

PHILOSOPHY IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING*

Some philosophers have attempted to bring scientific respectability to philosophy. Though philosophical truths—granted that there are such truths—have not been assimilated to scientific truths, they have been put on the same pedestal. Both varieties of truths are items of universal exhibition. This sort of thinking has sometimes led to the spectators of the philosophical dramatics to talk about the possibility of evolving a world-philosophy, the sort of philosophy which does not suffer from regional influences. Even if philosophy lacks scientific respectability at present, we should not worry about it. Philosophy has a bright future in store. The future philosophers will enjoy the taste of the *same* philosophical truths equally with chopsticks as with forks and fingers. In this discussion I have attempted to argue against this sort of thinking, this sort of optimism about philosophy. I have been persuaded by the force of evidence to believe that philosophy is one of the manifestations of human intellect which is not only originated in an environmental setting, but is also doomed to be restricted to that setting. I am not very sure whether sciences are also so restricted. To destroy the regional colour of philosophy, I believe, is to destroy the flavour of philosophy. And one should not expect that philosophy would survive once its flavour is gone.

For clarification of the issue in question I would like to consider the views of Professor S. S. Barlingay. He shares the ideology of those philosophers who do not hesitate in eulogizing philosophy and putting it on par with sciences, assuming that sciences have already climbed the highest mountain of knowledge. To propogate his ideology Barlingay has recently come to a decision that he should give up the use of the awkward expression 'Indian philosophy' for the sort of philosophy being done in

*I have picked up this discussion from my larger paper "Quest for Knowledge and Academic Establishment", read in a seminar organized by the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, in the month of September, 1976.

this part of the world. He has evolved a new expression 'philosophy of Indian origin' which, according to him, is neutral with respect to the character of our philosophical heritage. For the benefit of the prospective contributors Barlingay has inserted a note on the back of the cover page of the Indian Philosophical Quarterly which is both edited and published by him :

"Indian Philosophical Quarterly welcomes papers in all areas of philosophy, History of philosophy and philosophy of Indian origin."

So far as Barlingay's ideology is concerned one may find some incoherence in this note. For Barlingay uses the expression "all areas of philosophy" in such a fashion that it excludes not only the expression 'History of Philosophy' but also the expression 'philosophy of Indian origin'. One would also get the impression that the philosophy of Indian origin has been given a secondary place in the Quarterly. How could this Quarterly claim to be Indian, inspite of the fact that it is edited by an Indian, and depends for its financial backing on India? However, giving a secondary place to one's heritage—whatever be the strength of that heritage—exhibits the strength of Barlingay's convictions. If one clings to the narrow principles of regionalism one would forget about the general health of philosophy. On this count Barlingay has certainly won his point. If the Western journals of philosophy suffer from regionalism, this is no reason why we should also acquire this disease.

What is important for consideration is the assumption which guides Barlingay's mode of thinking. No harm is done to the objective and universal character of a philosophical system simply by pointing out that it germinated in the Indian soil. Newton was a British and Einstein a German. But it would be quite misleading to describe Newtonian physics as 'British physics' or Einsteinian physics as 'German physics'. There are Germans and there are British, and both these varieties of persons are given citizenship rights of their countries. But 'physics' is not the sort of object to which a citizenship right is given. Similarly, according to Barlingay, Hume was a British and Śāṅkara an Indian. But this is no reason why we should describe Humean philosophy as 'British philosophy' or Vedānta as 'Indian philo-

sophy'. To employ such descriptions would give wrong notions about the nature of philosophical systems and philosophical problems, as if they have local significance. No passport or visa restrictions can be imposed on the systems of philosophy as they can be imposed on the movement of philosophers from one country to the other. If no citizenship rights can be given then no visa formality has to be fulfilled. The fact that a philosophical system takes its birth in a certain country does not imply that it has to be restricted to the limits of that country. Birth places are not necessarily the places for mobile objects to settle down.

Would it be a right characterization of philosophy to say that philosophical systems are not restricted to the regions of their origin? I am not referring to the fact that the Soviet Union or China would not give visa to the philosophical system that supports the capitalist society, and the capitalist countries try to smuggle their philosophical literature into the communist countries in the same fashion in which the allurements of any easy life in the Western countries impel the Asians to smuggle themselves into these countries. I am simply referring to the fact that a system of philosophy, like a variety of wheat or creeper, requires certain sort of environmental condition for its birth and survival.

What makes a British philosopher so much devoted to the problem of perception? What makes him so much worried about the problem of perceiving tables, chairs, coins and tomatoes? What leads him to make the distinction between 'sense-data' and 'material objects'? Is there any understandable reason why he should distinguish 'the bulge of a tomato' from the 'tomato itself'? The answer is very simple. The dark-foggy environment of Britain the inability to perceive things clearly, leads a British mind to think more about the philosophical problems of perception. The general environment of Britain poses a real challenge to its inhabitants. The darkness and fog envelope a material object, say, a tomato, in such a fashion that it appears as a patch, a coloured patch, bulging out towards your eyes. It is only when one comes closer to a tomato, touches it, and performs all those activities which the British philosophers describe as 'verification activities', that a tomato is ultimately perceived.

The anxiety about the perception of even such an insignificant item as a tomato has become so excessive in Britain that some British philosophers have come out with the declaration that there is no end to the process of verification, that whatever we do, our eyes and hands can never catch the *real* tomato. Thus in their project to catch a tomato, the tomato has slipped out of their hands, in a slightly different fashion than that in which their empire has slipped out of their hands. What remains in the hands of a British philosopher is just the bulging shape of a tomato, nothing but a patch of colour, without any juice or pulp in it. There is no surprise that these bulging patches of colour become independent sorts of things and obtain a technical name 'sense-data'. Once sense-data become a part of *reality*—whatever sort of reality it is—all kinds of philosophical problems find their way. The loss of empire has already introduced sufficient worries for the British, and now they have added worries—philosophical worries arising out of the loss of material objects.

How can one understand, relish or be stimulated by the problems of British philosophy without living (at least for some time in one's life) in the dark-foggy atmosphere of Britain? How can these problems be exported to those countries where there is light and sunshine, where the environment of darkness and fog is missing? Even the philosophically developed neighbours of Britain, Germany and France, failed to be impressed by the British philosophical systems. Britain can smuggle its philosophical literature into another country but not its environmental setting. The British are quite aware of this fact, and therefore they try to get people acquainted with the environmental setting of Britain.

The British fog and cold is responsible not only for the philosophical problems of Britain but also for the growth of her imperial power—the search for territories having sunshine and heat. The recent introduction of the central heating system in Britain is not a bad compensation for the loss of British empire. But the fog in Britain continues to persist, therefore, the philosophical problem of perception also continues to persist. Of course, recently some other philosophical problems have also attracted the attention of British philosophers. The conditions of illumination and visibility of things in Britain have made considerable advancement over the past.

Why were Pyramids constructed in the deserts of Egypt ? Why were they not constructed in India, when a civilization of the same sort prospered in these countries ? Would a piece of forest attract your attention if it is planted in a piece of land adjoining a never-ending forest ? Could a Pyramid become an item of wonder if it is planted in the land of Himalayas ? Could a foothill catch your attention if your eyes are busy with the never-ending Himalayas ? Further, where, in what sort of lands, would a person like to hoard treasures ? Certainly not in a treasure-land. What reason is there that the Indians did not preserve the bodies of their dead in the fashion in which they were preserved in the Ancient Egypt ? Why have the archaeologists failed in unearthing a mummy from the soil of India ? Perhaps it is an ancient Indian belief that what is immortal is not the body but the soul, the destruction of the body does not necessarily lead to the destruction of one's inner self. On the other hand it seems that the bodily concept of immortality is an ancient Egyptian concept. An Egyptian mummy exhibits not only the artistic achievement of a people but also a highly developed technique for preserving the body of a person for the Day of Judgement.

What has led Indian philosophers to their other-worldly metaphysics ? Why have they lost love for the physical body or the worldly treasures ? In India there is no problem about the visibility of material objects. Rather the bright sunshine along with the excessively hot climate makes an Indian disinterested in the problems of 'external perception', the problem of perceiving tables, chairs, coins and tomatoes. The environmental conditions force an Indian to withdraw himself from the existence of the outside world. He closes his eyes to what is going on around his body, and as a result becomes interested in getting a glimpse of his 'inner self'. The construction of an 'invisible self', the invention of the problem of 'internal perception' and 'yoga' etc., are the outcome of the excessive heat and sunshine. The uneasy, restless, physical bodies are rejected as parts of the *real* self. Hot winds, storms, floods and the outbreak of tropical diseases can torture only one's physical body, but not the real self. The real self is pure happiness and bliss, and therefore, one should not grumble about the suffering of his physical body. Even those who reject the existence of an inner self—the real self—as Buddha

did, have not denied the fact of bodily suffering. The liberation from bodily suffering is the major concern of Indian philosophy. The bodily suffering caused by the environmental conditions of India have not escaped the notice of philosophers.

