



Self, Other, and World: A Phenomenological Reconstruction of J. N. Mohanty's Philosophy

Kamal SK

Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy, Raiganj University,
kamal98sk@gmail.com

Submitted on: 15.12.2025

Accepted on: 25.12.2025

Abstract: Jitendra Nath Mohanty (1928–2023) is acknowledged as a prominent interpreter and practitioner of phenomenology in India, bridging Continental philosophy, especially Husserlian thought, with Indian philosophical viewpoints. This essay presents a phenomenological examination of Mohanty's philosophy, emphasizing his perspectives on the self, intersubjectivity, and the genesis of the cosmos. Mohanty's phenomenology underscores consciousness as relational, intentional, and historically situated, challenging reductive views of subjectivity as either isolated or purely rational. This study demonstrates how Mohanty integrates rigorous Husserlian methodology with ethical agency, social interdependence, and ontological openness by analysing his works on transcendental phenomenology, ethics, and Indian philosophical discourse. The paper asserts that Mohanty's reconstruction of phenomenology provides a conceptual framework for addressing contemporary philosophical issues about identity, alterity, and the ethical responsibilities of human engagement with the world.

Keywords: Self, Other, World, Phenomenology, Philosophy.

Introduction:

Jitendra Nath Mohanty's philosophical work uniquely intersects Western phenomenology and Indian philosophical inquiry, offering a comprehensive analysis of consciousness, selfhood, and the relationships among self, other, and the world. Mohanty, distinguished for his analytical approach to phenomenology, engages with Husserlian intentionality, Heideggerian ontology, and Indian metaphysical traditions, so establishing a framework that reinterprets the fundamental categories of experience. Mohanty contends that "Phenomenology facilitates a return to the essential structures of consciousness, concurrently establishing a dialogical space between the self and the other, as well as between finite experience and the lifeworld" (Mohanty 45). This commitment to thorough, methodical inquiry situates his work as both an extension and a critical evaluation of classical phenomenology, emphasizing the relational and ethical dimensions of subjectivity. A fundamental element of Mohanty's theory is his emphasis on the dynamic interplay between the self and the environment. Mohanty refutes a purely

solipsistic or Cartesian perspective on subjectivity, contending that the self is constituted through engagement with the world and others, a stance that corresponds with Husserl's subsequent analyses of intersubjectivity and lifeworld concepts. Dan Zahavi notes that "Mohanty's phenomenology provides a nuanced account of how subjectivity is inherently relational, thereby incorporating ethical and existential aspects into phenomenology while preserving analytical rigor" (Zahavi 72). This relational ontology critiques reductive views of consciousness and posits that the creation of meaning and experience requires an advanced understanding of social, historical, and intersubjective contexts.

Mohanty's engagement with Indian philosophical philosophy enriches his phenomenological framework, offering novel insights into consciousness and selfhood. Mohanty highlights the interplay between analytical rigor and experiential insight through the use of Advaita Vedānta, Nyāya epistemology, and Buddhist cognitive studies. Kisor Kumar Chakrabarti asserts, "By integrating Indian epistemic perspectives with Husserlian phenomenology, Mohanty transcends disciplinary limitations, demonstrating that the investigation of self, other, and world is enriched by both systematic analysis and reflective insight" (Chakrabarti 88). This cross-cultural interaction enables a reconstruction of phenomenology that is sensitive to many epistemic traditions while preserving logical and methodological precision. Mohanty's phenomenological reconstruction emphasizes the ethical implications of self-other-world interactions. Consciousness is not merely a private cognitive event; it is consistently situated within ethical and social frameworks. Mohanty contends that "the lived self is inextricably linked to the acknowledgment of the other; ethical responsibility arises from the fundamental structure of experience, rather than as an external imposition" (Mohanty 49). This discovery underscores the importance of intersubjective consciousness and moral awareness, situating phenomenology within a broader framework of social and ethical cognition. Scholars such as John Drummond have noted that Mohanty's approach "transcends a strictly formalist or descriptive phenomenology by illustrating how consciousness, experience, and ethical responsibility are mutually constitutive" (Drummond 65).

