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**Creative Social Research:
Rethinking Theories and Methods and the Calling
of an Ontological Epistemology of Participation**

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Abstract

Modern social research, as we know it now, emerged as a part of rise of modern social sciences in the context of transition to modernity. As an enterprise of modernity social research reflected some of the foundational assumptions of modernity such as the primacy of epistemology and an easy equation between society and nation-state. But all these assumptions have been subjected to fundamental interrogations in the last decades and century in varieties of social movements and new movements of ideas. In the background of critiques of modernity, social movements and processes of transformations the present essay submits some proposals for a creative and critical social research. It explores ways of moving beyond mere denunciations and critiques and embodying transformational theories and methods which would facilitate creative and critical research. The essay also calls for a new vocation of social research by pleading for a simultaneous engagement in activism and creative understanding, fieldwork and philosophical reflections, ontological self-cultivation and epistemic labor of learning.

The present essay presents some proposals for rethinking theories and methods. It discusses ways of rethinking society and subjectivity and pleads for a frame of ontological sociality. It submits some proposals for rethinking method, especially overcoming the dualism of qualitative and quantitative, ontology and epistemology. It pleads for border crossing between philosophy and social sciences, a multi-valued logic of autonomy and interpenetration and an ontological epistemology of participation.

What is the contemporary field of possible experience? Here it is not a question of an analytic of truth, but of what one might call an ontology of the present, an ontology of ourselves [...]

Michel Foucault (1986), "Kant on Enlightenment and Revolution"

[...] to deny someone's claim that she is in pain is not an intellectual failure, it is a spiritual failure: the future between us is at stake.

Veena Das (2000), *Violence and the Work of Time*

Faithful to the Platonic motto of 'wondering' (thaumazein), the reflective theorist in the global village must shun spectatorial allures and adopt the more modest stance of participant in the search for truth: by opening mind and heart to the puzzling diversity of human experiences and traditions—and also to the possibility of jeopardizing cherished preoccupations or beliefs.

Fred Dallmayr (1999), *Border Crossing: Toward a Comparative Political Theory*

This amounts to saying that theory of knowledge and theory of life seem to us inseparable. A theory of life that is not accompanied by a criticism of knowledge is obliged to accept, as they stand, the concepts which the understanding puts at its disposal: it can not but enclose the facts, willing or not, in pre-existing frames which it regards as ultimate [...] On the other hand, a theory of knowledge which does not replace the intellect in the general evolution of life will teach us neither how the frames of knowledge have been constructed nor how we can enlarge or go beyond them. It is necessary that these two inquiries, theory of knowledge and theory of life, should join each other, and, by a circular process push each other unceasingly.

Henri Bergson (1912), *Creative Evolution*

The Problem

Modern social research, as we know it now, emerged as a part of rise of modern social sciences in the context of transition to modernity. As an enterprise of modernity social research reflected some of the foundational assumptions of modernity. For example, the project of sociology was closely tied to the project of nation-state, embodying in its epistemology what Ulrich Beck (2002) calls methodological nationalism. Social research also proceeded within the bounded logic of disciplines. Another assumption of modernity that social research reflected was modernity's primacy of epistemology and the neglect of ontology which short-circuited "ontological issues by assuming that once the right procedure for attaining truth as correspondence or coherence is reached, any remaining issues will be either resolved *through* that method or shown to be irrelevant" (Connolly 1995: 6). In the modernist mode, social research was considered only an epistemic engagement, a project of knowing about the world with proper procedure and scientific method. But this only embodies a questionable "social ontology" which in its "empiricist version [...] treats human beings as independent objects susceptible to representation, or at least, a medium in which the designative dimensions of concepts can be disconnected rigorously from the contexts of rhetoric / action / evaluation in which they originate" (Connolly 1995: 6).¹ But all these assumptions of modernity as well as their social manifestations have been subjected to fundamental criticisms and interrogations in the last decades. Both anti-systematic socio-cultural movements and critical discursive movements and new movements of ideas have challenged the modernist paradigms of pathology and normality as well as distinction between ontology and epistemology. There has been some fundamental criticism of the bounded logic of both the disciplines and nation-state and awareness of the need for post-national² transformations, planetary realizations and a creative transdisciplinarity (Giri 2004b; Strathern 2004). In the background of critiques of modernity, social movements and processes of transformations the present essay submits some proposals for a creative and critical social research. It explores ways of moving beyond mere denunciations and critiques and embodying transformational theories and methods which would facilitate creative and critical research. The essay also calls for a new vocation of social research by pleading for a simultaneous engagement in activism and creative understanding, fieldwork and philosophical reflections, ontological self-cultivation and epistemic labor of learning.

The present essay presents some proposals for rethinking theories and methods. It discusses ways of rethinking society and subjectivity and pleads for a frame of ontological sociality. It submits some proposals for rethinking method, especially overcoming the dualism of qualitative and quantitative, ontology and epistemology. It pleads for border crossing between philosophy and social sciences, a multi-valued logic of autonomy and interpenetration and an ontological epistemology of participation. As the limitations of any such single engagement can be appreciated, the present essay is not able to present an exhaustive critical description of all relevant thoughts

and thinkers and presents only some glimpses from this vast field of rethinking and reconstruction of theories and methods of social sciences.

Creative Social Research and Rethinking Theories and Methods: The Calling of Social Movements

In the last quarter century social movements have been a very important dimension of normative horizon and domain of social practice. Study of social movements have enabled social scientists to rethink theories of self and society as well be engaged in new methodological formulations. As Veena Das tells us, “The emergence of social movements around issues of environment, gender inequalities, and health (to name a few) have similarly offered important critiques of the disciplines by interrogating notions of normality and pathology around which conceptual distinctions have been organized. For instance, the role of the women’s movement in bringing the issue of sexual violence into public discourse has also provided an impetus for rethinking ideas about heterosexuality, reproduction and sexual geographies in the classic field of kinship and marriage” (Das 2003: 20). In the evocative phrase of Alain Touraine (1977), social movements are agents of “self-production of society” and embody a new dialectic of self and society (Melucci 1996). They embody the self-transcendence of culture and society and point to the “non-identity of society with itself” (Fuchs 2004: 44). Social movements show the limitations of looking at society only through its own logic of identity, through its code of “self-referentiality.” Reflections on social movements have been innumerable in recent years and Martin Fuchs, an insightful scholar in the field, tells us that social movements “express the self-defining subjectivity—identity and distantiation, (self-) reflexivity and (self-) transformation in an exemplary way and as social act” (ibid). Study of social movements also calls for a new methodology of dialogue, hermeneutics and interpretation. It calls for a “change in the relationship between the social analyst and those he is analyzing. The analyst would have to be more of a *hermeneute*, an interpreter of the ways in which collective or individual actors link up with discourse and representations and appropriate or reject (i.e., interact with) them; a listener to ideas and imaginations which crop up in the ongoing negotiation of sociality (social relationship). Instead of just a distant observer of society the analyst has to become an interlocutor of the actors [..]” (Fuchs 2004: 44)

But while study of society provides an opportunity for rethinking theories and methods, especially rethinking society and self, it has to be born in mind that study of social movements cannot be just an act of valorization—just paraphrasing representations and articulations of movements and their words and worlds. In this context, Andre Beteille’s distinction between sociological engagement and activist engagement is important to keep in mind. For Beteille, “The social activist is a partisan, and partisanship undermines the very conditions of sociological enquiry and analysis [...] it is fair-mindedness and not partisanship, that is the defining virtue of the sociologist” (2002: 9). But as helpful as such a critical perspective is, it still leaves some fundamental questions untouched. Are participation and partisanship the same thing? Does fair-mindedness stand for a spectatorial stance or a pure view of the observer? How can fair-mindedness arise without the sociologist also participating in the aspirations and struggles of the activists? In this regard what may be considered is that participation may not be partisanship because while participating in the dreams and struggles of the activists a sociologist or anthropologist does not to have to abandon one’s vocation of critical understanding.

In fact it is the virtue of fair-mindedness that also requires of the sociologist to participate in the lifeworlds of actors. This participation is however an engagement of simultaneous

sympathetic participation and critical understanding. Instead of a confident and valorizing distinction between the activist and the sociologist we need dialogue between them and through this dialogue contribute to the making of the transgressive and transformative genre of scholar-activists. But much of this dialogue so far has remained either half-hearted or empty because the concerned actors here are too anxious to guard their identity either as an activist or a scholar rather than learn from each other in a transgressive manner and to strive to embody the vision and practice of both, i.e. to be a scholar-activist. The worlds of scholarship and critical social actions have their own autonomies but they are also related to each other in a spirit of embodied interpenetration. To be a scholar-activist is to realize this logic of autonomy and interpenetration in one's own vision and practice, ontology and epistemology, embodying a labor and love of learning (cf. Giri 2004b)

Rethinking Theories

Social research has been influenced by several theories in philosophy and social sciences, notable among the recent ones being structuration theory, theories of reflexivity, varieties of postmodernism and post-structuralism. A detailed rethinking of all these theories is outside the scope of this essay. Here I am engaged in particularly with three issues: first rethinking of theory itself, rethinking of society and rethinking of self and subjectivity (cf. Turner 1996). To begin with the former, so far theory has been thought of as a body of prescriptive and predictive rules and regulations. Now theory has to be thought of in a new way as our companion rather than as a master, as a moving light house which gives possible direction in the sea of complex reality, rather than as a fixed star. It involves a critique of "theoreticist theory"—a "theoretical logic" which is not grounded in a concrete research practice (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 32). Rethinking theory also involves an acknowledgment of limits of theory or of what Dallmayr (1987: 3) calls formulating purely "philosophical questions" in the hope of finding for them "philosophical solutions." Building on Oakeshott's distinction between theory and theorizing, Dallmayr presents the notion of a conditional, non-systematic mode of theorizing: "Although propelled by an 'unconditional' commitment to learning, theorizing in this view does not pretend to systematic epistemic knowledge, but only to an ongoing clarification of its own limitations or conditions of possibility" (Dallmayr 1984: 6).³ It also calls for abandonment of theoretical arrogance, lying at the heart of modernity, of solving problems of practice solely through theoretical means.⁴

Rethinking Society: The Calling of an Ontological Sociality

Creative social research involves a reconceptualisation of society and subjectivity and an important task here is to understand what can be called the work of ontological sociality in self, culture and society. One important challenge here is to go beyond the false dichotomy between individual and society. As Norbert Elias tells us: "We have the familiar concepts of 'individual' and 'society', the first of which refers to a single human being as if he or she were an entity existing in complete isolation [...] Society is understood either as a mere accumulation, an additive and unstructured collection of many individual people, or as an object existing beyond individuals and incapable of further explanation [...] the words available to us, the concepts which decisively influence the thought and action of people growing up within their sphere, make it appear as if the single human being, labeled the individual, and the plurality of people conceived as society, were two ontologically different entities" (Elias 1991: i). For Elias, "[...] the individual person is able to say "I" because he can at the same time say "we." Thus society consists of a simultaneously I and we but the balance between them has changed historically" (ibid: 61). At the contemporary juncture it is the "I" dimension which seems to be getting more primacy and attention in modern

and late modern societies which Zygmunt Bauman calls individualized society (Bauman 2001). In such societies there is a recognition of the limits of the social in many spheres of life such as education, love and ethics (cf. Beck 2000; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995). The ideal of society is now being foundationally rethought as providing a space for self-development of individuals. For example, Andre Gorz (1999) argues that educative relation is not just a social relation.⁵ Similarly ethics is not just acting in accordance with social conventions but acting in accordance with post-conventional awareness and realizations where, as Habermas says, conventional norms of society turn out to be “instances of problematic justice” (Habermas 1990: 108). Morality is not just obeying pre-given command by either society or a benevolent dictator or a wise master but acting according to one’s conscience (Giri 1998a).

