

THINKING AND SPEAKING IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF K. C. BHATTACHARYA

In his paper "The Concept of Philosophy"* K. C. Bhattacharya holds that doing philosophy is, strictly speaking, not thinking at all but only speaking. It is not literal thinking, he says, though it is an expression of the theoretic consciousness like science. Theoretic consciousness, he maintains, is at its minimum the understanding of a speakable. All forms of this consciousness, however, often pass as thinking. But according to Bhattacharya, this should not be so. Only one form is literal thinking, exemplified in science and commonsense involving factual beliefs assertions etc. Other forms, though these also may involve beliefs, do not constitute literal thinking.

But Bhattacharya is unable to avoid referring to these other forms as *thought*, perhaps because of the exigencies of linguistic conventions. In distinction from literal thought he speaks of these as 'symbolistic thought' and distinguishes the sub-grades of pure objective, subjective and transcendental thought. Embedded in this distinction between literal and symbolistic thinking or in the meanings of 'thinking' and 'speaking' is Bhattacharya's distinction between science and philosophy, which is not only very original but also highly plausible. Therefore, a critical appreciation of the distinction and relation between thinking and speaking, as conceived by him, is worth undertaking.

Bhattacharya's idea of thinking is different from that of Kant. For Kant the self is thinkable, though unknowable. For Bhattacharya it is unthinkable but knowable. Kant admits the extension of thought-forms and categories beyond experience, though, for him, this is illegitimate and does not yield knowledge. Bhattacharya holds that such non-empirical use of forms of thought is not thinking proper, but only symbolising what is unthinkable by verbal forms of thinking. If such symbolising use of thought-forms

* *Vide*, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, edited by Radhakrishnan and Muirhead (G. Allen and Unwin) : Also, K. C. Bhattacharya; *Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. II. edited by Gopinath Bhattacharya (Progressive Publishers, Calcutta).

is at all to be subsumed under thinking, it might be called 'symbolistic thinking' to distinguish it from genuine thinking which always relates to experiential matter.

The distinction between literal or empirical thought and symbolistic thought enables Bhattacharya to demarcate the field of philosophy from that of science or commonsense. Scientific thought is literal or empirical as concerned with facts, to which perception or sense-experience is invariably relevant-directly or indirectly. Philosophy is not concerned with facts; nor is sense-experience relevant for philosophical description or for settling philosophical disputes. Philosophy is sustained by symbolistic thought in which speaking is *necessarily* involved. Our knowledge of facts, which constitute the subject-matter of empirical thought, does not involve speaking necessarily. Fact can be known or understood without being spoken. Thought of fact may, of course, involve speech as in science, but even here what is spoken is other than and independent of as well as without any necessary reference to the speaking of it. As Bhattacharya says, "Speakability is a contingent character of the content of empirical thought, but it is a necessary character of the content of pure philosophic thought." (*The Concept of Philosophy*, Section 9)

Literal thought is expressible in literal or genuine judgments. Fact, which is literally thought, can always be represented in judgements proper. As fact is invariably relational, a judgment proper is of the form "A is B". Factual assertions are relational assertions. Empirical things, qualities etc. are supposed to be related in certain ways. The subject-predicate form of expression may be taken to be a very typical or characteristic way of describing facts. The empirical statement "Snow is white", e. g., asserts a relation between snow and whiteness. It attributes a quality to a substance. It is a synthetic judgement. The predicate here makes somewhat explicit the nature of the subject. In literal thinking, all this is possible.

It is not so in philosophy. Philosophical descriptions are also clothed in judgments of the subject-predicate form, but what is described therein is not perceptible fact or factual generalisation. The subject-matter of philosophy is non-empirical. Branches of philosophy like Logic, Metaphysics, Epistemology etc. do not deal with observable events or states of affairs of the world. Nor are

they concerned with fictitious entities or mere speech-creations. Bhattacharya holds that there is a realm of forms, entities, and processes other than the factual. This is elaborated in philosophy. Logic elaborates thought-forms and their interconnections. Metaphysics deals with reality as objective, though non-empirical. Epistemology is concerned with conscious processes and attitudes which is no task for empirical science. Beyond Epistemology, there is a philosophical subject which Bhattacharya calls Spiritual or Transcendental Psychology. He has elaborated this in his book *The Subject as Freedom* and in other writings.

