



Walking, Meditating and Rising in Friendship with the Other: Transforming the Subjective and the Objective and the Calling of Transpositional Subjectobjectivity

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Abstract: Befriending the other is a complex process of walking, meditating and further actions, reflections and transformations. It in turn calls for appropriate cultivation of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, transsubjectivity and objectivity. Friendship is not just a spontaneous overflow of feelings. It calls for works of love, labor and mutual learning involving epistemic and ontological works, meditations and transformations. It also calls for transpositional movements, for example, from self to other and other to self and creative, critical and transformative movements in between and across. It also calls for transforming the subjectivity of the self and the other and the structures of objectivity which produce us. In my essay, I bring both these concerns, transpositional movements as well as transforming subjectivity and objectivity as a companion and contribution to our engagement with friendship.

Walking and meditating with self and other calls for experience of new wisdom about self and other as well as wisdom of relationship and the world. Transpositional movements give birth to such wisdoms which help us in cultivating transformative friendship with self and the other. Transformative friendship is different from acquiescent friendship where we just adjust to existing status quo

even if it is not expressive of creative potential of all concerned. In transformative friendship we challenge each other to be more truthful, giving and capacious and generous.

Keywords: Walking, meditating, Transpositional Subjectobjectivity, friendship, togetherness.

“Objectivity does not mean detachment, it means respect; that is, the ability not to distort and to falsify things, persons and oneself [...] 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.” Eric Fromm (1950), Man for Himself p. 105-104.

“Observations are unavoidably position-based, but scientific reasoning need not, of course, be based on observational information from one specific position only. There is need for what may be called “trans-positional” assessment—drawing on but going beyond different positional observations. The constructed “view from no where” would then be based on synthesizing different views from distinct positions. The positional objectivity of the respective observations would still remain important but not in itself adequate. A trans-positional scrutiny would also demand some kind of coherence between different positional views.” Amartya Sen (1994), “Positional Objectivity,” p. 130.

“What we receive in contemplation, we give out in love.” Meister Eckhart.

“If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal domain but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.” Ludwig Wittgenstein.

“What is it namely, that connects the temporal and eternity, what else but love, which for that very reason is before everything and remains after everything is gone.” Soren Kierkegaard

Introduction and Invitation

Befriending the other calls for being with the other not only in static positions but also in dynamic and meditative

movements--walking and meditating. Walking and meditating with the other we arise in friendship with other but we may not as well as we might meet some unsurmountable and intractable differences in our journey. We can embrace the challenges of such differences and further walk and meditate instead of turning these into an excuse for a condition of permanent withdrawal, escape or enmity. Befriending the other is a complex process of walking, meditating and further actions, reflections and transformations. It in turn calls for appropriate cultivation of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, transsubjectivity and objectivity. Friendship is not just a spontaneous overflow of feelings. It calls for works of love, labor and mutual learning which involves epistemic and ontological works, meditations and transformations. It also calls for transpositional movements, for example, from self to other and other to self and creative, critical and transformative movements in between and across. It also calls for transforming the subjectivity of the self and the other and the structures of objectivity which produce us. In my essay, I bring both these concerns, transpositional movements as well as transforming subjectivity and objectivity as a companion and contribution to our engagement with friendship.

1. Walking and Meditating with Self and the Other: Transforming the Subjective

Arising in friendship in the context of challenges of life calls for walking and meditating not only with the other but also with the self as one can become a friend to oneself and the same way as one can be one's enemy.¹ Walking and meditating with the other, we discover unexplored layers and dimensions of both self and other which can be a source of emergent mutuality or emergent disdain of hatred. In our mutual walk and meditation, we can not put our subjectivity aside as if it does not exist. If as Gadamer tells us that our initial cultural prejudices can not be wished away, similarly our initial subjective

biases can not be put under the carpet. They are with us and for a journey of togetherness which involves both communication as well disjunction, commonalty and conflict, we need to work with our subjectivity and cultivate it appropriately.

Subjectivity has a dimension of ego as well as self. In both critical theory and spiritual traditions, there is a distinction between ego and self which is nurtured by the cultivation of a post-conventional self which is not an uncritical reproduction of the existing conventions of society and which has not lost its capacity for creative, critical, autonomous and responsible moral reflections (cf. Habermas 1990). Our subjectivity has a reality and possibility of post-conventional which is not bound to existing conventions of ego, self, culture and science and this becomes a helpful companion in our striving for objectivity. In a related way, Sri Aurobindo also challenges us to understand that subjective is not reproduction of the typical conventions of society nor is it a case of reproduction of one's egotistic standpoint. In his *Human Cycles*, Sri Aurobindo (1962) characterizes the modern age as the rise of the subjective which goes beyond the typical conventions of society, not only of traditional social order but also of the modern ones which is dominated by conventions of science and society. The subjective in both Sri Aurobindo and Habermas is animated by a post-typical and post-conventional movement which also finds a creative resonance in the work of Alain Touraine who looks at the subjective in terms of a process of critique, creativity and transformation what he calls *subjectivation* (Touraine 2000).

