

PHILOSOPHY EAST AND WEST

History of Philosophy: Eastern and Western

SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN (ed.)

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The manuals on Indian philosophy, very rare until about thirty years ago (you still had to rely on Deussen and Max Mueller at that time), have multiplied since then. The years between 1922 and 1925 saw the publication of the first volume of Dasgupta's study as well as of Radhakrishnan's, of the shorter treatises by Masson-Oursel, by Grousset, and by Otto Strauss. Slowly it became clear that philosophy was not the monopoly of the Greeks and their successors and that, since the beginning of historical time, India in particular had handled in its own way and most worthily the notions which form the nucleus of our own speculations. It will become increasingly more difficult to set aside the role of India when a world-

wide picture of the facts is to be presented.

Nevertheless it must be admitted that at first sight this task is hardly encouraging: while thought in the West continued to enlarge its domain, adding new outlooks with every new century, the limits in India seemed to have been fixed once for all at some point, somewhere near the Christian era: speculation remains fixed at pre-established categories, thus presenting a picture of a kind of timeless and relatively impersonal scholasticism. This scholasticism—and here we find a strange paradox—has given rise to action more directly and more intensively than anywhere else. Here in India, metaphysics have become the foundation of vitalism: in

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the ancient ritual speculations or in the health religions that took their place, the Absolute becomes less a matter of knowledge and cognition than one of acquisition, of realisation by men who have created for themselves—by dint of following various teachings (some of them most astonishing)—the conditions of identification with the Absolute. In short, India has continued to envisage philosophic research as the quest for the immanent 'divine', even in systems like Śāṅkya or Mīmāṃsā which are considered atheistic.

Another difficulty facing us is the fact that a large number of philosophic terms are hardly translatable; to render a text faithfully it is necessary to weigh it down with Sanskrit words (since Indian thinking is directly or indirectly an expression of Sanskrit). The reader is asked once for all to suppose that there is an equivalent word in our languages. To summarise: whereas the accounts of Greek thought, for example, show new methods of investigation in every instance, while they underscore this or that revelation of new facts, the treatises dealing with India, no matter whether they are more or less scholarly, all resemble one another.

The book under consideration here, nevertheless, has its own special qualities. It is above all, a collective work; almost all the available Indian specialists (except for the regrettable absence of Professor Dasgupta) have been enrolled under the leadership of the most famous among them, S. Radhakrishnan. Only occasional chapters, such as those on Jewish or on Arab thought, on China (outside of Buddhist China) or on Japan have been entrusted to foreigners.

S. Radhakrishnan himself has undertaken to write the pages dealing with Saṅkara, the great vulgariser of the classic Vedānta. He has also written the general conclusion to both volumes while the preliminary discussion on the 'meaning of philosophy' was entrusted to a well-known statesman and scholar, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

The novelty of the book consists in the fact that for the first time all of Western philosophy is reviewed by Indians and from an Indian point of view. It is a reassuring thought that in a country where the teaching of our languages and literatures (with the exception of those of the Anglo-Saxon countries) is so rare and so ineffectual, the history of our philosophies could find such excellent interpreters. This does not mean, however, that volume II, 'Western', is as valuable as volume I, 'Eastern'. The authors have been forced to allot to the former its proper short space: certain important names, certain intellectual movements are missing. It appears also that some of the writers have been hard pressed to free themselves of points of view all too obviously of English or American origin. In these learned contributions, brilliant though they are at times, the most disappointing thing is that they do not convey that kind of shock which should result each time when a familiar idea is interpreted by minds formed by an entirely different tradition. A certain conformism has left its mark here as elsewhere.

While 400 pages have been set aside for the West, the treatment of India alone takes up nine tenths of volume I, i.e., 550 pages—a compensation for

long neglect! This gives the authors the opportunity to expand on the 'sectarian' movements of the Middle Ages, each of which has its philosophic superstructure. Social and political aspects have not been neglected, nor have the discoveries of Indian science in the past. Such inclusiveness is indeed quite justified, for there is a unity in the various manifestations of the Indian genius, which becomes apparent only when various departments of knowledge are patiently set side by side. It is well known that religious facts (many of which, to put it more correctly, are magical) are inseparable from speculative trends. It is even regrettable that no space was found for 'applied' Yoga except where it appears in the special guise of tantrism. The most carefully composed chapters seem to me those on Mīmāṃsā, on Śāktaiism, on the Buddhist movements of the Great Vehicle, on the Mahābhārata, insofar as the standard text is concerned. In spite of certain prejudices manifested in the treatment, there is also much to be learned in the chapter on Mathematics.

