

Critiques of Dominant Tradition of Epistemology

Chris O. Abakare

Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Ifite Road, 420110, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.

* chrisabakare@gmail.com

Abstract

Aquinas' views on the soul follows closely those of Aristotle, but diverges on some key points. This study examines whether the soul for Aquinas is or is not a body, whether it is or not immortal. It further examines in detail Aquinas' exposition of the fittingness of the soul to the body and why it is necessary. Herein, lies the most significant way Aquinas diverges from Aristotle. Aquinas' re-statement and re-framing of the question in a new way also marks his unique and original contribution to the discourse on the Soul.

Keywords: Body; Soul; Immortality' Man; Knowledge.

1. INTRODUCTION: HUSSERL'S CRITIQUE OF EPISTEMOLOGY

Logical Investigations is the central work of Husserl, which provides a breakthrough in philosophical analysis. Through this work he aims to provide a new foundation for pure logic and epistemology. Husserl introduced phenomenological analysis against this critical background. Husserl characterizes the entire modern epistemological tradition as embodying natural attitude. In his critical analysis according to Husserl the position of natural attitude is that "...We are psychological beings in the world who depend for knowledge on being affected by external objects; this is what Husserl calls the natural attitude, which is exploited in scientific naturalism or physicalism" (Pietersma 2000, p. 51). The assumption that there is such a world, "out there" surrounding me, Husserl calls "the general thesis of the natural attitude" (Christensen et al., 2017). Husserl remarks that this natural attitude is correlated with our common sense notion of obviousness. Husserl's primary objection to natural attitude is that in the perspective of natural attitude consciousness too is considered as another object in the world and philosophy/epistemology studies the characteristics of consciousness or the characteristics of conscious experience as any object that physical science studies.

Husserl's primary assertion is that consciousness has a primacy over the physical objects. For him, it is inadequate to view consciousness as mere object. Realm of conscious experience cannot be adequately analysed through the objectification of consciousness. His phenomenological analysis stems from the point that for conscious beings (for human being) conscious experience and experience of

objects are two distinct kinds of experience. By employing his conception of phenomenology Husserl thoroughly criticizes the modern epistemological tradition (Christensen et al., 2017). According to him, modern epistemology is formulated within the structure of natural attitude. Natural attitude and its relation to knowledge are to be analysed in detail. Natural attitude is primarily viewing everything as objects or objects related properties. Then the question would be that "Can we have Knowledge about an internal state of human?" or "Can we have Knowledge about the mental state?" This question arises because mental states do not belong to the external world and natural attitude claims that Knowledge is about external world. But, according natural attitude, we can have Knowledge about the mental state too. But natural attitude may not say that mind / mental states are parts of physical world. However, it approaches mind as an object which exist in the world like any other object. This attitude of naturalism is called psychologism. Psychologism studies mental phenomena from a third person point of view. That means psychologism examines mental state not from the agent's perspective (from the perspective of one who holds the belief) but as an object which exist independently from agent/believer (Mitova 2015). Suppose, I have depression; then psychiatrists/psychologists studies our mental actions and will find the reason of my depression. Here what they are doing is that they are studying about internal state of a human being as an object which is in interaction with other mental objects/states. And mental phenomena like depression are the result of the interaction.

Husserl finds that psychologism fails to give an adequate explanation for our Knowledge claims. So, he criticizes psychologism (Davidson 2020). Husserl's

criticism to psychologism is mainly based on the concerns of Epistemology. According to him, psychologism is incapable for accounting for the possibility of Knowledge. Possibility of Knowledge means specifying the conditions under which a belief would be Knowledge. That is specifying how Knowledge would be possible. Husserl's understanding of psychologism in relation to Epistemology can be elucidated as follows:

Epistemology is concerned with the cognitive nature of perceiving, believing, judging, and knowing. All of these phenomena, however, are psychical phenomena, and it is therefore obvious that it must be up to psychology to investigate and explore their structure. This also holds true for our scientific and logical reasoning, and ultimately logic must therefore be regarded as a part of psychology and the laws of logic as psycho-logical regularities, whose nature and validity must be empirically investigated. Thus psychology provides the theoretical foundation for logic. (Zahavi 2003, p. 8).

This is what psychologism amounts to. According to Husserl, psychologism, at best is only a description of factual nature of mind/consciousness (Wild 2013). It shows how a mental phenomenon / belief is formed as a part of interaction with other physical conditions / objects. But such an account cannot explain the validity of laws of logic. For the followers of psychologism concepts like certainty and non-empirical validity remains unexplainable. What psychologism basically explains is an act of mind. The fundamental mistake of psychologism is that it does not distinguish correctly between the act of knowing and the object of knowledge. As Husserl points out a statement like "Abuja is the capital of Nigeria" can be repeated by many people at different time. The statement and meaning of it will be identical in all such cases though they are different acts of consciousness. "The very possibility of *repeating* the same meaning in numerically different acts is in itself a sufficient argument to refute psychologism as a confusion of ideality and reality.... Thus, Husserl can argue that psychologism entails a self-refuting skepticism. To attempt a naturalistic and empiricistic reduction of ideality to reality is to undermine the very possibility of any theory, including psychologism itself." (Zahavi 2003, p. 9).

