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Editor : DR. JYOTSNA SAHA

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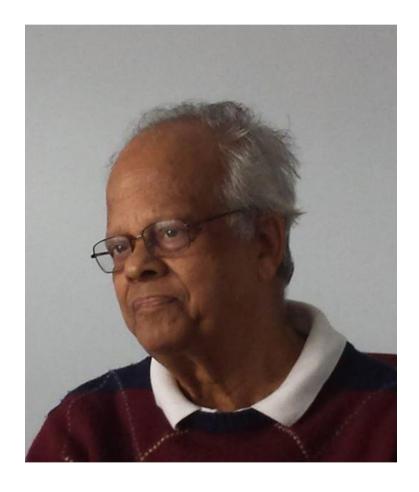
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OBITUARY

J. N. (Jitendra Nath) Mohanty (1928–2023)[1]

David Woodruff Smith
and
Purushottama Bilimoria

Professor J. N. Mohanty has characterized his life and philosophy as being both "inside" and "outside" East and West, i.e., *inside* and *outside* traditions of India and those of the West, living in both India and United States: geographically, culturally, and philosophically; while also traveling the world: Melbourne to Moscow. Most of his academic time was spent teaching at the University of Oklahoma, The New School Graduate Faculty, and finally Temple University. Yet his preeminent work in Husserlian phenomenology developed alongside his eminent work in Indian philosophy: describing his interests as "a fusion of disparate horizons."

J. N. Mohanty was born September 26, 1928, in Cuttack (Odisha, East India). After graduating from high school, he went on to study both Indian and Western philosophy in Calcutta, earning bachelor's and master's degrees. There he read Whitehead and Kant's *First Critique*; although he wanted to include mathematics in his curriculum, he was led instead to include Indian philosophy and Sanskrit. On the shelves of his teacher, Ras Vihar Das, he came upon a copy of the English translation (*Ideas I*, 1931) of Edmund Husserl's classic *Ideen I* (1913), which presented Husserl's ground-breaking conception of phenomenology. In 1952–1954 he left India for the first time, reaching Göttingen to study mathematics and philosophy, which earned him a doctorate in mathematics and "philosophy of mathematical sciences" (in his own words). In Göttingen, Mohanty found the powerful mathematical world that Husserl himself had earlier interacted with, where several Husserl students had formed the Göttingen school of phenomenology. During these years Mohanty studied primarily mathematics, alongside Kant and also Vedic Sanskrit. From his friend Günter Patzig, interpreter of Aristotle and Frege, Mohanty was drawn to Frege in relation to mathematical logic. He attended lectures of Heidegger, intrigued by his ontological thinking. Yet, despite the Husserlian legacy, Mohanty was completely self-taught in his studies of Husserl (as he has reported). With a doctorate in mathematics, and ideas from Kant and Frege in his philosophical background, Mohanty set about crafting his own conception of philosophy grounded in phenomenology, drawing on Husserl's extensive work, critically sifting through Husserl's texts and their emerging concepts of intentionality, meaning, subject, intersubjectivity, and world. In between he wrote his first book-length study: on phenomenological insights in Nicolai Hartmann and A. N. Whitehead (1958). Over many decades Mohanty formulated and argued, in analytical detail, for a conception of phenomenology and its place in philosophy, later presented in a clear and concise book titled *Transcendental Phenomenology: An Analytic Account* (1989). Over these very decades the same scholar explored

classical and recent Indian philosophy, thinking through kindred ideas of consciousness, self, and knowledge drawn from the Indian philosophical contexts. While writing on Nyāya theory of truth, he also pondered whether the world and finite individual are illusory or real, and whether Marx, Arendt, Gandhi (whom he heard speak in Calcutta), or Vinoba Bhave (with whom he marched across India for the land-grant movement) could best navigate post-Independent India's social and *svarāj* or self-rule reforms. The two Mohantys, thinking through a vision of self and world, turned out to be "non-different" or "non-dual" as they each practiced critical phenomenology from both inside and outside the respective philosophical and cultural traditions. Numerous students, fellows, and colleagues or collaborators have benefited immensely from this infusion and unified approach to diversity in philosophical thought.

In the 2000s, moving into retirement, Mohanty wrote two long books devoted to his understanding of Husserl and phenomenology and the calling of philosophy itself. This two-volume study shows Mohanty himself thinking through Husserl, critically, in *The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl: A Historical Introduction* (2008), and *Edmund Husserl's Freiburg Years: 1916–1938*. As Mohanty worked on Husserl, he carefully indicated where he agreed and where he rejected or changed ideas, all part of his practice in phenomenology of "description and interpretation." It was the same pattern he used in addressing the thought of Husserl vis-à-vis Kant or Frege or even Quine.

As Mohanty developed his understanding of phenomenology over the years, he wrote books on theory of meaning and the concept of intentionality, developing a model of ideal meaning and its foundation in intentionality, drawing on Husserl's results. He followed these with the book *Husserl and Frege* (1982), linking the thought of those foundational figures for the "continental" and "analytic" traditions, respectively, in twentieth-century Western philosophy. Over his long career Mohanty addressed both traditions in his clear and accessible writing style. While developing his views on phenomenology, Mohanty regularly looked to "Husserl and his others," evaluating views in Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur, and then Derrida and others in the wake of Husserl. With his background in Kant, Mohanty also looked toward Heidegger and Hegel in relation to Husserl's later work in the *Crisis* (1935–38). Similarly, he looked to contemporary analytic philosophers, adjudicating his own, oft-wise Husserlian views in relation to Frege, Nagel, and others. Amid his active scholarly career, Mohanty co-founded the journal *Husserl Studies,* and was editorial advisor to *Philosophy & Phenomenological*

Research, Philosophy East & West, Journal of Indian Philosophy, Sophia, among others.

Yet all this while Mohanty was also thinking and writing about Indian philosophy and its relation to phenomenology. In his own retrospective, Indian philosophy is "the permanent background" of his Husserlian thinking, while Kant is the recurrent Western background of his Husserlian phenomenology. Mohanty's form of "transcendental phenomenology" evolved, in his own perspective, against the background of his studies of Navya-Nyāya on logic and Vedānta on consciousness, in Indian philosophy, and against the background of Kant's First *Critique* on the transcendental, in Western philosophy. Accordingly, Mohanty's study of logical form and of the intentionality of consciousness seeks a fusion of East and West in the conception of transcendental phenomenology. (Cf. Mohanty's apt response to critics in *The Empirical and the Transcendental* (2000).)

Even in the context of North American Husserl scholarship, Mohanty has exercised an earnest fusion of East and West. For the so-called East Coast and West Coast interpretations of Husserl's crucial notion of noema both find a sympathetic spirit in J. N. Mohanty's careful and nuanced interpretation of Husserlian transcendental phenomenology. With Mohanty the two faces of the noema are the logical (Fregean) and the phenomenal (Kantian), and these views of intentional structure join in consciousness—in a way resonant with Indian thought.

Constructivism Revisited: An Analysis of Onora O'Neill's Critique of John Rawls

L. Vijai

Introduction

John Rawls's seminal works, *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*, have cemented his central role in political theory. His groundbreaking ideas not only enriched the field but also sparked a vibrant debate marked by a series of critiques and counter-critiques. At the heart of Rawls's philosophy is a constructivist approach that strives to formulate principles of justice through rational deliberation, relying on procedural justification and idealized conditions.

Exploring Rawls's theories—particularly his discussions on justice and political legitimacy—and engaging with the critiques from contemporary thinkers like Onora O'Neill can be both enlightening and thought-provoking. This article aims to revisit Rawls's constructivism in the context of the criticisms raised by the modern philosopher Onora Sylvia O'Neill, better known as Baroness O'Neill of Bengarve. Her critique is especially significant given that Rawls has profoundly influenced her intellectual development.

Statement of Methodology

This study primarily uses a critical approach to carefully examine and question the underlying assumptions and arguments within Rawls's constructivist framework, as critiqued by Onora O'Neill. In addition, it employs analytic methods to break down and clarify key concepts—such as the original position and the veil of ignorance—and comparative methods that juxtapose these theoretical ideas with practical cases in healthcare and education. Together, these approaches help explore the interplay between abstract theory and real-world application in a clear and accessible way.

The Constructivism of John Rawls

John Rawls's constructivism stands as a milestone in modern political philosophy, as evidenced by his influential works *A Theory of Justice*

(1971) and *Political Liberalism* (1993). His framework is dedicated to deriving principles of justice through rational deliberation, meticulously distancing itself from personal biases and contingent social conditions (Rawls, 1971, 1993). Deeply rooted in the Kantian tradition, Rawls's approach highlights the critical roles of reason and impartiality in establishing just principles, thereby offering a robust method for justifying moral and political norms within a pluralistic society (Rawls, 1971).

The Original Position and the Veil of Ignorance

Central to Rawls's constructivist philosophy is the concept of the original position. In this hypothetical scenario, individuals are placed behind a "veil of ignorance" that prevents them from knowing their personal characteristics, social status, or aspirations. This designed abstraction ensures impartiality, allowing participants to agree on principles of justice free from the influence of self-interest. Rawls (1971) articulates this idea when he states, "The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance" (p. 12).

The Two Principles of Justice

The principles of justice chosen in the original position form the cornerstone of Rawls's theory of justice as fairness. These principles include:

1. **Equal Basic Liberties**: Every individual is entitled to fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of speech and religion.
2. **The Difference Principle**: Social and economic inequalities are permissible only if they benefit the least advantaged members of society.

Together, these principles establish a framework that balances equality with liberty, reflecting Rawls's commitment to fairness and rational deliberation (Rawls, 1971).

The Influence of Kantian Constructivism

Rawls's constructivism is deeply influenced by the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant, particularly in its emphasis on autonomy and practical reason as foundations for moral decision-making. While Kant emphasizes universal moral laws, Rawls adapts this perspective to a political context by designing justice principles that promote societal cooperation and impartial deliberation (Rawls, 1971). This integration of Kantian

principles underlines the rational and impartial nature of Rawls's constructivist method.

Public Reason and Political Constructivism

In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls expands his constructivist framework by introducing the concept of public reason. In a pluralistic society, public reason represents the shared deliberation that individuals use to justify political decisions. Rawls (1993) observes, "A well-ordered society is not simply a society in which everyone complies with just institutions... but one in which everyone accepts the institutions as justified" (p. 35). This idea underscores the legitimacy of justice principles derived from mutual reasoning.

Criticisms Levelled Against the Constructivism of John Rawls

The methodological approach and real-world implications of John Rawls's constructivism have sparked a broad spectrum of criticisms from various philosophical traditions.

Criticisms from Utilitarian Perspectives

Utilitarian philosophers contend that Rawls's emphasis on fairness and equal liberties—central to his constructivist method—tends to overlook the broader goal of maximizing overall utility. By prioritizing individual rights and distributive justice, critics argue that Rawls's theory does not sufficiently aim to produce the greatest benefit for the greatest number. Rawls himself distances his position from utilitarianism. For instance, he asserts, "Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override" (Rawls, 1971, p. 3). Utilitarians, however, maintain that such a focus on inalienable individual rights may lead to outcomes that compromise collective well-being, thereby limiting the theory's capacity to address large-scale societal challenges (Smart & Williams, 1973).

Libertarian Objections

Libertarian critics—drawing on thinkers such as Robert Nozick—argue that Rawls's constructivism imposes undue constraints on individual freedoms. They particularly object to his difference principle, which calls for redistribution designed to benefit the least advantaged. According to libertarian perspectives, individuals should be entitled to the full fruits of their labour without interference from redistribution policies (Nozick, 1974). Furthermore, Rawls's use of the veil of ignorance, intended to

justify these redistributive practices, is seen as neglecting natural property rights and the voluntary arrangements formed by individuals. Ultimately, libertarians claim that this approach diminishes personal autonomy and fails to adequately recognize the roles of merit and market dynamics in achieving just outcomes.

Desert-Based Critiques

Another line of criticism focuses on Rawls's explicit rejection of desert as a basis for distributing social and economic rewards. Rawls (1971) argues that rewarding individuals based on their inherent talents or efforts is morally arbitrary; instead, he endorses principles chosen in the original position to secure fairness. Critics, however, contend that Rawls's dismissal of desert overlooks deeply intuitive notions of fairness—specifically, that those who work harder or contribute more to society should be entitled to greater rewards (cf. Nozick, 1974). This disconnect, they suggest, renders Rawls's framework overly abstract and detached from commonly held views about merit and reward.

Metaphysical Concerns

Metaphysical objections to Rawls's constructivism centre on the abstract and idealized nature of his theoretical constructs. Both the original position and the veil of ignorance are innovative in concept but are criticized as relying on hypothetical conditions that fail to capture the complex realities of human behaviour and social life. Critics argue that by constructing principles of justice solely through rational deliberation, Rawls risks oversimplifying the intricate interplay among morality, societal norms, and human conduct. Additionally, some contend that Rawls's departure from metaphysical realism deprives his theory of grounding in objective moral truths, thereby challenging its practical feasibility in diverse, real-world contexts (Rawls, 1971; O'Neill, 1996).

The Constructivism of Onora O'Neill

Onora O'Neill's constructivism—deeply rooted in Kantian ethics—offers a unique contribution to modern moral and political philosophy. Her work underscores the critical role of practical reasoning, justice, and the careful construction of ethical principles that not only claim universal validity but also remain sensitive to contextual variations (O'Neill, 1996).

Practical Reasoning and Justice

O'Neill's approach is firmly based on the Kantian tradition, which holds that practical reasoning is at the heart of ethical deliberation. She argues that principles of justice should emerge from a process of rational deliberation, ensuring they are both universally sound and applicable in real-world scenarios. As she articulates in Towards Justice and Virtue, "Principles of justice must be constructed in ways that respect the autonomy and rationality of all agents" (O'Neill, 1996, p. 41). This perspective highlights her belief that justice must go beyond abstract ideals to become actionable principles capable of guiding everyday decisions. By bridging universal norms with particular contexts, O'Neill's constructivism aims to effectively address a range of ethical dilemmas.

Critique of Rawlsian Constructivism

O'Neill critically examines John Rawls's constructivist framework, particularly its dependence on hypothetical constructs like the original position and the veil of ignorance. Although she recognizes the ingenuity of Rawls's method, she maintains that it suffers from a lack of procedural rigor and falls short in terms of practical applicability. According to O'Neill (1996), Rawls's framework tends to be overly idealized, not sufficiently reflecting the complexities inherent in moral and political life. She asserts that a robust constructivist framework should be more responsive to the nuances of human agency and the practical limits of rational deliberation.

Repercussions

The influence of O'Neill's constructivism extends far beyond traditional moral philosophy. Its principles have shaped debates in diverse fields such as bioethics, international justice, and public policy. For instance, her focus on autonomy, consent, and respect for persons has profoundly impacted discussions on healthcare ethics and the distribution of resources in global justice debates. Furthermore, by advocating for principles formed through rational deliberation and mutual respect, O'Neill provides an important model for fostering ethical awareness and civic engagement in pluralistic societies. Her work, therefore, not only contributes to academic discourse but also offers transformative insights for practical decision-making in contemporary society (O'Neill, 1996).

Onora O'Neill's Critique of Procedural Justification in Rawls's Framework

John Rawls's theory of justice as fairness has been widely celebrated for its innovative use of procedural justification, particularly through constructs such as the original position and the veil of ignorance (Rawls, 1971). However, Onora O'Neill has raised significant concerns regarding the adequacy and practical applicability of these procedural methods (O'Neill, 1996).

Foundations of Procedural Justification in Rawls's Framework

Rawls's procedural justification is based on the notion that principles of justice can be derived through rational deliberation in a hypothetical scenario. In the original position, individuals are tasked with choosing principles behind a veil of ignorance—a state in which they are unaware of their personal characteristics and social positions. This design is intended to ensure impartiality. As Rawls (1971) asserts, "The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance" (p. 12). This methodological approach is intended to construct principles that are universally valid and acceptable to all rational agents. By abstracting away personal biases, Rawls's framework seeks to establish a foundation for justice that is both impartial and rationally justified.

O'Neill's Critique of Procedural Justification

Onora O'Neill challenges Rawls's heavy reliance on hypothetical constructs, arguing that they lack the procedural rigor and practical applicability essential for sound ethical reasoning (O'Neill, 1996). She contends that while the original position and the veil of ignorance are conceptually innovative, they are excessively idealized and disconnected from the lived realities of moral and political life (O'Neill, 1996). According to O'Neill, by focusing predominantly on abstract scenarios, Rawls's procedural methods fail to capture the complexities of human agency as well as the constraints imposed by real-world contexts (O'Neill, 1996). Consequently, his framework risks oversimplifying the intricate interplay among morality, societal norms, and human behaviour. Instead, O'Neill advocates for a constructivist approach that is more firmly grounded in the realities of ethical deliberation, emphasizing the need for principles that are both theoretically robust and practically applicable in everyday decision-making (O'Neill, 1996).

The critique offered by O'Neill has significant implications for the broader field of moral and political philosophy. By questioning the

abstract nature of procedural justification in Rawls's framework, she calls for a more context-sensitive approach to ethical reasoning—one that integrates the complexities of real-world situations into the construction of moral principles (O'Neill, 1996). Her arguments underscore the necessity for ethical frameworks that are developed through rational deliberation, yet remain attuned to the nuances of human behaviour and diverse societal conditions. Such an approach ensures that the resulting principles of justice are both meaningful and applicable across various contexts, thereby contributing to more effective discourse in modern ethics and public policy.

Onora O'Neill's Critique of Abstract Starting Points in Rawlsian Philosophy

Rawlsian Abstract Starting Points

Rawls's theory of justice as fairness is built upon abstract hypothetical constructs that are designed to ensure impartiality and fairness in deriving principles. In the original position, rational agents select principles of justice behind a veil of ignorance that removes any knowledge of their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or personal preferences. This abstraction is intended to guarantee impartiality by preventing self-interest from influencing the deliberative process. While this approach highlights a significant theoretical innovation, critics have questioned the reliance on abstraction for its detachment from real-world moral and political contexts.

O'Neill's Critique of Abstract Starting Points

Onora O'Neill's critique focuses on the practical limitations inherent in Rawlsian abstraction. Although acknowledging the intellectual appeal of constructs like the original position and the veil of ignorance, O'Neill argues that these abstract starting points fail to adequately address the complexities of human agency and ethical decision-making. O'Neill contends that the reliance on abstract constructs risks oversimplifying the nuanced interplay of moral reasoning, societal norms, and human behaviour. She advocates for a constructivist approach that is firmly rooted in practical reasoning rather than solely relying on hypothetical scenarios. According to O'Neill (1996), ethical principles should be formulated through processes that are context-sensitive and capable of effectively guiding real-world decision-making.

Implications

By questioning the adequacy of abstract starting points, O'Neill (1996) emphasizes the need for ethical frameworks that are deeply anchored in real-world contexts and attuned to the complexities of human agency. Her analysis underscores the importance of integrating practical reasoning into the construction of justice principles, ensuring their relevance and applicability across diverse societies (O'Neill, 1996). O'Neill's insights invite contemporary philosophers to reconsider the role of abstraction in ethical deliberation and to explore alternative methodologies that bridge the gap between high-level theoretical constructs and everyday realities (O'Neill, 1996). This dialogue is crucial for refining our understanding of justice and for developing ethical systems that are both philosophically robust and practically viable.

Onora O'Neill's Critique of John Rawls: Universalism Versus Relativism

John Rawls's theory of justice as fairness is often celebrated for its universalist aspirations, as it seeks to establish principles of justice that are impartial and applicable across diverse societies (Rawls, 1971). However, his reliance on hypothetical constructs—such as the original position and the veil of ignorance—has drawn criticism for introducing relativistic elements that may undermine the universality of his framework (Rawls, 1971; O'Neill, 1996). Onora O'Neill, critiques this tension in Rawls's philosophy, arguing in favour of a more robust and consistent approach to universalism (O'Neill, 1996).

Rawls's Universalist Aspirations

Rawls's constructivist framework aims to derive principles of justice that are universally valid and acceptable to all rational agents. The original position, in which individuals choose principles behind a veil of ignorance, is designed to ensure impartiality by abstracting away personal biases and social contingencies. In this regard, Rawls (1971) asserts, "The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance" (p. 12) which emphasizes both the fairness and the universality of his method. Nonetheless, his commitment to universalism is nuanced by his recognition of the pluralistic nature of modern societies. In *Political Liberalism* (Rawls, 1993), he introduces the concept of overlapping consensus, where diverse moral and religious doctrines converge on shared principles of justice. This attempt to reconcile universalism with pluralism has garnered both praise and criticism for its far-reaching implications.

O'Neill's Critique of Relativistic Tendencies

O'Neill challenges Rawls's framework on the grounds that its reliance on hypothetical constructs introduces a degree of contextual dependency that ultimately undermines the universality of the derived principles. In Towards Justice and Virtue, O'Neill (1996) critiques Rawls's method by stating, "Principles of justice must be constructed in ways that respect the autonomy and rationality of all agents" (p. 45). She argues that while Rawls's framework is innovative, it does not sufficiently address the complexities of moral reasoning or the constraints imposed by practical deliberation. By prioritizing consensus over truly universal validity, Rawls risks diluting the normative force of his proposed principles. O'Neill advocates for a constructivist methodology that is firmly rooted in Kantian ethics, emphasizing that universal principles must not be contingent on specific social or cultural contexts. O'Neill's critique has significant implications for contemporary debates on justice and constructivism. By questioning the relativistic tendencies in Rawls's framework, she underscores the importance of maintaining a clear distinction between universal principles and contextual considerations (O'Neill, 1996). Her arguments invite philosophers to reconsider the role of universalism in ethical reasoning and to explore alternative methodologies that balance theoretical rigor with practical applicability. Moreover, her work highlights the enduring relevance of Kantian ethics in addressing the challenges posed by pluralistic societies, offering valuable insights into the further development of moral and political philosophy.

Onora O'Neill's Critique of John Rawls: Instrumental Justification

John Rawls' reliance on what can be termed "instrumental justification" has elicited criticism from several philosophers, including Onora O'Neill. O'Neill argues that, although Rawls's framework is conceptually appealing, it lacks the normative rigor necessary for a robust theory of justice (O'Neill, 1996).

Instrumental Justification in Rawls's Framework

Rawls's constructivist methodology is premised on the idea that principles of justice are best justified by employing a hypothetical procedure. Central to this methodology is the use of abstract constructs—such as the original position and the veil of ignorance—which are designed to ensure impartiality by removing personal biases and contextual influences (Rawls, 1971). This approach is considered instrumental because it seeks

to validate principles based on their acceptability to rational agents under specific, idealized conditions (Rawls, 1971). By focusing on the outcomes of such a hypothetical procedure, Rawls's aim is to construct principles that are both rational and fair (Rawls, 1971). Nevertheless, critics note that this reliance on instrumental justification might undermine the normative force of the principles it produces (O'Neill, 1996).

O'Neill's Critique of Instrumental Justification

Onora O'Neill (1996) challenges the instrumental nature of Rawls's justification. She contends that the framework's dependence on hypothetical constructs, such as the original position, introduces a degree of contingency that ultimately detracts from the universality and normative authority of the resulting principles (O'Neill, 1996). O'Neill argues that by emphasizing procedural acceptability, Rawls's framework prioritizes a level of abstraction that does not adequately engage with substantive moral reasoning (O'Neill, 1996). According to her, this focus on procedure risks reducing justice to a mere outcome of hypothetically rational agreements—rather than establishing a truly robust normative ideal (O'Neill, 1996). Instead, she advocates for a constructivist methodology that is more deeply rooted in Kantian ethics, ensuring that ethical principles are not only theoretically sound but also practically applicable across real-world contexts (O'Neill, 1996).

By challenging the adequacy of an instrumental approach, O'Neill underscores the necessity of grounding principles of justice in substantive, practical moral reasoning rather than relying solely on the acceptance of rational procedures (O'Neill, 1996). Her arguments prompt philosophers to reconsider whether instrumental justification is sufficient for achieving normative depth, and they invite exploration of alternative methodologies that strike a balance between theoretical rigor and practical applicability. Additionally, her work reinforces the enduring relevance of Kantian ethics in addressing the challenges posed by pluralistic and diverse societies.

Onora O'Neill's Critique of John Rawls: Value Assumptions

Rawls's reliance on implicit value assumptions has drawn criticism from several philosophers, including Onora O'Neill. O'Neill argues that these assumptions, though frequently unacknowledged, play a crucial role in shaping the outcomes of Rawls's framework (O'Neill, 1996).

Value Assumptions in Rawls's Framework

Rawls's constructivist methodology's reliance on hypothetical constructs to derive principles of justice is designed to ensure impartiality and fairness by abstracting away personal biases and social contingencies (Rawls, 1971). However, the process of such abstraction inherently involves implicit value assumptions that influence both the selection and the justification of the resulting principles (O'Neill, 1996). For example, Rawls's emphasis on fairness and equality reflects underlying normative commitments that are not explicitly justified within his framework (Rawls, 1971). Critics contend that this reliance on implicit value assumptions raises questions about the universality and validity of the derived principles since these assumptions may inadvertently privilege specific normative commitments (O'Neill, 1996).

O'Neill's Critique of Value Assumptions

Onora O'Neill (1996) challenges the implicit value assumptions embedded in Rawls's framework, arguing that these assumptions undermine the transparency and rigor of his constructivist methodology. She maintains that, although often unacknowledged, such assumptions decisively shape the outcomes of Rawls's hypothetical constructs and risk privileging certain normative commitments over others, thereby limiting both the universality and the applicability of his principles (O'Neill, 1996). As a remedy, she advocates for a constructivist approach that is more transparent and explicit in its normative commitments. By directly addressing the underlying value assumptions in ethical reasoning, O'Neill calls for a more rigorous and inclusive approach to constructing principles of justice while underscoring the importance of methodological rigor in establishing justice principles (O'Neill, 1996). Her arguments invite contemporary philosophers to reconsider the role of normative commitments within constructivist methodologies and to explore alternative approaches that effectively balance theoretical rigor with practical applicability.

Understanding Onora O'Neill's Criticisms Through Case Studies

While much of the debate surrounding Rawls and O'Neill has been theoretical, various scholars have begun to explore the application of these theories in practice. Recent studies have examined how Rawlsian principles may inform policy design in contexts such as healthcare resource allocation (e.g., Daniels, 2008) and educational equity (e.g.,

West, 2016). These empirical explorations serve as valuable case studies to test the robustness of constructivist methods when confronted with complex and often messy social realities. The selected case studies serve as illustrative examples of how abstract moral principles derived from theoretical constructs can both inform and sometimes fail to capture the nuances of real-world decision-making.

Case Study Selection

Two case studies were selected based on their relevance to the ongoing debates about fairness, equality, and normative commitment:

1. Healthcare Resource Allocation: This case study examines how Rawlsian principles might be applied in the distribution of healthcare resources, particularly in contexts where disparities are stark.
2. Educational Policy and Equity: This case study explores the application of constructivist methodologies in educational settings, highlighting critiques regarding the role of implicit normative commitments in decisions about merit and reward.

Case Study 1: Healthcare Resource Allocation

Background

Healthcare systems worldwide are increasingly being challenged by issues of fairness and equity. Rawls's framework, with its emphasis on impartial deliberation through hypothetical constructs, has been suggested as a potential model for resource distribution. In theory, the original position would require decision-makers to allocate resources without knowledge of personal circumstances, thereby ensuring decisions that are free from bias (Rawls, 1971).

Application of Rawlsian Constructivism

In practice, policymaking in healthcare often involves prioritizing resources for the most vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. Rawls's difference principle—which permits social and economic inequalities only if they benefit the least advantaged (Rawls, 1971)—appears particularly relevant when making decisions about resource allocation. Advocates argue that this procedural framework can offer a fair basis for decision-making that aligns with humanitarian values and the pursuit of equality.

O'Neill's Critique in Context

However, O'Neill (1996) raises important concerns regarding the feasibility of such an abstract framework. She argues that the hypothetical conditions of the original position do not necessarily capture the intricacies of real-world healthcare dilemmas. For instance, practical challenges such as bureaucratic inertia, political pressures, and variations in community needs are not easily reconciled with the rigid abstractions of Rawls's theory. Furthermore, O'Neill contends that implicit value assumptions regarding fairness and equality—though theoretically sound—may not adequately justify policies that require tough ethical trade-offs in dynamic and diverse healthcare contexts.

Analysis

In this case study, Rawls's constructivist approach offers a compelling ideal—but one that struggles to adapt when confronted with the complexities of actual healthcare systems. The lack of methodological transparency regarding normative assumptions, as highlighted by O'Neill (1996), suggests that an exclusive reliance on abstract constructs may ultimately undermine the practical authority of justice principles in this domain.

Case Study 2: Educational Policy and Equity

Background

Educational policy is another fertile area for the application of constructivist principles. Issues such as resource allocation, grading fairness, and access to quality education deeply involve questions of justice, merit, and societal obligation. The promise of Rawlsian constructivism lies in its potential to offer an impartial framework in which decisions can be made free from the biases of socioeconomic status or personal background (Rawls, 1971).

