

## DISCUSSIONS (1)

### Is Philosophy Free of the Psychology of philosophers?

Dr. G.L. Pandit argues in his 'Analysis without Empirical Description'<sup>1</sup> that

'... a given concept in need of philosophical analysis may be either a psychological or a non - psychological one. Any actual attempt at analysis of either type of concept will pre-suppose number of things including the psychological fact of a given philosopher's dispositions to provide the analysis that he does provide. In either case there is no sense in which analysis of the concept in order to be complete can be required to incorporate empirical statements of psychological fact about the given philosopher doing the analysis. Conceptual analysis, in any case, has to be analysis **without** any elements of empirical description including those of the psychology of the analysis, no matter whether it is a psychological or a non-psychological concept. Psychologic of conceptual analysis may very well be developed as a branch of psychology. But it is absurd to subject conceptual analysis to a completeness requirement accord-to which it must incorporate in its anatomy the sort of statements whose proper place is in the psychology of analysis'.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Pandit's point is supported by Mr. T. McMullen, a psychologist :

'The proper description of scientific method is the philosophy of science seen as the description of the logical connections and distinctions, the conceptual relations generally, between the elements of a network of scientific propositions. It is logically independent of the psychologies of individual philosophers'.<sup>3</sup>

Just as Dr. Pandit reacts to my article, 'Self-Knowledge and Human Action'<sup>4</sup>, Mr. McMullen reacts to professor J. Z. Young's article, 'The pineal Gland'<sup>5</sup>. Mr. McMullen says that

'Young's mistake is that he identifies the description of scientific method with accounts of scientists' motivations and intentions, i. e. he has a **psychologicistic** view of the philosophy of science'<sup>6</sup>.

Dr. Pandit says;

'...to require, as Rakesh does, that, in order to be completely conclusive, Descartes-type analysis must incorporate a **specific** descriptive component describing one's disposition to make that analysis, is really to commit the grave error of seeing attempts at empirical description where actually there are only attempts at providing methodologically better alternatives to existing frameworks for empirical descriptions of reality'.<sup>7</sup>

Professor Young, a professor of anatomy, says :

'Until ten years ago biologists had almost no information about the function of the pineal body, though they suspected that it was not that assigned to it by Descartes. It was often stated to be a mere vestige. We now know approximately what it does, and the sequence of the discovery makes an interesting case of scientific procedure. So far as I can see it does not conform to any clear schedule of method such as are proposed by Popper or Kuhn. Certainly biologists were not trying to disprove Descartes. Nor were they seeking to establish a new paradigm of normal science. They were trying to find out what the pineal does, and they succeeded'.<sup>8</sup>

Thus while Professor Young was concerned about the nature of the pineal gland, I was concerned about an adequate answer to the question, 'Who am I?',<sup>9</sup> I went on to say that: '...I shall try to show that any conclusive answer, except one, would be self stultifying'<sup>10</sup>.

Without going into too much detail about what Professor Young or I say, let us examine the arguments of Dr. Pandit and Mr. McMullen.

To take Dr. Pandit's argument first. I don't think that Descartes was concerned about 'providing methodologically better alternatives to existing frameworks for empirical descriptions of reality'<sup>11</sup>. When Descartes asked the question: 'But what then am I?' he was not, to my mind, making any distinction about

the philosophical analysis of 'I' and about an existence of a psychological state. Descartes was asking the question out of philosophical curiosity, and he wanted an answer. Descartes was not bothered whether that answer came from physiology or from psychology or from philosophy. (As a matter of fact, Descartes located the seat of the soul in the pineal gland).

Also, Dr. Pandit sees the role of philosophical analysis as conceptual analysis: 'Conceived very broadly as conceptual analysis, the purpose of all philosophical analysis should be.'<sup>12</sup>. I think that some existentialists and phenomenologists might disagree. They might insist in calling themselves philosophical analysts but not conceptual analysts.

