

## BOOK REVIEWS

### REVIEW ARTICLE

1. Gangavane Deepti, *DIALOGUES OF REASONABLENESS* Poona Nimitta Prakashan, 1995, pp. vi+132. PRICE RS. 200/-

This book may be broadly identified as a work in the philosophy of language. But at the same time it is far away from the main stream of philosophy of language -- the dominant thinking of which is that the philosophy of language has an autonomy of its own. This book is an implicit revolt against this conception of the philosophy of language being autonomous. At a constructive level, it seeks to unite the philosophy of language with other segments of knowledge, such as, sociology of language, epistemology, rhetorics etc. This constitutes a unified conception of the philosophy of language as being uniquely characterized by a moral concern.

One of the most noted features of this work is to emphasize that the philosophy of language cannot be devoid of human/moral concern. The reason is that the concern for others, as the author claims, can be shown to be one of the chief functions of language. But how does it happen? This needs clarification. The idea of moral concern essentially implies the moral use of language. But it should also be noted that this dimension of language does not confine itself to mere analysis of moral words and concepts. This is where the author calls for a new conception of the philosophy of language. In this conception, language used as a mode of persuasion, becomes the focal point. This brings a change in the existing structure of the philosophy of language. In this respect, the pattern of the argument used by the author in her work may be summarised in the following pages.

First is the conception of language. The author offers what may be called the rhetorical conception of language, where language is defined as performing

the function of a rhetoric. This is how persuasion or the persuasive use of language comes to the forefront of language, where persuasion means to persuade others as well as to be persuaded by others.

The second argument is to see how persuasion and language are related. The best way to study the former will be to study it through the latter. Persuading or more specifically persuading each other is an ability. It is an ability which is exhibited only through language. In fact, there is no other way through which one can study this particular competence of man which may be termed as persuasive competence. It presupposes man's capacity to use symbols and to respond to it appropriately. These symbols are significant because they presuppose a system of meaning which are established through linguistic means. Even the non-linguistic symbols which are sometimes used for the purpose of persuasion are understood and interpreted through these meanings expressed in language. Thus, the ability to persuade which forms what the author calls persuasive competence can be studied through language or, more appropriately, through persuasive use of language.

The third argument of the author seeks to give an account of the nature of this persuasive competence. It has been said that human beings have the ability to use language persuasively. This linguistic ability is possible because human beings have the ability to persuade each other. This ability which is specific to human is not possessed by animals. An important point that is implicit here is that man's ability to persuade others through the use of language is essentially a reflection on his/her ability to communicate with each other. Unless one has the latter ability he cannot have the former also. The latter ability has been described in the literature as communicative competence which is the basis of persuasive competence since it is viewed as a specific type of communication. The author while defining and explaining persuasive competence as communicative competence, relies on Habermas's theory of communicative competence. Her point is that the ultimate objective of persuasive competence is to arrive at certain consensus through rational means. Persuading other is a rational activity because it is a form of communication and being a form of communication it must observe the norms of communication or speech act.

The author's final argument is directed to show the nature of rationality involved in persuasion. This leads to an important discussion on the idea of

reason, rationality and reasonableness. The crucial question here is : what sort of rationality is involved in the speech act of persuasion? This question arises due to a practical problem. It is argued that the consensus or the agreement to which one arrives at in the speaker-hearer situation must be though rational means. This is where the need to clarify the nature of rationality involved in the context of persuasion and in the larger context of communication, in general, arises. The nature of rationality involved here is different from the standard notion of rationality which is viewed mainly in terms of certain deductive relationship. The best example of such mode of reasoning is found in the formal - deductive systems of logic and pure mathematics. As against this deductive model of reasoning, the author argues that there is another form or made of reasoning which may be characterized as the notion of reasonableness. Aruguments falling within the scope of recsonableness are nondeductive in nature. Hence, in an argument one may not arrive at the conclusion by following any mechanical procedure. It is quite conceivable in this picture that one may accept the premise of an argument but denies its conclusion. This speaks for the non-compulsive noture of the argument. Due to this non-compulsive nature such arguments are not universally binding. They are context-specific. In fact, the notion of 'other' becomes very important. The reason is that the hearer to whom the argument is addressed constitutes the basis for the validity of the argument. The hearer's acceptance of the argument forms the criterion by which the conclusion is established. Persuasive reasoning because of its peculiar nature does not assume any formal a *priori* model of reasoning. But at the same time to consider it as irrational just because it does not conform the formal mode of reasoning will be a gross error. In the author's defense, persuasive competence involves reasoning and the best way to characterise it will be to do it in terms of reasonableness. One may call it as the expression of practical reason.