Application of Rawlsian Constructivism

Rawls's theory posits that if decision-makers could operate behind a veil of ignorance, they would agree on principles that champion fairness and equality. In education, this ideal might translate to policies that ensure every student, regardless of background, has equal access to quality resources. In theory, such an approach could help recalibrate disparities and foster an environment of equal opportunity (Rawls, 1971).

O'Neill's Critique in Context

O'Neill (1996) challenges this viewpoint by emphasizing that Rawls's reliance on abstract procedures and implicit normative assumptions about fairness does not fully account for the complex dynamics involved in educational attainment. In the realm of education, outcomes are influenced by a wide array of factors—from cultural values to individualized learning needs—which may not be adequately reflected in a purely procedural model. Critics further argue that by focusing too heavily on detached abstraction, Rawls's model risks neglecting the meritocratic and context-specific nuances that influence educational success and reward (cf. Nozick, 1974).

Analysis

This case study illustrates the tension between high-level normative ideals and the messy realities of educational policy. While Rawlsian constructivism provides an attractive normative framework for promoting equal opportunity, O'Neill's critiques suggest that failing to engage with the full spectrum of contextual factors may render the framework less applicable in practice. Her call for greater transparency and the incorporation of concrete realities encourages a re-evaluation of the assumptions underlying the model, thereby prompting a search for more inclusive and adaptable approaches to justice.

Discussion

The examination of these two case studies reveals a recurring theme in the debate over Rawls's constructivism: the balance between abstraction and practicality. On one hand, Rawls's methodology—through its idealized constructs—aims to provide a clear and impartial foundation for justice (Rawls, 1971). On the other hand, O'Neill's potent criticisms draw attention to the inherent limitations of relying exclusively on hypothetical scenarios, particularly when addressing the complex realities of everyday decision-making (O'Neill, 1996).

O'Neill's insistence on transparency in normative commitments calls for a more nuanced constructivist methodology—one that accommodates the messy realities of human agency and acknowledges contextual particularities (O'Neill, 1996). By highlighting the potential disconnect between high-level theoretical constructs and everyday practice, her critique underscores the need for political theory to remain both dynamic and responsive to concrete social challenges.

In both healthcare and education, the case studies demonstrate that while abstract principles can inform ethical decision-making, they must be continually re-interrogated and refined to ensure their relevance, fairness, and applicability across diverse settings (Rawls, 1971; O'Neill, 1996). The iterative process of re-evaluation is crucial not only to bolster the legitimacy of normative claims but also to ensure that traditionally abstract principles can adapt to real-world complexities.

Moreover, the interplay between universalist aspirations and context-specific needs brings to light the challenge of achieving a holistic conception of justice. Although Rawls's framework is well-intentioned in its emphasis on universal principles, it risks overlooking the particularities that shape individual experiences (Rawls, 1971). O'Neill's critiques, therefore, serve as an essential corrective, urging contemporary scholars and policymakers to strike a more effective balance between idealized theory and grounded practice (O'Neill, 1996)**.**

Responses to Onora O'Neill's Criticisms of John Rawls's Constructivism

Onora O'Neill's critique of Rawlsian constructivism has sparked widespread debate, with philosophers who felt aligned to the Rawlsian position coming up with responses to O'Neill's criticisms. This article would remain incomplete if glimpses of the responses are not mentioned.

Defending Procedural Justification

O'Neill (1996) critiques Rawls's reliance on procedural justification, arguing that it prioritizes hypothetical constructs over substantive moral reasoning. In defence, proponents of Rawls emphasize the normative strength of tools like the original position and the veil of ignorance. Rawls (1971) asserts, "The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance" (p. 12), which defenders interpret as evidence that the original position is not merely an abstract construct but a rational device embodying moral autonomy and equality. By grounding justice in a shared, rational procedure, Rawls's framework is seen as averting the pitfalls associated with subjective or arbitrary moral claims (Rawls, 1971).

Revisiting Abstract Starting Points

O'Neill also challenges the abstract starting points of Rawls's framework—such as the original position—for being overly idealized and

disconnected from real-world contexts. In response, defenders argue that abstraction is a necessary methodological feature of constructivist theorizing. According to Carla Bagnoli (2014), "Abstract starting points in constructivism serve to isolate the essential features of moral reasoning, enabling the construction of principles that are universally valid" (p. 315). This perspective underscores the role of abstraction in achieving impartiality and fairness while acknowledging that practical applicability must eventually be addressed.

Navigating Universalism and Relativism

O'Neill critiques Rawls for attempting to balance universalism with the realities of pluralistic societies, suggesting that this balancing act risks veering into relativism. In defence, supporters of Rawls point to his concept of overlapping consensus, which offers a mechanism for reconciling universal principles with the diverse moral and religious doctrines present in society. Rawls (1993) explains that "A well-ordered society is not simply a society in which everyone complies with just institutions... but one in which everyone accepts the institutions as justified" (p. 35). This emphasis on public reason and mutual justification is argued to maintain Rawls's universalist aspirations while respecting pluralism.

Addressing Instrumental Justification

O'Neill criticizes the instrumental nature of Rawls's justification, arguing that it risks reducing justice to a mere product of procedural acceptability rather than grounding it in substantive ethical commitments. In response, defenders highlight the normative foundations of Rawls's approach, arguing that his framework is deeply rooted in the moral autonomy and equality of individuals. Eric Brandstedt and Johan Brännmark (2020) contend that "Rawlsian constructivism provides a coherent and practical methodology for deriving principles of justice that are both rational and normatively compelling" (p. 360). This perspective emphasizes that the substantive moral commitments underlying Rawls's procedural approach counter the notion that it is merely instrumental.

Challenging Critiques of Value Assumptions

O'Neill further challenges the implicit value assumptions present in Rawls's framework, arguing that these assumptions undermine its transparency and universal applicability. In Rawls's constructivist

methodology, the emphasis on fairness and equality reflects certain normative commitments that are taken for granted. Rawls (1971) states, "Justice as fairness aims to establish a suitable connection between a particular conception of the person and first principles of justice" (p. 252). Defenders of Rawls argue that these value assumptions are not arbitrary; rather, they mirror widely shared moral commitments in democratic societies. This connection, they claim, underscores the normative coherence of Rawls's framework and addresses concerns regarding the validity of its implicit values.

Conclusion

O'Neill's critical insights remind us that philosophy is not an ivory-tower exercise but a living conversation about justice that reverberates in our everyday lives. Her call to ground abstract ideals in the messy realities of human experience challenges us to reimagine what it means to build a fair society—one where our shared values and individual complexities are both honoured. As we reflect on this dialogue, we are invited not only to rethink theoretical frameworks but also to embrace the imperfect, vibrant humanity that underlies our quest for a more just world.

The philosophical conversation between Onora O'Neill and John Rawls highlights the intricate challenges and opportunities of constructivist methodologies, especially as they apply to ethical and political theory. Rawls's constructivist framework, built on procedural justification and abstract starting points, has profoundly influenced the discourse on justice. Yet, O'Neill's sharp critique exposes significant weaknesses in these core aspects of his approach. O'Neill points out that Rawls's reliance on procedural justification—while innovative—places too much emphasis on formal rational agreement, often neglecting the substance of moral reasoning. As she observes (O'Neill, 1989), this procedural focus risks disconnecting ethical principles from the lived experiences and moral commitments of actual individuals. Her critique challenges the notion that procedural fairness alone can underpin principles of justice, urging deeper engagement with the moral content underlying those agreements. Rawls's use of highly abstract constructs, such as the original position and veil of ignorance, is another key target of O'Neill's critique. While these constructs aim to model impartiality, O'Neill (1996) argues that their detachment from real-world social and historical contexts limits their relevance for pluralistic and diverse societies. According to her, such idealizations oversimplify the nuanced realities of human interactions and moral reasoning—both essential components of achieving justice in practice.

Rawls seeks to reconcile universal principles with the plurality of moral traditions through his idea of public reason, carving out a middle path between universalism and relativism. Yet O'Neill raises concerns about whether his framework truly achieves universality, given its grounding in implicit liberal egalitarian values that may not resonate across all moral and cultural contexts. For O'Neill (1989), ethical reasoning requires a careful balance between universal aspirations and sensitivity to cultural and contextual realities—a balance Rawls's constructivism struggles to strike effectively. O'Neill also critiques the instrumental justification underlying Rawls's framework, arguing that it focuses too heavily on procedural agreement at the expense of the deeper ethical foundations of justice. As O'Neill (1996) warns, this instrumental focus risks reducing principles of justice to outcomes of hypothetical deliberations, detached from the substantive moral commitments that give them legitimacy. This approach, she argues, compromises the philosophical depth of Rawls's constructivism.

O'Neill challenges the value assumptions embedded in Rawls's framework, noting that his principles—while striving for neutrality— actually reflect specific normative commitments. The prioritization of equality and fairness within his framework, though central to liberal philosophy, represents a distinct moral outlook that may not universally apply across diverse societies. For O'Neill (1989), ethical frameworks must engage with the full spectrum of moral values and avoid imposing unexamined assumptions.

O'Neill's critique offers an important lens through which Rawls's constructivism can be refined and reimagined. Her emphasis on grounding justice in context-sensitive reasoning, substantive moral engagement, and inclusive value systems provides critical direction for strengthening constructivist methodologies. While Rawls's contributions remain foundational in modern political philosophy, O'Neill's insights remind us of the need for continual scrutiny and adaptation to meet the ethical demands of an increasingly pluralistic world.

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Exit from Philosophy: Of Foundational Deficiencies and Metaphysical Necessity

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Abstract

The philosophical discourse has traditionally been led by two predominant paradigms; Idealism and Realism. Pragmatism constitutes a radical departure from traditional philosophical inquiry. The term 'inquiry' becomes even more significant as pragmatism marks its shift from inquisition and analysis to workability and practicality. Philosophical inquiry, reflective of the second order nature of philosophy as a discipline, makes the primary task of the philosopher to theorize and define from abstractions. For this to happen, there has to be some sort of metaphysics necessarily present for foundational purposes. The incorporation of pragmatism into philosophy has led to over dilution of philosophical inquiry and over generalizations to make it workable and practical. It is indeed wonderful to observe that such pragmatics is uncommon in puritan disciplines like mathematics, physics or medicine. We do not hear of pragmatic mathematics or workable medicine. Rather, one who bypasses the medical technicalities is referred to as a quack and is subjected to prosecution. The whole intent of philosophical inquiry was not workability but achievement of clarity and precision for the pursuit of knowledge. The pragmatists themselves do not want to refer to themselves as 'philosophers'. William James refers to himself as 'psychologist philosopher' whereas Dewey referred to himself as 'educator' or 'social theorist'. Existence of pragmatism as some sort of workable hypothesis was prevalent before it being labelled as some sort of philosophical tradition. But it rather lacks both the metaphysical depth and logical consistency to be called a coherent philosophical system.

Keywords: Idealism-realism divide, over-dilution, workability, consistency

With the onset of Logical positivism and analytic philosophy in the 20th century philosophical discourse, metaphysics took an existential blow, the primary intent of the logical positivists being the unconditional 'elimination' of metaphysics from philosophy in totality. In the very first paragraph of his seminal work, *Language, Truth and Logic,* A.J. Ayer

makes his case quite clear for such elimination, almost in dire urgency, as follows, "For if there are any questions which science leaves it to philosophy to answer, a straightforward process of elimination must lead to their discovery. We may begin by criticizing the metaphysical thesis that philosophy affords us knowledge of a reality transcending the world of science and common sense" (Ayer, 2001, p. 13). The case against metaphysics was not made without its instrumentalities. Keeping in mind the time period and the science and logic laden background of these logical positivists, the developments and discoveries of the early 20th century made it impossible to escape the charm of according to it the scientific legitimacy and salvage the existence of the discipline. The time was rife as the development of a new form of Logic by Russell and Whitehead, development of non Euclidean geometry, incompleteness theorem in mathematics, uncertainty principle in physics and exit of various disciplines from philosophy and their subsequent evolution on their own indeed was more than enough to make a charge against metaphysical enquiries. But the complete annihilation of a branch of discipline is not ideal even in the historical or historiographical sense. Metaphysics being one of the most fundamental branches of philosophy primarily dealing with the nature of reality, existence and structure and nature of the universe cannot be eliminated that easily. A case for metaphysics was made fervently and it bounced back even before its elimination. The reason for the same was the inherent interrelation of philosophical enterprise and the very nature of metaphysics. As it aims to answer the fundamental questions pertaining to ultimate reality, nature of being per se, existence of things independently or being dependent on each other etc. it forms the very basis of philosophical inquiry. For the same reason, metaphysics as a discipline has had its profound effect on various domains of thought such as Epistemology, ethics, inquiry on the nature of existence and beginning of the universe, physics and biology. Metaphysics provides the foundational framework for understanding reality. Each and every philosophical discourse, whether epistemic, epistemological, ethical, moral or scientific, depends on a primary metaphysical standpoint. "Unlike the various arts that are concerned with production and the various practical sciences (ethics,economics and politics) whose end is the direction of human action, metaphysics has as its goal the apprehension of truth for its own sake" (Loux, 2006, p. 2). Cartesian Cogito is not a mere epistemological claim but a nuanced metaphysical stance concerning self and existence. Even the early scientific endeavours were guided by metaphysical assumptions. For the sake of an example, one of the most celebrated scientists, Sir Issac Newton's mechanistic worldview was rooted in a form of a metaphysical realism, asserting the existence of an objective reality, independent of perception (Newton, 1687). The

developments which occurred in 20th century Quantum physics have reignited the debates concerning the idealist worldview. Thus metaphysics has remained indispensable throughout in shaping, at least a theoretical worldview. At the very centre of metaphysical thought lies a fundamental division of two opposing schools of thought: Idealism and Realism.

Idealism vs. Realism: A Lasting Debate

Idealism posits a theoretical framework which asserts that reality is fundamentally mental or conceptual rendering it immaterial. Reality is perceived either as a construction of the mind or entirely dependent on it. Though we have to keep in mind that in the modern philosophical discourse, there has been a categorisation which distinguishes between metaphysical idealism and epistemological idealism. Where in the case of metaphysical idealism, the assertion is that something mental is the foundation of all reality. In the case of epistemological idealism or formal idealism, it is established that although there is a possibility of existence of something which is independent of mind, is so interconnected that all forms of knowledge would account to self knowledge. In the paper, the concern is only with the idealism in the broad manner. One of the most influential proponents of idealism was Plato. In his theory of forms (Coplestone, 1993, p. 163), he asserted that the material world is merely a shadow of the higher, more real and unchanging realm of abstract forms or ideas. What we perceive or tend to perceive through our senses is not the true reality but a mere reflection of perfect, eternal archetypes. Platonic forms were ideal and unchanging in nature. Later, George Berkeley, in his work *A treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (2003), argued that the whole material world in its entirety is a construction of the mind or dependent on it. His fundamental doctrine of "*Esse est percipi*" (to be is to be perceived) affirms that reality consists only of perceptions and the perceiving mind.

In contrast, Realism holds that reality is independent of human perception or thought. The external world remains the same irrespective of it being perceived or not. This position is historically associated with Aristotle. Aristotle rejected Plato's view and reiterated that substances exist in the material world instead of an abstract realm (Aristotle, 1924). Reality, according to Aristotle, is composed of concrete objects which possess inherent properties. Our knowledge about these inherent properties is derived through observation and experience. John Locke, later on developed the distinction between primary qualities such as shape,

motion and number which tend to exist in the object themselves and the secondary qualities such as colour, taste and sound which exist in the observer's perception (Locke, 1975). This path breaking perspective brought about a paradigm shift and laid the groundwork for empiricism which would establish that the knowledge of the external world has to be acquired through sensory devices and experiences. Scientific realism, which is much more recent, establishes that the world described by science which includes even the unobservable sub-atomic entities such as atoms and quarks exist independently of our perception or understanding (Putnam, 1981). This perspective is predominantly prevalent and accepted in contemporary philosophical discourse.

The debate between idealism and realism has consistently remained one of the most endearing ones through the course of philosophical discourse. It has, in turn, influenced various disciplines, from ethical and moral decision making, to epistemological discussions concerning perception and reality and more importantly the discussions concerning the philosophy of religion. A very famous painting, 'The School of Athens', painted by Raphael, symbolically represents the dichotomy. Plato, depicted in the painting, points upwards towards the realm of ideas, whereas Aristotle is seen gesturing towards the earthly plane, signifying the empirical and material reality. This pictorial representation perfectly encapsulates the two varying metaphysical positions, also highlighting their impact on the development of philosophical thought.

The Central Metaphysical Divide: 'There' and 'Here'

Both idealism and realism still continue to shape contemporary discussions and developments. Various modern thinkers have attempted to reconcile both the positions and develop a holistic solution. Immanuel Kant is one of the most prominent ones to do so. He floated the idea of Transcendental Idealism. The basic tenet of transcendental idealism is that although things exist independently of perception, our understanding of them is inherently shaped by the structures of human cognition (Kant, 1998). This reflects that although there has been a contrasting divide between the two positions, there is a possibility of reconciliation and development of a significant philosophical advancement. We have to keep in mind that this distinction between Idealism and Realism is not an abstract debate but it is a core foundational issue in itself. This foundational issue is a direct consequence of the development of

metaphysics and its subsequent evolution. The painting, '*School of Athens*' places Plato and Aristotle at the centre of the philosophical tradition, reinforcing their status as two foundational figures in metaphysical discourse. Symbolically, the painting makes a very clear and distinct statement- every contingent philosophical position has to align either with idealism or realism.

School of Athens, Racheal (1510-11)

The inherent contrast between Plato's 'there' and Aristotle's 'here' cannot be regarded as a mere artistic nuance. It is a deep intertwined reference of a metaphysical dilemma. Plato's raised finger signifies his theoretical assumption that reality is indeed transcendental, way beyond the material, physical world. His philosophical viewpoint aligns with the idea that this World of forms is the ultimate reality. What is perceived by the senses is the imperfect shadow. His particularly upward gesture signifies that knowledge and truth exist somewhere in a comparatively higher, immaterial realm which can be deciphered or grasped through a process of rational contemplation. Whereas Aristotle's downward hand is significant of his belief that reality is grounded in the material and physical world. He asserted that both the substance and the form exist together in the material world and knowledge is deduced from the empirical observation. His philosophy has been regarded as the benchmark and foundation stone of scientific inquiry and empirical

realism. Raphael's painting points out that every philosopher in the history of philosophy has, in some way or the other, either aligned with, or refuted these two prevalent metaphysical stances. Every philosophical tradition has either extended, modified or defended idealism or extended, modified or defended realism. Chronologically speaking, Neoplatonism refined the idea of Plato specifically the concept of transcendent reality. Rationalism of Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza, while upholding reason or rationality, is aligning, in a way, with Plato's belief in innate ideas. The German Idealism of Kant and then Hegel reinvigorated Plato's ideas in the context of transcendental idealism and dialectical idealism. In the case of empiricism as a philosophical thought; Locke, Berkeley and Hume reinforced Aristotle's idea of sense perception as the foundation of knowledge. Scientific realism, although passively, is built upon the Aristotelian notion of reality consisting of observable substances being governed by natural and physical laws. The development of logical positivism as a movement and Analytic philosophy was a step towards empiricity prevalent in the works of Aristotle. Even the ones who are completely sceptical of traditional metaphysical assumptions, had to engage with these two positions. For example, the logical positivists, who were attempting to reject metaphysics in its totality, took the empiricist stance. Raphael's painting is not merely historical or historiographical. It is reflective of a prominent philosophical principle. Any attempt which is made to make sense of reality, irrespective of it being a metaphysical attempt, scientific attempt or an ethical attempt, has to necessarily align with one of the two paradigms. It would not be wrong to assert that the entire tradition of the western thought is an ongoing dialogue between idealism and realism. This makes 'The school of Athens' not just a work of art, but a pictorial manifesto of philosophy.

Consistency in Philosophical Theories: A Logical Necessity

One of the fundamental affirmations of metaphysics is that any fresh and novel philosophical theory should align either with Idealism or Realism. This is deep rooted in the belief that any metaphysical reality to even begin with or lay down its foundational framework has to pick and choose as to the nature of reality. However this claim is not without its set of objections as various philosophical traditions challenge the very notion that all theories must fit neatly into one of these two categories in a form of a pigeon hole. The historical debate between rationalism and empiricism of the 17th and 18th century mirrors the debate of idealistic and realistic epistemology. Rationalist philosophers who were Idealism

oriented such as Rene Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz and Baruch Spinoza who argued that knowledge is primarily derived from reason and innate ideas, rather than experience. Descartes' famous statement '*Cogito, ergo sum*' (Descartes, 2008) is suggestive of the fact that the self is the fundamental reality, reinforcing Idealist notions of the primacy of the mind. Empiricist thinkers who were realism oriented such as John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume emphasised that knowledge comes from sense experience. Locke argued that the mind is 'Tabula Rasa', thereby rejecting innate ideas in favour of a Realist conception of knowledge as derived from the external world.

Immanuel Kant made an attempt to reconcile these two opposing positions through his idea of Transcendental Idealism, arguing that while things exist independently (noumena), our understanding of them (phenomena) is shaped by human cognition. Peripherally it appears to be a middle ground, the Kantian system is ultimately tilted towards Idealism as he asserts that one can never know reality as it is (Ding an Sich). German Idealists such as Hegel, Fichte, Schelling further pushed Kant's Idealism and proposed that reality itself is a product of mind and historical development (Hegel, 1977). Scientific realism emphasised that objective reality exists independently and science uncovers truths independent of perception (Mach, 1883). Certain philosophical traditions challenge this rigid stance. Pragmatism as a philosophical movement argued that truth is not absolute, neither does it exist independently of human experience, rather it is determined and defined by its practical consequences. Pragmatism reflects that the whole Idealism vs. Realism debate was misguided, as it assumes a fixed nature of reality rather than an evolving, experience dependent process.

The existential and phenomenological turn brought about a subjective orientation to the philosophical discourse. Philosophers like Kierkegaard, Sartre and Heidegger challenged the traditional metaphysical framework. Heidegger criticised both idealism and realism for fundamentally assuming that 'being' is an abstract or objective category. He introduced an altogether new concept of 'Dasein'- a being whose existence is shaped by its own self awareness (Heidegger, 2008). Sartre rejects the notion of both external as well as an internal reality or abstract ideas (Sartre, 2003). He rather suggests that existence precedes essence. Postmodern thinkers like Derrida and Foucault reject the very premise of grand metaphysical narratives. Derrida affirms that all metaphysical categories are indeed some sort of linguistic constructs (Derrida, 2016). Foucault argued that both truth and reality are produced by power structures, rather than being independently existing entities (Foucault,

1977). This brings us back to the question of whether this Idealism-Realism Divide is escapable and whether pragmatism does any sort of justice in its purported notion of functionality and practicality.

Pragmatism as an Exit from Philosophy

One of the fiercest retorts to the debate concerning idealism and realism comes from Pragmatism which was developed by Charles Pierce, William James and John Dewey in the late 19th Century. The fundamental tenet of pragmatism as a movement was its definition of truth. Pierce, who is often considered to be the father of pragmatism, asserted the idea that pragmatism is indeed a method of inquiry. In his essay entitled *The Fixation of Belief* (1877) and *How to Make Our Ideas Clear* (1878), he argued that the meaning of a concept is essentially determined by its practical effects. For him, ideas are not essentially true or false in the absolute terms, rather their truth depends on how they function in guiding action. Knowledge, according to Pierce, can be best advanced through scientific inquiry. He defined truth as the 'end of inquiry' essentially meaning that which is considered the truth is what survives rigorous doubt and continuous testing. Although he focussed upon scientific inquiry and prima facie, it might seem that he is aligned more towards the realistic point of view, he did not directly refute certain idealistic elements. William James had a different methodological preliminary. Where Pierce advocated for Pragmatism as a method of inquiry, James was essentially concerned with Pragmatism as a theory of truth. In *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907) he argued that truth is not at all static or absolute, but dynamic and evolving. His workability criterion was put forward where he emphasised on the workability of ideas. He said that ideas are true if they work, if they help individuals navigate the world successfully. He asserts that all three of the religious, moral and metaphysical questions should be answered keeping in mind their practical impact rather than completely abstract speculation. James applied his version of pragmatism to psychology, ethical and moral decision making and religious questions and emphasised that beliefs should be judged by their particular consequences (James, 1902). John Dewey developed pragmatism into instrumentalism which was focused towards education, democratic ideals and social reforms. His version of pragmatism was intended towards the practical application of ideas, making philosophy useful for social sciences, politics and education.

On the peripheral glance itself, it is quite evident that pragmatism differs from the traditional metaphysical positions. Pragmatism is concerned with the usefulness of ideas rather than their ontological status. It believes in the fluid nature of truth, which begs the question of it being even the truth at all. Pragmatists establish that truth need not be something to be discovered but rather it is something that emerges through experimentation and subjective experience. Pragmatists are concerned with the evolutionary nature of truth and knowledge. They do not believe in fixed foundations of truth. They assert that knowledge is an evolving enterprise like empirical sciences. These arguments make us wonder that although pragmatism has had its practical benefits and has had its fair share of influence in fields like science, politics and pedagogical enterprise, there are certain foundational deficiencies for it to be called a philosophical viewpoint. From the historical point of view, pragmatism has existed as a practical form of thinking much before it was categorised to be some sort of philosophy in the 19th century. Many thinkers level the charge against pragmatism to be lacking of metaphysical depth and conceptual rigour to be considered a comprehensive philosophical system. On the close examination of History of Philosophy, we can easily point out the traces of pragmatic hypotheses in many philosophical systems. Socrates' dialectical method can be regarded as highly pragmatic. The Aristotelian concept of 'phronesis' (practical wisdom) in Nicomachean Ethics reflects a pragmatic approach (Aristotle, 1934). Stoics and Epicureans promoted pragmatic approaches to happiness and well being. Maciavelli's disregard of moral idealism can be referred to as being practical and workable and in turn, pragmatic in nature. Modern science itself works on pragmatic and workable ideals as modern science is dependent on provisional truths, although the defenders of pragmatism have various arguments in favour of it being a philosophy. These proponents argue that pragmatism is in a way redefining the traditional nature and definition of philosophy itself. Pragmatists assert that they are rejecting abstract metaphysics and making the case of philosophy stronger by doing so. In doing so, they challenge both the correspondence and coherence theory of truth and offer their pragmatic theory of truth in response. Pragmatism and its influence in ethical and political philosophy is claimed to further their stand of it being a consistent philosophy.

Concluding Remarks: An Unpragmatic Solution

On the escapability of idealism-realism divide, it can be argued that pragmatism in a way is leaning towards realism as it is assumptive of the

fact that the world moves by action and interaction and works by functionality. But the existential and postmodernist rejection of this rigid divide makes it a meaningful question to ponder over and in fact makes existentialism and postmodernism more philosophical in nature when compared to pragmatism. On the question of pragmatism being a consistent philosophical system on its own, the authors have their reservations. The traditional philosophical inquiry being concerned with fundamental questions concerning existence and its complications, pragmatism lacks the basis of it being called philosophical at all. Rather, pragmatism is a methodology in itself, it might be classified as some sort of 'way of life' in a disparaging sense, but sidestepping the metaphysical foundation makes it take a step away from philosophical enterprise. To have metaphysics is complacent in accepting some sort of reality and rejection of metaphysics in totality is in a way departure from philosophy. Acceptance of Pragmatism and its definition of truth become even more problematic. The whole workability criterion leads to a very dangerous predicament. Truth being 'useful' is one of the most gruesome attacks on the very notion of truth and thousands of years of commitment of various philosophers who worked for the refinement of the definition and search of truth. The subjective burden it brings about makes it unbearable to accommodate. It makes the definition of truth too relativistic in nature. This also makes it fallibilistic in nature. The pragmatists' assertion of them being effective in the domain of ethics makes it even more problematic. Ethical decision making and ethical narratives have in themselves an element of Universality and depend on absolute truths. The pragmatist workable truths make ethical statements to be overly subjective in nature. The moral values of particular actions become justifiable because of their practical outcomes. This is dangerous, especially for totalitarian regimes and post truths. The pragmatic truth might make post truth 'workable'. The question also arises for the differentiation of 'comfortable' and 'workable'.