These problems aside, it is clear that if we can rebut Dr. Pandit, we can rebut Mr McMullen. Mr. McMullen says of **Philosophy of science** what Dr. Pandit says about philosophical analysis as a whole. And what is true of philosophical analysis must also be true about one particular area of philosophical analysis, namely the philosophy of science.

Is philosophy free of the psychology of philosophers? No. If by psychology is meant the 'sum of the mental states and processes characteristic of a person or class of persons'<sup>13</sup>, the answer must be a definite No. The answer will be Yes if psychology is 'the science of the mind or the mental states and processes'<sup>14</sup>, or if we define psychology as 'the science of human and animal behaviour'<sup>15</sup>. Obviously philosophy is different from psychology in the latter two definitions of psychology much as any other science is different from philosophy. But it is obviously false to say that philosophy is free of the psychology of philosophers in our first definition of psychology, where by psychology is meant 'sum of the mental states and processes characteristic of a person or class of persons'. If we say that philosophers are human beings and all human beings are psychological entities then, obviously, all philosophers are psychological entities. This means that they are psychological entities while they are composing philosophical works. This means that there is a relation of philosophy to the psychology of the philosopher whereby philosophers would not be philosophers without at the same time being psychological-entitise. Nothing very profound is being said here. Dis-

assion, someone might say, is necessary for philosophical pursuit. But dispassionate search after truth is as much a psychological state or process as is a passionate search after truth. Both passion and dispassion are psychological states. The obviousness of our conclusions render Dr. Pandit's observations about the independence of philosophical analysis from psychological states quite absurd. It looks even more absurd when he says that '... there is no sense in which analysis of the concept in order to be complete can be required to incorporate empirical statements of psychological fact about the given philosopher doing the analysis'<sup>16</sup>, where the concept of analysis is 'I'. Where does the philosopher most readily begin in an analysis of 'I', if not with himself? This, indeed, is what Descartes does when he says 'But what then am I? A thing which thinks. It is a thing which doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses and which also imagines and feels'. I saw a logical ( not psychological ) difficulty with any conclusive account of 'I', namely the difficulty that any conclusive analysis of 'I' faces when it leaves out the disposition to make that analysis. But it must here be remarked that logic and psychology are extremely close. It is a logical empiricist dogma which says that we can ( indeed must ) do logic without psychology. I will end this article by smashing this dogma. Let us do a thought-experiment. Can we or can't we imagine ourselves to be at two different places at the same time? Let us see what this entails. It entails that at time  $t_1$  we should be able to imagine ourselves to be at two different places  $p_2$  and  $p_4$ . I can't do this and neither can you: The moment we think of  $p_2$  it is too late ( by howsoever small fraction of a second ) to think of  $p_4$  at  $t_1$ . What is self-contradiction if it is not the inability of the human mind to perform the kind of thought-experiment stated above? Would it make any sense for us to say, "'p and -p, are self-contradictory but I can imagine 'p and -p'"? It would not make any sense because the statement above is self-contradictory. Thus it is that people knew logical reasoning before Aristotle. Aristotle came to formalize logic, not to expound it.

Another very obvious empirical fact about the effect of individual psychology upon philosophy: philosophers disagree, sometimes violently. Scientists mostly do not. Scientists don't even disagree in their almost universal rebuff to philosophy:

'Many of my experimental colleagues in psychology, physiology and biology believe that there is quite a difference between what they actually do as scientists and what philosophers of science tell them that they are doing. They see themselves as simply getting on with the job'; they regard philosophers of science, to put it more charitably than I have heard it put, as mere purveyors of esoteric stories which have little to do with the realities of scientific activity'.<sup>17</sup>

