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*George F. McLean*

# **Knowledge and Belief in the Dialogue of Cultures**

Edited by  
*Marietta Stepanyants*

Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences  
The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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## DEDICATION

It is a special honor for the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP), and for me personally as its President and General Editor, to dedicate this volume, *Knowledge and Belief in the Dialogue of Cultures*, to Professor Marietta Stepanyants on the occasion of her 75th birthday and her 30th anniversary as head of the Academy's Center for Oriental Studies.

I first met Professor Stepanyants in India on the burning plains of the Punjab and some years later at the University of Andhra Pradesh. Though coming from opposite sides of a very Cold War her combination of personal warmth and high professionalism have made these first meetings stand out in my mind to this day.

It was typical of her to reach out at the cost of personal inconvenience, not to mention danger, in order to immerse herself personally in the culture of India and to be wherever its philosophers gathered for their annual All-Indian Congresses. As a result she not only read about this totally different culture and civilization, but formed the kind of deep personal friendships which enable profound and sympathetic understanding.

But whereas most scholars would focus on but one cultural area, Professor Stepanyants shared a broad concern for all Eastern philosophies. This can be seen as well from her intensive work on Islam as seen from her books: *Pakistan Philosophy* and *Sufi Wisdom*, and the editing of a number of major reference works on Islamic thought.

Indeed, these collections reflect the amazing breadth of her professional philosophical range from *Philosophy of Religion* and *God-Man-Society in Traditional Cultures* to *the Rationalist Tradition*, to *Feminism*, and to a forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*.

What is especially remarkable is that she managed all this gigantic accomplishment in the midst of the most diverse and dramatic socio-political transformations of her native Russia. Throughout Professor Stepanyants managed to hold together her team of eminent scholars and to train new and newly professional specialists in the classical Eastern languages and philosophical traditions. It was her personal achievement that the rich Russian heritage of work in this field, while in transformation, continues to shed bright light that illumine the path for the emerging engagements with the East in this global 21<sup>st</sup> century.

All this she did as head of Oriental Philosophies and Director of Oriental Philosophical Studies at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Social Sciences in Moscow since 1980 and Professor and head of the Chair of Philosophy and Political Thought of the East at the Russian State University of Humanities. Thus when the University of Hawaii wished to expand globally its prestigious 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> East-West conferences it appointed Professor Stepanyants as their director just as the International

Federation of Philosophical Societies appointed her as its present Vice President.

It is then with the warmest regards that The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP) dedicates this volume in honor of her many professional accomplishments and esteemed abilities: personal and professional, as professor and editor; and administrative in leading philosophers of the world across boundaries, East and West, so that all can bring their gifts to our global future.

*George F. McLean*

## INTRODUCTION

MARIETTA STEPANYANTS

Knowledge, the means of its production, and the ways of ascertaining its validity – as juxtaposed to faith as a matter of religion and/or of philosophy treating faith/belief as an epistemological issue: these themes are so important that a vast body of literature has been created around them. Nevertheless, it is not an overstatement to claim that the present volume has no precedents.

The complex and multifaceted problems of knowledge and faith are usually analysed in the context of one particular culture. In this book an attempt is undertaken to present and investigate specific approaches and attitudes to these problems in several civilisations: Chinese, Indian, Muslim and Western, historically based on Christianity. Moreover, attitudes of different cultures are treated comparatively; most often they are compared with the Western tradition as most familiar to us. It is this comparative analysis that brings to light the specific features of the various cultures.

The list of authors in this book is also unique. Each culture is represented by its “natives”, who look at it, as it were, from the inside, as well as by those who look at it from the outside. But these latter studies because done by philosophers and scholars who have devoted her/his life work to the study of other cultures are free from any enmity or arrogance. One may not always agree with these authors, but it is hard to deny that their opinions are solidly based on primary sources as well as on profound understanding of the subjects in question.

Comparative studies in the past, especially at the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were oriented more towards finding the common, rather than the specific, in various traditions. The aim was to work out a synthesis or, in other words, a kind of mutual convertibility of the categories and concepts of various traditions. When in the 1930s there was put forward the idea to convene, in Hawaii, a conference of philosophers from the East and from the West, the task of the conference was formulated to investigate the possibility for the development of world philosophy through a synthesis of ideas from the East and the West<sup>1</sup>.

The first East West Philosophers' conferences aimed at such a synthesis of cultures which implied the “assimilation” to Western values of whatever could be taken as more or less “similar” to them in the cultures of the East. All the rest, all other non-Western traditions were to be rejected as dated and passé. The project as put forward by the founder (and first editor) of the journal “Philosophy East and West”, Charles A. Moore called for the

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<sup>1</sup> See: *Philosophy East and West*. Vol. XXXVIII, № 3, Honolulu, July 1988, p. 225.

“substantial synthesis” of the cultures of East and West. However, it is only fair to note that as early as 1951, in connection with the appearance of the first issue of the journal, John Dewy, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and George Santayana voiced dissenting views. All three philosophers expressed negative opinions about the project. The most straightforward was the comment of George Santayana:

You speak of “synthesis” between Eastern and Western philosophy: but this could only be reached by blurring or emptying both systems...From a literary or humanistic point of view I think that it is the variety and incomparability of systems, as of kinds of beauty, that make them interesting, not any compromise, or fusion that could be made of them<sup>2</sup>.

The founders of the comparative philosophy movement did not heed the voices which warned against the efforts deliberately to construct a cultural synthesis. But nowadays such voices sound quite topical and are, in fact, strongly supported by the majority of those who professionally work in the field of comparative philosophy. Hilary Putnam, the philosopher and a professor of Harvard in his paper “Can Ethics be Ahistorical? The French Revolution and the Holocaust” presented at the Sixth East-West Philosophers’ Conference in 1989, said there is no such thing as one universal truth for all. We must preserve everything which constitutes the riches of people, their world. We must know how to listen to each other, not be contented with what we have already got, always searching, seeking the perfection of ourselves and of the society as a whole.

Among the authors of the present volume, only Antanas Andrijauskas, Director, Institute of culture, philosophy and arts (Vilnius, Lithuania), persists in the opinion that a kind of *macrophilosophy* can possibly be worked out. But the majority of the authors of this book consider the plans for world cultural synthesis as illusionary and, moreover, as objectionable, because it is important to acknowledge and preserve cultural pluralism. This very idea has determined the composition of this book which is structured according to a “regional” principle. Such composition helps to bring into relief the peculiarities of each cultural tradition with regard to the problems of knowledge and faith.

### *Chinese Thought*

It is not by chance that the section devoted to China comes first. In Chinese culture, the ideas about knowledge and faith differ most radically from what is habitual for us.

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<sup>2</sup> *Philosophy East and West*. Vol. I, № 1, April 1951, p. 5.



Thus, the graph *zhi*, usually translated as “knowledge“ or “wisdom“ nominally, and verbally as “to know”, does indeed designate in Chinese and particularly in Confucianism a human excellence, one of human virtues. This is a philosophically significant term which frequently occurs in the “Analects“ of Confucius. In this famous text, *zhi* appears 113 times, which is 21 more times than such an important graph as *ren* (authoritativeness, benevolence, humaneness), 33 more than *dao* (way, path, the Way), almost twice as frequently as *li* (ritual propriety, rites, ceremonies, customs, etiquette, etc.) or *junzi* (exemplary person), and ten times more often than *xiao* (filial piety).

Usually in the West the word “knowledge” means mostly knowledge about facts, about the world as it is, and also the knowledge of scientific theories which explain such facts (the knowledge of the “laws of nature”).

But these two, closely interrelated, kinds of knowledge are not discussed in the “Analects“. According to Henry Rosemont, the graph *zhi* in this text (the basic one for the tradition of Confucianism) appears to mean (“in its most philosophically and spiritually significant usages”) something like this: “a sense of what it is most fitting to do in our interactions, understanding why, doing them, and achieving a sense of contentment from so doing”.

A similar interpretation is offered by the Chinese philosopher Ni Peimin, now a professor of Grand Valley State University (USA). He writes that in Confucianism knowledge means “knowledge about what one should do or not do – the way of life”; “the Confucian approach transcends the epistemological realm of truth or falsity, and enters the realms of moral goodness and aesthetic creativity”.

Artiom Kobzev (Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences) also claims that the Confucian approach to knowledge is but “a set of socio-ethical prescriptions.” “Therefore achieving the truth was understood as mainly learning it”. To support this claim, Kobzev refers to many authoritative sources, beginning with “Shu-jing” (11 – 6 cc. BC), which says: “It is not true that knowledge is difficult; it is action that is difficult”,<sup>3</sup> and the philosopher Yang Xiong (53 BC – 18 AD), who declared that “being engaged in a study is worse than being engaged in seeking a teacher”, “the height of a teaching (a doctrine?) is its embodiment in action”.<sup>4</sup>

The Russian sinologist traces the evolution of attitudes towards knowledge in the whole course of China’s history.<sup>5</sup> He remarks that

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<sup>3</sup> Shu-jing, 17/22.

<sup>4</sup> «Fa yan» («Lawful words»), 1.

<sup>5</sup> The thesis “knowledge is easy, action is difficult” meant, among other things, that “knowledge” precedes “action” (cf. “Xun-zi”, Ch. 8: “Learning reaches the end and stops (ceases to be) in action”). An exemplary formula of the relations between knowledge and action was given by Chu His (1130 – 1200): “If we talk about the preceding and the following, then knowledge is the

sometimes there took place deviations from the traditionally dominant stand (as described above). Thus, Wang Yang-ming (1472 – 1529) put forward the proposition about “the coinciding unity of knowledge and action“. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tan Si-tong (1865 – 1898), one of the reformers, inspired by the successes of Western science, put forward a thesis about the priority of knowledge. He wrote: “I value knowledge and do not value action; knowledge is a pursuit of spiritual, high souls; action is a pursuit of corporal, low souls”; “true knowledge necessarily presupposes the capacity for action”.

Sun Yat-sen (1866 – 1925) formulated a conception which was utterly opposite to the traditional one: “Action is easy, knowledge is difficult”. The acquaintance with Western culture made him draw the following conclusion: “If [we] are able to be guided by scientific principles in reaching true knowledge, then it will be not difficult to bring [this knowledge] into practice”. Nevertheless, “Action is the preceding, knowledge is the following”, because “action predetermines striving for knowledge, which, in its turn, determines the realisation of action”.

It is well known that, besides Confucianism, there existed and still exist in China other trends of thought. One of the most important among them is Taoism. The German sinologist, Hans-Georg Möller, considers the Daoist attitude towards knowledge as “a bad habit”. Referring to the “*Dao-de jing*”, Möller asserts that a Daoist sage “knows” like a baby or an animal, not at all in the Aristotelian way. A Daoist sage does not start journeys in search of intellectual discoveries, but remains at one and the same place, preferring to perfect himself in the art of limiting one’s intellect in order to develop one’s intrinsic (natural, inborn) capacities and instincts. Keeping away from the temptations of knowledge, a man thus gains the capacity to act in full harmony with nature. New knowledge would just bring about the unwanted interference into, and the violation of, the natural order of things.

The Chinese understanding of “faith” is also utterly different from the one accepted in Western culture. Thus, in Confucianism, the graph *xin*, usually translated as “faith/reliability“, has in fact quite a gamut of meanings: “loyalty,” “sincerity,” “trustworthiness,” “authenticity,” “truthfulness,” “honesty,” “verity,” “proof,” “witness,” etc.

Artiom Kobzev remarks that ancient religious connotations of *xin* underwent rationalization as early as in first Confucian writings. Thus in the historical-cum- ideological work “*Zuo Zhuan*” (“The Commentary of Zuo”, 5-3 cc. BC), there is recorded a maxim according to which *xin* is “a good message for words and a guidance for good”.

A similar reduction of *xin* to correct words and good deeds was sanctified by Confucius, who posited as the object of faith not some spiritual or divine entity but “things ancient” (*gu*), that is traditional norms

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preceding. If we talk about the insignificant and the important, then action is the important”.

and values.<sup>6</sup> Mencius distinguished in the very “things ancient” between what is worthy of faith (*xin*) and what is not: “It is better not to have the Canon at all, than fully believe it”.

A modern Chinese understanding of “faith” is well represented by the position of Ni Peimin. His paper is interesting as an attempt to explain the basic reason for a peculiar idea of faith. This reason is found in the specific character of Confucian ontology.

Ni Peimin has chosen to demonstrate the peculiarity of Chinese tradition, comparing the Confucian interpretation of faith with the theory of Alvin Plantinga (b. 1932), a contemporary American philosopher.<sup>7</sup> Ni Peimin discusses Confucian and Plantingian epistemological approaches in the context of the so called “epistemology of virtue,” which determines the status of a faith by investigating the virtues of those who practice the faith in question. The Chinese philosopher acknowledges the compatibility and even similarity of the two approaches: they both accept that faith is not acquired through reasoning or proofs, but is directly manifested to a mind. But there are at least two major differences between a Confucian and a Plantingian.

First, a Plantingian “directs one’s attention externally to an object of transcendental deity”, whereas a Confucian “directs one’s attention inwardly to the world of one’s heart-mind”. This difference is connected with the radical difference between the two ontologies. In Confucianism the highest reality is immanent. As Ni Peimin puts it, “Heaven is no longer a mysterious world above, but rather the world in which humans live and even the world of humans themselves”.

Secondly, although both a Plantingian and a Confucianist are sure of the verity of their religious convictions, the two kinds of confidence have different origins. “The former bases the confidence on an external factor, i.e. whether or not there is a personal God, and if it turns out that there is no God, or that there is a different kind of deity, the confidence will disappear. The latter, however, bases confidence in one’s own internal choice and decision, and will therefore not change with this kind of external facts, even if it means eventually to face an unjust but all-mighty deity”.

From all this we may draw a conclusion that, unlike their Western counterparts, the concepts of “knowledge“ and “faith“ in traditional Chinese philosophy (with Confucianism as the dominant system) were mutually correlative rather than antinomical. Moreover, they overlapped in some basic aspects of their semantics: the subjective and objective, the theoretical and practical, because these pairs were united in a typically Chinese way and because a successful self-realisation in well-reasoned deeds and good actions was considered the criterion of the validity for both knowledge and faith.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. “Analects”, VII, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Plantinga A. *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford University Press, 2000.

*Indian Thought*

Any philosophical tradition is oriented one way or another, towards knowledge. The differences are in the accents, in the attitudes towards theorising about knowledge. Thus, in the Chinese tradition, it is pragmatic knowledge that was considered vital, and the orientation towards this kind of knowledge ruled out any motivation to develop general theories of knowledge. On the contrary, for Indian philosophy the development of the theory of knowledge was absolutely inevitable, so thinks Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad (Lancaster University, Great Britain). In India, the need for pragmatic knowledge, “knowledge-how”, was acknowledged, but on the whole this type of knowledge was much less valued and discussed.

Ram-Prasad sketches an outline of the development of theoretical knowledge in India, from its earliest stages, which were, as he rightly supposes, closely connected with the emergence of metaphysics. The central idea of Indian thought, according to Ram-Prasad, is that the ultimate reality either transcends the world of our experience or even is something utterly different from this world. And if the reality transcends the world of appearances, it is most important to gain knowledge of this reality.

According to traditional Indian ideas, the value of cognition and knowledge consists in their capacity to transform the one who cognises and gets to know. This transformation may mean that the knowing one increases his/her capacity to influence the world of experience and to change it. Or it may mean that in the knowing, one gets an insight which liberates him (or her) from the bondage of the world. In many spheres of Indian culture, for instance in mathematics, in political theory and in some religious practices, the former type of transformation was preferred. But philosophical schools are oriented by and large towards the latter type. In Upanishads, as far as we can judge, striving towards knowledge is motivated both by a desire to gain a power over this world and a desire to be liberated from this world. But a decisive impact on Indian philosophical thought was effected by Buddha and Jina Mahavira (the founder of Jainism), in whose teachings the main objective was to be liberated from this world.

Philosophers of different schools, in spite of all the differences between them, shared a common system of coordinates (“a common framework of inquiry”, as Ram-Prasad himself puts it) within which cognition was thought to be effected. Ram-Prasad thinks that the central postulate of this common system may be formulated as follows: knowledge presupposes cognition which is both true (“somehow capturing the way things really are”) and valid (“arrived at non-accidentally”). A second postulate of this system claims that the validity of knowledge is achieved through specific means of cognition (or means of knowledge – in Sanskrit called *pramānas*). All schools agree that one of such means (*pramānas*) is perception (*anubhava*). Most schools accept inference (*anumāna*). Almost all the Hindu schools also accept testimony (*śabda*), or information conveyed through language by an authoritative source. In particular, *śabda*

means the testimony of the sacred texts. Three other means of knowledge are accepted only by some schools: comparison, non-apprehension and postulation. There may also be extraordinary cases like clairvoyance or mystical experience.

Acknowledging the necessity of true knowledge, Indian philosophers, nevertheless, differ in their definitions of knowledge itself. The most common definition, accepted by Nyāya, Mimāṃsā, the Jaina schools, as well as by non-advaita schools of Vedānta, is connected with the ‘correspondence’ theory: knowledge is the cognitive state that has the quality of being like its object.

Most schools of Indian Buddhism deny that the world is as we experience it. Therefore these schools do not subscribe to the correspondence theory. However, they have to grant that, even if ultimately things are not as we normally experience them, we do nevertheless function in this world and are usually successful in our actions. This means that we do have some way of distinguishing between what is true (“veridical”) and not true (“erroneous”) in our ordinary experience. So Buddhists offer a ‘success’ theory, in which knowledge is cognition that leads to successful practice.

Even Hindu and Jaina schools, of course, agree that successful practice should count as a test for knowledge, but the Buddhist schools alone say that knowledge itself amounts to nothing but successful practice. This enables them to say that the knowledge which ultimately remains is the knowledge of the Buddha – which, if we have it, is successful in taking us to *nirvāna*.

Advaita Vedānta also grants some provisional acceptance to our ordinary experience, while claiming that eventually, when the self (*ātman*) realizes that it is no different from the universal consciousness (*brahman*), all of that seeming knowledge is set aside as misleading. The Advaitins, therefore, negatively define knowledge through a kind of ‘fallibilist’ theory: knowledge is cognition that has not been invalidated but always could be, and hence is fallible. If a claim to know that something is the case has not been contradicted, then we should count it as knowledge. Of course, this means that all cognitions about the ordinary world are set aside upon realization of *brahman*-consciousness.

This survey of different attitudes towards knowledge in various schools of Indian philosophy is, actually, a description of what is rather well known. But the originality of Ram-Prasad’s paper is to be seen elsewhere.

Comparative studies most often are being done (as Ram-Prasad himself puts it) “with the West as the hub, with spokes of comparison radiating out to different non-Western systems”. And, to a certain extent, this is unavoidable, because the global discourse of philosophy is permeated with the cultural, linguistic and institutional dominance of the West. But Ram-Prasad has preferred to compare Indian traditions with Chinese ones, as he thinks that it is high time to arrange a global intercultural (or cross-cultural) dialogue on a multilateral basis.

The comparative analysis which he has undertaken brings him to the conclusion that, although the “deepest concerns” and the explicitly formulated problems of Indian and Chinese thinkers are very different, the two traditions may be considered as mutually “complementary”. This thesis is substantiated through an analysis of Indian and Chinese varieties of scepticism.

Victoria Lysenko, in her paper, considers the interrelations between knowledge and faith in Buddhism. Analysing from this viewpoint, the Pāli canon (“Tipitaka”), the Russian scholar of Indian philosophy comes to the conclusion that in Buddhism there is neither the opposition of knowledge and faith as antithetical ways of approaching the highest religious truth, nor any room for statements which would be analogous to the Western alternative: either “knowledge is higher than faith” or “faith is higher than knowledge”. In Buddhism neither notion has the meanings which they have in European tradition: faith is not a kind of faith understood fideistically, that is not requiring or even rejecting any rational justification; and knowledge is not a kind of knowledge understood only in a rationalist way, that is as pure theory.

In early Buddhism, the value of all human manifestations (words, thoughts, emotions, actions, wishes, etc.) was determined by their soteriological effectiveness, that is, mainly, by their capacity to contribute to the liberation from suffering and from its “root”, the chain of rebirths.

The Pāli term *saddhā* (= *śraddhā* in Sanskrit), which is usually translated as “faith”, has, in fact, a much wider gamut of meanings than “faith” in English (or “*vera*” in Russian): from “trust” to “certitude”. In Christianity and in the related monotheistic (Abrahamic) religions the sphere of faith is the sphere of the transcendental, of what is inaccessible for human knowledge and experience. In early Buddhism such a sphere is just nonexistent, just not there. Even if something is inaccessible for human reason, e.g. *saddhā* (in Pāli *nibbāna*), it is nevertheless accessible for human experience: *nirvāna* cannot possibly be described, nor cognised intellectually, but it can be experienced. Moreover, it can be experienced not through the God’s grace (it is the Lord that, in Christianity, gives both faith and salvation to man; in Buddhism there is no such thing as *the God*), but by one’s own choice and as a result of one’s own efforts.

Neither faith (trust, certitude), nor rational knowledge alone can serve as guiding lights. Both must be combined with “methodical doubt”, with critical inquiry and experimental checking. Thus, in early Buddhism, *saddhā*, unlike Christian faith, is not the Lord’s gift which must be accepted humbly and gratefully. *Saddhā* is a challenge, an invitation to an inquiry and experimental testing. Buddhist *saddhā* is “an urging impulse of a dynamic and ever renewing effort to progress towards *nirvāna* using the full gamut of endless human capacities”.

As for the problem of faith, it is treated in the papers by Michel Hulin and Vladimir Shokhin.

Michel Hulin, the French philosopher-cum-Orientalist, analyses the status of the Veda in Mimāṃsā and Vedānta, the two of the six “orthodox” philosophical schools (*darśanas*) of Brahmanism. In both schools, Hulin recognises a “radical ethnocentrism”. The followers of both *darśanas* looked upon all foreigners as an undifferentiated mass of “barbarians” (*mlecchas*), defined in a purely negative way. Therefore both *mimāṃsakas* and *vedāntins* were utterly unable to imagine the existence of other civilisations, contemporary with their own, but based on an absolutely different kind of “revelation”. In this respect, both *darśanas* are, for a person brought up within Western tradition, a hopeless “blind alley”. Nevertheless, we should not draw our conclusion hastily. Even though Mimāṃsā and Vedānta are a kind of “twins”, there are very important differences between them as far as the understanding of faith and knowledge (and their interrelations) is concerned. Such differences become more substantial if and when we turn to other schools of Indian philosophy.

According to Hulin, “in Mimāṃsā, ‘faith’ in the word of the Veda is so blind and comprehensive, that it understands itself not as faith but rather as a kind of collective knowledge... On the contrary, a follower of Vedānta must begin from feeling confidence to the word of Upanishads (most often mediated by the words of his teacher), whose content at first is not at all self-evident to him. Moving towards this word, as it were, like a ship that moves towards the light of a beacon, the adept strives to be united with it, gradually checking its trustworthiness while progressing along the theological and meditative way. It is in terms of this way that the adept’s initial faith-confidence may be indeed transmuted into faith-certainty about what he has really experienced”. If this interpretation of traditional Hindu thought is valid, then mutual understanding and dialogue with other cultures and with Western culture in particular, no longer look impossible.

Vladimir Shokhin (Institute of Philosophy, RAS) approaches the same problems in a way that is actually opposite to the approach of Hulin. Shokhin prefers to formulate the issue in a very broad way: the attitude towards faith in Brahmanism as a whole. The conclusions that Shokhin draws, on the basis of his reading and interpretation of Sanskrit and Pāli sources, are quite categorical and provocative.

Considering the historical development of the status of faith in Brahmanism, Shokhin postulates three main stages in this process. First, faith-*śraddhā* was understood “magically, as a personified sacral energy, necessary for effecting a sacrifice”. Next, it is sublimated to the status of spiritual energy, with which one starts one’s progress along the “way of gods” (according to esoteric Gnostics), or else (according to experts in rituals) it is interpreted as one of the components of the proper ritualistic procedure. At last, in the so called time of *śramanas*, “the faith in the divine origin of the sacral tradition, on the one hand, and in the possibility to attain the unity with the Godhead through this tradition, on the other hand, are but rather hesitatingly defended by brahmanists from very persistent and comprehensive attacks from the side of new religions, first of all from

Buddhism. As a result of this very intense *agon* (competition), faith loses its position in Brahmanism”.

Shokhin thinks that the brahmanist faith-*śraddhā*, seen in a general historical perspective, is quite analogous to those Greek and Latin words that were chosen for translating the corresponding Hebrew words of the Old Testament. But faith-*śraddhā* does not at all match that basic dimension of Biblical faith which constitutes the deepest foundation of the intersubjective relations between man and God. On the basis of this conclusion, Shokhin emphatically disagrees with the idea of mutual convertibility of the basic tenets of world religions. This idea has become very popular in today’s religious studies, but, according to Shokhin, it does not answer the standards of Orientalist scholarship.

### *Islamic Thought*

The section of this book devoted to the world of Islam is rich and multifaceted in its contents. The problem of knowledge and/versus faith is treated here in two different ways. First, in terms of general historical development from the traditional *kalām* (Ibrahim Taufiq, Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS) up to modern thought (Eugenia Frolova, Institute of Philosophy, RAS; Aidar Yuzev, Kazan Socio-juridical University). Secondly, in terms of major trends and/or personalities: *falsafah* as represented by Ibn Rushd (Natalya Yefremova, Institute of Philosophy, RAS, Muslim “scholastics” as represented, in its acme, by Al-Ghazali (Nur Kirabayev, Russian University of Peoples’ Friendship) and Sufism (Ilshad Nasyrov, Institute of Philosophy, RAS). The specificity of Islamic approaches is presented in comparison with Western (Christian) ones, which means that the very possibility of such comparisons is admitted and acknowledged.

Andrey Smirnov addressed the issue of the logic-and-meaning foundation of Islamic and Western thought. This is, generally speaking, a procedure of building up a non-reducible, ‘atomic’ meaning cluster by setting up an opposition through mutual negation and arriving at its unity through a general term. The implementation of this procedure, Smirnov argues, varies in Western and Islamic cultures, which accounts for the incompatibility of their argumentation patterns rooted in this contrast of their logic-and-meaning structures of thought.

The notion of ‘faith’ was analyzed to provide an example for this theoretical layout. The commonly accepted understanding of ‘faith’ (*īmān*) in classical Islamic thought defines it as a unity of ‘knowledge’ (*‘ilm*) and ‘action’ (*‘amal*). Those two are treated as opposites, and to express their opposition in the most general form it suffices to point to the fact that knowledge is ‘inner’ (*bātin*), while action is ‘outward’ (*zāhir*). So, knowledge is opposed to action; this opposition, however, is constructed through the version of the logic-and-meaning procedure distinctive for Islamic, and not Western, culture. This implies that knowledge and action



are mutual prerequisites. They serve for each other as a *condition sine qua non* and *convert* into each other. If the opposition is constructed that way, that is to say, if it is set up correctly under the given version of logic-and-meaning procedure, the third, generalizing entity appears to account for the unity of the two opposites. This generalizing entity is 'faith'.