The field of society is also a work of ontological sociality which is not confined only to contemporary late modern or individualized societies. It is a reality and possibility in all kinds of societies though degrees may vary (cf. Touraine 2000). In this context what Michael Frietag writes deserves our careful consideration: “Contrary to a misguided reading of Max Weber’s well-known texts, the ontological aspect—the immanent normativity of human / social and historical being is primary, and an understanding of it involves another break with the Weberian heritage: the idea of an ontological reciprocity of individual and society should replace methodological individualism” (Frietag 2001: 2). But acknowledging the ontological aspect of society does not mean only acknowledging its normative dimension but also its “subjective existence” (ibid). As has been already suggested, in recent social experience in the work of varieties of social movements this ontological dimension of society comes into play—creativity of self, return of the actor, and self-production of society. Some scholars of social movements suggest that in social movements we get a glimpse of the pathways of an alternative sociality which can be called ontological sociality, the basic ontological relationship characterized by interpretative action. As Martin Fuchs argues: “Humans not only refer to their self and their social environment, the sociality or polity they live in but the world as a [...] latent `surplus of meaning,` as exceeding. The basic (ontological) relationship would be interpretative action. This broadens the reference of human action and interpretation or, rather, transcends the idea of a specific referent [...] Instead of seeing subjectivity as constitutive of the world [..we have to see it] as open to the world” (Fuchs 2004)

There is a recognition of an ontological dimension in varieties of life and disciplines now. For example in so far as the domain of economy and the field of economics is concerned, Irene van Staveren tells us: “[...] There is a methodological alternative to the utilitarian paradigm of economics to be found in ontology” (van Staveren 2004: 86). Like Frietag’s discussion of ontological reciprocity in sociology pointing to the normative and subjective dimensions of self and society, in van Staveren, an ontological approach to economics urges us to understand the value-commitments of actors. An ontological approach to economics relies on people’s value commitments but these values should not be understood as only utility maximization or profit maximization but reflect values of justice and care, and these values should not be understood through “the dualistic methodology of mainstream economics, separating values from economic behaviour” (ibid). In her outline of an alternative economic methodology (an ontological methodology for economics grounded on human values) and conceptualization of economics as concerned with provisioning rather than exchange, van Staveren builds on Aristotle but reformulates the essentialist traces of an Aristotelian ontology in the direction of movement and pluralism.

For van Staveren, economic actors have plural value commitments of freedom, justice and

care. So far the ontology of economics has been narrowly defined in terms of freedom, market and exchange but for van Staveren we should acknowledge that the domains of justice and care are also integral parts of the reality of economic life. These domains of the economy are autonomous yet interdependent and what is helpful for us to realize is that there is a non-instrumental relationship between them. What van Staveren writes can open new vistas of imagination in our methodological engagement: “[...] in an economic ontology grounded in human values, economic value domains are interdependent but not instrumentally related. Each domain functions on its own terms but at the same time it is a precondition for the functioning of other domains, without being instrumental” (ibid: 98).

We also get glimpses of an ontological sociality going beyond subject-object dualism in classical formulations of society. For example, building on both Indian and Greek traditions, philosopher Binod Kumar Agarwala (2004) tells us that play was central to Greek and Vedic imagination of society. Central to the practice of play is that the actor or subject loses himself in the play. Furthermore, “The mode of being of *lila* [play] does not permit the *jiva* [person] to behave towards the *lila* as to an object”; “the self-understanding of *jiva* is inevitably involved in understanding of *lila* in such a way that the medium is not differentiated from it” (Agarwala 2004: 263). This suggests an ontology and epistemology of participation which are important components of a creative social research but Agarwala urges us to be open towards the dimension of beyond or transcendence in this ontology and epistemology of participation. Self-consciousness here cannot be completely dissolved into self-knowledge: “*There is always a remainder, an excess of what we are beyond what we know of ourselves*” (ibid: emphases added).

Rethinking Society: Some Further Considerations

The perspective of ontological sociality helps us rethink society in a foundational way which can be understood in conjunction with other recent efforts. For example, many contemporary sociologists point to the need for thinking about sociology beyond society. John Urry and Karin Knorr-Cetina point to this which has a much wider currency than acknowledged by anxiety-stricken sociologists of our times.⁶ Writes John Urry in his *Sociology Beyond Societies*: “New rules of sociological method are necessitated by the apparently declining power of national societies (whether or not we do in fact live in a global society), since it was these societies that had provided the social context for sociological study until the present” (Urry 2000: 1-2). Urry looks at the emergence of “natural-social” hybrids for contemporary citizenship and explores whether “notions of chaos and complexity” can assist in the “elaboration of a ‘sociology beyond societies’” (ibid: 190).

Social theorist and sociologist of science Karin Knorr-Cetina takes this exploration of a sociology beyond society to inspiring height and depth. Writes Knorr-Cetina in her provocatively titled essay, “Postsocial relations: Theorizing Society in a Postsocial Environment:” “Sociality is very likely a permanent feature of human life. But the focus of sociality are nonetheless changing—in conjunction with concrete historical developments” (Knorr-Cetina 2001: 521). And one of the most important aspect of the contemporary development is “the loss of social imagination, the slow erosion of the belief in salvation by society” (ibid: 523). The post-social environment today not only consists of subject-centered imagination but also objects and the non-human world which challenges us to go beyond anthropocentrism. The very beginning lines of Knorr-Cetina deserves our careful attention from the point of view of overcoming the tight-grip of anthropocentrism in our thinking:

“[...] we take it for granted that social reality is the world of human affairs, exclusively [...] Luckman raised the issue from a phenomenological perspective arguing that the boundary we see between the human social and the non-human, non-social was not an essential structure of the life-world. One reason for this was that our sense of humanness itself is not an original or universal projection but arises from revisions and modifications of other distinctions, for example that between living and non-living beings” (Knorr-Cetina 2001: 520).

For Knorr-Cetina in contemporary consumer culture and society we find that social reality consists not only of subjects but also objects. Living in this reality leads to the emergence of a new self: the self as a structure of wanting and the shift from “the inner censor to the mirror image self.” Knorr-Cetina writes building on his dialogue with George Herbert Mead and Jacques Lacan: “The lack-wanting system describes contemporary selves better than the I-you-me system” (ibid: 527). Here self is characterized by wanting and though in contemporary consumer culture individuals want fulfillment in having more objects, this object-centered consumption may not be our destiny and our structure of wanting has the potential to make us seeker of a more authentic solidarity, an intimate relation with self, other, Nature and God. The task here is to realize the challenge of an emergent subjectivity and what Foucault had written *vis-a-vis* Nietzsche: “For Nietzsche, the death of God signifies the end of metaphysics, but God is not replaced by man, and the space remains empty” (quoted in Carretto 1999: 85; see also Uberoi 2002; Bhaskar 2002a, 2002b).

In Knorr-Cetina’s insightful formulation, solidarity is central to a post-social sociality but solidarity here is not entrapped in a logic of nation-state and society and carries the signature of an ontological sociality. Post-social sociality also calls for a new epistemology of participation. Writes Knorr-Cetina: “[...] we can do less without positioning ourselves on the object’s side when the object is non-human than when it is human [...] The process of position-taking involves the subject’s ‘becoming the object,’ a sort of cross-over through which the subject attempts to see the object world from inside, to ‘think’ as it does, and to feel its reactions. In the words of a biologist, ‘if you want to really understand about a tumor, you’ve got to be a tumor’” (ibid: 531).

But such an ontology and epistemology of participation calls for overcoming not only anthropocentrism but also egoism. What is interesting is that such a calling seems to be articulated now by scholars with a Marxist background. In his presidential address to World Congress of Sociology, “The Heritage of Sociology, the Promise of Social Science,” Wallerstein writes: “Human arrogance has been humanity’s greatest self-imposed limitation. [...] In all these arrogances we have betrayed first of all ourselves, and closed off our potential” (Wallerstein 1999: 250). Wallerstein transforms the whole logic of familiar sociological discourse when he talks about cosmic creativity which prepares the ground for far deeper radical proposals of thinkers such as Roy Bhaskar to follow who talks about cosmic envelope and transcendental identification: “We live in an uncertain cosmos, whose single greatest merit is the permanence of [...] uncertainty, because it is this uncertainty that makes possible creativity—Cosmic Creativity, and with that of course human creativity” (ibid).

In the same essay, Wallerstein presents sociology six challenges: a) the challenge of rethinking rationality; b) the challenge of overcoming its initial Eurocentric bias; c) Rethinking time and temporality; d) reckoning with complexities and uncertainties; e) coming to terms with feminist

challenges not only in social relations but also in epistemology and questioning objectivity in not only social sciences but also in natural science”; and finally rethinking modernity by acknowledging that modernity, the centerpiece of all our work, has never really existed” (ibid: 241) which urges us to realize that the relations between self, other and the world can be more meaningfully imagined and lived than what has been done under the regime of European modernity (Uberoi 2002).

Out of these challenges, we can elaborate the challenge of rethinking rationality and universality as a starting point of a multi-dimensional foundational rethinking of the very category of society that can be facilitated by starting with any of the other challenges that Wallerstein outlines such as the challenge of feminism. Our conception of society in sociology suffers from a “myth of rationality” and “myth of stability” (cf Toulmin 2001). But society is not only the ground of the rational, society is also the base of much irrational and also the ground for supra-rational aspirations, as Nietzsche and Sri Aurobindo from their very different positions would urge us to understand (Connolly 2002; Giri 2004a). And in so far as universality is concerned, there is a dimension of universality as a reality as well as possibility in particular cultures calling us to transcend the dichotomy between universalism and particularism and understanding the work of a contingent universal. Wallerstein *et al* (1996) many years ago had challenged us to understand the work of “parituculraistic universalism.” This is akin to a relational and perspectival universality articulated by literary theorist Radhakrishnan (2003: 34) which is always in process. In their work on cosmopolitanism, Sheldon Pollock et al. (2000) urge us to understand the similar work of what they call “situated universality”⁷ which is different from an opposition between global and local, universal and particular. Ulrich Beck (2002) in this regard also talks about cosmopolitanism with roots and wings. In rethinking universality, along with perspectives such as situated universality and perspectival universality we are also enriched by a perspective of dialectical universality recently developed by Roy Bhaskar in his project of a deepened critical realism. For Bhaskar, for rethinking universality, we must go beyond abstract universality, understand it dialectically, and relate universality to “irreducible uniqueness” (Bhaskar 2002a: 122). For Bhaskar, dialectical universality of particular beings is sustained by “genuine non-duality and relations of identity” (2002b: xxv). For Bhaskar, “once you describe the world in an abstract universal way as consisting in constant conjunctions of events or actualized empirical uniformities then you put a halt to history” (ibid: 122). It reflects “ontological monovalence” and a sense of fatalism that the present society is the best of all possible worlds. In stead, “[..] universality had to be understood dialectically—that is universality together with differentiations and mediations, together with geo-historical trajectories, or what I call *rhythmics*, and together with irreducible uniqueness, all of which defines the concrete singularity of every instance, everything that ever occurs. This would mean in concrete terms that the two members of the working class or two members of human race would always have to be understood in their mediations, that is whether they are women or men, what kind of work they do, and also in terms of their geo-historical trajectories, where they are coming from, their place and past, and where they are going, what their tangential future” (ibid: 122).