One might have expected to find in these two volumes a kind of confrontation, not so much for the purpose of revealing some sort of *philosophia perennis* (a relic of theosophy) as to note, in any given case, the filiations and the mutual indebtedness of one and the other of the major fields and, secondly, to establish convergences and parallelisms, which may be useful if they are divorced from any attempt to demonstrate their significance historically.

This objective has been only partially realised. The problem of indebtedness is particularly hard to solve in philosophic

discussion. In Greece, for example, it would have been more fruitful to establish a positive correlation in the realm of Neoplatonism than in the deceptive interpretations of Pythagoreanaism: yet the author of that chapter has not raised this point. On another level, there arises the question of the possible reciprocal interpenetration of Sūfism with Vishnuite mysticism and medieval Sivaism: here too the author has failed to throw any light on the problem. Nor has the writer of the chapter on Nietzsche and Schopenhauer brought any new insight on this point which he touched only casually, referring to Schopenhauer's reading of the Upanishads and to the emotional reaction they aroused in him.

There would be much to say about Stoicism, Pyrrhonism, the Epicureans, and the possible contacts of all of these systems with certain Indian speculations; but these movements are not touched upon in volume II, and we have to look for the name of Epicurus in the chapter devoted to Cārvāka in volume I. On the other hand, resemblances receive better treatment wherever they pertain to Asia: a full chapter, abounding in precise facts, is devoted to Indian influence on Chinese thought.

As for convergences, they are, of course, innumerable, provided that they are considered apart from the heterogeneity of form. The writers of this work have noted a certain number of them, beginning with Permenides who is likened to Sankara, down to Bradley, compared with the defenders of the 'Void' in the Great Vehicle; and to the thought of Benedetto Croce,

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whose affinity to the anti-metaphysicians of early Buddhism had previously been shown by Dasgupta. The systems of Spinoza, of Hume, of Berkeley would have invited other comparisons. On more solid grounds, one might have expected a comparative treatment of the atomism of Greece and that of India, and, where the work of Kautilya is discussed so extensively the name of Machiavelli should not have been omitted. In the last analysis, it is rather in the details that suggestive comparisons come to light, as, for instance, where the Absolute according to Hegel is defined as *Brahman* 'wrapped in *Māyā*', as a *purusa* combined with *prakṛti*; or where the theory of error of contemporary logicians is explained by certain theses of the later Vaiśeṣika, or even where, referring to Marxist thought, the writer notes a precedent in the school of Nyāyā.

Fortunately the collaborators on these two volumes do not exaggerate the well-known tendency, according to which ancient India is the precursor of this or that particular achievement of the West; only the chapter on Mathematics, praised above, goes somewhat too far in this direction. Naturally the influence of European thought on contemporary India is duly noted. M.P. T. Raju writes (p. 304):

Among the academical philosophers, the practice of approaching the Advaita from the point of view of Western idealism has gained strength. Instead of expounding or interpreting Śamkara, they develop a line of thinking found in Western thought and reach the Advaita conclusion. Professor K. C. Bhat-

tacharya is the most well-known of this group of thinkers. He starts from Kant's agnosticism regarding the Supreme Ideal of reason and shows in what sense one can be conscious of Brahman. Obviously consciousness here cannot be ordinary cognition but what Radhakrishnan calls 'integral intuition'.

Even outside academic circles in India modern thought is widely cultivated in the direction of Western ideas: this is a matter of course with Tagore, but even in Aurobindo (with his theosophical postulates) a synthesis is apparent in which the share of the Orient is not always predominant in spite of appearances to the contrary.

The work is soundly planned as a whole, and, in spite of possible reservations, it gives a representation of lasting interest. The editor, S. Radhakrishnan, has summed up certain valuable conclusions. He says, in fact, that the concordances are considerable, that the differences lie rather in the manner of presentation, in the emphasis placed on this or that element, than in the basic foundations of the doctrines. As he testifies to the preponderance of scientific thought which aims at finding laws and tendencies in harmony with the development of scientific knowledge, he demands a total philosophy based on the realisation of everything that 'is without us, of what is within us, of what is above us' (p. 440). 'Philosophy, which is the fruit of contemplation . . . is the sign of freedom in a world of necessity, freedom in the very awareness of bondage' (p. 441). From a short but decisive comparison of certain

parallel movements in the East and the West he derives the lesson that 'we must now get back to this fundamental wisdom which has been obscured and distorted in the course of history by dogmatic and sectarian developments.

We must get back to the primal sources which are not necessarily what was in the beginning but what is eternally present' (p. 447). And finally, 'We must strive to be human in this most inhuman of all ages' (p. 448).

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