

## DISCUSSION AND COMMENTS

### Should one try to understand Indian Philosophy on the Western model?

#### Fundamental defect in Daya Krishna's approach to the 'understanding' of the Indian Philosophy

We are giving below a long comment from Prof. Rudolf Brandner, which he had written in a personal letter after reading the book entitled *Indian Philosophy—A Counterperspective*. We are publishing his comments, as his observations might be of wider interests to all those who are interested in 'understanding' the philosophical enterprises as enshrined in the two traditions of philosophising which have come to be known by the names 'Indian' and 'Western'.

I received your book *Indian Philosophy—A Counterperspective* and I found it so stimulating that I read it through at a stretch. I think that your straightforward way of attacking certain myths about 'Indian Philosophy' and to question the historical and philological constitution of its reference texts is an invaluable contribution to contemporary philosophy. It teaches us to take philosophy serious—and how else could we open up new perspectives of philosophical thinking if not by a different approach to the traditions we belong to? I think that any intercultural approach to philosophy will depend on our capacity to originally reappropriate the own tradition; and there are quite a lot of typical modern prejudices we will have to cancel in order to get there. Our concerns in this direction might be quite similar and it might be even a common project we are working on from very different angles; it seems to me quite funny—in a very significant way—that while you are trying to show that Indian philosophy is not *mokṣa*-centred: and that thereby it has to be considered as 'philosophy proper' *just as western philosophy*, I am trying to show—by passing through Indian Philosophy—that Occidental Philosophy is basically *mokṣa*-centred and that this is exactly its constitution as 'philosophy proper'. This strange coincidence of apparently opposed philosophical views is quite exciting for me; it would be too easy to just point out that we differ in how we understand 'philosophy' and how we understand '*mokṣa*'; so I think we will only be able to explore the problem we are both dealing with if we take into account each other's philosophical approach to the question. I completely agree with you that such philosophical approach has to

liberate itself entirely from any 'emotional predisposition' regarding the western or eastern tradition of philosophy; there is nothing to defend or to accuse, to evaluate or to distribute according to presupposed intellectual values. Everything remains to be discovered; and of course: this is easy to say, but difficult to do. Why?—

I think we have to start with this question: the question who we are in all this, or to put in a more philosophical way: What is the hermeneutical situation of our thinking dealing with different traditions?—Modernity; but what does this mean?—I think it means basically one thing: That we are all de-rooted from our traditions, historically alienated of everything that has been conceived within human history before. How can we take philosophical thinking seriously if we don't face the problems that arise out of its historical situation? I obviously don't think that this historical situation is something external, accidental or irrelevant to philosophical thinking, but constitutive of its innermost formation within the contemporary world. This is no option for 'historicism' or 'historical relativism' but the attempt to acknowledge what I would like to call the absolute uniqueness of the historical situation of modernity. Nietzsche and Heidegger taught me to see this—and I think it is the absolute condition of any serious philosophical thinking today to face this factual situation of humanity. 'Modernity' is not a 'progress' of humanity with historical antecedents—it is a completely new way of dealing with what is a new constellation of man and world. It is a fact that this constellation originated out of the occidental tradition; and what we have been witnessing for the last two or three centuries is the globalization all over the world. Scientific-technological rationality is becoming the fundamental paradigm of human relationship with everything what is—it is unifying the entire humanity into one and only one valid way of relating to things. The self-assertation of scientific-technological rationality has de-rooted the European world of its own tradition; and it works likewise in any other culture. As 'modern subjects' belonging to the modern world of scientific-technological rationality our thinking is already constituted by certain (logical and ontological) principles within which the philosophical thinking of those who have lived before us does not make sense any more. I think we are all experiencing this 'hermeneutical privation' regarding the traditions of metaphysics, religion, mythology and so on; and if we attain any genuine understanding of these traditions participating in their insights we owe this exclusively to our own hermeneutical effort to overcome our own 'modernity'. I think that the acute awareness of this unique historical situation bears deep consequences for every

serious attempt of philosophical thinking today.

Why did scientific-technological rationality originate in the western tradition—and not anywhere else?— I think that this is one of the questions that should be asked; and it has already been asked by Nietzsche, Heidegger and others. How to get an answer?—By the reconstruction of the fundamental principles of occidental philosophy and its religious traditions. This is what also I have been working on for the last fifteen years; my research has been directed on the foundation of Platonic-Aristotelean philosophy, of transcendental philosophy and its ulterior speculative development within the German Idealism (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel), of Nietzsche and Heidegger, Phenomenology and Hermeneutics. But as my books are all in German and not available in English it does not make sense to refer to them in the context of contemporary Indian philosophy.\* Perhaps I can best explain to you my approach to the Indian thinking tradition by referring to the concept of nihilism. If 'Nihilism'—as conceived by Nietzsche and Heidegger—is the concept to describe the historical situation of modernity (and not a theoretical or philosophical position), which is generated by the occidental history of philosophy, then occidental philosophy itself has to be basically 'nihilistic'. Whatever that means—it is clear, that philosophy ceases thereby to be a 'positive value'; it becomes something that should be overcome by some sort of non-philosophical, non-metaphysical thinking in order to open up new—non-nihilistic—perspectives of human being-in-the-world. Contemporary continental 'philosophy' has to quite a large extent worked on this project of overcoming 'philosophy' into a 'post-metaphysical' way of thinking: an issue which as far as I know has not yet been taken into much consideration by contemporary Indian philosophy. As far as I can see 'philosophy' is always treated there as a 'positive value'; and out of this evaluation everybody is trying to prove that there is something like 'Indian philosophy' with all the respective disciplines like logic, epistemology, ontology, ethics and so on. The underlying hermeneutical attitude is one of competition—and I think that exactly this 'spirit of competition' spoils everything, every possibility of a genuine philosophical inquiry into the different formations of thinking. I think it is quite evident that this spirit of competition is a result of the overwhelming process of modernity; a defence reaction against the domination of western scientific-technological rationality, which has already and