Rethinking Subjectivity

In his introduction to an anthology of contemporary European social thought on “Rethinking the subject,” James D. Faubion argues that while Kant’s ontology is that of autonomous subject which was followed by Durkheim as he reformulated it in terms of making society “the genuine referent of Kant’s transcendental subject,” contemporary European thinkers go beyond this in offering an ontology of technopraxis of the “technopractitioner.” For Faubion, the works of

Habermas and Bourdieu reflect this shifting subjectivity: “For Habermas, the hallmark of the technopractitioner is his or her capacity—no longer noumenal, but instead the product and profit of all in this world that mankind has learned—at once to recognize, accept, and follow the normative principles immanent in communication. For Bourdieu, the hallmark of technopractitioner is his or her capacity to play a game, to use his or her material and symbolic resources strategically in order to win a context more or less local in its rule but everywhere the same in its covert end: domination” (Faubion 1995: 14 / 15).

Rethinking the subject as a techno-practitioner, for Faubion, should remind us of Aristotle to realize its promise and limits. For Faubion, “The Ethics [Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle] sets the technician to one side; it features only the practitioner. But the practitioner it features is, like those of his lineage, a being neither transcendental nor natural but instead a being constructed, trained, and socialized, a being of acquired competence and acquired habit” (ibid: 15). But Aristotle would also urge us to understand the limit of the contemporary technopractitioner in terms of “ethical formalism” of Habermas and Bourdieu’s “perverse teleology” [This is what Faubion himself writes]. Aristotle’s hallmark is *eudaimonia*—happiness—and the technopractitioner must not only argue and strategize but embody a striving for *eudaimonia* a striving which takes them beyond the contemporary models of the subject as coming from Habermas and Bourdieu. Realization of happiness is not a matter of social practice but also of appropriate subjective cultivation; realization of *eudaimonia* also calls for a spiritualization of practice, as we shall shortly see, and also going beyond Aristotle.

Subject as Not Only a Technopractitioner But Also a Transcendentally Real Self

Thus rethinking the subject urges us to realize the limits of the models of the technopractitioner which is closer to the earlier sociological model of *homo sociologicus* presented by Ralph Dahrendorf. Neither the techno-practitioner nor *homo sociologicus* as occupants of social roles exhaust the reality and possibility of the subject (see Cohen 1994; Giri 1998) and it is helpful also here to acknowledge that the subject is also a transcendently real self. Such a deepening and widening of perspective is suggested by Roy Bhaskar. Bhaskar, the pioneer in the movement of critical realism, has now deepened the quest of realism to touch spiritual quest of self-development and social emancipation. Even much before his contemporary spiritual deepening of critical realism Bhaskar had posed some fundamental challenges to social sciences. For Bhaskar in thinking about society we should not commit a collectivist or individualist fallacy as society consists of neither the collective nor the individual but relations. But what is at the core of relationship? For Bhaskar, it is the ideal and practice of identification what he calls “transcendental identification.” Transcendental identification is the work of the transcendently real self; so in rethinking the subject we have to think of her as also a transcendently real self and not merely a “technopractitioner.” For Bhaskar, “[...] transcendental identification is absolutely basic to life. This means non-duality is absolutely basic to life” (Bhaskar 2002a: 140). And this “non-duality is not something ‘mystical,’ not something that depends on any kind of belief or faith, but the necessary condition for our most quotidian states and acts” (ibid: 261). For Bhaskar (2002a), our ontology has to be “vastly expanded to allow for the possibility for the enfolding layers of being” (ibid: 16). Parallel to Knorr-Cetina’s notion of self as a structure of wanting, Bhaskar refers to absence that affects our ontology and epistemology: “The whole process is really structured by absence: first in the form of incompleteness which initiates it; second it is negativity in the form of contradiction which stimulates the crisis which motivates you to transcend an existing problem field. And, what happens when you are transcending it is that you have a moment of creative discovery

which actually cannot be induced or deduced from the existing subject matter; so it comes from the epistemically unknown” (ibid: 130).

Acknowledging that the subject is also a transcendently real self urges us to rethink differentiation from a perspective of identification. Bhaskar takes the discourse and practice of identification to a new depth and height by talking of ground state, cosmic envelope and co-presence. Bhaskar writes: “When your action is coming from your ground-state you will see no preference for your own development over the development and freedom of any other being in the universe” (ibid: 148). Bhaskar urges social scientists to be open to these new pathways of connectivity at work in people’s lives rather than just be preoccupied with difference:

The critique of postmodernism involves accepting the emphasis on uniqueness and differentiation without throwing out our concepts of universality and connection. Indeed the ground-state and cosmic envelope are just precisely the concepts we need to understand differentiation within a unity. But these aspects of being, on which all other aspects ultimately depend, are precisely those which through the generalized theory of co-presence, allows us to see that everything is implicitly enfolded or contained and may be brought to consciousness, implicit or explicit, in everything else, so that anything can be traced or manifest in anything else. The world becomes one in which a quasi-magical or generalized (dialectically universalized) synchronicity is potentially capable of being manifest anywhere (ibid: 248).

Max Weber spoke about the disenchantment of the world in which modern scientific world view played an important role. Modern social science took part in this disenchantment of the world in the process making us unable to live authentically. Now there is a need to go beyond the crisis of European sciences and to live a non-dual life and through our ontology and epistemology contribute to the experience and making of a reenchanted world where “knowledge of” cannot be dissociated from “knowing with” (cf. Sunder Rajan 1998). Bhaskar urges us to attend to this calling of rechantment both as subjects and scientists which involves collapse of “subject-object duality” and “fact-value distinction” (Bhaskar 2002b: xxxvii).⁸ For Bhaskar we are all enchanted beings, i.e “bearers of values, meaning and change.” Bhaskar writes: “We are involved as totalities in a world which is enchanted in the sense that it is the bearer of values, of meaning and change. This level of critique also enables us to see that the world consists of emergent totalities..” (ibid: 247). Bhaskar elaborates the dynamics of an expanded ontology as a reflection of and striving towards a dynamically moving re-enchanted world:

[..] we perspectively re-totalise the field, which we all daily experience, and which is plummeting into global crisis, under the categories of transcendence, duality and non-duality, in the context of an expanded ontology, in which we not only, as in hitherto critical realism, think being, thing being processually, and as a totality, and as incorporating transformative agency and reflexivity; but also now think being as multi-planar and n-dimensionally generalised, with mental and emotional *sui generis* realities, bound together within a more basic level which is not only beyond thought but beyond sight, which I have called the cosmic envelope; and within this vastly expanded conception of being, and the very extended ontology it necessitates, we now see being as re-enchanted, that is as valuable, meaningful and containing invisible, (more generally unknown and even unmanifest), subtle, mysterious and even magical qualities

and connections, which our contemporary sciences know nothing of (ibid: 257-258).⁹

Rethinking Methods

a) Overcoming Dualism: Towards a Multi-Valued Logic of Autonomy and Interpenetration And an Aesthetics of Discovering Threads of Connections

Realization of non-duality in a world of duality is an important challenge before us both ontologically as well as epistemologically, i.e. what ever reality we try to understand has a non-dual dimension and our method of understanding it ought to embody this non-dual sensitivity. As we shall see, an ontology and epistemology of non-duality is neither one of total absorption nor uncritical holism nor monism¹⁰ as it is sensitive to disjunction and antinomies between different dimensions or parts of reality. Building on our earlier discussion about subject, subject is simultaneously a technopractitioner or *homo sociologicus* and transcendently real self. Furthermore building on Freud, Jung and Victor Frankl, the subject has also a dimension of unconscious. Thus the subject has, at least, three dimensions, in her multi-planar existence—unconscious, role player / techno-practitioner, and transcendently real self. But how do they relate to each other? Does one totally exhaust the other or is opposed to the other? The relationship between these dimensions is one of autonomy and interpenetration, i.e. these dimensions of subject exist as concentric and interpenetrative circles having simultaneously an autonomous and relational existence. For example what ever we do as role occupants and technopractitioners is influenced by both the dimensions of unconscious and transcendently real self.¹¹ But neither of these exist in a situation of either or nor can one be unproblematically reduced to or subsumed under the other.

Such a perspective that the world we had taken for granted as unitary is in fact a plural world consisting of multiple domains which are simultaneously irreducible to each other and at the same time in relationship with each other is emerging in varieties of domains of reflections now.¹² For example, van Staveren (2001) argues that the field of economy consists of not only the domain of market exchange but also domains of justice and care and they are not related to each other in a dualistic or exclusionary manner. Such a plural but interconnected and relational conceptualization of a field of study is also emerging in domains such as history. For example, philosopher R. Sunder Rajan argues that history does not consist of only power and reason but also of vision. Taking cues from this in his efforts to rethink modernist historiography, Giri (2004) critically interrogates Amartya Sen's view of history as an enterprise of knowledge (cf. Sen 2001). For Giri, as an enterprise of knowledge, history is "neither unitary and rational." There are different domains in the enterprise of history such as history as power, history as reason and history as vision. But like van Staveren's conceptualizations of different domains of economy, Giri argues that these different domains of history are simultaneously autonomous and interpenetrative where they "illumine each other revealing unsuspected dimensions of each other" (Sunder Rajan 1996: 193).