The dangers are not only ethical but epistemological as well. The nature of philosophical inquiry and the whole idea of philosophical analysis of the term might get overdiluted to just the workability of it. The workability raises another set of can of worms. Is it individual or societal? The philosophical enterprise is inherently a second order enterprise and relishes in its capability of theory making, This is what makes philosophy different from other disciplines. The over simplification would make it lose the theoretical rigour it has. Pragmatism would also lead to dilution of philosophical purity. It would lead to contamination of philosophy by introduction of non philosophical subject matter into the discipline. While every other discipline is trying to make the discipline legitimate by

sticking to a set of methodologies, definitions and strict norms, is there really a need to make philosophy even more gullible to accommodate various sub disciplines just for the sake of it. The fundamental ideals of philosophy have remained consistent throughout the history of philosophy, namely clarity and precision. The pragmatic approach would lead to loss of clarity and precision in philosophical definitions and concepts. The whole idea of pursuit of clear and indubitable knowledge would be lost to practical concerns. As the debate over pragmatism's legitimacy as a philosophy is ensuing, it would pain us to witness the departure of Philosophy from philosophy. While pragmatism as a methodology and a practical approach for problem solving is totally acceptable, as it has helped shaped the human thought and behaviour for centuries and it is indeed an effective method of problem solving, the flexibility inherent in pragmatic thought makes it difficult to be acceptable as a philosophical school. Its lack of metaphysical, epistemological and ethical foundations makes its ground too shaky. It opens up a Pandora's Box to legitimise any subject to be some sort of philosophy. When the pragmatists themselves are shying away to be referred to as philosophers, is there really a need to call it a philosophy? It is upon us to decide to act as watchdog or a gatekeeper, or instead let anything pass on as philosophy.

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The Ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo Regarding Nationalism and Upliftment of Human Beings: A Study in Comparison

Baishali Majumdar

Abstract

In the recent decades, mental restlessness is found almost everywhere. These various tenets of restlessness lead us to conflict, while, on the other hand, reconciliation and the existence of positive, recently healed interpersonal or international ties can result from peace showers. Peace was the foundation of the Gandhian Philosophy. The other tenet, nationalism, was termed by Gandhiji as *'Swadeshi'*, which, once again, means the spirit of universal love and service to mankind, that can be achieved only by following Truth and Non-violence and other moral values. In respect to nationalism, Sri Aurobindo opined that the people of India have to achieve total liberation from foreign domination. According to him, India is the Divine mother, a *Śakti, Devī* or Goddess. Sri Aurobindo pleaded to Indian people 'serve her, sacrifice all for her, so that she may be free.' For him, the *Jīvātmā* is conceived as the spark of the Divine. The Gnostic beings in Divine life feel intimate oneness with other human beings. The present paper proposes to – first of all, explain the philosophical background of Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo behind Nationalism; second, what their opinions were about the term 'nationalism'; third, examine the resemblance between their philosophy and nationalism; and, finally, in what perspective they explain the upliftment of human being in respect to the path of nationalism.

Keywords: Nationalism, Upliftment, Truth, Non-violence, Gnostic being, Divine life.

There are various types of conflicts that we perceive in the recent times. These conflicts produce different types of violence like religious, social, political, economic, and so on, and if we deeply examine the ultimate source of the conflicts, we can explore the very cause of anxiety or mental restlessness within ourselves. In stark contrast, reconciliation and the existence of positive, recently healed interpersonal or international ties can result from peace showers. Prosperity in terms of ensuring equality, social or economic welfare, and a functional political system that aids in advancing the real interests of all citizens. Peace is at the core of the

concept of Mahatma Gandhi's (1869 – 1948) philosophy. Nationalism was elucidated by Gandhi as *'Swadeshi'*, and that refers to 'belonging to one's own country'. The implication of the word in Gandhian terminology was that the notion of universal love and service to mankind and that can be possible only when the great principles Truth and Non-violence and other moral values can prepare the base for attaining peace and bringing the true sense of nationalism.

Eminent philosopher Aurobindo Ghose (1872–1950) has the creative and significant personality in the history of Indian nationalism. In Dr. Radhakrishnan's opinion, Sri Aurobindo was 'the most accomplished of modern Indian thinkers'. He was the 'Messiah of Indian culture and civilisation', as was described by Tagore. According to Chittaranjan Das, Sri Aurobindo was the 'Poet of patriotism, the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity'. Sri Aurobindo was a versatile genius and a passionate patriot, a renowned thinker, a notable metaphysician. In 1907, Aurobindo joined National Freedom Movement and he himself associated with journals and periodicals like, the *Jugāntar*, the *Bande Mātaram*, and the *Karmayogī* – through which he relentlessly criticised British imperialism, and preached the ideals of the National Movement of India. He was, perhaps, one of the more Indian radical leaders of the 20th century. He was arrested in 1908 on charges of involvement with the Alipore Bomb-Case, and was acquitted in 1909 after a long trial. He left active politics in 1910 and remained in Pondicherry as a *yogī* till his last breath on 5th December, 1950. His celebrated writings are – *The Life Divine, Essays on the Gita, The Ideal of Human Unity, The Foundations of Indian Culture*, and so on.

Mahatma Gandhi's Lessons of Philosophy behind Nationalism

Gandhi elucidated 'Nationalism' by the word of *swadeshi*. The meaning of the word '*Swadeshi'* in broader perspective is the segregation of the foreign things and the usage of all home-made things. This has a very broad definition. For the protection and the preservation of the home-industry, Mahatma Gandhi insisted on the recommendation of *swadeshi.* On the other hand, if the use of the foreign goods does not unpleasantly affect the home-industry and if the utilisation of the foreign things are beneficial then it could be sanctioned to use the foreign things, and *swadeshi* will not be meant as domination. Gandhi supported *swadeshi* for the development of the home-industry of our country, however he also would be prepared to purchase anything from anywhere of the realm that are indispensable for the growth of our country. For an example, by the usage of foreign talent and capital even if *khādi* can be promoted, it could

be called as *swadeshi*. It is grounded on the political and economic stability of one's own country. The term *'swadeshi'* is so much associated with the terms like 'Nationalism' as well as 'Internationalism'.

Here a relevant question arises: is it not contradictory that Gandhi repeatedly insisted only on *swadeshi?* Is it not go against of internationalism? He is aware of this and he solved the riddle in his own point of view. He once opined that there is a crucial unity of everything, whereas he said about preaching love for one's personal country. According to him, nationalism and internationalism are not essentially opposed to each other, rather they go corollary to each other. First of all, love is defined by Gandhi as self-transcendence or going beyond the individualistic considerations. We, the people simultaneously love our relatives, friends, our family, society, nation and also towards the humanity that indicates the notion of internationalism. In this perspective nationalism is an excellence.

It can be also said that it is not adverse from internationalism. Nationalism will not create any barrier or hindrance in the way of internationalism or the love for the humanity. He thinks that a person can work for his society and for the humankind also. In respect of the feelings on nationalism he opined that his sense of patriotism is broad and exclusive. While it will be inclusive in that sense his service is neither confrontational or competitive, it will be also inclusive in that he focuses solely on the country of his birth out of humility (Sharma, 1956, p. 116). For Gandhi, in reality, nationalism is a pre-condition of internationalism. If healthy relationship will be there among different nations, then the feeling of oneness and a flavour of internationalism could be developed. In Gandhian sense, true internationalism presupposes the unity of internationalism and nationalism. Every nation has to preserve the value and status of non-violence and should go towards disarmament voluntarily then the actual notion of internationalism could be entertained.

So it is clear that the concepts of non-violence, peace, the tenet of love which is the nuclear concept in the philosophy of Gandhi that he had applied in man's character and also applied it to the nation. Therefore, we can assume that the doctrine of love, self-sacrifice, nationalism, internationalism – these concepts are related and so much intertwined in Gandhian philosophy. A person can sacrifice himself towards the family and towards the village, also for the district, he will also do sacrifice for the province, the nation and after all for all the humanities (Datta, 1968, p. 160).

Gandhi opined that life as a whole and it has no isolated compartments. In Indian scriptures we find that there are four aspects of individual's life – *Dharma* (righteousness), *Artha* (money), *Kāma* (desire) and *Mokṣa* (liberation). These aspects are correlated with each other and should be harmoniously developed in ourselves. The crucial aim of life is to achieve liberation and we have to conscious about righteousness. In case of nationalism he also said that when an individual makes broader his heart and accepts all the human beings of the globe as his own brother then we can observe the development or upliftment of human beings and the society. All the facets of Gandhian philosophy like social, political, economic, aspects related with the general thinking of life and the all-round development of human being. Possession of the principles in all the human beings by which he wanted to build the ideal socialist society are as follows (Trivedi, 2012, p. 71):

(a) **Humanism:** Man is the measure of all performances. Each and everything committed before the face of human beings. For building a better man all ideas and actions are to be judged according to the necessity.

(b) **Simple Living:** Simple living and high thinking should be the motto of our life. Material progress is essential for the development of human society. However, the actual aim of human life should be the moral growth and the exclusion for the accumulation of wealth and luxurious life style.

(c) **Social Justice:** Equality between the rich and the poor, between the privileged and unprivileged, between the elite and the masses will be the measurement of a just society. The ideal society which is in Gandhian terminology as *'sarvodaya'* will be established by providing social justice and reducing inequalities.

(d) **Non-violence:** A peaceful society will be established by only non-violent means and not by hatred or violence. End and means are inseparable in Gandhian philosophy. The end like truth will be achieved by only pure means i.e., non-violence. *Rāmrājya* will come to the earth only by practising the principle of non-violence.

(e) **Love and co-operation:** This kind of love does not refer self-love; this is love for others. Love and co-operation are the requirements by which *Rāmrājya* can be constructed. Human relationship will become stronger by truth, love and co-operation, not by money, matter or any other egocentric impulses.

(f) **Harmony:** For Gandhi, self-sufficiency is the ideal economic condition of a society. There should be harmonious relationship among the people and the resources. Production should also match to the people's requirements.

These are the characteristics of an ideal society what he wanted to build up. In his book, *India of My Dream,* he discussed about the features of the ideal society. In his perception of *Rāmrājya,* there will be no discrimination between poor and rich, caste, colour, religion and sex. The state will think about maximum welfare for all the people. People can enjoy full liberty, happiness and independent life.

Sri Aurobindo's Teachings of Philosophy behind Nationalism

Sri Aurobindo's philosophical teachings were known as the integral Vedanta or sometimes it was also called as "integral idealism", "the integral Yoga" or "integralism". According to the traditional Vedanta systems, all the materialism and idealism, rationalism and mysticism, monism and pluralism appeared as opposites in a state of implacable conflicts. Whereas, in the integral vedanta, all these opposites are fully reconciled.

According to him, Brahman is an absolute that cannot be composed of any quantity or combination of qualities, nor it can be summed up in any quantity or qualities. It is neither a formal substratum of forms nor an aggregation of forms. Even if all shapes, sizes and attributes vanished, this would still be there. Not only the existence without quantity, quality or form possible, but it is the only explanation for these phenomena that we can think of (Ghose, 1947, p. 96). Brahman as the absolute that is the pure existence on which everything is dependent, however it is independent in itself. Brahman and its essence reveal in two principal forms or attributes like matter and spirit. The material Brahman is the material cause of the world from which all things induce. The spiritual Brahman is absolute reason, absolute consciousness, absolute soul. The both of these attributes penetrate in the whole of things of the entire phenomenal world. By introducing his doctrine of integral vedanta Sri Aurobindo tried to eliminate the major problem of Philosophy regarding the materialism and idealism and he synthesises all the particular viewpoints by establishing his new dimension of thought.

If we go to sum up the main tenets of Sri Aurobindo's integral idealism, then we can find the following viewpoints:

(1) Brahman as the absolute from which everything emerges and everything reverts; this process or the cycle is eternal;

(2) The soul is only reincarnate itself. Life and death are the two phases of a single cycle.

(3) The destiny of the human soul as well as the destiny of the nature will be determined by the karma which is the eternal moral law of the universe.

(4) The ultimate goal of man's life is "life divine" i.e., the merging with the Brahman and it will be possible through the cognition of the self.

As the Philosopher of the 20th Century Sri Aurobindo Ghose recognised the truth of the material world and procured a positive attitude to the achievements of the philosophy of materialism and natural science. However, he believed that their conclusions to be "one-sided". In this respect, Frederick Engels thought that philosophers were not solely guided by 'pure reason'. Their ideas were formulated by their responses to the progression and development of natural science and industries around them. Engels opined that not only did the materialists led themselves to be affected by these factors, the idealists too were often drawn to materialism, and vainly attempted to reconcile the entities of 'mind and 'matter' (Engels, 1886, p. 347-48).

Secondly, Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is progressive because of his criticism on Indian asceticism for its neglect of the factual conditions of life. For making the relationship between matter and consciousness Ghose opined, "Spirit is the soul and reality of that which we sense as Matter, Matter is a form and body of that which we realise as Spirit" (Ghose, 1947, 96). So, according to him, all that exists in space and time is an infinite number of qualities, forms and constructions out of matter and consciousness. This is known to be as the phenomenal world or nature. However, the real nature of the world is the eternal flow; everything flows out of Brahman and everything returns to Brahman.

The sociological views of Sri Aurobindo were directly related to the philosophical vision. Sri Aurobindo was the supporter of the national liberation movement aimed at the political freedom and the economic independence for all the countries and peoples of the world and specifically the oppressed countries and the peoples of the East. However, it was very difficult to get the people understand the theory that each and every individual irrespective of their colour of skin, religious convictions or their status has the right to live. All men are equal according to the law of nature and they have the divine fire, the *jīva*, a particle of Brahman is burning within them. Through the all-round development of the human beings man can realise these things and it will be possible by giving him a proper education. Three things are necessary for a rational education: first, it should teach people how to observe and correctly understand the facts around which they must make decisions; second, it should teach them how

to think critically and productively; and third, it should prepare them to apply their knowledge and reasoning for both personal and societal benefit (Ghose, 1949, p. 64). He also said about mankind's movement to the ultimate goal, for constructing "a spiritualised society". This is the evolution and there will be no contradictions among three constant factors: individuals, communities of various sorts and mankind. Aurobindo Ghose said on it:

"Each seeks its own fulfilment and satisfaction but each is compelled to develop

them not independently but in relation to the others" (Ghose, 1950, p. 178).

This is necessary to build "a spiritualised society" the entire humanity of the whole world should be united in a single world-state. He was persuaded towards the vision of a world-union. The world union was based on the norm of liberty and variation in a free and intelligent unity (Ghose, 1950, p. 234).

The Crucial Components of Gandhi's Nationalism

Gandhi is not only renowned for his political thinking rather he is also well-known for his socio-religious and economic thought. He was the leader of Indian freedom struggle and he brought the Indian masses into the freedom struggle. He occupied the pivotal place in the freedom struggle of India. His political philosophy begins from South Africa where he first exercised the technique of *satyāgraha*. *Satyāgraha, swarāj, swadeshi, sarvodaya* and other constructive works played a significant role for making Gandhi as Mahatma and he has been known to the whole world an eminent socio-political leader of India.

In South Africa he has coined the term '*Satyāgraha*' in 1906. The term '*Satyāgraha*' is made of two words '*Satya*' that is 'truth' and '*Āgraha'* means 'insistence' or 'holding firmly to'. According to him, truth and non-violence were the weapon of a *satyāgrahī*. This is one of the theory of morality as Gandhi was propounded. A *satyāgrahī* will be firm in his dealings and behaviour. In any adverse situation he should not apply physical force on opponents. For Gandhi, a *Satyāgrahī* must have a living faith in God. His general conviction was that the soldiers with arms are the reflection of violence, so he intended to make an army of *Satyāgrahīs* for the freedom of India (Gandhi, 2011, p. 154-89). *Satyāgraha* is the spiritual weapon that is based on love and humanity. The kinds that Gandhi uses for solving the problems are specifically Disobedience, Non-co-operation,

Direct Action and Fasting. By applying these components of *satyāgraha* he expected the growth of 'nationalism' in our country. *Satyāgraha* has have multifarious effects on different dimensions of our nation.

Gandhi was the worshiper of the principles of *Satya* and *Ahiṃsā* and these two principles also reflected in his social and political philosophy. *Satya* and *Ahiṃsā* also the basis of his concept of *satyāgraha.* In this respect, he distinguishes *satyāgraha* from passive resistance. For describing the nature of passive resistance Gandhi opined that while passive resistance would include hurting the opponent nevertheless, 'Satyāgraha' did not entail this hurt (Gandhi, 2011, p. 105-06). He very much applied the technique of *satyāgraha* in the movement of Indian nationalism. *Satyāgraha* movement was the example of his philosophy because he always gave the priority on morality and spirituality. Gandhi convinced the Indian people that through *satyāgraha,* India could get freedom.

Another concept in the philosophy of Gandhi is so much associated with nationalism was the notion of *swarāj* that means self-rule. Gandhi's *swarāj* was not related with any particular religion. Like the notion of *swarāj,* patriotism, morality and selflessness should be the essential elements of each and every citizen of India. According to him, immorality and selfishness can lead us to anarchism. For Gandhi, civilization is an essential element of *swarāj.* Gandhi wrote in 'Young India' (published on 23 January 1930) that *swarāj* would be worthless if it were not intended to elevate humanity and to purify and stabilize civilization. Our civilization's fundamental characteristic is the importance we place on morality in all of our dealings, whether they are private or public. *Swarāj* is not only related with political affairs but also it is associated with everything. Social, economic, political and moral together constitute the square of *swarāj.* He said in *Hind Swarāj*: "It is *Swarāj* when we learn to rule ourselves (Gandhi, 2011, p. 73). *Swarāj* is the fruit of patience, labour, suffering beyond measure and courage and intelligent appreciation of the environment.

Gandhi also thought about classless society. According to him, '*Dalits* can also enjoy equal rights like others'. Gandhi plays an active role for the woman's development in rural and urban areas. He struggled for equal rights for women and he was not supported the purdah system, polygamy, marriage of the children, system of dowry prevailed in the society. For economic solidarity Mahatma Gandhi always focused on decentralisation of power through *Panchâyati Râj* system. This mode of system is known as 'Decentralized democracy'. This is the need of the

time for the economic upliftment of the population of India. He emphasised on practical education that could help for earning bread and butter. He believes on that type of education that teaches us to control our emotions and senses, it helps us in character building. Gandhi supported the knowledge of all languages, but he gave emphasise on the knowledge of the native language. For him, everyone should know their native language. His concept of *sarvodaya* emphasises on advancement of all. These are all the components by which Gandhi expedited the growth of *swadeshi* in Gandhian terminology or nationalism.

Indian culture as well as tradition was deeply influenced by Gandhi. He did not write more on nationalism, but his entire philosophy and thinking is deeply rooted on it. His faith in non-violence and its practices bring a new dimension in Indian nationalist movement. He did not ever support the path of violence because this is against the principle of truth, the supreme nature of God. So that he introduced new concepts in Indian nationalist movement. Gandhi more believed on constructive works rather than armed forces. He introduced a non-violent nationalism that could bring the populace of the country in a common platform.

The Essential Points of Aurobindo's Nationalism

In the question of nationalism, Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950), preached that the Indian people have to achieve total liberation from foreign domination. First of all, Sri Aurobindo associated spiritualism with nationalism and he also expressed his emotions to motherland called it the divinity within the motherland. He has correlated both the concepts spiritualism and nationalism. At a large public-gathering at Bombay on 19[th]January 1908, he thus defined 'nationalism': Following Sri Aurobindo, nationalism is not a religion which is derived from God; it is not a political programme; it is a creed where we can live. No man will try to call himself a nationalist if he has the feelings of a sort of intellectual pride, thinking that he is more patriotic, he is something higher than those who do not call themselves by that name. If we want to be a nationalist and will try to ascent to the nationalism as a religion, then we have to do in a religious spirit. We should keep in mind that we are the God's creation for the salvation of our own country. We should live as the creature of God (Kadam and Tanwar 2022). He has united the religious faith to national freedom that's why the masses could be conscious about it.

Sri Aurobindo was the supporter of boycott and passive resistance. He described the purpose of passive resistance was the exploitation of British trading by refusing the products supplied by the British. Aurobindo

also asserted that passive resistance may be convert into violence if the ruler suppressed the citizen of India. In this regard, it is different from Gandhian non-violent technique of passive resistance. In this concern, by refusing the British products – that is known as the 'theory of economic boycotting' – he emphasised upon the necessity of *swadeshi*. He also asserted the social boycott which means that the Indians will go to non-cooperation with the British if they will desire the like. He gave emphasis on the development of national education.

Aurobindo wanted to establish India as the important place in world affairs and his ideal was of the human unity. When the rule of British was firmly established in India then he was like the visionary who dreamed India will be a free nation and the contributions of India in the globe will be fabulous. He was very confident about the matter that free India will be capable of acquiring a position in the world. He promoted the notion of humanity. He urged for the independence of India. He has said about total liberation from foreign domination that was also known as complete freedom; complete liberty for the populace in their own homeland. That was the spirit of his performances in politics. He holds that India is more than just a geographical area or a collection of people; rather, it is a Divine Power, a *Śakti, Devi* or Goddess – a cognizant Spiritual Being. He Writes:

> "Mother India is not a piece of earth, she is a power, a Godhead, for all nations have such a Devi supporting their separate existence and keeping it in being. Such beings are real and more permanently real than the men they influence, but they belong to a higher plane. . ." ("Sri Aurobindo on Mother India" 1).

According to him, India is the Divine Mother, we should be taking care of India from the British rulers, only then she will be developed or manifested in her own soul. In order for her to be free, Sri Aurobindo prayed that Indians would serve her and sacrifice all for her. His vision was for founding the 'Religion of Humanity' and restructuring of 'Human Unity' which is to be actualised by the term 'globalisation' in the recent decades. He has also described freedom in spiritual perspective. For him, the *Jīvātmā* is conceived as the spark of the Divine, it transcends the individual expressions of life and mind by the spiritual evolutionary process. When the total spiritualisation of mundane nature was taken place, the men will not be considered to be 'mental men' but become super-men or supramental men. They are the men of knowledge known to

be 'Gnostic beings.' Now the question is, who is the Gnostic being? The Gnostic beings in Divine life will act as a conscious being with an intimate oneness. He observes himself in his own fulfilment as well as the fulfilment of others. Divine life is 'a perfected life on earth' that consists of a race of Supermen. We can say that this is the spiritual aspect of freedom according to Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy.

Comparative Study and Concluding Remarks

By reaching to this platform, we have observed that until and unless one would be a *Mahāyogī* then he will be also a *Mahātmā* likewise without being a *Mahātmā* he could not be a *Mahāyogī*. The two great Philosophers Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo were the active participant of the movement of nationalism. Gandhi had tried to establish the Kingdom of God here on earth and Aurobindo had emphasised on the divinity in man or Life Divine for a blissful and peaceful existence of man. Both emphasised on *sādhanā, tapaṣyā* by which man can overcome the miseries and ultimately free the spirit that is the true identity of man. The two great freedom fighters involved themselves for the freedom of the motherland and for pursuing the true freedom, the unity of mankind is very essential and they were the invocator of this. Therefore, for both of them the decisive aim of freedom movement was 'Liberation of the humanity'.

However, in between them we have also noticed few of dissimilarities.
- At first, Both Aurobindo and Gandhian visions of nationalism are intensely rooted in the amusing tapestry of India's spiritual heritage. Instead of Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo's interpretation resonates more profoundly in Vedic traditions as because he was a mystic poet and also a dedicated yogi. Sri Aurobindo made a connection between the ancient wisdom of the Vedas and the soul of the nation, infusing his thoughts with a spiritual depth that elevates his understanding of nationalism to a transcendent level.
- Sri Aurobindo gives an important contribution to the theory of boycott and passive resistance. According to him, for demolishing British trading we have to apply the concept of this kind and if it to require to be very effective then passive resistance would be turn to violence. In this regard, Gandhian passive resistance was totally depended on non-violence as because Gandhi was the apostle of peace and non-violence. Here the key differences between Aurobindo and Gandhi lay in their methods of struggle; Gandhi's insistence on non-violence contrasted sharply with Aurobindo's initial militant stance, which later evolved into a spiritual focus.

- Gandhi used the terms '*Swarāj'* and '*Swadeshi'* in relation with nationalism. Whereas, Sri Aurobindo coined the term 'independence' in respect of nationalism. Additionally, while Gandhi's concept of *Swaraj* included both political freedom and social transformation, Aurobindo's vision was more concentrated on spiritual and national development. Finally, Gandhi's outright rejection of violence stood in contrast to Aurobindo's acknowledgement of its potential role in the fight for freedom under certain circumstances.

- According to Gandhi, men are not mere psycho-physical entity, he has also soul or consciousness. He was so much influenced by *Upaniṣads, Vedanta* and the *Gita*. The Vedic description of *Brahman* as *sat-cit-ânanda* was the intellectual framework of the philosophical thoughts of Gandhi. This is also true in case of Sri Aurobindo. Importantly, while Gandhi emphasised on the *sat* aspect, Sri Aurobindo emphasised the *cit* aspect. According to him, through the evolutionary process man will become a Gnostic and Supramental being. For both of them, when a man dissociates his egoistic impulses and act like a servant to mankind then the upliftment of humanity and the true sense of freedom can be achievable.

- A critique can criticise Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo's approaches to nationalism concentrated on the observable limitations of their respective philosophies. Critics of Gandhi often argue that his stress on non-violence and soul force, while impactful, may be viewed as too idealistic and not entirely practical for the complexities of a national liberation struggle, particularly against a powerful empire. Some express that Gandhi's focus on suffering and self-discipline could be perceived as a weakness in the face of violent repression. Additionally, Gandhi's emphasis on individual transformation and moral purity is seen by some critics as potentially side-lining the importance of political organization and broader social change. Furthermore, there are arguments suggesting that Gandhi's view of British rule as inherently unjust and exploitative may oversimplify the complexities of colonial power.

- Critics of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual nationalism contend that while he aimed to elevate Indian culture and heritage, his focus on a specific spiritual identity could be considered exclusionary, potentially marginalizing other religious or cultural groups within India. Concerns are also raised regarding Aurobindo's emphasis on human unity over national identity, with some suggesting that this focus might dilute the sense of national identity and unity, especially in the context of challenges such as partition. Moreover, Aurobindo's concept of spiritual nationalism, while aspirational, may be perceived as overly

idealistic and not sufficiently practical for addressing immediate political and social challenges.

- Another difference between Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo was in contrast to Gandhi's insistence on non-violence, Sri Aurobindo, in his early-life, actively participated in Indian national movement through the path of violence, like believing in the 'Cult of Bomb'. Gandhi stood in direct opposition to these paths. He was the invocator of Truth and Non-violence. Later on, in Indian politics, Sri Aurobindo introduced the cult of Spiritualism and Gandhi advocated the cult of Ethics. They had interactions, and a good relationship developed between them.

- Both Gandhi and Aurobindo emphasised the importance of self-rule (*Swaraj*) and a strong sense of national identity. They recognised the necessity for spiritual and moral regeneration in India, albeit through different methodologies. Gandhi advocated for non-violent resistance and mass movements, while Aurobindo highlighted spiritual transformation and a holistic approach to national development.

Finally, at this juncture, it is perceived that in the restlessness and darkness of recent decades, Aurobindo supplied us a path of hope. He wanted to construct a new civilization, a new society and after all a new man. In this respect, Dr, S. Radhakrishnan opined that the greatest intellectual and major force for the spiritual life of the age was Sri Aurobindo. India should always be grateful for his contributions to philosophy and politics, and the world will always remember his priceless contributions to religion and philosophy. In another pole, the great soul Mahatma Gandhi is the nation's 'father', and we, the Indians, have to follow his principles of Truth and Non-violence so that we can make our country a role model for the whole world. Truth – it is known – is a kind of transparency: 'to be true' means 'to be honest', and 'to be honest' means to adopt a path where there is one to one correspondence among what we think, what we speak and what we do. These are what Gandhi emphasised. There would be no confusion, conflict or evil in any sphere of our life or society if we are the follower of the path of truth. If we live our life by loving all the categories of people, the steady upliftment of human beings would be possible, and, by this, nationalism – in the true sense – would become a reality.

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Understanding the Role of *Karma* in Śaṅkara's Path of *Mokṣa*: A Critical Analysis

Shampa Roy

Abstract

Śaṅkarācārya's *kevalādvaita* theory of *mokṣa* found as greater exponent in the traditional Indian philosophy. In his whole philosophical discussion he continuously reminds that *mokṣa* is the ultimate and supreme ideal of human life. All human activities, personal or social or religious must be directed towards the ultimate end and this end is *mokṣa*. In Śaṅkara's philosophy *mokṣa* does not describe such a thing to be achieved, it is the realisation of one's own self. For Śaṅkarācārya, *mokṣa* is a completely positive state; it is the state of identity with *Brahman*. Liberation from bondage does not lies in acquisition or attainment but only in realisation (*aparokṣānubhūti*), a immediate realization in which the individual soul shakes off all false notion about its individuality and difference from *Brahman*, which difference occur due to the ignorance of the individual soul and the individual became bounded due to this ignorance. For this reason, Śaṅkarācārya repeatedly asserts that *mokṣa* is possible only through the knowledge (*jñāna*) or the realisation of the real, which means the realization of the real nature of the individual soul and by nature the individual is pure existence, consciousness and bliss (*saccidānandasvarūpa*). So, the individual soul is nothing but the *Brahman* itself and according to the Advaitins there is only one truth and that is Brahman.

