representation, and knowledge as if they were already fixed in their range of application. [..]
>
> The primacy of epistemology turns out itself, of course, to embody a contestable social ontology. The empiricist version, for instance, treats human beings as subjects or agents of knowledge; it treats human things as independent objects susceptible to representation, or, at least, a medium in which the designative dimension of concepts can be disconnected rigorously from the contexts of rhetoric/action/evaluation in which they originate (Connolly 1995:6)

3 In Savitri there are many conversations between Savitri who is trying to overcome death and Yamaraj, the Kind of Death. Rev. Chris Platt Episcopal Church, Lexington, suggests that these conversations also embody a Habermasian discursive argumentation (personal communication). I am grateful to Rev. Platt for this extremely innovative reading and I am exploring further about it.

4 In this context, Habermas writes: "if knowledge could ever outwit its innate human interest, it would be by comprehending that the mediation of subject and object that philosophical consciousness attributes exclusively to its own synthesis is produced originally by interests. The mind can become aware of its natural basis reflexively" (Habermas 1971: 312).

5 In this context, what Sang-Jin Han writes from a Confucian perspective deserves our careful attention:

> Critical theory is required to reflect on the normative basis of its own project. Critique always presupposes normative claims which need to be reorganized as such. Critique is, in fact, derived from, and based on, cultural traditions capable of orienting human actions (Han 1998: 306).

6 Habermas is aware of the deep points about the human condition made in the Jewish mystical tradition and also aware of the Kabalist tradition. In one of his recently published essasy, "The German Idealism of the Jewish philosophers," Habermas tells us how Max Scheler talks about a God who becomes. But Habermas does not invite such mystical intimations to his postmetaphysical thinking. My argument that Habermas's postmetaphysics just hides a metpahysics of Kantianism and Chritianity finds a support in what Connolly writes:

> What, then, is the thought behind the thought that drives the actually existing Habermas to give singular primacy to one dimension of discourse over all others? Perhaps, at a visceral level, it is a reiteration of the Christian and Kantian demands to occupy the authoritative place of public discourse. The imperative to occupy that place of authority may be bolstered by

> another preliminary drive, that is, *the political* sense that a non-Kantian, religiously pluralized world fall into either disorder or religious tyranny if its participants did not endorse a single standard rational authority [..] (Connolly 1999: 39).

7 In this context, what Habermas writes about the three fundamental Kantian questions deserves our careful attention: "The first question , 'What Can I Know?' is merely speculative. The second, 'What Ought I do,' is merely practical. But the third question, 'What may I hope' is both practical and theoretical at the same time" (Habermas 1971: 203). But the question of hope also is more than theory and practice understood in a Kantian and Habrmasian sense and here a Gandhian calling emphasizes the crucial significance of suffering with and for the love of other for the generation and sustenance of hope.

8 Consider here the following lines from one of Habermas's recent interviews: "[the issue of global justice] on the analytical level, it demands a great deal of empirical knowledge and institutional imagination" (Habermas 2002a: 166).

9 Roy Bhaskar also presents such a challenge of world transformation before spiritual engagement:

> Our task is to re-become non-dual beings in a world of duality, opposition and strife. Freedom is the elimination of the non-dual components within my embodied personality; that is the elimination of everything inconsistent with my ground-state, the cessation of negative incompleteness. In order to do this, I had to experience duality, heteronomy and change, to grow and fulfil my intentionality. When I have fulfilled my intentionality, when I have no more non-me within me, I am one with my ground state, and one with the ground-states of all other beings in the rest of creation too. I am one with the whole of creation; and as such will reflect back to its creator his work, formation, creation, will or intentionality; and perfectly reflecting his intentionality, I am one with him too. This is self-realisation, the realisation of the divine ingredient within me. The very process where by it is achieved is a mimetic reproduction of the very act of creation itself—for I must strive to externalise and fulfill my intentionality until it perfectly reflects back me to me. In becoming one with myself, I become one with the divine ingredient within me.. ,and in becoming one with the divine ingredient within me or divinity I become one with the rest of the cosmos. For the divine ingredient within me is just what we have been calling my ground-state and the rest of the cosmos is what is bound by the cosmic envelope.
>
> But this is not the end of the odyssey in the world of duality. I am still *positively incomplete*, in so far as other beings are co-present, enfolded within me, are negatively incomplete, that is, unfree. When the whole of creation is self-realized, when it reflects back its own divinity, then and only then will there be *peace*. Even then this peace is only the end of pre-history. I know in the meantime that I will grow and develop while I strive for this goal, a development to which I can see no conceivable end; so if there is an expanded plenitude of possibilities packed into my non-dual being, my agentive self in the world of duality, we cannot even begin to anticipate what possibilities lie within eudemonia. This *eudenomia* is not something removed from ordinary secular speculation..; rather, we have found it everywhere as a presupposition of even the most crude and rudimentary forms of ethics (Bhaskar 2002: 261-262).

10. Another pioneering spiritual seeker of modern India known in the West for his interventions in the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893.

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