We find a similar sensitivity to autonomy and interpenetration emerging in anthropologist Frederik Bath's approach to and conceptualization of knowledge. Bath (2002) argues that knowledge consists of three domains—substantive corpus, communicative medium, and social organization—but they are related to each other. Bath writes:

I am *not* inviting you to take a highly generalized and abstract unity (knowledge) and

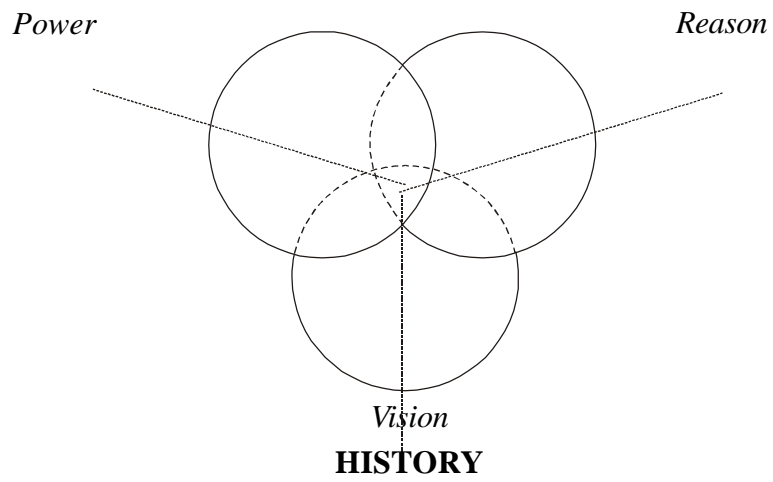
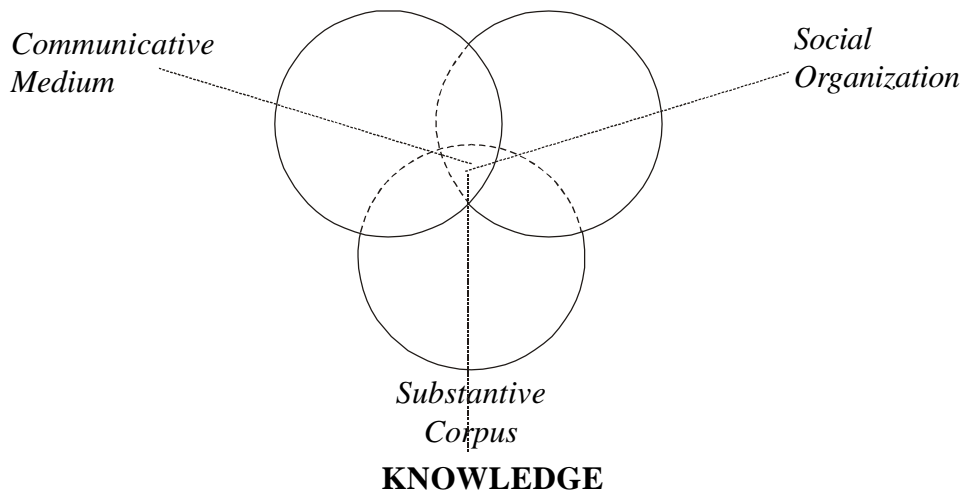
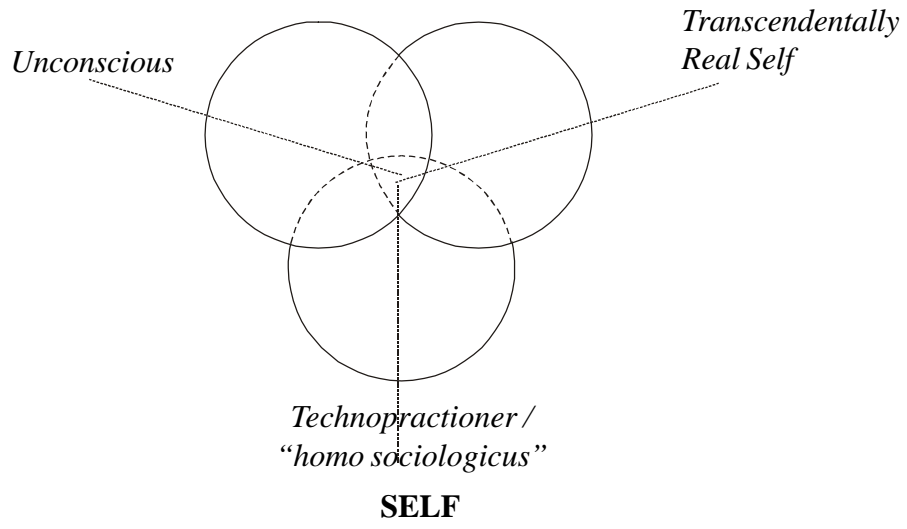
divide into three parts (substantive corpus, communicative medium, and social organization) and then progressively break each of these parts down further till we finally arrive at the level of particular human actions and events. On the contrary, my theses is that these three faces of knowledge appear together precisely in the particulars of action in every event of the application of knowledge [...] Their mutual determination takes place at those specific moments when a particular item of substantive knowledge is cast in a particular communicative medium and applied in an actor by an action positioned in a particular social organization: their systematic interdependence arises by virtue of the constraints *in realization* that these three aspects impose on each other in the context of every particular application (Barth 2002: 3; italics in the original).

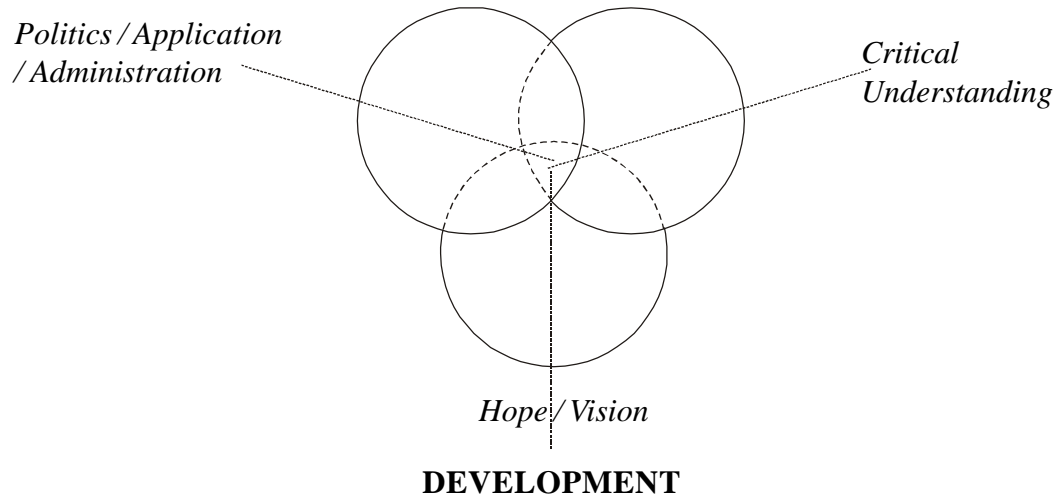
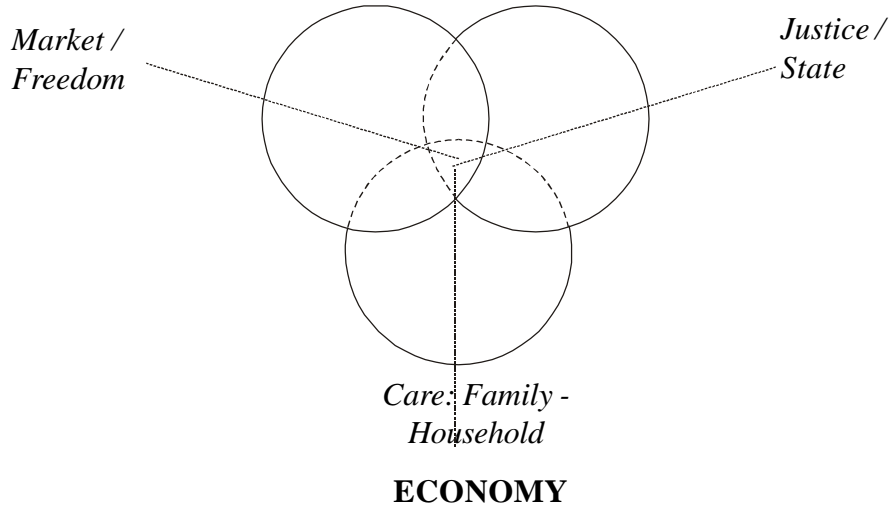
As a final example of this proposed ontology of autonomy and interpenetration we can look at the field of development. Building on three fundamental Kantian questions—what can we do? What can we know? and What can we hope—Quarles van Ufford and Giri (2003) argue that the discourse and practice of development consist of domains of hope, politics and administration, and critical understanding. Autonomous as well as interconnected knowledges and actions arise in these domains. But these domains though autonomous already presuppose the other in their constitution, genealogy and dynamics. The domain of development as hope has or ought to have within itself an awareness of the issues emerging from domains of politics and application, and critical understanding. The same simultaneous logic of autonomy and interpenetration is true of domains of politics and critique as well.

But in order to understand this relationship of autonomy and interpenetration we need a new logic what philosopher J.N. Mohanty (2000) building on both the Jaina tradition of Svedavada and Husserl's phenomenology calls multi-valued logic or what sociologist JPS Uberoi (2002) building on Goethe, Gandhi and the Hermetic tradition of Europe calls "the four-fold logic of truth and method." What Mohanty writes below helps us understand the proposed multi-valued logic of autonomy and interpenetration:

The ethic of non-injury applied to philosophical thinking requires that one does not reject outright the other point of view without first recognizing the element of truth in it; it is based on the belief that every point of view is partly true, partly false, and partly undecidable. A simple two-valued logic requiring that a proposition must either be true or false is thereby rejected, and what the Jaina philosopher proposes is a multi-valued logic. To this multi-valued logic, I add the Husserlian idea of overlapping contents. The different perspectives on a thing are not mutually exclusive, but share some contents with each other. The different 'worlds' have shared contents, contrary to the total relativism. *If you represent them by circles, they are intersecting circles, not incommensurable, [and it is this model of] intersecting circles which can get us out of relativism on the one hand and absolutism on the other* (Mohanty 2000: 24; emphases added).

Thus taking inspiration from Mohanty we can represent our previous examples of fields in terms of following series of overlapping and concentric circles:





But though these different domains or dimensions of our life and science—self, knowledge, history and development—embody a logic autonomy and interpenetration it requires a bit of effort to discover their threads of connections. There is a dimension of autonomy among these domains and many a time they present themselves as well as are perceived as incommensurabilities. In this context, a move from autonomy trapped inside incommensurability as fate to discovering threads of connections requires work on self and science, ontology and epistemology. For philosopher and historian Ankersmit (2002), it calls for an aesthetic cultivation which enables us deal with immensurabilities and discover threads of connections without suppressing gaps or disjunctions.¹³ It also calls for the work of a “transversal reason” which takes us beyond the exclusionary rationality of each of the domains, for instance, cognitive or ethical (Ankersmit 2002: 233-234). Transversal reason which is connected to both aesthetics¹⁴ and transcendence (cf. Schrag 1997; Quarles van Ufford & Giri 2003) works across boundaries and has the unique “capacity of dealing with incommensurability” (Ankersmit 2002: 233-234). Thus moving from the dimension of autonomy which is perceived as incommensurability to discovering threads of connections or to the locus of the intersecting circles calls for an aesthetics of transversal reason and non-violence in both thought and action, as non-violence is linked to understanding the world in a plural but interconnected way.¹⁵

b) Rethinking the opposition between quantitative and qualitative

The need for overcoming dualism is most urgent in the sterile and now lazy fight over the primacy of either the qualitative or the quantitative methods of research. Social research is wedded to a cult of the quantitative but here as economist Achin Chakraborty (2004) tells us, just bringing the tool of qualitative research to the methodological kit box of a field like economics, for example, which is wedded to a positivist Methodology is not enough. As “Monotheism reigns supreme in Methodology” (Bourdieu 1992: 226) what is called for here is a plural and reflexive methodology which does not valorize reflection at the expense of fieldwork or what Pierre Bourdieu calls getting “hands dirty in the kitchens of empirical research” (Bourdieu 1990: 19). Bourdieu’s outstanding works show how new insights emerge by combining ethnological fieldwork with statistical research.¹⁶ In this context, Mats Alvesson and Kaj Skoldberg (2000) present us some helpful insights. For them the issue is not quantitative versus qualitative, or standardization or non-standardization. They write: “It is not methods but ontology and epistemology which are the determinants of good social science. These aspects are often handled better in the qualitative research—which allows for ambiguity as regards interpretive possibilities, and lets the researcher’s construction of what is explored become more visible—but there are also examples of the use of the quantitative methods in which figures, techniques and claims to objectivity are not allowed to gain the upper hand [...]” (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2000: 4). In fact now there is an emergent new qualitative method which combines rich description and deep reflections: “While it remains descriptively rich, it is also privileged to engage the thorny epistemological questions that arise when researchers attempt to document the contours and workings of a constructed, yet substantial, world of everyday life” (Gubrium & Holstein 1997: vii).