Subjectivation in Touraine is different from looking at subjects as just subjected to regimes of subjection as it seems to happen in certain aspects of works of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler and is characterized by the desire, aspiration, capacity and creativity to say no to existing conventions of self, science and society which hinders fuller self-realization.

Thus the subjective as subjectivation of saying no to taken-for-granted idols of method, science, epistemology and ontology² is crucial for our striving towards our journey of being with others which does not have a fixed *apriori* formula but is a dynamic formation. Walking and meditating with both self and other become multi-dimensional formations and verbs of co-realizations of self, other and the world. Our verbs of togetherness, however, are not only activistic but also meditative; they embody what I have elsewhere called meditative verbs of co-realizations (cf. Giri 2012; 2013).

2. Transforming the Objective

Being with self and other which becomes the ground and sky of arising in friendship or falling from grace grapples with not only the challenge of transforming the subjective but also the objective. We relate to both self and other many a time with a naïve sense of objectified social categories: both belonging to objectified structural categories such as caste, race, gender or the so-called personality types. Being imprisoned within such objectifying and objectivistic categories does not help us in starting our journey with self and the other. We need to move beyond objectifying categories which produces us as stones and move towards ways of being together and realizations which co-create us as flows. This thus calls for transforming objectivity as we conventionally know and practice and cultivate a new mode of objectivation in our journey and mediation of togetherness.

Here we can build upon some contemporary rethinking of objectivity. Pierre Bourdieu talks (2003) about participant objectivation where the key question is how an observer observes himself or herself and this is a helpful capacity in our journey of togetherness. Though Bourdieu asks this question he does not really address this as he does not cultivate an appropriate subjectivity where one can simultaneously take part in an

activity and observe with some kind of needed distancing. In Indian spiritual traditions this has been spoken of as developing a witnessing consciousness which while taking part in life nonetheless has a capacity to witness with detachment as evident in the metaphor and realization of two birds sitting on a tree, one eating fruits and the other witnessing.³ Bourdieu is silent about these issues as he is primarily within a valorized epistemological mode here and does not feel the need to cultivate an appropriate ontological mode.⁴ Bourdieu, like Habermas, does not cultivate an appropriate ontological mode as both of them look at ontology primarily from the point of view of limitations of political ontology of Martin Heidegger and their justified critique of Heidegger's early association with Nazism and his subsequent silence over the Holocaust (cf. Bourdieu 1991). But ontological is a multi-dimensional journey of reality and realization and we need to cultivate it further drawing inspiration from both critical philosophy and spiritual traditions. For example, Foucault talks about an ontology of the present and Vattimo (2011) talks about an ontology of actuality⁵ which also resonates with what I have called on ontological epistemology of participation. Transforming objectivity as part of a journey of togetherness involves a creative ontological epistemology of participation. In fact, our journey of togetherness can be viewed as a dynamic movement of ontological epistemology of participation in which we strive to know each other truthfully and be together authentically. Such truthful knowing, authentic being and inter-being and loving can help us in our journey of friendship with the other.

3. Transforming the Epistemological and Ontological in our Journey of Togetherness and Transpositional Movements

Our journey of togetherness has an epistemological dimension as well as ontological dimension but here epistemology is

not one of conventional epistemology of certainty and ontology one of mastery. Our journey of togetherness here is related to contemporary post-epistemological movements which go beyond conventional epistemology and links epistemology to hermeneutics (Capurro 2000). Post-epistemological movements are accompanied by transformations of conventional epistemology through movements such as practical epistemology⁶ in which aesthetics plays an important role and virtue epistemology. In the last half century we have witnessed important moves beyond positivism and these post-positivist moves are discernible in linguistic, feminist and ecological turns (cf. Sunder Rajan 1998). But these post-positivist turns are not necessarily aware of the limits of the modernistic primacy of the epistemic and they need to acknowledge the link between epistemology and violence more head on. This then calls us to go beyond epistemology of violence and epistemology as violence in our relations and cultivate non-violence in relations and non-injury in modes of thinking.⁷

Post-epistemological movements are also accompanied by post-ontological movements which take ontology beyond the dualism of subjectivism and objectivity and make it part of a journey of love, care, labor and learning. In moves such as practical ontology characterized by love, labor and learning (cf. Dallmayr 1987) and practical epistemology we find nurturing support for the interlinked movement of ontological epistemology of participation. Ontological epistemology of participation calls for a multi-valued logic of autonomy and interpenetration and an aesthetics of discovering threads of connections which helps us in our needed journey of the transpositional, for example moving beyond our fixed positions of ontology and epistemology. Walking and meditating together with self and other calls for such movements.

4. Transpositional Movements

Transpositional movements build upon movements with and beyond positions and call for multi-dimensional transformative movements in both theory and practice. It calls for a new pragmatics of transpositionality and social communication where subjects from different positions come together and communicate with each other in a spirit of compassion and confrontation. It calls for a new poetics and aesthetics of transpositionality where poetics and aesthetics help us in border crossing between different positions. It also needs a new pragmatics of transpositionality as part of a new aesthetic ethics of responsibility which involves both ethical and aesthetic works, imaginations and meditations. It also calls for a new politics of transpositionality. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2008), for example, talks about trans-conflictual moves while in forums such as World Social Forum participating organizations and individuals move beyond their positions with agreement, disagreement and an emergent trans-conflictual move.

In transpositional movements, there is creative and critical work of a different art of transpositional subjectivation as well as transpositional objectivation. Transpositional subjectivation builds on positional subjectivation which is different from positional subjectivity which is most of the time a positioned subjectivity. Positional subjectivation can be much more than positional subjectivity as it is not just a logic of reproduction. Transpositional subjectivation builds upon positional subjectivation. But our positions are embedded in socio-psychic structures of constitution. Our positions are embedded in psychic and social histories, many time in histories of production of domination, pain and suffering. Moving beyond such positional subjectivity thus calls for courage, *karuna* and mutual adventures. It also calls for transformative forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and forgetting. This is both an act of soul as well as creative institutional experimentation and constitution

making in society which is part of transpositional subjectivation.

Like transpositional subjectivation, we also need transpositional objectivation. This builds upon both Bourdieu's concept of participant objectivation discussed earlier as well as Amartya Sen's idea of positional objectivity. For Sen, "[...] positionally dependent observations, beliefs, and actions are central to our knowledge and practical reason. The nature of objectivity in epistemology, decision theory and ethics has to take note of the parametric dependence of observation and observation on the position of the observer" (1994: 126). But the objectivity here is that of an observer but as co-walkers in our journey, we are not only observers but also participants but even beyond our conventional understanding of participation—we are co-walkers and co-meditators. Sen talks about the need for transpositional scrutiny but transpositional scrutiny is not adequate for the challenges at hand, we need to cultivate transpositional movements.

Sen talks about the need for positional objectivity but once the agents are not only observers but also participants the objectivity that emerges is not only objective but also intersubjective and transsubjective. So in our journey with self and other, we need to cultivate *transpositional subjectobjectivity*—one which emerges out of pluralization of the subjects, border-crossing transmutations among positions and transformative cultivation of the objective and the subjective including intersubjective and transsubjective. It calls for transformation of the subjectivity and objectivity as we know including transformation of these from nouns to verbs—meditative verbs of pluralization. It also involves transformation of epistemological and the ontological including work of what I have elsewhere called ontological epistemology of participation and what Bruno Latour (2013) calls post-epistemological moves. But transpositional subjectobjectivity also calls for a new prag-

matics of social communication, social dialogues and contestations. These are also part of our walking and meditating with self and other which is the ground of emergence of friendship.

Walking and meditating with self and other calls for experience of new wisdom about self and other as well as wisdom of relationship and the world. Transpositional movements give birth to such wisdoms which help us in cultivating transformative friendship with self and the other.⁸ Transformative friendship is different from acquiescent friendship where we just adjust to existing status quo even if it not expressing of creative potential of all concerned. In transformative friendship we challenge each other to be more truthful, giving and capacious and generous.

Transpositional movements involve a new hermeneutics of self, culture and society where we walk and meditate with not only with self but also with the other. Building upon Raimundo Panikkar and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, we can call this diatopical hermeneutics where we put one foot in one topoi and the other in another. But walking and meditating with self and other also needs to go beyond the double contingency of self and other and embrace the triple contingency and the multiple contingencies of the world. Hermeneutics here is thus multi-topial and such a multi-topial hermeneutics helps us in self-realizations, co-realizations and world realizations in creative ways.⁹

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Notes

1. This is written in Bhagvad Gita. One can also read Paul Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another* in a related way.
2. This resonates with Foucault’s (2005) hermeneutics of the subject where to be a subject means to be critically reflective upon the models of individualization offered by the state.
3. These two may not be two separate birds; they may be two parts of the same bird—one part not only witnessing but meditating and the other eating which is a metaphor for engagement in action.
4. Strydom (2011) also draws our attention to foundational limitations of Bourdieu’s approach to objectivity as he seems not to question dominant models and methods of science.

5. Vattimo (2011) writes: “I will use ontology in a sense I take from Heidegger for whom it denotes the thought of Being in both senses, subjective and objective, of the genitive. This is different from “most ontologists, who reduce ontology to a theory of objects. As for actuality, I use the term to refer to the common condition of our life at present.”

Vattimo (2011: 139-140) also links ontology of actuality to a quest for charity and solidarity: “At the horizon line of the near future toward which we gaze, pragmatically assessing the utility of truth, there lies a more distant future that we can never really forget. Rorty alludes to this with the term solidarity, which I propose to read directly in the sense of charity, and not just as the means of achieving consensus but as an end in itself. Christian dogma teaches that *Deus Caritas est*, charity is God himself. From a Hegelian viewpoint, we may take the horizon to be that absolute spirit which never allows itself to be entirely set aside but becomes the final horizon of history that legitimates all our near-term choices.”

6. In his book, *Aesthetic Experience in Science Education*, Wickman tells us about practical epistemology in the following way: “[...] Practical epistemology is not a description of how people should go about to find the right answers in life. Rather, it should be understood in a situated sense as a description of the actions usually used by people to deal with the events of life and to pursue their goals. [...] by calling it a practical epistemology, the intention is to stress that there are no cognitivist or deterministic assumptions made, and that the unit of analysis is not the individual mental capacities but the activities of individuals as participants in social practice (Wickman 2006: 52).”

Wickman also argues how practical epistemology has an aesthetic dimension as in the works of John Dewey and Leo Vygotsky.

7. Patomaki & Wright (2000) urge us to understand the link between epistemology and violence. Here what Alessandra Tanesini writes about Wittgenstein, feminism and epistemology shows us how feminist turn is still very much bound within

the epistemic frame and it needs to be part of a transformative movement of ontological epistemology of participation.

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein does not characterize the notion of the subject in epistemic terms. The subject is not born out of the Cartesian search for certainty. Rather, it is the result of the need to transcend the contingent empirical world in order to create a place for meaning in one's lives. Recent feminist theorists, instead have often described the subject in epistemic terms (Tanesini 2004: 55).

About linguistic turn, Stephen D. Long tells us that "[...] the methodological nominalism of the linguistic turn must be *exceeded*" (Long 2012: 34).

8. Elisabeth S. Fiorenza talks about wisdom emerging from dance of positions.
9. The vision and pathways of multi-*topical* hermeneutics builds upon the idea of *diatopical* hermeneutics proposed by Raimundo Panikkar. Building upon the seminal work of Raimundo Panikkar, Boaventura de Sousa Santos elaborates *diatopical* hermeneutics thus:

The aim of *diatopical* hermeneutics is to maximize the awareness of the reciprocal incompleteness of cultures by engaging in a dialogue, as it were, with one foot in one culture and the other in another—hence its *diatopical* character. *Diatopical* hermeneutics is an exercise in reciprocity among cultures that consists in transforming the premises of argumentation in a given culture into intelligible and credible arguments in another (2014: 92).

Santos here talks about putting one's feet in cultures which resonates with my idea of footwork, footwork in landscapes of self, culture and society as part of creative research (cf. Giri 2012). Hermeneutics does not mean only reading of texts and cultures as texts but also foot-walking with texts and cultures as foot walks and foot works resonating with Heidegger calls a hermeneutics of *facticity* (cf. Mehta 2004). Santos talks about *diatopical* hermeneutics but this need not be confined to our feet only in two cultures; it needs to move beyond two cultures and embrace many cultures. Spiritual traditions also can

help us realize that though we have physically two feet, we can realize that we have many feet. In the Vedas it is considered that Divine has million feet and similarly we can realize that humans also have million feet and with our million feet we can engage ourselves with not only creative foot work but also heart work (*Herzwerk* as it is called in German) in our acts of gathering of knowledge, self and the world. Supplementing Santos's *diatopical* hermeneutics, we can cultivate *multi-topial* hermeneutics which is accompanied by a multi-valued logic of autonomy and interpenetration going beyond either-or logic. Art and aesthetics play an important role in both multi-topial hermeneutics and multi-valued logic as they help us to take gentle and careful artistic steps in difficult journeys across terrains and domains and making connections across fields usually constructed isolated and separate (see Giri).

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