

BEING AND BEING KNOWN

What I present in these pages is really an abstract of a much longer article. I shall, in this paper, search for some consideration in favour of the admission of cognitive acts. What prompts me to this is the fact that in the West most of the philosophers, at present, refuse to admit any act of knowing or cognitive act. But it was not very long ago when the philosophers used to speak in terms of act of consciousness or act of knowing. It was then thought that a distinction between the act of knowing and the object known could remove the confusion to which Berkeleyan subjectivism owed its origin. Now though the "official academic doctrine"¹ in the West continues to be some form of realism yet it is no longer felt necessary to subscribe to the doctrine of cognitive acts. I shall, in this paper, try to find out with reference to the Buddhist Philosophy what might possibly have led many of the contemporary western philosophers to deny cognitive acts. I shall not claim, however, that this could be the only reason which determines their refusal of cognitive act. Nor shall I claim that this is the actual reason. For whatever may be the reason, the denial of cognitive act exposes the contemporary western philosophers to the same difficulty in epistemology to which the Buddhists exposed themselves. They experience in common the same difficulty in solving an epistemological problem. And, if I can show that admission of cognitive acts can solve the problem in question then I shall be deemed to have shown some consideration in favour of the admission of cognitive acts. Whether the consideration is conclusive will, however, depend on the availability of alternative solution.

There are certain genuine problems relating to knowledge which were either not recognised or left undiscussed by the British and American philosophers. In a book² recently published from America attempt has been made to enumerate the main problems relating to knowledge and to discuss them. In this book one does not find even the mention of the problem I am going to discuss. The book, of course, refers to problems not enumerated actually as metaphysical. I, however, think that the problem is really epistemological. My reason is this. In India, at least, the problem in question has been discussed with all seriousness by philosophers

whose strict metaphysical standpoint would render impossible even the every statement of the problem. For the statement of the problem, as I shall show presently, presupposes certain distinctions between the factors in the knowledge situation. These distinctions have been denied by the idealist metaphysicians. And this denial is not an accidental but characteristic feature of idealism. Yet the idealists never ignored the problem to be discussed here. Therefore, so far as the problem remains the same, irrespective of the metaphysical position of the philosophers, it cannot be ignored in epistemology as metaphysical. Metaphysically speaking, the distinctions in question have no reality and the problem does not exist for the idealists. But so far as the distinctions are already involved in ordinary usages and presupposed in common practice the idealists in India along with the philosophers of the other schools felt obliged to tackle the problem.

Many common sense usages are there which already draw or show certain distinctions among the factors of knowledge situation. Let us take some specimens of such usage :

- (1) I know the table.
- (2) I know the table but not the clock in the room.
- (3) I can know the colour of the wall if and only if my eyes are functioning normally.
- (4) I can know at this moment the sound of the car plying down the street even if my eyes are not functioning normally.
- (5) I am seeing if there is any evidence in support of the cognitive acts.

If we examine these sentences closely we find that they make certain distinctions between factors of a knowledge situation. As these distinctions are familiar and we have not much space at our disposal I shall simply name the distinctions instead of discussing in detail the manner in which the above usage reveals them.

In the first three sentences the word "know" occurs in such a way that it can be replaced by the expression "have knowledge of" without altering the sense of the statements. The word "know" occurring in this way stands for a state of possession rather than action. It is a case of having rather than doing. The word

“know” does not occur in (5). Here the ‘I’ is intended to be taken as cognitively active. It is a case of judging as distinguished from judgement. Here the subject is attributed with the cognitive activity of *jñāna-kriyā* rather than merely with a state of cognition or simply *jñāna* which is a particular *guṇa* as the Naiyāyikas will call it. Again comparing the sentence (3) with the sentence (4) we find another distinction—that between the knowing activity and the instrument employed in bringing about the action or the instrument in the employment of which the cognitive activity consists. The instrument is called *jñāna-sādhana* or *pramāṇa*. With reference to the *pramāṇa*, the cognition as the resulting state is called *pramāṇa-phala*. In addition to all these factors and as distinct from each of them there are, the usages show, two more factors called respectively the subject of knowledge or *jñātā* and object or *viśaya*. The *Jñātā* is also called *pramātā* while the *viśaya* is called *prameya*. Thus the commonsense usages clearly show, among other distinctions, a distinction between *pramāṇa* and its *phala* on the one hand and *pramātā* and *prameya* or *viśaya* on the other. These two distinctions, we shall see, are very closely related. The denial of the first tends somehow to render unintelligible the notion of object. The distinction between *pramāṇa* and its *phala* has much to do with the proper understanding of the concept of *pramāṇa*—a topic which, though epistemological, has almost completely been ignored by Western philosophers.

The Buddhists seem to obliterate the distinction between *pramāṇa* and *phala* when they define *pramāṇa* as true cognition. And on this point they are severely criticised by the Naiyāyikas. We shall presently seek to discover the reason for the Buddhist refusal of the distinction in question. But before proceeding with the Buddhist account of *pramāṇa* I shall sketch once again and more clearly the line of the argument I am going to adopt. While subscribing on the whole to some form of realistic epistemology the contemporary philosophers will admit the above distinctions between the factors in a knowledge situation. Even if they are not aware of all the distinctions, we saw to be actually involved in common usages, they are aware of at least the distinction between knowledge and its object or *jñāna* and its *viśaya*. They will further agree with common sense in maintaining that the relation that obtains between knowledge and its object is external. In other

words, objects may exist or have being without being known. But once we start, as we do in common sense and in realistic epistemology, from a distinction between knowledge and its object or between being and being known it becomes our responsibility to show how a being becomes a being known. It will not do to say that a mere being becomes a being known the moment we turn our attention to it. For this hardly means more than that a being becomes a being for knowledge when we know it. The question still remains how knowing can turn an existent into object or a mere being into a being known. In other words, how is knowing to be conceived if it is to turn a being into an object. It may be said that a thing becomes known when a knowledge relation is established. But this relation requires activity on the part of the subject to be established. Just as felling a tree requires the relation between the axe and the tree to be established by the act of the cutter so also, in the language of the Indian philosophers, the subjects of knowledge must use some *pramāṇa* through the agency of which the knowledge relation can be established. And nothing more is required to turn a being into an object other than establishing this relation. In short, therefore, to make it possible for a mere being to become an object a *pramāṇa* is necessary. And the concept of *pramāṇa* cannot be admitted in any intelligible or significant sense of the term unless a subject is admitted as possessing the activity of operating with the instrument or *pramāṇa*.

The Buddhists define *pramāṇa* as true knowledge or *avisaśvādakam jñānam*. One point to note here is that the definition is much narrower and restricted than another, perhaps more familiar, definition of *pramāṇa*. The definition is to the effect that *pramāṇa* is the instrument that brings about the cognition. In accordance with this second definition, which the Naiyāyikas among others accept, anything can be a *pramāṇa* if it helps in bringing about or producing knowledge—whether that thing is a piece of cognition or something material does not matter. But so far as the Buddhist definition identifies *pramāṇa* with cognition, such things as eyes or ears or lamp cannot be regarded any longer as *pramāṇa*. The Naiyāyikas hold that this restriction has been introduced by the Buddhists in violation of such commonsense usages as “we see by means of our eyes” or “we see with the help of the lamp” where eyes and lamp have been assigned the status of *pramāṇa*. The

Buddhists, however, can, I think, meet this charge in more than one way. And if *pramāṇa* is then defined as cognition then the Buddhists end by identifying *pramāṇa* with cognition or *pramāṇa phala*.

From the above account one may receive the suggestion that the Buddhists obliteration of the distinction, already noticed by common usages, is the result or consequence of their definition of *pramāṇa* as cognition. For, if *pramāṇa* is defined as cognition, it is not distinct from what is regarded as *pramāṇa phala* by those who maintain a distinction between *pramāṇa* and the cognition resulting from it or the *phala*. For, on this theory, it is the *phala* which is cognition.³ I maintain, however, that it is better not to accept the suggestion. One should rather view the situation in another way. Instead of the Buddhist denial of the distinction between *pramāṇa* and *phala* being the result of their definition of *pramāṇa*, the latter is the result of the said denial. For, if *pramāṇa* and *phala* are not distinguished then *pramāṇa* is to be incorporated either within *pramāṇā* or within *pramā*. And since whatever else a *pramāṇa* may be it must remove *ajñāna* or false knowledge it must be identified as true knowledge. For it is only true knowledge which removes *ajñāna*.

We have observed before that the Buddhists can well answer the charge that to define *pramāṇa* as cognition is to offer a too narrow definition which runs counter to the common practice of regarding such material things as lamp or eye as *pramāṇa*. But the charge that the definition violates the common distinction between *pramāṇa* and *pramāṇa-phala* is more serious. The *Mīmāṃsakas* also define *pramāṇa* as cognition but they escape the charge in so far as they admit a *pramāṇa phala* as distinct from *pramāṇa*.

But what exactly is this charge and how far the said identification of *pramāṇa* with its *phala* is objectionable? Or, in other words, how the charge against the Buddhists can be construed? To say that the identification under consideration violates certain common usages does not appear to be sufficiently formidable. The charge or objection so construed does not become decisive. But what do then the critics contend when they hold the Buddhist identification of *pramāṇa* with *pramāṇa-phala* is objectionable? Is it contended that to obliterate the distinction in question amounts to a denial of the distinction between cause and effect which, there is reason

to believe, is a valid distinction? The answer must be in the negative. For even from their strict metaphysical or transcendental point of view the Buddhists⁴ need not deny the casual relation. According to them, on the other hand, under the transcendental condition of *nirvāṇa* the beginningless and endless series of conscious moments keeps on flowing free from all phenomenal associates.⁵ So far, therefore, as they do not deny all distinctions in the state of *nirvāṇa* and so far as the casual relation can obtain between homogeneous entities the Buddhists are under no compulsion to deny the distinction between cause and effect. Thus the Buddhists not only do but also can accept casual relation while denying any distinction between *pramāṇa* and its *phala*.

Thus we cannot bring the charge of denying the casual relation against the Buddhists. The distinction between cause and effect on the one hand and *pramāṇa* and its *phala* on the other do not exactly coincide. Nor can we bring the charge of violating the common practice of referring to certain material things as *pramāṇa*. However, we maintain that by identifying *pramāṇa* with its *phala* they can hardly solve the epistemological problem as to how a thing which is a mere being becomes known. We anticipate an immediate objection. If our charge against the Buddhists is construed in terms of things that are mere being then the charge does not apply to all the Buddhists, but only to the Vaibhāsikas and the Sautāntikas. At least the charge so construed does not affect the Yogācaras. For the latter do not admit any thing other than conscious moments. Even if we grant this defence in favour of the Buddhist to be legitimate to some extent, our charge, nevertheless, may be shown to hold against them. For the notion of *pramāṇa* cannot be made intelligible in terms of conscious moments which alone the Yogācaras admit. I shall not argue this point here. On the other hand, I shall show that the charge does not suffer from the limitation the defender thought it to suffer. For even if it were true that the charge has relevance only in the context of the admission of an external world the problem affects the idealists none the less. They also have to admit such a world even if they do not grant it any ultimate reality.

The problem under discussion does not, therefore, arise from the fact that the idealist school of the Buddhists refuses to accept the *pramāṇa* and *pramāṇa phala* distinction in the sense that such

distinction has no ultimate reality. For the Advaitins also do not hold the distinction to have any reality in the ultimate sense of the term. The problem arises rather due to the fact that the Buddhists deny the distinction altogether. In other words, here there will be a problem if and only if the Buddhists deny the distinction in question in its phenomenal form also. To put it in a still different way the problem will arise if the Vaibhāsikas and the Sautāntikas also deny the *pramāṇa* and *pramāṇa phala* distinction. And they do. Taking the text by itself and without entering into the controversy over the metaphysical standpoint of its author the *Nyāya-Bindu* may be regarded as representing the view of the non-idealist Buddhists. And in this book also we see that *pramāṇa* has been identified with its *phala*.

All the Buddhists alike deny the distinction between *pramāṇa* and *phala*. Is there any common reason that leads them all to obliterate the distinction which, we saw, is already involved in common usages? I think that there is one. All the Buddhists deny the existence of self over and above the conscious moments. And anybody refusing to admit a self over and above the stream of conscious moments cannot render intelligible the notion of knowing activity. He, therefore, will find it impossible to admit *pramāṇa* in the sense that it is something other than *pramāṇa-phala*. For the notion of *pramāṇa* as distinguished from *pramāṇa phala* can be made intelligible only in terms of cognitive activity. This point needs some clarification.

We have shown above, with reference to common sense usages, that many factors are involved in a knowledge situation and that each of these factors is distinct from all the rest. But it did not perhaps become clear from the usages that the factors are also very closely related. The notions of *pramāṇas*, *prameya* etc., form a family or group and each bears relations to others. But among them the notion of knowing activity is somewhat more basic. For if we analyse the notions *pramāṇa*, *prameya* etc., we shall find that their meaning cannot be understood in any knowledge situation without reference to *jñānakriyā*. The terms *pramātā*, *prameya* and *pramāṇa* are all "*kāraka-śabda*". And something is a *kāraka* only in relation to a *kriyā*. Taking the notion of *jñāna kriyā* as basic we can understand the other notions somewhat in the following way.

Pramātā is the agent or subject in relation to cognitive activity. In any sentence in which the word "*jñāna*" or some form of it occurs in the role of a verb, we can find another word to occur which stands for the person who is the knowing agent. And this agent is the *pramātā*. This shows that without an agent the knowing activity cannot take place. And unless we can attribute to this agent the cognitive activity it cannot be regarded as the *pramātā*.

Pramāṇa is that which brings about the action called knowing. That is to say, in a sentence in which the word "know" occurs in the role of a verb there occurs, if not always actually and explicitly at least by way of implication, a certain other word which names that (the instrument) which the agent employs and in the employment of which his activity called knowing consists. *Pramāṇa* then is that which when it relates a subject to the object relative to a particular knowledge situation, the subject is said to know the object or perform the *jñāna-kriyā* relative to that object.

Prameya is the object of *jñāna-kriyā*. That is to say in a sentence in which the word "*jñāna*" occurs in the role of a verb, there occurs a certain other word in the role of accusative. And the thing denoted by this word is the object or *prameya*. *Prameya* in relation to a particular *jñāna-kriyā* is that which is determined in a way in which such things, the names of which do not occur in the role of accusative, are not determined. For example, an object can be made use of if and only if it has already been made object of some knowing activity of some person.⁶

Two things follow from the above account of the notions of *pramātā*, *pramāṇa* and *prameya*. Even though the notion of *jñāna-kriyā* remains somewhat vague as it has been taken to be basic, it is fairly clear that this is the activity that turns a thing into an object of knowledge. And, secondly, the knowing activity consists in the employment by the agent of some *pramāṇas*.

The definition of *pramāṇa* that does not identify it with *pramāṇa-phala* identifies it as the *kāraṇa* of *pramā*. And this is in agreement with the analysis of the concept presented above. For the definition of *pramāṇa* as *pramā-kāraṇa* means that *pramāṇa* is the instrument through the agency of which the subject gets to know an object. But taken in this sense *pramāṇa* implies a cognitive agent as much as cognitive activity implies it. For nothing is a *pramāṇa*

by virtue of its existence. It becomes *pramāṇa* only when in relation to a subject it functions as the agency through which the subject comes to know the object it knows. And self has actually been inferred by using *pramāṇa* as *hetu*. In such inference *pramāṇa* has been taken as implying a conscious agent in accordance with the views that knowing is an activity which consists in the employment of *pramāṇa* by the subject.

Now we are at the end of our journey in search for a common ground on which all the Buddhists refuse to view *pramāṇa* as the instrument that brings the knowing activity. The ground is their rejection of a self in the sense of a conscious agent. Once they refuse to admit a conscious agent they have to deny cognitive activity and also *pramāṇa* in the sense of *pramā-kāraṇa*. But when they deny cognitive activity and also *pramāṇa* they find it difficult to explain the notion of object and to solve the problem how a being becomes a being known.

The results we have achieved at the end of our excursion into the Buddhist philosophy may now be used in understanding the position of some contemporary Western philosophers. I shall only suggest rather than discuss in detail that the case of many contemporary philosophers is very much like that of the Buddhists. They deny the notion of a cognitive act because they are not prepared to admit any conscious agent. And their denial of cognitive activity leaves them in no better position than it leaves the Buddhists in relation to the epistemological question how a being becomes a being known. The problem in the case of Western philosophers is more serious as they appear to subscribe to realism in a more radical way than even the Buddhists.

I would not like here to argue the point that the denial of the conscious agent did constitute actual, let alone the only, ground for the Western philosophers' denial of knowing activity. The historical fact that epistemology as a separate branch of study owes much to the empiricists who refused to admit any conscious agent and that the influential creed in contemporary British and American epistemology is empiricism lends much support to the point. Nor should I be taken to mean when I draw an analogy between the Buddhists and the Western Philosophers that the grounds for rejecting self in both the cases were identical. I simply wish to say that

Western Philosophers, at least most of them, are not ready to admit any conscious agent and it is also a fact about them that they deny the existence of cognitive activity. And I further wish to suggest that the two are not unrelated. The denial of any conscious agent may very well constitute a ground for the denial of any cognitive act. Prof., Ryle, for instance, has rejected⁷ what according to him is the Cartesian myth of the Ghost in the machine and he has also denied strongly any form of mental activity. I do further maintain that the denial of a conscious agent constitutes a better and a more decisive ground than some of the explicitly used arguments against the existence of cognitive act. For example, when Russell⁸ or Ayer⁹ says that he has been convinced about the absence of cognitive acts by introspection one may enumerate the name of quite a few eminent psychologists who claim evidence of direct experience in favour of those acts.¹⁰ And again when Russell says¹¹ that the cognitive acts do not enjoy any theoretical justification, he takes the sentence "I see" to be equivalent to the sentence "there is a thought in me". And this clearly betrays his refusal to admit any conscious agent. He does not appear to have noticed that "know" cannot be replaced by "have knowledge of" in all contexts. And again in so far as the notion of cognitive act helps rendering a group of other notions intelligible the admission of cognitive acts cannot be said to serve no purpose at all. And even if Western Philosophers do not consciously make much use of all these notions, the notion of objects in the sense of being known is very familiar to them.

If, therefore, the denial of cognitive acts renders certain fundamental epistemological notions unintelligible and makes it impossible to discharge their responsibility of showing how a being can become being known, then it may be expected from the contemporary Western Realist Philosophers that they would admit the reality of cognitive acts, rather than deny them. But this they would have done if they were not scared, with what justification it is beyond the scope of this present article to discuss, of the ghost in the machine. It goes to the credit of some Indian realists, some Mīmāṃsakas I mean, that they did what was just expected. They admitted the reality of cognitive acts, as otherwise the problem could not have been solved.

One word of caution, I think, is necessary before I end. I should not be taken to have represented in this article the view that most Indian philosophers admitted the reality of cognitive acts. For the truth, as is apparent even to the most casual student of Indian Philosophy, is just the reverse. In India there were more critics than advocates of cognitive acts. And it is highly doubtful if even those few advocates subscribed to the doctrine of cognitive acts in any significant sense. But this creates a new problem for me to discuss which is beyond the scope of this paper. Otherwise, this fact about Indian Philosophy has no relevance for this paper. For, I have not claimed to represent the Indian point of view in the matter of cognitive acts. I have just stated how my study of Indian Philosophy has suggested to me the possible motive behind the denial of cognitive acts by some contemporary Western philosophers, and the far reaching consequences of this denial, and lastly, a way of criticising the denial and defending the admission of cognitive acts. Whether I am right in receiving these suggestions from my study of Indian Philosophies and in applying them to understand and criticise some Western philosophical doctrines is a matter for discussion.

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NOTES

1. A. M. Quinton's article in *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*. ed. D. J. O'Connor, p. 531.

2. R. M. Chisholm's *Theory of Knowledge in the Foundation of Philosophy Series*.

3. I disregard here the cases where the Naiyayikas take some cognition to function as *pramāṇa*. For even though the difference from the Buddhists still remains it is no longer so much pronounced.

4. Of course this observation does not hold for those who maintain that in *nirvāṇa* the flow of conscious moments comes to a stop.

5. Udayanacarya : *Kiraṇāvali* (Benaras Sanskrit Series) p. 7.

6. Nothing can be an object of desire or volition (*iccādi viṣaya*) unless it is already an object of the cognition (*jñāna viṣaya*) which functions as the cause of this desire and volition.

7. G. Ryle : *The Concept of Mind*.

8. D. J. O'Connor's article in *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*, p. 483

9. A J Ayer : *Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*, p. 62.

10. B Blanshard : *The Nature of Thought*, vol. I, p. 397.

11. D. J. O'Connor's article in *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*, p. 483.