Representationalism can be understood as a novel approach to overcome the difficulties of the psychologism while maintaining the fundamental attitude of psychologism that is natural attitude. The trouble with psychologism is that for psychologism all mental acts are of the same kind. Hence, they could not distinguish between knowledge and mere belief. Psychologism could only describe the acts. Representationalism came up with a distinction between belief and knowledge. That is, representationalism provides an account on the possibility of knowledge. It says that an act/belief which represents the reality is the knowledge. That is, representationalism provides an

account on the possibility of knowledge. From naturalistic point of view what we have for knowledge is a certain mental phenomenon / act of mind. Representationalism maintains that there is consciousness and reality. Analogically we can say if I look at a mirror the image in the mirror represents the object "I". In that way, the reality and our consciousness are related. If I say "crow is black", and in the outside world there is a black crow, then only Knowledge can said to have been attained. So we can see the dualism in representationalism. But there is a mediator in this duality that is representation. What we can see is that there is an adequate correlation between an object and our consciousness. Whatever comes to our mind (sensations) is caused by an object in the external world, if not, our belief cannot be considered as Knowledge. The part of the claim is that reality cannot be grasped directly because it is available only through perceptions of reality, which are representation of it in the mind. That means there is a real object outside the world, and through perception we are getting the replica or copy or representation of that particular object. Our discussion of Husserl's anti-psychologism clearly paves way for the discussion of his anti-representationalism which we consider in terms of its basic tenets.

2. REPRESENTATIONALIST ACCOUNT OF PERCEPTION IS UNFAITHFUL TO EXPERIENCE.

Husserl's position is that representationalist epistemology provides a curious picture of perception, which is counter-intuitive. According to representationalism, object of perception is not the real object but the image of the real object. From this image we are getting the Knowledge of real object of the world. Husserl claims that we mistakenly believe that our sensation is caused by an object in the external world. The description that there are two different entities in perception must be rejected as being unfaithful to experience. "When I perceive a rose, then it is this rose, and nothing else which is the object of my perception. To claim that there is also an immanent rose, namely an intramental picture or representation of the rose, is a pure postulate that does not explain anything" (Zahavi, Dan. 2003, p. 18). According to Husserl, what we perceive is not an image or representation of the external world but the real object itself. In Husserl's terminology, object of perception is intentional object. This intentional object / object of perception is not to be identified with some mental construction, but is simply the object of my intention. Husserl claims that in the case of perception we have a direct and unmediated acquaintance with the object in question. By making this claim, Husserl defends a form of direct perceptual realism and rejects representative theory of perception.

2.1 Representation as a link between object and subject is untenable

Husserl's main criticism of representational theory rests on the point that there is no basis for claiming that mental representation leads us to the object. The relation of representation which is distinct from object of external world can never relate it to subject/consciousness. That is, as long as we maintain the gap between external world and subject, there would be gap between representation and object. It cannot be claimed legitimately that mental images/ideas are the representation of external world. Failure of mental representation to be a true representation of reality is necessary consequence of subject-object dichotomy. And representational epistemology is structured within the frame work of subject- object dichotomy. But Husserl argues that such dichotomy vanishes in first person point of view. That's why he insisted on a first person point of view of experience/consciousness.

2.2 Representation bound to be partial

In his criticism of modern epistemology, Husserl is not relying solely on the sceptical challenge that images/ideas need not be a representation of an external world. Husserl here makes the point that even if we accept that there is a relation of representation between object and consciousness it is bound to be partial and incomplete. Once an object is treated as given by the external world instead of as given in experience or consciousness, the images/ideas, which is caused by the external object (as claimed by the representationalist) is bound to be a partial one. It is clear that if perception is considered in the way as representationalism articulated, the image or sense data of the object is partial as we are seeing the object only partially as an external object, e.g. the perception of cube. All sides of the cube do not appear to us in perception. When we see a person from the front side, the left, right, and back side of the person he is not available to our senses. This is the case for each and every perception, if perception is considered as sense data / idea collected/constructed through the senses. The situation is different when we treat the object as given to consciousness. But if we analyse visual perception in reflection, the perception of cube or a person who is standing in front of me is given in its totality.

3 REPRESENTATIONALISM IS FOUNDED ON PRESUPPOSITIONS WHICH ARE UNEXAMINED

Husserl's critique is that representationalism is founded on certain presuppositions which are unexamined. Our attempt in modern epistemology starts with the assumption that the subject, the knower, is ontologically distinct from the known, the world of objects (Akwaji & Nchua 2018). But there is neither a justification nor even an attempt to examine it in representationalist

epistemology.