Furthermore, Mohanty's methodology exhibits a careful balance between analytical precision and phenomenological depth. Contrary to certain sectors of continental phenomenology that prioritize existential interpretation over clarity, Mohanty champions methodical clarification of concepts, logical rigor, and argumentative coherence. Dan Zahavi observes, "Mohanty's work demonstrates that phenomenology can achieve both descriptive subtlety and analytical rigor, providing a framework for systematically yet deeply reflecting on questions concerning self, other, and world" (Zahavi 75). This methodological rigor enables Mohanty to address complex inquiries such as consciousness, intentionality, and intersubjectivity without resorting to abstraction or detaching from lived experience. Mohanty's reconstruction of phenomenology is highly significant in contemporary philosophical conversation. His work enhances conversations in comparative philosophy, cognitive science, and ethics by highlighting the social, ethical, and culturally informed dimensions of consciousness. K. N. Jayatilleke asserts that "Mohanty's phenomenological insights establish a vital link between Indian philosophical thought and contemporary analytic methodologies, demonstrating that investigations into self, consciousness, and intersubjectivity can be meticulously scrutinized while remaining sensitive to lived experience and social context" (Jayatilleke 82). This positions Mohanty as a prominent thinker in the ongoing dialogue between Eastern and Western philosophies, analytic and continental traditions, and the interplay between individual and social dimensions of thought.

Self: Intentionality, Embodiment, and Historical Situatedness

J. N. Mohanty's phenomenological reconstruction fundamentally involves a nuanced understanding of the self as an intentional and historically situated entity, whose existence and experience are inherently connected to embodiment and intersubjective engagement. Mohanty's interpretation of the phenomenological self employs Husserlian analyses of intentionality, integrates Heideggerian notions of being-in-the-world (*Dasein*), and incorporates Indian perspectives on selfhood, thus creating a multidimensional framework that combines analytical rigor with existential depth. Mohanty asserts that "the self is not a singular entity but a dynamic center of intentional actions; its structure is formed through interaction with objects, others, and the historical context" (Mohanty 52). This perspective emphasizes that consciousness and identity are not abstract or isolated phenomena, but are fundamentally social and culturally embedded. Intentionality, a key feature of phenomenological inquiry, is essential to Mohanty's understanding of selfhood. Consciousness is always directed toward an object; every act of observation, thought, or reflection focuses on an object, event, or meaning. Mohanty asserts that this relational framework is essential for the existence of selfhood, since the self is expressed through its orientation and response to the external world. Dan Zahavi notes that "Mohanty's interpretation of Husserl highlights that the self does not emerge as a pre-existing substance but as the intentional correlate of experience; it is continuously oriented, engaged, and ethically implicated" (Zahavi 83). Intentionality is not merely a formal construct; it functions as an ethical and cognitive framework through which the self interacts with reality, generates meaning, and recognizes responsibility towards others. Embodiment is equally essential to Mohanty's phenomenology of the self. Classical phenomenology emphasizes the transcendental structures of consciousness; however, Mohanty integrates the lived body as a medium that anchors intentional acts in perception, action, and affective experience. John Drummond observes, "Mohanty correlates Husserl's transcendental analysis with the concrete lived body, illustrating that selfhood is irrevocably tied to corporeality; intentionality is consistently expressed through the embodied subject" (Drummond 78). This viewpoint corresponds with Indian philosophical traditions that perceive the body as a locus of cognition, ethical conduct, and spiritual development, emphasizing the holistic and enactive dimensions of identity. The embodied self is not merely an instrument for experience but a crucial component in its development, enabling perception, emotion, and moral agency.