According to the *kevalādvaitavāda* of Śaṅkara, liberation is the state of infinite bliss. It is a state of intuitive realisation of the oneness of *jīva* and *Brahman* or the *saccidānandasvarūpa*. Knowledge of *Nirguṇa Brahman*, the principle of spiritual unity is the pre-eminent means to the attainment of liberation. The immediate knowledge of the identity of *jīva* and *Brahman* (*aparokṣabrahmātmaikyajñāna*) is called *tattvajñāna* and this *tattvajñāna* (true knowledge) is the only means of *mokṣa*. Indirect knowledge dose not remove the false knowledge of mind-body relation. Because the knowledge of duality is ignorance which can be removed only by right knowledge of *Brahman*. Śāstras only generates this right knowledge. The *Brahmanjñāna* which leads to the highest goal does not

depends on any *karma*, because any kind of *karma* (laukika or Vedic), one can do it or done incorrectly or leave it undone. But in the case of *jñāna* there is no option to us whether it is this or that or whether it exists or dose not exist. The real knowledge or *Brahmanjñāna* cannot be changed by any individual. So, *Brahmanjñāna* depends on *Brahman* itself and liberation means *avidyānivṛtti* and this *avidyā* can only removed by the *Brahmanjñāna*. In *kevalādvaitavāda* of Śaṅkarācārya *Brahman*, *Brahmajñāna*, *avidyā-nivṛtti* and *mokṣa* are one and same. In this context, Maharṣi Bādarāyaṇa and Śaṅkarācārya state that only knowledge is the direct cause of liberation. For this purpose Maharṣi Bādarāyaṇa says in *Brahmasūtra* - "*Puruṣārtha ataḥ śavdāt iti Bādarāyaṇaḥ*'' (*Brahmasūtra*, 3.4.1.) i.e. the immediate knowledge of *Nirguṇa Brahman* can alone leads to the attainment of *mokṣa*, without the help of any *karma*, because this is known from the *śruti* like "*tarati śokaṁ ātmavid*" (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 7.1.3), "*Brahmaveda brahmaiva bhavati*" (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 3.2.9) etc.

Now here the question arise: Is there any role of *karma* for the attainment of *mokṣa* in Śaṅkara's philosophy? Because, Knowledge (*jñāna)*, action (*karma*), devotion (*bhakti*) and concentration of mind (*yoga*) – are the well-known means to the attainment of liberation. But, different philosophical system of Indian philosophy holds different opinion regarding the question- what is the direct cause (*sākṣāt kāraṇa*) of *mokṣa*? Is it *karma* or *jñāna* or *bhakti* or *yoga* or the combination of any two or any three or of all? There are different views among the system builders of Indian philosophy on this issue. According to the ancient Mīmāṁsakas like Jaimini and Śabara, action is the direct cause of supreme end because they admit that heaven is the supreme end of our life and it can be attained through the Vedic action. Of course, the later Mīmāṁsakas like Kumārila and Prabhākara, admit *mokṣa* as the supreme end of human life, which can be attend through Vedic Action as well as realisation of the nature of true self. On the other hand, Śaṅkarācārya holds that the path of knowledge alone can lead one to the realisation of *Brahman* through self-realisation. As against Śaṅkara's path of *jñānamārga*, Rāmānujācārya follows the path of *jñānakarmasamuccaya* for attaining liberation. So, there are different opinion among the Mīmāṁsakas regarding the path of *mokṣa* and among them Śaṅkarācārya only gives importance on Knowledge as the direct means of *mokṣa*. For this reason, the opponents of Śaṅkara argues that without action knowledge cannot alone leads to the liberation.

According to the Advaitins the knowledge of *Nirguṇa Brahman* leads to *mokṣa* but the doubt is that whether this kind of knowledge is the forms of part of rituals or *yajña* through the medium of the man qualified

for them or this kind of knowledge can leads independently to the highest goal. Here the opponents holds the first position i.e. the *jñānakarmasamuccayavādins* like Rāmānujācārya who says in his *Śrībhāṣya* that, the Pūrva and the Uttara Mīmāṁsā are one science and the study of the Pūrva-Mīmāṁsā is a pre-requisite for the study of the Vedānta. According to Rāmānujācārya, the study of Vedāntaśāstra can produces only theoretical knowledge about the Reality but it does not alone leads to liberation. It is true that the *Upaniṣads* says, liberation can be attained by knowledge. But this knowledge is not mere verbal understanding of scriptures. If so, then simply reading the scriptures would instantly lead to liberation for everyone. So, liberation can be attained by both knowledge and continuous remembrance of God (*dhruvā-smṛti*); this has been described in different way as *dhyāna* (meditation), *upāsanā* (prayer), *bhakti* (devotion). Therefore, Rāmānujācārya holds that liberation can be attained by a harmonious combination of *upāsanātmak-karma* and *jñāna*.

On the other hand, Ācārya Śaṅkara consistently emphasizes that the *Brahman* can be realised through knowledge, because knowledge can only leads to the highest end; though *karma* or *upāsanā* are subsidiary. Ācārya Śaṅkara always gives importance to *niṣkāmakarma* because by practicing this *niṣkāmakarma* one can purify his mind (*sattvaśuddhi)* for acquiring that knowledge. But ignorance which is the root cause of the world can only be removed by knowledge and ultimately it is knowledge alone which can leads us to the oneness. So, combination of *jñāna* and *karma* is impossible, because Knowledge and action are opposite like light and darkness. They are contradictory and are poles apart. Though Ācārya Śaṅkara admits the *niṣkāma-karma* for purification of mind, but *kāmya-karma* is opposite to knowledge. Because, this kind of action is not eternal, their fruits are also not eternal because performance of action leads to the attainment of heaven, which is also non-eternal. So, the *Nirguṇa Brahman* cannot be realized by performance of duty. And to refute this above view Ācārya says in his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* - "*asmāt vedāntavihitāt ātmajñānāt svatantrāt puruṣārthaḥ sidhyati iti Bādarāyaṇaḥ acharyah manyate*" (*Vedāntadarśanam*, 2014, p. 569) i.e. the knowledge of self is independently leads to the liberation as imparted by the *Upaniṣads*. In favour of his position Ācārya also mentioned the *śruti pramāṇas* like the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* says that "*tarati śokam ātmavid*" (7.1.3) i.e. one who know the Supreme Self, he overcomes all kind of sorrow. In *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* it is stated that "he who knows that supreme *Brahman* becomes *Brahman* itself" (3.2.9), *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* also says "the knower of *Brahman* attains the highest" (2.1.1). There is also the dialogue between Yājñavalka and Maitrī from which it is

known that *jñāna* can leads to the liberation directly. So, the Upaniṣadic text and others Vedic text shows that *jñāna* is alone as the direct cause of liberation.

In this context, the opponents like Jaimini, may oppose that the individual self holds a subservient position in rites etc. because the self comes into subservient relationship with religious acts by becoming their performer; and the knowledge of the Self also must be a part of the rites or *yajña*. Like the purification of paddy by sprinkling of water, the purification of the soul of the performer of rites or *yajña* is also done by the knowledge of soul. Thus, the knowledge of Self regarded as subsidiary to the action.

In response to this objection the Advaitins says that the knowledge of Self is not subsidiary to action and there is also *śruti pramāṇa* like "*tarati śokam ātmavid*" etc. from this *śruti* it is proved that the knowledge of self has independent result.

Against this above view the opponents says that, in the Upaniṣadic text where it mentioned that the self has any result then it must be eulogy. Such as "he whose sacrificial ladle is made of palaśa wood does not hear any evil", "when a sacrificer applies collyrium to his own eyes, he covers the eyes of his enemy thereby", "that the (subsidiary rites) *prayāja*, *anuyāja* etc. are performed, thereby is created an armour for the sacrificer and the (main) sacrifice, so that the enemy of the sacrificer may be defeated" (Gambhirananda, 2013, p. 759) and so on. This kind of eulogy mentions in different Vedic text and from this Upaniṣadic verses it proves that the result of *ātmajñāna* which mentioned in *Upaniṣad* is also *arthavāda* (eulogy).

In response to the above objection Śaṅkarācārya says that - "*kathaṁ punaḥ asya anārabhyādhītasya ātmajñānasya prakaraṇādīnāṁ anyatamenāpi hetunā vinā kratu praveśaḥ āśaṅkate?"* (*Vedāntadarśanam*, 2014, p. 572). Here Ācārya asked the opponents that how is this possible that the knowledge of Self is subsidiary to action? Because there is no context (*prakaraṇādi pramāṇa*) mentioned in the *Upaniṣad* which justify that the knowledge of Self is subsidiary to the rites and if it does not proved that *ātmajñāna* is subsidiary to rites then its result which mentioned as eulogy is not established. Besides this, there is no invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*) between the *ātmā* and *yajña*, such as the fact of being made of palaśa getting connected with a ritual through the ladle.

According to the Advaitins the knowledge of *Nirguṇa Brahman* can never be subsidiary to any action; though the *asaṁsārī Brahman* is different from the *saṁsārī jīvātmā* but the knowledge of this *paramātmā* is independently leads to the highest goal. For this reason Maharṣi Bādarāyaṇa says in his *Brahmasūtra* -"*Adhikopadeśāttu Bādarāyaṇasyaivaṁ taddarśanāt*" (*Brahmasūtra,* 3.4.8). i.e. the *Brahman* is even greater than the agent and there is *śruti pramāṇa*. Because as mentioned in the *Upaniṣad*, the Supreme Self is that which is distinct from the embodied soul and the eternal self untouched by worldly attributes such as agentship; this divine Self free from sin and all kind of limiting qualities, it is an object to be realised, not a doer or a enjoyer. Knowledge of this Supreme Self does not depends on any action rather it's eradicates all notion of action at the root. So, the knowledge of *Nirguṇa Brahman* is contrary to *karma*, it cannot be regarded as a part of *karma*. Rather the person who realises this *Nirguṇa Brahman* he had no action to perform and the knowledge of this *Paramabrahman* alone leads to *mokṣa*. In this regard Ācārya says - "*Upamarda ca*" (*Brahmasūtra,* 3.4.15), here Ācārya intent to say that the knowledge of the Supreme Self is independent of all kind of rituals, and for this reason it transcends all worldly distinction.

In Śaṅkara's *kevalādavitavāda* it is mentioned that there are two paths to achieve the knowledge of oneness of *jīva* and *Brahman* which is the only way for the attainment of *mokṣa*. The first path is the direct meditation of the *Nirguṇa Brahman* and this path prescribe for those whose mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) is purified and there is no inclination and desire for phenomenal object. Another path is the meditation of *Saguṇa Brahman* and this path prescribe for those men whose mind is impure and who are desirous of attaining freedom despite their mental impurities, though both of these paths leads to the same goal. But before practicing this meditation of *Nirguṇa Brahman* as well as *Saguṇa Brahman* one must acquire the four necessary pre-requisites (*sādhana-catuṣṭaya*) and these are-

(1) Discrimination between things permanent and transient (*nityānityavastuviveka*)

(2) Renunciation of the enjoyment of the fruits of action in this world and hereafter (*ihāmutraphalabhogavirāga*).

(3) Six treasures, such as control of the mind (*śama*), control of senses and organs (*dama*), the withdrawing of the self (*uparati*), forbearance (*titikṣā*), self-settledness (*samādhāna*) and faith (*śraddhā*)

(4) The desire for spiritual freedom (*mumukṣutva*).

In *Vedāntasāra* it mentioned that- "*sādhanāni nityānityavastuvivekehāmutra- phalabhogavirāga- śamādiṣaṭakasampattimumukṣutvāni*" (*Vedānta-sāra, 15)*. So, according to the Advaitins the competent person is an aspirant (*adhikarī*) who has adopted these four *sādhanas* or means to the attainment of the spiritual knowledge. After getting these *sādhanas* the aspirant have to practice *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* for the realisation of the consciousness which is one's own self. To define the nature of *śravanādi* Vedānta-paribhāṣākāra says that - "*Śravaṇaṁ nāma vedāntānāmadvaitīye brahmṇi tātparyāvadhāraṇānukūla mānasī kriyā. Mananaṁ nāma śabdāvadhārite arthe mānāntara virodhaśaṅkāyāṁ tannirākaraṇānukūla tarkātmakajñānajanako mānaso vyāpāraḥ. Nididhyāsanaṁ nāma anādidūrvasanayā viṣayeṣvākṛṣyamāṇasya cittasya viṣayebhyo apakṛṣya ātmaviṣayaka sthairyānukūlo mānāsa vyāpāraḥ.*" (Mādhavānanda, 2015, p. 212-213). From the above verse it is clear that *Śravaṇa* is a mental process that leads to the firm conviction that the Vedic scriptures are only teaches by the Brahmana. *Manana* is a mental activity that generates logical understanding which helps to resolve the apparent contradictions regarding the meaning declared by the scriptures, like '*tattvamsi*'. *Nididhyāsana* is a mental practice to focus the mind on the self; it is also involve the mind to withdraw it from external object and concentrated on the self only.

Though all these methods are inter related, but here arisen a controversy between the Bhāmatī school and the Vivaraṇa school regarding the question whether *nididhyāsana* is the direct cause of *Brahma* realisation or *śravaṇa* is alone sufficient for the immediate knowledge of *Brahman*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* are auxiliary to *śravaṇa*?

To describe the Bhāmatī view Dharmarāja says in his *Vedānta Paribhāṣā* - "*tatra nididhyāsanaṁ Brahmasākṣātkāre sākṣāt kāraṇaṁ*" (*Vedānta-Paribhāṣā, 1377, p. 332*) i.e. meditation is the direct cause of *Brahman* realisation and there is also *śruti* text like "*te dhyānayogānugatā apaśyan devātmaśaktiṁ svaguṇainirgūḍām*". So, following the *yoga* of meditation, one can visualise the power which is identical with the Supreme Being, and is hidden by its own ingredients (*guṇas*). Though the followers of Bhāmatī schools gives importance on *manana* as the cause of meditation. Because, without *manana* it is impossible to the aspirant to meditate on the meaning what he has been heard of and so that *śravaṇa* is also must be regarded as the cause of *manana*. Without *Śravaṇa* it is impossible to grasp the intended meaning of a passage and consequently the verbal comprehension cannot arise. So, all the three are causes are inter related for the origination of self- realisation.

On the other hand, by mentioning "*apare tu śravaṇaṁ pradhānam*" (*Vedānta-Paribhāṣā*, 1377, p. 333) Dharmarāja describes the Vivaraṇa view. According to the Vivaraṇa School, *śravaṇa* is the principal cause and *manana* and *nididhyāsana* are auxiliaries of *śravaṇa* for the realisation of *Brahman*. They argue that by hearing the *mahāvākyas* the removal of the ignorance which hides the true nature of the self is possible, although the role of reasoning which based on *śruti* is important for discriminate the self from non-self.

In this context, Paribhāṣākāra also mention the role of *Saguṇa Brahman upāsanā* for attainment of the highest goal. He says - "*saguṇopāsanāmapi cittaikāgra dvārā nirviśeṣa brahma sākṣātkāra hetuḥ.*" (*Vedānta-Paribhāṣā*, 1377, p. 341) that means, like *śravaṇadi* the meditation of qualified *Brahman* can also leads to the realisation of the Supreme Self and it is possible through the concentration of mind (*upāsanā*). But it is also clearly mentioned that this kind of *Saguṇa Brahman upāsanā* prescribe for those persons who are not able to realise the unconditioned Supreme Self and their minds are brought under control by the practice of meditation of *Saguṇa Brahman*. But the difference between *Saguṇa Brahman upāsanā* and *Nirguṇa Brahman upāsanā* is - "those who meditate on the conditioned *Brahman* go by the path of light etc. to the world of *hiraṇyagarbha* and attaining there itself a realisation of the truth by means of hearing etc., they are liberated alone with *hiraṇyagarbha*" (*Vedānta Paribhāṣā,* 2015, p. 224). Maharṣi Bādarāyaṇa also says that "those who attain the world of *Hiraṇyagarbha* or *Brahmaloka* are also liberated because they too never return to the world of *saṁsāra*"(*Brahmasūtra,* 4.4.22). But the person who has realized the *nirviśeṣa Brahman* does not attain any other realm, though he can still experience the pleasure and pain until his *prāravdha karma* is exhausted, thereafter; he attains liberation.

Now the question is, if knowledge is regarded as the direct cause of liberation then why the texts mentioned that the person who already got the right knowledge but still must experience the fruit of *prāravdha karma?* Or is there any scope for *karma* to leads a person to the highest goal? What is the role of *karma* regarding the attainment of *mokṣa*? Is there any possibility to combined *karma* with *jñāna*?

The answer of these above questions is beautifully discussed in *Bhagavad Gītā* through the dialogue between Śri Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. In this connection, Ācārya Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, in his *Gūḍhārthadīpikā* also discussed the impossibility of *jñānakarmasamuccaya*. The combination of knowledge with action is impossible because they are opposite to each

other. Then why does Lord Kṛṣṇa advise Arjuna about *karmayoga*, after discussing the *jñānayoga*? In response to this question Ācārya says that, *karmayoga* prescribes for those who are still in ignorance i.e. whose minds are not purified (*aśuddhāntaḥkaraṇa*) and not for those who are enlightened. *Jñānayoga* prescribed for those whose mind are purified (*śuddhāntaḥkaraṇa*) by attaining *niṣkāma karma*. In regard to the superiority of knowledge Ācārya Madhusūdana also speaks of the '*Bibidiṣāśruti*' for establishing that all the Vedic action are performed for the purification of mind to make it the substratum of knowledge. After attaing liberation, a sage still acts without any desire, engaging himself for selfless deeds for upliftment of humanity (*loka-saṅgraha*). So, it is not *naiṣkarmya* (inactivity), but *niṣkāma karma* (disinterested action) or action done without any expectation of fruit.

To solve the dilemma of *jñānayoga* and *karmayoga Gītā* also says: "*ekaṁ saṁkhyaṁ ca yogaṁ ca yaḥ paśyati sa paśyati*'' (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 5.5.). Actually, liberation can be attained by *jñānayoga* as well as *karmayoga*. In fact, if the *karmayoga* can be performed properly then it is also able to leads us to the liberation; though *karma* is not the direct cause of liberation, but it is the means of purification of mind (*sattvaśuddhi)*, which is the pre-requisite of right knowledge. Actually the results of *jñānayoga* and *karmayoga* are not different. Different people reach the same goal of liberation through different paths, such as *jñānayoga* or *karmayoga*.

According to the Advaita Vedāntins knowledge (*jñāna*) is alone the cause of *mokṣa.* In this regard Advaitācārya Śaṅkara also says that, the steadfastness in action is not a direct cause of liberation, but it has a very important role for fostering steadfastness in knowledge; and on the other hand, steadfastness in knowledge, which arises through the steadfastness in action can leads to the highest Goal independently. To give importance to the *karmayoga* Ācārya syas in his *Gītābhāṣya*, "performing action is itself a means to freedom from action. Indeed, there can be no attainment of an end without its means. And *karmayoga* is the means to the yoga of knowledge characterized by freedom from action" (Gambhirananda, 2018, p. 123).

Śaṅkarācārya in his *Gītābhāṣya* describes a processes of spiritual upliftment from *karmayoga* to *jñānayoga*. Ācārya firstly tells about the Karma-Mīmāṁsakas view who accepted that heaven is the highest goal and for them practice of spiritual rites and duties are driven by a desire for result and they are deeply focused on the utterance of the Vedas, in the Vedic verses, there are many hymns that describe the results of actions

and the ways to achieve them; they do not believe in liberation and they holds that apart from these the Vedic rites and duties are conductive to the attainment of heaven. To express this view *Gītā* says that "*yāmimām puṣpitam vācam …...na anyat asti vādinaḥ*" (*Bhagavad Gītā,* 2.42). Secondly, Ācārya Śaṅkara talks about the *jñānakarmasamuccayavādins* who holds that only the Self- knowledge, preceded by complete renunciation of all duties cannot leads to liberation; rather liberation can achieve through knowledge which combined with actions, like *Agnihotra* etc. which are prescribed in the Vedas and the Smṛtis and in this context, they quote the *Gītā* verses in support of their view like - "*Atha cettvamimam dharmyam saṁgrāmam na kariṣyasi* (*Bhagavad Gītā,* 2.33)" etc.

Both of these above views are refuted by Ācārya Śaṅkara from the point of view of *Gītā*. According to him, these above views are wrong because of the distinction between *jñāna* and *karma*, are based on two different convictions (*buddhi*) which mentioned in *Gītā* as *jñānayoga* and *karmayoga*. As mentioned in the *Gītā* the *sāṅkhyabuddhi* is to know the nature of the Self which regarded as the ultimate reality; the Self cannot be consider as an agent, as it is free from the six kinds of changes, such as birth etc. On the other hand, the *yogabuddhi* means the practice of the disciplines leading to liberation which based on a discrimination between virtue and vice along with the adoration of God. That is why Ācārya secondly focus on the practice of the same rites and duties as dedicate to God without expecting rewards for oneself. As Lord Kṛṣṇa says "*yuktaḥ karmaphalam tyaktā śāntimāpnoti naiṣṭhikīm* (*Bhagavad Gītā,* 5.12)" i.e. giving up the result of action by becoming resolute in faith, by having the conviction of 'Action are for God, not for my gain'; liberation is the peaceful state of mind that arises from steadfastness. But one should understand that it is possible through the purification of mind, realization of the true knowledge, giving up all action and steadfastness in knowledge. For this reason Ācārya later gives emphasizes on the purification of the mind and moral excellence along with *upāsanā* of the qualified *Brahman* and he also discuss about acquiring knowledge from a teacher and the scripture, then giving up all rituals and actions and prepares one for steadfastness in that knowledge.

In this regard, it is essential to mentioned that in the *Bhagavad Gītā* when Lord Kṛṣṇa advice Arjuna about the *karmayoga* (practice of *karma*) and also the *karmasnnayāsa* (detachment of *karma*) then naturally here arise a doubt how does it possible to undertake both of them together for a same person? To resolve this doubt Śaṅkarācārya says in his *Gītābhāṣya* – "since it is impossible that renunciation of actions and

karmayoga can be undertake by a knower of the self, therefore, to say that both of them lead to liberation and that *karmayoga* is superior to renunciation of actions - both this positions are absurd" (Gambhirananda, 2018, pp. 194). It is only justifiable for an ignorant person, not for an enlighten person. Because, when a person know the Self, his false knowledge can removed by this true knowledge of the Self and for him *karmayoga*, which based on erroneous knowledge, will become impossible. In this context Ācārya says in the description of *Gītā*, "the knower of the Self, how one has realised as his own Self which is actionless owing to its free from all such transformations as birth etc. from whom false ignorance has been eradicated as a result of full enlightenment, there follows renunciation of all actions characterized by abiding in the state of identity with the actionless Self, it is then stated that because of the contradiction between correct knowledge and false ignorance, and their results, *karmayoga* which is opposed to renunciation of actions which has false ignorance as its basis, which is preceded by the idea of agentship, and which consists in being established in the active self - is non-existent for him" (Gambhirananda, 2018, p. 195). Therefore, it is impossible for the knower of the Self, who free from false knowledge to practice the *karmayoga* which is based on false knowledge. So, the person who realised the real nature of the Self by *jñānayoga* and abiding in the state of oneness with the actionless Self, is different from the steadfastness of *karmayoga* which is followed by someone who is still in ignorance. Because, there is left no duty to perform for the knower of the Self, as *Gītā* says, "…*ātmanyeva ca saṁtuṣṭaḥ tasya kāryam na vidyate*" (*Bhagavad Gītā,* 3.17).

But one more thing to note here that, Lord also says that "*sannyāsastu māvāho duḥkhamāptumayogataḥ.*" (*Bhagavad Gītā,* 5.6) etc. it means that, renunciation of actions is hard to attain with *karmayoga*. Because, *karmayoga* is prescribed as a path to realize the Supreme Self. But when one realised the Self or one who has ascended to *dhyānayoga* then inaction is regarded alone as the means. That is why, Ācārya Śaṅkara says in his *Gītābhāṣya*, "*karmayoga*, undertaken as a dedication to *Brahman*, to God, by surrendering all activities to God, leads to liberation through the stages of purification of the heart, attainment of knowledge and renunciation of all actions" (Gambhirananda, 2018, p. 217-218). And that was said earlier that, 'the practice of sacrifice, charity and austerity should not be given up'- these alternatives recommended for those who are qualified for action, not to the monks who are steadfastness in knowledge, transcended the stages of life.

The procedure through which one can become steadfast in that knowledge has stated by Lord Kṛṣṇa, "*Na dveṣṭi akuśalam karma kuśule nānuṣajjate. Tyāgī sattva samāviṣṭaḥ medhāvī chinnsaṁśayaḥ.*"(*Bhagavad Gītā,* 18.10) i.e. the renunciant (*tyāgī*), endowed with *sattva*, does not reject actions, rituals and duties meant for desired result, nor he attached to befitting activity, daily obligatory duties, by thinking that they are the means to liberation by purifying the mind, rise of knowledge and steadfast in it. So, a *tyāgī* when performs *nityakarmas* he finds no purpose in it, even he does not entertain any liking for it; because he performs those actions by relinquishing attachment to those acts and their result also. The *tyāgī* also freed from doubts which created by ignorance, because he has become imbued with *sattva* - which is the cause of the knowledge that discriminate between Self and non-self, when one free from ignorance then realised the real nature of the self which is the supreme means of the ultimate goal.

Thus, Ācārya Śaṅkara describes that the person whose mind is purified by the practiced of *karmayoga*, has realised the real nature of the Self i.e. the actionless Self, which is free from all kinds of modifications, such as birth etc., then he has detached himself from all kinds of actions mentally, he attains 'steadfastness in knowledge', which is characterised as 'actionelessness'. Here Ācārya also makes a difference between this enlightened person from those ignorant person, who being qualified for rituals and duties but still believe that the body is self and think that 'I am the agent', for them it is impossible to give up all kinds of actions totally. Therefore, this unenlightened person only competent to perform enjoyed duties by renouncing the fruits of actions. So, the complete eradication of actions is possible only for those person who has realised the Supreme Self, who is not attached to the body and who is free from the misconception that the body is self, i.e. he remain think that he is '*akartā*', '*abhoktā*'. This person becomes a monk and renounce actions totally, because actions, accessories and results are superimpositions on the Self through ignorance and this ignorance is only removed by the realisation of the supreme truth viz. the realisation of *Brahman.*

From the above discussion it can be clearly understood that, *karmayoga* and *karmasannyās* both are leads to the liberation through the steadfastness of knowledge. So, according to the Advaita Vedāntins knowledge (*jñāna*) is alone the direct cause of *mokṣa* and they accept the role of *karma* in the absolute sense for purification of mind (*chittaśuddhi*). Though Śaṅkarācārya established the superiority of knowledge over action and meditation, but he does not reject the importance of *niṣkāma karma* and *upāsanā*. Because, *niṣkāma karma* and *upāsanā* can prepare our mind

to acquire the pure knowledge which leads to the eternal bliss. But, Ācārya strictly refuses the combination of knowledge and action; because they are opposite like light and darkness, knowledge can alone leads to the ultimate goal.

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The Power of Selflessness: Swami Vivekananda's Legacy of Moral Wisdom

Santu Kandar

Abstract

Swami Vivekananda, one of the most powerful spiritual leaders, defined morality as selflessness. He decided that moral principles should transcend distinctions between race, nationality and religion, emphasizing that, 'that which is selfish is immoral and that which is not selfish is moral.' His teachings were based on the idea that true morality leads to personal and social upliftment, and selflessness is the foundation of an ethical life.

Vivekananda considered selflessness to be the highest virtue, equal to divinity itself. He argued that morality should not be an end but a means to achieve true liberation (mokṣa), freeing individuals from selfish desires and leading them towards spiritual enlightenment. Keeping on mind Advaita philosophy, he explained that all beings are interconnected and that harming another is, in essence, harming yourself. This universal view provided a rational and humanitarian justification for moral behaviour outside religious dogma.

In his discourse on Karma-Yoga, he pointed out that selflessness is not only for renunciation but also as a guiding principle for heads of families and people involved in society. He harmonized the paths of action, devotion and knowledge into a unified moral philosophy, advocating the purification of the self through discipline and ethical conduct. This article examines the great moral philosophy of Vivekananda, emphasizing selflessness as the cornerstone of ethical life. By examining his views on morality, spirituality and social responsibility, we gain a deeper understanding of how his teachings remain relevant in today's world, providing timeless guidance for individual and collective transformation.

Keywords: Swami Vivekananda, Morality, Bhagavad Gītā, Advaita Vedanta, Spiritual Upliftment, Liberation, Karma-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, Jñāna-Yoga, Rāj-Yoga

Introduction

Morality has long been a subject of debate, varying across cultures, societies and individuals. Despite these differences, thinkers throughout history have sought a universal moral principle that transcends race, nationality and social divisions. Swami Vivekananda, one of the most profound spiritual leaders of today, gave a powerful answer to this question by defining morality in the simplest of term selflessness.