3.1 Representative reference is parasitic.

According to representationalist theory of perception, the object of our perception is not the real object but the representation of the object. That means perception presupposes representation. However, such an account says that representations formed are through sense perception. That is, representation is simultaneously considered as the object of perception (pre-condition) and the product of perception. Thus, representation cannot explain perception as it presupposes perception.

3.2 Representation is not a natural property of object.

For representationalism, which endorses the natural attitude, consciousness is also an object. Husserl asserts that representability, the characteristic of something is being represented, cannot be considered as a natural property of an object. Being red, being metallic, or being round is natural properties of an object. But being representable is not a natural property of an object. For example, usually we consider a photo of a person as representation of that person. But that representative nature of that photo is an attributed one, it is not natural property of the photo like photo's colour, photo's shape etc.

Some may claim that similarity is the basis of the relation of representation. That is, a photo is similar to the person in certain respect and that is why a photo is considered as the representation of the person. Similarity/resemblance cannot be the basis of representation. Similarity between two things does not create representational relation between them. Two copies of the same book may look alike, but that does not make one a representation of the other. Moreover, similarity relation is reciprocal. That is if X (a photo) is similar to Y (the person) then person (Y) is also similar to photo (X). But, representational relation is not reciprocal. That is, when a photo represents the person, it is not the case that person represents the photo. The point is that similarity relation cannot be the basis of representation. Husserl's point is that representational relation is based on interpretation. "If X is to represent Y, X needs to be interpreted as being a representation of Y. It is exactly the interpretation... that confers X with its representative function" (Zahavi 2003, p. 18). Thus, Husserl challenges the claim of the representational epistemology that representative relation is an objective one. That is, consideration of a mental image as representation of an external world is only an interpretation. If so, it is possible that one could take a different interpretation of a mental image representation of something else. That is, Knowledge of external world which is gained through the representation of the external world is not an objective one.

Through his theory of knowledge, Husserl tries to establish how knowledge is possible for an agent or a subject. Husserl argues that "His task is not to examine whether (and how) consciousness can attain knowledge of mind-independent reality. These very types of questions, as well as all questions as to whether or not there is an external reality, are rejected by Husserl as being metaphysical questions, which have no place in epistemology" (Zahavi 2003, p. 8). First of all we have to keep in mind that Husserl is not asking us to focus only on the mental content and exclude reality. But as the thesis of intentionality points out intentionality cannot be described without reference to the world. But he radically alters the concept of world or reality. For him, the reality (thing in itself) is not the one which is different from phenomena (thing as appears). If the distinction of reality/appearance is maintained in traditional way, he says that knowledge would never be possible. If the cognitive subject is a mind in possession only of representations of things, then the question of knowledge becomes that of how that mind can know something outside itself. As already noted the problem can be dealt with only by setting it aside or reformulating it. For Husserl, "The world is not something that simply exists. The world appears, and the structure of this appearance is conditioned and made possible by subjectivity. It is in this context that Husserl would say that it is absurd to speak of the existence of an absolutely mind-independent world, that is, of a world that exists apart from any possible experiential and conceptual perspective. For Husserl, this notion is simply contradictory." (Zahavi 2003, p. 52). Husserl says that phenomenology solves or dissolves the riddle of knowledge by redefining the relation between "Inner" or "Immanent" subjectivity and "outer" or transcendent objectivity, such that one attends only to what is transcendent within-immanence. In saying this Husserl is very much influenced by Kantian philosophy, though he treats the concept of immanent and transcendent in a very different manner. It was necessary for Husserl to distance himself from Kant's position because the Kantian framework is very much embedded in the modern epistemology whose gaps Kant sought to fill.

3. HEIDEGGER'S CRITIQUE OF EPISTEMOLOGY

The meaning of "Being" is the key question in Heidegger's pursuit of philosophy. Usually the word "Being" refers to what exists (Withy 2015). One way of interpreting "Being" is that whatever we are referring to "Is", p. Rocks, colours, sounds, dreams, numbers etc can be considered as instances of "Being". Generally, we can say that "Being" is something which is referred to by the verb "to be". But when using the word "Being" Heidegger does not mean all existing things. His concern is not with which things represent being but with the *nature* of "Being"; i.e, what does it mean to say that a thing or relation or property exists or a rock or a colour exists or a dream exists. "What does existence mean in all these utterances?" "What is the

one thing which is commonly shared by everything when we say that everything exists?" In the Greek language, there are two words to denote "Being". One is "ta onta", p. which refers to all "Being" and other is "Ousia" (Kahn 1966). The latter represents the abstract noun "Being" which refers to general concept Existence or "Being". By the word, "Being" Heidegger refers to general concept of existence.