\*The English-speaking reader may refer now to the article of Rudolf Brandner Nietzsche: 'Thinking as Liberation', published in *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XXV, No. 1, January 1998.

without questioning accepted its underlying values as achieved truths. My question in India has been a lot of times: How little self-estimation must there be for the own tradition, the own culture and its way of dealing with human existence, if everybody accepts to measure and evaluate it by the standards of modern scientific-technological rationality?—And a lot of times I was wondering whether Indian philosophers realized at all to what incredible extent they were ‘westernized’ in their way of dealing with the Indian tradition. I think that if western indology has succeeded in having some real insights into the Indian culture, this was achieved by exactly the opposite methodological attitude: by cancelling the validity of its presupposed concepts in order to pass to a phenomenological reconstruction of the validity of the basic Indian concepts. And I suppose that you must not have felt too comfortably writing the sentence: ‘Surely, the term *ânviksiki* comes as close to it (= the word philosophy) as one may want it to be’ (42). I don’t think this at all—and I think you would even agree with me. But if we take ‘philosophy’ to be what is practiced nowadays under this name in a lot of philosophical institutions, then of course the term *ânviksiki* comes quite close to this way of thinking. But is this really philosophy?—Or is it what is left of philosophy within the crisis of modernity, that is (i) History of Philosophy as distinct from philosophy itself, dealing with a tradition that does not make any sense anymore, and (ii) an auxiliary discipline of the sciences as Formal Logic, Epistemology, Philosophy of Science and so on. There is no need to point out that ‘Philosophy’ from Plato to Hegel has been something quite different. My impression is that a lot of times when Indian philosophers talk about ‘western philosophy’ they just mean Hume and Locke, J.S. Mill and Pierce, Frege and Wittgenstein or what has been summarized in B. Russell’s *History of Philosophy*; brief, the knowledge and understanding of western philosophy is highly conditioned by a very limited sector of (Anglo-Saxonian) philosophy and its specific interpretation of the western tradition. I wonder if in India there is any original confrontation with the European philosophy studying the original texts themselves, Greek philosophy in Greek, medieval philosophy in Latin, modern philosophy in German and French—or if everybody relies on secondary texts and interpretations written in English. I think that as long as Indian philosophers have no authentic access of their own to the occidental philosophy their conceptual understanding of what has been here ‘philosophy’ for two and a half thousand years will be just too limited for any serious confrontation with the Indian tradition. We need a very high level of competence for any attempt to conceptualize the different thinking traditions; and the central methodological problem

for me remains the phenomenological reconstruction of the basic concepts of each of these traditions. Put into strong terms: I think that every application of a concept originated within the realm of one tradition onto the other is methodologically faulty and theoretically unacceptable.

Let me give you an example related to *aletheia* and *mokṣa* as the prevailing purposes of thinking: Let us imagine two men, *A* and *B* with different obsessions: *A* wants absolutely to hunt a deer, *B* wants absolutely to seduce a woman. Each of them commits himself entirely and exclusively to this one purpose, organizing and structuring all his lifetime and his lifestyle, all his habits and ideas according to it. I hope you agree that their lives will be quite different. Now *A*—the hunter—might purchase a green dress to hide in the woods, he might build there a little cabin in order to observe the deer and get himself bow and arrow in order to shoot him. Now *B*—the gallant—might also buy himself a new dress in order to please the woman he adores—and perhaps just by accident it will be green. He also might build a little cabin in the woods—in order to have a place to retire with her; and he might also get bow and arrow in order to impress her with his virile virtues. So everything might look the same. We can even imagine that the woman will fall in love with the hunter and the gallant might—purely by accident—shoot the deer. Both will be very unhappy and deceived by life. None of them realized what he really wanted to realize. Their lives will still be very different and none of them will even have lived the life of the other.

Now let me just ask you: Don’t you think that a lot in the Indian and in the western traditions might look very similar, even the same—and be something completely different? Don’t you think that what has been projected in the different thinking traditions as the ultimate purpose of thinking must necessarily generate very different formations of thinking?—And why should we at all evaluate them?—How could we possibly do this?—Does it make sense to say that the life of the hunter is more true than the one of the gallant—even if he would shoot the deer while the living gallant would never get his beloved?—And what if the hunter would desperately shoot down all living beings in the wood—the gallant included—and erect himself as the tyrant of life: would you submit to him and subscribe that *by his success* he has proved that his way of life is the only true one?—And that the attempt to seduce a woman was just an erroneous way of chasing deers?—Please!