Vivekananda's moral philosophy was deeply connected in the idea of universal unity, drawing on the principles of Advaita Vedānta. He stated that true morality is not just a social construct but a path to spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*). In his view, ethical behaviour is not only about conforming to social norms but about recognizing divinity in all beings and acting selflessly. He integrated this moral vision with practical life, emphasizing that selflessness should guide not only monks and renunciates but also householders, professionals, and leaders. In his teachings, Vivekananda harmonized different ways of spiritual practice: *Karma-Yoga* (selfless action), *Bhakti-Yoga* (devotion) and *Jñāna-Yoga* (knowledge), in a unified ethical framework. He also recognized the gradations of morality, understanding that ethical duties vary according to one's role in society. His ideas on social morality emphasized the need to end privilege and promote unity without suppressing diversity. Ultimately, Vivekananda's philosophy showed that morality and spirituality meet at the highest level, when selflessness becomes the characteristic of a truly free person.

The value of selfless action: Vivekananda's Advaita ideal

Moral values, principles and standards of right behaviour differ between races, nations, communities, individuals and even at different stages of human life. However, reason and conscience have led thinkers around the world to search for a universal moral principle, a principle that allows us to judge, evaluate or criticize human behaviour regardless of race, language, nationality, community or social status. Swami Vivekananda, a prominent spiritual leader of the modern era, identified the essence of morality in selflessness. He evaluated all aspects of human thought and action, be it social, political, religious or spiritual, based on this universal moral principle. He explained morality in these simple terms: "That which is selfish is immoral and that which is unselfish is moral."[1] Furthering this idea, Vivekananda described the nature of universal morality as follows:

"The watch-world of every good state, every moral good, is not 'I' but 'you'. Who cares whether there is heaven or hell? Who cares whether

there is or is not a soul, who cares if there is an unchangeable or not? The world is here and it is full of suffering. Go out into it, as Buddha did, and struggle to lessen it, or die in the attempt. Forget yourself; this is the first lesson to be learnt, whether you are a theist or atheist, agnostic or Vedantist, Christian or Mohammedan. The universal truth alone is the destruction of the small self and the realization of the higher self."[2] He derided man's attachment to 'small pleasures' as 'utter selfishness.' In his own words, 'I will have everything and not worry about anyone else.' His moral teachings aimed to cultivate increasingly selfless, prophet-like individuals committed to the moral and spiritual upliftment of mankind. Expressing his hope, he said: "I would like to see more moral men in the world like some of those great prophets and great sages who gave a hundred lives if they could benefit from any small animal!"[3]

According to Vivekananda, a person, whether a householder or a recluse can only be considered good if he embodies selflessness in his behaviour and conduct. He emphasized this principle, saying: "All ethics, all human action and all human thought depend on this single idea of selflessness."[4] He further reinforced this view by saying: "The whole idea of human life can be expressed in one word: selflessness."[5]

From an ethical point of view, kindness has no intrinsic value; something is only considered 'good' if it has a meaningful purpose. This raises an essential question: what is the purpose of moral or altruistic behaviour? Faced with this, Vivekananda asked, 'Why should men be moral?' and he answered in ethical terms: "Because through morality is the path to freedom (*mokṣa*), and through immorality to slavery (*bandha*)."[6] However, he clarified that morality itself is not the ultimate goal of life but a means to achieve true freedom: "Morality is not the goal of man, but the means by which this freedom is attained."[7] This freedom refers to freedom from the distractions of sensual desires, which cloud the mind and prevent one from attaining the eternal and divine freedom of the soul. In this context, Vivekananda said: "Perfect morality is complete control of the mind. The perfectly moral man has nothing else to do: he is free."[8]

This profound statement represents Bhagavān Sri Krishna's famous declaration in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: an eternal affirmation of the highest ideal of selfless action and freedom.

"*Na me Pārtha asti kartavyam triṣu lokeṣu kiñcana*'—'O Pārtha, I have no duty to perform in the three worlds."[9]

However, the modern rational mind may have difficulty accepting the idea of a transcendent state of absolute freedom, which rises above all individual desires. To address the doubts of rational atheists and to provide a logical basis for selflessness, Vivekananda offered a monistic humanist (Advaita) explanation of morality. He explained: Why should I be moral? You can only explain it when you understand the truth as given in the Gita: He who sees everything in himself and himself in everything, if he sees the same God living in everyone, he, the wise, will no longer destroy that person for himself.

Through Advaita, you should know this: when you hurt another, you are hurting yourself, because all beings are but a reflection of the same person. Whether you realize it or not, you act with every hand, you move with every foot; you are the king in the palace and the cripple suffering in the streets. You are both strong and weak. Understand this and you will develop a true relationship. That is why we should not harm others. That's why I don't care even if I have to be hungry, because there are millions of mouths eating at simultaneously and they are all mine. So, I should not worry about what happens to 'me' or 'mine', because the whole universe is mine. I am happy all at the same time. Who, then, can destroy me or the universe? Here is the foundation of morality. It is only in Advaita that morality finds its true definition.

The above passage represents the highest and most refined standard of morality, where morality and spirituality, reason and conscience merge into one. It stands for absolute or ideal morality, embodied in the actions of the *Avatāra*s, divine incarnations who have descended to earth. At this level, selflessness and piety cannot be distinguished. In his lectures on *Karma-Yoga*, Vivekananda summarized this idea in a simple but profound equation: "Unselfishness is God."[10] Furthermore, in discussing the ideal of *Karma-Yoga*, selflessness was synonymous with supreme freedom.

"Although this universe will go on always, our goal is freedom, our goal is selflessness."[11]

This transcendent selflessness is expressed as complete self-denial or complete renunciation. However, it would be wrong to assume that selflessness is exclusive to the *Karma-Yogi*. Vivekananda harmonized *Karma* (action), *Bhakti* (devotion) and *Jñāna* (knowledge) in his unified path of self-denial. He illustrated this synthesis:

The worshiper, by constantly keeping before him the thought of God and surrounding himself with goodness, finally reaches the point

where he surrenders himself completely, saying, Thy will be done, keeping something for himself. Likewise, the first two branches of the eightfold *Yoga* (*Aṣṭāṅga*), *Yama* and *Niyama*, are moral disciplines necessary for a *Rāja Yogi*. Principles such as *asteya* (non-stealing), *satya* (truth), *brahmacharya* (celibacy), *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) and *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness), as prescribed in the Patañjali *Yoga Sūtra*, serve to foster selflessness, which is essential for mastering selfish desires.

The moral self and Divinity

Vivekananda emphasized the purification of the inner self through moral discipline: The inner man, or himself, must purify himself by not telling lies, abstaining from intoxicants, avoiding immoral acts, and doing good to others. He said: "We believe that it is the duty of every soul to treat, think and behave towards other souls as divine; never to hate them, hate them, slander them or try to harm them in any way.[12] However, it is only in the incarnation of God that the ultimate embodiment of selflessness – total renunciation – is found. According to Vivekananda, when a person dedicates his life completely to the welfare of humanity, with complete selflessness, that person should be recognized as an incarnation of Divinity. However, the Ācāryas (great religious teachers of India) have given different moral teachings to people depending on their social status, personal inclinations, abilities and dispositions.

From a social point of view, morality reigns; According to Vivekananda, the same moral principle can manifest itself in different degrees depending on the person's stage in life and the circumstances. The important thing is to know that there are gradations of morality, that one state of life, in one set of circumstances, will not and cannot be the duty of another state. For example, a soldier on the battlefield cannot be expected to practice non-violence, just as a family head cannot be asked to abandon family responsibilities and retreat to the forest to meditate.

Vivekananda criticized the Buddhists for making precisely this mistake: indiscriminately urging ordinary people to renounce all worldly duties in pursuit of *Nirvāṇa*, the total end of suffering. He illustrated this point with practical observation: "All the great teachers have taught, 'Do not resist evil,' that non-resistance is the highest moral ideal. However, we all know that if a certain number of us tried to fully apply that maxim, the whole social fabric would collapse. The evil people would take possession of our property and our lives and do with us as they will."[13]

Thus, while non-resistance may be the highest moral ideal, it is not universally applicable in all situations. Moral duties must be

understood in relation to the role each person plays in society and the practical realities of life. Vivekananda believed that morality should not only guide man towards *mokṣa* (liberation), but also serve the greater good of society. Since society is made up of individuals and social relations are determined by individual behaviour, public and private morality cannot be clearly separated. He emphasized that personal morality is the cornerstone of the social structure.

'What is the basis of society?' Vivekananda asked and answered unequivocally: "Morality, ethics, laws. Abandon all temptation to take one's property, lay hands on one's neighbour, and enjoy the pleasure of deceiving others with falsehood. Isn't morality the foundation of society? What is marriage, but the abandonment of prostitution? The savage does not marry. Man marries because he renounces, so on and on."[14]

For Vivekananda, selflessness was the universal moral ideal. The liberation of the individual and the true well-being of society could be achieved through this one virtue. Although selfishness and unselfishness are intertwined in social life, when selfishness exceeds unselfishness, disorder arises, disrupts peace, and prevents the fulfilment of the ultimate goals of life: *Dharma* (righteousness), *Artha* (wealth), *Kāma* (desires), and *Mokṣa* (liberation). Just as a person progresses morally through renunciation, society can also evolve in the same way. In the vivid words of Vivekananda: "Abandonment, non-resistance and non-destructiveness are the ideals to be achieved, through less and less worldliness, less and less resistance, less and less destructiveness. The world has not yet reached the state where this ideal can be fully realized in society."[15]

Vivekananda's noble heart rose against all kinds of privilege and against privileged classes in society. He believed that the ultimate goal of social morality, in all ages, was the elimination of privilege in all areas of human interaction. He argued that this could be achieved by fighting for unity and equality, without destroying diversity. The goal of social morality was to destroy privilege in all areas of human relations. This goal can be achieved if we work towards equality, towards unity, without destroying diversity.

Looking at the future, Vivekananda envisaged an ethical framework based not on external identity but on the identification of the divine within each individual. In his words: "The work of ethics was, and will continue to be, not the destruction of diversity or the application of equality to the external world, as that would mean death and annihilation, but to recognize the God within despite everything that would make us

afraid; to see infinite strength as the birth right of all, despite apparent weakness; and to recognize the eternal and unlimited purity of the soul, whatever it may be on the surface."[16] According to Vivekananda, true social development lies not in imposing external conformity but in awakening an inherent divinity and power within each individual.

Conclusion

So we can say that Swami Vivekananda's moral philosophy offers an extreme and perpetual guidance for ethical living, embedded in the principle of selflessness. He asserted that true morality transcends cultural, religious and social differences, and emphasized that selflessness is the highest virtue. By integrating the paths of action (*Karma-Yoga*), devotion (*Bhakti-Yoga*) and knowledge (*Jñāna-Yoga*), he provided a holistic ethical framework that applies to people from all walks of life.

Vivekananda's teachings also say that morality is not only about conforming to external rules but about internal transformation. He regarded ethical behaviour as a means of achieving spiritual freedom (*mokṣa*), where the self is dissolved in the service of others. His philosophy, embedded in Vedanta Advaita, reinforces the idea that all beings are interconnected: harming another is harming oneself. Additionally, to personal ethics, Vivekananda gave the importance of social morality. He believed that the true progress of society lies in ending privilege and promoting equality without suppressing diversity. He recognized that morality works in gradations, which differ according to their roles and responsibilities and informed against the indiscriminate imposition of absolute moral ideals.

Ultimately, Vivekananda's moral vision is one of unity, selflessness and spiritual upliftment. His teachings are still exceptionally pertinent in today's world, where materialism and self-interest often override ethical values. By practicing unselfishness and recognizing the divine in everyone, individuals and societies can move towards true companionship and absoluteness. His philosophy serves as a moral compass and call to action, encouraging humanity to overcome individualism and welcome a life of higher purpose.

Here we can also say that Swami Vivekananda though extremely influenced by Advaita Vedānta, offers a reinterpretation of its metaphysical foundations that remarkably departs from the non-dualism of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya. While both uphold the idea of ultimate oneness (Brahman), Vivekananda introduces a dynamic, humanistic

reinterpretation of this oneness, making moral life not only pertinent but essential to spiritual realization. In contrast, Śaṅkara's classical Advaita, with its emphasis on metaphysical absolutism, often relegates morality to a provisional, preparatory stage—ultimately sublated by knowledge (*jñāna*) of the non-dual Self.

Vivekananda harmonizes the spiritual disciplines of *karma* (action), *bhakti* (devotion), and *jñāna* (knowledge), making room for both the monk and the householder. He re-centers morality as intrinsic to spiritual life by redefining metaphysical non-dualism in existential, lived terms. For him, Advaita is not simply a philosophical assertion but a **practical truth**: 'He who sees everyone in himself and himself in everyone' lives the reality of non-duality. From this vision, morality becomes not just preparation for higher truth but its **expression**. Unselfishness, in Vivekananda's metaphysics, is not a means to realization—it **is realization** in action. His proclamation, 'Unselfishness is God,' encapsulates this radical shift.

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16. Swami Vivekananda, (1907), *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda* (Vol. 1), Advaita Ashram, Kolkata, p. 436

Notion of Self-creation: Foundation of Nietzsche's Moral View

Nabanita Deb

Abstract

We believe that morality is a thought to flourish of human behaviour or character. The practical necessity of morality is to create a well-being man who will be a pillar of a healthy society. Nietzschean morality is not opposite of this. But he does not support the traditional moral theories which ask for a moral standard. His moral philosophy suggests the development of a new self by removing the old existing values which are situated within self. He often asks for a higher man or an overman who has an exceptional personality to create a new self by removing the old values considered as obstacles in the process of self-creation Instead of introducing any principle or moral standard, he constantly advocates that morality means self-creation by re-evaluating of old values given by conventional morality. In his theory of revaluation of all values, he suggests for re-creating all new values for shaping one's own self (Nietzsche, 2024). He admits that all human beings are unique and their particularities make them different. The uniqueness is the result of human integrity. This uniqueness proves that the existing values cannot be useful for the flourishment of all human being. These values need to be modified by the man himself. The process of modification of old values of self is called self-creation. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, Will to power is the motivational force which helps a moral self or agent to overcome the limitations of the old values and create new which are useful and suited for that particular self. The potentiality of self can be actualised by applying the power of will. So, will to power is the basic thing behind the self-creation process of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Key words: drives, will to power, revaluation, self-sacrifice, self-overcoming, self-creation

Introduction

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche is a 19th century German philosopher whose writings reflected on ideas of morality, religion, and science. His works are based upon ideas of good and evil and the end of religion in the

modern world. His philosophical notions make some readers to admit him as a follower of existential style, a famous twentieth century philosophy focusing on man's existential situation, but there is a huge confusion among philosophers regarding this consideration. As in this paper, I am not going to discuss about the debate that weather Nietzsche is an existentialist or not rather I will project the view of self-creation which is the prime concept of Nietzschean morality. Nietzsche promotes the notion of self-creation as he thinks that every person is unique so if we accept morality as process of flourishment of self then it cannot be possible by using same values. As nothing is common between two men so their values never are same or common. They need different values which is suited for him. These values can never be given by outside authority this value must be given by the person or agent himself. The process of creating new values is considered as morality by Nietzsche.

Relation between morality and self-creation

Nietzsche does not prescribe any moral standard or principle. He considers morality as self-transition. For self- transition, one needs self- creation. He views morality as a continuous process which resumes by the process of self- transition. There is no upper limit which is suggested for self-transformation. If there is anything considered as moral duty for Nietzsche then that will be carry on the process of self –transformation by a person. He never admits morality as a fixed standard. Thus, Nietzsche is famous for uncompromising criticisms of traditional European morality and religion, as well as of conventional philosophical ideas and social and political pieties associated with modernity (Wicks, 2022, "Nietzsche's Life and Works"). In general, morality means which instils values in our minds. The attitudes of human being are the outward manifestation of these values. Now, Nietzsche claims that these values should be created by the person or the moral agent himself otherwise these do not have any use for flourishment of that person. Nietzsche says that when a human being is born in a specific environment then he learns about the existing values from that environment. These all existing values may not be suited for the transition of his self. He needs to modify or create new values. The creation of new values by removing the old is called creation of self by Nietzsche. He believes that the true meaning of morality is to revalue the old existing values of self and create new values. By creating new values the self- transition or flourishment of self can be possible. The transition of the human self and the nurturing of values in character are central to Nietzsche's conception of morality. In his moral philosophy, Nietzsche

asks for that particular type of men who are able to accept the challenge which creates obstacle in the process of removing old values and create new. These types of men are called as higher man or overman or *Übermensch* by Nietzsche. He demands that a person needs to know the unique nature of his existence before creating the new self of him. Creating a new self means to actualise the potential existence of a person. Thus, Nietzsche demands that creating a new self by removing the old existing values of the self is to be considered as duty for every moral person. Nietzsche admits that every self has some unique and particular characteristics which are regulated by his drives, passions, reasons etc. These are the prime factors of creating a new self after leaving the old one. Nietzsche thinks that as the notion of self-creation is related with these factors so we need a thorough discussion on these. Now I am going to discuss these notions elaborately.

Drive psychology and self-knowledge

For self-creation a moral agent needs to know his own self. Self-knowledge is a related notion with the perception and the interpretation of the world or the surroundings of a person or agent. This knowledge process is carried on by the underlying drives of the agent. Nietzsche (1974) says that a human being is a totality of different drives. Drive is not mere force; it is definitely connected with actions. The force that propels an agent to act is called a drive. In Nietzsche's view, the driving force present behind our behaviour is not a conscious, rational force controlled by human beings. He confirms that an action, performed by an agent, is a result of play and counter play of conscious and unconscious drives. According to Nietzsche, even though humans possess a variety of conscious and unconscious drives, the question of conflict among the drives does not arise. The variety of drives does not hamper our motivational balance as one of them becomes the master drive and subdues all the lesser competing drives. The strongest drive, or the master drive produces the stimulus that triggers an action. In a particular circumstance, the agent's perception is influenced by the relatively greater drive or stronger drive which prompts him to behave in accordance with his perspective of the environment. So it is important to note that, for Nietzsche, all the drives do not have the same force and therefore are flexible. The strength of them is always relative. A person may have a wish to see things in a certain way; this can inspire him to take action. However, there is a chance that he won't do it because, at any given time, one of his dominant drives will be triggered. I think, in Nietzsche's view,

to build a strong personality, the presence of strong drives is required. Presence of strong drives gives him the ability to control the opposite drives. According to Nietzsche, beings of a higher kind are able to manage their divided desires. Such a person can control his drive. Higher man's special talent aids in his quest for self-awareness. He is capable of self-transition in later life as a result of his self-knowledge (Ioan, 2020). However, this self-awareness does not appear overnight; rather, it develops gradually. In his book *Daybreak* Nietzsche describes that a person is at first ignorant of the nature of his drives so the person could not realize the real nature of self. At the beginning, he is unaware of the strengths, quantity, play, and counter play of the drives. But as he begins to comprehend the nature of his drives by watching their impacts, the transformation of self begins.

But the question is how does a person acquire self-knowledge to transform into a higher soul with the help of these underlying drives? Here, we can discuss the points made by Paul Katsafanas (2013), a distinguished academician who is engaged in studying Nietzsche's philosophy. He has offered a more thorough explanation that makes Nietzsche's concept of drive much more lucid to understand. According to Katsafanas' theory, a drive is a disposition that represents the agent's view of an object. Thus, based on the agent's perspective regarding a problem, we can assess the type of drive that propels the individual to perform an action. According to Nietzsche (1994), our drives are so fundamental that they are not the result of any rational reflective method, though the pattern of our existence depends on these drives. These drives are triggered by how we see the world and then assess what we see. Therefore, drives are responsible for both perception and assessment of perceived items. Thus, although drives are not always controlled by agent's conscious will, these are nevertheless the disposition of the agent, but the drives are ultimate regulating force of human perception and interpretation of the world. These perception and interpretation help an agent to know about the external world and about himself. Then, the agent can understand his relationship with the external world. This understanding helps him to know his choice, his expectation from outside world, his interest, his passion – that means he gains self-knowledge. After getting the self-knowledge, the person or agent performs actions or takes decisions regarding his interest or choice. From the actions doing by an agent, we confirm his character traits. Although human character and desires are inextricably linked, this does not imply that people cannot alter their characteristics.

Nietzsche never acknowledges that these drives can form an unchangeable character from the moment of our birth, actually these drives lead a human being to see the world and judge the surroundings according to a particular perspective. He acknowledges that although we are born with certain drives that enable us to perceive the world in a particular way, humans eventually develop the ability to form their own unique viewpoints about the world as a result of experiencing the world, analysing, and interpreting it. This novel viewpoint creates new personal qualities. He thereby acknowledges the human potentiality of becoming (Leiter, 2024). The person gains a better understanding of himself which may be termed as his potential existence or real existence. Here, the "real existence" refers to the individual's uniqueness, which projects his difference from other people. This distinctiveness exalts the person's individuality. Being aware of this distinctiveness is a sign of self-awareness. This self-awareness is foundation of self-transition or self-creation. Moral agent always faces challenges that create obstructions in the way of pursuing self-transition. In this sense, the challenges are helpful for acquiring self-knowledge. These challenges are motivates the drive to overcome the obstacles. Though here I must mention that the obstacles are not outsider they are also the drives. And the conflict among drives is a common phenomenon of human psychology. But among these conflicting drives which will master that is a big question because this master determines the nature of the agent.

According to Nietzsche, the drives are different from one another and every drive constantly tries to dominate other drives. Their manifestations vary as a result of their differences. There are certain drives that create difficulties, while others are underling dives that are attempting to accomplish the goal. The drives that assist to achieve the goal are the individual's primary motivational drives. Since the motivational drive is stronger than the other drives, it overcomes the challenges and captures the essence of human nature in the best way. This basic urge encourages self-transition and establishes the authentic existence of an individual. Thus, because of the strength of the primary motivational drives, they overcome the hurdles of challenges and form human nature by exploring one's current self. There are a number of drives that contribute to the human condition, according to Nietzsche. The most notable of these various drives is will to power. Human existence is partially shaped by this impulse. An agent is inspired to act by it.

Will to power: a hidden force to create the new self

An important place in Nietzsche's philosophy is occupied by the will to power. One of the main goals of Nietzsche's early works, including *Human All Too Human,* and *Daybreak,* is to comprehend the essence of human self. He concentrates on the human will in order to comprehend the relevance of desire. He asserts that everyone aspires to control themselves, other people, or the environment. Will to power is the fundamental force behind the drives. According to Nietzsche, everything is motivated by the will power. Nietzsche's theory suggests that a species is judged not only on its capacity for survival but also on its capacity to express and subdue its will to power, which results in the emergence of superior traits and the overcoming of constraints. Thus Nietzsche admits that it is a force that influences people's experiences and interactions with this world, and it also exists in nature as a force for development and evolution. This force is called will to power. Human self has will to power as its constituent part. This motivational force helps to create a new self by removing the old values. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he uses the phrase "will to power". In this essay, Nietzsche discusses the ideas of self-transition by using the motivational force will to power. This piece demonstrates Nietzsche's attempt to do philosophy as art. Nietzsche develops his most important ideas by integrating them into a fictitious story.

His aim of presenting philosophy as fiction is thus most effectively expressed in this text. The main figure is named after Zarathustra, the founder of the ancient Persian religion, according to Nietzsche. He uses Zarathustra's teachings to illustrate his beliefs. At the beginning of the book, Nietzsche writes that after ten years of isolation, Zarathustra emerges from his mountain cave. Zarathustra wishes to teach humanity about the overman and is full of love and wisdom. In German, Nietzsche refers to the fictional character Overman as *Übermensch*. This *Übermensch,* or overman, is a person who is capable of creating his own worth. This idea, which is essential to Nietzsche's philosophy, makes self-overcoming and human potentiality visible. The *Übermensch* is a person who embodies a new standard of human perfection and inventiveness, surpassing the bounds set by conventional religious and moral standards (Firestone, 2017). Thus, the perfect man is exemplified by overman. The ideas of overman and will to power are closely related. Nietzsche explores how someone might become an overman by using their will to gain power in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. He promotes the concept of overman or higher self by the teachings of Zarathustra. According to Nietzsche, Zarathustra declares that the overman may overthrow the established order or conventional values of the society and create new values for his self-

transition. Nietzsche essentially protests against any traditional and conventional style of living when he asserts, in this context, that God is dead (1974). The overman is ideal man because he is devoid of all human society's biases and established so called moral theories and develops his own values and goals. The audacious assertion made by Nietzsche that "God is dead" reverberates throughout Zarathustra's lessons. This proclamation marks the end of the previous worldview that is based on religious doctrine and divine authority. God's death suggests that conventional ideals based on religious convictions are untenable in the contemporary world. Nietzsche's bold proclamation that "God is dead" resonates throughout Zarathustra's teachings. This declaration signifies the collapse of the old worldview dominated by divine authority and religious dogma. The death of God implies that traditional values derived from religious beliefs are no longer tenable in the post-modern era. Consequently, the society must be shifted from the divine-centered values to human-centered values, focusing on the creation and transformation. The "will to power," which Nietzsche asserts is the fundamental human motivation, is the central theme of Zarathustra's philosophy (Nietzsche,1995). The will to power emphasizes on the innate human impulse to strengthen and establish oneself, to achieve and create values, in contrast to other moral theories. According to Zarathustra, self-overcoming and empowerment require embracing of will to power. Will to power is like an encouraging force of human existence, Nietzsche, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* questions the established moral theories which limit human potential. People are encouraged to exert their will and aim for greatness by the will to power. The teachings of Zarathustra emphasize the value of personal strength and self-control, promoting a life of constant self-improvement and the quest for greatness.

Rejection of conventional moral ideas

By encouraging human existence, Nietzsche opposes conventional moralities that limit human potential. People are encouraged to exert their will and aim for greatness by using the will to power. The teachings of Zarathustra emphasize the value of personal strength and self-control, promoting a life of constant self-improvement and the quest for greatness. According to Nietzsche, a human being needs a power as a commanding to other drive. It instructs other drive to act in a specific manner. Since, power generally refers to military or physical strength, Nietzsche's assertions regarding will to power are difficult to comprehend. However, in this case, his strong will aids in bringing out the best in people. According to him, the "Will to Power," which also transcends physical power and includes our need for accomplishment, control, and self-

assertion, is what truly defines the nature of human self. Nietzsche's primary idea is the "Will to Power" which stands for the motivation behind all human endeavours and deeds. Nietzsche clarifies in *Zarathustra* that the will to power, which is the benchmark for self-overcoming, is the foundation of all morality.

We know that Nietzsche rejects the conventional metaphysics and the notion of objective truths. According to Nietzsche, reality is a creation of personal perceptions and viewpoints that want to control their environment. Therefore, truth is to be subjective rather than objective, and the universe itself is to have multiple meanings rather than a single meaning; these interpretations give the world a feeling of purpose, coherence, and organization (Solomon, 2004). According to this epistemological stance, the only realities that are accessible could be seen as men's truths, or truths that are beneficial only to those men. This indicates that a person lives according to a particular interpretation of the perception which he gains, this can influence how he lives. Establishing one's distinct being in the world is the goal of Nietzsche's existential philosophy. The importance of conventional moral and religious ideas must be questioned in order to maintain one's own existence. People have long been forced to adopt these conventional ideas. He calls for a self-aware attitude to reality, urging people to question the dominant ideologies and dogmas and accept their own viewpoints. He counsels the reader to see the potential that is hidden beneath the self. Nietzsche presents a picture of perspectival knowledge in place of absolute facts and objectively objective knowledge of oneself or moral postulates. He frequently praised Heraclitus for accepting change and becoming rather than the Platonic desire for an invisible, unchanging universe. He implies that perspective has a role in the fundamental nature of truth. Truths are subjective because various truths follow different perspectives. A person assesses their environment by employing viewpoints. He states in the book *Will to Power* that every assessment is conducted from a specific point of view.

Nietzsche believes that the best means to learn are by the interpretations of view point. These interpretations make a person aware about his surroundings, his fates, his expectations, limitations and many more aspects which are related with his existence. A person is then able to comprehend his true nature of self and select a course of action or way of living that aligns with their inner self. And one must need a force or power in order to actualize this underlying potentiality. Because sometimes this actualization is difficult as sometimes a person is unable to encounter barriers which are present in the self as resistances. These resistant which

are present within the self and create obstacles in the process of self – transition are may be different kinds of passions or desires or the conflicting drives that prevent the self from reaching his full form of potential. Then, achieving the goal is challenging. So, an agent or moral agent needs this strongest will to gain power that it can overcome the resistant. This will is called will to power which helps an agent to become what he wants (Nietzsche, 1995). For example, someone may have a drive, which we might define as a wish or desire, to pursue a career in writing. However, a person cannot become a writer simply because they want to or wish to become one. The person must be motivated by another second order drive that opposes the impediments (the interrupting drives). This secondary drive is called the will to power. This force is working behind all the action where an agent overcomes the resistant. In *The Genealogy of Morals*, he characterizes the will to power as the most powerful and life-affirming motivation since it is the force that underlies all life. Nietzsche acknowledges the will to power as the fundamental force behind everything, but the strength of this force varies. The manifestation of power confirms its degree.