Heidegger agrees with Husserl on the point that "Being" of all entities lies in acts of consciousness to which the entities appear (Doyon 2015). "Being" of an entity lies in how it appears to us. That is, "Being" lies in our understanding of it. "Being" of an entity lies in the sense we gain of them in our understanding. That is, Existence is a part of a phenomenal world, not something which is beyond phenomenon. Husserl's position that if all objects are to be understood as objects of consciousness it leads us to think that existence/" Being" depends on the sense/meaning that is bestowed on them by the subject. That is, pursuing the question of "Being" is pursuing the sense we gain of them in our conscious acts. The question is how to unearth the meaning/sense we gained of them? Thus, the crucial factor regarding "Being" is human being. "Being" of all entities lies in the sense we gain of them. For the further analysis of "Being", we need to analyse our meaning-giving activity. On this point, Heidegger differs radically from Husserl. Husserl assumed that acts of consciousness or transcendental ego are transparent to our phenomenological reflection. Heidegger feels that on this point Husserl went back to the Cartesian epistemology. The claim of Cartesian epistemology is that the content of our consciousness is quite transparent to us. That is, the facts about my conscious acts are given to us in readymade format. For example, it assumes that I can know quite clearly and totally as to what now I am thinking of. I know whether I am sad or happy and about what I am sad or happy. So my judgments about my own conscious states are indubitable. In the same way, the precise analysis of my own conscious acts shows me how an object appears to me and what sense I gain of it in my consciousness. Heidegger's point is that our self - understanding of our conscious acts is not at all authentic. "Heidegger's realization that the picture we form of ourselves may be influenced (and even distorted) by our personal interests and propensities, and that it is conditioned by the general historical situation, made it seem questionable whether there is such a neutral transcendental "I" that underlies all acts of consciousness." (Frede 1993, p. 53). Heidegger's position is that phenomena (the appearance of entities) or "Being" of entities cannot be simply read off from the way they are given in acts of consciousness. So the challenge is to unearth the Being/phenomenon which is latent in our acts of consciousness. "...the task of his analysis is to "uncover" the phenomena that have been covered up, buried, or hidden..." (Frede 1993, p. 54).

While Husserl thought that a phenomenon can be simply read off from the acts of consciousness, Heidegger

maintains that it is implicit in our understanding of it and cannot be hence read off. Instead we have to unearth "Being"/phenomenon from our understating. And the implicit understanding which we keep in our everyday existence reveals the essence / Being of objects. Phenomenon or "Being" is something which is covered or buried. The process of uncovering the "Being" or phenomenon is a more complex process than envisaged by Husserl (Stevens 2012). For Heidegger, existence or Being is something which is bestowed through a human understanding of it. So revealing the nature of human understanding leads us to the nature of "Being". Knowing the "Being" of entities is possible only through the analysis of the understanding we have of them. Human understanding is the only key to uncover the nature of "Being". For Husserl, phenomenological analysis starts with the reflection of our conscious acts as they are transparent to us. For Heidegger, Being is not given to us in our reflection. Being is implicitly contained in conscious acts and in our understanding. And the implicit understanding is latent in our everyday activities and everyday existence. So, for Heidegger, phenomenological analysis starts with the implicit understanding we have in our everyday existence (Finlay 2014). The implicit understanding in our everyday existence means implicit understanding of "Being" which is in our self-awareness and in our world awareness. Heidegger introduced the term *Dasein* to any entity which has self-awareness and world awareness, that is, human being.

So, in our self-awareness and world awareness which we have in our everyday existence, we have a pre-understanding of "Being". So the aim is to explicate the basic structure of pre-understanding. Heidegger's analysis of our *everydayness* intends to explicate the basic structure of our pre-understanding. Analysis of *Dasein* itself is not the aim of Heidegger's project. But the analysis of *Dasein* is the key to the understanding of "Being". Heidegger assumes that enquiry into the nature of Being has to start with an analysis of human existence (Dahlstrom 2020). So the analysis of *Dasein* is a prerequisite to the analysis of the "nature of 'Being'/meaning of 'Being'". Heidegger's phenomenological description of *everydayness* is an analysis of *Dasein*. He is understood as an existential philosopher because of his focus on *everydayness* of human existence. But Heidegger's primary interest was not in the phenomenological description of human existence. That is the reason for his aversion to the label of an "existential philosopher". For Heidegger, the key to the understanding of "Being" lies in *Dasein's* disclosedness of the world. So only through an analysis of *Dasein*, one can reach at the nature of "Being". "An analysis of *Dasein* must precede a general fundamental ontology" Analysis of human existence / *everydayness* is the celebrated part of the work '*Being and Time* though he insists that the task of uncovering "Being" is the project of fundamental ontology.

Heidegger's point is that we have an implicit understanding of "Being" in our awareness of our focus in everyday existence. Because of our "forgetfulness of 'Being'", understanding of "Being" never became explicit before. Heidegger's point is that often we forget our awareness about ourselves and about the world and we accept the standards of awareness prevailing in society. And we do not pay attention to our own understanding and simply adopt the explanations and judgements of society. "For the most part we simply adopt our mode of living and self-understanding in compliance with the general standards" (Frede, 1993, p. 57). And this Heidegger calls "Inauthentic existence". Though one cannot lead *authentic* life all the time, certain efforts help us to shed the public standards from us and regain our authentic understanding. Heidegger notes that in moments of anxiety of facing death, one comes out of the domination of public standards. With this background let us look at Heidegger's critique of modern epistemology.

The important question concerns the significance of the question of "Being" especially in the analysis of epistemology. Heidegger often claims that the question of "Being" is quite fundamental to the all philosophical inquiries, especially that of epistemology. How is the question of "Being" quite significant to the project of epistemology? From Descartes onwards the philosophical queries are based on the "I" or "Ego". For Descartes, the foundational knowledge is "I think". Heidegger simply asks "what this 'I' means" or "What does it mean to say that I exist"? The question of "Being" is exactly concerned with the exploration of "I" or the exploration of the existence of "I". Heidegger desists from using the traditional terms like "I" or "ego" or "consciousness". All these specific terms of modern epistemology are loaded with lots of naive ideas of human existence. Modern epistemology characterized "I" or human being as cognitive subject. This is evident in Descartes' dictum of "I think, therefore, I am". Of course, Descartes often specifies that he uses the word "thinking" in a very wide sense as it includes even non-cognitive aspects like feeling or emotions etc. Heidegger's objection is to the total framework of the project. According to the Cartesian framework, the so called mental phenomena like thinking or feeling can be abstracted from everything and can be analysed independently. They can be delinked or detached from everything, even from my own existence. So "I" or the subject or the "ego" of the traditional epistemology is a mental phenomenon or a centre of conscious acts delinked or detached from one's own existence and other objects. Heidegger's point is that such a notion of "I" or subject is quite problematic. The primary point is that cognitive acts can be analysed only in close relation with existence.

Heidegger's critique of epistemology is mainly based on the point that the notion of subject or "I" which is the rallying point of modern epistemology is a naively constructed idea. Modern epistemology construes the

subject as a thinking thing. That is, subject or "I" is an entity which primarily forms a belief about objects in the external world. That is, the primordial activity of the subject is forming beliefs about objects in the world. And all other activities can be explained only in relation to this primordial activity. Take for example, perception. Perception of the subject can be explained only by referring to the activity of belief forming. As per modern epistemology (representative theory of perception) what we see in perception is the mental image or representation of the object (generally we can say beliefs formed about the object). Not only perception, but all such everyday activities of human beings can be explained only in relation to the cognitive activity of belief forming. Consider another activity like using language. For the modern philosophical tradition, I am conceptualizing the meaning of a word and then using it. Consider using some objects or tools. I am forming an idea about it (use of the tools) and then putting it into action. Thus, a human being as a cognitive agent in the sense holding beliefs about the external world is the ground of his/her activities or interaction with the world.

Heidegger's fundamental criticism of epistemology lies in the point that a human being is not basically a knower. In other words, knowledge is not a basic/primitive mode of his "Being" in the world. According to him, the traditional epistemology identifies the subject as truth-seeker. Heidegger's point is that the subject cannot be characterized as primarily a thinking thing. Heidegger considers that our very "Being" is "Being-in-the-world". It is not the case that we first encounter the entities and then form beliefs about them. "Being-in-the-world" which is our primary engagement with world is located in practical contexts. That means we are not primarily engaging with an object like a pen as an entity distinct from us on which we focus our cognitive attention but as a tool to write something. "...Heidegger leads us to see that our most primordial encounter with the world is not through the mediation of mere seeing, but is rather through handling, manipulating, producing, and operating - that is, through *dealing* with the ready-to-hand along the guidelines laid out by our social competence in a publicly intelligible world" (Guignon 1983, p. 195).

The most important aspect of traditional epistemology concerns justification. Often the justificatory attempts are to show that certain beliefs or claims or positions are the true ones. So, the claim of true belief is an obsession with and the driving force of modern epistemology. Thus the objectivity of our knowledge claims became important to traditional epistemology. So, the attempt is to capture things or properties as such. In a certain sense, objectivity is the driving idea of representationalism. The subject captures the external world in an objective manner. Representationalism assumes that the subject has the cognitive capacity to capture the world as it is. Such a conception of subject is characterized as a "disinterested subject" (Pérez-Álvarez 2018). The activity of capturing the