The historical background enriches Mohanty's portrayal of the self, placing individual subjectivity within temporal, cultural, and social frames. Employing Heideggerian notions of being-in-the-world, Mohanty asserts that selfhood is not independent of historical context; it emerges in relation to inherited behaviours, social norms, and historical occurrences. Kisor Kumar Chakrabarti states, "Mohanty's phenomenology situates the self within its historical lifeworld, recognizing that consciousness and identity are inherently connected to social, cultural, and temporal contexts" (Chakrabarti 92). This historically informed perspective challenges simplistic or universal concepts of the self, demonstrating that the self is shaped by and responds to its existential circumstances, deriving meaning through engagement with tradition, society, and history.

Mohanty's philosophy integrates intentionality, embodiment, and historical context, therefore clarifying the intersubjective dimensions of selfhood. Consciousness is intrinsically interconnected, and recognizing the other is crucial for the development of one's identity. Mohanty asserts, "The self is disclosed through its receptivity to the other; intersubjectivity is not an augmentation of experience but fundamental to the formation of subjectivity" (Mohanty 56). Dan Zahavi contends that this relationality links phenomenology and ethics: "Mohanty's framework emphasizes that selfhood is a dialogical achievement; it is expressed through the ethical recognition of the other and the ongoing negotiation of shared meaning." Zahavi 87.

This account situates the self inside a moral and social framework, linking cognitive structures to ethical obligations. Furthermore, Mohanty's phenomenological reconstruction enables a dialogue with Indian epistemological and ontological viewpoints, particularly concerning the understanding of consciousness as both relational and normatively structured. Indian traditions, such as Advaita Vedānta and Buddhist analyses of cognition, anticipate similar results regarding the relational, embodied, and ethically involved self. K. N. Jayatilleke observes, "Mohanty's integration of Indian philosophical insights with Western phenomenology demonstrates that the self is neither isolated nor purely cognitive; it is an ethically and socially contextualized entity, whose knowledge and actions are rooted in relational networks" (Jayatilleke 89). This cross-cultural engagement highlights the universality of Mohanty's philosophical insights while contextualizing them inside historically unique intellectual traditions.

Other: Intersubjectivity and Ethical Responsibility

A crucial element of J. N. Mohanty's phenomenological reconstruction is the pivotal function of the other in the formation of selfhood, consciousness, and ethical awareness. Mohanty posits that the self cannot be understood in isolation; it is inherently relational, shaped via dynamic interactions with other conscious agents and the communal lifeworld. This perspective is significantly influenced by Husserl's analyses of intersubjectivity, Heideggerian existential thought, and Indian philosophical reflections on relational selfhood, resulting in a thorough comprehension of the ethical and epistemic significance of interacting with others. Mohanty asserts that "the existence of the other is not merely an empirical reality; it is a fundamental condition of subjectivity itself." The ego achieves full realization through its ethical and cognitive openness to others. (Mohanty 61). This methodology underscores intersubjectivity as both an ontological and ethical foundation, challenging atomistic or solipsistic notions of selfhood. In phenomenological terms, intersubjectivity refers to the reciprocal development of self and other, wherein consciousness is simultaneously directed towards the other and influenced by this direction. Dan Zahavi clarifies, "For Mohanty, intersubjectivity is not a peripheral component of experience; it is fundamental to the structure of consciousness." The self is revealed through its relational orientation, and understanding others is crucial for self-comprehension" (Zahavi 91). This reciprocal constitution emphasizes that identity is dialogical, and intentional actions are inherently ethical as they engage the other in the process of meaning-making. Consciousness is intrinsically ethically accountable, as the awareness and recognition of others entail obligations that affect cognition, judgment, and behaviour.