Different degrees of power

According to Nietzsche, there are several expressions of power, these are not same and equal. He mentions that power is used everywhere. For example, a balanced diet is another example of how the human mind can prevent itself from consuming bad foods. Being healthy is desired here. Additionally, a person can employ self-control to avoid eating delicious junk food in order to satisfy this desire. According to Nietzsche, this kind of resistance is also an exercise of will to power. For him, however, this is not the best form of will to power. This is not the highest level of will to power for him. Highest level of will to power is to leave the conventional life and create new values. Here I want to add something that though he says that he does not think that we need to establish any moral standard while doing philosophy and that is why he refuses the traditional moral view. But if we notice minutely then we can see that he also prescribes a goal or postulates in his works. He also establishes a purpose or set of principles in his writings. He also discusses the idea that becoming the *Übermensch*, or superman, is a fundamental aspect of human existence. And will to power is necessary condition to become Superman. Having this kind of desire to power is the ultimate kind of morality for Nietzsche. Because he believes that using reason as a tool to control one's passions is necessary to become Superman. We may also see that he supports subjective truth and criticizes objective or universal views of truth, but he does not deny reason. He accepts subjective interpretations and viewpoints

at the moment of knowledge, but reason is used while making decisions or making choices for one's own betterment. When it comes to self-improvement, reason becomes a kind of tool or driving principle. Therefore, Nietzsche refers to the mastery of reason over passions when he employs the phrase "mastery" over passions or wants. Mastering one's passions is a means to self-overcoming, according to Nietzsche (1995).

Notion of self-overcoming

According to Friedrich Nietzsche human being is collection of several drives. Among these drives will to power is the most prominent drive of an individual. Will to power is interminable intensification of force or power which never tries to stop but always increases its power to overcome the limitations of an individual self. According to Nietzsche, morality entails gaining more authority and overcoming one's own constraints. Nietzsche makes no claim about a universal moral code or standard since, in his view, if we accept that morality is the ultimate goal of human existence, then this objective never implies a definite domain. Morality is never permanent because human's existence is never passive. He insists only on self-overcoming or transition when it comes to morality. He asks for self-overcoming for a number of reasons, the first of which is a reassessment of ideals or pre-existing values. Thus he criticizes the traditional Christian ideals because he believes they are ineffective for human development or change (Nietzsche,1989). According to him, the core Christian ideals of self-pity, self-abnegation, and self-sacrifice are self-denying and life-negating traits that ultimately crush the human spirit and obstruct the development of greatness. According to Nietzsche, there is no ultimate value in suggestion. All that exists is a process of establishing values and conquering the challenges. He believes that the higher kind of man or whom he calls *Übermensch* or superman, has the capacity to overcome his current constraints and create values that are unique to him. Thus, self-creation resumes by the process of self-overcoming. Nietzsche's notion of self-overcoming involves in a kind of self-sacrifice. However, not ever thinker uses the term "self-sacrifice" in the same way. The concept of self-sacrifice that Nietzsche employed is not the same as the Christian concept. Nietzsche says that a person or an individual self has passions, desires which bind him to do those things which interfere in the way of self- progression (Ercole,2017). To overcome this is called self- overcome. The first thing which we can do for self- overcoming is that we should eliminate the longing of those social recognition which recognises the attitudes like the modesty, meekness as adjective of a good man as these are definitions of weak man not a good man. The longing of this type of social recognition is the prime resistance

of self-progression so we first overcome this resistance. He therefore contends that *Übermensch* or superman ought to give up this soul-worshipping urge. However, making this sacrifice requires bravery and a strong will because doing so could lead to social criticism. *Übermensch* does not bother sympathy or compassion from others and he leads a courageous life which may be isolated by the average people of the society. As these people choose to spend their lives in conventional way and do not consider the creation of self. Nietzsche does not consider these average men of society as moral person. He names them as herd. His morality suggests to overcome these unnecessary criticisms.

Übermensch or superman who can do this healthy sacrifice becomes so strong. This strong man or *Übermensch* can live a life without any higher authority. In this context Nietzsche uses the phrase that God is dead. The inner meaning of this phrase is not that God is really dead. This phrase tries to free human being from the feeling of inferiority. It implies that God is not the only the superior authority, and saviour of the earth. Human being is the creator of his own destiny so there is none who is saviour of his life. This acceptance makes a human being to believe on his own ability. He tries to create own values and overcome the constraints of the old self. According to Nietzsche (1995), the growth of human being and the process of re-evaluating all values would never begin if we reject the idea of God's death. Therefore, we must re-evaluate all of our current ideals and establish our own values. Value creation is a process of growth, and progress is never achieved by luck or peace but rather by struggle, conquest, and constant triumph. It is true that self-overcoming requires sacrificing things like social recognition, so-called brilliance, and humility.

Conclusion

If we acknowledge that morality is the flourishment of human behaviour or character to establish a healthy society, then Nietzsche's demand or assertion is accurate. He does not support a conventional theory, as evidenced by his demands and efforts. He always advocates for self-reflection rather than the establishment of societal norms. According to Nietzsche's *Gay Science*, value is not natural; rather, people give value to things as the things do not have value naturally. Since every one of us will have our own ideas about what is morally acceptable or not, right or wrong, etc. Nietzsche also encourages the pursuit of personal goals. According to Nietzsche, man can identify which ideals are consistent with his overall well-being. So, man should get the opportunity to re-evaluate the ideals. According to Nietzsche, human ideals can be changed through

the process of evaluation. In a conventional system, values like good, bad, hate, love etc. are accepted as a fixed parameter. But he thinks that these should not be set as permanent, because they are very subjective and depend on personal interpretation. They are dependent on the interpretations of different subjects. Different subjects face enormous kinds of complexity in their life. Different viewpoints create new values. Therefore, a single value cannot be used for everyone. Nietzsche contends that each person must establish his own value and reject outside authority as the arbiter of that value. He acknowledges that a person may only develop his own morals and can transcend the constraints by using his will to power (Nietzsche, 2017). Nietzsche argues that will to power helps to overcome the old values which cover the self as cloud. Will to power continues the process of transformation of self. The self-transformation is a never ending process to Nietzsche. Every time this process creates a new self and overcomes the obstacles of old self. Thus, morality carries on a never ending journey of self- creation.

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Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Culture in the Backdrop of Spengler: Some Observations

Noor Banu Khatun

Abstract

This paper is going to investigate Wittgenstein's philosophy of culture in the backdrop of Spengler with some other thinkers. Mainly the paper wants to explore the idea of culture and civilization in the perspectives of both Spengler and Wittgenstein. The paper tries to illustrate the advent of civilization and its affect on culture in this context. In this regard, Wittgenstein has made a significant methodological shift in his later half of philosophical career. He disapproved the European and American civilization because he does not understand the goal of their civilization in the perspective of Spengler's influence on him. Spengler says in his famous book *The Decline of the West* that civilization is the natural result of cultural decline but Wittgenstein says civilization will produce a culture. His later philosophy is largely based on meaning in terms of its use as found in *Philosophical Investigations* (*PI*) and some other works. His view offers insights into the nature of philosophical inquiry and the role of tradition with the relationship between language, culture and societal decline. He also highlights the importance of context and the interrelatedness of language, thought and social behaviour. According to *PI*, the concept of 'form of life' is vital to understand Wittgenstein's philosophy of culture. Particularly *Culture and Value* (*CV*) is one work where we can get an idea of Wittgenstein's philosophy of culture. We can relate Wittgenstein's philosophy of language with his philosophy of culture.

Keywords: Forms of Life Language-Games Culture Society Civilization Philosophy of Culture

Abbreviations of Wittgenstein's books:

TLP: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

PI: *Philosophical Investigations*

CV: *Culture and Value*

Introduction

Ludwig Wittgenstein was mostly influenced by Oswald Spengler at one point of time with some other thinkers viz. Boltzmann, Frege, Russell and so on (*CV*, 19e). Spengler's influence on Wittgenstein is represented by the assertion of Wittgenstein's general pessimism and his disrespect for the civilization of his time, although he is not pessimistic like Spengler. DeAngelis connects his book *Philosophy in the darkness of this time* with Spengler. In the perspective of Spengler the term 'this time' indicates toward the state of Western Europe and America between the period of 1800 and 2000 which engages the inevitable decline of culture into civilization. On the other side, Wittgenstein talks about the darkness of 'this time' referring to the post World War scenario. First of all, in this paper I would like to draw a primary overview of Spengler's main theses towards Wittgenstein's later philosophical thought while exploring about Spengler's comparative morphology of cultures, an assessment of contemporary civilization – what are the features of the influence which is examined by some prominent philosophers' viz. Stanley Cavell, Von Wright, William James DeAngelis and so on. In this paper I want to deal with several essential concepts which are interrelated to each other such as language, forms of life, culture, civilization and also philosophy of culture. In general the word 'culture' refers to the customs, beliefs, art, music and all the other products of human thought made by a particular group of a people at a particular time. Culture binds the individuals into a society where each has its own place. The notion of 'culture' is something which combines community. It is surrounded by language, religion, social habits, beliefs, knowledge, values, dress, music and arts as well as attitude etc. We have also seen that the concept of 'form of life' is central towards the understanding of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. This notion is fundamental for him. He says, "What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – form of life" (*PI*, 226e). The idea of 'form of life' is vital to understand Wittgenstein's philosophy of culture also. The word 'civilization' means an advanced stage of human development marked by a high level of art, religion, science, and social as well as political organization. We can say that civilization significantly started to make progress in terms of industrial, scientific and technological development. We have already seen that where culture binds the individuals into a society there civilization creates fragmentation and that is why the role of culture gets declined.

Philosophy of culture is a branch of philosophy that examines the essence and meaning of culture. For the most part, *Culture and Value* is one work where we can get an idea of Wittgenstein's philosophy of

culture. One can relate Wittgenstein's philosophy of language with his philosophy of culture. In the society or community or form of life language is to be taken as a binding power. As a matter of fact the cultural aspect of humans is pictured by language. We need to keep in mind that Wittgenstein talks about the time in which he lived, its darkness or crisis as far as his views on culture is concerned. He has been influenced by Oswald Spengler in this respect. On the other hand, this paper is also going to analyze Wittgenstein's philosophy of culture which is based on Wittgenstein's notion of forms of life or the ideas of culture in the backdrop of language.

Spengler on culture and its decline in the West

Oswald Arnold Gottfried Spengler is best known for his famous book *The Decline of the West* that expresses human history of culture and civilization. According to him, culture and civilization both follow biological entities where he also thinks that each and every thing lives with an inevitable, limited, predictable as well as deterministic lifespan. He argues that when one 'culture' enters its last stage then it becomes a 'civilization'. This is to say that cultures are no longer surviving because they lost their creativity and growth. According to him, culture can be described into hidden historical tendency and it is encompassing individuals, several customs, classes, myths, arts, techniques and so on. We have seen that culture and civilization are described as the internal as well as external entities in the perspective of Spengler's thought. In this respect, culture is always growing where civilization is merely expanding. We can say that civilization is the destiny of every culture following Spengler. However, we would like to say that in Spengler's viewpoint cultures are 'things-becoming' where civilizations are 'thing-become'. As a result, we can clearly say that civilizations are the final stage of cultures; civilizations can be stated by the cultures when cultures are no longer creative and progressive. We have also seen that Spengler thinks about culture and civilization that the Greek culture (imaginative) gets declined into Roman civilization (practical). According to him, religion is a vital aspect of culture and religious expression is also a basic sign of its period. He argues that the spirit of each culture is religion. We have seen in his famous book *The Decline of the West* that every culture is unique and as a result that the religious expression is also the same. For him, each culture develops within its unique religious system. In this respect, he thinks that the religious expression cannot be revived because of cultural decline or death and it achieve a new stage that is civilization. According to Spengler, the revised form of cultures is the 'high history' and the closing stages of each culture in its civilization. However, we can say that there is

not only 'high history' in the history of humans but also 'non-history' before a culture develops. There are three periods within cultures. Firstly, pre-cultural period which lived in the countryside or village, we can say as the world of peasantry; secondly, cultural stage which grows and develops in the town and city and lastly the civilizational period where every culture begins come to rest and decline within the megacity definitely that is call a phenomenon of civilization. Spengler admits western culture has passed its cultural stage and entered upon its stage of civilization and is living out its ending. He emphasizes on western culture's history which is familiarly bound up with both classical culture (Greece and Rome) and Arabian culture (Magian). He also declares western culture as 'Faustian Culture'. He argues that each culture pursue an inevitable pathway from birth to adolescence, a phase of great maturity, then a decline into its civilization and death.

By and large, Oswald Spengler was an extremely unorthodox historian and his most important work is *The Decline of the West.* According to him, primarily history is concerned with cultures. It reveals that cultures all develop, mature, decline and die out in discernibly similar stages (DeAngelis, p.8). He thought that the cultures constitute the entire content of history. For him all cultures have developed, flourished and exhausted. His main focus is upon the Classical, the Egyptian, the Arabian and the modern cultures. He attempts to show his main theses in *Decline* – the patterns of cultural development and document as well as to describe the stages that presumably every culture has passed through. Spengler thought that the essential work of history is the 'comparative morphology of cultures'. That is why he conceives that there is an analogy between the progress of a culture and an organic entity or constructive process. He frequently gives a reference with cultures such as 'youth', 'maturity', 'decline', 'aging', and 'death'. For example, a seed develops into a plant or an infant into an adult, in a predictable sequence of stages, culture too so develops (DeAngelis, p. 9). According to him, a culture is a 'spiritual' direction. When the people shared their spiritual conceptions to each other or their forms of life then all their actions are influence by them.

Now we will focus on Spengler's idea of 'culture' and 'civilization' in the perspective of *The Decline of the West*. He says that 'culture' symbolizes the presence of certain intrinsic discernible features which include the prominence of art and religion as social forces, and a shared sense of religious, aesthetic, and ethical values. And 'civilization' likewise requires certain intrinsic observable features which include irreligiousness, prominent technological and scientific events, politics on the global scale and a lack of influential artistic activity. However,

Spengler considers the historical necessity and suggests the people of the next generation to abandon poetry, art and philosophy in favor of technology, the control of nature and even participation in the politics of civilized time.

Hence, his noteworthy expression thus indicates in *The Decline of the West* that in the twentieth century Western Civilization takes a form as if "every Culture has its own Civilization……..the Civilization is the inevitable destiny of the Culture……Civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion,…death following life, rigidity following expansion….They are an end. Pure Civilization, as a historical process, consists in a taking-down of forms that have become inorganic or dead" (Spengler1, pp. 31-32). This inspection is very radical because it says about which time or era where one culture is no longer. So there comes to a cultural decline. It also says that all cultures including our own develop, mature and decline. That is why Spengler offers the decline of a culture into a civilization. He represents the transition from culture to civilization is as the decrease of religion which is a vigorous power or a progress toward irreligiousness. That is why he says in his book *The Decline of the West* "Every soul has religion, which is only another word for its existence. All living forms in which it expresses itself – all arts, doctrines, customs, all metaphysical and mathematical form – worlds, all ornament, every column and verse and idea – are ultimately religious, and must be so" (Spengler1, p. 358). Therefore, cultures are fundamentally religious but civilizations are not. As a matter of fact Spengler holds that civilizations are irreligious. He says in his book in *The Decline of the West* "But from the setting in of Civilization, they cannot be so any longer. As the essence of every Culture is religion, so - and consequently – the essence of every Civilization is irreligion, the two words synonymous." And again he adds "It is this extinction of living inner religiousness…at the turn the Culture to the Civilization…in which a mankind loses its spiritual fruitfulness forever" (Spengler, p. 359). Eventually, he considers that the loss of religion as a valuable social power that lie behind the other manifestations of cultural decline.

Wittgenstein on culture and civilization

Ludwig Wittgenstein was obviously influenced by Spengler that we have noticed in his own reflections on the 'darkness of this time' and the decline of traditional philosophical pursuits. However, Wittgenstein was deeply concerned with language as well as the relationship between language and reality. And he also addressed language from a more

philosophical perspective where he emphasized the basic nature of meaning and the relationship between language and thought. Although we have seen that Wittgenstein's early philosophy (*TLP*) where he focused the logical structure of language and its ability to represents the world. But his later philosophy shifted towards understanding of language in the respect of social context in which language is used. In this respect he rejects the notion of language as a perfect mirror of reality that he admitted in *TLP*. Anyway, later Wittgenstein believes that many philosophical problems arise from misunderstanding of how language functions or works. That is why he suggested us this problems can be resolved by the use of language in ordinary contexts which is practiced in the everyday life. Wittgenstein focuses on the concepts of 'language-games' and 'forms of life' in *PI*. However, later Wittgenstein admits language as a tool or instrument that is used in human practice. In this case he also believes that language is not only a tool for describing reality but also a reflection of our cultural forms of life. He gives various analogies for understanding the meaning of words or language. For example, we can think of the tools in the tool-box, such as hammer, rule, screw-driver, and pin etc. in the tool-box; they function in diverse ways. In the same way the various words function in the language as tools. That is why Wittgenstein says that the meaning of word is its use in language. On the other hand, we have also seen that Wittgenstein's important concept 'forms of life' highlights the connection between language, customs and social practices that shape a culture and give its meaning. He emphasizes that the meaning of language comes from its usages based on specific forms of life as well as cultural contexts. This is mostly connected with 'forms of life' which is socially practiced. In this case, he perceives 'forms of life' to draw the path where human beings live, perform and interact within a particular culture. So, we can say that different forms of life can be understood and practiced in the background of different culture, seeing from intra-cultural or intercultural perspectives. In this regard we can say that understanding a culture needs understanding its language-games and how they structure people's interactions and beliefs. Culture may be seen as the way of expressing human values. The disappearance of a culture, according to Wittgenstein, reduces the means of expressing our values.

Wittgenstein observes a linguistic disorientation in Vienna circle after the World Wars. Because he believes that philosophers often fall into traps or puzzles by emphasizing on the factual structure of language rather than the use of language within particular cultural contexts. Basically philosophical problems arise from misusing of language, failing to recognize the contextual nature of meaning. He holds that we can communicate or understand the world by the language which is used in a

various ways as a dynamic tool. He also considers about language is deeply embedded in culture. According to Wittgenstein, 'culture' is a range of language-games, practices as well as ways of life or forms of life that shape our understanding of the world. He critically thinks that cultural orientation can be measured by the materialistic as well as spiritualistic perspective. This view expresses modern civilization that is characterized by the rapid advancement of science, technology. In this regard he argues that this materialist culture more emphasized on scientific achievements and technological progress where human beings neglecting their spiritual values. However, he always seeks a true way for humanity in a culture that is measured by the spiritual values which is eternal as well as fundamental. As a result, we can achieve a meaningful life from spiritual culture that is the foundation of human civilization. Nevertheless, he distinguished between culture and civilization; when civilization is deeply focused on material progress then he perceived a decline or disappearance of real culture. That is why he insists that linguistic disorientation towards a wide cultural disorientation. He suggests us when we failed to understand our language then us unable to recognize the meaning as well as significance of our own culture and its practices. In this perspective we can obviously say that cultural background, traditions and practices are also intertwined with our understanding of language. Since, we can say that 'forms of life' are also disrupted, uncertainty and disorientation as the cultural disorientation.

In the early twentieth century Wittgenstein was influenced by European culture where including the beliefs in reason, science and progress. During this century cultural atmosphere of Vienna was embracing the modernity and scientific advancements. While Wittgenstein admitted the value of European cultural traditions he also expressed anxiety about its direction and realized it lacked a sense of purpose or meaning. Although, he praised the depth of cultural expression mainly music and arts but he remarks about the goals as well as values of modern European civilization. That is why he says "I have no sympathy for the current European civilization and do not understand its goals" (Wittgenstein 1980, p. 6). In this respect he also thinks about European or American civilization is the effect of misuse of language. However, we have seen that he concerns about the decline of cultural values. He also believes that the disappearance of a particular culture does not mean the loss of human value, rather the loss of particular paths of express it (value).

Wittgenstein regards that ours is the age of art, religion, science and philosophy. Ultimately the conception of philosophy is closely related

to the path of contemporary civilization but in western culture this is decline in Spenglerian thought. Spengler had considerable influence on Wittgenstein's outlook toward his own time or his philosophical works. From this conception we can say that the most characteristic feature of Wittgenstein's later philosophy has been influenced by Spengler. In his book *Philosophical Remarks* he explicitly held a view of his time that was mainly a Spenglerian approach toward his *Philosophical Investigations.* He believed both works to be opposed to the spirit of their time. Wittgenstein recommends that negative thought about civilization of his time and claims that it is the time of cultural decline. He says in *Culture and Value* that the spirit of European and American civilization makes itself manifest in the industry, architecture and music of their time, in its fascism and socialism and it is alien and uncongenial to him. So he disapproved the European and American civilization to such an extent that he remarked he does not understand the goal of their civilization. His aspect on European and American civilization is a complex one. In this case he has seen a sense of decline as well as a lack of unifying structure. He thinks that the so called progress in the civilization is actually generating a crisis for culture to exist. Culture is akin to a big association which setting every of its members a place where they can work in the spirit of the whole; whereas, civilization produces disintegration and as a result the culture gets declined (*CV*, 6e-7e). Now we can say that these remarks of Wittgenstein obviously reflect the Spenglerian assessment of culture and civilization of Wittgenstein's own times when civilization significantly started to make progress in terms of industrial, scientific and technological development. He offers that civilization is characterized by the word progress where progress is its form rather than making progress being one of its features (*CV*, 8e). However, Wittgenstein clearly admits that his own time of civilization is somehow blind to itself, to its own tendencies and after setting its evolution into a culture. In 1946 he emerges a negative picture of civilization in his book *Culture and Value* where he writes that our civilized environment is separated from our origin, is isolated from God etc. Noteworthy, this indicates that civilizations isolate human being from what is most valuable. However, I would like to suggest that in this paper, Wittgenstein's later philosophical work carried a Spenglerian thought in his own time that may also be called a Spenglerian assessment of his time.

Some interpretations of Wittgenstein's philosophy of culture

G. H. Von Wright holds in his article "Wittgenstein in Relation to His Times" about the Spenglerian aspects of Wittgenstein's later philosophical thought. He also says in this article that the idea of 'family resemblance'

in Wittgenstein 'appears to have its origin' in Spengler's work. That is why he says in his article "The actual influence pertains, it seems, to an idea in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, indeed to one of its most characteristics thought manoeuvres. This is the idea of 'family resemblance'" (p. 116). He gives a different thought about Spengler's influence on Wittgenstein that is very notable and widespread which concerns Wittgenstein's relation to his time and also his later philosophy. He also offers a different conception about Wittgenstein's relation to his times and his expression of that relation in his later work. Actually we have seen that this approach was toward censuring and disgusting. And there is another conception, that is the misuses of language which goes against the rule governing language games that may be called 'malignant outgrowths' which is in turn of systemic condition, an underlying cancer, in the forms of life those misuses which addresses as features of a Spenglerian cultural decline.

Stanley Cavell was deeply influenced by Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Particularly he emphasizes on Wittgenstein's language-games as well as its contexts which determine the meaning. This is to say that words or expressions are meaningful only how they are used in particular situations or contexts. In this regard he thinks, like Wittgenstein, words or expressions have no fixed meaning. So he emphasizes on understanding of language where language is practiced within the context of human interaction or cultural practices. He emphasizes on the Wittgensteinian notion of 'form of life' which irreducibly refers to the social and natural phases of human existence. We have seen that he says "The human as irreducibly social and natural" (Cavell 1996: 353). Stanley Cavell in his article "Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture" regards that his own time is also connected to a Spenglerian influence. He holds that Wittgenstein's later philosophy *Investigations* as "a depiction of our times" and Wittgenstein as a "philosopher – even a critic – of culture" and "a Spenglerian valence" (Cavell 2, p.336). However, he interprets Wittgenstein's philosophy as a therapeutic form. But we have seen that Von Wright has been working on a disturbing metaphor which imputes to Wittgenstein's views that relates our philosophical misuses of language to malignancies. These linguistic malignancies are seen as appearances of a cancerous condition in the way of life underlying our language or our misuses of language. So the notion of a cultural malignancy he imputes to Wittgenstein is also Spenglerian. That is why Cavell says "the idea of a cancer in a culture's way of life does not strike me as a Spenglerian thought. "Cancer" says that a way of life is threatened with an invasive abnormal death; Spengler's "decline" is about the normal; say the internal, death and life of cultures" (Cavell 2, p.338).

We notice in Cavell's interpretation a Spenglerian portrayal of cultural decline and that is why he treats *Philosophical Investigations* as a '"philosophy of culture". He carefully interprets the *Investigations* as a 'philosophy of culture' which can be understood as 'a depiction of our times' by us. He mostly emphasizes upon the both works of Wittgenstein and Spengler. Although directly in the *Investigations* he never mentions about culture, civilization, cultural decline as well as the time or era when it was writing. Despite we can get some hints about these noions. Cavell clearly offers that Wittgenstein's philosophy of culture is Spenglerian in nature or it has a 'Spenglerian valence'. We have seen that Cavell underlines on Wittgenstein's work of the misuses of language in which another philosopher is also engaged. He claims "both Wittgenstein and Spengler write of a loss of human orientation and spirit that is internal to human language and culture" (Cavell 2, p. 340). In order to say that there is no doubt that the *Investigations* embodies account of a loss of orientation of in language. As a matter of fact Cavell explicitly interprets how Wittgenstein suggests us a loss of orientation in human culture in the *PI*. He thinks about this matter in the *Investigations* which links a disorientation of philosophers' uses of language with disorientation in culture. However, now we also identify that Wittgenstein's philosophical misuses of languages are analogous to the characteristics of Spengler's depiction of cultural decline. The *Investigations* is based on meaning in terms of its use. In *PI* Wittgenstein takes language as a cornerstone to understand the reality. Language is a practice, speaking a language is part of an activity or form of life. The concept of 'form of life' is vital to understand Wittgenstein's philosophy of culture. In another way Cavell admits that the fact of a child's 'inheritance of language' is 'an image of a culture as an inheritance'. Due to the significance of the notion of 'form of life', he interprets the *Investigations* as a philosophy of culture.

However, with the occurrence of cultural decline, the spirit of life is also lost. We have found some contrast with Spengler's assessment. Spengler thinks that every culture has its own civilization and the civilization is the certain destiny of the culture (Spengler, p. 31). He also conceives that cultures are essentially religious as well as civilization is the natural result of cultural decline. When cultures exhaust themselves and degenerate then civilizations come into being by their nature. Therefore, civilizations proceed from cultures and not vice-versa. That mean is cultures produce civilizations; civilizations do not produce cultures. But Wittgenstein says "this civilization will produce a culture" (*CV*, 64e). We can realize that this remark of Wittgenstein actually portrays the view that he did not accept Spengler's investigation of the morphology of culture or that culture would unavoidably decline and

wither away with the progress of civilization (DeAngelis, 44). Culture is the origin of human beings, and also of human civilization.

Conclusion

In the conclusion we can say that Wittgenstein's remarks strikingly reflect a Spenglerian assessment of culture and civilization. One may say this is a reflection of Wittgenstein's own times or era when civilization significantly started to make progress in modern times (in arts, science and industry). We have found that Spengler's cyclical theory of cultures which provides a framework for understanding the changing landscape of philosophical ideas. Spengler thinks that 'culture is organism'. In this respect, we can say that life is moving from culture to civilization in the perspective of Spengler's idea of the cyclical nature of life or history. However, in this paper we have focused on the relationship between Wittgenstein's language, culture and the concept of 'forms of life', 'language-games' which are central to the vital role determining our understanding of the world. In Wittgenstein's thought we have understood that language as originated in definite cultural contexts. Since, we have also seen that it implies a new branch of anthropological conception. So, we can obviously say that our languages as well as meanings are embedded by the particular practices and forms of life within a culture. However, we need to keep in mind that culture can be understood through its practices and language. However, in this paper I think that Wittgenstein's view about culture and civilization is more apposite than Spengler because they have different outlook about culture and civilization. Spengler is pessimistic but Wittgenstein is not so pessimistic, he is hopeful of a new emergence of culture. He thinks as the foundation of human being or form of life, whereas, civilization will generate a new culture. He focuses on everyday human practices as well as diversity among the people. And another, Spengler's cultural thought always follow a cyclical pattern of birth, growth as well as death (decline) and civilization as a stage of cultural development which is manifested by mechanization and materialism. That is why we can say that Spengler's civilizational thought depicts the decline and decay of a culture. However, finally we can say that though Wittgenstein saw in his time the European and American civilization as a 'time without culture' or a time of 'poverty and darkness', nevertheless he deeply believes that a day will definitely come when on-going European and American civilization will give rise to a new culture.