world is not distorted by any other purpose or aim or feature of the subject. And Heidegger's criticism of modern epistemology is mainly based on his interrogation of the notion of a disinterested or detached subject. Heidegger's position is that such a detached point of view is a fictitious notion and that is the critical mistake of both traditional and modern epistemology. Detached point of view / theorization claims that the inquirer assumes an indifferent attitude or attitudes towards the appearance of objects. Indifferent approach means that the appearance of objects to our consciousness is not influenced/shaped by any other preconceived ideas or conceptions or lineages or frameworks which we already have. That means, appearance of an object would be the same for all subjects irrespective of their different pre-understandings. That is the basis of the claim of objectivity and the idea of representing the world. Heidegger's point is that we neither encounter the objects with a blank conscious state like *tabula-rasa* nor with the uninfluenced, ineffective pre-understanding. Each appearance/phenomenon necessarily requires a pre-understanding of it. Primary understanding is one of the fundamental factors of the "Being" of the 'there'. And primary understanding decisively shapes the phenomenon. "Heidegger is describing the "primary understanding" that runs through our various ways of existing in and interpreting the world" (Gordon, 2013, p. 173). And without the pre-understanding it is impossible to gain sense of the phenomenon. Pre-understanding is such a crucial element in the appearance of entities. Hence, Heidegger looks upon such a theoretical stance as a derivative mode of "Being". So the theoretical stance is always a special way of viewing the objects of "Being" in the world and not a 'no-where' point of view.

The other major criticism of Heidegger is that modern epistemology assumes that the content of consciousness is quite transparent to us. We have discussed in the previous sections Heidegger's critique of ready availability of phenomenon or "Being" to our acts of consciousness. But while claiming that the essence of phenomenon or "Being" is not something which is obviously available for any viewer, he undermines the basic premise of representationalism that representations are *given* to us. Hence, our judgements cannot be abstracted from existence and from pre-understanding. So, a normative approach itself is impossible as the abstraction assumed as it is impossible. Heidegger's attack on the detached point of view or view from "no-where" is precisely the crux of his criticism of normativism. The fundamental premise of normativism is that a general or universal distinction of valid and invalid knowledge is possible. For the normativists, it is improper to claim that a knowledge claim is valid or justified in a particular context. A general claim of validity and justification across the contexts and situations is the crux of the normativist claim. The basic requirement or presupposition or assumption of the normativist approach is that we all hold identical beliefs or

claims. That, certain phenomena appear to all of us in an identical manner. Heidegger's position is that since a phenomenon is closely tied to our pre-understanding, the very idea of an identical phenomenon across different contexts is unintelligible. Such an identical phenomenon can be introduced only by a "detached point of view". A detached point of view is viewing of a "Being" which is detached from its own pre-understanding. Heidegger's position is that appearance of objects would be impossible to our consciousness if we delink or detach our pre-understanding from our conscious acts. Pre-understanding of ourselves and of world is a necessary requirement for an appearance of objects through conscious acts.

Practical needs or requirements necessarily consist of an engagement of "Being" with the world, with human beings and with oneself. Our understanding of entities and ourselves is formed within and is based on interaction. So Heidegger objects to the construal of theoretical stance as detachment from prior understanding. Instead, he interprets a detached view as a special view of "Being" within the framework of pre-understanding. And this special view ignores the referential totality. So a theoretical stance is neither fundamental nor the sole mode of "Being". When modes of "Being" are operative in our everydayness, "One and the same "thing" can be treated as a piece of equipment with a practical meaning, or as a piece of art, or as the object of scientific investigation. Other human beings can be treated as "scientific objects" (as ciphers in statistics) or as mere tools (something ready-to-hand) instead of as "Dasein-withs." The context therefore determines their "Being" (Frede, 1993, p. 59).

The above discussion has brought out how Heidegger rejects normativism, foundationalism, and representationalism which are the three planks of modern epistemology. Though Heidegger seems to be more concerned with the empiricist version of modern epistemology, his critique applies to the rationalist as well as the Kantian version since pre-understanding which emerges out of the prior engagement with the world has nothing to do with and in fact, is antithetical to the system of innate ideas of the rationalists and the categorial framework of Kant.

4. Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Epistemology

Now let us discuss Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological epistemology. He was the first philosopher who gives importance to our actions/experience and body for attaining knowledge (Uzoigwe 2020). According to modern epistemologists, all knowledge is mediational. Mediational knowledge is the knowledge of reality achieved through a certain media/medium, that is, the media/medium of representation within ourselves (Ihde & Selinger 2014). Descartes onwards epistemologists celebrated this meditational knowledge. Merleau-Ponty argues that this meditational knowledge is a mystery. So