In fact in so far as an emergent qualitative method is concerned, in their reformulation of development ethics as emergent ethics Giri & Quarles van Ufford (2004) speak about emergent empiricism which looks at data as part of an emergent situation; emergent empiricism looks at possible data in a given situation always open to horizon of emergence in the empirical world itself. Development ethicist Des Gasper (2003) brings a new dimension to this emergent empiricism by urging us to go beyond the division between the quantitative and qualitative as monolithic and unitary things. For Gasper, what is often labeled as case-approach includes a varieties of cases or different kinds of cases, for example—“thick case studies; thin case studies; real life choice situations; real life anecdotes and

other illustrations; conceivably true fictions; and impossible fictions” (Gasper 2003: 196). Gasper discusses the implications of different kinds of cases and engagement with cases for ethical argumentation and action; for example in some cases it is helpful to have thick case studies, in others like Rawls’s discussion of the original situation it is helpful to have impossible fictions as cases. One implication of Gasper’s pluralization of the case study approach which is usually considered unitary is that the practice of research and critical social action should embody a creative pluralism of cases. It has a further ethical dimension too in real life action on the part of researchers, policy makers and activists. For example, if a dam is being built then before taking such a decision it is an ethical imperative for the policy makers and decision-making politicians to engage themselves with a thick case study of communities and people at risk. This may not alter the footsteps of the monolithic giants involved but it can create a space of possibility for the marginalized and powerless and also for all concerned. This is much more so when powers that be almost always “see like a state” and do not engage themselves in a situation which would give them an opportunity for a thick description and thick experience of the life of people. The need for such a thicker case engagement has become all the more important now when in the name of audit culture in economy, academy and development organizations, a new myopia and organized blindness is being promoted which looks at only quick and short-term results collected also at a finger of the tip by clicking the button of the mouse (cf. Strathern 2000). There is an imperial triumph of the survey method now to the exclusion of participation with the life of the people and now many academic researchers even do not do this themselves subcontracting their survey research to other people as part of a flexible dismantling of research labor. In this context, combining varieties of methods—qualitative and quantitative—and varieties of cases from the qualitative—has important implications, ethical as well as epistemological. But the very practice and choice of doing so is not dependent on epistemology alone; it depends upon nature and quality of self-cultivation and commitment, understood broadly as touching both self and institutions.

What this issue raises is the challenge of overcoming expediency. For example, how do we overcome the temptation for expediency when we are epistemologically and ethically required to embody methodological pluralism, for example the task and responsibility of being engaged in a thick understanding of a damaged, vulnerable form of life. In this context Narendar Pani’s (2004) discussion of “Gandhian economic methods and the challenge of expediency” is helpful. For Pani, though Gandhian economic method shares with pragmatism a focus on human practice, Gandhi’s concept of knowledge is more inclusive and includes practices of self-reflection and self-development which enables one not to use one’s knowledge expeditiously. Gandhi reduced the scope for “expediency by refusing to accept moral justification for promoting self-interest” (Pani 2004).

(c) **Dialogue Between Philosophy and Social Sciences**

As we have prepared our ground a bit, for creative and critical social research border crossing between philosophy and social scientists is not just a matter of fancy, whim or benevolence but a matter of necessity now. As Aversson and Skoldberg write: “Referring to philosophical ideas without really using them is pointless, bewildering and means a waste of time and energy for the researcher and of his or her unfortunate readers. Interplay between philosophical ideas and empirical work marks high-quality social research. While philosophical sophistication is certainly not the principal task of social science, social research without philosophically informed reflection easily grows so unreflexive that the label ‘research’ becomes questionable” (ibid: 7). But here the caution from Andrew Sayer, a philosopher, needs to be born in mind: “But while I believe social scientists can learn from philosophy they should not be in awe of it, for they can also inform it” (Sayer 1992: 3). Thus what is called for here is a mutually transforming border crossing between philosophy and social sciences where philosophers do fieldwork¹⁷

and field-working social scientists themselves become philosophers in reflecting upon the foundations of their presuppositions and not just become servants of the awe-inspiring philosophical masters no matter whether the master is Plato, Kant, Heidegger or now our new prophet Derrida. Johan Godfried Herder had asked long ago: “What fruitful new developments would not arise if only our whole philosophy would become anthropology” (quoted in Zammito 2002). Anthropology similarly could ask a similar self-transcending question: “What fruitful new developments would not arise if only our whole anthropology would become philosophy.”

Fortunately for us from both sides now there are self-critical, transgressive and transformational moves.¹⁸ From philosophy, just as an example, Richard Rorty (1990) and J.N. Mohanty (2002) in their many different ways reiterate the significance of description. Mohanty brings to philosophical description a sense of pathos which is enriching. Writes Mohanty (2002): “A genuinely descriptive philosophy [and we can add here sociology, anthropology or social sciences] is bound to be characterized by a tragic sense not merely because everywhere phenomena exhibit discontinuity and gaps which he would not fill in, but also because he is haunted by the gap which continues to persist and which he only tries to make up asymptotically, between philosophical reflection and unreflective experience. His is thus a never-ending endeavour, his is an open system. The speculative metaphysician, on the other hand, closes the system [...]”

Even though Mohanty is a philosopher he brings to philosophical description a tragic sense of life but do we find it in Clifford Geertz, the celebrated anthropologist of thick description? Where is a sense of tragedy in Geertz’s Balinese cockfight, where are Geertz’s tears in Geertz’s (1973) description of bleeding cocks? In his *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Themes*, Geertz (2000) says that Wittgenstein has been a sort of *Guru* to him and Geertz has been a *guru* to many anthropologists and many others. Here we may wonder how the trajectory of cultural anthropology would have developed had Heidegger also been some sort of a *guru* to Geertz? Surely it would not have been that easy for anthropologists to hide behind the category of language game and neglect the question of ontology. Going beyond a formulaic denunciation of Heidegger’s complicity with Nazism (cf. Bourdieu 1991b), it would have certainly urged them to come to terms with the calling of what Dallmayr (1987) calls “practical ontology.”¹⁹

Wittgenstein is not only a *guru* to Geertz but also to many philosophically engaged anthropologists of our times such as Pierre Bourdieu (1990; 2000) and Veena Das (1995, 1999). Veena Das develops a passionate project of anthropology of suffering taking inspiration from Wittgenstein which poses important transformational challenges for Geertz whose Wittgensteinian anthropology does not embody the pains of a groaning humanity.²⁰

The lack of sufficient attention to issues of ontological cultivation is not the only limitation with much of contemporary philosophical anthropology. Another foundational limitation of the project of philosophical anthropology or anthropological philosophy as it has emerged in the Euro-American world in the last fifty years is that it is too parochial (its philosophical sources such as Pascal, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Pierce or Kenneth Burke come from a very narrow part of the world) and lack a transcultural and transcivilizational dialogue as, for example, found in the works of seekers such as Fred Dallmayr (cf. Dallmayr 1996, 1998, 2001, 2002, forthcoming).²¹

d) Paying attention to Disjunction and Gaps: Attending to Antinomies in Self and Society

Mohanty speaks about attending to gaps between systems. Theoretically and methodologically

we need to go beyond preoccupation with an unproblematic whole or sociology of the black box and attend to gaps and disjunctions in between. Here Foucault and Ankersmit are helpful in providing us a new theoretical imagination. In his reflection on Kant, Foucault (1984a) endorses Kant's distinction between three domains of knowledge (knowledge related to political action, knowledge related to critical reflection, and knowledge related to hope) as constitutive of Enlightenment but urges us to acknowledge the lack of fit between them. Similarly Ankersmit (1996, 2002) point to the incommensurabilities between domains and how they can be dealt with artistically can not be forcefully absorbed into a system. Beteille also urges us to bring attending to antinomies to the heart of sociological understanding as he defines antinomies as "contradictions, oppositions and tensions inherent in the norms and values through which societies regulate themselves and continue their existence" (Beteille 2000: 1).

e) **Paying attention to contingency:**

Along with paying attention to disjunctions, as students of self, culture and society, we need to be aware of the work of contingencies in society and history. Contingency points to our embeddedness in many webs of relationships which simultaneously determines and opens up spaces of possibilities. Contingent engagement also is a creative one, as Santos, building on Ilya Prigogine tells us, now instead of necessity we have creativity and contingency (Santos 1995: 19).

An engagement with contingency points us to the contextual dimension in the work of self, culture and society and frees us from our confinement with abstractions and law-like generalizations. An awareness of contingency enables us to realize that a particular mode of development also could have been different thus freeing us from notions of historical inevitability which reflects an "ontological monovalence" (Bhaskar 2002a: 123). As social theorist Nancy Weiss Hanrahan tells us: "[...] the outcome of social processes are always contingent in that things could turn out otherwise" (Hanrahan 2000: 35; also see Hawthorn 1991; Walker 1998).²²

f) **Contingency and *Phronesis*: New Methodological Outlines**

Taking contingency seriously means paying importance to context. This is in tune with paying importance to practice as has been suggested by Bourdieu and many others. Recently some scholars urge us to draw new methodological and theoretical insights by drawing upon Aristotle, namely his emphasis on *phronesis*. One of the most important dialogues with Aristotle in contemporary social science is Bent Flyvbjerg's *Making Social Sciences Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How it can Succeed Again* (Flyvbjerg 2001). In building on Aristotle in reconstructing social sciences, Flyvbjerg primarily focuses on Aristotelian *phronesis* rather than *techné* and *epistémé*. For Flyvbjerg, "*Phronesis* is most important because it is that activity by which instrumental rationality is balanced by value-rationality, and because such balancing is crucial to the sustained happiness of the citizens in any society" (Flyvbjerg 2001: 4). A focus on *phronesis* enables us to understand context –dependence but "context-dependence does not mean just a more complex form of determinism. It means an open-ended, contingent relation between contexts and actions and interpretations" (ibid: 43). In tune with our running concern of cultivation of a non-dual mode in ontology and epistemology, an engagement with *phronesis* also facilitates this. In Flyvbjerg's words: "There are rules, and there is the particular. This much can be observed phenomenologically. [...] To amputate one side in these pairs of phenomena into a dualistic 'either-or' is to amputate our understanding. Rather than the 'either or,' we should develop a non-dualism and pluralistic 'both-and'" (ibid: 49).