The concept of reasonableness associated with persuasive communication presupposes a social situation. It is in the situation of a dialogue that reasonableness finds its foothold. Since the concept of reasonableness cannot be conceived without the speaker-hearer situation the essential characteristics of reasonableness is dialogical in nature. A rational persuasion is possible only through the situation of a dialogue since the latter ensures the active participation of the hearer. Through such participation disagreement between the speaker and the audience is overcome. Disagreement is the very basis of persuasion. In fact,

without the former the latter will have no role.

Taking dialogue as central to the understanding of language we can have dialogical paradigm as against monological paradigm in the philosophy of language. A monological paradigm is one where language is chiefly viewed in terms of certain fixed logical order. This is not so in the case of a dialogical paradigm where, as the author claims, language is viewed not as logical but as rhetorical. The rhetorical approach defines language in terms of communication where the notion of inter subjectivity of language is accepted as its very foundation. This brings, as the author shows, a radical change in our conception of knowledge, science and logic.

Finally comes the moral implication of persuasion. The author really identifies rational with moral. The structure of her argument is : that which is rational is also moral. A persuasion is reasonable if it is not manipulative. Such a persuasion is both rational and moral. In this conception of rational and moral persuasion the notion of 'other' is projected as independent individual enjoying freedom and dignity. The individual is never treated as means so that he can be manipulated. That is the reason why freedom and dignity are to be granted to individual. A rational persuasion is thus necessarily moral in nature.

In the above I have presented the author's view point. I have highlighted the nature of this work, its significance and the contribution that it makes. But, I suppose, there can be also a reviewer's view point without which the review of a book will be incomplete. Having this in mind, I now intend to raise certain points pertaining to the central theme of this work, namely, reasonableness.

The author's discussion of reason, rationality and reasonableness has failed to note that there is a line of continuity existing between these concepts. The concepts like rationality, reasonableness, intelligence etc., are all related to a primary concept which is really the concept of reason. Since these concepts are expressions of reason they have an overlapping nature. From the author's account it appears that there is a sharp contrast between rhetorical approach and logical approach. The former is associated with reasonableness and the latter is associated with rationality. I am not denying the obvious difference between the two. But to consider them as mutually opposed will be certainly wrong. That they have an overlapping nature is evident if we see the principal components and the structure of the concept of reason. The following discussion will help

to clarify my contention.

Reasoning as a process involves two aspects. At one level, it is specific to the situation and at another level, it transcends situations. At the first level, call it a situational level, reason is closely associated with intelligence. As Piaget<sup>1</sup> observes, in the development of reason the link between the two cannot be denied. In fact, rationality which involves lot more than intelligence has its root in the latter. It may be viewed as the development of the latter. The claim that at the situational level reason mostly expresses itself through intelligence can be easily substantiated from the expressions that we use to describe such situations. We thus often characterize a particular behaviour or thought in a situation as intelligent or stupid. We say this because there is a novelty in agent's behaviour as against his routine behaviour. These cases are so specific to situations that there is no influence of general rules on them. The thought or the behaviour concern is mostly guided by immediate impulses and current experience.

However, this whole scenario changes once we consider the notion of rationality. Let me explain this. Being rational or reasonable is different from being intelligent. This is evident from our every day use of language. We often say, for example small children or animals as intelligent or stupid but not rational or irrational. The reason is that we understand rational behaviour in terms of certain general rules. His action is called rational due to certain general consideration. They form a system of reasoning which is presupposed by a rational behaviour or thought. Now this system of background reasoning may not be present when we say a particular behaviour is intelligent or stupid. Reason or the process of reasoning at the situational level is thus not influenced by any general rules of rationality. Reason is confined only to the present situation and thus what matters here is the novelty of the situation. This is how at this stage reason is closely associated with intelligence.