he feels the need to unfold/unravel the mystery behind the mediational knowledge. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological pursuit is very radical in the history of epistemological tradition. He can be considered as the true adherent of Husserl regarding the purpose of phenomenology. However, he is highly critical of Husserl regarding the method or means of achieving the purpose of phenomenology. The aim or purpose of phenomenology is to capture the essence of our consciousness/conscious experience. More clearly, the attempt is to capture the experience as it appears to our consciousness without any medium. Then only we can attain our undistorted experience of consciousness. For attaining this Merleau-Ponty tries to develop Husserl's theory of intentionality Merleau-Ponty tries to modify the thesis of intentionality. He notes that Husserl is right in emphasizing that all conscious experience is directed towards something. It is not directed towards some states or situations but to some object, which we call "intentional objects". Merleau-Ponty's point is that it is not merely that consciousness is directed towards some object. It is not merely that we perceive an object. Instead "we perceive objects or events as "hiding" others or "bringing them into view" as being "In front of" or "behind others things" or as "the beginning of" or "end of" some object or event" (Smith, 2002, p. 27). That is, our precepts or conscious acts refer to things that are not actual or present. For example, when I perceive a screen, it is not merely that I perceive a screen. I am not merely directed towards the screen but directed towards the screen as hiding something else. That is, the screen refers to something which is not present in the phenomenal field. That is, intentional objects refer to something that are not actual or not present. Merleau-Ponty's formulation is that "Whatever is an object of consciousness has significance. To say that consciousness is intentional is thus to say more about it than that it is directed towards some object, p. it implies a relation not just of mere aboutness, but aboutness "for" something. This interpretation of intentionality - we might call "Intentionality-as-significance"...." (Smith, 2002, p. 27).

Merleau-Ponty is formulating the structure of conscious acts, especially the structure of perceptual acts. Intentionality is the basic nature of perceptual acts. That is, in a perceptual act, we are directed towards something which refers to something else which is not present. For Merleau-Ponty, the other crucial component or structure of the perceptual act is the purpose of the perceiver. Suppose we perceive a map. If our purpose is to reach a place, then we consider it as one which provides directions. Otherwise it might be just colourful paper or an abstract drawing. That means "[A] phenomenal object will appear, for example, "as means to" or "In the way of" an end desired by perceiving subject. In this sense, perception is closely tied to the way in which perceivers are "at grips" with their environment. Perception is thus intimately connected with behavior" (Smith, 2002, p. 27).

Perception is closely linked with how we have situated ourselves in an environment. For example, I can situate myself in a situation as a student or as a girl or as a friend. This affects how I am looking at an object. One who knows the swimming view the swimming pool/lake differs from one who does not know swimming. In one case, it could be associated with fear and in another case it might be associated with joy and freshness. "Merleau-Ponty's intentionality thesis attempts to capture an essential structure of lived experience" (Smith, 2002, p. 27).

He criticizes both rationalism and empiricism for their naive account of perception. According to empiricism, sensations or qualia are the primitive building blocks of perceptual experience. Sensations are due, according to that view, to mind sensing a quality or property of an object. e.g. sensation of colour, sensation of shape, sensation of smell etc. So sensations are basically mental effects produced by each sense organ when they are affected by the properties of objects. When the eye is affected by a green coloured object, it produces a particular colour sensation and perceiving or experiencing is what we normally call "perception of the colour". According to empiricism, when we perceive an object, we are having different and distinct sensations of colour, shape smell, softness/hardness etc.,. And from these different sensations we infer an object or construct it. Thus perceptual experience is basically about internal/mental sensations. Merleau Ponty's major criticism against the concept of sensation is a phenomenological one. In a phenomenological reflection (when I am conscious of conscious acts, i.e. when we reflect upon our experience as we experience perception) we are not able to find out anything called sensation. "We find that perceptual experience is not a collection of internal sensations. What we have in perception is not sensations but external things. Concepts of sensation correspond to nothing in our experience" (Carman, 2006, p. 52). That is, an account of perception provided by sensationalism or sense data theory appears to be counterintuitive. Any kind of reflection of our own perceptual experience does not reveal any kind of entities like sensations. In our reflection of our perceptual experience, perception comes as a single and unitary experience.

Nowhere in our perceptual awareness do we come across discrete qualitative bits of experience, fully abstracted from the external, perceptually coherent environment. Occasionally we might see an after image or hear a ringing in our ears, but typically we see objects and hear noises made by things and events. This is in part just to say that perceptual experience is intentional, that it is of something, whereas impressions, sensations, and sense data are supposed to be the non intentional stuff from which the mind somehow extracts or constructs an experience of something... Perception is essentially interwoven with the world we perceive, and each feature of the perceptual field is interwoven with others (Carman,

2006, p. 52).

Merleau Ponty's another criticism is directed towards the atomistic conception of perception. According to which when we perceive an object we get sensations or sense data/impression of colour, shape, size and texture etc.,. Separately, and certain mental processes combine them together (Pompermaier 2018). But an object is not mere bundle of sensations. Such an account fails to explain the unity of the object. But, Merleau-Ponty's main trouble with the atomistic picture is that it provides discrete character to perception. The perception of a rose is distinct from the perception of the rose plant. Such an alleged distinctness is provided by the supposedly discrete nature of the basic units of experience like sensations or impressions.