Flyvbjerg's outline of a new methodology is in tune with many of the proposals in this essay. But

there still seems to be an unconscious streak of dualism in his proposal when he talks about “looking at practice before discourse.” Though I do not believe that practice is discursively constituted it is helpful to study practice and discourse simultaneously. Flyvbjerg is also within the modernist regime of denial of ontology when he writes the following to elaborate his advice of doing narrative: “Narratology, understood as the question of ‘how best to get an honest story honestly told’ is more important than epistemology and ontology” (ibid: 137).

For Flyvbjerg, “The horizon of meaning is that of the individual practice” (ibid: 135). But the horizon of meaning also lies beyond practice, or in a beyond which is a dimension in the immanent domain of practice. There is insufficient recognition of this dimension of beyond in contemporary social sciences even though Wittgenstein, another key source in contemporary creative reconstruction of social sciences, had told us long ago: “The meaning of a word lies outside a word.” Here along with empowering Aristotle, as Flyvbjerg suggests, we have also to spiritualize him, a spiritualization which enables one to embody normative alternative to the will to power or realizing what Dallmayr, building on Heidegger says, a “power-free existence” (cf. Dallmayr 2001). In critical social science there is not only a lack of sufficient acknowledgment of the transcendental dimension of our co-present reality but there is an anxiety to distance one’s initiative of reconstruction from any engagement with transcendence. A case in point here is the work of Hardt and Negri referred to earlier. They write in their influential critical treatise on the contemporary condition *Empire*: “The multitude today, however, resides on the imperial surfaces where there is no God the Father and no transcendence. Instead there is our immanent labor. [...] The multitude has no reason to look outside its own history to lead towards its constitution as a political subject” (Hardt & Negri 2000: 396). But though there is no point in asserting transcendence there is also no point in denying it and what is called for here is an openness to transcendence as a real and possible dimension of self, culture and society.

g) A Comparative Global Engagement

Social research now needs to embody a comparative global engagement by simultaneously studying the self and other. Comparative method has been a hallmark of social sciences such as sociology and social anthropology for long but this reflected a nation-state centered ethnocentrism and suffers from what Radhakrishnan calls a “dominant universalizing tendency” (Radhakrishnan 2003: 73). Now there is a need to embody a new comparative global engagement by simultaneously studying the self and other not only discursively but also ethnographically to the extent possible. Multi-sited ethnography of a discursive theme of comparison ought to be a companion of a globally engaged social science (cf. Marcus & Fischer 1986). Here we have to move beyond systemic comparisons and attend to complexities that lie in between and beyond. As Beteille (1983) tells us, the whole scale comparison of civilizations such as India as “*Homo Hierarchicus*” and West as “*Homo Equalis*” is not only unhelpful but perpetuates Western ethnocentrism. Similar is also the perspective of Touraine who argues that the distinction between modernity and tradition in terms of individualism and hierarchy—ala Louis Dumont—is not helpful to understand either of them. As he writes: “The distinction between social and non-social definitions of the individual seems to me to be even more important than that between the holistic societies of old and modern individualistic societies. *Both types of society are Janus-faced, because there is no fundamental difference between an individual who is trapped in the roles imposed on him by the community and an individual whose actions are determined by his social situation and the highly effective blandishments of the market. At the same time, there is a similarity between the renouncer and the modern individual who appeals to the universal rights of man and in particular the dissident or resister who risks his life by challenging a social order which, in his view, is an affront to human dignity*” (Touraine 2000: 86; emphases added).

Thus we need a comparative global and even planetary engagement which is interested to explore pathways of partial connections rather than whole sale comparison of civilizations and systems: “Partial connections require images other than those taxonomies or configurations that compel one to look for overarching principles or for some core or central features [..]” (Strathern 1991: xviii). Based on her work in New Guinea, Marilyn Strathern writes: “[..] attempts to produce a typology of societies from the application of constant principles may also evaporate. For instance, principles of reciprocity as they affect the organization of transactions and the role of leaders as Great Men or Big Men may well appear to discriminate effectively between a handful of cases; but the discrimination cannot be necessarily sustained at that level—an expanded version reveals that principles radically distinguishing whole cluster of societies are also replicated within them” (Strathern 1994: xviii; also see Gingrich & Fox 2002).

But a global comparative anthropology not only calls for multi-sited fieldwork²³ in our global ethnoscapes; it also calls for a transcivilizational dialogue on our foundational presuppositions about self, culture and society. Social research can not just be a surface level engagement of doing fieldwork on practices without entering into the foundational ways in which people constitute themselves and their worlds. For example in Bhagavad Gita, a spiritual text from Indian civilizational journey, it is written: “*Sradhha Maya Ayam Purusha Jo Jat Sraddha Sa Ebasa*: This Purusha [the human person] is characterized by *sraddha*—capacity for love and reverence—; one is what one who loves or reveres.” These lines also offer some presuppositions about self, culture and society as the presuppositions about power offered by Weber and Foucault and justification offered by Habermas. For a broadened understanding of culture and society should not there be a dialogue among such presuppositions? (cf. Giri 2003). The need for a transcivilizational dialogue for social theory as part of a comparative global engagement becomes a little more clear when we take the issue of Japan, modernity and social theory. John Clammer writes us in his provocative work *Difference and Modernity: Social Theory and Contemporary Japanese Society* : “While mainstream social theory has largely assumed the separateness of man from nature, the Japanese understanding has always been ‘ecological’: that man as part of nature not only in the obvious sense of dependence on the biosphere for good, air, water and warmth, but also in the sense that processes and rhythms in nature parallel, reinforce or are identical with patterns of human interaction” (Clammer 1995: 61). Clammer further tells us that in the Japanese way, “the non-duality of nature and non-duality of human selfhood are [..] intimately linked” (ibid: 73). Furthermore there is a connection between ethics and aesthetics: “[..] aesthetics here does not imply just ‘art’ but the integration of art and life based on a holistic understanding of the universe” (ibid: 66; also see Peacock 2002).

Creative and Critical Social Research: Towards a New Vocation

Creative social research at the contemporary juncture has to renew its commitment to the realization of beautiful and dignified worlds. Creative social research can help us to recognize our own ontological power and the ontological power of the multitude. By recording the narratives of struggles and strivings for a better world in the face of the ideology of “end of history” creative social research can participate in multiple breakthroughs. We find such a commitment to creative social research in some of our contemporary interlocutors. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri tell us in their *Empire* to “subvert the hegemonic languages and social structures and thereby reveal an alternative ontological basis that resides in the creative and productive practices of the multitude” and participate in the “constructive and ethico-political” striving for a better world (Hardt & Negri 2000; also Hardt & Negri 1994). Similar is also Arjun Appadurai’s calling in his provocative and inspiring reflection, “Grassroots Globalization and Research Imagination” (Appadurai 2000). Reflecting on the contemporary predicament

of globalization and the pessimist tendency of resignation on the part of the academics, Appadurai asks: “Can we retain the methodological rigor of modern social science while restoring some of the prestige and energy of earlier visions of scholarship in which moral and political concerns were central? Can we find ways to legitimately engage scholarship by public intellectuals here and overseas whose work is not primarily conditioned by professional criteria of criticism and dissemination?” (Appadurai 2000: 14). For Appadurai, “[...] globalisation is not simply the name for a new epoch in the history of capital or in the biography of the nation-state. It is marked by a new role for imagination in social life” (ibid: 13). Creative social research has to be receptive to this work of imagination in the life of self and society (see Gatens & Lloyd 2001). Appadurai elaborates: “If globalization is characterized by disjunctive flows that generate acute problems of social well-being, one positive force that encourages an emancipatory politics of globalization is the role of imagination in social life. The imagination is no longer a matter of individual genius, escapism from ordinary life, or just a dimension of aesthetics. It is a faculty that informs the daily lives of ordinary people in myriad ways. It allows people to consider migration, resist state violence, seek social redress and design new forms of civic association and collaboration, often across national boundaries” (ibid: 6). In the midst and face of such works of imagination, Appadurai articulates the following challenge before research: “[...] Critical voices who speak for the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalized in the international fora in which global policies are made lack the means to produce a systematic grasp of the complexities of globalization. A new architecture for producing and sharing knowledge about globalization could provide the foundations of a pedagogy that closes this gap and helps to democratize the flow of knowledge about globalization itself. Such a pedagogy could create new forms of dialogue between academics, public intellectuals, activists, and policy makers in different societies” (ibid: 18).

Creative social research has to resist the temptation and security of paraphrasing the logic of global capital and the police state and has to contribute towards democratization of the public sphere with its insights of research. Such a commitment has a particular salience in the contemporary climate of terror where the world is being so easily classified into good and evil. After September 11 attack on the world trade center, New York there is now a globalization of war on terrorism which is itself a terrorist campaign and in this context we have to renew our commitment to interpretive social science as a critical democratic engagement. For Veena Das, the challenge here is: “Might we be able to mourn with the survivors of September 11 without the needing to appropriate their grief for other grander projects” (Das 2001: 111). As Michele Fine tells us: “Perhaps we can exhibit our most bold and radical democratic presence by refusing the freezing of conversation and imagination” (Fine 2002: 141). Fine cautions us: “[...] Descriptive research, I worry, will not do. In our research we are now obliged to interrogate *Why*, assuring that analyses of history and justice are joined; discussion of what “is” is are yoked to “what has been” and “what must be.” *Why* raises hard questions, negotiated genesis stories, contentious histories. Given the shrinking community for public intellectuals who are allowed to speak, the scupts for public intellectuals must grow correspondingly bold” (ibid: 139-140).

The Calling of an Ontological Epistemology of Participation

But practicing such a vocation of research calls for adequate preparation in self and society. Research is not just an epistemic activity; it also calls for cultivation of appropriate virtues transgressing the conventional boundaries between epistemology and ontology. As John Greco writes: “Just as virtue theories in ethics try to understand the normative properties of actions in terms of the normative properties of moral agents, virtue theories in epistemology try to understand the normative properties of beliefs in terms of the normative properties of cognitive agents” (Greco 2001: 136). Virtue epistemology makes activities of research “person-based rather than belief-based” (ibid). While in epistemology there is a

move towards “virtue epistemology” in ontology there are moves towards “weak ontology”²⁴ as pioneered by Vattimo (1999), “practical ontology” and “critical ontology” as striven by Dallmayr (1984, 1987, 1991), and “ontological anthropology” as striven by Clammer et al. (2004), which interestingly embodies a “relational epistemology” (Clammer et al. 2004: 17). Vattimo’s weak ontology embodies vulnerability, self-emptying (*kenosis*), love and non-violence; similar is also Dallmayr’s strivings of a practical ontology which touches the height and depth of a practical spirituality. We can bring “virtue epistemology,” “weak ontology,” “practical ontology,” “ontological anthropology” and Bhaskar’s expanded ontology or ontology of self-expansion and nurture the ground for an ontological epistemology of participation.