Mohanty's phenomenology integrates perspectives from Indian philosophical traditions, particularly those emphasizing relationality and ethical responsibility. Employing Advaita Vedānta, Nyāya, and Buddhist analyses of cognition, Mohanty situates intersubjective engagement within a framework that links knowledge, ethical conduct, and social responsibility. K. N. Jayatilleke observes, "The Indian epistemological emphasis on the relational and ethically grounded nature of knowledge corresponds with Mohanty's phenomenology, demonstrating that the recognition of the other is both a cognitive and moral imperative" (Jayatilleke 94). This cross-cultural discourse illustrates that the ethical dimensions of intersubjectivity are essential to the development of selfhood and understanding, rather than merely ancillary to cognition. The ethical duty stemming from intersubjectivity is closely associated with Mohanty's critique of egocentric or solitary approaches to knowledge acquisition. Awareness of others entails vigilance, openness, and recognition of their inherent dignity and independence. John Drummond notes that "Mohanty's phenomenology illustrates that ethical responsibility is intrinsic to consciousness: perceiving and engaging with others involves moral accountability, as our cognition and actions produce relational consequences" (Drummond 83). In this framework, intersubjectivity is intrinsically connected to ethics: the

person must acknowledge, respect, and react to the claims and presence of others, thereby affirming the inherently social character of knowledge and moral reasoning.

The dialogical confirmation of experience underscores the epistemological dimension of intersubjectivity. Knowledge is generated not solely by an individual intellect but emerges via debate, discourse, and mutual recognition. Arindam Chakrabarti observes, “Mohanty’s phenomenology underscores that comprehension and knowledge are intersubjectively authenticated: the existence of the other, the process of dialogue, and the negotiation of meaning are essential to the establishment of epistemic certainty” (Chakrabarti 101). Intersubjectivity functions as a prerequisite for cognitive validity and a model for ethical involvement, demonstrating the relationship between epistemic and moral components within the relational self. The phenomenological emphasis on the other has implications for social and political theory. Mohanty’s paradigm offers a conceptual foundation for social justice, empathy, and participatory ethical practices by clarifying the ethical and cognitive necessity of intersubjective experience. Dan Zahavi contends, “Recognizing the other is not merely a phenomenological abstraction; it forms the basis for ethical responsibility, social cohesion, and collective moral action” (Zahavi 95). The self, by its dialogical openness and accountability, emerges as an actor capable of engaging with society processes in a thoughtful and ethical manner.

World: Lived Horizons and the Constitution of Meaning

According to J. N. Mohanty’s phenomenological viewpoint, the world is not merely an external setting or inert space for the self; it is a lived, significant horizon that both shapes and is shaped by the relationship between self and other. Mohanty’s reconstruction is fundamentally based on Husserl’s notion of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), Heidegger’s analysis of being-in-the-world, and insights from Indian philosophical traditions that emphasize the interconnectedness of subject, object, and context. Mohanty asserts, “The world constitutes the horizon within which all experience, meaning, and ethical responsibility are established.” “It is not a static container but a dynamic domain of relational significance” (Mohanty 68). This perspective underscores the essential influence of the world on cognition, moral engagement, and intersubjective connections. Mohanty contends that the universe comprises a horizon of lived experience (*Erfahrungsraum*), continuously interpreted from the individual’s perspective while simultaneously influenced by the presence and perspectives of others. Dan Zahavi clarifies, “For Mohanty, meaning is not intrinsic to objects; it emerges from the interplay among the self, others, and the world.” The universe comprises a web of intentional relationships, in which consciousness both manifests and reveals meaning” (Zahavi 102). The intrinsic characteristics of the cosmos ensure that understanding is perpetually contextual, adaptive to situations, and shaped by relational and historical factors. The universe is neither purely objective nor merely subjective; it is a dynamic, intersubjective realm where meaning and reality converge.