Empiricism assumes that the framework of perception is clearly distinct. That is, left and right side (as well as front and back side) boundaries of a perceptual field can be determined. However, Merleau Ponty's position is that such a definite limit to perceptual field is incongruous. It might be right to say that an object has discrete and determinate boundaries. But perceptual field would not have. Though in our perceptual act, we are directed towards an object, we perceive the object against a background. Obviously, the background of an object which is perceived will not have definite limit. "The perceptual field is not rigidly framed like a tableau. It is bounded more in the manner of horizon, p. indeterminate, out of focus, shifting with the eye of viewer and never caught up by it" (Smith, 2007, p. 28). In perception, the background of an object is a horizon, not a well-defined boundary.

Merleau Ponty's another point is that objects in perceptual field do not play a passive role. It is not adequate to assume that objects are fully available to our consciousness or fully present themselves. Even if we perceive a single rose a hundred times, we cannot claim that we have fully perceived the intended object. As object appears to us, always with attached meaning it is always open to perceptual exploration. "Each part arouses the expectation of more than it contains, and this elementary perception is therefore already charged with a *meaning*. . . The perceptual "something" is always in the middle of something else; it always forms part of a "field." . . The pure impression is therefore not just undiscoverable, but imperceptible and thus inconceivable as a moment of perception" (Maurice & Colin 1962, pp. 9–10).

We end this work with a brief discussion of Merleau Ponty's critique of rationalism. In his critique he mainly focuses on the rationalist theory of Kant. Certainly, the Kantian theory made some improvement in theorising conscious experience and perception over empiricism. For empiricism, concepts are products of perception and perception itself is concept-free and devoid of meaning. However, from the information or sensation which we receive from the outer world, mind generates concepts or meaning through certain mental processes. Kantian school

rejects such claims and holds that perception itself is meaningful. It is not the case that after perception, through certain mental process, mind identifies an object as something. Instead, in perception itself we apprehend objects as something. Perceptual process employs our faculty of judgement "a view Kant expressed in the famous formula "Intuitions without concepts are blind"" (Smith, 2002, p. 29).

Merleau Ponty acknowledges that rationalism, and in particular its Kantian version, is a great advance on empiricism. He particularly empathizes with Kant's idea that the meaning of an object is traceable to our conceptualization of it. But Merleau Ponty considers this to be a half truth in the sense such a conceptualization cannot account for the fullness of the meaning. Merleau Ponty disagrees with Kantianism on the nature of the faculty of judgement. According to the Kantian theory our faculty of judgement is not something which is accompanied by perception; instead it is prior to perception. And perception possesses meaning because objects of perception are captured within the framework of *a priori* categories. That is, meaning lies in the logical connection between objects of perception. Consequently, judgements of perception are determinate and explicit. "According to this view, a perception has a sense in the same way a proposition does" (Smith, 2002, p. 29). Merleau-Ponty's basic objection against Kantianism is on the point of determinate and explicit meaning of perception. For Merleau Ponty "We often perceive without being able to put what we perceive into words" (Smith, 2002, p. 29) In other words, sense of perception is different from the sense of proposition. A description of perception cannot exhaust or account for the fullness of perception. "...The propositional model of perception like sense- data account fails to appreciate the richness of phenomenal field, arichness, and diversity that no finite series of statements can do justice to. There is always an excess or surplus or remainder to the described content of perception." (Smith, 2002, p. 29)

According to Merleau Ponty, the notion of background is the one which resists the possibility of an exhaustive and explicit description of perception. For Merleau Ponty, perception can be understood always against a background. But background is not a collection of objects or properties. In perception we may not be aware of each and every part or element of background in the way we are aware of objects of perception. That means the background of perception and objects of perception are different categories which play different roles. Therefore, the background cannot be so reduced to a set of objects or properties and as it cannot be reduced, it cannot be described too. The role of background is to highlight the object of perception in a particular fashion. Of course, without taking cognizance of the background we can have a description of perception, but not an exhaustive or complete one. This is because our description of perception is based on factors like background which are

not fully describable or can be made explicit. Another related criticism of Merleau Ponty against Kantian theory is that it fails to account for the perspectival nature of perception. According to Merleau Ponty, perception not only provides information of what we perceive but also about how the subject is related to what is perceived. As Nicholas H Smith points out, "...it would seem that prior to any conceptualization of experience, prior to experience assuming the form of a judgement " that", perception gives us access to a world, a pre-predicative or pre-objective world" Kantian theory rules out the possibility of such an access to the world.

5. CONCLUSION

The three philosophers we have considered in this work provide a critique of the dominant tradition of epistemology as has been handed over to them since the emergence of modern philosophy. The common *leit motif* of their distinct critique is that in some way or the other modern epistemology construes knowledge in isolation from a background located either in the subjective world of consciousness or in the objective world of things or both. And this results in an impoverished conception of knowledge itself. As we shall see, Charles Taylor takes this core and develops it in his own way a critique of the very philosophical ethos of modernity.

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