In ontological epistemology of participation, there is attentiveness to and interpenetration of both the subjective and the objective and the whole challenge is to arrive at an objective in spite of our irreducible subjectivity. This calls for a new conception of both the subjective and the objective. As we have suggested subjective also refers to the dimension of transcendental or non-dual self in the actor / subject / scientist and this would be a companion of an aspired for objectivity. As Eric Fromm tells us: “Objectivity does not mean detachment, *it means respect*; that is, the ability not to distort and to falsify things, persons and oneself” (Fromm 1950: 105). Furthermore, “To be objective is possible only if we respect the things we observe; that is, if we are capable of seeing them in their uniqueness and interconnectedness” (ibid: 104) (Compare this to Bhaskar’s perspective of dialectical universality paying attention to uniqueness and singularity).

Ontological epistemology of participation differs from participant observation as it is conventionally understood. Bourdieu asks of participant observation: “How can one be both subject and object, the one who acts and the one who, as it were, watching himself acting? (Bourdieu 2003: 282). As an alternative Bourdieu proposes *participant objectivation*: “By participant objectivation I mean the objectivation of the subject of objectivation, of the analyzing subject—in short the researcher herself?” (ibid). But how can one watch oneself acting and be both subject and object? Does it not involve work on oneself or cultivation of some kind of witnessing self what is called *sakhi pursusha* in Indian spiritual traditions or impartial spectator by Adam Smith (cf. Sen 2002; Smith 1976)? Can this be only epistemic and doesn’t it also involve some ontological work on oneself? Bourdieu speaks about “epistemic reflexivity” (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 38). His application of statistical analysis to self-understanding is helpful but does it also not involve ontological nurturance?²⁵

In this context, Ankersmit’s most recent discussion of the methodology of historical representation helps us understand the work of ontological epistemology of participation in a new way. Ankersmit tells us that historical representation of a period may present a “coherent whole of developments on domains that are incommensurable with each other” such as the “cognitive, ethical, aesthetic, religious or technical preoccupations of a period” (Ankersmit 2002: 234). For Ankersmit such a connected picture and free movement “from one domain to another” is possible because of historical representation. He goes on to write: “If we ask ourselves how representation may enable us to do this, the answer is that *the unique contribution of representation [..] is that it involves the knowing subject [..] The self is activated by representation in a way that would mean the end of objective knowledge.* And from the point of view recommended by representation, suddenly a common ground can be discerned for domains that seemed hitherto completely unrelated and incommensurable” (ibid; emphases added).

Here Ankersmit presents the example of epistemology and politics in 17th century France. For Ankersmit, “at first sight seventeenth-century rationalist philosophy and absolutism will have nothing in

common for us. But then the historian may suggest the point of view of the transcendental ego [or it may emerge from any self-initiated historical engagement, not just from historian as a professional expert], of a self that withdraws from the world but in order to get a firmer hold of it” (ibid). “And this point of view makes us aware of what the Cartesian self, doubting all knowledge in order to gain access to absolute certain knowledge, has in common with Louis XIV withdrawing from the bustle of Paris to Versailles in order to confirm his absolutist mastery of France” (ibid). Thus the perspective of transcendental ego born of historical inquiry and representation, an engagement in which all of us seeking souls can participate, not only professional historians, helps us understand the connection between epistemology and politics in seventeenth century France. For Ankersmit, one may not totally identify with such a perspective which emerges from our work of historical representation but nonetheless it shapes our personality and what we are. From the perspective of the calling of an ontological epistemology of participation, what Ankersmit writes deserves our careful considerations: “Nevertheless, becoming acquainted with the possibility of many such points of view will, add each time, a new, though tiny stone to the mosaic of our personality. And in the end this cannot fail to have its effect on the kind of person that we are” (ibid: 235)

By the Way of Conclusion:

In this essay we have touched some of the themes and challenges in the vocation of a creative and critical social research which point to the need for cultivation of an appropriate ontology in our engagement of research which can help us come to terms with not only some of the theoretical problems such as the postmodern imprisonment within difference but also realize the practical task of establishing solidarity across divides. As we have seen, this includes the challenge of cultivating non-dual modes within ourselves as subjects of investigation. Such an ontological cultivation has an epochal significance as our theories and methods have been imprisoned within the modernist privileging of epistemology over ontology. Bringing ontological cultivation back to social research enables us to go beyond the conventional slogan of renewing social research with participation. For the last quarter century participatory research has been much valorized—it has been on everybody’s lips starting from anthropologists to development practitioners, and now the agents of World Bank. But our approach to and involvement with participatory research has been mostly procedural and instrumental. In this context, we need to think about and practise research in a new way, in an ontological way, where our whole self—not just the inquiring mind—is involved with research. The valorized discourse of participatory research today needs a radical supplement from Gandhi and Heidegger where research becomes a time and space of laying open oneself and realization of co-being (cf. Dallmayr 1996). The time of research becomes both a time of communication and silence²⁶- a time of “lived time”— and the space of research becomes a space of dwelling, in fact a “poetics of dwelling” (cf. Ingold 2004), rather than building. Here what Pillai writes about Gandhi’s modes of participation in social service from a Heideggerian point of view can be helpful in going beyond an instrumentalist approach to participatory research: “Gandhi’s participation in the life of his time was always (at the same time) an interior journey, an exploration of his being, and not just working out of a pre-established strategy.²⁷ It is this insistent questioning of himself which distinguishes his action all self-sanctifying ‘social service’ based on representation. Every decision for Gandhi was simultaneously the laying open of himself” (Pillai 1985: 77).

Bringing ontological cultivation to the discourse and practice of social research is an important calling of our time. But while embodying ontological cultivation we can proceed in the spirit of a journey and evolution rather than with an essentialist, fixed ontology. Much of talk of ontology has in the past suffered from the dangers of essentialism and fixation. But we are not destined to commit the

same errors nor should we valorize ontology to the point of excluding the epistemic activity of learning. A way out of the modernist privileging of epistemology and neglect of ontology is not to valorize ontology at the expense of the epistemic practices of learning and inquiry. Here we can supplement Heidegger with Gandhi, not only in politics but also in epistemology, thus rescuing us from complicity with any politics of mastery in the name of the resoluteness of *Dasein* and making *Dasein* and self an involved and emergent participant in learning (cf. Bourdieu 1991; Dallmayr 2001; Srinivasan 1998).²⁸ One arresting aspect of Gandhi's life and work is his insatiable passion for learning and experiments with truth. At the ripe age of eighty when he was traveling from village to village and trying to calm the fire of communal violence in riot-torn Noakhali, he was devoting an hour everyday to learning the alphabets of the language of the locality, *Bengali*. It is this passion for learning and self-cultivation which can make us humble and rescue us from the danger of using our knowledge, including the knowledge generated out of our research, as an aid to our will to power—an instrument of authority, including ethnographic authority; it can help us realize that what we need is not so much “self-mastery” as an “ethics of sevanthood,” and a “pathos of shakenness” (cf. Giri 2002; Shanks 2001). As we renew our commitment to creative social research as a companion in our activity of understanding self, society and the world and transforming it, we have to realize that ontology emerges as much from contestation, conversation and learning as it is an initial participant in self and science. We have to open ontology itself to a journey of homelessness (cf. Dallmayr 2001) and an epistemic practice of learning thus crossing the boundaries between ontology and epistemology, a border-crossing which becomes a paradigmatic activity of multiple border-crossing between philosophy and fieldwork, creative research and critical action, self and other, society and cosmos. To sing it with Rabindranath Tagore, the immortal poet of *Gitanjali*: “Life is perpetually creative because it contains in itself that surplus which ever overflows the boundaries of immediate time and space, restlessly pursuing its adventure of expression in the varied forms of self-realization” (Tagore 1961: 45).

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Endnotes

- ¹ Connolly urges us to understand the gaps modern social sciences have left in not paying attention to ontology. In this context, Charles Taylor also urges to acknowledge this similar problem. For Taylor, “What the ontology of mainstream social science lacks is the notion of meaning as not simply for an individual subject; of a subject who can be a ‘we’ as well as an ‘I’” (Taylor 1971: 32). But many contemporary thinkers would still like to maintain a self-confident distance from any ontological consideration. Jurgen Habermas seems to be foremost among them. For Habermas, “[..] 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 be the case? What is to be noted that the situation is not much different even forty years of Habermas. For example in his project of a cosmopolitan social science Ulrich Beck (2002) talks about “methodological cosmopolitanism” but this seems to be primarily epistemological and lacks any engagement of ontological nurturance. Cf. Giri 2004.
- ² This is especially urgent as much of social research not only in India but also in many parts of the world, have been conducted “under the sign of the nation” (Das 2003: 1). We need a critical genealogy as to the complicity of such a nation-state directed sociology with many violent projects of the nation-state.
- ³ For Oakeshott, a non-totalizing mode of theorizing “does not claim for philosophy any special source of knowledge hidden from other forms of experience” or any “immunity” from contingent events (quoted in Dallmayr 1984: 5-6). What Oakeshott writes deserves our careful consideration: “My use of ‘theorizing’ as a transitive verb is not an inadvertence; it is the recognition of the enterprise as one of learning to understand; that is, as a transitive engagement” (ibid: 6).
- ⁴ A famous example in this regard is the structure-agency problem in sociology. So much has been written about from Parsons to Giddens but none of the protagonists seem to acknowledge that this problem is not amenable only to a theoretical resolution. While theoretical meditations can illumine a contextual and provisional resolution of this problem, this also crucially depends upon the nature and quality of practice of both structure and agency, self and society.
- ⁵ Gorz (1999) writes the following about education which embodies a critique of society-centered sociological reasoning and signature of an ontological sociality:

This can not be *taught*; it has to be *stimulated*. It can arise only out of the affective attachment of children or adolescents to a reference group who makes them *feel* deserving of *unconditional* love, and *confident* of their capacity to learn, act, undertake projects and measure themselves against others—who gives them, in a word “self-esteem.” The subject emerges by virtue of the love with which another subject calls it to become a subject and it develops through the desire to be loved by that other subject. This means that the *educative* relation is *not a social relation and is not socializable*.
- ⁶ This seems to be the case with Anthony Giddens whose very title, *In Defence of Sociology*, suggests this anxiety. It is no wonder than that Giddens laments the disappearance of the “capacity of sociology to provide a unifying center for the diverse branches of social research” (Giddens 1996: 2). To be fair to Giddens he is surely not alone, traces of this anxiety is to be found in Andre Beteille (2000) as well. An anxiety to defend one’s discipline is not confined to sociology. Habermas (1990) seems to be worried that one day philosophy may be replaced by cultural anthropology and Sidney Mintz (2000) is worried about this being replaced by cultural studies.