Philosophy thrives on speaking. There is no Logic, Metaphysics, Epistemology etc. without speaking. True, there is no science either without speaking. But there speaking is tagged to and restrained by perception. Mere speculative theorising unconnected with perceptual data is no serious science. Speaking in philosophy, on the contrary, is not parasitical on sense-perception. Speaking here is a necessary feature of elaboration of non-empirical data or processes or presuppositions.

In philosophical description or elaboration the subject-predicate judgement-form is not literal or genuine, in as much as no fact is represented by it. Instead, there are in it only pseudo-judgments and pseudo-proofs. In a literal judgement, the predicate presupposes the subject and is an elaboration of it. This pattern is observed in all empirical statements of fact. In philosophical elaboration, on the other hand, the subject presupposes the predicate and is an elaboration of it. Hence the judgement-form is not literal but only symbolic. What Bhattacharya possibly means is that in philosophical judgments the predicate stands for some kind of non-empirical being or reality which the subject explicates. These judgements, are tautological. The status of the subject-matter of Logic or Metaphysics is not factual. Bhattacharya calls it "self-subsistent", perhaps in view of its non-relational nature as contrasted with fact. Logical forms or relations have a peculiar status which is elaborated in Logic. This elaboration is not conducted in genuine judgments because of non-factual nature of the content. Similar is the case of metaphysics. Its subject-matter is also non-factual. Universal, matter, life, mind etc. as conceived in philosophy are not facts. The self or subject has a being that is not only non-empirical but also non-objective.

There is unquestioning belief in self, but it is not given as object. Absolute, the concept of which is also elaborated in philosophy, is neither subjective nor objective. It is of course not fact. It is said to be the ultimate truth. "Self-subsistent is", "Self is", and "Absolute is" are judgments only in form, not literally.

If these are not literal judgements, the elaboration of these contents in philosophy is not literal thinking either. Philosophical contents are not sensuous and there are no images corresponding to them. They are conveyed and understood through words, but words do not picture them. Truth, freedom value, thinking, knowing, believing, life, mind, self, universals, implication, alternation, disjunction etc. are conceived and understood only through being spoken, though they are not mere fictitious speech-creations. They are regarded as independent of the speaking of any individual, though they cannot be understood without speaking about them. The formulation, understanding and elaboration of all philosophical contents are, according to Bhattacharya, necessarily through speaking.

Such speaking has to be distinguished from literal thinking, though thinking may also involve speech. For Bhattacharya, literal thought and empirical thought are identical. It relates to the matter of sense experience, explicitly or implicitly. Literal thought is always thought relating to the external world of sense-experience or its internal reflections about physical or psychological phenomena. All science as well as our ordinary knowledge about the world exemplify this thought. So also does fiction and fairy-tales, though derivatively. For in none of these is sense-experience totally transcended. At least its vestige in the form of imagery remains.

Thinking is thinking about something which may be said to be its content. The content is something distinct on which thought is focussed. This content is the resultant of sense-experience immediate or remote in whatever degree it may be. The content is apprehended or reflected upon by thought. It is that which is thought. It may be said to be posited by thought but not without the aid of sense-experience. Sense-experience is conceived here in a wide sense so that psychological reflection which deals with internal contents is also subsumed under literal thinking.

Thinking may or may not involve speech. Perceptual thought may not be accompanied by words. On the other hand, thought about laws or general truths does involve use of language. Thinking does not cease to be thinking, does not get transformed into speaking merely because language has been used. All thinking does not involve verbalisation, though all speaking does so. Therefore, thinking cannot always be described as a species of speaking. Thinking and speaking overlap so far as the use of language is concerned.