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M.N. Roy's Thoughts on Humanism: A Radical Philosophy

Nilanjan Roy

Abstract

In this paper, I would like to focus on M.N. Roy's radical approaches to humanistic thoughts. M.N. Roy was deeply concerned with individual freedom, rationality, and morality, which were central to his entire philosophical vision. Roy says that man makes his destiny. Freedom is the supreme human value. The struggle for freedom is the struggle for existence. Man is essentially rational. The reason in man is an echo of the harmony of the universe. Man is moral because he is rational. He started his revolutionary journey, no doubt as a strong supporter of Marxism, but later he realized that the Marxist theory of communism is a dictatorship of the proletariat class. This realization prompted him to explore alternative paths that emphasized individual liberty and personal responsibility. So, he moved beyond communism. He criticizes historical determinism and asserts that 'human will' is the most determining factor rather than economic interpretation in history. M.N. Roy opposes nationalism, capitalism, fascism, and any other cultural system or traditional dogma that subordinates individual sovereignty. The question of human existence and the meaning of life in bourgeois society is also paramount for M.N. Roy. The radical philosophy criticizes conventional oppressive thoughts and ideas about individuals and tries to make the world a home for humanity; M.N. Roy's views on humanity also do. In this paper, I will attempt to discuss whether M.N. Roy's humanistic ideas and philosophy might be considered radical.

Keywords: Radical, Freedom, Rationality, Morality, Dictatorship, Nationalism, Communism, Fascism, Humanity

Introduction

"Philosophy is homesickness," said Novalis (Heller, 1984, p. 134). All sentimental philosophy embodies a yearning for a realm where philosophy finds its true home. The world serves as humanity's home—this constitutes the empire, the garden of philosophy, and its view pertains to this empire. All that exists beyond the realm of humanity's dominion is considered 'jungle.' Radical philosophy aspires for humanity to find a home on earth. Radical philosophy must reach the masses and transform into a material force that embodies the philosophy of radical movements.

Such an approach is necessary to ensure that humanity eventually finds its place in the world, specifically in morality and understanding. Critical social theory is a form of radical philosophy. It examines modern social dynamics, with a particular focus on conflict situations. It explores the possibility of achieving radical utopia through these specific conflict scenarios. It examines economic and political relationships, national conflicts, social classes and strata, methods of manipulation, labour and working conditions, education and distribution, law, ideology, and more. It examines both the ideal of the species and the social essence of humanity, together with their intrinsic potentialities. Therefore, to discuss radical philosophy, we must first examine 'radicalism' itself. By radicalism, I primarily comprehended a comprehensive criticism of society—a civilization founded on ties of subordination and superordination, as well as the natural division of labour. People who have rejected bourgeois ways of living and chosen to live a different kind of life, and who also develop and explain their rationale for doing so, are considered radical actors. Radical actors operate based on novel value interpretations that stem from this foundational decision.

Since the dawn of philosophy, many radical voices have emerged. Manabendra Nath Roy (M.N. Roy, 1887-1954), a prominent humanist intellectual of twentieth-century India, is among them. Roy asserts that intellectual progress is unattainable without the elimination of conventional religious concepts and theological doctrines. He emphasized the distinct roles of philosophy and religion in intellectual advancement. He conceptualized a profound connection between philosophy and science. Roy's philosophy, embodied in the "Twenty-Two Theses of Radical Democracy," outlines humanist principles for history, society, and a global order characterized by freedom and cooperation. His entire life encompassed three distinct phases: national revolutionary, active communist, and revolutionary humanist. M.N. Roy was a passionate advocate of Marxism in his early years. Subsequently, he renounced orthodox Marxism, asserting that Marxist ideas such as communism and the dictatorship of the proletariat infringe upon individual freedom. He also condemned capitalism, fascism, Nazism, and various other ideologies that undermine the supremacy of human freedom. He asserts that man is the archetype of civilization. Social bonds foster the development of individual potential. The advancement of the person serves as the benchmark for societal progress. The pursuit of freedom and the quest for truth are fundamental drives for societal advancement. This study addresses the inquiry: Are M.N. Roy's approaches to humanity radical? If this is indeed the case, what are the reasons behind it? This writing aims to address this primary motto or question**.** The two primary aspects of M.N.

Roy's philosophy are critical and constructive. The critical aspect examines the limitations of various contemporary ideologies, while the constructive aspect elaborates on his philosophy of humanism.

M.N. Roy and Marxism

Karl Marx was the preeminent humanist of his era. The autonomy and independence of the individual were his esteemed objectives. Karl Marx stated, "man is the root of mankind," which encapsulates the conceptual essence of Marxism. In *The Communist Manifesto*, it is stated, "the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all" (Marx & Engels, 2023, p. 76). He was an eminent moralist and a fervent adversary of pretentiousness and hypocrisy. Nevertheless, the intellectual school he established resulted in the formation of enduring dictatorships across extensive regions of the globe. This is the reason Marxism did not realize Marx's ideal of a society composed of liberated individuals. M.N. Roy asserted that the inadequacy of Marxism can be attributed to the principle of economic determinism, which constitutes the foundation of Marxian philosophy. Economic determinism is a historical philosophy that interprets the fundamental causes of historical developments. The way a society is organized economically, based on who owns the resources and how different classes relate to each other, is the main reality that shapes moral beliefs and cultural values, which are just reflections of this reality and not critical on their own. People behave according to their economic interests, making the history of civilization a story of class conflicts. Marx stated, "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle" (Marx & Engels, 2023, p. 39).

Roy advocates for a humanist perspective on history, rejecting both historical materialism and its economic interpretations. For him, the economic interpretation of history arises from a flawed understanding of historical events. It suggests dualism, while materialism represents a monistic ideology. He asserts that "history is a deterministic process; but there is more than one causative factor. 'Human will' is one of them, and it cannot always be referred directly to any economic incentives" (Nath, 2001, p. 102). Roy stated that historical determinism does not preclude the freedom of the will. He believes that the freedom of the will is necessary for revolution in the rationally determined process of history. Otherwise, there would be no possibility of revolution. Rousseau states, "each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole" (Rousseau, 2015, p. 11). In this instance, Rousseau's concept of 'general will' may generate conflicts

between individual will and the purported 'general will.' Such issues typically entail a conflict between individual interests and the welfare of society. Roy considers 'human will' a significant determinant in history and simultaneously refutes the Marxist philosophy that perceives thoughts as mere superstructure built upon the economic base. In this context, he enunciates that "cultural patterns and ethical values are not mere ideological super-structures of established economic relations. They are also historically determined by the logic of the history of ideas" (Roy, 2011a, pp. 65, thesis six). This humanist interpretation of history emphasizes the importance of human will and the historical context of ideas. Marx excessively stressed economic considerations in the emergence of revolutionary movements while tending to undervalue the significance of moral and ideological elements. However, these factors are essential, as stated by Roy. Roy appears to believe that "even economic factors influence history only when they assume a moral garb. This transformation of the economic factors into moral issues is brought about by thinking individuals" (Devaraja, 1988, p. 137).

Karl Marx criticized utopian socialism and explored the path of society's transition from capitalism to communism. Marx stated, "communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution" (Marx, 2016, p. 97). M.N. Roy asserts that "communism is also a totalitarian cult" (Roy & Spratt, 2011b, p. 122). It reduces the individual to nothing more than a cog in a gigantic machine driven by a collective ego. Roy elucidates that communism attributes a collective identity not to society as a whole, but to a specific class, the 'proletariat.' Marx acknowledged the primacy of humanity in the causal dynamics of history. Roy says that "until now there is no other culture and morality. Proletarian culture is a contradiction in terms" (Roy, 2011a, p. 40). Roy contends that Marxism first advocated the proletariat's dictatorship as a forerunner to a higher kind of democracy. Marx believed capitalism might last forever unless the proletariat overthrew the bourgeoisie. Roy believes that the proletariat is not revolutionary. The root of the problem is the proletariat's lack of cultural and intellectual maturity. For him, the concept of a new system may be appealing, but it is only envisioned by middle-class intellectuals. The middle-class intellectuals emerge as leaders in a revolutionary fight because of their ability to eloquently describe the moral and ideological dilemmas inherent in the battle. They must assume a crucial role in the future establishment of the new society.

Now the question arises: how can an individual get freedom in a society that is ostensibly the product of a collective identity? Individuals, who are creators of society, are subordinated to the collective ego. This

subordination, similar to nationalism and communism, forms the theoretical foundation of dictatorship. M.N. Roy asserts, "if the germs of socialism or communism grew in the womb of the capitalist society, then, the inspiration for a truly liberating philosophy of the future should also be found in the moral and spiritual values of the so-called bourgeois culture" (Roy, 2011a, p. 19). The issue cannot be addressed by capitalist free enterprise or parliamentary democracy. Socialism and communism appear to hinder progress toward that objective by dismissing the concept of individual liberty. Then, what is the solution? A new political structure must be proposed that balances individual liberty with economic reconstruction, thereby eliminating private ownership of production means. A liberated society must constitute a fraternity of autonomous individuals, grounded in individual sovereignty. So, in the words of Roy: "any social philosophy, or scheme of social reconstruction which does not recognise the sovereignty of the individual, and dismisses the ideal of freedom as an empty abstraction, can have no more than a very limited progressive and revolutionary significance" (Roy, 2011a, pp. 65-66, thesis eight). Roy predicts that a society based on radicalism will transform nations' depressing atmosphere and pave the way for an optimistic and promising global future.

M.N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi

M.N. Roy and Mahatma Gandhi espoused similar ideologies, emphasizing individualism, decentralization of power, and party-less democracy. However, Roy was materialist and rationalist, while Gandhi was spiritual, relying on his 'inner voice', which he considered the voice of God. Gandhi's vision of an ideal, just, and inclusive society, based on moral and spiritual principles, was outlined in "Ramaraj Divine Raj, the Kingdom of God" (Gandhi, 1929, p. 305). Roy posits that Gandhism embodies a belief system of Indian nationalism. Roy believed that Gandhi's nationalism was deeply rooted in religious and cultural revivalism, which he saw as socially reactionary. Roy strongly objected to Gandhi's mixing of politics with religion. He argued that Gandhi's emphasis on traditional Indian values and concepts like "Ramarajya" appealed to the "twilight of medievalism" (Ray, 1999, p. 100) of the masses and could hinder social progress. By mixing religion and politics, Gandhi became the Mahatma and avatar to the Hindu masses and stepped into emotional effervescence, prejudices, and superstitions. Henceforth, Gandhi's emphasis on faith over reason may have hindered the development of contemporary ideas in Indian culture.

Roy says that the idea behind nationalism is that the freedom of the group depends on the sacrifices of its individual members. It means that the country is more than the sum of its parts. For him, the nation comprises individuals. We should understand national freedom as the sum of the individual freedoms within it. He asserts fascism fully expresses the essence of nationalism, which denies the very existence of the individual. In this context, M.N. Roy (1945) remarks:

> Both Fascism and Gandhism represent negation of the modern concept of freedom, indeed, even of the ancient concept of freedom, as the spiritual as well as temporal autonomy of individuals in the context of a social and cultural pattern, making the being and becoming of such individuals possible. (p. 29)

Gandhi's support of nationalism contributes to the breakdown of communal harmony. This form of nationalism undermines the concept of individual liberty. Without individual freedom, the idea of humanism becomes unattainable. Therefore, Roy pronounced that "a cosmopolitan commonwealth of free men and women is a possibility. It will be a spiritual community, not limited by the boundaries of national states— capitalist, fascist, communist, or of any other kind— which will gradually disappear under the impact of cosmopolitan Humanism. That is the Radical perspective of the future of mankind" (Roy, 2011a, p. 47).

Roy contends that the ethical principle underlying Gandhi's non-violence is questionable. Gandhi's principle of non-violence is a paradox. Violence constitutes an exertion of force or energy. In a social group that really needs to change its old ways and reject cultural traditions, the idea of non-violence stops the progress of positive change. We cannot achieve the required readjustment without causing some harm to vested interests. Even the most tranquil revolution inflicts some harm on its adversaries. The operation of force is intrinsic to all physical and biological processes, and social evolution is fundamentally a biological process. Consequently, perfect non-violence would preclude all growth in society, which, similar to any physical or biological activity, signifies the manifestation of energy. That is why M.N. Roy uttered, "the doctrine of non-violence means a taboo on the operation of the forces of progress" (Roy, 1945, p. 32). The doctrine of non-violence, a core message of Mahatma Gandhi, emphasizes that "the end does not justify the means", which is not compatible with power politics. Gandhi aimed to introduce morality in political practice and purify politics by raising political practice above power struggles. However, this would prevent nationalist India today from being

intoxicated by the idea of a strong army, which may symbolize the danger of war. Therefore, declaring firm devotion to Gandhi's message of non-violence is deemed inappropriate in this regard.

Though M.N. Roy's modern philosophy focuses on individual freedom, rationalism, and secularism, it doesn't align with Gandhism. Instead, it's better to appreciate Gandhi's positive teachings, such as morality and the use of pure means to achieve a good end. Mahatma Gandhi's concept of non-violence is undoubtedly the highest "good". However, it will only be practical if every human being in the world adheres to it in all aspects of their life.

Inadequacy of Liberalism

Liberalism advanced the humanistic revolution initiated by the European Renaissance. It possessed much merit as a secular ideology, with individual freedom as its core ideal. It established the ideological foundation of contemporary democracies in the West. However, Roy claims that gradually its popularity started to wane and that its failure gave rise to the twin ideologies of fascism and communism. Despite the defeat of fascism, liberalism has not restored its previous influence in the Western world. Roy dictates, "the main reason why liberalism failed as a philosophy of freedom was its acceptance of the doctrine of laissez-faire" (Tarkunde, 1983, p. 21). Liberalism supports the idea explained by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) that capitalism works best when people focus on their own interests, which in turn benefits society as a whole; therefore, the best approach for a democratic government is to stay out of economic issues. This theological commitment, which evidently favoured the capitalist class, left liberalism without a substantive response to the exploitation of industrial workers and the escalating economic insecurity they encountered. Liberal politicians occasionally proposed laws to alleviate the severity of economic exploitation; yet, as a collective, they never emerged as advocates for the marginalized segments of society. If the concept of freedom encompasses objective economic well-being, which it obviously does, then liberalism in reality has ceased to be a philosophy of freedom.

M.N. Roy posits that the superficiality of liberal democracy is another cause for the failure of liberalism. A liberal parliamentary democracy is merely a nominal or formal democracy. It encapsulates the notion of governance *for* the people rather than governance *by* the people. In a parliamentary democracy, the people have no say in how their nation is run, with the exception of periodic elections when they elect their

leaders. Between two elections, the state's political power is concentrated in a small number of hands, leaving the populace as a whole atomized and powerless, with no political responsibility to fulfil. Despite the legal guarantee of civil freedoms, the current economic condition often prevents the wealthiest members of society from exercising them. This shallow kind of democracy cannot elicit robust popular loyalty and is thus susceptible to overthrow. That is why M.N. Roy expresses, "the fundamental democratic principle— the greatest good to the greatest number— can be realised only when the conduct of public affairs will be in charge of spiritually free individuals who represent their own conscience before anybody or anything else" (Roy, 2011a, p. 54).

Liberalism presents utilitarian ethics. However, "the orthodox utilitarian dictum logically justifies suppression of a minority even of forty-nine (because fifty-one is a greater number), and thus keeps the door open to dictatorship" (Roy, 1955, p. 126). M.N. Roy argues that the main flaw in utilitarian ethics is the conflict between personal and psychological hedonism and societal and moral hedonism. This implies a distinction between the assertion that individuals should seek their pleasure and the assertion that they should strive for the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The utilitarian fall of liberalism led to dictatorship and collectivism. The collapse of liberalism resulted in what M.N. Roy termed the "twins of irrationality" – communism on one side and fascism on the other. However, it is important to distinguish between the liberal spirit and the liberal philosophy. There is little question that the liberal spirit, which includes free thought, tolerance for others, and respect for individual freedom, is a lasting contribution to humanity's future, even though liberalism as a system of ideas must be considered a failure. Modern humanism has incorporated the beneficial feature of liberalism.

M.N. Roy's Views on Metaphysics and Theology

Roy contends that religion is based on belief in supernatural powers or superhuman agency. Ignorance serves as its foundation. Roy asserts, "Ignorance is the 'original sin' of mankind" (Roy, 2005, p. 65). The ignorance of early humans conceives supernatural entities as the cause of natural phenomena. However, his mental capacities are unable to acknowledge entities as deities fundamentally superior to himself. M.N. Roy asserts that "the phenomenon of life is not explained by the childish conception of a god holding out a lamp from behind the clouds, or the poetic conception of the sun-god riding in his chariot from the east to the west" (Roy, 1940b, p. 1). Nursery tales entertain adults but do not

persuade them. Imagination doesn't mean knowledge. Speculation about natural origins begins when humans reach intellectual capacity, ignoring the spiritual demands of natural religion. According to Pythagoras, philosophy is the "contemplation, study, and knowledge of nature" (Roy, 1940b, p. 1). The aim is to comprehend reality and identify the common source of various phenomena within nature itself.

Aristotle referred to metaphysics as the "First Philosophy." God was incorporated into Aristotle's philosophy as a category of substance. M.N. Roy posits that initially, man gazes at the sky neither to adore the omnipotent deity nor to appreciate the creator's craftsmanship. His emotions drive him to observe the sky, monitor clouds for rain, track the sun and moon, determine star locations, and predict wind direction. David Hume noted that emotion, rather than reason, is the primary drive in human existence. "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (Hume, 1955, p. 415). But Roy is of the opinion that in all aspects, they are only idealized humans, embodying the image of what primordial man aspires to become. They are not deities to be admired but material entities that aid in physical existence, as humans recognize those as necessary entities for their survival. Man engages in virtuous conduct not to secure a position in paradise or to attain redemption for his soul, but rather because he is compelled to do so. Roy intends to say that when man rejects perceiving nature as a supernatural entity and embraces its independence, beauty, grandeur, and potential, he integrates himself into the cosmos.

Roy describes that primitive man encounters Mother Earth not as a deity to worship, but as a collection of soil that sustains him through his labour. The battle for existence confronts mankind with the various phenomena of nature, initially in their actuality. If it weren't for the fears and superstitions that come from our early instincts, the connection between humans, who are part of nature, and natural events would motivate us to look for their causes and the rules that govern them. Every individual develops a religious propensity until they reach a significant level of spiritual advancement. Roy asserts that knowledge enhances the superior mental capacities of reason and intellect. It undermines the impact of religious bias. Religiosity signifies spiritual regression. Consequently, the more pronounced the backwardness, the more robust the religious inclination. For Roy, "truth cannot be attained by the sacrifice of reason and realities. The light of known realities alone can illuminate the way to hidden truths" (Roy, 2005, p. 64).

M.N. Roy on Humanism

Roy claims that materialism, which holds that everything originates from matter and that there is just matter, is the only possible philosophy. All living and non-living things are transformations of matter. He defines the term 'materialism' to mean physical realism. According to him, man came into the physical cosmos after a prolonged biological development. Together with his intellect, volition, and mind as well, man continues to be an essential component of the physical world. The law of the universe also governs man's thoughts, feelings, volition, and existence. The essence of man is reason. "The reason in man is an echo of the harmony of the universe" (Karnik, 2023, p. 87)**.** Man is not only a biological and social being; he is a moral being as well. Human beings possess morality due to their rationality. Morality evolves with the advancement of rationality.

According to Roy, humanism is characterized by three key elements: reason, morality, and freedom. The fundamental drives for human advancement are the pursuit of truth and freedom. The struggle for human life is the pursuit of freedom. Jean-Paul Sartre states, "man is condemned to be free" (Sartre, 2007, p. 29). Roy discusses human freedom as the essential drive for societal advancement. The pursuit of freedom to an ever-greater degree is the goal of all rational humans and collectives. According to Roy, the core tenet of revolutionary philosophy is that the individual comes before society and that social structure must yield to individual freedom. It does not advocate for the welfare of people in a society confined by national state borders or any kind of ideology, whether it be capitalist, fascist, communist, or whatever. "Marx had said that a good society is necessary to have good individuals. Roy asserted that it is important to have good individuals first to have a good society" (Kataria, 2005, pp. 629-630).

Roy criticizes parliamentary democracy and accepts participatory, decentralized, and organized democracy. He opines that "democracy is the base, while rationalism its centre and sovereignty of man its apex" (Mahakul, 2005, p. 616). Roy argues that organized democracy promotes cooperative economic and societal organization to eliminate man-made exploitation, emphasizing the need to start with man to achieve economic welfare, social reconstruction, and political liberty. "Man has created something great. He is destined to create something still greater" (Roy, 1940a, p. 7). Man measures his world. M.N. Roy attempts to give a scientific exposition of his philosophy. He tries to solve the socio-political problems with a philosophical outlook**.** His humanism is known as scientific humanism. It is also known as 'new humanism' and is a form of

humanism that is enriched and developed through the acquisition of scientific knowledge and social experiences throughout modern civilization.

Conclusion

It was a difficult path for M.N. Roy to adopt his new kind of humanism. In the realm of ideas, the journey resembled an adventure. There were no guides or signposts along the route. It was necessary for him to discard many ideas. But based on the discussions above, I should respond to the question: Are M.N. Roy's views on humanity radical? Roy's transcendence from traditional Marxist historical materialism highlights a profound shift in the understanding of history and human agency. By prioritizing "human will" as the primary determinant of historical events, Roy challenges the notion that material conditions alone dictate societal progress and change. He argues that Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence, while noble, falls short in the context of revolutionary movements that demand more immediate and forceful action. By dismissing metaphysical and theological frameworks as manifestations of human ignorance, Roy paves the way for a more pragmatic understanding of societal issues. His opposition to liberal utilitarian ideology underscores a crucial imbalance, where the needs of the majority can overshadow the rights of minority groups, raising ethical concerns about equity and justice. His call for radical democracy emphasizes the importance of upholding individual autonomy, positioning the quest for freedom as an essential biological struggle that underscores our very existence. Ultimately, his insights compel us to critically engage with our beliefs and consider the implications they hold for both individual rights and collective well-being.

Therefore, it can be said that M.N. Roy's humanism is "radical" because it seeks profound, root-level transformation of society, emphasizing the individual's freedom, reason, and moral responsibility. It calls for a fundamental intellectual and social revolution driven by awakened individuals. It requires a complete break with old oppressive traditions and ideologies, exploitative systems, religious orthodoxy, and political authoritarianism, making it a pioneering modern humanist philosophy. Accordingly, the radical message to humanity, for Roy (1955, p. 310), is:

> A brotherhood men attracted by the adventure of ideas,
> keenly conscious of the urge for freedom, fired with
> the vision of a free society of free men, and motivated
> by the will to remake the world, so as to restore the
> individual in his position of primacy and dignity, will

show the way out of the contemporary crisis of modern
civilization.

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Gandhi's Perspectives on Modernity: A Philosophical Inquiry into Present-Day Relevance

Md Hasanur Ali

Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi's critique of modern civilisation, as articulated in his seminal work Hind Swarāj, presents a profound philosophical challenge to the dominant paradigms of industrialisation, materialism, and technological advancement. Gandhi viewed modern civilisation as morally and spiritually bankrupt, emphasising its exploitative economic structures, degradation of human values, and detachment from nature. He advocated for a civilisation rooted in simplicity, self-sufficiency, non-violence (ahiṃsā), and moral development. In the present day, marked by climate crises, rampant consumerism, mental health concerns, and socio-economic inequalities, Gandhi's critique appears strikingly prescient. His emphasis on sustainable living, decentralised economies, and ethical politics offers a compelling framework for addressing contemporary global challenges. This paper revisits Gandhi's critique of modern civilisation through a contemporary lens, exploring its continued relevance and potential to inspire alternative pathways toward a more just and harmonious society. It examines Gandhi's key arguments against modernity and assesses their significance in addressing present-day global challenges, urging a re-evaluation of current development paradigms through a Gandhian perspective.

Keywords: Gandhi, Modern Civilization, Hind Swarāj, Non-violence, Relevance Today, Decentralization, critique of industrialisation.

Introduction

Gandhi was a social and political reformer and one of the most influential modern characters, making him one of the greatest leaders in history. He was a humanist, spiritual leader, and visionary who set the country on the path to freedom. He has gained respect worldwide for his nonviolent approach. Gandhi took up his pen to write classic works such as "The Story of My Experiments with Truth" to communicate and spread his beliefs and life lessons.

Every person who has seen Gandhi in pictures will correspond that he wore and seemed like an Indian ascetic. He purposefully presented himself as a strong opponent of British imperialism and a mass leader. In contrast, his worldview was dominated by words and symbols that were essentially Eastern in meaning and appearance, specifically Hindu. He attacked the modern culture they represented and, in some ways, modernity itself, in addition to employing these words and symbols as weapons against the British colonists. Other emblems include Ram Rajya, Sanātan Dharma, *Satyāgraha*, and *Swarāj*, in addition to Khadi. Gandhi coined the majority of the terms and symbols that were employed in his protracted political and intellectual conflict with British and Western materialism. These were used as both emblems of Indian culture and criticisms of modern Western civilization. They also supported several ideas, the most significant of which was a critique of modernity. Gandhi criticized and rejected the three main modern Indian principles of nationalism, industrialism, and Western education using these fundamentally Indian terms and symbols. All of this indicates that Gandhi disagreed with the majority of the principles of "modern civilization," or what he calls "Western civilization." Using language, symbols, ideas, customs, values, and, finally, the essentially Indian worldview, he fought against them continuously.

Gandhi's Idea of Civilization

In some speeches and writings, Gandhi addresses his ideas about civilization, the similarities and differences between Indian and Western civilizations, and the advantages and disadvantages of Western civilization (i.e., modern civilization). One of his most notable works is *Hind Swarāj*, which he wrote in Gujarati while returning from London to South Africa in 1909. It appeared in the Gujarati edition of Gandhi's weekly journal, Indian Opinion, in Gujarat that same year. British authorities promptly prohibited it because of its seditious elements after it was published in 1910 as a Gujarati pamphlet. Throughout his life, Gandhi refined and expanded upon the ideals he advocated in *Hind Swarāj*, undeterred by the actions of the imperial rulers. When assessing Gandhi's viewpoint on the civilization that existed at the time, it is important to take into account his complete philosophical framework. His responses to circumstances and his attempts to spearhead various political and social reform movements were the main factors that shaped his beliefs. However, the consistency of his views makes connecting, interpreting, and analysing them relatively simple. Gandhi's moral viewpoint and desire to live an active and creative life for the sake of his countrymen rather than himself made his ideas coherent.

Gandhi wrote *Hind Swarāj* to express his belief that violence was not Indian and was not part of Indian civilization. In some ways, *Hind Swarāj* aimed to provide a nonviolent alternative to anarchist and aggressive Indian nationalism, drawing inspiration from Gandhi's early *Satyāgraha* campaigns. According to Gandhi, the purpose of *Hind Swarāj* was to demonstrate that his countrymen were pursuing a deadly and aggressive approach and that if they just returned to their ancient culture, the English would either embrace it and become Indianized or lose their control over India.

Gandhi also captured more loudly than any of his predecessors "the dichotomy between Indian society's spiritual and moral superiority and the violent, politically corrupt nature of European states" in *Hind Swarāj*. While Gandhi opposed Western powers' "brute force," he distanced himself from militant nationalists' support for violence, which Gandhi viewed as a suicide tactic because it would incite the governing authority's "organised aggression."

Hind Swarāj served as a harsh indictment of materialistic Western civilizations. Gandhi listed immorality, commercial and worthless education, alienation, greed, violence, colonialism, imperialism, war technology, injustice, exploitation, poverty, extravagance and luxury, body comforts, unrestrained individualism and vulgar materialism, and immorality as some of the many negative aspects of modern Western civilization.

Gandhi doesn't agree with them at all. Gandhi explained what he meant by "civilization," both Western and Indian, using numerous quotations. He then went on to discuss these characteristics and how they affect the social, political, economic, and moral aspects of contemporary human life as well as his broader criticism of Western civilization, which is scattered throughout his writings.

"Civilization is the way of life that guides man toward responsibility. Moral observance and duty fulfilment are synonymous. Maintaining morals requires us to have emotional and mental self-control. By doing this, we become aware of ourselves."[1]

Hind Swarāj: Gandhi's Criticism of Contemporary (Western) Civilization

Let us begin by defining the term "civilisation" concerning current affairs. The ultimate test will be whether or not the residents prioritize their physical health. Homes built in Europe today are of higher quality than

those constructed a century ago. This is seen both as a means of encouraging bodily comfort and as a proof of civilization. In the past, people carried spears and wore animal skins. Today, they adorn themselves with a variety of garments, including long pants, and carry revolvers with five or more chambers instead of spears. A nation is considered to have become civilized if, after a period of barbarism—during which they wore little more than boots and simple clothing—its citizens begin to wear European-style dress. Historically, Europeans relied mainly on physical labour to till their land. Since the invention of the steam engine, however, a single individual can cultivate vast areas and accumulate substantial wealth. This, too, is seen as a sign of civilization.