- ⁷ What Pollock et al. write below vis-à-vis their elaboration of what they call as cosmofeminism as an example of situated universalism deserves our careful attention:

Any cosmofeminine would have to create a critically engaged space that is not just a screen for globalization or an antidote to nationalism but is rather a focus on projects of the intimate sphere conceived as a part of the cosmopolitan. Such a critical perspective would also open up a new understanding of the domestic, which would no longer be confined spatially or socially to the private sphere. This perspective would allow us to recognize that domesticity itself is a vital interlocutor and not just an interloper in law, politics and public ethics. From this reconfigured understanding of the public life of domesticity and intimacy it follows that spheres of intimacy generate legitimate pressure on any understanding of cosmopolitan solidarities and networks. The cosmofeminine could thus be seen as subverting those larger networks that refuse to recognize their own nature as specific systems of relations among others. That is, we would no longer have feminism as the voice of the specificity interrogating the claims of other putative universals. Instead we would have the cosmofeminine *as the sign of an argument for a situated universalism that invites broader debate based on a recognition of their own situatedness*. A focus on this extensional understanding of domesticity and intimacy could *generate a different picture of more public universalisms*, making the domestic sphere subversive of *thin claims to universalism* (Pollock et al. 2000: 584 / 585; emphases added).

- ⁸ Reenchantment for Baskar also involves a “collapse of the distinction between sacred and profane” (Bhaskar 2002b: xxxviii). For him, “Once this distinction goes we can read the spiritual into the structure of everyday life” (ibid).

- ⁹ Bhaskar’s subsequent elaboration deserves our careful attention:

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 fulfill 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 [..]

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 *eudemonia* 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 (ibid: 261-262).

- ¹⁰ Here it is important to keep in mind what Isiah Berlin writes about pluralism and monism: “The enemy of pluralism in monism—the ancient belief that there is a single harmony of truths into which everything, if it is genuine, in the end must fit. The consequence of this belief is that

those who know should command those who do not” (Berlin 2001: 14).

¹¹ Building on transformations in psychoanalysis and spiritual traditions of the world, Chitta Ranjan Das argues that the Unconscious itself is the repository of not only the libido or the irrational but also the highest possible in self, world and cosmos.

¹² Bourdieu also speaks about “plurality of worlds” with “consideration of the plurality of logics corresponding to different worlds, that is, to different fields as places in which different kinds of common sense, different common place ideas and different systems of topics, all irreducible to each other, are constructed” (Bourdieu 1990: 21). Also note what Bourdieu suggests about a far deeper interpenetrative logic:

Thus *Sociology partakes at once* of two radically discrepant logics: the logic of the political field in which the force of ideas is mainly a function of the power of groups that take them to be true; and the logic of the scientific field, which, in its most advanced states, knows and recognizes only the ‘intrinsic force of true idea’ of which Spinoza spoke (Bourdieu 1991, in epilogue).

¹³ Our multi-valued logic of autonomy and interpenetration and the aesthetics of discovering threads of connections does not suppress disjunctions nor does it want to forcibly force connections as part of an a priori teleological grid about which Strathern rightly warns the following which needs to be kept in mind: “A problem that jumps out of twenty-first-century imaginings of a connected-up (‘globalized’) world is the connecting work that the language of connection seems to do. Its epistemological effect (making connections) makes thinkers lazy. [...] Like ‘network,’ the very term seems intrinsically benign, desirable; also like network, it gobbles up all the spaces between—a continentalizing empire, leaving nothing that is not potentially connectable to everything else” (Strathern 2002: xv).

¹⁴ In their creative interpretation of what they call John Dewey’s “aesthetic ecology of public intelligence” Herbert Reid and Betsy Taylor also urge us to understand the significance of aesthetics in moving beyond fixed boundaries and discovering emergence and interconnections: “..aesthetic practices are necessary to the Knower’s ability to grasp the emergent qualities of the thing..” (Reid & Taylor Forthcoming: 12). Another important recent development which connects aesthetics and the ability to have relational logic is the pioneering work of John Clammer et al. who talk about “figured worlds” and “relational logic” at the same time: “Figured worlds are discourses built up by relational logic, linking people, cultural forms, and social positions by facts of experience in specific historical worlds” (Clammer et al. 2004: 9).

¹⁵ In fact the multi-valued logic of Mohanty draws inspiration from not only Jaina tradition and Husserlian phenomenology but also from Gandhian experiments in non-violence. See Mohanty 2000b.

¹⁶ In the words of Bourdieu:

I was stupefied to discover, by the use of statistics—something that was very rarely done in ethnology—that the type of marriage considered to be typical in Arabo-Berber societies, namely marriage with the parallel girl cousin, accounted for about 3 to 4 percent of cases, and 5 to 6 percent in Marabout families, that are stricter and more orthodox. This forced me to think about the notion of kinship, rule, and rules of kinship which led me to the antipodes of structuralist tradition. And then it was, I think, necessary for me to leave ethnology as a social world, by becoming a sociologist, so that the raising of certain unthinkable questions could become possible (Bourdieu 1990: 9).

¹⁷ Bourdieu (1990) speaks about “fieldwork in philosophy” but many philosophers may not be that enthusiastic about themselves carrying out fieldwork. During a discussion Karl Otto-Apel, a doyen of contemporary continental philosophy, told me that while he is open to using ethnographic data, he

himself does not feel the need for doing fieldwork himself as, among other things, this would cut into his time for philosophical reflections and disturb the division of labor between philosophers and anthropologists.

- ¹⁸ From anthropology we find glimpses of it in the following lines of Michel Fisher (1999: 456):

Emergent forms of life“ acknowledge an ethnographic datum, a social theoretic heuristic, and a philosophical stance regarding ethics. The ethnographic datum is the pervasive claim [...] by practitioners in many contemporary arenas of life [...] that traditional concepts and ways of doing no longer work, that life is outnumbering the pedagogies in which we have been trained. The social theoretic heuristic is that complex societies, including the globalized regimes under which late and postmodernities operate, are always compromise formations among [...] emergent, dominant and fading historical horizons. The philosophical stance towards ethics is that “giving grounds” for belief comes to an end somewhere and that “the end is not an ungrounded presupposition; it is an ungrounded way of acting”—a sociality of action, that always contains within it ethical dilemmas or, in the idiom of Emmanuel Levinas, the face of the other.

- ¹⁹ Dallmayr elaborates his pathway of practical ontology thus:

By ‘ontology’ I mean substantive (but non-positivist) mode of thinking and acting, a mode of exceeding the confines of a purely formal analysis; the adjective ‘practical’ is added to accentuate the aspect of lived engagement. Basically the phrase stands opposed to a traditional or strictly theoretical ontology founded on the contemplation of ultimate substances, primal causes, or foundational structures” (Dallmayr 1987: 3).

- ²⁰ To be fair to Geertz, Geertz is reported to have intervened for the release of some human rights activists and political prisoners during the authoritarian rule in Indonesia (see Inglis 2000). But such a practice now needs to foundationally reconfigure Geertzian symbolic anthropology.

- ²¹ From the perspective of transcivilizational dialogues, it seems Veena Das’s project of an anthropology of suffering can be enriched by a transcivilizational dialogue with Buddhism. See, Clammer Forthcoming.

- ²² From a contingent perspective it would be interesting to ask, as Uberoi suggests, how science and social sciences would have looked like had Goethe, with his more non-dualistic perspective and not Newton, been our main source of inspiration (cf. Uberoi 1978; 1984; 2002). This is not just a hypothetical question, it has important implications for the way we look at our present and future. As Veena Das argues, “A tunnel view of history shapes our understanding of the emergence of social science and modernity in which relatively little attention is paid to those ideas which were defeated or simply failed to be realized” (Das 2003: 3). This question of contingency then would make the confident formulation of sociology as a modern, as opposed to postmodern or traditional, discipline problematic. For Beteille (2002), sociology is a modern and not postmodern discipline. Beteille also says that sociology is not an ideology but if modernity, as Veena Das (ibid) suggests, “functions as the ideology of social sciences” then in making sociology a part of a teleological part of modernity is not Beteille making sociology an ideological project? How far such an ideological project then can sympathetically, what to speak of even objectively, understand and take part in both postmodernity as well as tradition?

- ²³ Unfortunately many of our advocates of comparative method do not do fieldwork in multiple sites integrally relevant to the themes of their own discursive formation. For example, Beteille takes Dumont to task for not having based his comparison of India and the West on fieldwork in the West but Beteille

himself has not pursued his comparative engagement on this simultaneous theme of equality and hierarchy by carrying out fieldwork in the West as well (cf. Giri 1993).

- ²⁴ In the words of Vattimo: “..We derive an ethics of non-violence from weak ontology, yet we are led to weak thought, from its origin in Heidegger’s concern with the metaphysics of objectivity, by the Christian legacy of the rejection of violence at work within us” (Vattimo 1999 : 44).
- ²⁵ This may still be a helpful step despite Bourdieu’s own disdain for “the political ontology of Martin Heidegger” (Bourdieu 1991b). A way out is not to be trapped inside the abominable walls of Heideggerian political ontology and to explore the pathways of spiritual ontologies taking inspiration, for example, from Dallmayr’s (1993) exploration of an other Heidegger.
- ²⁶ Consider here what Niklas Luhman, the sociologist of communication writes: “ [We need] to make a digression at this point and consider whether the participation of consciousness is not perhaps best conceived as a silence” (Luhman 2001: 16).
- ²⁷ It is also enriching here to read what Dallmayr writes about his own vocation of journey which takes inspiration from both Gandhi and Heidegger:

The notion of experience as a journey or of man as *homo viator*, is no longer much in vogue today—having been replaced by the sturdier conceptions of man as fabricator or else as a creative assembler and dissembler of symbolic designs. In invoking or reclaiming the eclipsed notion of a ‘journey’ I wish to dissociate myself, however, from a number of accretions clouding the term. First of all, I do not identify the term with a deliberate venture or project (in a Sartrean or broadly existentialist sense)—irrespective of the deliberative or reflective posture of participants. Shunning the planned delights of organized tourism, I prefer to associate the term with unanticipated incidents or adventures which one does not so much charter as undergo. Moreover, journeying in my sense does not basically travelling along a well demarcated route in the direction of a carefully chosen or clearly specified goal. Rather, being properly underway or ‘abroad’ denotes to me also frequenting byways, detours, and uncharted trails—sometimes exploring dead-ends,cul-de-sacs [...] (Dallmayr 1987: 1)

- ²⁸ It must be noted however that in his later seeking Heidegger himself made a shift from his earlier preoccupation with resoluteness. As Dallmayr helps us understand in an original reinterpretation of the Heideggerian pathway: “..Heidegger’s middle and later writings came to see the pitfalls and streamlining effects of linear power- seeking and to adumbrate a realm beyond power and impotence, domination and submission under the rubric of a ‘power-free’ (machtlos) dispensation that allows being (s) ‘to be’ (Dallmayr 2001b: 190).

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