An essential difference between thinking and speaking is that the former is primarily private and solipsistic while the latter is primarily social and intercommunicative. One thinks for himself and speaks to another. The aim of thinking is understanding and comprehension in the first instance. The purpose of speaking is rather communication to another than clarity in one's own understanding. This is so in spite of the fact that higher forms of thinking may rightly be described as speaking to and for oneself.

Speaking may be variously conceived and represented. In one formulation Bhattacharya distinguishes three functions or moments of it—articulation, will to communicate and verbalisation. 'The will to speak is the will to verbalise for communication by articulation.'

To speak is not simply to utter articulate sounds. Such sounds may be produced by machines like tape-recorders and gramophones, and may be uttered by parrots or by human beings in parrot-like reproductions. These are not regarded as typical examples of speaking. Typical speaking involves willing to communicate with and the intention to be understood by another mind. This is evident from the fact that when we know that there is nobody to hear or understand, we do not feel like speaking. Again, if after having said something, we realise that nobody was around, we do not feel like having really spoken at all. Therefore, genuine speaking presupposes the existence of some other mind by whom the speaker wishes to be understood.

But even this is not sufficient to constitute genuine speaking. It is not enough that the speaker believes that there is somebody to hear or understand him and he then externalises by articulation a full-formed sentence that is already there in his mind. Genuine speech is more than mere recitation in an articulate form a verbal

expression that is already completed in idea. What is spoken must be at least partially formed in and through verbalisation. Speaking is not just communicating to another something pre-existent that has already been formulated in words. When one speaks, what is spoken gets formulated at least partially, then and there in and through the spoken words. This is borne out by examples of speaking that are not mere articulate delivery of ready-made sentences. Speaking has a creative aspect. Before one speaks, there may be a vague idea in the mind as to what is to be conveyed through words. But a vague idea is not a sentence or speech fully dressed in language. Where speaking is not mere recitation, what is spoken does not exist in the mind pre-formed linguistically but gets formed through the operation of speaking.

If this is so, it may be said that unlike thinking speaking has no distinct content for the speaker. Or, to put it differently, whereas the content of thinking is regarded as distinct from it, the content of speech is immanent in and is a mode of the speech-act itself. To think about oneself or another person is to be conscious of oneself or the other person as content of thought. But to speak about a person or to speak to him is not to take, him to be the content of the speech.

The three analysed elements of speaking, articulating, willing to communicate and verbalising are not necessarily to be taken as different successive functions. It is not that in order to speak one first puts the thought mentally into words, then desires to put it across to another and then articulates in audible sounds. The three may be welded together in one process. It may well be that in communicating, verbalisation and articulation go hand in hand. Communication may take place through simultaneous verbalisation and articulation. Of course, it cannot be denied that there can be verbalisation with or without the intention to communicate, along with absence of articulation. This may even be called speaking. Only, it would not be speaking in the inclusive sense that Bhattacharya explicates. Often mere articulation is regarded as speaking. But that is because the other two functions are internal and subjective, and do not ordinarily interest us. "Speaking as an empirical operation may be said to be actual in three grades, in the creative function, in this as expressed in the communicative function and in this as further externalised in articulation."¹

Higher forms of thinking undoubtedly involve the use of language, i. e. speech in some sense. Whether all thinking whatever involve speech may be a matter of controversy. But it need not be controversial that all speaking is not thinking. The range of speakability is wider. All that is speakable is not thinkable. For example, an utterly unmeaning expression like 'abracadabra' is speakable but not thinkable. A contradictory combination of words such as "square cricle" is capable of being spoken but is not a matter of thought. Thought always involves consciousness of some content or other, but in the case of an unmeaning word or word-combination, there is no assignable content for thought. Similarly, when an illusion is detected and corrected the illusory content or object that is spoken of is no thought content. One can speak of an object of illusion, but there is no such object in the world. One cannot think of such an object. So also, is the case of illusion of meaning. When one speaks nonsense without realising, and this is later detected, the illusory meaning may be referred to by speaking, but there is no question of thinking it. Thus what is unmeaning, contradictory can be spoken and understood as such but cannot be thought. Thought-contents are real or at least possibly real; but the unmeaning etc. are not so.