Department of Philosophy  
Mc Master University

Rakesh Varma

#### NOTES

1. G. L. Pandit, 'Analysis without Empirical Description', *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. VI, No. 4 (July 1979), pp. 727-731.
2. Pandit, pp. 729-730.
3. T. McMullen, 'Philosophy of Science and the Pineal Gland', *Philosophy*, Vol. 54, No. 209 (July 1979), p. 381.
4. R. Varma, 'Self-Knowledge and Human Action', *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. VI, No. 3 (April 1979), pp. 570-573.
5. J. Z. Young, 'The Pineal Gland', *Philosophy*, Vol. 48, No. 183 (January 1973), pp. 70-74.
6. McMullen, p. 381.
7. Pandit, p. 729.
8. Young, p. 70.
9. Varma, p. 570.
10. Varma, p. 570.
11. Pandit, p. 729.
12. Pandit, p. 728.
13. *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (College Edition), Allied Publishers Ltd., 1977, p. 1068 (Def. 3). Henceforth *The Random House Dictionary*.
14. *The Random House Dictionary*, p. 1068 (def. 1)
15. *The Random House Dictionary*, p. 1068, (Def. 2)
16. Pandit, p. 730.
17. Young, p. 380.



## DISCUSSIONS (2)

### A note on Suresh Chandra's "Philosophy in the Environmental Setting"<sup>1</sup>

My purpose in this note is to show that Suresh Chandra's claim "that philosophy is one of the manifestations of human intellect which is not only originated in an environmental setting, but is also doomed to be restricted to that setting"<sup>2</sup> is mistaken. In claiming this, as he explains later on he is "simply referring to the fact that system of philosophy, like a variety of wheat or creeper, requires certain sort of environmental conditions for its birth and survival"<sup>3</sup>

1. At no place in his paper does he explicitly mention the meaning of "environmental setting" but that by it he means the physical, natural surroundings like the climate, weather etc. is clear from the fact that time and again he says that the problem of perception, of other minds *et al* are there because of the foggy weather of Britain. Likewise, he has not clarified implicitly or explicitly, the meaning of "philosophical system." It would not be unreasonable to say that by this he means systems like empiricism, rationalism, etc.

2. It is true that one of the factors which stimulates thought is the environmental setting, but it is only one of the factors; it is not the only or prime factor as Suresh Chandra has claimed. The most important or the most essential ingredient of philosophic attitude are inquisitiveness, imagination and a capacity to see through the immediate and familiar, to underlying complexities. Only the person who is capable of experiencing perplexity about the meaning of his life, his relationship with others, and the nature of the world, and who desires to understand more about these matters than can be learned from history books, science laboratories etc. will embark in more than a cursory fashion upon an inquiry that is distinctively philosophical. Philosophy springs from an inquiring attitude that seeks to penetrate beyond the limits of settled accepted knowledge. This

can be illustrated by the fact that there are many parts of the world, including India, other than Britain which have foggy weather for the most part of the year, but none of the people living in any of those areas ever for whatever reasons ( lethargy, mental laxity, dullness etc. ) examined and evaluated the common sense belief that whatever we percieve exists in the world. None of them attempted to answer the question ' What relationship exists between that which we percieve and the real things in the world ? ' in a patient, serious and disciplined way.

3. If what Suresh Chandra claims was true, the subject matter of philosophy would be problems of regional interest, in other words, the problems of philosophy would be only spatio-temporal and not universal. But this is wrong because the subject matter of philosophy are the problems of the kind : What is knowledge ? What if any, are the limits of knowledge ? What is justice ? What is virtue ? What is a cause ? etc. and each of them is of as great interest today ( in all parts of the world ) as they were in Plato's time and would continue to interest and agitate human mind for years to come.

4. I believe that the mistake of Suresh Chandra lies in his ignoring the fact to which Sartre draws our attention namely, "Philosophical variations can never be wholly explained by reference to surrounding social and historical conditions, important as they are to the full undersanding of them, for ideas often spread across geographical boundaries and periods of time; they germinate anew wherever they find individuals with mentality and sensibility favourable to their gtowth."<sup>4</sup>

St. Stephen's College,  
Delhi

Ashok Vohra

#### NOTES

1, Indian Philosophical Quarterly, April, 1977.

2, Ibid, p. 363

3, ibid, p. 365

4, Existentialism and Humanism, trans. Philip. Mairet, Methuen & Co, 1968, p. 10