The very way of constructing that cluster of notions and the semantic logic inherent to it entail that no contradiction between faith and knowledge can be conceived within the logic-and-meaning domain of Islamic culture, because those two notions do not stand in opposition to each other within that domain. On the contrary, knowledge is a condition for faith, the other condition being action when correctly opposed to knowledge. This accounts for the well-known fact that Islamic intellectuals, past and present, claim 'harmony' of faith and reason. What they mean, however, is absolutely not what could be meant by such a thesis within the logic-and-meaning domain of Western culture.

The logically correct opposition for 'knowledge' here is 'non-knowledge', and the opposition is constructed through a dichotomic procedure. A general notion accounting for the unity of such a dichotomic opposition would be a sort of a 'genus' comprising the opposed 'species' under itself. This procedure presupposes that 'faith' has to fit into one of those categories in order to become an actor in a logically consistent discourse. It would be correct from the logical point of view to consider faith in a 'non-knowledge' category, which accounts for Western tradition of treating faith as opposed to knowledge. On the other hand, we cannot equalize faith and ignorance (it matters even though ignorance is not the same as non-knowledge), and at the same time it is difficult to claim that faith falls into the 'knowledge' category or that it is a general notion for knowledge and non-knowledge. This accounts for the paradoxes of faith, since it seems to escape all the possible places in this cluster of notions.

The notions of faith in Western and Islamic thought belong to clusters which differ both logically and semantically, since they are constructed through different versions of logic-and-meaning procedure. Those clusters, Smirnov argues, cannot be reduced to each other or to a common denominator. To understand what 'faith' means within the domain of Islamic culture, we need to go through the procedure of building up the logical and semantic 'aura', as Islamic thought does, and resist all temptations to equate it with any notion within our own semantic inventory.

In Western thought there is a normative, logically correct opposition of knowledge and non-knowledge. This opposition is constructed as a procedure of dichotomisation, that is cuts in two a certain general notion which appears as the overarching *genus* for the two opposites and fully includes them in itself. By the very logic of forming this cluster of notions, faith must be "inscribed" in one of the "cells" in order to participate in a meaningful and logically correct discourse. On the one hand, ascribing faith to non-knowledge would be logically correct, and this explains the tradition of treating faith as an opposite to knowledge in Western thought.

On the other hand, faith is not identical with non-knowledge, provided, of course, that non-knowledge and knowledge are, indeed, different notions. Nevertheless, from a purely logical viewpoint, faith cannot be considered as identical to knowledge, either, or to pose as an overarching *genus* for knowledge and non-knowledge. This explains the paradoxical character of the notion of faith in Western culture, which was discussed by many participants in our conference.

So, the notion of faith is constructed in different ways in the two cultures, and, according to A.V. Smirnov, the different constructing procedures cannot be reduced to each other. That is why, speaking about “faith” in a culture with a different logic, one must not correlate it directly with the notions of one’s own culture. Rather one must trace all the way along which the notion in question has been constructed in its native culture.

This paper of the Russian scholar of Arab philosophy will undoubtedly arouse interest of readers, so original is his approach to the problems in question. Surely, this approach will bring about many objections and many questions. For instance, can we really accept the author’s contention that “for Western culture the notions of ‘faith’ and ‘knowledge’ are opposites”? Does not the history of the Western world witness more complicated and ambivalent relations between these notions? Is indeed uncontroversial the stress on the “procedures of rationality” as a feature determining the specificity of a particular culture? Are not these procedures but derivative from a broader cultural context which comprises many other, not less important, components, including the dominant concepts of being, of the structure of universe and its development? Is the understanding of knowledge and faith in Arab culture really so unique? The list of such questions might be easily enlarged, and this means that the paper of A. Smirnov will hardly leave readers indifferent to its theses.

### *Western Thought*

It is the concluding section of the book. There are at least two reasons for using inverted commas here. First, the attitudes of the Western tradition to the issues of faith and knowledge have been investigated by many scholars, very deeply and in many details; so here we dare present only some cases of contemporary treatment of these problems. Secondly, we understand “the West” broadly, as including Russia. We consider this quite justified because the Russian contributors to this book have been brought up, and do their thinking now, within the general paradigm of Western culture, particularly within the paradigm of Western philosophy.

This section consists of two parts. The first one includes papers of general methodological character. Vladislav Lectorsky, the editor-in-chief of the journal “Problems of Philosophy” and the leading Russian specialist in the theory of knowledge, formulates in a very broad way the theme of his paper: “Faith and knowledge in contemporary culture”. Ilya Kasavin, the editor-in-chief of the journal “Epistemology and Scientific Knowledge”

draws our attention to the “formation of an interdisciplinary paradigm around the theme ‘Science and other forms of thinking’ “. Roger Smith, a British philosopher whose major interest is the history of human sciences, writes about knowledge and faith in the context of natural sciences, that is about the “the place of man in the universe”. Arindam Chakrabarti, an Indian philosopher and a professor at University of Hawaii, ponders problems of knowledge and understanding in the context of the current analytical critique of traditional Indian epistemology (more exactly, the epistemology of teaching and the transmission of knowledge). Antanas Andrijauskas, the coordinator of research in the field of comparative philosophy in Lithuania, prefers to discourse on what he calls “metaphilosophy“ and on the deep-seated reasons of methodological transformations in today’s comparative philosophy.

The second part of the last section of the book may seem somewhat unexpected. This part consists of two papers, highly academic, but emphatically conveying the *existential* aspect of the problem of relations between knowledge and faith. The universally present and universally relevant relations between faith (as a religious notion) and knowledge (associated with rational thinking) could become a highly intense internal experience of an individual human person.

Thinking about the experience of a medieval European person, as exemplified by Nicolas of Cusa, Fred Dallmayr (University of Notre Dame, USA) draws several major lessons. “One is the importance and irreplaceability of sense experience and ordinary belief (or pre-judgment). Another is the crucial significance of rational cognition – and its ultimately arid character”. Finally, the highest mode of truth which is attainable for human beings is learned ignorance or knowing un-knowledge. “The more deeply we understand our ignorance (or non-understanding), ‘the closer we approach the truth’” [according to Nicolas of Cusa]. Fred Dallmayr reminds us that similar ideas were “not unfamiliar to Nagarjuna” and have been “revived more recently by Martin Heidegger and his heirs”. Here we may add that at least two papers in this book can help us compare the ideas of Nicolas of Cusa with ideas that were developed within traditional Chinese and Indian (brahmanic) cultures.<sup>8</sup>

Abdusalam Gusseinov, Director, Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of sciences, writes about Lev Tolstoy. In Tolstoy’s case, it was not only a cognitive interest, but a search for a solution of a very personal and deeply existential problem (when one’s “very life was at stake”) that has brought the person to a “rational faith”.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Rama Rao Pappu. *The concept of avidyā from the viewpoint of Vedānta*; Möller H.-G. *Knowledge as a bad habit*.

<sup>9</sup> Tolstoy sometimes experienced strange psychic states, a kind of “stoppage of life”, when he was tormented by the question about the meaning of one’s very existence. He described such states many times, most fully in his “Confession” (1882), most strikingly in the “Notes of a mad man” (1884).

The great writer looked for the way to overcome his personal crisis and to discover the meaning of life for its own self. Tolstoy criticised “European reason” which, in his opinion, had made cognition a value in itself and had been interested in lots of things except one thing: investigating human life as such, which “had been always considered the most important among all peoples preceding our European society” (emphasis mine – M.S.).

After a hard search, Lev Tolstoy came to a conclusion that the meaning life, faith and religion are one and the same reality, seen in different aspects: “Faith is the knowledge of the meaning of human life, through which man lives on”; “Faith is the same as religion; the only difference is that by the word religion we understand the externally observed phenomenon, and we call faith the same phenomenon experienced by man inside himself”.

Lev Tolstoy did not accept the version of faith preached by the church; he considered it a fraud, basically contradicting the very essence of faith: “True faith is never non-rational, never disagrees with the available knowledge; it can never have as its quality supernaturalness and meaninglessness”.

According to the interpretation of Gusseinov, faith and reason, for Tolstoy, are notions of the same order. Faith is an immediate knowledge, immanent to a conscious life in its concrete, individual and active embodiment. Reason represents knowledge, as mediated by cognition of the world. Both notions are connected in such a way that they form a kind of circle: faith forms the limit and the basis of reason; reason brings one to faith and grounds it. Gusseinov makes the following conclusion: “Tolstoy accepted neither the position of Augustine and Anselm of Canterbury, summarized in the thesis ‘I believe in order to understand’, nor the position of Abelard with his thesis ‘I understand in order to believe’. Tolstoy both believes in order to understand and understands in order to believe. With him, reason is checked and tested by faith, while faith is checked and tested by reason”.

Concluding the book with the cases of existential tension in personal attitudes towards knowledge and faith, we would like to emphasize that both thinking and truly believing human beings are always in an incessant quest; hence the issues treated in this book are ever topical and are always worth being revisited and reconsidered.

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**PART I**

**CHINESE THOUGHT**



CHAPTER I

**ON KNOWING (ZHI):  
PRAXIS-GUIDING DISCOURSE IN THE  
CONFUCIAN ANALECTS**

*HENRY ROSEMONT, JR.*

Most people with any acquaintance with early Chinese thought will be able to list most of the major human excellences which Confucius discusses with his students in the *Analects*: *ren* (authoritativeness, benevolence, humaneness); *li* (ritual propriety, rites, ceremonies, customs, etiquette, etc.); *xin* (authenticity, sincerity); *dao* (way, path, the Way); *xiao* (filial piety); *de* (virtue, charisma, power); and the model human who embodies these excellences, the *junzi* (exemplary person).

The character *zhi*, however – uniformly translated as “knowledge” or “wisdom” nominally, and verbally as “to know” – is surely a human excellence for Confucius, and, indeed, is the philosophically significant term most frequently occurring in the text. It appears 113 times, which is 21 more times than *ren*, 33 more than *dao*, almost twice as frequently as *li* or *junzi*, and ten times more often than *xiao*, filial piety.

A major reason for the relative neglect of attention to *zhi* when studying the *Analects* is that if rendered simply as “knowledge” it appears philosophically unproblematic, unlike the other characters denoting the Confucian excellences, onto which no single English term can be easily mapped. But I believe *zhi* is no less multivocal than the others, and much of both the form and content of the brief discussions between Confucius and his students that comprise the *Analects* will be misunderstood if the complex meanings of *zhi* are not properly understood.

While English “knowledge” has several shades of meaning, most commonly it means “knowing that,” in the sense of awareness of facts about the way the world is: “Water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit,” “Reptiles are cold-blooded,” “Pluto is the smallest planet in the solar system,” and so forth. This is the most common form of knowledge, and we regularly test whether or not people have this knowledge by giving them True/False or multiple-choice examinations.

A closely related type of “knowing that” has to do with explanations of facts, i.e., knowledge of scientific laws or theories, from Boyle’s Law to Evolutionary or General Relativity Theory. In these cases we can test knowledge with either mathematical formulae or essay examinations.

These two closely related kinds of knowledge are not found in the *Analects*. Rather Confucius is modeling behavior – including verbal behavior – and encouraging and teaching his students always to act

appropriately, and to develop appropriate attitudes toward those appropriate actions, which together make up the usages of *zhi* in most of the text.

Clearly no mere written examination could thus test *zhi*, and an oral “test” would not only be evaluated strictly on the basis of what the student actually said, but also on his tone of voice in saying it, his demeanor overall, and equally his past actions. “Knowledge,” then, does not seem to be the most perspicacious translation of the excellence *zhi*. Confucius is not so much describing the world for his students as he is giving them guidance on how best to live in it.

Before turning directly to an alternative interpretation of the character, we may briefly consider other passages in the text which do not square at all well with translating it as “knowledge” in the sense of knowing facts or theories.

In 7.20, Confucius says:

“I am not the kind of person who has had *zhi* from birth. Rather, loving antiquity, I am earnest in seeking it out.”

And relatedly, in 16.9 he says:

“*Zhi* had from birth is the highest; *zhi* obtained through learning is next highest.”

Even though most translators have rendered these occurrences of *zhi* as “knowledge,” surely we cannot meaningfully be said to be born with facts and theories in our heads, even in rudimentary form. Moreover, *xue* (learning, study) and *si* (thought, thinking) are not often associated with *zhi* as they are just above. A more typical passage in this regard is 2.15:

The Master said: “Learning without due reflection leads to perplexity; reflection without learning leads to perilous circumstances.”

What *zhi* appears to mean in its most philosophically and spiritually significant usages in the text is something like *a sense of what it is most fitting to do in our interactions, understanding why, doing them, and achieving a sense of contentment from so doing*. This is, obviously, far too cumbersome a locution to employ in translation, and it is not possible to merely gloss the term and thereafter simply transliterate it, because *zhi* is a very common phoneme in Chinese; over twenty different graphs, having little to do semantically, are all transliterated as *zhi* in the *Analects* alone.

Perhaps, then, a better English term for most occasions of the “knowing” *zhi* in the *Analects* is “realize.” It is epistemically as strong in English as “know,” for just as I cannot ‘know’ that today is Tuesday if it is in fact Thursday, I can’t ‘realize’ it either. That is to say, if I may be said to ‘know’ or ‘realize’ X, X must be the case (unlike dispositional terms like “hope,” “think,” “believe,” etc.).

“Realize” is also an appropriate term for *zhi* most of the time because of another way the English term can function. If “to finalize” is “to make final,” and “to personalize” is “to make personal,” then “to realize” can mean “to make real” in just the sense, I believe, intended in the *Analects*, that is, “to put into practice.” For Confucius, a person who doesn’t



practice what he preaches isn't really preaching anything, and is surely not worthy of our audience.

A few examples of the naturalness of "realize" for *zhi*:

"Children must realize (*zhi*) the age of their parents. On the one hand it is a source of joy, on the other, of fear." (4.21)

"I (Confucius) am so eager to teach and learn that I forget to eat, enjoy myself so much I forget to worry, and do not even realize (*zhi*) that old age is nearing." (7.19)

"At fifty, I realized (*zhi*) the propensities of *Tian*." (*tian ming*) (2.4)

To be sure, there are many passages where "realize" will work only clumsily or, worse, as translation for *zhi*. In at least five passages – 1.1, 1.16, 4.14, 14.30 and 14.35 – *zhi* should be rendered "acknowledge," as in 1.16:

The Master said: "Don't worry about not being acknowledged (*zhi*) by others; worry about failing to acknowledge (*zhi*) them."

In seven other passages, the negative expression *bu zhi* is used by the Master when a student asks whether so-and-so had the excellence of *ren*, and in these cases the proper translation is "I don't know," or "I'm not sure," or a similar locution, as in 5.8:

Meng Wubo asked Confucius, "Is Zilu an authoritative (*ren*) Person?" The Master said, "I am not sure he is."

Perhaps the most well known analect using *zhi* is a brief one of only twenty-one characters, with *zhi* occurring six times. (2.17). It is usually rendered

The Master said: "Zilu, shall I teach you what wisdom (*zhi*) means?

To know (*zhi*) what you know (*zhi*) and know (*zhi*) what you do not know (*zhi*), is wisdom (*zhi*)."

Somewhat less elegantly, but capturing more of the meaning of the passage, in my opinion, would be:

The Master said: "Zilu, shall I teach you what realization means?

To make real what you have realized, and to realize what you have not yet made real, is realization."

To make real, however, it is enough to put into practice; we must have the proper stance and feelings toward what we are realizing. Consider two passages that deal with *xiao*, filial piety, one of the highest excellences for the early Confucians:

The Master said: "Those today who are filial are thought so because they are able to provide for their parents. But even dogs and horses are given that much care. If you do not reverence your parents, what is the difference?" (2.7)

The Master said: *xiao* lies in showing the proper countenance. As for the young contributing their energies when there is work to be done, and deferring to their elders when there is wine and food to be had – how can merely doing these things be considered being filial?" (2.8).

The point of these and a number of closely similar passages is that we must not only be aware of our responsibilities, we must understand how

best to discharge them, both with respect to what is most appropriate in the circumstances, but ritually proper (the *li*) as well, and we must have the correct attitude toward performing these actions. Together, this is the excellence of *zhi*.

Against this all-too-brief and sketchy background, let me turn to the question, with a little play on words, of how Confucius tries to get his students to realize *zhi*. In the early chapters of his *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, Chad Hansen proffers a fairly detailed philosophical analysis of a number of the features of the Chinese language(s). While not uncontroversial, I believe he has a number of keen insights into the nature of Chinese, and how it has impacted, and been impacted by, early Chinese thought.

Probably one of his most challenging claims is that the early Chinese thinkers did not see language so much as conveying information about the world – facts and theories – as they saw it as behavior-guiding discourse. To quote him in his own words, at some length, to make his position clear, he attributes to early Chinese thinkers the view that:

Language is a social practice. Its basic function is guiding action. The smallest units of guiding discourse are *ming* (names). We string *ming* together in progressively larger units. The salient compositional structure is a *dao* (guiding discourse). The Chinese counterpart of interpretation is not an account of the truth conditions. Rather, to *interpret a dao* is to *perform* it. The interpretation of a *dao* starts from the interpretation of the *ming* that compose it. In learning a conventional name, you learn a socially shared way of making discriminations in guiding your actions according to a *dao* (pp.3-4; italics in the original).

It is permissible for Hansen to use *dao* in its sometime use as “doctrines,” or “to speak,” even though its much more common usage is as “way,” “path,” “road,” “The Way,” and verbally “to go down the road,” to “tread the path,” or to “follow the Way.” Thus Hansen enhances the plausibility of his argument by his multiple employment of *dao*, but I believe the usage is legitimate.

He draws a number of conclusions from his analyses, the key one of which is that Confucianism comes up far inferior to Daoism as a philosophy or way of life, a view to which I do not at all subscribe. But I see a number of other implications of Hansen’s cogent interpretations that bear on our understanding of *zhi*, which he says “[W]orks only like English *know-how*, *know-to*, or *know-about* – but not *know-that* (p. 8; italics in the original). The character is not restricted to these “know-how” meanings on my account, but he and I agree fully that “know-that” plays almost no role in the meaning of *zhi*.

One important implication of Hansen's work is that if language can be seen fundamentally as praxis-guiding verbal behavior, as I will call it, more than as a way of conveying factual information about the world, then most of what the Master says to his students should be read as imperatives, despite the declarative structure of most of his "sentences" when rendered into English. Or put somewhat differently, his statements should be construed fairly uniformly as perlocutionary, rather than illocutionary speech acts. He is not so much concerned to have his students absorb information – which he could do merely by illocutionarily stating the information – as he is to have his students act and/or react, or at least be disposed to act and/or react, in specific ways. For success in this, he may have to perform a variety of perlocutionary speech acts, depending on the circumstances, and the background and readiness for instruction on the part of his listener(s)

Evidence for this reading is numerous in the text, and straightforward: some readers are frustrated that Confucius frequently gives a different answer to the same question asked by a student or protagonist, failing to appreciate that the questioner is a different person in each case. One of his own students was clearly frustrated by this seeming inconsistency on the Master's part, as described in 11.22:

Zilu inquired, "On learning something, should one act upon it?" The Master said, "While your father and elder brothers are still alive, how could you, on learning something, act upon it?" Then Ranyou asked the same question. The Master replied, "On learning something, act on it."

Gongxi Hua said, "When Zilu asked the question, you observed that his father and elder brothers are still alive, but when Ranyou asked the same question you told him to act on what he learns. I am confused – could you explain this to me?" The Master replied, Ranyou is diffident, and so I urged him on. But Zilu has the energy of two, and so I sought to rein him in." A perfect example of praxis-guiding discourse.

Another implication of Hansen's and my own linguistic analyses in relation to *zhi* is that it is a mistake to ask literally of any statement of the Master's, "Is it true?" Only when language is used to state facts or theories as illocutionary speech acts, as sentences to state facts in the indicative/declarative mood, can the predicate verb phrase "is true" (or "is false") be applied to them. But if a great many of the statements of Confucius and his students in the *Analects* should not to be read as declarative/indicative sentences, despite having that syntactic form in English, then a specific term/graph for "truth" or "is true" is not needed in the language, and indeed, early Chinese has no such term in its lexicon. "True" is at times found in English translations of the *Analects*, and correctly so, but in the sense of "true friend" or "true North," i.e. in the sense of being authentic, genuine, upright, or again, real.

To note what might seem to be a semantic oddity, however, is not in any way to suggest that there was some conceptual weakness or naivete on the part of early Chinese philosophers. If one's culture views language

primarily as a vehicle for conveying straightforward information, it had better have a term for describing the accurate from the inaccurate information conveyed, which “true” and “false” do very well. (Despite 2500 years of failure on the part of philosophers in the West to satisfactorily explain what makes true statements true). But if a more significant function of human language in a culture is seen as as praxis-guiding discourse, then the evaluative terms needed will more nearly approximate “appropriate” and “inappropriate” than “true” and “false.”

There are a number of other implications of this analysis of *zhi* seen in conjunction with Hansen’s analyses of the relation between the Chinese language and Chinese thought, the most significant of which is that the Master’s urging us to “make real” his teachings is, in the end, to be construed not simply as moral, psychological, social and political advice – although they are surely all of these – but more basically as spiritual instructions for how to live a meaningful life in a seemingly random world not of our own making. But that would be another paper, a long one at that, and must wait another time. I will therefore close with another, more immediate implication, of direct relevance, I believe, to all of us who are educators.

If the task of teaching is seen as conveying knowledge from teacher to students, and if the knowledge is seen as of the factual kind, then, of course, lecturers can simply state the facts, assign texts with more facts (and theories) in them, and mechanically give true/false, multiple choice, or descriptive essays examinations, in order to claim to have met their obligations. If the students do not “get” the knowledge, it is their fault, so long as the instructor can make a minimal claim to have lectured clearly.

I do not wish to downplay the importance of facts. I wish every one of my fellow Americans was aware of such facts as that our country’s military budget is larger than the rest of the world combined, while almost 20 percent of our people have no health care, and an equal number of young children are living in families whose income is below the poverty line. Everyone should know these facts.

But unless the facts are evaluated, and lead to courses of action, of what value is their dissemination? And if all we do is present facts and theories, from whence will our students and fellow citizens gain the normative dimensions of learning? Confucius holds up a mirror for us: What else is education for?

Perhaps we need fewer large lecture classes filled with students whose names we do not know, and more praxis-guiding small seminars with students we have come to know as Confucius knew his. Students then will wish to study with us not because we credential them after graduation to take jobs they do not like or find satisfying in order to buy things they do not need, but rather will want to study with us as exemplars and transmitters of *zhi*, aiding them in defining and living meaningful lives for themselves, and others.

And on this basis I commend the teachings found in the *Analects* to everyone who would be a teacher, who would *zhi*, and want each of her students to *zhi* appropriately in their own way.

(Author's Note: Hansen's book was published by Oxford University Press in 1992. I have also utilized the several writings of J.L. Austin on differing types of locutionary speech acts herein, though at times I disagree with his conclusions. Now considered dated by some, to my mind his works remain of philosophical and linguistic import, especially his *How to do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975). Translations from the *Analects* are from the translation by Roger Ames and myself (New York: Random House/Ballantine, 1998), which I have modified on occasion.)

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## CHAPTER II

# KNOWLEDGE/RATIONALE AND BELIEF/TRUSTINESS IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

ARTIOM I. KOBZEV

In traditional Chinese philosophy functional analogs to the first items in the classical Western opposition of “knowledge/rationality to belief” are represented by the kindred, homonymic and homographic hieroglyphs “zhi” 知 (“knowledge”) and “zhi<sub>1</sub>” 智 (“rational[ity]”).

The specific understanding of knowledge in Chinese philosophy is most clearly manifest in the terminological opposition “zhi – xing” (“knowledge – action”) comprising two fundamental concepts: “zhi” – “[effective] knowledge” (“consciousness,” “cognition,” “reasoning,” “wisdom,” “comprehension,” “vision”) and “xing” 行 – “[conscious] action” (“act,” “activity,” “action,” “to do,” “to go”).

“Zhi”, as a philosophical category, implies, on the one hand, pure forms of cognition and purposeful conscious actions, practical experience, on the other hand. The praxeological interpretation of “knowledge” was made by Confucius (552/1 – 479): “Righteousness (*yi* 義) in the treatment of people and reverence for spirits and the souls of the dead (*gui shen* 鬼神) while keeping away from them – [this] can be defined as knowledge”; “the knowing/rational/wise is efficient-and-mobile (*dong* 動)”; “knowledge” is the “knowledge of people” making it possible to instill obedience in them (“*Lun yu*” – “Theoretical Talks”, VI, 20/22, 21/23, XII, 22).

The notions about the “active” character of knowledge reflect the Neo-Confucian interpretations of the thesis from the canonic text “*Da xue*” (“The Great Learning”, 4<sup>th</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> c.c. B.C.), the first of “The Four Books” (“*Si shu*”): “To carry knowledge through (*zhi zhi* 致知) means to verify things (*ge wu* 格物)” where “*zhi zhi*” and “*ge wu*” are interdependent demands for controlling the world. Zhu Xi (1130 – 1200) interpreted “*ge wu*” as “exhaustion of the principles (*li* 理) of deeds and things (*shi wu* 事物)” implying under “deeds and things” the problems of morality, politics, etc. Wang Yang-ming (1472 – 1529) defined “*ge*” as “to correct” (*zheng* 正) and “*wu*” as “deed” (*shi*) which can be “verified” only “in one’s own heart”. In Taoism “knowledge” is correlated with the active aspect, primarily through the negation (connection): “to know while taking no action” (“*Dao de jing*” – “Canon of the Way and Virtue”, 5<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> c.c. B.C.) where “inaction” (*bu xing* 不行) is synonymous to “inertia” (*wu wei* 無為), i.e. the lack of volitional activity disagreeable with the world order (*dao* 道). The conceptions of “active” knowledge in Confucianism and “inactive” (but

effective) knowledge in Taoism are synthesized in Neo-Confucianism through their mediation by the teaching on innate knowledge and the Confucian interpretations of Taoist views (dating mainly to “Zhuang-zi”, 4<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> c.c. B.C.) on the possible development of the ability for intuitive cognition of the truth.

The specific feature of the category “*xing*” is due to two factors: (1) its ability to denote not only a physical action but also a mental process (e.g. love and hatred, according to Wang Yang-ming); and (2) its correlation with the concepts “*wei*” 為 (“act”, “deed”, “action”), “*shi*” 事 (“deed”, “service”) and “*yi*” (“righteousness”). The concept “*wei*” is generic for “*shi*” and “*xing*”. The definition of both terms, similarly treated in “Lun yu”, “Zuo zhuan”, “Guan-zi”, “Meng-zi” and the other records dating to the 5<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> c.c. B.C., is given in “Xun-zi” (Ch. 22; 4<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> c.c. B.C.): “To act (*wei*) while looking for benefit/advantage is called deed (*shi*); to act for righteousness is called action (*xing*).” In “Lun yu” (VII, 24/25) “*xing*” denotes one of the basic principles applied by Confucius in his “teaching” practice, along with “culture” (*wen* 文), “loyalty” (*zhong* 忠) and “belief/trustiness” (*xin* 信). Legalists countered the Confucian treatment of “*xing*” by collating this concept with “benefit/advantage”: “If in their actions (*xing*), [people] do not get rich, this sows discord” (“Shang jun shu” – “The Book of the Ruler of Shang [Province]”, Ch. 8; 4<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> c.c. B.C.).

The content of the given thesis and the Confucian interpretation of “action” is predetermined by such aspect of “*xing*” as practical completion. Its other aspect – planned rationality (consciousness) follows from the semantic field of the correlative term “*yi*” (in addition to “righteousness” including “sense” and “meaning”), which is evident by the passages in “Lun yu” (V, 20, XVIII, 8, VII, 11) on the imperative coordination of “*xing*” with “meditation” (*si* 思), “prudence” (*lü* 慮) and “deliberation” (*mou* 謀). The initial meaning of the hieroglyph “*xing*” – “to go” and its philosophical meaning as the realization of ontologically required (social and ethical) life principles merged into the terminological word-combination “*xing dao*” (“to follow the Way”, “to carry out the Teaching”) dating to “Meng-zi”. The premises of this mental image are contained in the hieroglyph “*xing*” (in the “hang” reading) meaning also “rank” and “file”, and its classification of ranks and phases (“elements”) in the scheme of “five elements” (*wu xing* 五行) whose interaction reveals major regularities in the world process (*dao*).

The problem of correlation between “knowledge” and “action” proper had the following three basic types of decision: (1) “knowledge is easy and action is difficult” (*zhi yi xing nan* 知易行難); (2) “knowledge and action coincide in their unity” (*zhi xing he yi* 知行合一); and (3) “knowledge is difficult and action is easy” (*zhi nan xing yi* 知難行易). The first thesis followed from the Confucian approach to “knowledge” as a set of social and ethical commandments, therefore, the ascertainment of the truth was understood mainly as its tuition (cf. the propositions of Yang Xung [53 B.C. – 18 A.D.] in “*Fa yan*” [“Exemplary Words”, Scroll 1]: “It is



worse to study than to look for a tutor”, “The supreme point in teaching is its implementation in action” and “*Shu jing*” [“Canon of Scriptures”, Ch. 17/22; 11<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> c.c. B.C.]: “It is wrong to assert that knowledge is difficult for it is action that is difficult”). The thesis that “knowledge is easy and action is difficult” also meant that “knowledge” precedes “action” (cf. “Xun-zi”, Ch. 8: “Teaching comes to an end and stops at action”). The normative formula of their correlation was devised by Zhu Xi: “Speaking about the preceding and the following, knowledge is preceding. Speaking about the insignificant and the significant, action is significant.” Placing accent on the understanding of cognitive functions as actions, or “motions”, and the moral content of knowledge, Wang Yang-ming put forward a proposition about the “coinciding unity of knowledge and action”, both from the psycho-functional and ethical points of view. Wang Ting-xiang (1476 – 1544) subjected to criticism the views of both Zhu Xi and Wang Yang-ming, advancing a thesis about “true knowledge” (*zhen zhi* 真知), identifying “achievement” (*xing*) with its “knowledge” (*zhi*). Wang Chuan-shan (1619–1692) intensifying this criticism rejected the primacy of “knowledge” over “action” pointing to the presence in the latter of “an additional energy striving for knowledge”; and even though “knowledge and action supplement each other in their utilization (*yong* 用)”, “action may embrace knowledge but the latter cannot embrace action,” i.e. practical “action” both predetermines “knowledge” (“cognition”) and embodies it. Inspired by the progress of Western science, Tan Si-tong (1865–1898), the ideologue of reforms, on the contrary, in “*Ren xue*” (“The Teaching on Humanity”) formulated the thesis about the priority of “knowledge”: “I appreciate knowledge and scorn action; knowledge is a matter of spiritual (*ling* 靈) heavenly souls (*hun* 魂) while action is a matter of bodily (*ti* 體) low souls (*po* 魄)”; “True knowledge necessarily implies the ability for action.” Zhang Bing-lin (1869–1936) took up again the apology of action, asserting that “rationality (*zhi-hui* 智慧) of a human heart is born as a result of rivalry” and the “disclosure” of popular rationality calls for a revolution as the embodiment of required action.

Sun Zhong-shan (1866–1925), who had at first accepted the conception of Wang Yang-ming, later in “*Jian guo fang lue*” (“The Program for National Construction”) worked out his own conception, namely, “action is easy and knowledge is difficult”, ensuing from his contacts with the Western culture: “If [we] prove capable of being guided by scientific principles in gaining true knowledge, [its] prompt realization would not be so difficult.” Nonetheless, “action precedes knowledge” since “action determines the striving for knowledge which, in its turn, determines the realization of action.” Sun Zhong-shan identified three forms of the correlation between knowledge and action, which came to be realized at the three stages in human development: “not to know and act” – the period of movement toward civilization; “to act and then to know” – the period

covering the origin of civilization and its initial development; and “to know and then act” – the period that started following scientific discoveries.

In Chinese philosophy, rationality, i.e. the psycho-moral, cultural and behavioral ability for cognition, is expressed by the category “*zhi*” combining two semantically divergent arrays of meanings: (1) reasoning, mind, intellect, wisdom and (2) inventiveness, shrewdness, stratagems. The first semantic array, particularly in the ancient treatises dated prior to the reform of the written language in 213 B.C., is often conveyed by the synonymic and homonymous hieroglyph “*zhi*” 知 (“knowledge”) which, being the main graphic component of “*zhi*” 智, as an independent symbol was fixed in later texts, i.e. it could be used as its simplification. In the earliest records, which were turned into the Confucian canons, “*zhi*” means wisdom and rationality. According to “*Shu jing*” (Ch. 11), the heavens bestow it on the ruler in addition to courage (*yong*<sub>1</sub> 勇). In “*Zhou yi*” (hexagram № 39 Jian – Obstacle, Commentary “*Tuan zhuan*”) it is defined as the “ability to come to a standstill upon facing an abyss.”

In the first Confucian texts proper, beginning with Confucius, “*zhi*<sub>1</sub>” in this meaning is associated with “humanity” (*ren* 仁) (“*Lun yu*”, IV, 1; “*Meng-zi*,” II A, 7), which together with “courage” as its counterbalance forms a “triad making up the greatest virtue (*da de* 達德) of the world”, i.e. a set of virtues required for self-perfection (*xiu shen* 修身) and characteristic for “the Way (*dao*) of an exemplary person (*jun zi* 君子)” (“*Zhong yong*” – “The Mean and the Immutable,” § 20; “*Lun yu*”, XIV, 28). Upon defining “*zhi*<sub>1</sub>” as “righteousness (*yi*) in the treatment of people and reverence for spirits and the souls of the dead while keeping away from them”, Confucius drew a fundamental distinction between wisdom and humanity as two basic models of behavior for culture and life organization in general: «The wise/rational/known (*zhi*<sub>1</sub>/*zhi*) takes pleasure in water, whereas the humane enjoys mountains. The wise/rational/known is efficient-and-mobile (*dong*), whereas the humane is calm and unperturbed (*jing* 靜). The wise/rational/known enjoys life, whereas the humane lives a long life” (“*Lun yu*”, VI, 22, 23).

Meng-zi (circa 372 – 289), on the one hand, specified the definition of “wisdom” making a distinction between wisdom and “sagacity” (“holiness,” “genius” – *sheng* 聖): “To start the good organization [of life] according to the principles (*li*) is a matter of wisdom, but to complete it according to the same principles is a matter of sagacity. Wisdom is comparable to artfulness, while sagacity is comparable to forcefulness.” On the other hand, Meng-zi expanded the Confucian understanding of “*zhi*<sub>1</sub>” up to “rationality” as man’s integral innate property, along with humanity, righteousness (*yi* 義), and propriety (*li*<sub>1</sub> 禮), consisting in the ability of one’s “heart to uphold [truth] and reject [falseness]” (“*Meng-zi*”, V B, 1, II A, 6, VI A, 6). In this conception the semantic unity of “wisdom” and “rationality” was based on the recognition of human nature (*xing*<sub>1</sub> 性) as being originally and essentially good. Consequently, the content of “*zhi*<sub>1</sub>”

was confined to moral values and primarily humanity and righteousness (“Lun yu”, IV, 1; “Meng-zi”, IV A, 27).

Therefore, the category of people endowed with “innate knowledge,” i.e. owning the immutable “supreme rationale”, as delineated by Confucius (“Lun yu”, XVI, 9, XVII, 2/3), was later interpreted in the ethical rather than epistemological or psychological meaning as the presumed “ability to take part in doing good and the inability to take part in doing evil” (“Han shu” – “The Book about the Han [Dynasty]”, Ch. 20; 1<sup>st</sup> century). This category is opposed by “worst stupidity”, as the immutable characteristic “ability to take part in doing evil and the inability to take part in doing good.” A “mean man” is capable of doing both. In “Han shu” this theoretical premise was used to deduce the all-embracing nine-step classification of historical and mythological characters from the time immemorial till then.

Wang Chong (27 – 97/107) brought the given tendency up to the extreme, treating the immutability of the supremely rational and worst stupidity as a propensity for absolute good (*ji shan* 極善) and absolute evil (*ji e* 極惡) respectively, going beyond the Confucian presumption of an essential natural unity of all human beings (“Lun heng” – “The Weights of Judgments”, Ch. 13).

Conversely, his predecessor, Dong Zhong-shu (2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.), leader of the Han Confucianism, recognizing the complex makeup of human nature, at the same time as the founder of an official national teaching, strove to consolidate its universal foundations in the conception of “five constancies” (*wu chang* 五常) – humanity, compropriety (*yi* 宜, identical to righteousness), propriety, rationality and belief/trustiness (*xin*), whose “way” must be perfected by the ruler and which mean the same for the human world as the “five elements” (*wu xing*) for the natural world, earlier also defined by the term “*wu chang*” (“*Li ji*” – “Records on Propriety”, Ch. 19, 5<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> c.c. B.C.).

Han Yu (768 – 824), a forerunner of Neo-Confucianism, confirmed the set of five qualities making up human nature as it were, somewhat changing their sequence, namely: humanity, propriety, belief/trustiness, righteousness and rationality (“Yuan *xing*” – “Turning to the Beginnings of [Human] Nature”).

A similar approach was later canonized by Neo-Confucianism and became standardized in traditional Chinese culture. Within its framework “*zhi*” came to be ranked as the last or, at best, next to last, among the basic factors in human personality formation, which means the prevalence of treating man as homo moralis, rather than homo sapiens. According to the interpretation of Kang You-wei (1858 – 1927), summing up the traditional Chinese philosophy and culture, “when humanity and rationality are equally hidden [in man], rationality comes first; when humanity and rationality equally manifest (*yong*) themselves, humanity prevails” (“*Da tong shu*” – “The Book on the Great Unity”).

At first sight, a different understanding of the part played by *sapiens* is reflected in the Taoist ancient record “Le zi” (4<sup>th</sup> c. B.C. – 4<sup>th</sup> c. A.D.), where it is asserted that “rationality and prudence (*lü* 廬) constitute that which makes man more valuable than birds and animals.” Further on, however, the guiding principle of rationality is seen in propriety and righteousness (Ch. 7). But the most fundamental Taoist treatise “*Dao de jing*” already called for the eradication of the latter two principles along with sagacity and rationality for the benefit of people (§ 19). However, according to another judgment, it is a sage who is assigned to establish “order” (*zhi*<sub>2</sub> 治), under whom people “have neither knowledge nor desires” while “a rational person does not dare to act” (§ 3). Such dual interpretation of sagacity arose from a critical reappraisal of the basic concept of rationality in the Taoist texts. On the one hand, a distinction was made between “small” (relative, limited) and “great rationality” (“Zhuang-zi”, Ch. 1) but, on the other hand, the latter was identified with the “irrational”, i.e. self-oblivious, artless, natural, childish behavior. In this context the accent was placed on the second semantic array of “*zhi*<sub>1</sub>” associated with artfulness and artificiality. For example, the Taoist principle of organic unity with the world as manifested in “Han Fei-zi” (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.) brought to a conclusion that “a great person entrusting [his] bodily form (*xing*<sub>2</sub> 形) to the heavens and the earth” “does not entangle [his] heart with craftiness (*zhi*<sub>1</sub>)” since it is private and egoistical and, therefore, opposite to the “all-embracing great body” (*quan da ti* 全大體) of the Universe. In contrast, in “Le-zi” “the great unity” (*da tong* 大同), opening up unlimited potentialities, with the entire multitude of things is presented as being based on “the banishment of *zhi*<sub>1</sub> from one’s heart.”

On the contrary, in the military school teaching (*bing-jia* 兵家) the idea of craftiness, shrewdness, cunning, resourcefulness and slyness inherent in “*zhi*<sub>1</sub>” was naturally developed. In “Sun-zi” (5<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> c.c. B.C.) one of the five factors in “the great issue” of warfare epitomizing “the road of survival and death”, that is, a military leader, is also defined through five qualities akin to the Confucian “five constancies.” But, in contrast to the latter, these qualities begin, rather than end, with “*zhi*”: wisdom/rationality/shrewdness, belief/trustiness, humanity, courage and strictness (Ch. 1). Owing to the broad interpretation of war as a “road” of struggle intrinsic to life in general, the hieroglyph “*zhi*<sub>1</sub>” has acquired the universal cultural meaning of “stratagem”.

The direct definition of “*zhi*<sub>1</sub>”, the closest to the modern Western understanding of rationality, is contained in the scientific proto-logical part of “Mo-zi” (5<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> c.c. B.C.): “Rationality embraces judgments on things based on their self-evident knowledge” (“*Jing shuo*” – “The Explanation of Canons”, Pt. 1, Ch. 42).

In Chinese Buddhism the hieroglyph “*zhi*<sub>1</sub>” was also used in two meanings equivalent to the two basic terms defining the supreme forms of knowledge – “*jnana*”, i.e. the complete knowledge of “deeds and

principles” (*shi li*) or phenomena and noumena, removing the subject/object opposition attained through meditation and leading to salvation (*nirvana*, *niepan*), and “*prajna*”, i.e. divine wisdom, one out of the six or ten “perfections” (*paramita*, *bolomido*) of a *bodhisattva* and two or three virtues (*de*) of a buddha.

In modern Chinese “*zhi*” as the main component of several terms embraces the entire spectrum described above, including such present-day concepts such as “copyright (intellectual, inventors’) and rights” (*zhi-neng-quan* 智能權).

In Chinese philosophy a functional analog to the latter item in the opposition of “knowledge/rationality to belief” is represented by the category “*xin*” 信 meaning “belief/trustiness (devotion, sincerity, reliability, authenticity, truthfulness, honesty, veracity, proof, evidence)”, combining the idea of subjective confidence and sincerity with the idea of objective veracity and reliability. Its etymological meaning is “man’s words” or “words from one’s heart”. The term is first encountered in “*Shu jing*” (“The Canon of Scriptures”) and “*Shi jing*” (“The Canon of Poetry”), the proto-Confucian classical texts dating to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> – early 1<sup>st</sup> millennia B.C., where it already combines two meanings: the objective – “authenticity, truth” – and the subjective – “belief, sincere conviction”. This is explained by the specific features of the Chinese language where the hieroglyph “*xin*”, in addition to the customary verbal meaning “to enjoy confidence”, also has the causative meaning – “to inspire confidence”. Such semantic syncretism was consciously used in “Xun-zi” (Ch. 6): “Belief (*xin*) in the truth (*xin*) is true (*xin*), and a doubt about the doubtful is also true (*xin*).”

In “Lun yu,” the first proper Confucian canon, “*xin*” conveys, along with “humanity” (*ren*), “righteousness” (*yi*), “filial piety” (*xiao* 孝) and “fraternal love” (*ti* 悌), one of the principal socio-ethical concepts of Confucianism. This teaching (*jiao* 教) itself is defined there as the one based on the following four premises: “culture” (*wen*), “action” (*xing*), “loyalty” (*zhong*) and belief/trustiness (VII, 24/ 25). Here the symbols “*zhong* 忠” and “*xin*” being close in meaning make up a terminological pair “faithfulness and belief” (“devotion and trust”, “self-sacrifice and fidelity”, “honesty and sincerity”), which characterizes the embodiment of “virtue” (*de* 德) and the conduct of an “exemplary person” (*jun zi*) (I, 8, V, 28, VIII, 4, IX, 25, XII, 10, XV, 6, XIX, 10). “*Xin*” implies first and foremost the “required veracity of words” (*yan bi xin* 言必信, XIII, 20). Chapter 40 in “Mo-zi”, a synchronous canon of Mohism, specifies the definition of “*xin*” as “coincidence of words and intentions” (*yan he yu yi* 言合於意). But in “Lun yu”, “*xin*” is interpreted primarily as correspondence of words to actions (*shi, xing*). In this praxeological sphere the quality of “*xin*” is one of the behavioral (*xing*) components of humanity (XVII, 5), which should distinguish the actions of superiors and rulers (I, 5, XIII, 4, XIX, 10) and the interrelationships of equals and friends (I, 4, 7, V, 26), preconditioned by

“[deferential] discretion” (*jing* 敬) and “prudent respectfulness” (*jin* 謹) (I, 5, 6).

Developing the ideas of Confucius, Meng-zi linked up the “vertical” and “horizontal” aspects in the social manifestation of “*xin*” in his thesis that the one who fails to enjoy it among friends would not be trusted by the superiors either. The attainment of “*xin*” depends in the long run on the understanding of goodness (*shan* 善), which makes a person genuine (*cheng* 誠). “Genuineness is a heavenly way (*dao*), while premeditated genuineness is the way of man. Absolute genuineness has never happened to fail to be embodied in action (*dong*), the same as falseness could never be embodied in action” (“Meng-zi”, IV A, 13). The given interconnection of “*xin*” with goodness and genuineness on the way (*dao*) to attaining “sagacity” (*sheng* 聖) was repeated and canonized in the treatise “Zhong yong” (§ 20), included in the both Confucian classical collections “Wu jing” (“Five Canons”) as Ch. 31/28 in “Li ji” and “Si shu” as his second book. Defining “*xin*” as one’s inner goodness, Meng-zi objectified it as a “heavenly merit” (*tian jue* 天爵) together with humanity (“Meng-zi”, VII B, 25, VI A, 16). In “Go yu” (“States’ Speeches”, Ch. 1) the same “four merits” are presented as manifestations of “propriety” (*li* 禮).

On the contrary, according to “*Dao de jing*”, “propriety removes loyalty and trustiness” (§ 38), but the latter is a natural phenomenon inherent in the “spiritual seed” (*jing* 精) residing in the *dao* (§ 21). This ontological treatment is also evident in the encyclopedic treatise “*Guan-zi*”, where “*xin*” is defined as the “nonexistence of distortions in good predestination (*ming* 命)” (Ch. 51) and means “the right [order] of four seasons [of the year]” (Ch. 45). Moreover, in Chapter 19 of the legalist treatise “Han Fei-zi” the meaning of “*xin*” is narrowed down to an instrument used by the powers to be, in addition to awards, punishment and deferential discretion.

Dong Zhong-shu, who made the first universal synthesis of Confucianism and the ideas of its leading adversary schools and who was titled as “Confucius of the Han Epoch”, by uniting ontology with ethics worked out a formula of “five constancies” (*wu chang zhi dao* 五常之道). These include “humanity,” “righteousness,” “propriety,” “knowledge/rationality” (*zhi/zhi*<sub>1</sub>), and “belief/trustiness”. Han Yu in the treatise “Yuan *xing*” recognized these “five constancies” as the bases of human nature (*xing*<sub>1</sub> 形), where belief/trustiness held a middle position ranking third. Such understanding fixed down by Neo-Confucianism became standard for the entire spiritual culture of traditional China.

The ancient religious connotations of “*xin*” associated with the meaning of “belief” were subjected to rational revision as early as in the first Confucian works. The historical and ideological written monument “Zuo zhuan” (“Tradition of Zuo”, 5<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> c.c. B.C.) contains an utterance dating to 564 B.C. (“Xiang-gong”, 9<sup>th</sup> year) according to which “*xin*” symbolizing the presence of spirit (*shen*) represents a “blessing for the [right]

words and a guiding principle for good [actions].” Such reduction of “*xin*” to the right words and good actions was sanctified by Confucius through the establishment of an object for this believing not in the spiritual or divine essence, but in the preservation of ancient (*gu* 古) culture, i.e. traditional customs and values (“*Lun yu*”, VII, 1). The rational-minded Meng-zi made a distinction in the very foundations of the past between what is worthy of believing – “*xin*” – and that what is unworthy of it: “It is better not to have ‘The [Canon] of Scriptures’ than to believe in it completely,” and on this basis, by drawing on an antinomy and complementing Confucius’s thesis, recognized “the non-necessity of words’ veracity” (*yan bu bi xin* 言不必信) for “a great man” (“Meng-zi”, VII B, 3, IV B, 11).

On the other hand, in Chinese Buddhism the hieroglyph “*xin*” was specifically used for denoting a religious faith (*shraddha*). The same meaning is also conveyed by this hieroglyph when it is used as the main component of several terms in modern Chinese, in particular, “*xin-yang*” 信仰 (“faith”) and “*xin-yang-zhu-yi*” 信仰主義 (“fideism”).

As a whole, the above analysis allows us to draw a conclusion that, in contrast to the Western analogs, the categories “knowledge/rationale” (*zhi/zhi<sub>1</sub>*), on the one hand, and “belief/trustiness” (*xin*), on the other, in traditional Chinese philosophy were correlated but did not involve an antinomy. Moreover, these two categories were semantically intersected in the unity of the subjective and the objective typical for the Chinese mentality, and of theoretical and practical aspects in their semantics, since a reliable criterion of both knowledge and faith was seen in their embodiment in rational actions and trustworthy deeds.

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## CHAPTER III

# TWO KINDS OF WARRANT: A CONFUCIAN RESPONSE TO PLANTINGA'S THEORY OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE ULTIMATE<sup>1</sup>

PEIMIN NI

Zaiwo inquired, "The three-year mourning period on the death of one's parents is already too long ... surely a year is enough." The Master replied, "Would you then feel at ease [an 安] eating fine rice and wearing colorful brocade?" "I would indeed," responded Zaiwo. "If you would, then so be it," said the Master. ... When Zaiwo had left, the Master remarked, "Zaiwo is really perverse [bu ren 不仁]! It is only after being tended by his parents for three years that an infant can finally leave their bosom. ... Was not he given three years of loving care by his parents?"

– *The Analects of Confucius*, 17:21<sup>2</sup>

Alvin Plantinga's work *Warranted Christian Belief* (Plantinga 2000), is a courageous effort to respond to the postmodern critique of traditional religious beliefs. His overall clarity in thought and directness with regard to possible objections are exemplary of the best quality of analytic philosophy. As one of the major achievements of Christian philosophy today, Plantinga's theory is a valuable springboard for other traditions to engage in substantial dialogue with Christian philosophers. This paper is an attempt to respond to Plantinga's theory of our knowledge of the ultimate from a Confucian perspective. The author realizes that there are different approaches among Christian philosophers, and not all of them would endorse the one that Plantinga takes. There are different views about the ultimate within Confucian scholars, as well. Furthermore, neither Plantinga's theory nor the Confucian approach to the issue is a simple thesis that can be adequately discussed in the space of one paper. I want to make it clear, therefore, that this paper does not intend to cover more than what its

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Stephen Rowe, Kelly Clark, Raymond J. VanArragon, Mark Pestana, and Dewey Hoytenga for their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of the paper.

<sup>2</sup> Translations of Confucius' *Analects* in this paper are largely based on Ames and Rosemont's with my own modifications. Further reference to the *Analects* will be marked only by chapter and section numbers with parentheses.

title indicates: It is merely *a* (not *the*) Confucian response to Plantinga's theory, with the aim of triggering more discussions on the topic and more engaged dialogues between different spiritual traditions. On the other hand, as a response, it does not intend to stay within what is explicitly stated in classic Confucianism, but to draw implications from it in light of inspirations we may get from dialoguing with Plantinga, and to construct a Confucian account of warrant.

### **PLANTINGA AND HIS REIDIAN APPROACH TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE ULTIMATE.**

Plantinga's whole theory revolves around the notion of "warrant." Warrant, he tells us, is the property which transforms a mere true belief into knowledge (Plantinga 1993, chapters. 1&2, and 2000, 153). A belief is warranted for an agent only if the belief is produced in her by cognitive faculties that are functioning properly in accordance with a design plan that is successfully aimed at acquiring truth, in a suitably congenial environment. This stipulation entails four components: (1) Purpose of the faculties: The belief in question (that has warrant) is produced by cognitive faculties such that the purpose of those faculties is that of producing true beliefs, rather than, say, survival, psychological comfort, etc. (Plantinga 2000, 155). (2) Successful design plan: That the design plan of the cognitive faculties in question is a good one – for if the faculties were created by Hume's infant deity for the purpose of producing true belief, it would still be possible for the faculty to produce false beliefs even if they work in the way and the sort of environment that they supposed work, and so the beliefs would still lack warrant. (3) Proper function: That the faculties function in the way that they are supposed to work, no malfunction (just like the proper function of the heart is to pump blood). (4) Appropriate cognitive environment: That the faculties function in the suitable environment. Just like human lungs are not supposed to breathe under water, the function of a cognitive faculty can be warranted only if it works in its suitable environment (Plantinga 1993, 7, and 2000, 155).

Through this definition of "warrant" Plantinga establishes the claim that if the belief in God is true, then it is possible that it does have warrant (Plantinga 2000, 188). The point of making this claim is that, if so, then no one can make any pure *de jure* objections against Christian beliefs – that is, objections that do not say that Christian beliefs are false, but instead claim that, whether true or not, Christian beliefs are unjustified, irrational, or contrary to sound morality. This is because pure *de jure* objections all inevitably rely on *de facto* objections – objections that question whether or not Christian beliefs are true or not. Since one cannot successfully separate the two kinds of objections, there is no reason to say that Christian beliefs are irrational.

While it is important to clarify whether or not all *de jure* objections have to rely on *de facto* objections, as there have been plenty of objections

made on the bases of the separation of the two, Plantinga's definition of "warrant" and his hypothetical proposition that "if belief *X* is true, then it is possible that *X* does have warrant" do not lead us very far. It does not help us much in determining whether a particular belief has warrant or not. If we want to know whether Christian beliefs are warranted or not, we get the answer "If the beliefs are true, then they probably are." If we ask, "Are Christian beliefs true?" the answer is, "I am not trying to prove that they are true, but I can tell you that they are probably warranted." This is why his notion of warrant has been more appropriately discussed as a way of addressing the Gettier problem – a problem about defining knowledge, of specifying the necessary and sufficient conditions for a belief to be called knowledge, rather than about offering a practical criterion that can help us to determine whether a belief is knowledge or not. If we do not know whether someone's faculties are working properly, what kind of environment is appropriate, and whether the particular faculty in question is successfully designed for the purpose of producing true beliefs, how are we able to judge whether the belief in question has warrant or not? Who can argue against the proposition that "The belief about God, if true, is probably warranted"? In fact we may plug in any belief *X* in the formula "The belief about *X*, if true, is probably warranted," no matter how absurd *X* is. There is always a possibility that the belief is produced by a faculty in us that is successfully designed for the purpose of producing this kind of true belief in us in the given kind of environment. Since we have no way of verifying these conditions, we have no way of rejecting the statement that "*X* is probably warranted." If this were all Plantinga offers as his justification for Christian beliefs, it would be no other than to endorse a notion of rationality that virtually makes no belief irrational, and then argue that Christian beliefs are not irrational.

Plantinga's more valuable contribution is found when he goes beyond the definition of "warrant" and starts to use what he calls the "Calvin/Aquinas model" (C/A model) to show that theistic beliefs can actually have warrant epistemologically, and not merely logically.<sup>3</sup> According to Calvin, there is a sort of instinct, a natural human tendency to form beliefs about God under a variety of conditions, and these beliefs are produced by a faculty, *sensus divinitatis* – sense of divinity. The basic feature of these beliefs is "basicality" – just like our perception, memory, and *a priori* beliefs, they are not derived from any inference or argument, or propositional evidence (Plantinga 2000, 175). Though they may be occasioned by circumstances, they are not conclusions from them.

Plantinga's "extended C/A model" goes even further to justify specific Christian beliefs (not merely general theistic beliefs). The extended

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<sup>3</sup> The difference can be illustrated by an example that Plantinga uses: It is logically possible that the population of China is less than 1,000, but epistemologically it is impossible since it is inconsistent with the rest of our knowledge.

C/A model contains both an intellectual component – that the truth is revealed to our minds by an “inward instigation of the Holy Spirit” (IIHS), and an affective component – that they are “sealed unto our hearts,” like *eros*, by God’s love (see Plantinga 2000, 311-23).<sup>4</sup>

As Plantinga says, his approach to the knowledge of the Ultimate is “broadly Reidian” (Plantinga 2000, x). In his trilogy, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (1993), *Warrant and Proper Function* (1993), and *Warranted Christian Belief* (2000), Plantinga made numerous references to Scottish philosopher, Thomas Reid (1710-1796), and always in the same appreciative tone: “Here again, Reid is correct.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, his main contribution is the application of the Reidian method to show that many have fallen victims of the modern Cartesian and Humean traps.<sup>6</sup> According to Plantinga, Thomas Reid has clearly seen the failure of the Cartesian project, a project that tries to establish the reliability of our beliefs on the basis of reason “some two hundred years or so before Rorty and Quine took this failure as a reason for proclaiming the death of epistemology [Rorty] or its transmogrification into empirical psychology [Quine]” (Plantinga 2000, 221).

According to Thomas Reid, the beliefs we derive from our perceptions are not subject to the judgment of our reason, because reason and perception are faculties that “came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he [the Creator] puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another?” (Reid, 183). The same applies to memory and our *a priori* beliefs, as well. According to Reid, these beliefs have the “first-ness,” or, to borrow a phrase from

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<sup>4</sup> The basic difference between the A/C model and the extended A/C model is that the *sensus divinitatis* is a cognitive faculty given to humans by God, yet the IIHS and God’s love in the extended A/C model are responses of the Holy Spirit to original sin.

<sup>5</sup> Plantinga’s indebtedness to Reid can be found through tracing all the references to Reid in Plantinga’s *Warrant and Proper Function* (see the “Index” of the book). They occur far more frequently than his references to any other authors.

<sup>6</sup> Reid’s target was initially Hume, and yet from examining Hume’s theory, he found that he had to criticize Descartes as well, for the fundamental roots of Hume’s mistakes are in Descartes’ philosophy. It was Descartes who first established the theory of ideas (ideas as objects of our perception), which was then uncritically accepted by the Empiricists, including Hume. Descartes’ assumption that reason should be the final judge of the validity of our beliefs is also tacitly accepted by the Empiricists, in the form of the Lockean egocentric predicament – Because experience can only provide us with ideas, not external objects, we are hopelessly trapped in our subjective world. Even though our experience compels us to believe that the objects we perceive are external, reason, however, tells us to be skeptical about what we perceive. This is how Hume got into the entanglement between his “philosophical reasoning” and his “psychological” account of “habits of the mind.”

Plantinga, are “properly basic.” They are not derived from any propositional support.

Plantinga differs from Reid in that he takes a further step to apply the Reidian approach to the knowledge about the ultimate, or, in his case, the Christian beliefs about God. Even though Reid constantly uses the words “God,” “Deity,” “the Creator,” or “our Maker” throughout his writings, he never claimed that he could have direct knowledge about God the way we do with objects of our ordinary experiences. Reid does say that the existence of God is a necessary truth, but he thinks that our belief in the existence of God is deduced from the knowledge of our own existence and the existence of other things through the argument from the First Cause.<sup>7</sup> Plantinga, however, argues that some of our religious beliefs, such as the existence of God, are no less warranted than our most cherished common sense beliefs. Whatever we can reasonably use to justify the validity or the warrant of our basic common sense beliefs can also be used for our religious beliefs about God. He even goes so far as to claim that from this perspective, specific Christian convictions about the person of Christ, the mysterious reality of the Holy Trinity, the presence of the Holy Spirit in one’s life, etc. can be warranted (Plantinga 2000, 199), and that religious exclusivism can be defensible. Since the beliefs are produced by the faculty called *sensus divinitatis*, or revealed through IHS, or sealed onto one’s heart by God’s love, they are basic, hence not expected to rely on any further justification.

Reid admits that basicity is a defining feature of “first principles” – principles that “are no sooner understood than they are believed” (Reid, 434). But according to Reid, basicity alone is not sufficient for us to take them without doubt. One can have the basic belief that one has a leg even though it has been amputated – the sensation of phantom limb produces the basic belief. But this does not mean that one should simply rely on this belief to walk around. Reid admits that some first principles, have greater degrees of certainty than others (Reid, 436), and people “who really love truth, and are open to conviction, may differ about first principles” (Reid, 437).<sup>8</sup> From the way Reid actually characterizes first principles we find that

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<sup>7</sup> As for how we can get from contingent knowledge of our own existence and the existence of other contingent beings to a necessary truth, Reid does not have a direct answer. But it is evident that Reid does not hold that knowledge of God is directly presented to our common sense. In some places Reid uses arguments that presuppose the existence of an all-knowing, all powerful, and all-benevolent God, but the arguments are always supplementary, and are not the sole support for the conclusions.

<sup>8</sup> I think this is also the reason why Plantinga starts to talk about “properly basic,” though his account of “properly basic” is either not clear or circular. He tells us that a belief can be “properly basic” in several senses of being “proper”: (a) that it is indeed basic (not accepted on the basis of other propositions), (2) that the person is justified in holding it in the basic way (he is within his

they entail two main features: (1) That the first principles have “firstness” – they are not deduced or inferred from other beliefs or evidence, and (2) that they are “irresistible” to us; they claim our assent upon their “own authority” (Reid, 443, 444).

In order to settle disagreements about first principles, Reid offers five additional criteria: (1) Popularity of the belief. Since in matters of common sense what is required is “no more than a sound mind free from prejudice, and a distinct conception of the question. The learned and the unlearned, the philosopher and the lay-labourer, are upon a level.” This is why here “the few must yield to the many” (Reid, 438). (2) Opinions which contradict first principles are distinguished from other errors in that “they are not only false but absurd” (Reid, 438). In other words, if the denial of a belief is not considered absurd, then the belief is not a first principle. (3) Self-consistency. If a person rejects a first principle which stands upon the same footing with others which he admits, then the person is guilty of being inconsistent. Similarly, if the rejection of a first principle will lead the person to other beliefs that are absurd, then the person cannot reject the principle. (4) Opinions that appear so early in the minds that they cannot be the effect of education or of false reasoning have a good claim to be considered as first principles. (5) “When an opinion is so necessary in the conduct of life, that, without the belief of it, a man must be led into a thousand absurdities in practice, such an opinion, when we can give no other reason for it, may safely be taken for a first principle” (Reid, 441).

Now with regard to Plantinga’s project, we should say that the Reidian set of criteria for first principles, taken together, is too restrictive. The belief in God cannot be as popular as other common sense beliefs. It may be the case that God reveals the truths to some people first. The requirement that they are not the result of education may also be put aside, for it is possible that *sensus divinitatis* has to be awakened by either education or some cultivation. The indispensability criterion is vague, for it may be dispensable according to one conception of life, yet indispensable for another. As for the self-consistency criterion, we may say that it is already entailed in the others, because if it were not itself basic and irresistible, we would not include it as a criterion in the first place. In other

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epistemic rights, is not irresponsible, is violating no epistemic or other duties in holding the belief in that way), and (3) that it is properly basic with respect to warrant: he accepts it in the basic way and is warranted in believing it (Plantinga 2000, 178). If we say that the first sense (that it is indeed basic) is simply circular, the other two seem but to extend the circle – What does it mean to be justified? How to determine the epistemic rights and how to define being responsible? How to determine if one’s basic belief is warranted or not (i.e. how do we know that it was produced by a successfully designed faculty to produce truth, and that it functioned properly in the right kind of environment)? Do we, indeed, have a *sensus divinitatis* or is it invented by Calvin just for the sake of providing basicity of the belief? We still don’t seem to reach far enough.

words, “a true belief has to be self-consistent” and is, itself, a first principle. Finally, “those which contradict first principles are considered not only false but absurd” can be taken as an indication of “irresistibility,” hence included in this criterion. As a result, we still have two main criteria left for first principles: Basicity (firstness) and irresistibility. Let us call this the Reidian notion of warrant for basic beliefs.

Beliefs produced by *sensus divinitatis* in the C/A model may well satisfy both criteria. They are basic, and they carry a convincing power with them.<sup>9</sup> If the power is so irresistible that the denial of the belief makes one feel absurd, then the belief may be considered warranted in the Reidian sense. Similarly, even though the believer cannot justify that her beliefs about God are indeed produced by the Holy Spirit through her “inward instigation” and her *eros*-like feelings and are, indeed, sealed unto her heart by God’s love, rather than being produced by a video game programmer, with the presence of the direct and irresistible experience, she is still able to say that the beliefs in God are warranted. One cannot argue that these experiences/feelings do not show the specifics of Christian beliefs (such as trinity, incarnation, atonement, resurrection, etc.), because neither does our ordinary experience show that we have lived more than a second (Plantinga 2000, 332). As long as the believer obtains the beliefs in a basic way, and finds them irresistible, she can claim that these beliefs are warranted in the Reidian sense.

With the application of the Reidian notion of warrant, Plantinga could go beyond the statement that “*X*, if true, is probably warranted,” and actually answer questions about whether any particular belief is warranted or not. Once this turn is made, we get a new proposition, i.e. “If *X* is warranted, then *X* is probably true.” Since now we have a way to verify warrant independent of *X*’s being true, the proposition is practically useful for choosing what to believe.

Having laid out the above points, we are now ready to move on to the Confucian views on the knowledge of the ultimate, and see how a Confucian might respond to the Plantinga-Reidian approach.

**CONFUCIAN APPROACH TO THE ULTIMATE:  
THE TRANSFORMATION FROM KNOWLEDGE OF  
THE TRANSCENDENT TO AWARENESS OF THE EMBODIMENT  
OF THE DECREE OF HEAVEN**

It is well known that Confucius’ attitude towards deities and life after death is somewhat skeptical. “The Master did not talk about strange phenomena, ... or spiritual beings” (7:21). He refrains from speculating or

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<sup>9</sup> That is what Plantinga calls “doxastic” experience. This experience always accompanies beliefs. A person feels natural and acceptable when she thinks of “ $3+2=5$ ,” but not so when she thinks of “ $3+2=6$ ” (see Plantinga 2000, 183).

conjecturing things that he had no knowledge about. When Confucius offered sacrifice to his ancestors, he did it as if his ancestral spirits were actually present. “If I am not fully present in the sacrifice, it is no different from having no sacrifice at all.” (3:12) But he does not seem to be convinced that praying for blessing from spiritual beings is at all effective (see 7:35). One might speculate that Confucius prayed and respected the gods simply because he is not sure whether there are gods or not, and so, as with Pascal’s wager, he does this just in case there are gods. But this speculation misses an important point of departure! As the quote at the beginning of this paper shows, when Confucius’ disciple Zaiwo argued with Confucius over whether a three-year period of mourning was necessary, Confucius did not say, that “Do you find it imprudent that if the spirits of your parents exist, they would be offended by your not offering them three years of mourning?” Instead, Confucius asked how Zaiwo himself would feel if he did not have the three-year mourning and ate luxury food and wore colorful cloths shortly after his parents passed away. Here we see an approach profoundly different from Plantinga’s or Pascal’s. It does not direct one’s attention to external deities, but inwardly toward one’s own moral feelings and calls for internal spiritual reflections. What one obtains from the reflections is not knowledge of what is or might be out there, or whether it is rational to believe in deities out there, but knowledge about what one should do or not do – the way of life. Indeed the Chinese word for knowledge, “*zhidao* 知道,” literally means “knowing the way.” Once, Zi Gong asked Confucius whether dead people still have awareness. The Master said:

If I were to say that they do have awareness, I am afraid that those who are filial to their parents and grandparents would send off the dead ones as if they were alive [and hence have lavish burials]. If I were to say that they don’t have awareness, I am afraid that the unfilial would discard the dead ones unburied. Ci [Zi Gong], do you want to know whether people have awareness after they die? When you die, you will get to know. It will not be too late to know by then. (*Shuo Yuan* “Bian Wu” 《說苑•辨物》, see Sun & Guo, 21)

The message entailed in this passage is very rich and interesting. Confucius’ reply starts with a speculation of what people would do if he were to say either yes or no. By this the Master humorously hinted that he does not know whether dead people have awareness or not. He substituted the question about knowledge of the transcendent external reality by a question about moral reflection of the practical life. Finally when he came back to the original question, namely whether dead people have awareness or not, his answer was that it would not be too late to know when one



actually dies. Why would it not be too late to know? Because if one had lived a proper way of life, one should not be afraid of facing any deities!

Many scholars have pointed out that the greatest characteristic of Confucian religious thought is the immanence of the ultimate reality.<sup>10</sup> In replacing the Shang Dynasty's notion of *Shang Di* 上帝 (Lord-on-high) with the notion of *tian* 天 (Heaven), the earlier Zhou predecessors of Confucius had gradually depersonalized the notion of "Lord-on-high" without losing its sense of a reality that governs the world. They brought the being from on-high down to the Earth. Heaven is no longer a mysterious world above, but rather the world in which humans live and even the world of humans themselves. As the well known passage in the *Book of History* (*Shang Shu* 尚書) says, "Heaven sees through what my people see; Heaven hears through what my people hear" (Legge, 292).<sup>11</sup> This passage shows clearly that Heaven is virtually embodied in the people and exemplified by the people. The will of Heaven is no longer seen as the will of an anthropomorphic deity that issues orders and gives blessings and sanctions from above; it exhibits itself immanently through human beings in popular consensus and in regular patterns of discernible social and natural events, and it can be affected by the moral undertakings of the people. Under such a notion, the legitimacy of rulers was measured by the will of the people. "Heaven entrusts decree to whomever that people follow" and "Heaven punishes whomever that people are against" (*Shangshu Zhushu*, vol. 3, p. 33). These statements shows more implications than causal relations – the fact that people follow a person or are against the person is the very evidence of (not the effect of) Heaven's decree or punishment to the person.

From the perspective of this historical development, the passages in Confucius' *Analects* that contain reference to *tian* should more properly be understood as the continuation of the process of transforming the notion of the Ultimate from transcendent to immanent. Confucius says, "A person who offends against *tian* has nowhere else to pray" (3:13). He claims that "At the age of fifty, I came to know the decree of Heaven" (2:4). He also clearly takes Heaven as a source of his own virtue and mission (7:23). Furthermore, Heaven is also a force that sustains everything: "Does Heaven speak? And yet the four seasons turn and the myriad things are born and

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<sup>10</sup> The word "immanent" here means "the world in which we live." It should not be taken to mean only the actual. Confucianism is very idealistic and it aims at transcending the actual persons and the society toward perfection. Though the complete perfection may never be realized, one should nevertheless keep striving toward it. For this reason, some contemporary Confucian scholars such as Mou Zongshan and Tu Weiming prefer to use expressions like "transcendental immanent."

<sup>11</sup> Another passage in the *Shangshu* that expresses the similar idea is "Heaven hears and sees through what our people hear and see. Heaven displays what is to be awed through our people's display of their power" (see Legge, 74). The translation is based on Legge's with my modification.

grow” (17:19). These passages have been taken as evidence that Confucius views Heaven as a power with consciousness and will that determines, monitors, and responds to human life and actions. But seeing from the historical perspective and from the actual development of Confucianism, they should be taken as metaphorical expressions, in much the same way we speak about the likes and dislikes of a plant. “*Tian*” in these passages can be quite consistently taken as a principle according to which natural events take place,<sup>12</sup> and a source of natural power that includes moral virtues.

This process of transformation continues after Confucius. The book of *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Centering the Commonality*, or as it is more commonly known, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, probably written by Confucius’ grandson Zisi) further linked Heaven with human nature. “What *tian* commands is called nature; drawing out from the nature is called the Way; cultivating the Way is called education” (chapter 1). The opening statements of the book clearly linked Heaven with human natural tendencies and explained the function of education in the unity of the two. “The way of *tian* is *cheng* 誠 (sincere), the way of humans to be *cheng*.” To be always sincere to our Heavenly endowed nature is the way to achieve the unity between human and Heaven. Finally, it was Mencius who, from the Zisi lineage, completed this process of transformation from the transcendent to the immanent. According to Mencius, Heaven is present within the human heart. “Those who give full realization to their own heart know nature, and those who know nature know Heaven” (Mencius, 7:A1)<sup>13</sup> What happened through this transition is that, on the one hand, the secular became sacred and the personal inner moral feelings became universal imperatives or moral responsibilities of every individual mandated by Heaven. Cultivating the internal moral feelings becomes a matter of respecting and manifesting the will of Heaven. On the other hand, the sacred becomes secular – something immanent in the human heart. Knowing the decree of Heaven becomes a matter of knowing one’s own nature rather than knowing an external transcendental reality. To serve Heaven becomes serving and cultivating the self.

The transition resulted in the Confucian view that knowledge of external ultimate reality is both unobtainable in this life and unnecessary if one were able to live a proper way of life. What is important is to see if the heart-mind can be at ease. This does not mean that a Confucian cannot

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<sup>12</sup> The same philosophical implication is in the *Book of Change*. The divination based on reading the patterns on heated tortoise shells and scattered yellow stalks entails the belief that everything in the universe is governed by the same principle, whether in an intentional or purely naturalistic way. The *Book of Change* also entails the view that humans can affect their destiny through their own activities. It tells people not only what situation they are facing, but also what kind of action should be taken in a given situation.

<sup>13</sup> This also paves the way for the atheistic interpretation of Confucianism by Xunzi and Wang Chong, see Ching, 124-6.

accept beliefs about external transcendent deities. If a Confucian were able to experience something produced by what Plantinga calls *sensus divinitatis*, or receive the “inward instigation” from the Holy Spirit or *eros*-like feelings induced by God’s love, he/she could very well accept the beliefs and become a Confucian Christian. Even though these two belief systems need serious encounters and transformations to come together, there is no fundamental conflict between the two, as people like Robert Neville and John Berthrong would testify.<sup>14</sup>

The main difference between the Confucian and the Plantingan is that the Plantingan directs one’s attention externally to an object of transcendental deity, whereas the Confucian directs one’s attention inwardly to the world of one’s heart-mind. Plantinga’s perceptions are still *representations* of the external deity (even though they are not necessarily image-like), whereas the Confucian perception is direct *presentation* of what is known. Because of this, Plantinga’s project is primarily an epistemological one – to secure a set of warranted beliefs. The Confucian effort, however, does not end with the acquisition of beliefs. The heart-mind comes to be at ease as a result of cultivating one’s deep moral conscience and acting according to it. It aims directly at the perfection of the person and living a proper way of life. It requires the full embodiment of moral virtues and life in accordance with them. In the previously mentioned case, Zaiwo did not feel that he would be uneasy to not mourn his parents for three years, and Confucius did not force him to do that. But obviously, Confucius felt that Zaiwo should. The fact that Zaiwo did not feel uneasy does not mean that he does not have to have three years of mourning; it means that he had not cultivated himself well. Confucius set his heart-mind on learning at the age of fifteen. It took him thirty-five years to get to know the decree of Heaven.<sup>15</sup>

If we say that Plantinga’s subject is like a ready-made sensitive and accurate receiver, the Confucian subject is like a competent artist who develops her sense of beauty through a long process of cultivation and practice. A “sensitive receiver” requires virtues like being open to all kinds of “signals,” willing to communicate with others and admit one’s own ignorance, being honest and earnest, careful in processing/interpreting data, persistence, and being consistent, etc. A “competent artist,” however, requires an overall sense of beauty/goodness that not only receives and makes judgments about the “data” but also selectively endorses or rejects certain “data” and embodies the ability to create what is beautiful/good. In other words, the Confucian approach transcends the epistemological realm of truth or falsity, and enters the realms of moral goodness and aesthetic creativity.

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<sup>14</sup> See Neville’s *Boston Confucianism* and Berthrong’s *All Under Heaven*.

<sup>15</sup> Confucius says: “At the age of fifty, I knew the Decree of Heaven (*tian ming* 天命)” (2:4).

This feature of the Confucian approach entails that there are multiple dimensions of the account. The Confucian beliefs about *tian* are simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive. As empirical assertions, they describe what is or can be known by the subject. Confucius did not explain specifically how, given that *tian* does not “speak,” he was able to know the decree of *tian*. We can infer that the long journey he took to get to know the decree of Heaven was not one of logical reasoning, for otherwise he would have explained it to his disciples. It must be something that is experienced directly, and could not be articulated verbally or proven through arguments.

On the other hand, the Confucian beliefs about *tian* also involve choice, recognition of certain aspects of our natural and cultivated tendencies as more essential to humans and as something good and right that every person is capable of developing, and as an effective means for leading toward human flourishing. In other words, the prescriptive aspect involves semantic stipulation, value recognition, faith commitment, and *gongfu* 工夫 instruction. It involves semantic stipulation because it takes a stretch of the word *tian*, which primarily means the sky or the natural realm above, to mean something that is sacred but within the human realm. It involves value recognition because humans perceive all sorts of things; to recognize some of them and not others as decrees of Heaven or as essential to our being human obviously requires choice. It involves faith commitment because empirical observations can never reach universality. And last but not least, it involves *gongfu* instruction, because the Confucians all believe that following the way of *tian* will lead humans to self-realization, human flourishing, and even the flourishing of everything in the world (成己成).<sup>16</sup>

### CONSTRUCTING A CONFUCIAN NOTION OF “WARRANT”

The Confucian and the Plantingan/Reidian approaches to beliefs about the ultimate, though differing from each other, have aspects of compatibility and even similarities. First, both hold that the beliefs are not acquired through inference or indirect evidence. Like our sense perceptions and memories, the beliefs are presented to the heart-mind directly. Because of this, any argument for the existence of Heaven or God becomes obsolete. In this respect the Confucian and the Plantingan are both different from the rationalists of the modern West, for whom justifiable beliefs have to be either self-evident to the reason or can be inferred from what is self-evident. They are also different from those empiricists who believe that since we cannot prove the correspondence between our sense perceptions and

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<sup>16</sup> These multiple dimensions are best exemplified in Mencius’ theory of human nature (see Ni 2006, and 2002, 18-20). Mencius and other Confucians have reported that when they cultivate their heavenly imparted human nature, they can enter into an experience in which one feels that “the myriad things are all here at my disposal,” or that the whole universe is within oneself. Similar reports came also from Buddhists and Daoists (see Ni 1996, 88-9).

external reality, our perceptions have no warrant. Second, the Confucian and the Plantingan also share the view that knowledge of the ultimate is not limited to reason, or what is capable of being expressed propositionally; it can be revealed to the human heart in the form of concrete feelings or dispositions.<sup>17</sup> This differs from the mainstream Western epistemological tradition, as the latter makes a sharp distinction between reason and feeling. For these reasons, both the Confucian and the Plantingan/Reidian approaches to epistemology can be discussed under the relatively new label, “virtue epistemology,” which tries to understand the epistemic status of beliefs by first examining virtues of the agents. However, because of their profound differences as I outlined in the last section, the sense and degree in which each can be considered “warranted” differ considerably.

Based on the previous observations, we can say that if we try to construct a Confucian notion of warrant by following the Reidian model, we may keep the two criteria, i.e. basicity and irresistibility. But since Confucian beliefs about *tian* have to do not only with truth or falsity, but also with moral goodness and practical effectiveness, we need to modify the Reidian account of warrant into something like this:

A belief of the ultimate is warranted if, and only if, the moral feelings it is based upon are basic, and that they can become so irresistible after cultivation that contrary feelings are considered absurd, and that when they are embodied, they lead to the effect of human flourishing.

The reason to add the third criterion is obviously to incorporate the effectiveness dimension. The warrant of a practical recommendation cannot be adequate without such a condition. But it also helps strengthen the moral value dimension. For if a person were to say that he has a basic evil sentiment, such as being selfish or envious, and after “cultivation” the sentiment becomes so irresistible that the contrary sentiments all seem to him absurd, and the embodiment of the feeling makes him feel completely at ease, the Confucian could reply that since this kind of sentiment does not generate human flourishing, it is not warranted. Adding this criterion to the “heart-mind at ease” does not seem to go beyond what is already recognized by classic Confucianism, as the “four books” contain abundant textual support.

We may also take up Plantinga’s definition of “warrant” and see how a Confucian revision of it would look. As we stated before, the Plantingan notion of warrant contains four conditions: belief is warranted for an agent only if (1) the belief is produced in one by cognitive faculties that are designed to acquire truth, and (2) the design is successful, and the faculties are (3) functioning properly in accordance with a design plan (4) in a suitably congenial environment. When we revise these four conditions in a

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<sup>17</sup> Though the Confucians would be more willing to call this form of knowledge or belief *tizhi* 體知 (bodily known) or *tiren* 體認 (bodily recognition).

Confucian language, we find that they can all be retained, but bestowed with novel contents.

Plantinga's use of "design plan for acquiring truth" in his definition of "warrant" stipulates that the cognitive faculties must be designed and produced by an intelligent designer, and hence pre-excludes the possibility that atheistic or non-theistic religious beliefs about the ultimate can have warrant. The cognitive faculties designed for acquiring truth cannot be made for these beliefs because by definition, they cannot be true, unless the design plan was not successful, which is ruled out by the second stipulation. With the A/C model and the extended A/C model, Plantinga may claim that this warrant condition may be empirically verified. He may even argue that the reason he defined "warrant" so narrowly is to set the most stringent conditions for claiming Christian beliefs to have warrant. But the notion so defined would be useful only in defending Christian beliefs, not in inter-faith dialogues.

If we use the Confucian terms "ends of becoming"<sup>18</sup> to substitute for "design plan," the condition would have much broader application. The word "end," as the Aristotelian *telos*, can mean both natural disposition and purpose. A design plan can only be used on someone with intention or purpose, but an end or *telos* can be a prominent natural orientation that exists in everything. "Ends of becoming" also entails a process metaphysics – the orientation is not fixed and static, but dynamic and generative, hence allowing a subject to develop the orientation through one's own choices and cultivation.

Both "successful design plan" and "ends of becoming" entail subjective interpretation, but in different degrees. It is much harder to judge a design plan to be successful than to judge whether a disposition is natural, especially because the latter can be determined by tangible results, such as human flourishing. An inspiring fact is that within Confucianism, there is never a universal agreement about what is Heavenly endowed human nature. Yet both Mencius, who believes that human nature is good, and Xunzi, who believes human nature is evil, are considered Confucians. This is because as *gongfu* instructions, both Mencius' and Xunzi's theories can be judged according to their prescriptive functions. Mencius tries to encourage people to conceive themselves as good, and his method is said to lead to effects such as having flood-like vital energy (*qi* 氣) fill the space between Heaven and Earth (Mencius, 2A:2), giving a person's face "a sleek appearance" and showing the same "in his back and extend to his limbs, rendering their message intelligible without words" (Mencius, 7A: 21), and even reaching the extent in which the myriad things can be all at the person's disposal

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<sup>18</sup> The idea is entailed in the notion of *shengcheng* 生成, as the Confucian expressions "*shengsheng bu qiong* 生生不窮," "*shengsheng bu xi* 生生不息" (both mean unceasing growth), and "*cheng ji cheng wu* 成己成物" (consummation of self and things) indicate.

(Mencius, 7A:4).<sup>19</sup> Xunzi tried to make people aware of the need to adjust their natural tendencies so that they might rectify themselves and become sages. His method puts more emphasis on the social or public dimension, and hence can be valuable in this regard. Since they both tend to promote human flourishing and both aim at the same ends of becoming, both were considered “warranted” enough to be included in Confucianism.

For Plantinga, proper function of the cognitive faculty means that the faculty does not malfunction. Indeed, if an insane person randomly comes up with Einstein’s theory of relativity, it should not be considered warranted knowledge. But the condition itself does not provide us any clue to determine whether or not there is such a cognitive faculty, much less whether it is functioning properly. The *sensus divinitatis* in the A/C model suggests that there is such a faculty, but, to borrow an expression from Gilbert Ryle, it seems more like a “ghost in the machine”, created to account for the function. Even though our notions of “mind” and “heart” can also be said to be “ghosts,” it is troubling to fabricate an *ad hoc* faculty simply to account for one specific kind of perception, as it opens the door for adding an infinite number of faculties for each particular perception. Confucians would prefer to use the term *xin* 心 (heart-mind) for our cognitive abilities in general. The word does not even make a sharp separation of thinking, feeling, and willing. The proper function of the heart-mind is simply stated as *cheng* 誠 (sincerity/reality),<sup>20</sup> or as Confucius puts it (in his response to Zaiwo’s question about mourning), *xinan* 心安 (heart-mind at ease), or as Aristotle would put it, *aletheutikos* (truthfulness) (see An, 21). This would shift the matter from questioning whether a faculty is functioning in the way that it is supposed to function, as intended by a transcendental designer, to the question of whether humans (whether we are designed, created, or products of nature) are “true to ourselves.” The latter is a question not easy to answer, but more addressable in human life than the former (the Plantingan one), and, when it is taken as a *gongfu* instruction, more conducive in leading people to recognize their own responsibility for manifesting their own virtues than passively waiting for God’s mercy to let us have some blessed instigations.

Finally with regard to a congenial environment, Plantinga’s condition is again a stipulation required for the application of his notion of warrant than a way of judging whether a given environment is suitably congenial. But the way we know that a human lung is not supposed to breathe under water is by observing whether it does breathe under water, instead of presupposing that since it is not supposed to do so, hence the breathe does not count as warranted. Similarly, the only way to go beyond giving a formal stipulation to verifying the actual satisfaction of this

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<sup>19</sup> I am using A.C. Graham’s translation (Graham, 127). The reason that I use this one rather than other more popular ones is explained in Ni, 1996.

<sup>20</sup> See Yanming An’s book *The Idea of Cheng (Sincerity/Reality) in the History of Chinese Philosophy* for a comprehensive study of the term.

condition in any particular case would be to see if an environment is conducive to generating the pertinent belief.

Confucians would instead make their recommendations of congenial environment for their knowledge of *tian* on the basis of their recognition of the ends of becoming and their practical knowledge about what kind of environments tend to be suitable for leading toward the ends. An important aspect of the enviroing condition for the Confucian recommendation, as many Confucian scholars have pointed out, is social/communal interaction and involvement. “A person whose world was the golden age of the Chou dynasty would, by virtue of the enviroing conditions which constitute him, have immediate access to a higher quality of *chih* [*zhi* 知, typically translated as knowing or knowledge] than someone living in the chaos of the Warring States period or on the barbarian frontier” (Ames 1991, 237). “The *Great Learning* makes it quite clear that one cannot know the reality of the ultimate and the total without participating in worldly affairs” (Cheng, 466). Not only is the recommendation of the enviroing condition important for reaching the knowledge or belief, it is also crucial for one’s spiritual self-cultivation in general (Rosemont 2003, 192).

Since a person in the Confucian tradition is always conceived of as a center of relationships, the more one penetrates into one’s inner self, the more one will be capable of realizing the true nature of one’s human-relatedness. Accordingly, “self-watchfulness when alone,” as a spiritual cultivation, far from being a quest for the idiosyncrasy of an atomized individual, is intended to reach levels of that reality which underlies common humanity. (Tu 1989, 27)

All these statements point toward the importance of enviroing conditions, not as a formal condition for warrant, but as practical recommendations or *gongfu* instructions.

Based on these observations and analysis, we may turn Plantinga’s definition of warrant (“*X* is warranted only if...”) to a Confucian recommendation of how to attain warranted beliefs (“*X* can be warranted if ...”):

A belief of the ultimate (*tian*, ends of becoming, the way or *dao*) can be warranted for an agent if the belief is produced or obtained in a suitably congenial environment (e.g. social/communal interactions) by the cognitive faculty that is functioning properly (being sincere or true to one self) in accordance with an end of becoming that will lead the agent to ease of the heart-mind and determination in pursuing and promoting human and world flourishing.

The difference between the modified Plantingan formulation and the previously stated Reidian formulation is that the latter offers the criteria for judging whether a belief is warranted or not, whereas the former offers practical recommendations for getting warranted beliefs.



## EXCLUSIVISM OR PLURALISM

Given the Confucian revision of the Reidian and the Plantingan accounts of warrant, we can say that Confucian beliefs about Heaven can be warranted. Could the Confucian be wrong? Of course. The Confucians could be wrong both in the sense of failing to recognize an external ultimate reality, such as the existence of God, and in the sense of failing to identify and cultivate the right kind of dispositions that will really be good or good enough for human flourishing.

First, it may well turn out to be the case that Christians are correct in believing that there is a God, and Confucians, even though they never denied the possibility of God, will be punished for failing to believe in Him. Pascal's wager addresses exactly this kind of concern: Either there is a God or there is none. If there is no God, it does not hurt to believe in God; but if there is, not believing in God could get one into deep trouble. It is therefore better, or more rational to believe in God.<sup>21</sup> But as we quoted before, Confucius would say that it would not be too late to know what is the case after we die. I guess the reasoning behind this attitude is this: If there is really an omni-benevolent God, God will reward those who live a moral life for the sake of being right more than for the sake of getting the reward. A good father is one who wishes the best well-being of his children, and would feel honored if his children lived honorably. He would not punish his children simply because they failed to recognize him, given that he did not clearly reveal himself to them as their father. If God unfairly punishes the Confucian regardless of how decent a human life she lived and how much contribution she made for making the world a better place, then the Confucian would say: "I have conducted my life according to my best conscience dictates, and if this is still wrong according to you, if you take believing in you or not to be more important than living a moral life, then I

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<sup>21</sup> William James' "The Will to believe" follows a similar pattern of reasoning, though he criticizes Pascal for being too intellectualistic, and for failing to take emotion into consideration. Socrates also suggests a pragmatic approach when he says that, inasmuch as the soul is shown to be immortal, a man should think of a purer world after death as a reward for his wisdom and virtue in this life. "That this is so seems to me proper and worthy of the risk of believing; for the risk is noble" (Plato's *Phaedo* 114d. See Plato, 518). But Pascalian argument for the rationality of believing in God is subject to numerous strong objections such as that the Pascalian could still get in trouble if it turned out that there is no God; instead there is a powerful evil demon who will punish anyone who believed in God, or that there is a God, but because the belief had no heart, only utilitarian self-concern, God still punishes the person. There are discussions of these and other objections to Pascal's wager, and of how to properly interpret the wager (See, for instance, Jeff Jordan's *Gambling on God, Essays on Pascal's Wager*, Rowman & Littlefield, 1994). Since the purpose of this paper is to clarify the Confucian position in relation to Plantinga's, I will not get into the controversy about the Wager.

do not regret having lived the life as I did.” There is no dependence on luck, nor on need for any warrant contingent on anything beyond the agent herself. “The wealth and position gained through inappropriate means are to me like floating clouds” (7:16), says Confucius. Mencius expresses the same attitude:

Life is what I want; dutifulness is also what I want. If I cannot have both, I would rather take dutifulness than life. On the one hand, though life is what I want, there is something I want more than life. That is why I do not cling to life at all costs. On the other hand, though death is what I loathe, there is something I loathe more than death. That is why there are troubles I do not avoid. (Mencius, 6A:10)

Hence Confucius says, “It is the human being who is able to broaden the way (*dao* 道), not the way that broadens the human being” (15:29). The Confucian moral authority comes mainly from this source – on the one hand, it is the decree of Heaven internally sealed in our hearts, which, in Reid’s words, “by its own authority” dictates our assent. On the other hand it is a conscientious choice, a self-determined affirmation, and a recommendation, which originates from within, and, therefore, is capable of becoming what Kant calls “categorical imperative.”

Both Plantinga and the Confucian have confidence in their respective religious commitments. But what accompanies the confidence is different. The former bases the confidence on an external factor, i.e. whether or not there is a personal God, and if it turns out that there is no God, or that there is a different kind of deity, the confidence will disappear. The latter, however, bases her confidence in her own internal choice and decision, and will, therefore, not change with this kind of external facts even if it means to eventually face an unjust but all-mighty deity.

With regard to the second sense of being wrong, namely choosing wrong values and wrong kind of dispositions to cultivate and live with, the Confucian would say that this is a risk that everyone faces. The realization of this liability and that human conduct can, in turn, affect the will of Heaven and millions of people’s lives, says the contemporary Confucian Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, is the root of the whole Chinese philosophical tradition. Greek culture started from a sense of curiosity, a motivation to know the natural world. For the Greeks, knowing was a leisurely activity for the sake of knowing itself. Rationality was considered the defining feature of a human being, and the love of wisdom or contemplation was taken to be the source of happiness. These characteristics of the Greek culture resulted in the development of metaphysics, science, and manipulative technological powers. To the contrary, the entire Chinese traditional culture that took its basic shape during the Zhou dynasty is based on *youhuan yishi* 憂患意識 – a sense of anxiety, which is a key linkage that runs all the way through Confucius, Mencius, Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi, Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism, and even Sinicized Buddhism.

The biggest difference between the sense of anxiety and the sense of dread and despair is that the sense of anxiety originates from a person's

vision obtained through deep thinking and reflection about good fortune and bad fortune, success and failure. The vision entails the discovery of a close interdependence between these fortunes and the person's own conduct and his responsibility for his conduct. Anxiety is the psychological state of a person when his feeling of responsibility urges him to overcome certain difficulties, and he has not got through them yet.... In a religious atmosphere centered on faith, a person relies on faith for salvation. He hands all the responsibilities to God, and will therefore have no anxiety. His confidence is his trust in God. Only when one takes over the responsibility oneself will one have a sense of anxiety. This sense of anxiety entails a strong will and a spirit of self-reliance. (Xu 1984, 20-22)

A result of the sense of anxiety is the notion of *jing* 敬 – reverence, which is, says Zhu Xi, to “have something to be cautious about and afraid of, and dare not to behave without discipline 有所畏謹，不敢放縱” (Zhu Xi, vol. 12, p. 20). *Jing* is different from religious piety in that:

Religious piety is a state of the mind when one dissolves one's own subjectivity and throws oneself entirely in front of God, and takes refuge thoroughly in God. The reverence of the early Zhou is a humanitarian spirit. The spirit collects itself from relaxation to concentration; it dissolves bodily desires in front of one's own [moral] responsibility, and manifests the rationality and autonomy of the subject. (Xu 1984, 22)

Because of this primary motivation, all Confucian teachings are centered on two inseparable aims – the cultivation of oneself and the manifestation of virtue to affect the world – both are about real life, about value, with no purely theoretical interest in obtaining objective knowledge about the natural world (Xu, 1952).

The point was further elaborated by Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, another 20<sup>th</sup> century Confucian. “The sense of anxiety,” says Mou, “may quite well be used to contrast with the Christian idea of the sense of guilt in original sin and the Buddhist idea of suffering and impermanence.” For Christians, “original sin is a deep abyss of fear, the shore of the abyss is salvation, and the refuge of the salvation is Heaven, to be close to God. Heaven is the final refuge originated from the Christian idea of original sin.” For Buddhists, “the idea of suffering can be seen from the Four Noble Truths. ...Sufferings caused by impermanence and frustrations caused by craving form an abyss of suffering. Its salvation...is to take refuge in the tranquil realm of Nirvana.” The Chinese sense of anxiety is different:

It was not generated from original sin or the suffering of human life. It originated from a positive moral conscience, an anxiety over not having one's moral quality cultivated

and not having learned. It is a sense of responsibility. What it led to were ideas such as reverence, the respect for morality, the manifestation of moral character, and the Decree of Heaven. (Mou, 13)

In Confucianism, the sense of *jing* and the confidence of one's own beliefs about *tian* derived from one's own cultivation and experience are in a critical tension. Confucius himself also had difficult times when he doubted whether Heaven was on his side or not.<sup>22</sup> Yet at the same time, he is known as “a man who does what he knows to be impossible” (14/38). In some cases he displays enormous courage and confidence over difficult situations. It was after the age of fifty – the age that he came to know the Decree of Heaven – that Confucius made the following remarks, when he encountered two personal dangers. One was from a man named Huan Tui in the state of Song who tried to kill him by felling a tree, and the other was from the people of Kuang, who attacked him, for they thought that he was an enemy whom Confucius resembled in appearance:

*Tian* has bestowed virtue in me. What can Huan Tui do to me? (7:23)

Since the death of King Wen, does not the heritage of culture (*wen* 文) reside here in us? If *tian* were going to destroy this culture, we latecomers would not have had access to it. But now given that *tian* has not destroyed the culture, what can the people of Kuang do to me? (9:5)<sup>23</sup>

The confidence manifested in these sayings is clearly derived from the belief that he embodied the virtue or the culture that King Wen used to represent, which was believed to be the Decree of Heaven that enabled King Wen to overthrow the Shang Dynasty. Unmistakably there was a confidence in the power of the Decree of Heaven by which he believed that virtue was going to prevail. This confidence was not a reliance on an external deity. It

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<sup>22</sup> “When Yan Hui died, the Master cried, “Oh my! *Tian* is the ruin of me! *Tian* is the ruin of me!” (11:9). “The Master said, “The auspicious phoenix does not appear; the Yellow river does not yield up its magical chart. All is lost with me!” (9.9).

<sup>23</sup> My own translation. The standard translation of the last sentence is “If *tian* is not going to destroy this culture,” or “if it is the will of Heaven that this culture should not perish,” what can the people of Kuang do to me? (See Ames and Rosemont, 127 and W. T. Chan, 35) This might be a misinterpretation, for the word “*wei* 未” typically means “not yet” rather than “not going to” or “should not.” Because it is “not yet,” it is still embodied in Confucius, and therefore the confidence.

was in the power of the virtue itself which he embodied. Xu Fuguan's comments are again appropriate:

According to traditional [Shang Dynasty Chinese] religious beliefs, Heaven issues commands to humans from without, from above, and humans, as the subjects of their own life, are in a passive and inactive state. Yet to Confucius, Heaven shows up in one's own nature, and the requirements from Heaven become the requirements of the nature of the subject himself. (Xu, 1984, 98-9)

Because of this, Confucians believe that a person can form a trinity with Heaven and Earth as a co-creator of the universe. The imperatives that come out of one's own cultivated nature or disposition can be much more determinate than what other normal human dispositions can generate. A person cannot possibly have the same confidence and determination in wanting to steal something from others:

To understand how a Confucian can manage the tension between the sense of *jing* and their confidence, we may turn to a brief comparative examination of Plantinga's and Confucian attitudes about "religious exclusivism." Plantinga does not deny that other religious beliefs may also have warrant. According to Plantinga, there is nothing irrational about religious exclusivism *per se*. An exclusivist, in Plantinga's definition, is one who continues to believe (i.e. take to be true) what she has all along believed, in spite of her full awareness of and reflections about other faiths and the adherents' intelligence, moral excellence, spiritual insight, etc., and consequently taking to be false any beliefs, religious or otherwise, that are incompatible with hers (Plantinga 2000, 440).

I think the Confucian would agree with Plantinga that it is not irrational to continue to maintain one's own beliefs when facing contesting faiths. Our world is threatened no less by the lack of definiteness than by the lack of openness. The "politically correct" movement has forced many to respect otherness, but it has also generated a false sense of equality and fairness, as if all beliefs, value systems, and religions have to be taken as equally good – that they are only different, but in no way better or worse than one another. This is as naive as mistaking the political right of maintaining a wrong idea (such as  $1+1=3$ ) as the correctness of the idea itself. This relativistic attitude can hardly even promote mutual understanding, because if there is no better or worse, why should one actively engage in dialogue with others?

But the trouble is that Plantinga allows very different positions to be included under this general name of “exclusivism.” The kind of religious exclusivism that we generally denounce is dogmatic insistence on one’s own absolute infallibility and dismissal of any other contesting beliefs. But dogmatic exclusivism apparently is not what Plantinga advocates. The exclusivism that Plantinga defends is actually a respectable position. Even though his overall tone sounds defensive, his articulation of the position reveals that he does not mean to suggest dogmatic insistence of religious beliefs. In facing contesting beliefs, he says, “You think the matter over more fully, imaginatively re-create and rehearse such situations, become more aware of just what is involved in such a situation, ...” (Plantinga 2000, 457). He acknowledges that the facts of religious pluralism could weaken one’s own religious belief, but need not necessarily go this way. “A fresh or heightened awareness of the facts of religious pluralism could bring about a reappraisal of one’s religious life, a reawakening, a new or renewed and deepened grasp and apprehension of” one’s own religious beliefs (Plantinga 2000, 457). Plantinga’s own works show that he does not turn blind eyes to challenges from non-Christians.

Therefore Confucians would suggest that Plantinga be careful in choosing his words. It is important to rectify names (*zhengming* 正名) because names are not merely labels attached to things without affecting the things they label. Names guide our way of treating what they name, or rather they *are* our ways of treating things. To put this kind of position together with simple dogmatic attitude under the umbrella of “religious exclusivism” is not good for making a distinction between the two. Confucians would further suggest that Plantinga should encourage more interfaith dialogue and critical reflections of one’s own spiritual traditions. This kind of dialogue may result in deepening one’s own faith, or it may take one in the opposite direction. But the latter could be all the better for the agent. Even though as Plantinga says, his kind of exclusivism is not irrational, is this non-dogmatic exclusivism the most rational position to hold? Is it more rational to be satisfied with “nonculpability,” with the assurance that “my beliefs are at least not irrational,” or to constantly try to learn from other traditions and improve oneself? Here the Confucians would support what Stephen Rowe calls “the open-definiteness” – a position that is willing to actively engage in dialogue with others on the basis of admitting one’s own fallibility, and is willing to change one’s own position if proven wrong or less insightful but remains definite before the beliefs are proven so (see Rowe, 6, 93). This is also what MacIntyre is saying in this statement:

[T]he only way to approach a point at which our own standpoint could be vindicated against some rival is to understand our own standpoint in a way that renders it from our own point of view as problematic as possible and therefore as maximally vulnerable as possible to defeat by that rival. We can only learn what intellectual and moral

resources our own standpoint, our own tradition of theoretical and practical inquiry possesses, as well as what intellectual and moral resources its rivals may possess, when we have understood our own point of view in a way that takes with full seriousness the possibility that we may in the end, as rational beings, have to abandon that point of view. This admission of fallibilism need not entail any present lack of certitude, but it is a condition of worthwhile conversation with equally certain antagonists. (MacIntyre, 121)

In this regard, actually Confucianism does not have a great historical record to be proud of. It is imperative for contemporary Confucians to shake off the self-righteous attitude accumulated in history when it was recognized by the Chinese imperial court as the official doctrine of the “Middle Kingdom,” and to learn from other traditions, including Christians, through active encounters. Though this self-righteous attitude has been significantly weakened in the last century, during which the May Fourth Movement (1919) and the “Cultural Revolution“ (1966-76) both took Confucianism as a major target of criticism, there is still a lack of interest and motivation among Confucian scholars to engage in active dialogue with other religious traditions.<sup>24</sup> But, on the other hand, classic Confucianism has little baggage to hold its contemporary practitioners back. As Tu Weiming likes to point out, within the Confucian tradition, Confucius is neither considered as the creator of Confucianism nor the symbol of highest level of perfection (See Tu et al., 108). A Confucian can readily criticize even Confucius himself. “Do I possess knowledge?” asks Confucius. “No, I do not,” he says. “If a rustic puts a question to me and my mind is a complete blank, I keep attacking the question from both ends until I have gotten everything out of it” (9:8). Being a model learner, Confucius tells his students that one must not hesitate in correcting oneself when in error (1:8). When the Master was told that he misjudged someone, he said, “I am fortunate. If I make a mistake, others are sure to inform me” (7:31). “When you err and yet not correct yourself, that is to err indeed” (15:30). All these teachings show that Confucius never presented himself as the infallible speaker for *tian* or a perfect being. The spirit of constant self-critique and self-improvement exemplified by Confucius, rarely seen among the major representatives of other religions, is understood by Confucianism not as self negation; to the contrary, it is considered the very practice of self-perfection.

As Henry Rosemont says, “each tradition can be renewed, and come to be seen as collaborative rather than competitive with the others, and thereby, as conducive to lessening the distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’”

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<sup>24</sup> For a quick browse of some Christian-Confucian encounters, see Lee, 1-37 and 399-433.

(Rosemont 2001, 34). May this paper, through both critique of Plantinga from a Confucian perspective and drawing inspirations from Plantinga to construct a Confucian account of warrant, bring the two sides a little closer.

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## CHAPTER IV

# KNOWLEDGE AS ADDICTION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

HANS-GEORG MOELLER

### I.

“All men by nature desire to know” – this is the famous first sentence of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. It is interesting to note how knowledge, at least since Aristotle, could be understood as a desire, a mental craving, so to speak. When understood as a desire, knowledge necessarily goes along with a certain absence or lack. Those who crave for knowledge are not yet fully in its possession, they are still on the search.

If humans pursue a cognitive desire that is not wholly fulfilled – since there is something yet unknown, something yet to be discovered – are they then not pitiful beings? Aristotle, obviously, did not draw this conclusion. Unlike bodily desires, the soul’s desire for knowledge could be regarded as a noble one, and rather than being a weakness, it could be an indicator of human dignity and power. The human striving for knowledge serves to distinguish this species from animals that do not, at least apparently, have such a desire. Aristotle praises the intellectual curiosity that was, for him, so significant for being human. Human rational desires can be distinguished from the merely physical drives of animals. Later humanist ideals accordingly view life as a process of personal transformation and growth through learning and the continuous acquiring of knowledge – or a process of *Bildung* to use a German term that stands for an enlightenment ideal of human cultivation. In the humanist tradition, the desire for knowledge was highly cherished – even if insatiable.

If one leaves the humanist tradition, however, one can encounter evaluations of knowledge that are quite different. One such instance is Daoist philosophy. Here, the permanent need that goes along with the desire for more and more knowledge is seen as substantially similar to the never ending state of want that goes along with physical cravings. Accordingly, the striving for knowledge was equated with incessant bodily desires – and could thus appear as a kind of addiction.

### II.

The negative attitude towards knowledge in Daoism is particularly obvious in the *Laozi* (or *Daodejing*). Chapter 3 says:

When the worthies are not promoted,  
then this will make the people not contending.  
When the goods that are difficult to obtain are not esteemed,  
then this will make the people not become robbers.  
When that which is desirable is not displayed,  
then this will make the people not disorderly.  
Therefore the ordering of the sage is such:  
He empties their hearts;  
he fills their bellies.  
He weakens their wishes;  
he strengthens their bones.

Persistently he makes the people have no knowledge and no desires.

It was Confucian doctrine to promote the worthy and wise in order to have the most virtuous people in the government. From a Daoist perspective such a practice will only lead to conflict among the people. They will develop a desire for political powers and thus there will be a competitive atmosphere and the social harmony will be poisoned. Similarly, the display of scarce luxury goods will unnecessarily and artificially create needs. Obviously, the Daoists cherished neither political competition nor an economy based on demand. Politically and economically, what was envisioned was a state of contentment rather than one of contention. The chapter advises the sage ruler, on the one hand, to provide for basic needs, particularly for sufficient food, and, at the other hand, to prevent any kind of craving for more than is needed. Satiation and satisfaction are reached when a mindset of yearning is avoided. If such a mindset cannot be avoided, this will lead to a state of addiction and strife. The people's desire for consumption would be awakened and there would be a permanent struggle among all.

Interestingly enough, the yearning that the Daoist sage ruler is supposed to prevent explicitly includes the desire for intellectual "properties" such as knowledge. Addiction is not limited to material goods and social power; it also extends to the strife for knowledge. Just as material indulgence may lead to a state of a continuous want for more and better goods, intellectual indulgence might create a hunger for more information. Peace of mind among the people – and a peaceful society – can only be attained if the arising of both physical and mental yearnings is quelled.

In a similar vein, chapter 57 states:

If the people have many sharp tools,  
the state and the families will increasingly be in disorder.  
If men have a lot of knowledge and sophistication,  
there will increasingly appear weird things.

Very much opposed to our “post-enlightenment“ vision of the informed citizen, the spread of knowledge among people was not seen as socially beneficial by the early Daoists. In a simple, agrarian life, what counted was the stability and peacefulness of society. People were supposed to spend their days performing their respective tasks and not to be encouraged to introduce novelties. The *Laozi* promotes an ancient Chinese version of a “Luddite” position. From its perspective, innovations produce more social harm than practical benefit. An increase in knowledge and sophistication will lead only to more discontent and friction. It will make people cunning and scheming and depart from natural simplicity. Chapter 18 thus warns:

When knowledge and smartness come out,  
then there is great falsity.

And chapter 19 continues:

Abandon sageliness and discard knowledge,  
and the people will benefit by a hundredfold.

Chapter 71 summarizes this negative attitude towards knowledge:

To know not-knowing –  
this is the highest.  
To not know not-knowing  
this is a blemish.

Still, if one reads these lines carefully, one discovers a paradox – and the use of paradoxes is nothing uncommon in Daoism and particularly not in the *Laozi*. Chapter 71 explicitly advises to *know* not-knowing. So, after all, there seems to be at least one thing one is supposed to know, there remains one kind of negative knowledge that the sage, or, in the political context of the *Laozi*, the sage ruler is supposed to acquire. Similarly ambiguous is chapter 65:

Those who in antiquity practiced the Dao  
did not do this by enlightening the people,  
but by keeping them dull.

Well, when people are difficult to govern  
the reason is that they are knowing.

Thus:

To master (know) the state by making it knowledgeable  
is to commit a crime on the state.

To master (know) the state by making it non-knowledgable  
is a virtue to the state.

Who constantly masters (knows) these two  
 also finds the pattern.  
 To constantly master (know) the found pattern,  
 this is called: dark virtue.

On the one hand, it is clear that the sage ruler's duty is to "keep people dull," to prevent them, to their own benefit, from becoming burdened with the insatiable desire for knowledge. But this technique of government is something that the sage himself has to *know* or to *master* – and the Chinese word for these two English terms is the same, namely *zhi*. The sage "masters" (*zhi*) the art of not-knowing (*bu zhi*). The ambiguous semantics of the word *zhi* in ancient Chinese has its parallel in modern English and in modern German. Ludwig Wittgenstein has remarked in his *Philosophical Investigations* (150) – which, of course, was originally written in German:

The grammar of the word "to know" (wissen) is obviously closely related to the grammar of the words "can" (können) and "to be able to;" (imstande sein) but also closely related to that of the word "to understand." (verstehen) (To "master" ("beherrschen") a technique.)

To know something well can mean to master something perfectly. Sometimes we use the word "to know" in the sense of to know *how* rather than to know *that*. That kind of – less intellectual and more practical – knowing seems to be highly appreciated in the *Laozi*. The sage ruler keeps the people non-knowing, and he remains so himself – but this not-knowing is at the same time a perfect mastery of the art of government. The sage ruler masters the art of not-knowing and thereby keeps the state in order. In this way, the paradoxical verses of chapter 47 make sense:

Not to go out of the door –  
 to know the world  
 Not to look out of the window –  
 to know the Dao of heaven.  
 The further one goes out,  
 the less one will know.  
 Therefore the sage  
 knows without going,  
 names without seeing,  
 completes without acting.

The sage ruler practices an abstinence of knowing-that and thereby, paradoxically enough, manages to reach the maximum in knowing-how. As in many instances, this paradoxical logic may be explained with the help of an illustration that is found several times in the *Laozi*. The sage (ruler) is

sometimes (for instance in chapters 55 and 10) compared with an infant. An infant has yet practically no knowing-that knowledge at all, but it has, from a Daoist point of view, perfect knowing-how knowledge. It lives without the expenditure of energy and “instinctively” knows what to do to survive. It eats and digests, it breathes and sleeps, etc. Without any reflection and without being taught, the infant does what needs to be done and inflicts no harm on itself or on others. A similar state of perfect mastery without knowledge is envisioned for the Daoist sage. Chapter 81 points out:

The one who knows  
is not erudite.  
The one who is erudite  
does not know.

The Daoist sage knows like an infant, or like an animal, in a very non-Aristotelian way. The sage does not venture out on a never-ending journey of intellectual discoveries, but remains at his place and masters the art of intellectual reduction – for the sake of perfecting his natural abilities and instincts. He prevents “positive” knowledge from interfering with what he can do “self-so” (*ziran*). Similarly, it is believed, the people in his state, the farming subjects, will not develop a desire for knowledge and will thus “instinctively” do what is right and what is in accord with the yearly cycle of the growth of their agricultural products. If one refrains from the seductions of knowledge, one will be able to act in perfect harmony with what is naturally so. More knowledge only leads to more interference, to more “artificial” infringements on what is natural.

The negative/positive knowledge of the Daoist sage, his mastery of not-knowing, is described in more concrete terms in a number of chapters. Chapter 55 states that he knows harmony and constancy, chapter 43 states that he knows the benefits of non-acting, and, perhaps most importantly, chapters 32, 33, and 44 state that he knows when to stop (*zhi zhi*) and when it is enough (*zhi zu*). It is particularly this last kind of “instinctive” knowledge that contrasts squarely with the Aristotelian view of the incessant human quest for knowledge. The non-addicted person “knows when to stop” and “knows when it is enough.” The Daoist knowledge is a mastery of satisfaction. It prevents the insatiable desire for knowledge from emerging and thus creates a condition of permanent and perfect contentment and instinctive mastery and knowing-how.

### III.

Switching from ancient Daoism to our postmodern times, it can be said, from the perspective of social systems theory,<sup>1</sup> that the production of

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<sup>1</sup> I am following here Niklas Luhmann’s version of social systems theory, particularly his two books *Die Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt/Main:

knowledge is to a great extent performed by two different social systems, namely the sciences and the mass media. As opposed to the sciences, the mass media do not create specialized knowledge that is only known by a group of experts. The mass media create knowledge that is virtually known by all – and scientific knowledge has to be transformed into mass media knowledge to become widespread. When such terms as the “ozone layer” or “genetic engineering” become familiar, this is not because people have now begun to read scientific articles in great numbers: rather, because topics in which these terms play an important role have become mass media material so that they appear in newspapers, on television, in popular books, in films, and on websites. That all of us have some idea of what genetic engineering and the ozone layer are is not due to any scientific familiarity with these terms, but to our consumption of mass media communication about them.

The knowledge that the mass media create is quite different from the knowledge created in the sciences. Scientific knowledge is in-depth knowledge, and in the sciences it is subject to continuous scrutiny. The sciences, particularly the natural sciences, consist largely of, to use Thomas Kuhn’s term, “mop-up operations”, in which scientific knowledge is proven to be right or wrong – or, more precisely, in which its way of being right or wrong is modified.<sup>2</sup> “Normal science“ consists in conducting experiments and publishing articles that either prove or disprove a certain hypothesis and add some more details to what is already known to be the case or not to be the case. The basic code of the science system is, therefore, correct/false or right/wrong.

This is not so in the mass media. The mass media do not waste time with such considerations, they do not conduct research in the strict sense. They may *report* on research that is being done, but they do not engage in scientific research themselves. As just said, they literally do not have the time to do this. What the mass media do, with respect to scientific knowledge, is basically to transform it into a different kind of knowledge and into a different code. The mass media do not and cannot do research on the ozone layer or on genetic engineering, but they transform the scientific truths and falsities into *information*. Information, if compared to scientific truths or falsities, just gives the facts – without an in-depth explanation. We know that the ozone layer exists, but we do not really know what it exactly is; and we know that the genetic code exists, but we do not know what it really consists of. This, however, is not to say that the mass media merely present scientific knowledge in a shallow or superficial way, nor do they restrict themselves to a mere representation of scientific facts. In order to transform scientific truths into information, the mass media have to add

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Suhrkamp, 1990) and *The Reality of the Mass Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000)

<sup>2</sup> I am following here Thomas Kuhn’s theory of the evolution of the sciences as depicted in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University press, 1962)

elements that make the scientific facts *interesting*. It is not interesting that the ozone layer exists, but that it is *endangered*. It is not interesting that there is a genetic code, but that it can be *manipulated*. The scientific facts that occur in the mass media no longer resemble scientific facts in the science system, rather they resemble other news items or other entertainment topics. The code of the mass media is information/non-information and not truth/falsity. A fact has to be transformed into information in order to be communicated in the mass media system, and information goes along with what may be called a “spectacularization” or “narrativization” of facts. In the news, the information on the ozone layer is taken out of the context of the scientific discourse and is resettled into a story line within the news. We hear about who is trying to protect it and which country damages it even further: we hear about politicians and lawmakers who invest an interest in it, etc. Likewise, in the mass media genetic engineering can be integrated into the plot of a Hollywood movie or a best-selling novel. In the news, a film, or a novel, scientific knowledge is no longer scientific knowledge. It becomes information within a larger narrative and therefore changes its form. The ozone layer that appears as information in the news and the genetic engineering that appears as information in an entertainment programme fulfill a completely different communicational function here than in the scientific system.

Another crucial difference between scientific communication and mass media communication is their respective temporality. What is a fact in the science system usually stays a fact for an extended period of time. Even though the mopping-up operations modify the facts constantly, the basic facts, or rather, in Kuhnian terms, the paradigm, remains stable – otherwise we could not be trained in a science. If the paradigm would shift on a daily basis, nobody would be able to keep up with these changes, and there would be no community of scientists. Scientific discourse is based on the stability of at least some of its premises. When writing a scientific article or scientific books, one relies on a large number of facts that are accepted as scientific knowledge. A scientific book that would entirely consist of new knowledge would be unintelligible and could not connect to existing discourse. It would not fit into the paradigm and would therefore be hardly acceptable as science at all.

This is, again, not so with information. Once it is uttered, information becomes non-information and needs to be replaced with new information. This is a decisive difference between the scientific and the mass media code. The scientific code does not immediately transform one side of the code into the other. A scientific truth that is uttered does not become, by the very utterance, a falsity. When you report something as news, however, it immediately loses its “newness.” Today’s news can not repeat yesterday’s news; news always has to be new. Very obvious examples for this mechanism are weather reports or sports coverage. Yesterday’s weather cannot be reported – but it is noted down as an unchanging fact by the meteorologists for their statistics. Likewise, last

week's football matches normally cannot be shown this week again. Information is not "mopped-up" either. Once it is uttered it becomes *history*, i.e. the part of a story that has been told. Next week's football results do neither prove nor disprove this week's, they just continue the story. Unlike scientific facts, the information produced in the mass media is in constant need of renewal. This strange mechanism that transforms information into non-information by its very utterance results in a remarkable acceleration of time. We need new information on a steady basis. Once we have heard today's news, we need to hear tomorrow's, as well, to follow the story. The same is the case with entertainment and sports programmes. The process of knowing our world is thus considerably sped up. Or, as Niklas Luhmann puts it: "Fresh money and new information are two central motives of modern social dynamics."<sup>3</sup>

In pre-mass media societies, one could know the world by getting an education. This is no longer the case in the times of the mass media. The education system certainly provides us, for instance, with scientific knowledge that enables us to pursue a career, but in order to be aware of what goes on in society on a daily basis we rely on the mass media as our source of *information*. The education system provides us, among other things, with facts, but not with information in the specific sense outlined above. In contemporary society, the mass media have established a monopoly on the production of knowledge as information. We rely on the mass media to follow the stories that constitute the context of our life: the political stories and the war stories in the news, the stories of the films and the soap operas that everybody talks about, the unfolding of fashions and continuously new products that the advertisements familiarize us with, etc.

The "social dynamics" fuelled by the mass media is a dynamics of knowledge, a "virtual" dynamics, so to speak. Instead of relatively stable paradigms that we can settle in, the mass media make us part of an ongoing story that is in continuous need of being continued – and it is we who continue it. We are not only passive observers of the story, it is our story that is told, and the mass media are ours too. We are at the inside and outside at the same time. We take part in the elections that the media report on, we see our presidents in the news, the advertisements show us the beers we drink and the clothes we wear, the entertainment programmes are the products of our fancies, we see the stars that we identify with, etc. By observing the mass media and by taking in their information we do not merely *watch* a spectacle and a narrative, the spectacles and the narratives are our own. The knowledge they produce is our own knowledge, and we take part in the temporality of their structure; their speed is ours.

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<sup>3</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 21.



#### IV.

In the light of these developments in a mass media society, Aristotle's dictum takes on a new significance: "All men by nature desire to know." Once again, we can focus on the *desire* that Aristotle talks about. We all have a desire to know – to know the new film with our favorite actor, the new news with the latest coverage of the development of the political scandal, etc. And we have to have this desire because otherwise we lose contact with our reality, with the story of which we are an intrinsic part. The desire for information becomes as socially essential as the intake of new food is biologically essential. In this sense, the desire for knowledge has truly become our *nature*. In an ironical sense, the mass media have turned us into passionate knowledge pursuers. Our desire for knowledge is, on principle, insatiable. If information turns into non-information once it is uttered, our desire for knowledge can never be completely fulfilled. There is always a sequel that we have not yet seen. The story – and it is our story – must go on.

Apologists of the new media praise this new kind of knowledge, and in their view the desire for it is noble; as for Aristotle it is what dignifies us as truly human. Through the mass media, and particularly through the new media, such as the internet, society makes us all part of the production of knowledge. We are not only passive observers. The news is news about our governments, the elections are those we take part in, the products are the products we purchase – they are displayed for our consumption. The mass media are the medium for the autopoietic self-reproduction of our knowledge. The information is for, by, and about us humans. What a great "democratic" achievement – the production of knowledge has finally become common! And it needs our attention every day. In the daily renewal of information, we do not merely sit at the sidelines. It is us people who make the news and the shows. Instead of being an "objective" realm of facts disconnected from our daily life, information has become our life, and the desire for it is once more our human nature.

Under these circumstances, however, some may also ascribe new significance to the Daoist position on knowledge. An insatiable desire for knowledge may well be conceived as a dilemma. Once we establish the code information/non-information, we are trapped in a hamster's wheel. The movement of information is entirely ours – but it does not get us anywhere. Knowledge becomes all-pervasive and meaningless at the same time.

Seen from a Daoist perspective, the code information/non-information establishes a communicational craving that makes it impossible to arrive at a point of rest. Contemporary mass media society illustrates the Daoist point quite well: The production of knowledge results in a cycle of addiction. The more information we get, the more we need; the more knowledge we have, the more we lack. In a situation like this, a Daoist would suggest a minimization of knowledge and the quelling of the desire for information. Instead, one would aspire to arrive at a state of knowing or

mastering non-knowledge. The difficulty obviously involved in such an attempt may at least render understandable the ancient Daoist paradox mentioned above: To master or know non-knowledge is an arduous task that, indeed, takes great knowing-how and perhaps a sage to achieve.

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**PART II**

**INDIAN THOUGHT**



## CHAPTER V

# **ALETHIC KNOWLEDGE: THE BASIC FEATURES OF CLASSICAL INDIAN EPISTEMOLOGY, WITH SOME COMPARATIVE REMARKS ON THE CHINESE TRADITION<sup>1</sup>**

*CHAKRAVARTHI RAM-PRASAD*

Philosophical discussions across traditions in our times are carried out always with the West as the hub, with spokes of comparison radiating out to different non-Western systems. To a certain extent, this is unavoidable, since the global discourse of philosophy is permeated with the cultural, linguistic and institutional dominance of the 'West'. However, for a truly global, inter-traditional philosophy to emerge, we must seek to speak across traditions that are now simply thought of as non-Western, as lacking in Westernness. This essay is a small attempt to both be realistic about the presence of Western philosophy in global discourse and optimistic about the possibilities of other comparativist tasks. So, the very idea of defining a philosophical discipline as being about knowledge is derived from Western experience; but I hope that in what follows there will be some genuine understanding of the interesting contrasts between Indian and Chinese traditions. As much less – indeed, hardly anything – has been done on the comparison of these ancient civilizations, this essay will have to do some very basic ground-clearing rather than any technical analysis. I am also aware that the readership of this essay might start from expertise in Western philosophy; so you are asked to bear with me while I engage in some very simple delineation of the epistemological landscapes of classical India and China.

In a relatively trivial way, knowledge is at the heart of all philosophy, even when we conceive of philosophy much more broadly than the Greek 'love of wisdom'. All systematic thought about the large issues of the human condition after all rests on knowing something or wishing to know something about that condition. One key thought I wish to introduce

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<sup>1</sup> The key idea that Chinese thought is 'pragmatic' and concerns 'know-how' was explored originally and incisively by Chad Hansen, in Hansen, *C. A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Hansen was thinking primarily of the contrast with Western philosophy (although he also indicates the similarity of Indian and Western thought by sometimes using the term 'Indo-European' to characterize a putative common tradition between them, in contrast to Chinese philosophy). However, I have developed this insight in my own way, and Hansen should not be held responsible for the uses to which I have put it.

here is that it is useful to keep to a relatively undeveloped and intuitive notion of knowledge in the course of this comparative essay. To explore the precise definition of 'knowledge' is another task altogether.

There is one major distinction that can be made with regard to what constitutes knowledge, even intuitively considered: there is *knowledge that* things are such and such ('knowledge-that', or knowledge of things); and *knowledge how* one must act ('knowledge-how', or knowledge of what one must do).

The former conception of knowledge as knowledge of things usually includes knowledge that things are the way they are: regarding the human body or mind, physical objects, numbers, and so on. It is a matter of possessing information about what is the case (the statement of which is the truth), gained in a non-accidental and systematic manner (a child may keep saying 'cow!' at every animal she sees, but just because one of them is a cow, it does not mean that she knows *that* it is a cow). Such a conception requires an account of non-accidental and systematic methods of gaining knowledge. One also needs to identify and employ certain instruments or means of attaining knowledge (certain putative modes, like guessing or dreaming, will not do; but we will have to explain why not). We need to deal with the possibility that the claims we make may be mistaken, that our statements are mere errors; are some of our claims wrong or all of them wrong? Usually, knowledge of something, when expressible as knowledge that something is the case, is called propositional or discursive knowledge, indicating that such knowledge is expressed through language. However, Indian philosophy also entertains the possibility that there may be knowledge free of concepts and language. Hence, there is a class of knowledge of reality that is not expressed in terms of knowledge that reality is such and such. There is, in Indian thought, a general conception of knowledge of reality, much of which is discursive but some of which transcends language. Let us call all this very general conception *alethic knowledge*, from the Greek word *aletheia*, meaning 'truth', since this is knowledge of how things truly are (whether we can express that grasp in language or not).<sup>2</sup> The contrast is with knowledge-how described below, which is *pragmatic knowledge*.

We can, then, have another type of knowledge: of how to ride a bicycle, cook a meal, lead masterfully, counsel sensitively. This is knowledge of how to do something. It is a matter of possessing skill, an

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<sup>2</sup> Note here that there is neither an obvious weight placed on the role of belief as the bearer of putative knowledge, nor a requirement for justification as such. All that is involved in this very general notion is some sense of cognition being appropriately linked and co-variable with that which is cognized. I do not propose in this essay to deal in detail with the differences inherent in Indian and conventional Western ideas of 'knowledge that', because the comparisons I want to make here are larger ones, between Indian and Chinese thought, where even more fundamental differences are in play.

ability to act in a way appropriate to the situation. This knowledge-how has several components. We need to know how to act in a context and to have (or develop) the ability to act in that context. There is the issue of who expects what outcome, and which expectation is significant to the knowledgeable actor. Of course, one may act and yet not bring about an outcome – through not having the knowledge of how to act, not having the ability to act, or not knowing what outcome to direct action towards. (It should be noted that ‘know-how’ is used here differently from the colloquial English sense, which refers to technology. The latter, from the Greek *techne*, concerns knowledge of how to do something, which requires knowledge that things work in a certain way. The ordinary use, as in ‘Japanese know-how’ referring to, say, automobile technology, contains within it the implication of knowledge that pistons, fluids, circuits, and so on, work in certain ways. *Techne* refers to knowledge-how to do something that requires knowledge-that that thing works in certain ways. This usage is quite different from the ‘purely’ pragmatic sense in which ‘know-how’ is used in this chapter.) Pragmatic knowledge tends to concentrate on the variety of things for which we actually have the knowledge-how, since there is no single, general theory to fit all the different knowledge-hows we have, except in so far as we have the very flexible notion of skill.

Any philosophical tradition will in some measure seek both knowledge-that and knowledge-how; and that is, indeed, the case with the Indian and Chinese traditions. But there are differences in emphasis and in their attitude to the need to produce *theories* of knowledge. To put the matter simply, Indian philosophy is primarily concerned with alethic knowledge; furthermore, it takes the development of theories of knowledge to be absolutely vital to the larger task of securing some ultimate end. It does recognize the need to have knowledge-how (and one school clearly values it above knowledge-that), but generally Indian thought gives pragmatic knowledge much less attention. Chinese philosophy clearly does recognize discursive knowledge-that, but apart from occasional mention, pays little or no attention to presenting any systematic account of it. Furthermore, while pragmatic knowledge is of vital importance to the Chinese tradition, the search to determine knowledge-how to do things excludes any motivation to develop general theories of knowledge. Despite these deep-rooted differences between the traditions, considered together they help us understand these very different conceptions of knowledge. Interestingly, in both traditions, there are challenges to the assumption that knowledge of any sort is possible; and these very challenges help us clarify what knowledge means.

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ALETHIC KNOWLEDGE IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY**

From very early in the history of Indian thought, alethic knowledge is central to the philosophical enterprise. This is closely tied to the

emergence of metaphysical views of reality. The Upanisads treat the world of experience as somehow not being all there is to reality; they view the world as an appearance that requires some deeper understanding to explain its features. That ultimate reality may reside in something more, or even other, than the world we experience is a crucial consideration in Indian thought, while the Chinese never even recognize it.

Now, if there is more to the world than we ordinarily see in it – if, that is, reality outstrips appearance – then it is important that we gain knowledge of it. The importance of the knowledge of reality (knowledge that things are *really* such and such) is believed to lie in the power it has to transform the knower in some way. The transformation may come through an accretion of the knower's capacity to influence and change the world of experience, or it may come through the attainment of an insight that frees the knower from the constraints imposed by that world. While the former notion is present in many strands of Indian culture, from mathematics through statecraft and certain religious practices, the philosophical schools in the main have the latter transformation in view. The Upanisads appear to seek knowledge in order to gain both power in and freedom from the world, but a decisive influence on Indian philosophical thought comes from the Buddha and Mahavira (the founder of Jainism), who both make liberation from the conditions of the world the purpose of their teachings.

Classical Indian schools, which come after these developments, tend to put greater or lesser emphasis on the capacity of knowledge to liberate. But more fundamentally, all schools share the conviction that knowledge that things are really such and such actually transforms the knower, altering consciousness and the very conditions of existence. Consequently, the development of a theory of knowledge becomes necessary. If knowledge is the crucial vehicle for the attainment of some ultimate end, then there must be utter clarity about its nature and the means of attaining it. Epistemology is thus vital to Indian philosophy.

Knowledge that things are (really) such and such is expressed discursively in language. So alethic knowledge is generally discursive knowledge. However, an obvious worry is that a great deal of discursive knowledge appears not to have transformative value, especially when it comes to matters of spiritual freedom. Knowledge that freedom from desire is freedom from suffering does not make us all Buddhas. There are two lines of response to this worry. One holds that knowledge must be accompanied by mental and moral virtues, such as tranquillity and compassion, in order for the alethic discovery to be truly transformative. The other is that certain truly transformative states, while alethic in that they convey truths about reality to the knower, are not discursive. They lie beyond the conceptual grasp of language; indeed, their status as liberating knowledge comes precisely from their lying beyond language.

While these responses by no means exhaust the debate, we may stop here by way of preliminary remarks about theories of knowledge in Indian philosophy. Finally, given that the theory of knowledge is the



common ground of Indian philosophy and that every school attempts to advance its own position on each aspect of the matter, it would be best if our exploration were organized around the issues, rather than around each school.

### **THE FRAMEWORK OF INDIAN EPISTEMOLOGY**

The consensus on the role and significance of alethic knowledge means that philosophers of otherwise widely divergent schools all relate to one another within a common framework of inquiry. Indeed, traditional Indian philosophy can be delineated by reference to this framework.

The first feature of this framework of inquiry is that knowledge is a matter of cognition (*jñāna*) that is veridical (*prama*) – that is, both true (somehow capturing the way things really are) and valid (arrived at non-accidentally). A cognition is, minimally, a particular state of awareness distinct from all others; and it can occur through different modes, such as seeing (or touching, tasting, hearing, smelling), thinking or remembering. There may even be extraordinary cognitions like clairvoyance or divine experience. Veridicality is the quality of not only being true but arrived at in some appropriate way (there is too much debate on veridicality to say more than this here). Veridicality naturally rules out error. I am in error when I claim that this is Kala, if it is her twin, Priya, that I see. But a veridical cognition also rules out truths arrived at accidentally. I may correctly say that I see Priya, but if I did not know that she had a twin and if I had previously seen one or the other without ever knowing that there were two of them, then I do not actually know that this is Priya (for I would claim to see her even if it was Kala facing me). In order to *know* that I see Priya, I must not only know that she is one of twins, but also be able to distinguish between her and Kala. The Nyaya term for veridical cognition is *avyabhicara*, literally ‘not wandering’; this can be translated technically as ‘non-deviating’ but has the literary meaning of ‘not promiscuous’. The veridical cognition is one that is ‘faithful’ to its object, never losing track of it, whereas non-veridical ones are promiscuous in their indiscriminate choice of objects.

Knowledge (*pramānya*) gives content, i.e., goes into the making of a veridical cognition. Technically, a cognition that is in error about the world is a non-veridical cognition (*aprama-jñāna*). However, some schools consider only veridical cognitions to be cognitions, and treat erroneous ones (those that are not appropriately connected with what they are supposed to be about) as ‘miscognitions’ (*ajñāna*).

The second feature of this framework is that veridicality – however it is defined by the different schools – is attained through particular ‘instruments’ or ‘means of knowledge’ (*pramāna*). In other words, for a cognition to count as knowledge, there must be some particular means that connects the cognition properly to what it is about. For knowledge that something is the case, the cognition must be appropriately tied to what is the

case, and only some means will count as appropriate. All schools agree that one such means is perception, or the deliverances of the various senses. Most also allow inference, which is reasoning through general principle from what is already known to a novel conclusion. Almost all the Hindu schools also accept testimony, or information conveyed through language by an authoritative source – in particular, the testimony of the sacred texts. Even when some means are agreed upon, they are defined differently by the various schools. Three other means of knowledge are accepted by some schools – comparison, non-apprehension and postulation – but we do not have the space here to treat them. For the moment, the point to note is that there is agreement that there are certain instruments which, functioning properly, yield knowledge.

Beyond this bare consensus on the framework, Indian philosophers agree on virtually nothing else; but this minimal agreement provides them with sufficient common ground to engage meaningfully with each other. Accepting that there is a need to have alethic knowledge, they develop different definitions of knowledge. Over 1500 years, the debate develops into a highly technical field, but we can give some of the well-known definitions in order to get a sense of the field.

The most widespread definition, followed by Nyaya, Mimamsa, the Jain schools, and the Vedanta schools outside Advaita, is the ‘correspondence’ theory: knowledge is the cognitive state that has the quality of being like its object. Of course, one must clarify what ‘like’ is: obviously, the cognition of an elephant cannot be 15 feet high and weigh three tons! But this definition is intuitively appealing, since it captures our sense that to know that this is an elephant, one must have come to possess an understanding *of* that elephant. This leads into what becomes the standard explanation of the correspondence theory: knowledge is the awareness of a thing *as* that thing. For the awareness of elephant A (male, asymmetrical tusks and ragged ear, 20 feet to the right of me) to be knowledge of it, I cannot make do with a memory of an elephant I saw yesterday, or the pink one that I hallucinated the other day, or even the other one, B, to one side of A. My awareness must be of A as it is. (There is a kink here in the definition. Obviously, my awareness of the elephant is not wholly of the elephant as it is, since I have no knowledge of, say, its stomach contents. The Nyaya school argues that there is a complex relationship between the parts and the whole of a thing, such that to see what is strictly the front surface of the elephant should count as knowledge of the elephant. Of course, this sensible notion opens up various questions, such as how much of a whole we must see before we can be said to know it.) But even this formulation is not precise enough to exclude other accidental situations that might count as knowledge. Suppose I am seeing an exact projection (a hologram, say) of the elephant, which is just in front of the elephant itself. In that case my awareness is of the elephant as it is, but it is only accidentally so and should not count as knowledge; but the definition seems to allow it. To counter this objection, the definition is

refined by Nyaya: knowledge is awareness born of an *experience* of the thing as it is. In the case of the projection, my experience was of the projection, not of the elephant behind it, and so should not count as knowledge.

Since most Indian Buddhist schools deny that the world is really as we experience it, they do not subscribe to the correspondence theory. However, they want to grant that, even if ultimately things are not as we normally experience them, we do nevertheless function in this world and are usually successful in our actions. We must therefore have some way of distinguishing between veridicality and error in ordinary experience. To do this, they offer a 'success' theory, in which knowledge is cognition that leads to successful practice. To the extent that my cognition is that it is an elephant when it is only a projection, I will be unsuccessful in my attempt to feed it. If I feed an elephant, then my cognition of it as an elephant (which is something to be fed) counts as knowledge. The Hindu and Jain schools, of course, agree that successful practice should count as a test for knowledge, but the Buddhist schools alone say that knowledge itself amounts to nothing but successful practice. This gives them room to say that eventually cognitions about the world fail to be knowledge when they fail to be successful in quenching our desires. The knowledge that ultimately remains is the knowledge of the Buddha – which, if we have it, is successful in taking us to *nirvana*.

Advaita Vedanta also wants to grant some provisional acceptance to our ordinary experience, while claiming that eventually, when the self realizes that it is no different from the universal consciousness (*brahman*), all of that seeming knowledge is set aside as misleading. (Not wrong – it worked before realization, after all – but misleading, because we thought that that was all there was, when it was not.) The Advaitins therefore negatively define knowledge through a 'fallibilist' theory: it is cognition that has not been invalidated but always could be, and hence is fallible. If a claim to know that something is the case has not been contradicted, then we should count it as knowledge. Of course, this sets up the situation for when all cognitions about the ordinary world are set aside upon realization of *brahman*-consciousness.

Each of these definitions faces objections, and each improves in an attempt to counter them, but further study will carry us into ever more analytic developments.

Let us now turn to how the significance and nature of knowledge is quite different in the Chinese traditions.

### **KNOW-HOW FROM KNOWING-THAT: THE CONFUCIAN PARADIGM**

Confucianism concentrates on the cultivation of a life of ritual precision, proper engagement with society, and the search for an ordered state. Its concerns exemplify the conception of knowledge as pragmatic – as

concerning what to do and the techniques to do it. Bearing in mind the Confucian use of *dao* as the guiding way constructed out of the creative interpretation of traditional practice, we see the pragmatic notion of knowledge evident when Confucius remarks that both knowing (*zhi*) and ignorance are determined by *dao*. This *zhi* is often used in the same way as another character *zhi*, which stands for the very general quality of wisdom. The *zhi* character includes a component radical for ‘mouth’, showing that there is a definite discursive aspect to it. But even speech for Confucius is more important as performance rather than as the statement of semantic truths.

Sometimes, *zhi* is translated as ‘realizing’. This is interesting, because ‘realization’ in Indian thought indicates a grasp that exceeds expression in language, an alethic knowing of truth that is not necessarily discursive. With Confucius, we must understand ‘realize’ in a performative rather than alethic way, as the bringing about of some state of affairs through action (realization as ‘making real’ rather than ‘grasping the real’). It is striking that for Confucius, even knowing people brings with it a guiding know-how. When his pupil, Fan Chi, asks him what knowledge is, Confucius replies that it is to know others. He explains that knowing others is to promote the straight over the crooked, so that one can make the crooked straight. Knowing someone is to *do* something: to make them ‘straight’ – to make them come to adhere to appropriate virtues if they fail to have them; and if they already possess such virtues, presumably to emulate them as models and thus ‘promote’ the straight. Confucius is not blind to the fact that there is knowledge-that people are such and such. He is not advocating acting upon any old belief about someone, but he is interested in teaching only about the pragmatic knowledge of how to go about conducting oneself with regard to such people.

For Confucius, the point in discussing knowledge is not to define it but to teach his pupils how to know *properly*. He then goes on to say that knowing is a matter of *treating* something as right (*shi*) or wrong (*fei*). Here, to ‘treat’ something in a certain way is to relate to it in a certain manner; this implies both how one thinks of it and how one acts towards it – the thinking/acting disjunction is absent in the holism of the Chinese tradition in general. Once again, Confucius clearly understands that knowledge refers to the way things are, but is more concerned with what to do about it.

His successor, Mencius, moves decisively away from any show of interest in discursive knowledge. For him, the activity of *shi/fei* is purely a matter of choosing a certain action (*shi*: this is right/this is it; or *fei*: this is wrong/this is not it) through the innate quality of the heart-mind (the physical heart, traditionally thought of the organ of both judgement and emotion). There need be no grasp of how things are in the world. The alethic conception of knowledge is completely absent.

The more nuanced position of Confucius serves to describe some later Confucians. Xunzi makes a powerful case for a conventionalist view of the right *dao*/way: it is what the sage-kings and the tradition have shown us

and what the rulers interpret them to be. Consequently, standards (*fa*) are those developed by the conventions of the elite, and the relevant knowledge is of how to act so as to attain and maintain order.

In terms of his main concerns, Xunzi is thoroughly pragmatic. But a wonderful paradox emerges: the more he asserts that what is required is know-how for socially ordered behaviour, the more he distinguishes it from, and gives it value over, knowing-that such and such is the case. People may believe that there is a reason that rain comes after a raindance or that an eclipse ends after a ritual to save the moon, but there are no such reasons; there are no hidden wonders of which we do not know. The rituals are cultural conventions, and knowing how to have them conducted is what the elite (the exemplary persons) possess and put into practice. Xunzi, here, is well aware of truths of the matter: he knows that there is no link between dance and rain or ritual and eclipse. Indeed, this discursive knowledge is evident in his elitist dismissal of the inability of the people to know about the world. But such grasp of alethic knowledge is meant only to emphasize pragmatic knowledge: the elite must know how to construct a culture in which the people are kept contented. Xunzi has to appeal to the way the world is, in order to say what must be done. There is clearly an awareness of alethic knowledge, but it is not theorized, for it is never the Confucian's aim to explore reality and its possible hidden structures. Not even a theory of pragmatic knowledge is worked out; rather, there is a filling in of the details of what such knowledge should amount to, what it will achieve, and how one should go about attaining it.

### **THEORY FOR PRACTICE: MOHISM AND KNOWLEDGE**

The followers of Mozi, the Mohists, are unique in Chinese philosophy in attempting systematic definitions of knowledge, which then play a role in the subsequent body of their work. The Mohists' views never gained acceptance, and whatever we find about knowledge in their writings is interesting in itself rather than for any wider impact on Chinese philosophy.

The Mohists have four constituents of knowledge, which do not seem to exclude either alethic or pragmatic conceptions of knowledge. The first is intelligence, the capacity by means of which one knows that one must know. The example is seeing something: upon seeing that something is the case, the Mohists claim, one knows that one knows something. While knowledge appears to be a skill – a capacity to do something – this notion does, nevertheless, seem to include an alethic aspect. The second constituent of knowledge is: 'thinking' (*lu*), which is seeking without necessarily finding. The apt example here is peering: we may ask whether peering should be analysed as the failure of the person to register how things are (a failure to know-that) or as the act of unsuccessfully doing a search (a failure of know-how).

The third constituent is contact (*jie*): having come across a thing, one is able to describe it. This has to be seen as a statement of discursive and alethic knowledge. The final constituent is fascinating in its visual impact as much as for its applicability to both conceptions of knowledge. Knowledge is clarity (*ming*), the Mohists say, adding the heart radical (*xin*) to the existing *zhi* character to produce *ming*. Mozi himself had taken clarity to reside in the ability to discriminate (*bian*) between what to treat as right/‘this is’ (*shi*) or wrong/‘not this’ (*fei*) when seeking what would give most benefit and cause least harm to people. Discrimination is an intellectual quality of knowing one thing from another, but it also suggests knowledge of how to sort out what to do from what not to do. The Mohists say that clarity is that by which one’s knowledge is made apparent through discourse (the use of language).

Perhaps it is best to see Mohism as briefly bringing together in China the two very different conceptions of knowledge, before this culturally atypical analysis disappeared from the scene for want of interest. The Mohist attention to explicit epistemology is also evident in their classification of the means and objects of knowledge. Coming to it, after reading about the *pramana* system in India, is to be struck by the extraordinary but missed parallels. The Mohists say that knowing is through hearing, explaining and personal experience. Hearing is receiving knowledge second-hand (that is, through testimony). An example of explaining is when one knows that a square will not rotate. This is clearly inferential reasoning (it would appear here to be established by reasoning alone, as in geometry, a topic of great interest to the Mohists). Finally, knowledge through experience is gained by having been a witness oneself, obviously through perceiving things. Although this classification is systematic, there is no further exploration of potential problems with and interpretations of each of these means; and that is, of course, a contrast with Indian philosophy.

There is also a listing of the objects of knowledge (where ‘objects’, like the Sanskrit *artha*, can mean both the things known and the purposes of knowing): names (what things are called), matters (things that are given names), relationship (the mating of name and matter) and acting (intention and performance). Without doubt, the Mohists conceive of knowledge as being a capability determined by matters (things and facts) of the world. While names are, indeed, conventional, they cannot avoid being fixed by the intrinsic nature (*gu*) of things. Storks cannot be classified with cows, for all that the meaning of ‘cow’ or even ‘cattle’ may be fixed by the social norms through which we liken a set of things to a name. Understanding the relationship between names and things, therefore, is a matter of both knowing how to use language and knowing the world. Finally, the fundamental Chinese preoccupation with pragmatic knowledge is clear: knowledge is a matter of having the right intention and the performative ability to act. Knowledge culminates in guiding action.

It is sensible, then, to take Mohism to adhere to the Chinese tradition of taking knowledge to be a guide through the world, even when it demonstrates a remarkable if subsequently neglected interest in systematic epistemology.

A particularly sharp way of coming to grips with how fundamentally different Indian and Chinese thought are – although, for that very reason, illuminating to be considered together – is to consider challenges to knowledge which, since ancient Greece, has been called scepticism in the West.

### **THE VARIETIES OF SCEPTICISM: CONTRASTING INDIAN STRATEGIES**

Scepticism determines the boundaries of knowledge. The strongest scepticism denies the possibility of knowledge altogether. In general, the stronger the scepticism, the more tightly it draws the boundaries of knowledge, thereby leaving fewer things that can be known. Weaker varieties of scepticism draw the boundaries more loosely, allowing more things that can be known. Seen that way, there is no one thing called scepticism, but a continuum of sceptical attitudes. Below we look at three positions that are thought of as sceptical, and examine what they imply for theories of knowledge.

Possibly the sceptical Indian thinker best known in world philosophy today is the founder of Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophy, Nagarjuna (we will view him in the light of his commentator Candrakirti). Like Zhuangzi in China, he remains endlessly interpretable. His position may be understood as claiming that we know – or more accurately that, if we follow him, we will come to know – that there is no knowledge. By knowledge, he means settled conclusions about the way the world is, arrived at through the means of knowledge (*pramana*). His immediate objective is to show that claims to know anything about the structure of reality fail, because every such claim actually leads to some unacceptable consequence (*prasanga*). He analyses claims that are important to anyone committed to *pramana*-based knowledge, identifies the core concepts involved, and offers refutations of them. Some of the important concepts involved are the theses of cause (the relationship between the nature of a thing and the effects of its functioning); proof (the relationship between a claim and the way it is established as true); perception (the relationship between a person's sense organ and the object that the person apprehends through that organ); movement (the relationship between the continuously shifting positions of an object across time); and desire (the relationship between the identification of something and a consequent set of feelings and thoughts directed to its acquisition).

In the case of each concept, Nagarjuna claims that we cannot actually depend upon that concept to attain knowledge. His general strategy is to present a problematic fourfold option or tetralemma (*catuskoti*) for any

concept that is supposed to give us knowledge about a relationship (and all the concepts above are expressed as relationships). A knowledge-yielding concept must relate (i) to itself, (ii) to something else, (iii) to itself and something else, or (iv) to neither. For each concept, he attempts to show that it fails to do any of these things. In the end, no concept that is used to gain knowledge has content. Nagarjuna concludes that the claim to know is invalid. In effect, he makes the claim that we can know that there is no knowledge. This looks to be self-contradictory (very clearly so in the extended example of his analysis of the concept of proof given below). How can we know that we cannot know? (How can we prove that there is no proof?) If we know that, we know something, so we do know. On the other hand, if we cannot know, then we cannot know anything, including that we cannot know. Either way, Nagarjuna's claim collapses. Let us get a sense of how he actually goes about getting out of this difficult position, and then we can see why he puts himself in it in the first place.

Nagarjuna's critique of proof speaks directly to the very possibility of knowledge. As with all his specific deconstructions of concepts, his attack on proof is demanding and really requires much more space than we can give it here. His basic argument is that proof for a claim to know something requires the proper use of the means of knowledge in relation to the thing to be known (I will use an obvious example to illustrate his very abstract argument: sight with regard to knowledge of a table). But to establish that one knows an object, one must first establish that that means of knowing work. The concept of *pramana* must relate to itself first; but does it? If a means of knowing (for example, seeing) is proven to work through another means of knowing (touching, or testimony that seeing works), there is regress, for the second means would itself require proof...and so on. Alternatively, without proof, the means of knowledge cannot be shown to relate to its supposed object. How can we claim to know that there is a table because we see it, if we cannot know that we are actually seeing (rather than, say, hallucinating) and if, furthermore, we do not first know that seeing is a proper means of knowing anything?

We cannot give up on the project of first establishing that the means of knowledge work, for then we will never know that we can know. Can the means of knowledge operate on themselves? For example, might we not see that we see, and thereby know that we know through seeing? Might the means establish themselves by relating to themselves first, before relating to an object to be known? Nagarjuna argues that we only prove that a means of knowledge works by first checking *independently* that it works. We should prove that seeing gives knowledge by checking against things that we already know are seen clearly (like an optician's chart). But this is hopeless, because how could those things be known to be seen clearly, except through the use of the means of knowledge – precisely those means of knowledge that are to be established in the first place? Nagarjuna sarcastically says this is like a father producing a son who himself produces the father. So, if a means cannot relate to itself or to another (the object) –



options (i) and (ii) of the tetralemma – neither can it relate to both (option (iii)). And if it relates to neither itself nor its object (option (iv)), it fails to provide knowledge.

It might be argued that Nagarjuna is asking for too much; it could be argued that it is sufficient for knowledge just for there to be *no disproof* of the means of knowledge. There is no need to prove them, just to work with them. We will see below how Sri Harsa, the Advaitin, uses this line of thought for his own ends. In any case, we must go back to our earlier question: is Nagarjuna not contradicting himself? Now, he has to make a claim, because he is a Buddhist, not just a sceptic. He wants to propagate the Buddha's teaching about attaining freedom from desire, not just argue against all comers merely for the sake of expressing doubt. He wants people to realize that they cannot make knowledge claims only so that he can show them the way of the Buddha. Consequently, he cannot help expressing himself in an apparently contradictory way. But is he really contradicting himself?

There is, indeed, a specific claim that Nagarjuna wants to make about knowledge-yielding concepts like proof and the rest: they are empty (*sunya*). He wants to say that while they appear to work, upon analysis they reveal themselves as incapable of doing so. It is here that the contradiction looms: Nagarjuna is saying that we know that we do not know; but then, the concept of emptiness of concepts will not be empty! But the Madhyamaka philosophers argue that this objection misunderstands what emptiness means. After all, emptiness itself can be subjected to the tetralemma (just as proof was subjected to disproof above). What that means is that emptiness itself is empty. This is a paradox, but a fruitful one. The knowledge that we cannot know is a certain sort of knowledge: it undercuts itself. Upon knowing that (as we will if we follow Nagarjuna properly, according to Madhyamaka), we will have exhausted all our epistemology. The whole illusion that we know that things are such and such, which drove our desire for things, will vanish. When we know that there is nothing to know, we will also know that there is nothing to desire. This is scepticism directed at transformation of awareness, if we are to believe Madhyamaka.

A much less problematic strategy is followed by Jayarasi, who is generally associated with the sceptical and materialist Lokayata school, the only system that does not believe in any state beyond this life. Jayarasi takes on various concepts in the *pramana* theory as they developed in the five centuries after Nagarjuna, and follows roughly the same strategy as the latter, albeit in a more detailed way. His conclusion, however, is more whole-heartedly sceptical: we cannot know that there is knowledge. He is perfectly willing to cast doubt on everything. He makes no claim about what we can know, merely showing that any claim to know is subject to doubt. We are even free to doubt whether his arguments work or not; that does not worry him. What he wants is to stop people from thinking that they can somehow establish clearly that there are certain truths to be known and that consequently there are certain things they must do. Now, if his arguments

are successful (and they certainly are searching), no certainty remains about knowledge, including knowledge that his own arguments are successful. But the difference between him and his knowledge-seeking opponents is that he is perfectly at ease with not knowing if he knows anything (including, possibly, whether his arguments work or not). It is sufficient for Jayarasi that his opponent is reduced to the state of uncertainty that he himself has arrived at.

Following the teachings of the Lokayata school, we must just reconcile ourselves to ignorance and live without the anxiety that comes with the ultimately fruitless search for knowledge. We must, as it were, return to an ordinary, unphilosophical life, taking things as they come and not trying to find any deeper meaning. Another name for the Lokayata school is the Carvaka, or the sensualist school. We can see why this is so: the implication of philosophical uncertainty is that one must stop asking questions and enjoy oneself, as there is nothing else to do. Philosophy is used to render philosophy redundant; the case for a life of ease is established with scrupulous analysis.

We may finally look at Sri Harsa, the Advaita dialectician, who is often seen as a sceptic. In a sense going back to Nagarjuna, he argues that no knowledge-claim can ever be conclusively proved. This failure of proof can happen in two different ways. Sometimes, each side to a competing claim turns out to have problems of its own, so neither wins out and the issue is inconclusive. At other times, both claims appear to be true to the facts, and one cannot rationally choose between them. The issue is, therefore, undecided. Sri Harsa sets out to subject a variety of issues – the nature of perception, the structure of inference, the general framework of knowledge, and so on – to this critique, but studying them will again take us deep into technical philosophical analysis. Our aim should be to see what his scepticism is about, or, indeed, whether he is a sceptic at all.

Sri Harsa's basic claim is a subtle mix of the sceptical and the anti-sceptical. He is sceptical in that he doubts whether knowledge claims can be established beyond any doubt. In this, he is akin to Nagarjuna. How can objects be known without knowing that the means of knowledge work, and how can *that* be known without either regress (to other means of knowledge, *ad infinitum*) or circular reference to supposedly known objects (resulting in what the Indians call the fault of mutual dependence: objects established through means and vice versa)? By subjecting various theories about knowledge and its means to criticism, he demonstrates scepticism over their ability to provide us with conclusive knowledge of the world. At the same time, he is anti-sceptical about a less rigorous grasp of the world. His opening argument is precisely that we can conduct the transactions of ordinary life (*vyavahara*) perfectly well – communicate, argue, undertake successful action – without conclusive proof that the means of knowledge provide us with knowledge. As he himself goes on to show, these means cannot be established; yet we carry on perfectly well doing all the things that are supposed to be possible only with conclusive knowledge. What

does this imply? Sri Harsa argues that we must acknowledge that it is indeterminate (*anirvacaniya*) as to whether there is knowledge of the world or not. There is no proof that there is knowledge; but there is no disproof either, since our ordinary lives appear to be based on knowledge. We must be content with the *assumption* that we have knowledge, but like all assumptions, it is provisional. Let us simply take knowledge to be an assumption of knowledge, and we will be able to function normally in this world, without the anxious burden of trying to establish that we have conclusive knowledge in the first place.

Sri Harsa argues that knowledge claims are perennially fallible because, as an Advaitin, he wants to say that eventually everything that we take for granted about ordinary experience is transcended in our attainment of *brahman* consciousness. He therefore wants to deny that knowledge is of the ultimate, without giving up on its ordinary workability.

Interestingly, the Nyaya philosophers who came after Sri Harsa accepted the weight of his criticisms, but they also came back with this defence of the means of knowledge: if the *pramanas* work in ordinary life, why deny that they provide knowledge? Why not simply redefine knowledge as that which we are supposed to know, so long as there is no disproof of our supposition? In short, they ask that we move from merely *assuming* knowledge (as Sri Harsa says we should) to *presuming* knowledge (so that we take ourselves to have non-conclusive knowledge of the world). This is because Nyaya believes that the world of ordinary experience is all the reality to be known. Where Sri Harsa would say that inconclusiveness points to the provisionality of knowledge before the realization of *brahman*, Nyaya, more sanguinely, would take it to indicate only that our knowledge of the world is subject to correction and improvement.

### **KNOW-HOW WITHOUT KNOWING-THAT? SCEPTICISM IN ZHUANGZI**

The Daoist philosopher, Zhuangzi, in appearing to question the possibility of knowledge, helps us get a clearer sense of what knowledge means in classical Chinese thought. He delights in undermining ordinary expectations, but this is to bring openness rather than doubt to his audience. The perfect example of joyful perversity is the celebrated butterfly dream. Zhuangzi says that he dreamt that he was a butterfly. Then he woke up. He asks: is this Zhuang, who dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly which is dreaming that it is Zhuang? He is not here trying to raise the hyperbolic doubt as to whether we know we are dreaming or not; he notes that there must be some difference between the butterfly and himself. Neither is he suggesting that there can be experience without objects. Rather, he is drawing on an immediately accessible example and using it to present an attractive alternative perspective. The idea of a butterfly's dream of being Zhuang suggests that there can be a very different perspective on the same situation (different, that is, from Zhuang's dream of being a butterfly). This

is not scepticism about the world, our senses or our knowledge, but an insistence that we cannot be sure what perspectives there are on any given situation. Best not to exclude other possible perspectives (like that of the butterfly), since we cannot adjudicate between them.

We will return to Zhuangzi's advocacy of a plurality of perspectives. But first, we must acknowledge that there is a way in which he does appear to be a sceptic, questioning whether knowledge is ever possible. The knowledge that he doubts is discursive, alethic knowledge, asserted through language. (The complex issue of non-discursive yet alethic knowledge that seems possible in Indian thought does not arise here.) He does not deny that language has its uses: talking is not like mere puffs of wind, he admits. Language has its uses in guidance and interaction. But when Confucians and Mohists move from living their way/*dao* to stating that they know that their way is right and other ways wrong, such speech obscures their *daos*. It cannot be decided which claim to knowing that a way is right is to be admitted.

The crucial consideration behind this sceptical conclusion is that what is claimed to be right is right only within the perspective of that *dao/way*. What is right is what is successful (*cheng*), but what counts as success varies from the *dao/way* from one school to another. Therefore, what counts as right will vary from one school's vision of the *dao/way* to another. Now, it may be the case that one person with one knowledge-claim will, through debate, convince another with a different claim to change his position. But that will only show that someone has been persuaded, not that they were wrong. The claim to know that one is right (*shi*) and another is wrong (*fei*) cannot be settled by the disputants alone. Yet if they go to someone else to have it settled, that will simply put the burden on that other person's claim to know-that a way is right...and so on. (Note here that Zhuangzi does not concede anything like the classical Indian presumption that winning a debate actually establishes something.)

Is Zhuangzi's argument self-defeating? Well, he is clearly not adopting the deeply sceptical stance – which, as we saw with Jayarasi in India, is not self-defeating – that we do not even know if we know anything. He is quite clearly claiming to know that there are specific problems with the claims of the Confucians and Mohists. Is he therefore claiming, more like Nagarjuna, to know that claims to know that something is right are never right? If so, what then of his own claim? Actually, he is saying something different, and it is not directly sceptical. He talks of a wise man and a master musician who sought to enlighten others. Their ways would have been successful (*cheng*) if others had been enlightened by them. But the wise man ended in the darkness of logical disputation, and nothing was left of the musician except the strings of his lute. This happened because both became bogged down in discursive teaching. Zhuangzi's claim is that conveying discursive knowledge is never successful; it always fails the task of getting people to act correctly (which he presupposes, in the typically pragmatic Chinese way, to be the proper purpose of conveying knowledge).

He is sceptical about the *practical success* of discursive knowledge rather than about knowledge itself. His position is not self-defeating, but it is not quite as radical as it may seem. By way of comparison, even the most cognition-oriented of Indian philosophers thought that discursive knowledge alone was insufficient for enlightened understanding; they all agreed that other virtues and skills must accompany it.

Zhuangzi does not deny that know-how is possible, since it was possession of it that made the wise man and the master musician originally approach perfection. Indeed, Zhuangzi's point here is the opposite of scepticism about knowledge: there is an infinite plurality of know-hows (knowledge of how to live *daos*). This pluralism towards *dao*/ways does contain two critical qualifications. First, the skills that he acknowledges demonstrate many of the ways of living *spontaneously*. Consequently, the elaborate rituals of Confucian ways and the heavy-handed calculations of Mohists are not equally valuable *daos*, since they lack spontaneity. Second, since claims to exclusivity always fail, to the extent that Confucians and Mohists each seek to establish their own way to the exclusion of others, they are bound to fail. There is undeniably a plurality of ways under heaven (*tian*); a plurality of *dao*/ways is natural and is not exclusive, although not all *dao*/ways are equally valuable.

Let us, however, press the question further of whether, in accepting an endless plurality of skilful know-hows revealing a plurality of *dao*/ways, Zhuangzi is not being amoral, relativistically denying that some ways are more valuable than others. If the skilled butcher is the epitome of the natural Daoist, cannot a serial killer be one as well? It is notable that Zhuangzi's models are all benign; but he does not argue for the moral superiority of some ways over others, except indirectly, when criticizing the Confucians and Mohists. This may be a philosophical failure, but it may also be a conscious and clever decision. After all, if he did start by saying that some ways were intrinsically or morally better than others, then he would self-contradictorily be indulging in claims to know that that is the case. So, if he does believe that people can be transformed to follow natural ways of living, then he can bring this about only by revealing his skill in his own *dao*/way; he can only *show* that there are some models of skill worth following and others not. This is how he can demonstrate that the artificiality of Confucianism and Mohism are not as valuable in living as is his. There is no scepticism about pragmatic knowledge here. Indeed, that is why he did do something: he wrote the book the way he did. Zhuangzi's *dao* was to write the *Zhuangzi*.

We can see that the deepest concerns of the Indian and Chinese thinkers are very different; and even the problems they define are different. Yet it has been possible to consider them together, and from our global perspective – so valuably created by an idiom derived from, but not determined by, Western philosophy – we have been able to see the complementary uses to which these different perspectives can be put. Indian scepticism sharpens our awareness of the need to maintain an alert and

questioning inquiry in the face of the highest and most sacred human goals. Chinese scepticism undermines some very powerful tendencies towards building social restrictions on inner human freedom. For all their historical distance from each other, they are both valuable lessons to us. But that is the general message behind considering the very idea and role of knowledge in these civilizational contexts.

This essay is very basic and introductory. It remains a task for the future to develop a genuine engagement between traditions, in which themes are identified and explored across different traditional milieux. The Moscow International Conferences have admirably undertaken this task, and one hopes that such efforts will bear fruit in the decades to come.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The main contents of this essay have been taken from C Ram-Prasad, *Eastern Philosophy* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 2005)

## CHAPTER VI

# THE STATUS OF THE VEDA IN THE TWO MĪMĀṂSĀS

MICHEL HULIN

In Brahmanism, has the question of the relationship between faith and knowledge (reason) the same meaning and the same significance as, for instance, it has in Christian thought? True, the terms to express it exist: on the one hand *śraddhā*, on the other one *jñāna* and its many derivatives and synonyms. But what is their exact content and in what context are they to be found? To answer these questions let us sift out data from two schools of thought which can be considered as the quintessence of brahmanic orthodoxy, since both introduce themselves as pure « exegesis » – *Mīmāṃsā* – of the Veda and that, unlike other schools – *Nyāya*, *Vaiśeṣika*, *Yoga* ... – they know nothing or comparatively little of a personal god tied to his faithful through a relationship of *bhakti*, that is of loving trust. These two doctrines are, properly speaking, the *Mīmāṃsā*, which investigates the Veda from the point of view of rite (*karman*), and the «second *Mīmāṃsā*», better known as the *Vedānta*, interested in the esoteric knowledge of the *Brahman*.

### MĪMĀṂSĀ AND RITE

Characteristic of the first *Mīmāṃsā* is its setting the authority or rather the normativity of the Veda as absolute and undebatable. It, then, could appear to be the very model of fideism. But it is not, at least for two reasons. On the one hand, although in the text of the Veda all knowledge can supposedly be found, at least, all the knowledge necessary to man, – its teaching is not considered as, in itself, obvious, and the *Mīmāṃsā* pretends to undertake building up a rational frame of reference to interpret the text of the Veda, hermeneutics for the Veda. On the other hand, the typical element of trust, present both in our Western notion of faith and in the Indian notion of *śraddhā* is here entirely lacking. The *Mīmāṃsā* does not need to trust the text of the Veda as it is confident to be able to restore its meaning directly and entirely. What is the ground for such a claim?

The answer is both simple and enigmatic: true, the Veda presents itself as a speech or, rather, as a Word – *śabda* - but it is the word of no one. The Veda has no author, not even a divine one. Now, the notion of trust, applied to any speech, is relevant only when there is a speaker: “Is he the true speaker? Do we hear him directly or, only, through intermediaries? Is he fallible or infallible? Could he want to mislead us?” But the sounds which, set together, compose the Veda, although carrying a meaning, are considered as impersonal and anonymous as the sougling of the wind or the

roaring of the sea. Besides, to maintain that the Veda has no author is more or less tantamount to saying that it is ageless: it has no beginning and no end, in short it is eternal. This tends to give it the status of a physical entity present in the cosmos just as the sky, the sun and the stars, but it is also meaningful and normative. How can such a strange concept – at least to our familiar intellectual criteria – come to life? An exhaustive answer to this question would require a detailed analysis of the Commentary of Shabara (not possible here) to the very first *sūtras* of the *Mīmāṃsā*, as well as of the Supercommentary – *Ślokavārttika* (further on SV) – of Kumārila Bhāṭṭa to these very passages. At least we can identify the main steps of their undertaking. Implicitly, it relies on different postulates, some of them being shared by all brahmanic philosophies and others found only in the *Mīmāṃsā*.

First assumption: knowledge has no proper shape. It does not build its object but only passively reflects it. Then, by definition, it is, always adequate. Its model is immediate, direct sense perception that “photographs” its object and cannot err except in a fortuitous way – because of a possible defect of the sense organ, or of the inopportune projection of memories on what is actually seen, etc. Therefrom a whole epistemology is born, which interprets all the other forms of knowledge considered as valid – the verbal testimony of trustworthy people or *āpta*, the inference (*anumāna*), etc. as orderly and systematic extensions of perception beyond its natural range in space and time. Particularly in the case of inference, the notion of “token” or “characteristic sign” – for instance smoke seen as usually following fire – enables us to infer the presence of a still invisible object, such as a fire behind a hill. It is the same with time: the sight of a swelling river means that, the day before, rain fell upstream; in the same way, the sight of falling rain means the river will swell downstream the following day.

Now this implies a major consequence that, in a Brahmanic context, maybe only the two *Mīmāṃsā* deduce: every reality known through inference or valid testimony must be in the first place perceptible through the senses. In Indian terms, it will have to possess its own characteristic or *liṅga*. This means that perception and its extensions are limited to what is visible and cannot extend to any invisible or «supersensible» world. Now, such a supersensible object is preeminently the *dharma* or duty, meaning all the rites and types of moral behaviour, thanks to which man can act upon the invisible and then, for instance, reap the «fruit» of his sacrifices or meet them after death with a happy fate. And the very first *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* runs as follows: athato dharmajijñāsa, «and now we desire to know the *dharma*». Now, as Kumārila states, the *dharma* cannot be reached by the normal ways of knowledge – perception, inference ... – because, then, every kind of *liṅga* is lacking.

Several consequences then ensue, some negative, others positive. On the one hand, the *Mīmāṃsā* tends to denounce as illusory all forms of experience reputed to give information on the invisible. In particular, the



famous yogic perception which, however, other such schools as *Nyāya* or *Vāśeṣika* do recognize (and, indeed, this notion is all the more severely criticized as to this purpose), its followers rest not directly on the Veda or *Śruti* but on the Tradition or *Smṛiti* – including such texts as the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhāgavad-Gīta*, the Laws of Manou, etc. – the authority of which the *Mīmāṃsā* accepts only to the extent in which their teaching is in agreement with that of the Veda. More generally, the *Mīmāṃsā* attacks the notion of human or divine omniscience and, for this purpose, always draws the attention to a real vicious circle in these doctrines, according to which the unconditional authority, granted them by their followers, rests upon the omniscience of their supposed authors – Prajapati, the Jina, the Buddha, etc. – while the reality of such an omniscience is itself founded on the authority of these doctrines.

So, by mercilessly restricting to the field of the visible the realm of authentic human knowledge, the *Mīmāṃsā* might seem to announce Kant's philosophy. Yet it parts from it as definitely as possible when it broaches the theme of action – *karman*. For, indeed, we are not dealing here with any form of moral experience which could – emotionally and directly – reveal to us the contents of our «duty» or *dharma*. Kumāṛila, especially, puts forth all his ardour to refute any form of moral conscience or direct «discrimination between good and evil», either utilitarian or in keeping with the principle of non-violence. Proceeding so, he sometimes skirts the edge of the abyss of moral relativism:

“Through which type of right knowledge can we reach the knowledge of right and wrong? This cannot be through perception and its derivatives; now, besides these, there is no authority in worldly practice – *lokaprasiddhi*. Some consider sacrificial violence as praiseworthy, because it enables us to escape transmigration; others are of a contrary opinion. And, because on this head, barbarians – *mleccha* – and «Aryans» [upper caste Hindus] differ from one another, the (content of) the *dharma* cannot be considered as a settled point. Aryans cannot, here, pretend to possess any superiority if they do not call on revealed teaching, but nothing can rest on this teaching before its authority is fixed. So that if the Vedic injunction were not to be able to pull «good» – *dharma* – and «evil» – *adharmā* – out of the nihilistic grasp, it would devour them under our eyes.” (SV IV, 5-8).

The ordinary means of right knowledge being disqualified (discredited), as far as the knowledge of the *dharma* is concerned, there remains only the Veda which the *Mīmāṃsā* mainly understands as a complex system of injunctions and defences, both accompanied by a description of the «fruit» promised to those who conform, in this our world or in a world to come. Such assertions, which we would immediately be tempted to reject as gratuitous and unverifiable, appear yet entirely justified to the *Mīmāṃsā*. For this school applies to the Veda its rule of the original validity of all knowledge – with the reservation that it might meet with a denial in the future. Now, for this school, though the words of the Veda are the same as those composing human discourses, they differ from them

because they are continuously present within the social body. That is why they can be compared to pure perceptible data, as their never contradicted inalterability keeps them free from all doubts about their validity. So the Veda must be taken as a whole; it is “part of the landscape”. Literally as old as the world, it stands out against all human discourses that can always be rightly questioned with regard to the circumstances of their origination, their original intentions, their degree of internal coherence, etc... « The Veda being, like light, common to all, cannot give rise to differing opinions, whereas, if its origin was human, we should need to consider – either to accept or to reject – its author, its qualities, its defects, its possible recognition by people in authority, etc. But the Mimansakas, here and elsewhere, do not need to postulate anything beyond what is directly visible » (SV II, 98-99). Further on, the same Kumārila supplies some information on the « sociological » conditioning of this unanimity:

The fact that, in the course of an individual existence the Veda has to be memorized and its meaning understood does not impair its autonomy for, at the same time, it resides within many minds. And if an individual had the idea to alter its content, many others would give him the lie. And the contribution of a casual man would in no way differ from an artificial composition. Neither do we accept that one individual, and one only, could have started the chain of oral transmission – *sampradaya*. Those very first persons must have been many, just as we find it to be the case in our days. (SV II, 149-151).

The first *Mīmāṃsā* presents us with an extreme instance of cultural ethnocentricity, of being a prisoner of a particular universe. Not for one minute, do these thinkers imagine that the Veda may be historical, that its present could result from the accumulation of successive layers, that it may have met with all sorts of hazard during its transmission, etc. And they are just as unable – used as they are to look upon foreigners as an undifferentiated bunch of « barbarians », defined in a purely negative way – to imagine that, beyond seas and mountains, there may exist brilliant civilizations, contemporaneous to theirs, but based on a « Revelation » with a totally different content. In this view, despite all its sophistication, the first *Mīmāṃsā* leads us into a dead end. But can we say the same thing of the second *Mīmāṃsā*?

## VEDĀNTA

In many respects, the second *Mīmāṃsā* or Vedānta, appears as the twin sister of the first: same epistemology, same way to institute the Veda as the supreme authority, same radical ethnocentricity. To the opening phrase of the *Mīmāṃsā*: « And now we desire to know the *dharma* »

corresponds that of the *Brahma*-or *Vedāntasūtra*: « And now we desire to know the *brahman* ». There remains the question: is the specific object of vedantic investigation, that is the *brahman*, willing to be treated on the same footing as the *dharma* of the *Mīmāṃsā*? We already saw how, in the *Mīmāṃsā*, to resort to the arbitration of Vedic texts was considered as the only way to escape relativism in morals. Now, we meet with the same proceedings in the *Brahmasūtra* (II 1 11), but in the field of metaphysics. Shankara's commentary to this *setra* begins so:

In matters to be known from Scripture, mere reasoning is not to be relied on for the following reason. As the thoughts of man are altogether unfettered, reasoning which disregards the holy texts and rests on individual opinion only has no proper foundation. We see how arguments, which some clever men had excogitated with great pains, are shown by people still more ingenuous to be fallacious, and how the arguments of the latter are refuted in their turn by other men; so that, on account of the diversity of men's opinions, it is impossible to accept mere reasoning as having a sane foundation (Transl. G. Thibault).

Such a statement of the failure of human reason when facing the ever new conflict of opinions is not unknown of Western philosophical thought: Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Husserl and many others, while critically commenting on their predecessors' works, formulated the same pessimistic diagnosis. And yet they did not give way to relativism and scepticism but, each time, they set their hopes in founding philosophy anew on more radical principles, such as would enable it, according to Kant's phrase, to enter « the royal way of science ». Could the Vedanta adopt such an attitude?

Nothing allows us to think so, for the rest of the text apparently stresses the parallelism of the proceedings with those of the *Mīmāṃsā*.

For although with regard to some things reasoning is observed to be well-founded, with regard to the matter in hand there will result "want of release" (...). The true nature of the cause of the world – *Brahman* – on which final emancipation depends cannot, on account of its excessive abstruseness, even be thought of without the help of the holy texts; it cannot become the object of perception, because it does not possess qualities such as form and the like, and as it is devoid of any characteristic signs (*liṅga*), it does not lend itself to inference and the other means of right knowledge.

Here, Shankara repeats about the *brahman* exactly the words of Kumārila about the *dharma*; both entities are depicted as entirely out of the range of our perceptive experience and hence deprived of all distinctive marks and, as it were, unclassifiable, so that inferential reasoning can prove neither their existence nor their properties. And this precisely causes the wanderings of human Reason in questions of metaphysics, whenever it

pretends to resort merely to inference. In this context, Shankara criticizes not only Buddhists and other “heretics”, but also the founders of the brahmanic schools of *Sāṃkhya* and *Vaiśeṣika* who believed they could do without the light of the Veda.

So far, then, the two systems agree. But there still remains a doubt: does the Vedānta really intend «to know» the *Brahman*, the same way as the *Mīmāṃsā* intended «to know» the *dharma*? The rest of the text shows it is not exactly so:

All those who teach the final release of the soul are agreed that it results from perfect knowledge. Perfect knowledge has the characteristic mark of uniformity, because it depends on accomplished, actually existing things [...] as, for instance, the knowledge embodied in the proposition: “fire is hot”. Now, it is clear that in such a case a mutual conflict of men’s opinions is impossible; [...] Nor can we collect, at a given moment and on a given spot, all the logicians of the past, present and future time, so as to settle (by their agreement) that their opinion regarding some uniform object is to be considered perfect knowledge. The Veda, on the other hand, which is eternal and the source of knowledge, may be allowed to have for its object firmly established things, and hence the perfection of that knowledge which is founded on the Veda cannot be denied by any of the logicians of the past, present or future.

The difference between the two ways of proceeding comes now fully to light. It mainly lies in the fact that the relationship between the knowledge of the *Brahman* and release in the *Vedānta* is not the same as that which, in the *Mīmāṃsā* makes following the *dharma* a necessary condition to be accepted into «Heaven». In the *Mīmāṃsā*, the *dharma* is fragmented into a multiplicity of ritual or behavioural rules, but without any understandable link between these and their «fruit». (The *Mīmāṃsā* actually postulates the existence of an entity called *apurva*, born from action and liable to produce later on its result, but says nothing about the way it works). The «knowledge» issuing from the *dharma* is then scattered, verbal and extrinsic knowledge, not an authentic understanding, coming from within, of the *meaning* of Vedic rules. On the contrary, in the case of the Vedānta, it is obvious that a mere abstract and negative knowledge of the *Brahman* as deprived of sensibility, of characteristic marks, etc. could not, in itself, lead its owner to release. It finds its meaning only within the context of other Vedic phrases, specially of the so-called Great Words of the Upanishads, of the type *tat tvam asi*: «You are That (the *Brahman*)» the understanding of these, because it gives a meaning to the “apophatic” description of the *brahman* as being «neither this, nor that», is thought to open onto release. Here are to be found two elements missing in the *Mīmāṃsā*. On the one hand, the idea that the natural human condition is ruled by congenital ignorance or illusion, that make us appear to ourselves as altogether finite beings. On the other hand, complementarily, the idea that the absolute must take the initiative to reveal itself to us – precisely through that Vedic Revelation – and to show us the way to salvation.

Looking backward, we begin to understand that, limited to our own natural light, we would not even have been able to guess the existence of the *Brahman*, much less, to determine its nature.

Finally, we can see that the idea of the relationship between faith and knowledge is very different on both sides. In the *Mīmāṃsā*, «faith» in the Vedic word is so massive, so unquestioning that it does not even consider itself as faith but rather as some collective, ageless knowledge which, seen from the outside, may always appear to be pseudo-knowledge. On the other hand, the follower of the *Vedānta* must first begin to trust – most often through his master – some Upanishadic “Great Word”, the content of which is, in the beginning, not obvious at all. Following its guidance as a ship does a lighthouse, he tries to respond to it, gradually to check its validity. Through a journey devoted both to reflexion (“theological”) and meditation, at the end, his or her initial faith can possibly become a life conviction.

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## CHAPTER VII

# WHAT IS MEANT BY FAITH IN BRAHMANISM?

V. SCHOKHIN

The present deliberations are an attempt to specify the importance of faith among the priorities of the tradition which could conventionally be designated as “the mainstream Hinduism“. However, since the opposition of faith versus knowledge was thematised only in the Abrahamic traditions, most of all in Christianity, while the modern religious studies insist that the priorities of world religions are mutually convertible, the present paper will have a comparativist point of view as well.

First, the significance of faith in the Biblical approach to religion will be briefly specified, mainly in the Christian perspective. Then, the central part of the paper will be dedicated to the most significant contexts for understanding faith in Brahmanist tradition from late Vedic period up to early medieval movement of the Smartas. By excluding “Hinduism“ from the paper’s title the author declines all responsibility for interpreting faith in all the Bhakti movements (starting with the Alvars and Nayanars), as well as the Shaktists; that would require a special study.

Finally, a brief summary will be made of the main points as well as an evaluation of the said presumption concerning a unity of priorities in world religions. It goes without saying that the present author in no way claims to give an exhaustive coverage of the theme.

1. The two initial Hebrew lexemes to define the semantics of faith in Biblical texts were, as is well-known, *aman* and *baṭah*, the former accentuating firmness and confidence and the latter reliability and trust. Beginning with the Septuagint’s translation, the first lexeme has become the base of the semantics of the Greek verb *pisteō* selected to carry the meaning of Biblical faith, and the noun *pistis* (in Vulgate *sperare* and *spēs* correspondingly). Both accents are in a sense synthesized in the only Biblical definition of faith (which is the only case of definitions in the Bible in general), the one given in the Epistle to the Hebrews (11: 1) describing it as realization of the expected (*elpisomenōn hypostasis*) and confidence in the invisible (*pragmatōn elegkos on blepomenōn*).

Yet the spiritual dimensions both of the act and fact of faith in the Biblical worldview considerably exceed the said mental states. First of all, because they are conceived not only as states of individual conscience alone, but rather as the results of interaction between the invocatory God and responding man. It is a secret of their intersubjective relations that constitutes the actual union between them, all the outer signs of the covenant being no more than their symbols. That is why it is Abraham who turns out to be the key figure in the Biblical history, the righteous one who

*believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness* (Genesis 15: 6). And it is understandable why Abraham's feats of faith, when he performed two deeds inconceivable for the humanity of his times, that is, in response to God's summons he left the habitat of his forefathers for the sake of promise, and, moreover, did not hesitate to sacrifice his son without whom the promise itself would be an impossibility, remained paradigmatic both for the Old and the New Testament religiosity.<sup>1</sup> But even apart from Abraham, the whole history of the God-chosen people is conceived in the Old Testament historiography as a history of falling away from the faith of the majority and of regaining it through the feats of individual righteous men. In New Testament texts faith appears not only as the source but also as "the substance" of spiritual life, not only as a prerequisite of salvation but as salvation itself, not only the means of gaining the fruit of God's gifts, but also the actual partaking of it.<sup>2</sup> It is important too, that in addition faith is presented in the New Testament texts as a battle weapon: on the one hand, a defensive weapon as a shield sufficient to repulse all the *arrows of the wicked* (Ephesians 6:16), and, on the other hand, as an offensive weapon securing victory over the world to one *who is born of God* (1 John 5:4). The epistemic aspect of faith is considerably less manifest in the New Testament, but the above mentioned definition from The Epistle to the Hebrews reveals it as a spiritual insight that renders perceivable what is beyond the possibilities of reason.

Although the Biblical texts are by no means philosophical (among other things, we have already referred to the fact that the cited definition of faith is probably the only attempt at definition in the whole Bible), they still allow one to comprehend the ontological reasons for the significance of faith in the Biblical worldview. Faith is an overcoming, or transcending of a certain distance, and there are two distances here. The first is the initial distance between Noncreated Being and its human creatures which are summoned from non-existence and tasked to become similar to the first Being without losing their "creatureliness". The second distance is that acquired as the result of the voluntary refusal of the created human being to carry out this mission. The principal cause of the Fall was man's refusal to trust and then to believe his God, thus rejecting together all three basic vocations, namely, kingship, prophethood and priesthood. Therefore, the

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<sup>1</sup> It is of great significance that the words of Habbakuk the Prophet that the just shall live by his faith (Habakkuk 2:4) are referred to three times in New Testament texts (Romans 1: 17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10: 38).

<sup>2</sup> So it was said to Martha before the resurrection of her brother Lazarus, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die (John 11: 25-26). Now, Apostle Paul writes to the Roman community, I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me (Romans 1:12).



Biblical authors considered the healing of faith to be the primary condition for the restoration of the initial intersubjective relations between an intelligent creature and its Creator.

2. It is the absence in all Non-Biblical ancient traditions of these two basic foundations of the religious worldview that are ontologically required for the primacy of faith, that compels us to undertake a kind of restoration in order to find even scanty mentions of faith. The Brahmanistic tradition is no exception to this rule. Nevertheless, even the direct and indirect evidences of the notion that we are concerned with, scanty as they are, still manifest an obvious and very significant historical dynamic and its stages.

The basic Indian correspondence to the notion of faith is Sanskrit *śraddhā* (Pali *saddhā* being its equivalent) derived from compound verb *śrat* + *√dhā* (akin to Latin *credo* and Irish *cretim*) and meaning “to trust”, “to believe in somebody”, “to adhere to something”.<sup>3</sup> Despite the evident antiquity of this verb, it becomes noticeable only in the latest of *Rigveda* “books”, i.e., in the 10th mandala, where the poet assures Indra of his “faith in the first fury” of the supreme god after he slew Vritra, thus bringing to goal his “manly activity” (X.147.1). But the same mandala contains also a special hymn addressed to Faith – already an abstract feminine deity (X.151). In the first stanza the Vedic poet propitiates her by reciting her merits (thanks to this, deity fire blazes up, sacrifice is poured, men in state of happiness express faith through speech), in the second and third stanzas he takes attentive care lest faith not leave his praise unrewarded, in the fourth stanza the deity’s merits are repeated in a more generalized manner (she is worshipped by gods and men gaining benefits through it), and in the fifth and last one it is said that faith should be appealed to in the morning, at about noontime and in the evening, too. The short hymn ends with an invocation: “O Faith, make us worthy of faith!”<sup>4</sup> Here Faith is one of a number of personified conceptual deities (on a par with Abundance, Speech, Fury, Wrath, Destruction, Heat, etc) and not at all the central one; the relations between it and men are based on a rather pragmatic attitude of *do ut des*, but the conviction that without it no ritual could be effective (ritual being the center of late Vedic Indian life) is highly important in the evaluation of its role in Vedic religion.

It is true that in the *Brahmanas* we discover the development both of a vocabulary related to faith<sup>5</sup> and of its personification, when *śraddhā* becomes the daughter of the sun-god (Shatapatha II.7.3.11) or of Prajapati

<sup>3</sup> See: *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch in kürzerer Fassung*. Bearb. von O. Böhtlingk. Bd. VI. St. Petersburg, 1886, S. 267.

<sup>4</sup> As is stated in the text, *śraddhe śrad dhāpayeha naḥ – Aufrecht Th. Die Hymnen des Rigveda*. Bd. II. Maṇḍala VII-X nebst Beigaben. B., 1955, S. 444.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. The lexeme *śraddhāvitta* – «one who is captivated by faith» in the *Shatapatha-brahmana* XIV.7.2.28. See: *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch in kürzerer Fassung*, S. 268.

(Taittiriya II.3.10.1). But the obvious fact of the increased significance of faith among what sociologists would call religious values is testified to only in the *Upanishads*. Thus, in the last part of the *Brihadaranyaka-upanishad* King Pravahana Jaivali communicates to Brahmin Gautama, the father of Shvetaketu, the teaching about the paths to the worlds of gods and ancestors which are known to him but secret to Brahmins. It is the teaching of five symbolic fires that step-by-step lead the subject of symbolic action to ascent.

The first fire is the other world, its fuel is the sun, its smoke the sunrays, its coals the cardinal points, its sparks the intermediary directions and, what is of major interest to us, gods use this fire to make a sacrificial offering of faith<sup>6</sup> as the result of which king Soma appears. Other sacrificial fires are those of the rain-god Parjanya, of this world, of man and woman. Accordingly, the offerings are Soma, rain, food, semen, and the results of sacrifices are rain, food, semen and finally man (VI.2.9-13). But when a man has completed his life-path and is carried to the pyre, then the fire, fuel, smoke, coals and sparks are just what they are, and as the result of this sacrifice of man by gods a new man emerges of “radiant color”. And here comes an essentially important specification, that the ones that know of all this, are those who in the forests “worship faith and truth” (*śraddhā satyam upāsate*), go into flames and then step by step into the daylight, light half of month, half year of northward movement of the sun, world of gods, sun and lightning where from Purusha consisting of mind takes them into the worlds of Brahman in order that they never return again, and this is the path of gods.

In contrast, those who are ignorant of this can acquire the worlds by sacrifices, alms-giving and ascetic life. They take the path of smoke gradually reaching the moon, and then becoming the food of gods to come back to the earth in order to be reincarnated; this is the path of ancestors (VI.2.15-16).

The explanation given by Pravahana to Gautama concerning the five symbolic fires and two afterlife paths is repeated in the *Chandogya-upanishad* (V.4-10) with the only difference that in the forests men taking the path of gods “worship faith and asceticism” (*śraddhā tapa ityupāsate*).<sup>7</sup> This teaching of two afterlife paths is to be found also in the so called “middle” (by relative chronology) *Upanishads*. According to the *Mundaka-upanishad*, the men who follow the ascetic mode of life accompanied with faith acquire calm and knowledge and get through the gates of the sun to the abodes of eternal Purusha – in contrast to common, even “blinded”, sacrificers who, after death, return to this or still lower worlds (II.10-11). In the *Prashna-upanishad*, faith is listed among the “properties” of anyone who is to take the path of the sun, along with the same asceticism and

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<sup>6</sup> *Tasminnetasminnagnau devāