

SELF-IDENTITY  
SOME REMARKS ON PROFESSOR RAMCHANDRA  
GANDHI'S APPROACH

1. In the essay entitled 'Soul' in his book *The Availability of Religious Ideas* Professor Ramchandra Gandhi brings an interesting, though not unfamiliar, approach to bear on the question of self-identity, and in doing so, claims to clarify a few essential features of the concept of a human soul. In working out his conception of human soul in its outline, Professor Gandhi suggests some moral, as apart from metaphysical, features of human communicative encounter, at the centre of which he places the idea of self-identity. Since the moral side can be at least in principle separated, I shall confine myself to a consideration of his main thesis of self-identity. I would not however be taken to suggest that I minimize the significance of the moral aspect as involved in any comprehensive discussion of the problem of soul.

2. As a start, Professor Ramchandra Gandhi gives his assent to certain things which the less persuaded might call into question. He accepts the reality of 'final' self-acquaintance and gives it its cardinal place in our lives as mental beings. He accepts with others like H. D. Lewis, whose theory of self-identity he otherwise dismisses as a 'simplistic illusion' (29), that this self-acquaintance means our awareness of ourselves as ourselves. "This sense of final self-acquaintance is undoubtedly a central feature of our mental lives. Apart from knowing, and being conscious of, a variety of facts about ourselves and our situation, we are also aware of ourselves as being *ourselves*" (22). He also acknowledges the distinction between self-acquaintance and self-knowledge (as in a descriptive sense) (23) — a distinction which is usually ignored by thinkers like Ryle. The

former is not necessarily dependent on the latter, though the latter is inconceivable without the former. My awareness of myself as myself is not contingent upon whether or not I know certain facts about myself, or certain features of autobiographical interest. The self-acquaintance may be of a deceptive kind, yet it is there in its immediate luminosity and Professor Gandhi too accepts this. A crucial distinction thus obtains between self-identity and what is called 'personal identity'. (Gandhi prefers to call it 'public identity'). "This conviction of self-identity is not reducible to knowledge that one is so-and-so, such and-such" (23).<sup>2</sup> Nor is self-identity impaired by partial or complete loss of memory. However frightening the thought of loss of memory — and with it the attendant forgetting of 'personal identity'—may otherwise be, one's awareness of oneself or one's ability, as Gandhi says, to ask the question 'Who am I?' remains unimpaired (23). If the conviction of self-identity cannot be 'disowned' without running into absurdity, it is, Gandhi says, not only because it is inseparable from the 'thinking of the thought "I" ' (28), but also because the reasonableness of the question 'Who am I?' which each of us is apt to ask and in fact does ask from time to time, becomes suspect. And since the reasonableness of the question cannot be 'questioned (unless one has prejudged the issue or takes philosophical activity beyond the human domain), even if one were to give the answer in different terms, the reasonableness of the question becomes intelligible only because of self-identity being taken as a presupposition. Doesn't the very question 'Who am I?' presuppose the 'I' who asks this question?

3. Given that this conviction of self-identity is beyond philosophical dispute one is tempted to conclude that this is the end of the matter and that all further probing is a needless venture. But this is not how philosophers feel, and this is also not how Professor Gandhi feels. He too extends his enquiry further and takes up the question of the source of this conviction which unfailingly attends our mental lives.

But before doing so he disposes of one of the usual answers given to the question, the answer that relates to introspection. It is maintained that it is above all introspection which yields the primary awareness of ourselves as ourselves, of our self-identity in the sense noted above, and it is this, it is further thought, on which much of what we call self-knowledge rests. Now there cannot be much doubt that introspection plays an immense role in our cognitive life, and helps in resuscitating for us certain experiences which go unattended; through it again we may gain sound intimation of some of the other important features of our inner lives, it may also significantly disclose to us some of our dispositional traits and behaviour-patterns, our foibles, delusions and our phantasies. It may further assist us in a more sustained and dispassionate evaluation of some of our own acts, judgements, beliefs. Introspection does these and hundred further things, but it can by no means put us in possession of the type of self-acquaintance which consists in being aware of ourselves as ourselves. Professor Gandhi too sees the limits of introspective experience — so far as this aspect of our mental life is concerned — and hence rejects it as a possible answer to the question of self-identity. As he says, "The conviction that I am myself not gained by attention or introspection..." (29),<sup>3</sup> and that "we do not through a private effort of attention or consciousness, experience our uniqueness" (27).

4. If, then, it is not introspection or some other kindred activity which can be the source of the conviction of self-identity, what else could fit as a possible candidate? Professor Gandhi, as noted above, regards the sense of self-identity as inseparable from the 'thinking of the thought' "I", and it is by exploring the full dimensions of this thought that he thinks that an answer can be provided. Thinking, i.e., 'reflective, self-conscious thinking' (28) — and by which he further means 'non-referential, non-descriptive, non-predicative' thinking — is, we are told, not a 'mere private agitation of experience' (28), but an 'act'—

an act of imagining a communicative interchange between oneself and some other, oneself being here cast in the role of an audience. As Professor Gandhi puts it, "In thinking the thought 'I' I perform an act of imaginatively adopting an audience-stance. . . . When I am addressed by somebody, a speaker, *I am uniquely picked out, I am non-referentially identified, I am called forth*" (25). It is the act of addressing which Gandhi puts at the heart of human communication, it is the prime condition for any conversion.

It is in the primal act of addressing or being addressed that human beings (I and you) are identified, are picked out from amidst the rest of the world, and also feel having so been picked out. In being addressed, I am, first of all, put 'in possession of the thought "He means me"' (25), I am identified not as a creature of some kind — because that would amount to referential identification — but 'quite simply as myself'. All referential, predicative conversation between two human beings must take place in the background of the initial act of addressing without however its entering as an element into the former.

"When I am addressed by you, I have no doubt at all in my mind that you mean *me*, that you have picked *me* out, and — given adequate success of the act of addressing — that you know that I know that you have identified me, picked me out. You have not, *in* addressing me, referred to me" (25).

It is not that in actual conversation all reference to an 'I' as such-and-such is excluded: only, that referential pointing out becomes possible on the threshold of the initial non-referential identification in the act of addressing. When addressed I do not construe the act (of addressing) of the speaker as something that seeks to identify or recognize me in certain descriptive terms; rather the simple idea that dawns on my mind is that the addresser means *me*, that it is *I* who have been picked out, summoned etc., and not as so-and-so, but as a 'unique but bare particular, a soul' (26).

This is how Professor Gandhi comes further to regard the act of addressing as a 'uniqueness-acknowledging act' (27). "Only when I suffer the experience of being vocatively picked out do I experience my uniqueness. I am called forth — of all the things in the universe, an appeal is made to me" (27). If so, the sheer private apprehension of one's uniqueness which according to Gandhi is what H. D. Lewis mistakenly advocates (27), turns out to be a mere phantom. The experience of one's uniqueness is not a private finding, just as awareness of oneself as oneself is not the result of some private effort; rather, both are emanations of one's awareness of being uniquely picked out in the act of addressing, and it is this which, according to Professor Gandhi, is the basis of the conviction of self-identity.

5. But this is as far as actual communication goes. What happens when one is not *actually* involved in a communicative act? Here, according to Gandhi, one has to imaginatively conjure up what obtains in actual communication. This imaginative reenactment of the latter requires one to *assume* an audience stance (*vis-a-vis* some imagined other or oneself as a speaker), and then in imagining that one was being addressed, vocatively picked out, etc., one lays hold on the thought of oneself as oneself, oneself being regarded as oneself, on the thought of 'I'. In soliloquy, in moments of intense and intimate conversation with myself, I invariably project a 'you', a part of me and yet in a different role, for whom I become the object of addressing, and to whose call I forthwith respond fully convinced that it is *I* who have been summoned. The thought 'I' yielded in the 'imaginative apprehension of oneself being regarded as a soul' must therefore symbolize, according to Professor Gandhi, a 'truncated experience', and hence remains an 'incomplete version' of the thought 'I am called', 'I am uniquely picked out' (29).

Thus on the horizon of self-identity symbolized by the expression 'I' there is simultaneously an addresser, a 'thou' actual or imagined, standing face to face with whom, and

called forth by whom, I receive the first intimations of my identity, of myself being the unique individual I am. Identification of myself as myself takes place at the heart of a perennial communication, an ever-existing relationship, at the other pole of which is a 'thou' to whose soliciting I respond when addressed. The idea of 'soul' which Professor Ramchandra Gandhi dresses in a novel form, and with insight, originates, according to him, in this communicative context (30). Passing over the context — which is its springboard, or its fulcrum so to say — may induce us into believing that the soul is an autonomous self-existing or capable of existing independently of or 'in isolation from other actual or possible selves'. It may also produce the illusion that one is a soul, a unique but bare particular. The truth of the matter, on the other hand, is that one can only see oneself as *being regarded* as a soul in the act of addressing.

"I necessarily, actually or imaginatively, see myself being regarded as a soul, but never see *myself* as a soul. It appears that one can only see another as a soul, or be seen by another as a soul" (33).

When, for instance, I address you, I project you as an audience, I call you forth, I see you as a soul, "quite simply as yourself, and not as a certain sort of creature" (33). And when you, in response to my call, come forth with communicative attention, this 'coming forth' of you becomes the basis of my thought of you as a 'you', of you as a soul. The thought 'you' is in fact unthinkable without my regarding you as a soul. "The thought 'I am called' and the thought 'you' are full experiences of soul . . . One can say that the thought 'I' is a *visualization*, the thought 'you' is a *realization*" (30). Similar is the case with the thought 'he'. Thinking of *him* as him, as a soul, becomes possible only if I project him as the object of an imagined act of addressing, mine or someone else's. But I *cannot* address him unless I see him as being capable of being regarded as a soul. And this is where Professor Gandhi discovers an-

other dimension of our experience of a soul, namely, our "being able to regard somebody as being able to be regarded as a soul" (31).

6. This is then the broad picture Professor Ramchandra Gandhi presents on the question of self-identity. What this finally, and in brief, leads up to is that in speaking or thinking of 'I', a 'you' is also spoken or meant alongwith. The concepts 'I', 'you', 'he' are concepts which have their proper seat in human communication, and can be adequately grasped only in terms of that communication. The saying of 'you' too invariably presupposes an 'I' in relation with which alone the former can be truly understood. Has not Martin Buber, the author of the classic *I and Thou*, taught is not only that 'I — Thou' and 'I — It' are primary words, but also that they signify 'intimate relations', that "there is no *I* taken in itself, but only the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* and the *I* of the primary word *I-It*"<sup>4</sup> The 'dialogical' is what informs Professor Gandhi's approach too, and in fact constitutes, for him, the point of departure. (The question as to the affinities between Buber's and Gandhi's approach need not concern us here.) Hence his declaration that "... the concepts 'I', 'you', 'he', etc., can only be explicated in terms of concepts of human communication" (20).

7. Now there perhaps cannot be much dispute so far as Professor Gandhi's account of actual communication goes. Human beings *are* communicative beings though not merely so, and Gandhi too acknowledges it. The terms 'I', 'you', 'he' etc. are also terms supplied to us by that peculiarly human phenomenon — language, which again is unthinkable without an intimate social intercourse (called communication) in corporate life. Professor Gandhi's insight that at the heart of all communication lies the act of addressing, also has much to commend it. He has also helped us understand, as against the persistent common belief that identification of others always takes a referential/predicative course, how such identification is first of all and essentially non-referential, though it can become referen-

tial after the inaugural step has been taken. It also seems to be the case that, on being addressed, actually or imaginatively, we suffer the experience of being uniquely picked out, of being regarded simply as ourselves, and also further experience our uniqueness being acknowledged. Gandhi is also right in insisting that without this 'soliciting' or 'calling forth' no communicative response can be elicited. But when all this is stated, the impression persists that somewhere something important has been left out of account, that perhaps the central question — that of self-identity — has either on the whole been not properly conceived or put on the sidelines. This becomes obvious from the way Professor Gandhi quietly slips from the question of identity to the question of *identification*; that there is a crucial difference between the two, he wholly misses. And this is in line with some contemporary thinking on the subject. Not that we do not identify ourselves to others in descriptive terms or that we are not identified non-predicatively by others; rather, besides our identification in these diverse ways, we also experience our identity in perhaps a more basic (or at least different) sense. Identity in this sense has something to do with our self-awareness. Besides being aware of others, we are also aware of ourselves, and this self-awareness does by no means involve as a constituent any reference to our awareness of others or others' awareness of us. I do not wait to be picked out by someone, actual or imagined, before I have the experience of being a self in just the fact of undergoing an experience.

8. This self-awareness is not to be confused with self-consciousness, particularly of the Hegelian type which, in one of its aspects involves, by negating internally, the existence of — and recognition of itself by — the 'other', which, in other words, has, as a necessary stage in its development, the 'moment' which Hegel terms as "being for the Other". (Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged.)<sup>5</sup> Our use of self-aware-



ness has none of these connotations, and so our knowledge of the self as in this sense need require no mediation from any quarter. It seems necessary to emphasize, lest there be misapprehension on this score, that the self-awareness in question is not some special awareness or experience which one has in addition to other experiences. To think so would be to miss the whole point about this awareness. Self-awareness is what characterizes every experience. Awareness 'of' and the awareness that one is aware 'of' are not to be treated as separate mental acts, nor is there involved here any 'doubling' or *returning upon itself* of consciousness as some would like us to believe. In becoming aware of something, in undergoing an experience, I also come to have direct and immediate, i.e., unmediated, awareness of myself as the subject of that experience. It would be a muddling of the worst sort to understand this self-awareness as some kind of introspective or self-reflexive experience. That would amount to saying that while an object can be known at a point of time, the knowing subject himself may remain unknown at that point and comes to be known only through some further epistemic process called introspection or reflection. That this would involve us in a vicious infinite regress should be obvious. If the subject of a state of awareness can be known only through some subsequent introspective act, the introspecting subject, itself remaining unknown, would be in need of another introspective act to know itself, and so on without end. No matter then how many times the self is known, we will always keep bumping against some unknown term and this term would be the subject of the last (introspective) experience. If, therefore, awareness of the self is not to be "logically condemned to eternal penultimacy" (Ryle), the reality of self-awareness has to be admitted.

This is of course an obvious point, and one would normally have not even felt it necessary to stress it, had it not been for some of the intractable-looking philosophical puzzles which its insufficient appreciation has led to. This

should also clinch for us the other related issue, the issue whether the self can be its own object. The answer, if the above observations are correct, should of course be in the negative. Those who have thought otherwise have, it seems, too often been gulled by the grammatical structure of language in which the accusative is associated with the object, and (hence) with the process of objectification. What therefore is a subject cannot be turned into an object without forfeiting its essential character. The self thus never being susceptible, unlike other entities, of being posited as an *object* of experience, the awareness of self talked of above has to be treated as 'non-positional' or 'non-propositional'. (In fact even this way of talking is a concession to language). The self cannot be taken as just another content among contents, nor can it be reduced to any one particular experience even though it is true that it is never known outside experience. From this point of view we may even regard our immediate knowledge of the self as a kind of 'self-disclosure' by the self of itself.

It is his failure to adequately grasp this reality of self-awareness that leads Professor Gandhi astray and makes him treat the whole question in 'identification'—terms. Professor Gandhi too is concerned to discover some such 'unique mode of identification' whereby persons can be identified without having to appeal to certain facts about them, and this because he too wants to ensure that our basic sense of self-identity survives our inability, partial or total, to know or recall details about ourselves. He is also anxious to see that no distinction obtains between identity in one's own case and identity in case of others, and hence his conclusion that the mode of identification which meets this requirement is the one which "consists in addressing them or being addressed by them."

9. Now it would be seen that so far as the first issue is concerned, the self-awareness theory fares even better, for the sense of self-identity which it ensures not only does not involve our being so-and-so, and such-and-such, i.e.

our identity in predicative terms, but also does not involve, as a prior condition, our identification by others. Not that the self is never talked of in descriptive or predicative terms, or that certain features cannot be intelligibly ascribed to it; only, that understanding it in these terms is never the whole truth about its reality — and our awareness of it — as a subject. Somewhere the conviction remains that perhaps the self cannot be talked of in this way, that the characteristics which appear to quality — and thus define — the self in so far as I comprehend it as a particular individual (as e.g. when I say “I am *this* [i.e., the author]”) — the characteristics by means of which it is further generally distinguished from others — have after all, as Marcel says, a “contingent character.”<sup>6</sup> Were it not so, an explanation would be in order as to why the subject, despite the fact that it is defined by the *this* and therefore as such, i. e. as *defined subjectivity* must exist in the objective mould, should yet appear as being subjective. The contingent character of the characteristics is reflected in the dissatisfaction, which we sometimes feel, even in the humdrum of practical life, with any attempt which aims at understanding us or clinging our identity through those characteristics alone. The dissatisfaction often is not with the ascription of some allegedly false features, but rather with the sufficiency that is implicitly and smugly claimed for the attempt. It is then only right to emphasize that the features which define (and hence identify) me, do so only in so far as I am a *person* too; and this further becomes apparent in our asking ourselves the question ‘Who am I?’ It is not that the question acquires legitimacy only when asked by someone suffering from amnesia: In fact it loses none of its meaningfulness even when asked by someone who is otherwise in full possession of all necessary and relevant details about himself. The asking by some such person of the question has surely not to do with his wishing to know certain more details about himself. It reflects perhaps a more ultimate concern about oneself, about one’s

*being* so to say, and does not become nugatory just because no clear-cut answer is forthcoming. The very asking of the question should be able to demonstrate that even when one is not exactly able to *disown* the characteristics that go to form one's particular individuality, one can still think oneself as *after all* dissociable from them. The *endistanced* and freer attitude which one is able in reflection to assume in respect of one's whole thinking and doing lends further confirmation to the observations made above.

It is passing over this prime fact about our identity as selves which makes Professor Gandhi look for non-referential identification of persons elsewhere — in the communicative ground. Alongside our non-predicative identification (by others) which Professor Gandhi insightfully maps out, there is also — and this he ignores — the awareness of the self which is not reducible or essentially relative to the features which we do ascribe to it. The quite intricate and intellectualistic procedure which Professor Gandhi lays down for our sense of self-identity therefore looks to be a pointless exercise.

As for the second difficulty, namely the difficulty concerning the distinction between identity in case of oneself and identity in case of others — in answer to which Professor Gandhi formulates his alternative, we may point out that the question of identity or identification in case of others is logically a separate problem not connected with the problem of self-identity in the sense indicated above, and should therefore be tackled on its own terms. Even while fully admitting that the other person can be directly apprehended as a self — in contradistinction, for example, to the inferential approach as enshrined in the 'argument from analogy — and to which Professor Gandhi's is also one answer,<sup>7</sup> it deserves to be noticed that the other's subjecthood cannot be known in the same way — in self-awareness — as our own subjecthood is. That is, even when recognizing a *you* as a subject, i.e., as one who could call himself "I" — and who thus is a possible "I" — the living

'enjoyment' which I have of the *I* which stands for my subject, is closed to me in respect of a you-subject. How then does the other come to be known as a subject of consciousness, is a problem which calls for separate treatment, and we shall therefore let it pass.

10. Let us now pass on to the concept of "I" on which Professor Gandhi has said quite many unusual things, and which therefore needs a brief consideration. Since Gandhi sees the question of self-identity as one of non-referential identification, the concept 'I' for him is "fundamentally the concept of an imagined audience." In speaking or thinking the thought 'I', the speaker does not intend his unique subjecthood, but rather 'posits' himself "as the object of an imagined act of addressing i.e., as an audience (20). The full version of the thought 'I' therefore turns out to be the thought 'I am called', 'I am uniquely picked out', etc. The concept 'I', as also the concepts 'you' and 'he', are thus primarily to be understood in terms of 'concepts of communication'. Now it may pertinently be asked: Is it legitimate to interpret the speaking of the word 'I' primarily as thinking' some thought. What kind of thinking the word 'I' embodies when, for instance, I say 'I am sad', 'I am in pain', etc. and all these to myself? What kind of identificatory role does 'I' play in these instances? Am I here identifying someone who is having these experiences? Am I strictly even ascribing certain experiences to myself? That would be clearly absurd. In talking about oneself in soliloquy, one does not identify oneself to oneself. Now does the use of the word 'I', considering the thought part, include here the additional experience of being imaginatively addressed by someone and the consequent communicative response on my part. And yet its use is not wholly meaningless. It here 'stands for' the subject who is *feelingly* aware of himself as getting expressed by it. The expression 'standing' for' I borrow from K. C. Bhattacharya,<sup>8</sup> and seems to me to capture the true character of the self, viz.

its *unique* subjecthood. And since on the view indicated above, the self cannot be its own object, this 'standing for' cannot, without sacrificing philosophical distinctions, be equated with 'referring', if referring involves some *object* — which is referred to. I suppose this must be the meaning of Anscombe when she suggests that 'I' cannot be a referring term at all.<sup>9</sup> (Notice that the 'I' being spoken of here is from the speaker's point of view, and not as understood by the hearer). Saying all this is not to deny that 'I' can or does perform some identificatory or referential function: only, that even while performing this function, it never gives up, despite appearances to the contrary, its non-referring sense, and therefore as such cannot be treated as on a par with any general terms such as "chair", "mountain", etc., whose referents, the objects, can be referred to by different subjects simultaneously. The first person singular, as used by different speakers, never means or refers to — speaking loosely — the same entity. It is always some unique subject that is intended by the word 'I'. This uniqueness of the subject remains unsoiled even in communication since there too 'I' is never assumed to be representing two parties in the communication. In fact, further, it is not only that 'I' expresses the subject but also, and equally truly, that the subject expresses himself and is aware of expressing himself through the word 'I'. Which means that simultaneously there also remains the feeling on the part of the subject that it could as well have been left unexpressed in this (objective) way. Awareness of self therefore is not dependent upon one's ability, or the use of this ability, to express oneself in speech — even though one does so express oneself as a matter of course — unless one has already accepted the position taken by Martin Buber that "the existence of I and the speaking of I are one and the same thing."<sup>10</sup> This means that the subject does not look upon speech as a 'built-in-affair',<sup>11</sup> but rather as a 'free construction'<sup>12</sup> from which he, as the speaker of 'I', can always, in consciousness, distinguish himself.

11. But this said, the problem of harmonizing the function of 'I' indicated above with its use in communication remains. And in communication I do seem to make identifying references to myself, so that it is not false to assume that there is a certain identificatory role to 'I'. And from this one might conclude, as indeed those like Strawson<sup>13</sup> have done, that there is just this referring sense of 'I', implying thereby that all further talk of its possible non-referential use must be meaningless. But this seems a rather hasty conclusion. We may insist that without losing its identificatory 'force' 'I' can at the same time retain its non-referential use too. And there seems no inherent incompatibility in this. Because even while performing its identificatory function, as when, the subject-speaker, in communication, refers to himself in attributive terms as 'I am so-and-so', 'I am such-and-such', 'I', from the subject's point of view, and in his consciousness, does by no means give up its non-referential or 'symbolic' sense. Only — and this of course is no less important — now a different aspect of our being comes to be emphasized, the aspect which relates to our being 'persons' too. It is then natural if its identificatory role should seem to be the more prominent — even to the extent of pushing wholly *out of notice* its non-referring 'standing for' sense and thereby leading, as it does, some to proclaim the concept of person as a logically 'primitive'<sup>14</sup> concept. But there is no over-powering reason why what appears natural should be the sole arbiter in such matters. The mere fact of communication, however, inescapable, does not alter the character of our experience of the self, nor does this experience become nugatory in the light of some fresh evidence — communication.

It may however still be argued that since 'I', as in our view, has no identificatory role to perform so far as our identity as selves (as rooted in self-awareness) is concerned, its so-called non-referential use becomes redundant,<sup>15</sup> and that this means that, in actual terms, the usefulness of 'I' remains restricted only for purposes of communication

and (hence) identification. To this we may reply that even though we do not need 'I' for identifying ourselves to ourselves, we yet, as language-users, may require, in a state of self-address, some personal pronoun so as to articulate our character as subjects, as distinct from the objects, and as set over against them, which duality as irrevocably embedded in our experience it may be our purpose to bring out in the act of narrating our experiences to ourselves. It then becomes obligatory for us to use the only first person singular our language provides us, even while the consciousness all the time remains that there is no identificatory role which is being discharged by 'I'.

The case is however different with communication. Communication, as said above, involves our being more than mere subjects of experience, viz. as persons, and it is with regard to the notion of person that questions of identification assume meaningfulness. But we are persons because we are subjects. The concept of persons, as C. O. Evans points out, "is logically more complex than the concept of subject, and is logically dependent upon the latter concept."<sup>16</sup> It then emerges that both the functions of 'I' remain valid in their respective spheres, and so its non-referential or symbolizing function need not be sacrificed in favour of its 'referring' function in the interest of some 'philosophical analysis'. Failure to grasp this root distinction is what leads to the prescription of only one mode of identification applicable to all and sundry, Strawson<sup>17</sup> looking for this identification in the referential role of 'I' (which for him is the only legitimate use of 'I') and Professor Gandhi advocating the idea of non-referential identification. Both the approaches however converge — despite this difference — firstly, in recommending only one mode of identification, and secondly, and what seems to be a natural extension of the former, in looking upon the identity (or identification) question from the third *person's point of view*. I think it is necessary to clarify that our purpose here is not to undermine the concept of person but



merely (though perhaps serviceably) to provide the needed corrective by pointing out certain philosophical distinctions and emphasizing the logically separate nature of the concepts involved, refusal to recognize which has resulted in much confusion and misconception. It is, however, a positive feature of Professor Gandhi's approach that even while putting the whole matter in identification-terms, he is at least able to look beyond referential identification, and thus avoid the pitfalls which any *mere* reductive analysis inevitably involves.

12. Lastly, Professor Gandhi considers the 'philosophical-religious' question 'Who am I?' which "I appear to discover at the heart of my conviction of self-identity" (31), and goes on to ask whether it makes sense to ask oneself a question like this. Ruling this possibility out on the ground that 'literal' self-communication is not possible — since it involves, as a necessary condition, addressing oneself which on Gandhi's view is impossible — he declares that "in what appears to be a case of asking myself questions, I *attend* to questions" (31), and this according to him involves 'imagining' somebody as asking me the question 'Who are you?' While this imagining would, in one sense, certainly give me the sense of having been vocatively identified and (hence) my self-identity, in another sense I would remain at a complete loss as to what answer to give to the above question. This is because while the usual reply that I am so-and-so would be misplaced since "I don't have to give myself these details" (31), any other reply based on inward experience would be a non-starter. It would be a non-starter because the question, as Gandhi sees it, is a question which concerns the 'concept'<sup>18</sup> of 'being myself' or 'being a human being' and "*being a human being* or *being myself* is not an experience of mine to which I have an inward access" (3). The question then calls for a conceptual enquiry (4), and that can be accomplished only by 'philosophical analysis'. The concept of 'I' or 'myself', according to Gandhi and as seen above, involves the experience not only of having been

non-referentially and vocatively picked out, but also, as Gandhi says, of being *regarded* — not of *being* — as ‘myself’, as a soul, in the act of addressing (by a ‘you’, actual or imagined). (Recall here the distinction that Gandhi draws between introspective experience and reflective self-consciousness.<sup>19</sup>) And since, from this point of view, there can be no question of someone regarding himself as a soul — for this would mean ‘literally’ addressing oneself, and that is declared impossible (33) — what we have here is a situation where all other admissible senses of the above question have been by stipulation excluded, by eliminating all admissible answers to it. How can inward experience supply an answer to the question ‘Who am I?’ when the concept of ‘myself’ is not even inwardly accessible? How can one ask the question concerning the nature of (one’s) soul when one cannot even have the experience of being a soul,<sup>20</sup> cannot even regard himself as being a soul. (“So I cannot, except profoundly mistakenly, regard myself as a soul, believe that I am a soul”) (33). Professor Gandhi does not so much as even pause to consider whether the question may not plausibly be asked by a person suffering from loss of memory. Such a person would certainly be ignorant of any information about himself, his name, address, his profession, his past, and so on, and would therefore appear justified in asking the question, ‘Who am I?’ Notice that the question will concern not his identity as subject (-self) of his present experience, but his identity as having been so-and-so and such-and-such, i.e., his identity in predicative or descriptive terms. (These details about him would, on the other hand, be known to those familiar with him.) In fact his experience of being a subject would be *necessary* to his being able at all to ask himself this question. (And it is in this sense that our awareness of our identity as selves can survive loss of memory.) Or differently, the question, as hinted above, might be of a more philosophical type and concern the nature of the self or our being. And such a question could be asked regardless of whether one knows certain details about himself or not. (This knowledge can clearly

not supply any answer to the question.) One may not succeed in finding an answer, or the right answer, to this, question. Yet — and despite its 'dizziness-producing' character — the question as in these senses cannot be wished away as a false or pseudo question. And if Professor Gandhi does question the legitimacy of this question, it is because he has different ideas about self-identity — the ideas which we have examined and found mistaken. It is because of his communication-oriented bias that Professor Gandhi is not able — even while providing useful insights into how human beings are able to see each other as souls in the vocative act — to throw any significant light on the question of our experience of self which alone is relevant to the problem of self-identity.

Department of Philosophy, RAMESH KUMAR SHARMA  
University of Delhi,  
Delhi.

#### NOTES

My thanks are due to Professor S. K. Saxena, Department of Philosophy, University of Delhi, for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

1. Ramchandra Gandhi, *The Availability of Religious Ideas*, Library of Philosophy and Religion Series (London): The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976). All parenthetical page references are to this book.
2. In the same vein Professor Gandhi observes: "My awareness of being myself, in the sense in question, appears not to depend on my knowledge or ignorance of facts about myself." *Ibid.*, p. 22.
3. It deserves to be noticed that Gandhi not only draws a sharp distinction between introspection and self-consciousness, but also means by the latter something different from what it is usually taken to be. While introspection means, for him, any 'inward experience, introspective or meditative' (*Ibid.*, p. 3) self-consciousness is a state which is gained by being addressed by the other. "Only an act of being addressed is capable of rendering one self-conscious in the *first instance*." *Ibid.*, p. 100; also p. 101.

- And it is on this basis that we are subsequently imaginatively able to 'sustain self-consciousness and apprehend ourselves as being vocatively and non-referentially identified. "Inward experience," on the other hand, "can do nothing of the kind because *being a human being or being myself* is not an experience of mine to which I have an inward access..." *Ibid.*, p. 3 (Last italics ours).
4. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: J. & J. Clark, 1958; 1st ed. 1937), p. 4.
  5. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, Pbk., 1979), p. 113. Elsewhere Hegel says: "Self-consciousness is real only in so far as it recognizes its echo (and its reflection) in another." Quoted in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, pbl., 1972, 1st ed. 1966), p. 321.
  6. Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 2 Vols. (Lanham: University Press of America, pbl. n.d., Regnery Gateway reissue; 1st Harvill Press ed. 1950), I, 86. Marcel draws attention to a certain paradox which, according to him, consists in the fact that a person appears to himself "both as a somebody and not a somebody, a particular individual and not a particular individual." (*Ibid.*) and gives the "mysterious reality", in relation to which the definite characteristics forming one's personality are seen as contingent, the name of 'subject'. Marcel, further, looks upon the subjects as a kind of "sacred" reality to be found in mystics. "That feeling which has always been so strong, not only among Christian mystics, but in, for instance, a Stoic like Marcus Aurelius, of a certain sacred reality in the self cannot be separated from an apprehension of the self in its subjectivity." *Ibid.*, p. 87.
  7. In so far as the 'address' theory has a bearing on the question of the apprehension of other subjects or selves, Ramchandra Gandhi has been anticipated by K. C. Bhattacharyya. See the latter's *Studies in Philosophy*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1958), II, pp. 22f. For a fuller exposition of his views see Kalidas Bhattacharyya, *The Fundamentals of K. C. Bhattacharyya's Philosophy* (Calcutta: Saraswat Library, 1975), pp. 82-84; 167-168. Kalidas Bhattacharyya in fact goes on to develop the 'address' approach in further detail. See his essay entitled "Self and Others" in his *Philosophy, Logic and Language* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1965).
  8. K. C. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, II, 19.
  9. G. E. M. Anscombe, "The First Person", in S. Guttenplan (ed.), *Mind and Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

10. Martin Buber, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
11. Kalidas Bhattacharyya, *The Fundamentals of K. C. Bhattacharyya's Philosophy*, p. 77.
12. *Ibid.*
13. To get the view of Strawson clear I quote here the following lengthy passage :

"It is easy to become intensely aware of the immediate character, of the purely inner basis, of such self-ascription while both retaining the sense of ascription to a subject and forgetting that immediate reports of experience have this character of ascriptions to a subject only because of the links I have mentioned with ordinary criteria of personal identity. Thus there arises a certain illusion: the illusion of a purely inner and yet subject-referring use for 'I'. If we try to abstract this use, to shake off the connection with ordinary criteria of personal identity, to arrive at a kind of subject-reference which is wholly and adequately based on nothing but inner experience, what we really do is simply to deprive our use of 'I' of any referential force whatever. It will simply express, as Kant would say, 'consciousness in general'. If we nevertheless continue to think of the 'I' as having referential force, as referring to a subject, then just because we have really nothing left but the bare form of reference, it will appear that the object of this reference must be an object of singular purity and simplicity — a pure, individual, immaterial substance." P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., pbk., rep. 1976; 1st ed. 1966), p. 166. It would be seen that Strawson here does notice a 'purely inner' use of 'I', but since he has already convinced himself as to the exclusiveness of the referring sense of 'I' — a view which results, in his case too, from his eagerness to have only one mode of identification for all — he comes to look upon other use of 'I' as illusory.

14. Thus P. T. Geach has argued — even while agreeing that 'I' serves no identificatory or referring role in respect of one's own self — that its use in soliloquy, for instance, is otiose or 'superfluous'. It is only because we are "habituated" to the use of 'I' as in expressing our thoughts to others that we use it in soliloquy and so, he concludes, "when there are no others, 'I' is redundant and has no special reference." Peter Geach, *Mental Acts* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971; 1st ed. 1957), pp. 118-120. The quotation occurs on p. 120. Strawson's view has already been referred to above and in footnote 13.

15. This is the view advanced e.g., by Strawson. See P. F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, pbk., rep. 1977; 1st ed. 1959), p. 103. Contrasting his concept of 'person' with what he regards as the concept of 'pure subject' or 'ego', Strawson concludes that 'I' does not refer to the latter (since there is no such thing as 'pure subject — which, if at all, enjoys only a 'logically secondary existence') but only to the person. "So then, the word 'I' never refers to this, the 'pure-subject'. But this does not mean ... that 'I' in some cases does not refer at all. It refers; because *I am a person among others.*" *Ibid.* (Italics ours) As in contrast with such views is the view of Chisholm who brilliantly and forcefully argues that a person first individuates himself *per se* and without reference to any other thing. Roderick M. Chisholm, *Person and Object* (London: 1976), Chapter 1, especially pp. 31-37.
16. C. O. Evans, *The Subject of Consciousness* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1970), p. 175.
17. Strawson's advocacy of a uniform mode of identification is connected with his view of the concept of person as a primitive concept (see footnote 15) or vice versa. If I am just one person 'among others', how can the mode of identification in my case be different from what it is in case of others? In according logical priority to the concept of person, Strawson, it seems, is being essentially governed by the twin concerns of verification and linguistic usage. There is also the unwarranted assumption that any attempt which makes one's own experience the starting-point for exploration of the concept of subject must inevitably lead to Pure Ego, to what Strawson calls 'a pure, individual, immaterial substance'. (And hence his alternative in the form of the concept of person which, as he sees it, not only obviates the need for starting with one's own case as a critical condition, but in fact, instead, involves identification of others as a prior condition for identification of oneself [*Individuals*, pp. 99, 100]). But this, if the foregoing discussion is any indication, need not be so. Nor is there any reason why the concept of 'person' and 'pure ego' should exhaust between them all the possibilities.

It would be seen that distrust of inward experience is what leads Professor Gandhi also to postulate only one mode of identification, its difference from the one recommended by Strawson notwithstanding. It may also be further noted that with Strawson (*Ibid.*, pp. 89, 93) — as indeed with Gandhi (see below), though in a different way, — self-awareness (or self-acquaintance) is reduced to the possession of the 'idea' or 'concept' of oneself. In Strawson, in fact, this 'concept' of *myself* reduces

to the concept of a person. Now while this equation indeed begs question, it appears presumptuous philosophically to treat awareness of something as a concept of that thing. Constraints of space however prohibit me from pursuing the question — especially Strawson's concept of person — any further.

18. Gandhi, *op. cit.*, pp. 3, 4. See also footnote 17. Elsewhere he observes: "...perhaps one can say that in self-consciousness one is vouchsafed a vivid thought or *idea* of oneself as a soul, i.e., as, quite simply, oneself." *Op. cit.*, p. 33.
19. See Footnote 3.
20. "The conviction of self-identity which pervades my mental life is not an *experience* of oneself as oneself," and "one can think of self-consciousness as vouchsafing not an experience but a powerful *picture* of oneself as soul." Gandhi, *op. cit.*, p. 35. (Latter italics ours).

# The Philosophy of Kalidas Bhattacharya

Proceedings of a seminar organised by the Department of Philosophy, Rajasthan University, the book contains a critical appraisal of various aspects of the late **Kalidas Bhattacharya's** philosophical thought; and includes his own final formulation of his philosophical position.

Edited by **Daya Krishna, A. M. Ghose, P. K. Srivastava** (et al).

The book includes contributions from **K. L. Sharma** (A Step Beyond K. C. Bhattacharya), **Daya Krishna** (Kalidas Bhattacharya and the Logic of Alternation), **S. K. Chattopadhyaya** (Professor Bhattacharya's "Alternative Standpoints" of Philosophy), **K. Bagchi** ('Subjective and Objective' Attitudes as Alternatives: A Study of Professor Kalidas Bhattacharya's view of Knowledge-Object Unity), **N. K. Sharma** (Kalidas Bhattacharya's Philosophy; Alternative Absolutes), **R. S. Bhatnagar** (Philosophy and Meta-Philosophy: Study of a Fundamental Dichotomy in Kalidas Bhattacharya's thought), **Mrs. Yogesh Gupta** (Pre-suppositions of Science and Philosophy: A Critical Study), **Mrinal Kanti Bhadra** (Kalidas Bhattacharya's View of Freedom and Existentialist Thought), **Rajendra Prasad** (Freedom and Existential Thought), **Rajendra Prasad Pandey** (Kalidas Bhattacharya on the Indian Concept of Man), **K. J. Shah** (Religion—Sophisticated and Unsophisticated), **J. N. Mohanty** (Kalidas Bhattacharya as Meta-physician).

1/8 Demy, Pages 239. Price Rs. 60/-

Contact : Organising Editor,  
Department of Philosophy,  
Indian Philosophical Quarterly,  
Poona University, PUNE 411 007.



## EUTHANASIA — A MORAL NECESSITY

Euthanasia may be defined as the doctrine or theory that under certain circumstances, when the life of a man becomes a burden to himself or to the society, he should be allowed to be painlessly killed either by himself or by others. All ethical problems involve at least two kinds of questions: one — what kind of things ought to exist for their own sake? and two: what actions are to be performed? Whether an action is a right action or duty. The two questions are obviously inter-related. Any consideration of the subject under discussion presents some fundamental problems. Firstly it may easily be conceived as recommending and encouraging suicide or wholesale murder of the aged or the infirm; secondly any theory prescribing euthanasia may adversely influence people of weak will; thirdly and the most important problem is regarding the practical application of euthanasia. But euthanasia can be shown to be justified in theory and the obstacles in the practical application can be dealt with.

Are there any circumstances under which a doctor might seem justified — or rather duty-bound to give his patient a painless death? The question can be considered from legal, medical, religious and moral points of view. If medical and moral points of view favour euthanasia yet the law of any country forbids it, then so much the worse for the law because law is nothing but the outward expression of man's will either by the society or by the state. Medical consideration is also basically a moral or religious consideration. The purpose of the present article is to show that the main responsibility of justifying in favour or against euthanasia falls on our moral principles along with the difficulties and obstacles implied in the application of our final decision. We must also agree that the problem be viewed from humanitarian point of view.

The question at the outset is that if a man is suffering from a terminal disease, whether he himself or if he is past taking this decision, his relatives and doctors have a right to decide that he should be allowed to depart in peace. In order that euthanasia may have the sanction of the state in the form of law or have a moral or social sanction, one would be obliged to encounter prejudices, time honoured religious beliefs and the moral feeling that human life is too sacred and valuable to be taken except under a few very definite conditions. It may be thought that euthanasia would constitute a new form of justifiable homicide and unless most strictly regulated, would lead to an increase in sundry forms of crime already too common. Thus if it were legally recognized that an infant, afflicted with an incurable physical incapacity or with idiocy, might be put to death, then a new excuse for infanticide — terribly prevalent in the case of illegitimate children, would at once be provided. Suicide also would be likely to become more common than now if, for example, persons suffering from a disease known or supposed to be, incurable, were rather encouraged to take their lives than discouraged from it.

On the other hand we can hardly refuse to recognize that an application of the doctrine of euthanasia would provide a solution for many grave problems which modern state and society are obliged to face. An example already mentioned that in all countries a great number of children are born with a high degree of incapacity — physical, mental or both. Though a certain proportion of these can be cured by proper medical attention, yet majority of them cannot be made normal by all the resources of modern surgery and medicine. The only substitute for euthanasia is segregation and training and this involves besides heavy expenses the more important factor of diverting the abilities and energies of a number of physicians etc., from other fields of activity. And even in most favourable cases the adequacy of the result may be doubtful. And this leaves out of account many cases whose physical or mental disabilities

may offer little or no hope of improvement. A carefully controlled system of euthanasia, on the contrary, would eliminate the more hopeless cases.

But in the very necessity of control lies the great difficulty. In spite of the fact that taking of life is allowed in battle, self-defence or capital punishment, there still remains the general feeling that life is a valuable asset and the question as to whether, in any society an authority could be found competent to decide whether a given individual deserved to live or not, and to carry out the decision in practice. Our greatest difficulty would be regarding those cases where it is obviously most difficult, if not impossible to judge whether a helpless cripple, known to possess considerable intellectual power is or is not more of a burden to the society by reason of constant attention he will require, than a benefit to it because of his possibilities of brain work.

Another vexing problem would be the appointment of the authority to take such decisions, because there is always a likelihood of abuse in practice. But the danger of abuse in practice is present in most of the spheres of human life, possibly in all cases where the subjective element in taking decisions is inevitable. Plato permits suicide on justifiable causes like intolerable pain, disgrace etc. At present Japan and some other countries permit euthanasia. And even in the countries where it is not legally permitted there is a strong feeling in favour of it.

Are we normally bound to contribute to the idea of duty or obligation to save life at any cost? The idea of inherent and absolute value of human life is merely an unnecessary tabu. It is easy to understand why and how the idea that life has inherent and absolute value is still acceptable to some individuals and societies. Early impressions are very lasting both in the individual and the society and the formidable conservative and pedagogical forces have been put forward by primitive religions. But there is a stronger force

that must be given its due attention. The need to reflect at the level of morality and reason. Many things are clearly good because they lead to other goods or lesser of the two evils. It is the subjective sentiment that prevents man from sanctioning euthanasia. But we must go beyond our personal desires and feelings and religious tabus, because values are independent of them. "Life is complex and changing and consists of exceptional cases in the sense that it is made up of particular actions and particular actions are always performed in particular circumstances. "Truth" is of great value but under certain circumstances falsehood may be more desirable than truth. In the same way life may be of great value but under certain circumstances death may be preferable to life.

The argument generally given by medical authorities and religious convictions is that we have no right to destroy a life that we can not create. The argument does not carry much weight because firstly we do not hesitate to destroy animal life so it is not life as such that is of value; and secondly saving life at what cost? Unremedial pain, endless heartache and despair. It would rather amount to a humiliation of man if we put abstract truth above the life of dignity and honour. Let us not allow them to vegetate and rot till their last moment.

Is it only the life that has to be preserved or a life which can manifest values (knowledge, love, appreciation of beauty etc.). If it is only the life that is to be saved then why do we discriminate between human life and animal life. We do not mind putting an animal to eternal sleep if it is suffering from excruciating pain or a terminal disease; but we do not allow our fellow beings to depart with dignity. Do we prefer to exhibit the sufferings of man and not of an animal? Does man suffer less because he is a man? Are we treating him as a person when we know the futility of living like a shrivelled cabbage — when we know that the going is inevitable? The best tribute that we can pay to such a person is to help him in a quick exit.

There is no difference of opinion regarding the belief that human life derives its value from its rationality which is nothing but the realization of higher values. And when rationality is gone, nothing remains to be retained. When the existence of a life does not constitute its value then life has no intrinsic value which can demand preservation at any cost. If we isolate such human lives, which are a burden to themselves and to others, and imagine a world in which they alone and none but they existed, their intrinsic worthlessness becomes apparent.

Mere existence of that which is just life has value so little, as to be negligible. This simple truth has been universally recognised. What has not been recognised is that it is the ultimate and fundamental truth of morality. The sole decision must rest with our reflective judgement upon it. We should guard ourselves against false sentimentalism. In such instances we are considering the cases of wholes in which one or more parts have a great negative value, they are rather real positive evils. Can such a whole ever be positively good on the whole? We should not attribute superior values to inferior objects. Extreme formalistic thinking leads to fanaticism and sentimentalism. Any theory of morality must in the end become teleological — we must accept a hierarchy of values.

We may conclude, with reference to the present discussion, the two questions raised earlier. It can be said that life is not something which ought to exist for its own sake. It is not sufficient that a man should merely live; it is required that he should also be in a position to fulfil the purpose of life. So that the question whether a life is truly valuable or not depends upon the objective question whether the whole life in question is or is not truly good, and does not depend on the question whether it would or would not excite particular sentiments of some persons.

So far as the question of action is concerned it is no doubt extremely difficult to find the authority to take deci-

sion regarding the course of action, yet any final answer is capable of proof or disproof. Many different considerations are relevant to the decision's truth or falsehood. Evidence in relation to each case is both necessary and relevant. The evidence must contain truth with regard to results of action in question along with self-evident truths. Then only the final answer can be obtained. And that will minimize the danger of abuse in practice.

It is obvious that in order to decide correctly at what state of things we ought to aim, we must not only consider what result it is possible for us to obtain but also which among equally possible results will have the greatest value. The central problem of morality is not to discover the formal tests for particular acts of commission and omission but the determination of the value of the form of life that is to be aimed at. We will have to accept that to some extent morality has to be hypothetical the ideals and ends cannot be determined universally and uniformly. It is not life as such that is to be prolonged but only a life where rationality can progress, a life pregnant with values, hopes and fulfilments.

Department of Philosophy,  
University of Jodhpur,  
JODHPUR.

P. MISHRA