The transcendence of reason implies reason going beyond the present situation. In the above, I have explained what this transcendence means in the context of reason. It is obvious from the above explanation that reason identified as rationality involves abstraction. Rationality becomes co-extensive with general rules or norms. To call something as rational it must satisfy certain standards -- the standards of rationality, such as, consistency, avoiding contradiction, relevance etc. These are general norms of reason and any developed form of

reasoning will try to achieve these standards. The aspiration to satisfy these normative demands is independent of any situation. This is the way how it becomes the part of the *a priori* forms. On the same consideration deductive reasoning is taken to be the ideal mode of reasoning. To identify this abstract nature of reasoning with the positivist ideal will be grossly erroneous. I am afraid the author has done a similar mistake. Reason is situational or contextual but at the same time it is context - transcendent. The latter feature comes as a part of the development of reason. One needs to see reason in its totality and the continuity that it has between its various phases. In this respect, perhaps we cannot make any formal separation between rationality and reasonableness. These distinctions should be viewed as different phases in the development of reason. I shall come to this later by offering a few details.

In the above, I have argued that norms of reason are the expressions of transcendent nature of reason. Further to this argument, I would like to point out, following the celebrated work of P. S. Peter<sup>2</sup> that norms of reason are accompanied by certain attitudes or emotions. An individual in order to be rational has a concern for consistency and he thus wants to avoid contradiction. There is no doubt that consistency, relevance and impartiality are the normative demands of reason but they may be also taken as values which the individual possesses because they influence the individual to think, to infer, to form beliefs and to act in a certain way, namely, rational way. They are really meant to search for truth. In view of this argument, it may be pointed out that the author's attempt to show that consistency is the mere tool of formal logic is one sided. I think she takes rationality in isolation from the development of reason. All the formal characteristics of rationality are the expressions of transcendence of reason which are supported by certain value considerations as possessed by human beings.

Let me now come to the question : can we formally separate rationality from reasonableness? In this respect a quick look at the taxonomy of these two concepts will be sufficient to answer the question. Rational and irrational form a pair. There is a contrast between these two terms. The term 'irrational' is applied to a situation where there is a belief or action for which there is no good reason. In fact, it is better to describe it as a total lack of reason. A similar thing does not apply to the expression 'unreasonable'. It is not a total lack of reason. An unreasonable man has reasons for what he believes or does. But the reasons

that he has are very weak. For example, a biased man is not an irrational man but he is an unreasonable man. This shows that unlike rationality - irrationality there is no mutual opposition between reasonable and unreasonable. The point that I am trying to make is that there is no clear cut line between reasonable and unreasonable. The line that we draw is arbitrary.

Due to the arbitrariness involved in the use of 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable', we find that there is also arbitrariness in the very use of the term 'reasonable'. The term 'reasonable' may have multiple uses. The two basic senses in which the term can be used is the strong and the mild sense. In its mild sense, the term 'reasonable' implies that an individual is willing to listen to other's arguments. It is also a fact that the term is widely used in this way. but at the same time we can not ignore the strong sense which implies adherence to a certain strict sense of rationality. This may be fund, for example,<sup>2</sup> in a situation where an individual chooses to be impartial and objective in order to defend, say, the rights and interests of the minority group. Here the term 'reasonable' functions in a much more rigid way. The concern for others is there but that concern is not the result of any dialogue. The term 'reasonable' thus behaves in the same way as 'rationality'. The strong sense of the use of the word 'reasonable' shows that a formal separation between 'reasonable' and 'rationality' cannot be systematically maintained.