We have given some examples of speakable contents that are not believed and not thought. There may also be speakable contents of belief that are beyond thought. Self or the subject may be such a thing. God or Absolute may be such. One can speak of Self, God or Absolute, but they are not objects of thought or sense-experience. Strictly speaking, they are not objects at all. It is in this context that Bhattacharya has spoken of the possibility of understanding, knowing or realising without thinking. Though the subject is not an object, it may yet be symbolised by object. The self, for example, may be supposed to be embodied. God may be represented through an idol. It is implicit in such symbolisations that the symbol is other than the symbolised. In a sense, all speaking is symbolising. In certain circumstances speaking is unnecessary except for communication, as in the case of perception. Elsewhere, speaking may be required both for understanding and communication, as in science or empirical thinking. Beyond the empirical field, speaking may continue as indispensable for comprehension and communication of phenomena implicitly or

explicitly connected with the subject. This is the field of philosophy where speaking goes beyond thinking in rising above all sense-experience. In logic or metaphysics, the involvement of the subject is only implicit. In Epistemology, the philosophy of the Self, of God or of the Absolute it is more and more explicit.

The place of speaking in philosophy is unique. Philosophical contents, problems or elaborations are inextricably bound up with speaking, but this is not to say that they are fictitious speech-creations. The concepts of meaning, truth, freedom, matter, life, mind, self, God, Absolute etc. are propounded and explicated in philosophy, and this is impossible without speaking, i. e., without the use of language. But language here is used not to represent empirical things and relations or their imaginary replicas. Philosophy therefore is neither science nor is it a kind of fiction or imaginative literature. Philosophical contents, though not sense-experienced, are believed with a greater assurance. But here there is no believing apart from speaking—"the content that is spoken is not intelligible except as spoken." (*The Concept of Philosophy*, Section 9). In fiction what is spoken need not be believed. In perception, what is believed need not be spoken. In science what is believed is somehow connected with sense-experience. Philosophy differs from these in that it involves beliefs that are not based on sense experience but are necessarily spoken. What is thus necessarily spoken, however, is dependent on speaking for its being understood but not for its being. Rather, it is understood as self-evident, i. e. as independent of the spoken belief of any individual mind. "This independence of speaking", says Bhattacharya in speaking about philosophical contents, "is, however, a part of their meaning. It is not part of the meaning of a scientific content which is understood without reference at all to the linguistic expression of it." (*The Concept of Philosophy*, Section 9).

The essential relevance of the function of speaking in philosophy distinguishes it from imaginative literature. The fact that belief is involved in the former and not in the latter indicates that the one is speech-independent in a sense in which the other is not, though speaking is a common feature of both. Fictional characters and situations are creations of the imagination or imaginative of their author in a very literal sense. They are understood as such

not only by the speaker or the author but also by his hearers or readers. Philosophy is not propounded or understood in this way. The philosopher is not understood at all if he is understood as merely giving expression to his subjective fancies. Yet what he speaks of is essentially bound up with speaking.

The distinctive role of speaking in philosophy is better understood if it is appreciated that speaking here is conscious subjectivity expressing itself through objective symbolising; that even when the speaking is about something objective (as in logic and metaphysics) the link with the subject is not totally lost but is only implicit. Whether logical forms are elaborated or metaphysical entities are described or values are propounded or subjective functions are analysed, speaking remains, in whatever degree it may be, a mode of self-expression of the self or subject. The self or subject (the 'I') is implicitly believed to be real. Its unreality cannot even be tried to be conceived. Therefore, whatever is posited through the speaking expression of the self is also, in the first instance, believed. This belief explains why philosophical contents cannot be described as mere speech-creations like the fictional entities of the imagination. At the same time the essential involvement of speaking in the formulation of philosophical contents brings out their difference from the contents of scientific discourse, where reference to the self or subject is totally lacking, rendering speakability a purely accidental feature of what is spoken.