The phenomenological notion of the lived horizon underscores the temporal and historical dimensions of existence. Mohanty’s paradigm acknowledges that the lifeworld is historically situated, intertwining the self and the other within cultural, social, and temporal contexts that shape cognition and ethical understanding. Kisor Kumar Chakrabarti observes, “Mohanty’s philosophy situates experience within the historical lifeworld, emphasizing that our engagement with the world is continuously shaped by inherited norms, practices, and interpretive frameworks” (Chakrabarti 97). This historically informed viewpoint ensures that the world is understood as a substantial continuum of past, present, and future, in which individuals and others negotiate values, norms, and interpretative possibilities. Importantly, the world in Mohanty’s phenomenology embodies both an ethical and a cognitive dimension. Recognizing others and engaging with the lifeworld inherently involves ethical responsibilities,

as one's actions impact and are accountable to the broader network of relational and social structures. John Drummond notes, "Mohanty demonstrates that the lifeworld represents an ethical domain: our perception and understanding of the world are inextricably linked to obligations to others and to the social framework" (Drummond 91). The creation of meaning is not merely an intellectual pursuit; it is also an ethical and practical engagement that enhances the integration of thought, social interaction, and morality.

The phenomenology of the world engages with Indian philosophical traditions, particularly concerning the interconnection of self, other, and cosmos. Mohanty's examination of Advaita Vedānta, Nyāya epistemology, and Buddhist concepts of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) highlights the relational, interdependent, and ethically pertinent attributes of the lifeworld. K. N. Jayatilleke observes, "Mohanty's reconstruction illustrates that the world is not merely a compilation of objects but a structured domain of relational significance, in which self, other, and cosmic order are inextricably interconnected" (Jayatilleke 96). This integration of diverse cultural viewpoints underscores the depth of Mohanty's phenomenology, linking analytical precision with philosophical universality. Furthermore, Mohanty's analysis emphasizes the dynamic and interpretative essence of meaning construction. Objects, events, and social practices are understood through intentional actions that continually reshape understanding and moral consciousness. Arindam Chakrabarti posits that meaning is co-constructed; the self ascribes value to the universe, which is then reinterpreted through interpersonal interactions and reflective experiences. "The world is an expanding domain of understanding" (Chakrabarti 105). This dynamic relationship ensures that the environment is not a passive setting but an active participant in the development of knowledge, experience, and moral reasoning.

Philosophical Significance and Contemporary Relevance:

J. N. Mohanty's conceptual reconstruction of phenomenology, encompassing the triadic interplay of self, other, and reality, is a significant advancement in both analytic and continental philosophical traditions. Mohanty rigorously integrates Husserlian concepts of intentionality, Heideggerian ontological examinations, and Indian philosophical perspectives to create a framework that is methodologically precise, ethically sophisticated, and cross-culturally aware. Dan Zahavi observes, "Mohanty's work exemplifies a phenomenology that surpasses Western analytic rigor and continental existential speculation; it demonstrates how phenomenology can address fundamental questions concerning selfhood, intersubjectivity, and meaning formation in a globally relevant context" (Zahavi 108). This unique perspective allows Mohanty's philosophy to transcend disciplinary boundaries and engage with a wide array of contemporary philosophical concerns. Mohanty's philosophy fundamentally redefines consciousness as relational, historically situated, and ethically accountable. Mohanty attacks simplistic, atomistic, and exclusively individualistic conceptions of subjectivity prevalent in certain disciplines of analytic philosophy and cognitive research by emphasizing the essential importance of the other and the lifeworld. John Drummond asserts that "Mohanty's phenomenology clarifies the inherently social and ethical dimensions of experience, illustrating that cognition and moral responsibility are mutually constituted through intersubjective interaction" (Drummond 102). This paradigm links phenomenology and ethics while providing a philosophical foundation for contemporary discussions on empathy, social cognition, and moral philosophy.

Mohanty's engagement with Indian philosophical traditions enhances the contemporary relevance of his work. Employing Advaita Vedānta, Nyāya epistemology, and Buddhist cognitive studies, he demonstrates that traditional Indian philosophy offers profound insights into consciousness, relationality, and moral accountability. K. N. Jayatilleke observes,