I would now like to turn my attention to another important aspect of this work, namely, communication competence. In a sense it provides the necessary theoretical framework within which the author develops her thesis on persuasive competence. As mentioned earlier, regarding the idea of communicative competence the author entirely depends on Habermas. In fact, without the theory of communicative competence of Habermas, the author possibly could not develop her theory of persuasive competence. While this is an entirely understandable strategy on the part of the author the problem lies with her uncritical acceptance of Habermas's theory. As I understand, Habermas's theory is not without flaws and I am afraid that these flaws may have serious consequences for the theory of persuasive competence as developed in the present work. In this connection I am pointing out the two important aspects of Habermas's theory<sup>3</sup>, namely the concept of universality and the concept of man. I shall briefly discuss both these concepts and will show its implication for the present theory.

Habermas defines language in terms of communication since the latter is the basic unit in terms of which, as he argues, an adequate analysis of language is possible. The view that language is communication is not something new. What is new or distinctive is the new dimension that Habermas adds to this view. This is the dimension of competence not with respect to language but with respect to communication. Analogous to linguistic competence, Habermas calls it communicative competence. The former describes individual's ability to speak grammatically correct sentences, whereas the latter describes individual's ability to communicate with others. The necessary implication of it is that Habermas is talking about certain presuppositions or conditions of communication. To this effect, his concrete proposal is that native speakers possess a knowledge of a set of universals which may be characterized as pragmatic or dialogue-constitutive universals. Without these universals there cannot be any successful communication and particularly speech act. These universals expressed through certain common linguistic elements are meant to provide the general structures of the speech situation. The speakers while performing speech acts use these universals with a purpose to attain such structures. Further, while they learn language they acquire these universals which constitute speakers' communicative competence. This is a stand which speaks for the acceptance of universal pragmatics. The author also accepts the same pragmatic conditions for communication which are universally shared by all speakers of a language.

The greatest danger that the author faces here is by assuming universal pragmatics as a framework of her inquiry. By assuming it as a framework she unknowingly subscribes to an essentialistic view of language which she herself denies in her work. The essentialism comes from the very theory of Habermas since it gives an account of language acquisition with the help of universals. These universals though pragmatic in nature have the same thrust as that of the rationalist notion of universal. In view of this, it may be reasonably argued that due to this rationalistic orientation her theory has the same defects as that of the rationalistic theory of universals as found in Chomsky's linguistic theory.

The idea of universality can be most prominently seen in Habermas's analysis of speech acts. According to him speech acts can be confined to certain standard forms. The formulation of these standard forms has its justification. The justification comes from man's communicative ability. On this, Habermas

offers two-level explanation. To put the point briefly, first, all speech situations are characterized by certain distinctions and, second, the speaker's ability to draw these distinctions presupposes his mastery of various kinds of speech acts. There is a strong sense of universality involved here with respect to both these points.

The supposed notion of universality can be criticised. But for our purpose, the more important thing is to see the essentialist picture of language that is emerging out of this account. As I understand, the author subscribes to a similar view of speech act where persuasion is taken as one of the fundamental forms of speech acts. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in this approach. But this approach inevitably leads to the acceptance of something that which is ideal. Habermas talks of ideal communication. A similar view is held by the author. But to make idealization implies accepting rationalism though that may be unnoticed by the person who is making it. I am afraid the author has become the victim of a similar situation.

The essentialist picture of language/communication leads to an essentialist picture of man. In Habermas's work on communication we find the picture of an abstract man -- a rational subject. As Habermas argues, the genuine agreement between the speaker and the hearer is possible only when it is prompted by reason. In her work, the author has argued at length that persuasion implies a rational process. The agreement reached as the result of persuasion cannot be anything other than rational. But I do not think it is true on a simple ground that there are large number of cases which defy the so called rational process as mentioned by the author. The fact is that people can come to an agreement on the ground of emotion. This may be a viable way of coming to a genuine agreement. The alternative ways to arrive at genuine argument is possible. This possibility comes from the very nature of man since man is the totality of both reason and emotion. The author has failed to notice the importance of emotion in human nature and thus unknowingly arrives at an abstract picture of man.

I think a way out to this situation is possible. Instead of assuming such problematic notions like pragmatic universals and communicative competence we may consider something else that will constitute the framework of the present inquiry. For this purpose, the particular theory that I have in my mind is the theory of conversational implicature proposed by Paul Grice.<sup>4</sup> In fact, in my

opinion, one of the lacuna of the book under review is that it does not take any note of Grice's work which has a considerable significance in the context of the author's discussion on communication and speech act. I shall now give a brief argument to show this connection.

It has been widely accepted that the notion of conversational implicature is one of the most important ideas developed in pragmatics. Its major contribution is that it shows the power of pragmatic explanation of linguistic phenomena. The implicature or the pragmatic inference that we draw from a speech situation has its source which is lying outside of language. In fact, the very need to have this concept arises because otherwise we cannot explain the fact of cooperative interaction among people which is the chief feature of communication.

As Grice puts it, the concept of implicature may be viewed as a theory concerning how people use language. Conversation follows a logic consisting of a set of norms which provide the guidelines for efficient and effective use of language employed in conversation, so that it can achieve cooperative ends. In this respect, Grice offers four basic maxims of conversation or general principles as guidelines which ensure efficient and co-operative use of language. Taken together they express what is called a general cooperative principle. The four basic maxims are : quality, quantity, relevance and manner. To put it broadly, the first is concerned with truth, the second is with information, the third is with relevance and the fourth is with perspicuousness. These maxims are like instructions which participants need to follow in order to make their conversation maximally efficient, rational and co-operative.

An objection may be raised here. It may be pointed out that these maxims of conversation describe only an ideal situation. The reason is that people do not follow these maxims while they speak. But Grice's point is different. According to him even if the conversation does not go along with the stated norms the hearer still believes that at a deeper level these norms have been adhered to. To give an example :

A : Where's Rajeev?

B : There is a red maruti outside Suman's house.

As it appears B does not answer to A's question. This failure implies violation of two maxims, namely, quantity and relevance. B's response may be thus taken as non-co-operative response. However, it may be argued that in spite of this non-cooperation B's utterance can still be interpreted as co-operative at some deeper level. We take it as co-operative on the assumption that a connection can be found between the "location of Rajeev" and the "location of red maruti". On the basis of this connection we come to a hypothetical conclusion that if Rajeev has a red maruti, he may be in Suman's house. One may further argue that this is what B effectively conveys through his utterance though it does not come out on surface. We arrive at this assumption i.e., the assumption of co-operation by making the relevant inference. It is a common feature that in the midst of conversation we make such inferences to preserve the assumption of co-operation. An inference of this type has been characterized by Grice as conversational implicature. Conversation progresses in a right direction because of these inferences that we make in order to preserve the cooperative ends.

A question that may be very important in the context of this inquiry is to find out whether these maxims of conversational behaviour have any basis or they are arbitrary. Regarding this Grice makes it clear that these maxims are not arbitrary conventions. They are, on the other hand, rational in the sense that they tell us how to rationally conduct co-operative exchanges. Maxims are derived from general rationality principles associated with conversation.

Another important feature is that the inferences generated by the maxims go beyond the semantic content of the sentences which are uttered by the speaker. These inferences as conversational implicatures must be distinguished from logical implication and entailment since the kind of inferences with which they are concerned are derived from logical or semantic content. Implicatures are not semantic inferences because they give an account of meaning over and above the literal meaning of the expression. It shows the primacy of pragmatics over semantics.

Grice's work singularly points out that conversation has a logic but that logic is not a formal logic. He really seeks to work out that logic without making any controversial assumption pertaining to pragmatic universals or communicative ability of man. The author of the book under review, could have used Grice's work for her framework and to see how far it can account for

persuasion. There are two ways in which Grice can be important to the author. First, it offers a dialogical model which has a firm logical and linguistic basis, without either being unnecessarily formal or metaphysical. Second, persuasion being a mode of communication assumes a definite format of conversation. With the help of Grice's maxims and conversational implicature it is possible to make the format explicit. The author's claim that persuasion is both rational and moral has never been established within the format of conversation. She has offered general philosophical arguments to prove her point. I am not denying the merit of her effort. But my point is that the rational and moral nature of persuasion can be most effectively established with the help of rationality principle and the co-operative principle as involved in actual conversation.

I think I have said much more than what is expected from a reviewer. But my only justification is that the theme discussed in this book demands serious treatment.

-- Amitabha Das Gupta

#### REFERENCES

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