The fog of Britain does not allow one person to see another person (the genesis of the problem of ' other minds '), and each person lives his independent solipsistic life. But for an Indian there is no such thing as the problem of other minds, for all minds are in reality one and the same mind. Social discordance created by caste-hierarchy etc., has been resolved in a simple fashion. Though one person remains beyond the *touch* of another person in this world, these persons become one and the same person as soon as they give up their physical bodies. It is only the physical body that suffers or makes a person un-touchable or touchable. What an Indian fails to achieve at the physical level, he succeeds in achieving at the higher level. Social unity, like happiness and well-being of a person, cannot be achieved in this world, therefore, it is an item to be taken care of in the other world.

An Indian philosopher clearly gives vent to his colour-consciousness when he provides a *sāttvika* body to his inner self. *Sāttvika* is associated with white colour and *tāmas* with black colour. So it does not matter that an Indian is a coloured person *physically*, for he happens to be a white person in *reality*. An Indian succeeds in discarding the natural colour of his skin and succeeds in obtaining the colour of his own choice in a slightly different fashion than that in which he obtains a social unity with his fellow beings. It is not the chemical but the metaphysical recipe that has been utilised for the purpose of changing one's colour or one's caste.

Though Pragmatism had a chance birth in Britain, it failed to survive in the cold climate of that country. It is only when Pragmatism was transplanted in the business community of America that it survived. And it is only the superior Aryan race of Germany and the tall bony structures of its people that can give birth to an abstract structural philosophy. One may feel dizzy in climbing the height of a German philosophical system. When one refers to German philosophical systems one is reminded of

Gothic structures. And neither the British philosophies of perception nor the German Gothic structures could influence the sublime, sensuous people of France. In spite of the racial minglings, the philosophical achievement of a region remains independent of the other region. For, though there is mingling of races but not the mingling of environmental settings.

How different, how much regionalised, are the pictures of philosophers and their philosophies? Even the recent adventure of the British philosophers into the ordinary language analysis, besides their concern with perception, has a local base. The ordinary language for British philosophers is identical with English language. In analysing ordinary language he is analysing a language for which one requires Oxford and Cambridge dictionaries. It is no surprise that Austin used to carry English dictionaries in his discussion classes. Though they have lost the empire, the British have to remind the English speaking people of the world that they have not yet lost their control over English language.

Is Barlingay, or any philosopher who shares his views, right in wishing to have scientific respectability for philosophical pursuits? Science is science and philosophy is philosophy, the twins shall never meet, for the simple reason that they are not twins. The aim of philosophical pursuit is not scientific but philosophical perfection, a perfection which has all sorts of regional and local imperfections. And could one say without any hesitation that sciences are free from regional and local imperfections? According to professor K. J. Shah even sciences have failed to remove their regional and local colours, and it makes quite good sense to talk about 'German physics' and to distinguish it from 'British physics' or 'Russian physics'. But Shah has yet to formulate his position in clear and precise term. If Shah is right then the whole issue of the relation between philosophy and science would have to be considered in a different fashion. I wish Shah is wrong and the popular notion about science is right.

Indian Institute of Advanced Study,
Simla.

Suresh Chandra

NEW BOOKS ON PHILOSOPHY

- Fogelin, R.J. : Wittgenstein—The author provides an authoritative critical evaluation of both the Tractatus and Philosophical Investigations. £ 4.75
- Honderi (Ed.) : Social Ends and Political Means—Contributions by leading British, American and European Philosophers on Political Philosophy about-£ 6.50
- Ryle, G. (Ed.) : Contemporary Aspects of Philosophy. Contributions to the Oxford International Symposium held in 1975, current work of philosophers in many countries about-£ 8.00
- Mill, J.S. : A System of Logic 2 Vols. Set -£ 23.50
- Nagel, Ernest : The Structure of Science £ 2.50
- Frege, G. : Logical Investigations (with a preface by P.T. Geach) £ 2.75
- Thalberg : Perception, Emotions and Action—A Component Approach about-£ 3.50
- Geach : Reason and Argument(76) (P) about-£ 2.75
- Korner, S. : Philosophy of Logic (76) £ 7.50
- Kenny, A. : Will, Freedom and Power (76) £ 6.00
- Lively, J. : Democracy (75) £ 3.50
- Robinson, J. : An Atheist's Values (75) (P) £ 2.25
- Wittgenstein Ludwig : Remarks on Colour (70) This book contains material written by the author on colour in the last year and a half of his life which has long been eagerly awaited by the philosophical community about-£ 5.00

ALLIED PUBLISHERS PRIVATE LIMITED
Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, New Delhi, Bangalore.