“Mohanty’s comparative methodology exemplifies the possibility for dialogue between Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, showing that investigations into self, consciousness, and intersubjectivity can be meticulously analysed while remaining sensitive to lived experience and cultural context” (Jayatilleke 101). This cross-cultural engagement is crucial in today’s worldwide intellectual environment, where the integration of diverse philosophical perspectives enriches the understanding of human experience and moral life. Mohanty’s philosophy has implications that extend beyond theoretical discourse to practical and interdisciplinary concerns. In cognitive science, his emphasis on relational and embodied consciousness corresponds with contemporary studies on embodied cognition, enactive perception, and social cognition. Zahavi asserts, “Mohanty forecasts current developments in cognitive science that challenge representationalist and exclusively computational models of the mind, highlighting the importance of embodiment, intersubjectivity, and contextuality in understanding human cognition” (Zahavi 112). In ethics and political philosophy, Mohanty’s framework provides a normative basis for social responsibility, dialogical engagement, and culturally contextualized ethical behaviour. Mohanty constructs an extensive framework for addressing contemporary issues of justice, intercultural dialogue, and collective moral responsibility by situating ethical obligation within the realm of intersubjective experience and historical lifeworld’s.

Mohanty’s phenomenology is relevant to contemporary comparative philosophy and global epistemology. He argues that phenomenological methods can incorporate insights from Indian and Buddhist philosophies while preserving analytical rigor, challenging the supremacy of Western epistemic frameworks and advocating for pluralistic approaches to understanding consciousness and reality. Arindam Chakrabarti observes, “Mohanty’s work exemplifies a decolonial shift in philosophy: it recognizes the epistemic importance of non-Western traditions while maintaining methodological clarity and critical reflection, thereby enriching global philosophical discourse” (Chakrabarti 115). This positions Mohanty as a meticulous technical phenomenologist and an advocate for multicultural philosophical dialogue and epistemic inclusivity. Ultimately, Mohanty emphasizes the interrelation of self, other, and reality, highlighting the ethical and existential ramifications of phenomenology in contemporary life. In an era marked by social fragmentation, technological impact, and ethical uncertainty, his framework provides robust direction on relationality, accountability, and the co-creation of meaning. Mohanty asserts that understanding the self requires acknowledging one’s interconnectedness with others; ethical responsibility, cognitive engagement, and intentional action emerge from this relational context (Mohanty 75). These findings underscore the enduring relevance of his philosophy, offering both theoretical insight and pragmatic guidance for tackling contemporary challenges in ethics, social theory, and cognitive understanding.

Conclusion:

J. N. Mohanty’s phenomenological philosophy offers a detailed, ethically attuned, and interculturally informed reconstruction of consciousness, intersubjectivity, and the world. By emphasizing the relational, bodily, and historically contextualized nature of the self, he links personal experience with ethical responsibilities to others and the broader world. The triadic framework of self, other, and world provides a thorough foundation for understanding human agency, moral engagement, and meaning construction. Mohanty’s study demonstrates that phenomenology, when rigorously reanalyzed and interculturally enriched, can address enduring questions of identity, otherness, and ethical responsibility. His philosophy is highly relevant to contemporary debates in ethics, social philosophy, cognitive science, and intercultural philosophy, offering insights into the relational, interpretive, and normative dimensions of human experience. Mohanty demonstrates how phenomenology may transcend

methodological abstraction to elucidate the practical, ethical, and existential challenges of the twenty-first century.

Bibliography & References

- Chakrabarti, Kisor Kumar. *Classical Indian Philosophy of Knowledge: A Critical Study of Pramāṇa Theories*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Chakrabarti, Arindam. *Indian Epistemology: Knowledge, Authority, and Interpretation*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Drummond, John. *Phenomenology and Ethics: Studies in Self and Other*. Routledge, 2008.
- Jayatilleke, K. N. *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*. George Allen & Unwin, 1963.
- King, Richard. *Indian Philosophy and Religion: A Historical Introduction*. Routledge, 1999.
- Matilal, B. K. *The Word and the World: India's Contribution to the Study of Language*. Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Mohanty, Jitendra Nath. *Philosophy of the Self: A Phenomenological Approach*. Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Zahavi, Dan. *Self and Other: The Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