The above account of K. C. Bhattacharya's view as to the nature of speaking and its role in philosophy gives an indication of the idealistic tendency of his thought. Through speaking the subject reveals itself in a way and elaborates the forms of logic, the entities of metaphysics etc. Their reality, whatever that be, is a reflection of and is derivative from the reality of the subject which is unquestioned.

Bhattacharya's idealistic position, however, is not the main concern of this paper. It is with his distinction between thinking and speaking and its consequences that we are primarily concerned. Through this distinction he has attempted a clear demarcation of the field of philosophy from that of science. That this thesis is very original and plausible, and goes a long way in satisfying the much-needed self-identity and self-defence of philosophy may not be disputed. But how far is it successful?

For one thing, it is clear that this way of distinguishing philosophy from science excludes from philosophy things that pass as such. For example, it excludes the whole or at least a large part of what is called the philosophy of science. This enterprise deal with the methods, postulates and basic concepts of science, and as such presupposes science. But as science is perception based, philosophy of science must also be so, though only indirectly. It cannot be mere perception-neutral speculation. But if so, it cannot be a part of philosophy as conceived by Bhattacharya. Not only philosophy of science, it is doubtful whether such subjects as philosophy of history can be accommodated under Bhattacharya's conception of philosophy. Criticisms of this kind, however, does not affect Bhattacharya's position very much. It could, if he could be shown to have undertaken to define philosophy in such a way that whatever passes as philosophy would be accommodated under the definition. But this cannot be shown.

Even if it is granted that the unique function of speaking sets philosophy apart from the natural sciences, it may still be asked whether this differentiates philosophy from such sciences as pure mathematics. The same question can be raised as to the position of introspective psychology. The answer to these questions, irrespective of whether they would go for or against Bhattacharya's theory, would require going much further into his conception of philosophy vis-a-vis the nature of pure mathematics and introspective psychology. That is beyond the scope of this paper.

Bhattacharaya's view that philosophy is not thinking proper but rather an unique type of speaking is quite likely to cause initial distrust and misunderstanding. For even though there is no general agreement or clarity as to the nature or scope of philosophy, that it is at least an affair of thinking is perhaps taken for granted. In questioning even this assumption, Bhattacharya deals a very hard blow, and that at the very beginning when he sets out to give an idea of the subject. This does not seem to be necessary. There is no reason to suppose that Bhattacharya's conception of philosophy as distinguished from science could not be elaborated without making the sharp distinction between thinking and the activity of philosophy. Thinking could be regarded as having different forms, types or grades, and the philosophic grade or grades could be distinguished from the others. In fact, by describing

philosophy as 'symbolistic thought' and by using such expressions as 'pure objective thought', 'spiritual thought' etc. Bhattacharya rather admits such a possibility. It may be mentioned in this connection that Bhattacharya's conception of thinking as invariably connected with sense-experience in some way or other is his own and not the standard or usually accepted sense of the term, if there be any.

We have already discussed one account of Bhattacharya's concept of speaking which involves the will to communicate as an essential element of it. This concept of speaking seems to be somewhat different from the one that is involved in philosophy as conceived by him. For speaking that is philosophy need not necessarily involve communicating with another person. No doubt, philosophy may develop in communication or dialogue with other persons. But it may also take shape in confinement within the person of the philosopher. One may develop one's philosophy in solitude without speaking to another. The addressing of one's ideas to others is not a necessary feature of philosophising. There may not be even the awareness that others may come to be acquainted with one's philosophical cogitations. In philosophy one may just think for oneself, just as in art and literature one may just express for oneself. Creativity is primarily self-expression.

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NOTES

1. Taken from an unpublished MS of K. C. Bhattacharya entitled "The Speaking Function." For access to the MSS, I am indebted to Professor Kalidas Bhattacharya, who is editing the manuscripts for publication.

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