In earlier times, important books were written by only a few select men. Today, anyone can write and print whatever they like, leading to the pollution of many minds. Men once travelled by wagon, but now they can journey up to 400 miles a day by train, which is considered a pinnacle of civilization. It is even predicted that, as humanity advances, airships will allow people to travel anywhere on Earth within a few short hours. In the future, men may no longer need to use their hands or feet at all. By pressing a button, their clothes will appear beside them; another button will deliver the newspaper; a third will summon a car and a servant. They will be served a variety of delicious meals, carefully prepared for their enjoyment.

The machines will do all the work. Formerly, when people desired to fight, they would compare their physical prowess; today, thousands of lives can be taken by one man operating a rifle from a hill. This is the way society operates. Men could work outside as much as they pleased in the past. Thousands of workers are now gathered in factories and mines to perform preventative maintenance. Their plight is comparable to that of beasts. For the advantage of millionaires, they are forced to labour in the riskiest professions at considerable personal risk. In the past, men were physically held as slaves. The temptation of wealth and the luxury goods it can buy has enslaved them. Hospital admissions are rising as a result of diseases that few people are aware of and the hordes of doctors scrambling to discover treatments. This is a civilizational test. In the past, mailing letters needed specialized couriers and significant financial outlays; today, anyone can write a letter to defraud someone for pennies. For the same sum, one can therefore show thankfulness. People used to eat handmade bread and vegetables for two or three meals a day, but now they have to eat every two hours, which leaves little time for other activities.

This civilization doesn't care about religion or morality. The goal of civilization is to make the body more comfortable, yet it fails horribly. This civilization is irreligious and has stifled the European populace to the extent that its inhabitants seem half-mad.

"The very structure of this civilization is set up to eventually collapse on itself. Mohammed's beliefs would classify America as a Satanic Civilization. It is known as the Dark Age in Hinduism."[2]

Gandhi discussed why Western writers showed little concern for the civilizations they inhabited

We hardly ever see people fighting among themselves. It is unlikely for someone who is enamoured with modern civilization to write against it. Since they think it is true, they will be concerned with gathering evidence and arguments in favour of it, which they will do unconsciously. A man thinks when he is sleeping. Until he is awakened from his slumber, he is not tricked. A man who suffers from the curse of civilization is like a man who has dreams. The works of proponents of contemporary civilization, which surely has some very intelligent and even some very good persons among its followers, are usually what we read. They write things that hypnotize us. Thus, one by one, we are pulled into the maelstrom.

Let's explore his views on Indian civilization: a look at his writings

India, in my opinion, has the most advanced civilization on the planet. There's nothing like the seeds our mothers and fathers planted. The Pharaohs may have been destroyed, Japan became Westernized, Rome and Greece both died, and China is unremarkable, but India is still fundamentally sound. The writings of men from ancient Greece and Rome, which no longer survive in their former splendour, teach the people of Europe valuable truths. Despite all of this, India has remained unwavering, and this is her greatest strength. It is said that India's inhabitants are so stolid, illiterate, and barbarous that no amount of persuasion will change them. Indeed, it is a critique of our abilities. On the anvil of experience, we dare not change what we have tried and found to be true. India receives advice from many, yet she doesn't flinch. She is beautiful because she is the source of our hope.

We still live in the same kind of cottages as before, and our indigenous education hasn't altered. No living system we've ever had has weakened competition. Each paid a regular wage and practised his trade or profession. Not because we were incapable of building machinery, but

rather because our forefathers saw that doing so would turn us into slaves and cause us to lose our moral fibre. They therefore decided, after great discussion, that we should only use our hands and feet to the extent that it was possible. They understood that the right use of our hands and feet was essential to both genuine happiness and good health. They considered the rulers of the world to be beneath the Rishis and Fakirs because they understood that the sword of ethics was superior to kings and their weapons. Under such a system, a country is more suited to impart knowledge than to absorb it.

Gandhi was well aware that India was not exactly how he depicted it, despite his admiration for Indian civilization. He was well aware of the more sinister elements, such as child marriage, child widowhood, adolescent moms and housewives, polyandry, *Niyoga* — a practice in which women commit prostitution under the guise of religion—and the killing of goats and lambs for religious purposes. He admitted the existence of those defects. He claimed that no one mistakenly believed that the shortcomings of old civilization were present in Indian culture. He knew what had been done in the past to rid the world of those horrors, and he expected that the same would be done in the future. According to him, we can cleanse ourselves of these vices by using the new spirit that has been born within us, he said, but the symbols of modern civilization that I have described to you are accepted as such by its followers, and the Indian civilization as I have described it has been described similarly by its followers. Men have never achieved perfection anywhere in the world or under any civilization. The Indian civilization tends to elevate the moral being, whereas the Western civilization spreads immorality; the former is based on faith in God, while the latter is devoid of Indian civilization and should be embraced by all Indian lovers with the same fervour and conviction that a child clings to its mother's breast.

India is unique. It has unfathomable power. Gandhi noted. Its power is beyond comprehension. He also highlights the historical reality that the Indian civilization has withstood several storms, unlike other civilizations.

The loss of India's Independence due to modern Civilization

If Indian civilization was better than Western civilization, then why were Western nations conquering and occupying India? Gandhi is quite clear that India was not conquered by the English but rather given to them by the Indians. "The British are in India to protect us, not to show off their strength," he clarified.

Gandhi wrote in his analysis of India's loss of Independence to the West

The British initially visited our country for business. Remember the Company of Bahadur? Who made it up, Bahadur? They had no intention of establishing a monarchy at that time. Who supported the Company's officers? Their silver tempted whom? Who bought their goods? History has recorded all of this. To gain instant wealth, we greeted the officers of the company with open arms. We assisted them. If I frequently use bhang and a seller sells it to me, should I hold the seller or myself accountable? Can I overcome the habit if I blame the seller? Will the forced-out retailer be replaced by another? ... English merchants were able to establish themselves in India with our help. Company Bahadur was called in to help our Princes when they clashed. This company had extensive experience in both business and combat. It was not hindered by ethical issues. Its goal was to increase trade and generate revenue. After accepting our help, it increased the size of its warehouse. It used an army, which we also used, to protect the latter.

Gandhi starts by invoking the adage "that removing the cause of a disease results in the removal of the disease itself." In a similar vein, he claims that "India can achieve freedom if the root cause of slavery is eradicated." He also raises an intriguing argument regarding "the entirety of India remaining unaffected." The only people who have been enslaved by Western civilization are those who have done so. To quantify the universe, we apply our own pitiful foot rule. We think we have control over the entire universe when we are slaves. We think that the entire nation is in the same state since we are in such a miserable situation. Even though this is untrue, it is acceptable to attribute our slavery to all of India. He ends by making the comforting remark that "if we bear the preceding fact in mind, we can see that if we become free, India becomes free" after presenting this image of India.

Gandhi considered the fight for Indian independence to be "India's contribution to world peace." He referred to his form of nationalism as *Swadeshī* and *Swarāj*. He declared that protecting our civilization's genius was the aim of his *Swarāj*.

The Downfall of India's Modern Civilization

Gandhi accused the railways, lawyers, and doctors—all essential elements of modern civilization—of being directly responsible for India's poverty. If we didn't wake up on time, he even threatened to "wreck" us. He seems to have unfairly singled out organizations that we consider essential and

helpful to modern life. Gandhi, however, was certain of his position. He claims that "you will have difficulty comprehending the true inwardness of civilisation's evils" at the outset of his critique of the emblems of modern civilization. He goes on, "Doctors tell us that even when a consumptive is near death, he clings to life."[3] Consumption doesn't seem to be harmful; in fact, it gives the sufferer a sensual colour that makes them think everything is well. Civilization is a sickness, so we need to be very careful.

He argues that the British could not have controlled India to the extent they did without the railways. According to him, the railways are responsible for the widespread distribution of diseases, particularly the bubonic plague, which devastated the Indian population. He suggests that the railways acted as carriers for the plague, enabling the rapid movement of people across the country. Without the railways, the masses would not have been able to travel so freely, and the disease would not have spread so quickly. In his view, the railways are the "germ bearers" of the plague.

Gandhi also blames the railways for exacerbating famine. Due to their convenience, people can sell food to the highest-paying markets, leading to an increased frequency of famines. He believes that as people grow more reckless, the threat of starvation becomes even more imminent. Furthermore, Gandhi argues that the railways have allowed malevolent individuals to "carry out their evil designs more quickly," leading to the desecration of sacred sites. In the past, these sacred sites were difficult to reach, so only sincere believers would visit them. Today, however, they are frequented by rogues with ill intentions. He concludes that "only the evil one could use the railways as a means of distribution."

However, Gandhi does not attribute the rise of nationalism in India to the railways. He cautions against blaming the railways for fostering patriotism. He firmly believes that India existed as a united nation long before the railways were built or the British arrived. "The English have taught us that it would take generations for us to unite as a nation and that we were not always one. This is inaccurate. Before they came to India, we were already one country, motivated by a single idea. Our lifestyles were unified. We were a single nation, which allowed them to create a unified kingdom. Then, they divided us."

"I do not wish to imply that because we were one nation, we had no differences," he continues, "but it is submitted that our leading men travelled throughout India on foot or in bullock carts." He raises the question, "What do you think our foresighted forefathers intended when

they established Setu bandha (Rameshwar) in the south, Jagannath in the east, and Hardwar in the north as pilgrimage centres?" They became friendly and learned one other's languages. Gandhi acknowledges that the following factors were the primary cause of our ancestors' aforementioned actions, and he feels that they were not dumb.

They knew that worshipping God might have been done at home just as successfully. They told us that the Ganges was in the homes of people who had good hearts. They acknowledged, nevertheless, that India was a single, unbroken country that nature had formed. They therefore argued that it had to be a single country. They created sacred sites across India and gave the people a sense of national identity by reasoning in this fashion, which was unprecedented in other areas of the world. And just as no two Englishmen are alike, neither are we Indians. The only people who think we are several nations are you and me, as well as those who consider ourselves to be superior and civilized. With the introduction of railroads, we started to believe in distinctions.

Khadi: A Critique of Modern Civilization

Khadi holds a unique and complex significance, as previously mentioned. Gandhi conveyed several key concepts through Khadi, with the most important being his critique of modernism. While Khadi was a direct challenge to modern Western society, it also embodied India's rich cultural heritage. For centuries, Indians have been weaving and exporting cotton fabric, and Khadi itself is deeply rooted in Indian communities. Gandhi infused new meaning into this handwoven fabric, revitalizing the concept and symbolizing a return to India's glorious civilization before European colonization. He believed that "Khadi delivers the poor from the bonds of the rich and creates a moral and spiritual bond between the classes and the masses. It restores to the poor somewhat of what the rich have taken from them."[4] Gandhi urged his fellow countrymen to dedicate thirty minutes each day to spinning as a form of devotion. In Gandhi's vision, the Charkha and Khadi symbolized a rejection of machines that reduced human labour or concentrated power in the hands of a few.

Gandhi concentrated on advancing Khadi after he left active politics in the middle of the 1920s, making it a key component of nation-building at the local level. He proposed the concept of a "yarn currency" and a Khadi franchise. Both British and Western-educated urban Indians would have been perplexed by Gandhi's intense emotional attachment to the spinning wheel and would not have understood the extent of rural poverty in India.

Education as a Critique of Modernity and its Values

The most significant contributing factor to the advent of modernism in India was probably primary education. The architecture of the colonial overlords was fundamentally disconnected from Indian heritage and ignored the demands and challenges of the hordes of people living in the countryside. Gandhi's basic education program was mostly focused on rural areas, and the main teaching medium was handicrafts. Gandhi's preferred crafts were spinning and weaving, and his pedagogy and educational system were inextricably linked to his khadi-based way of life. Essentially, Gandhi's educational philosophy had the potential to transform Indian society, underscoring the importance of adhering to the values of Truth and Non-violence.[5]

Gandhi had serious doubts about the fundamentals of the Western educational system. He said it was only a shoddy copy of the Western model and completely inappropriate for India's needs. He maintained that rather than encouraging intellectual development, the school system sapped students' energy by using a foreign language as the medium of instruction, creating a horde of clerks and job seekers. Gandhi was convinced that it discouraged creativity, weakened native tongues, and denied the masses access to the higher education that would have been gained through contact with the educated elite. He argued that India's learned and unskilled masses were sharply divided by this educational system. It had no theological basis, so it stimulated the mind but ignored the spirit, and the lack of vocational training left the body in poverty. Above all, he thought the system blatantly ignored the necessity of agricultural education.

Gandhi began his educational experiment together with his involvement in local politics, particularly during the Champaran *Satyāgraha*. In November 1917, the first school in Barharwa was established, marking the beginning of his educational experiment, which fully matured after the 1937 Wardha Conference. Gandhi articulated his educational philosophy clearly in *Young India* in June 1921:

"I see nothing wrong with children paying for their education through work from the very beginning. The simplest handicraft, suitable for all and essential for the entire country, is undoubtedly spinning, alongside other productive activities. If we integrate this into our educational institutions, we will achieve three key goals: we will make education self-sustaining, we will nurture both the body and the mind of children, and we will enable a full boycott of foreign yarn and cloth.

Furthermore, children trained in this way will develop self-reliance and independence."

The Nation's Condition and the Rise of Modern Industrialization

The nation-state notion and modern industrialization are two of the numerous Western-inspired ideas that most Indians with Western education willingly embrace. Gandhi's perspective on both was distinct. Gandhi argued that peaceful nationalism was a prerequisite for civilized existence, whereas violent nationalism — also referred to as imperialism — was the curse. He said "Industrialization is, I am afraid, going to be a curse for mankind. The exploitation of one nation by another cannot go on for all time. If not today, then tomorrow the countries that are under exploitation will rise and break the bonds."[6]

Gandhi contended for a concept of People's *Swarāj* based on truth and non-violence, for which Khadi was a suitable metaphor, in contrast to the West's aggressive and mechanical understanding of nationalism. Furthermore, this symbol linked the idea of *Swarāj* to care for the impoverished—the last man—and the hamlet, the imaginary stronghold of backwardness. Nationalist leaders had mostly embraced a Western definition of nationalism before Gandhi. Gandhi not only denied this, but he also presented a different, more thoroughly traditional vision that included all Indians, rich and poor. He gave the national movement a moral component and created a new set of symbols—Khadi, Rama Rajya, and *Satyāgraha*—for it. He was building a new intellectual foundation that would better serve the throngs of Indians, 85 per cent of whom reside in rural areas. He did not confine his criticism to a distinct ideology. He had a public action plan to revive India's economy, society, and politics.

Conclusion

During a dismal global situation, Gandhi stands out as a beacon of light — even for many in the West. He offered an alternative model of development, grounded not in material progress but in the restoration of moral values and the primacy of the human being as the true measure of development. His method of *Satyāgraha* remains a potent force, providing immense scope for individual action and non-cooperation with injustice. Gandhi consistently emphasized the importance of transparency in methods and the purity of both objectives and means, principles that are becoming increasingly relevant in today's world.

The rights-based approach to development has reached a state of stagnation. If not now, then shortly, Gandhi's emphasis on responsibilities and human values will become essential. Many contemporaries once thought Gandhi exaggerated when he dismissed European civilization as a "seven-day wonder," and some dismissed him as a relic of a bygone era. Yet now, a hundred years later, the world is beginning to recognize the enduring wisdom of his voice — a voice that was once solitary but now appears profoundly sane and sensible.

Gandhi's greatness lies not merely in his critique of the existing systems but in his unwavering commitment to building constructive alternatives. Mere criticism was never sufficient for him; he believed that humanity must be the ultimate measure of all things. His vision of *Sarvodaya* — the welfare of all — remains both an inspiring ideal and a practical blueprint for future action.

Today, Gandhi's ideas require reinterpretation in light of contemporary realities. The world is moving steadily toward a post-religious society, where morality is understood not as a divine mandate but as a social necessity. It is the embrace of secular, universal values — not blind faith — that will help address many of the world's pressing challenges. A future founded on individual freedom balanced by social responsibility promises to transform collective action into a powerful catalyst for change. At a time when rampant corruption threatens the very foundations of society, it is the spirit of individual initiative — so central to Gandhi's philosophy — that holds the potential for true renewal.

Therefore, we can say that Gandhi was not opposed to all currents of contemporary civilisation and wished for a return to a fundamentally Indian past. He frequently exaggerated his criticisms of modern civilisation's flaws. In his way, Gandhi had been a critic of modern civilisation. He criticised almost every aspect of contemporary civilisation. Gandhi was a social reformer and religious leader in the field of social organization. He opposed untouchability, the exclusion of lower castes from temples, and the hereditary priesthood. To further the cause of these social changes, he led a number of initiatives founded on social equality and the spirit of science. The formation of new social strata and subsequent socioeconomic changes in India during and after Gandhi's lifetime aided in the popularisation of the modern concepts Gandhi attempted to convey. Gandhi was dubbed the "Prophet of the Atomic Era" due to his foresight regarding the rejection of violence and the possibilities for social and political activity.

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Book Review

The Classical Upaniṣads: A Guide (Guides to Sacred Texts), By Signe Cohen, published by Oxford University Press, in 2024, 280 pp., $24.95 (pbk), ISBN 9780197654163.

Abhijit Tarafdar

Introduction

Signe Cohen's newly published book (2024) entitled as *The Classical Upaniṣads: A Guide* may be regarded as a significant contribution in the field of Vedanta studies across the world. It is a very precise scholarly introduction to the classical Indian scriptures and classical Indian school of philosophy. As one of the important parts of the *Guides to the series of Sacred Religious Texts* published by Oxford University Press, this book is intended to provide a rigorous, clear and distinct interpretations of so-called thirteen Indian Upaniṣads. As a scholar of South Asian religion studies and Sanskrit literature, Cohen is already considered as a popular scholar or intellectual for her already published books or works on Vedanta and post-Vedic texts. She tried to write this book as a combination of philosophical reflection and some textual exegesis, historical contextualization which might be appropriate not only for students but for general readers also. The conclusion or outcome of this book is very much informative and philosophically attuned of world's one of the most interesting spiritual sacred texts.

Here, I would try to provide an appreciative and critical review or analysis of this book focusing on the philosophical methodology, interpretation structure of this book. I would also try to locate Cohen's work in the context of both classical commentarial views and modern academic perspective on Upaniṣads, exploring its contributions and limitations in the wider contexts.

Cohen in her book has gone beyond narrow textualism by giving importance on the philosophical stakes of Upaniṣadic teachings. The book is divided into different text-specific chapters. The initial chapters provide the intellectual and historical background of the Upaniṣadic corpus. Cohen also focused on the distinction between the *saṃhitā*-based ritualism of the

early Vedas and the *jñāna*-centered speculative model that reflects the Upaniṣadic ethos. The first one is dominated by priestly authority and rituals, while the latter one activated a paradigmatic shift toward intellectual, metaphysical investigation, and renunciation.

Each of the thirteen Indian Upaniṣads as defined here was translated by Max Müller in the *Sacred Books of the East* series. These well known Upaniṣads are the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, *Chāndogya*, *Taittirīya*, *Aitareya*, *Īśā*, *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Māṇḍūkya*, *Praśna*, *Śvetāśvatara*, *Kauṣītaki*, and *Maitrī* Upaniṣads. Each chapter of this book provides a brief interpretation of the historical and literary context, followed by a overview of its main themes and philosophical reflections. Cohen incorporated some translations of notable passages, which are accompanied by careful philosophical explanation of technical Sanskrit terms. What makes the difference in this book is Cohen's sensitivity to the multiple levels of interpretation that the Upaniṣads demand. For example, she notes how one particular passage may be read from different angles; as a theological affirmation, a philosophical proposition depending upon the perspective brought to it. She did not reduce the texts to theory but considered them as living documents.

One of the major contributions of *The Classical Upaniṣads: A Guide* rests in its lucid exposition of difficult philosophical notions. Cohen is especially expert in handling the main themes of *ātman* (self), *brahman* (ultimate reality), *mokṣa* (liberation), and *karma* (action and its consequences). Cohen allowed the diversity of approaches within the framework of Upaniṣads to speak for themselves rather than instead of imposing a systematic metaphysics onto the texts. Say for instance, the notion of *ātman-brahman* identity. While the later school of Advaita, emphasizes the non-duality of these terms, Cohen carefully delineates how different Upaniṣads present divergent approaches regarding this issue. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogyam* Upaniṣads, we Can see the formulation of *tat tvam asi* ("That thou art"), suggesting an ontological unity between the individual self and the absolute self. Yet in Upaniṣads like the *Kaṭha* and *Śvetāśvatara*, one could find more dualistic or theistic views, with the *ātman* sketched as subordinate to or distinct from a supreme God.

Cohen also puts emphasize on epistemological and ethical aspects. Cohen points out the importance of *śravaṇa* (listening), *manana* (reflection) and *nididhyāsana* (meditative assimilation) as steps in the internalization of Upaniṣadic knowledge. The emphasis is not merely on

speculative knowledge but *jñāna* that may help us to attain *mokṣa*. From this angel, the Upaniṣads might be seen as texts of praxis, as much as of philosophical theory.

The Classical Upaniṣads: A Guide provides us an interesting historical research of the Indian classical *Upaniṣads*. These *Upaniṣads* are considered as a genre of sacred text that the Sanskrit tradition coins as scripture (*śruti)*. However, the *Upaniṣads* are taken with great interest not only to the philosophers but also to Sanskrit theologians. It catches interest not only of the Indian intellectuals but also the modern European philosophers like Hegel, Schopenhauer and so on. *Upaniṣads are only place where we can find* the ideas of a all pervading self (*ātman*); the absolute reality that is the basis of all. It talks about *Salvation* by the mean of knowledge (*jñāna)* rather than action. Action and reincarnation are brought into classical Indian Sanskrit thought.

Brief overview of the chapters

Signe Cohen's book "*The Classical Upaniṣads: A Guide (Guides to Sacred Texts*)" consists of eight chapters. The first Chapter provides the Introduction of the book. In introduction chapter Cohen considers *Upaniṣads* as a genre of approximately 200 texts written in Sanskrit by collectives of scholar but not by any individual author since eighth century BC. Their main aim was to explore a "person's inner self" (*ātman*), one "cosmic divine force" (*brahman)*, *along with* the relationship between these two entities. And the knowledge of the true nature of these two might lead to liberation of self in true sense. Among these approximately 200 well known *Upaniṣads,* some considers the identification of slef with a persisting essence, on the other hand, other *Upaniṣads* try to connect it with religious figures or deities like Śiva, Viṣṇu or any Goddess. And in case of other religion it may be Allah and Christ. So some *Upaniṣads* consider the universal divine power as identical with such religious deities, but there are also some *Upaniṣads* who do not consider them as identical with religious deities. Some *Upaniṣads* considers the relationship between these two entities as fictional. So it is well established that there is no one or singular philosophical perspective or approach of the *Upaniṣads*.

Signe Cohen's book "*The Classical Upaniṣads: A Guide (Guides to Sacred Texts*)" is the exploration of such classical classical *Upaniṣads*, dating back several centuries earlier than the others. Cohen provides a clear and lucid introduction to the genre of the

classical *Upaniṣads*, carefully searching their origins within the framework of distinct Vedic branches (*śākhās*) to which these *Upaniṣads* were initially affiliated. Cohen has shown us that how these affiliations are originally rooted in ritual contexts. These *Upaniṣads* were gradually evolved into more performative and doctrinal identities with the pace of time. At around the eighth century CE, when the great Indian philosophical theologian *Śaṅkara* wrote his commentaries on ten *Upaniṣads* of the thirteen classical Upaniṣads, the texts seemed begun to develop an autonomous or distinct interpretive identity. Cohen elucidates this development by illustrating how later intellectual and religious schools of philosophy wrote new Upaniṣads to support or advocate their own theological orientations and to support their antiquity or authority.

In the second, third and fifth chapters Signe Cohen analyses the historical background of the Indian classical *Upaniṣads* along with the date and authorship. Cohen discussed the social and political background, geography as well. As Cohen opines that the Indian classical *Upaniṣads* were mainly composed in between 800 BC to 100 CE in Northern India, which is surrounded by the Himalaya in the North, in the East the Bay of Bengal, in the northwest there is the Indus River, and in the south there is Vindhya mountains. Cohen argues that as the Upaniṣads were initially transmitted orally for at least a millennium before being written down so it is very difficult to provide precise dates for their composition. The dates Cohen provides are, for this reason, roughly estimated based on the available linguistic evidence, literary evidence and historical textual evidence. Most of the known part about the Upaniṣads came out from the texts themselves or by the method of comparative analysis among the four Vedas, which, in their present linguistic form, are might be dated in between 1500 to 1000 BC. The Vedic texts primarily focus on ritual theory and practices and also their associated worldly goals; such as securing rain, cattle, sons, and long life. These worldly goals that were seem to be attainable through specific ritual activities. The development of soteriology and the philosophical concepts required to explain liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth truly take shape in the *Upaniṣads*. In this regard, Signe Cohen critically analyses the relationship between the Upaniṣads and the emergent traditions of Buddhism and Jainism, providing a critical examination of two prevalent interpretations of their connection. One such interpretation divides the Upaniṣads into two sections: one section is said to be composed before the rise of Buddhism and those written afterward. Cohen perhaps appropriately challenges this

approach, pointing out the difficulties involved in dating both the early *Upaniṣads* and the historical Buddha with precision. Secondly, more widely accepted approach posits that the *Upaniṣads*, Buddhism, and Jainism they all originated or developed from the shared cultural milieu of "Greater Magadha". While this hypothesis might help us to explore certain similarities between these traditions, Cohen argues that it fails to adequately explain their significant distinctions, which could be better understood by recognizing that the earliest Upaniṣads predate both Buddhism and Jainism. By contrast, Cohen views that there is abundant evidence to suggest a mutual exchange of ideas among these intellectual currents and it is by the time of the middle of *Upaniṣads*.

In the fourth and sixth Chapters, Signe Cohen gives us useful overview of the 13 Indian classical *Upaniṣads* and analyses what she thinks as their central themes. Cohen analyses: (a) the self (*ātman)*, it is in the *Upaniṣads* is considered as the creator of this world. The body is considered as the impersonal substance of a living human being. (b) Regarding the nature of the person (*puruṣa*), some *Upaniṣads* think that it is quite similar to the self; on the other hand, some argue that it is separated from the self. (c) *Brahman,* a divine power that operates the universe. Some *Upaniṣads* argue that it is fundamental and both the material and instrumental cause behind the creation of the universe. On the other hand, other *Upaniṣads* claim that it is itself personal. (d) Time (*kāla*), is considered as a reality unto itself according to the the *Upaniṣads*. But in the Vedas time is explained in the sense of ritual action. (e) karma and reincarnation , they both, in Sanskrit thought refer to the principle or rule that establishes relation between personal actions and the outcomes which may be provide fruits in this present life or future lives through the rebirth cycle. (f) Knowledge and liberation are regarded as means and end. It is claimed that such knowledge of the true nature and the relationship between *atman* and *brahman* is transformative and it frees a person from the cycle of rebirth. All of these chapters are interesting, as Signe Cohen appropriately able to discuss all of them quite efficiently and detail.

In Chapter seven, she moved to the aspects of liberty in the classical *Upaniṣads* and analyzes many *Upaniṣad's* popular characters, to find out where, how, why they appeared in the body. For instance, in the Vedas we can find characters like, Naciketas and Yājñavalkya who focus on the practice of rituals and its theory. On the other hand, in the *Upaniṣads* both tales are seen to be focused on the self. In the *Upaniṣads*

ideas are evolved through dialogs between teachers and their students or kings and teachers. As Cohen finds out, thousand cows were given to Yājñāvalkya as reward for winning in a debate organized by King Janaka of Videha. Finally, in Chapter Eight, Signe Cohen critically explores the rception of the *Upaniṣads*, examining their impact on modern day religious field or Hinduism and broader Hindu philosophical thought. She also considers their engagement by Muslim scholars and their significant reception in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, particularly through the works of Hegel, Schelling, and Schopenhauer. This European involvement was facilitated by Abraham Anquetil-Duperron's Latin translation, published in two volumes, which was itself based on Dara Shikoh's 1657 Persian rendering of selected *Upaniṣads*. This cross-cultural trajectory highlights a period in the history of philosophy when European intellectuals were deeply influenced by texts originating from far-off cultures and earlier eras. In her final chapter, Cohen also gives us a comprehensive list of published translations and printed editions of the classical *Upaniṣads*. The book closes with a useful glossary and an extensive bibliography.

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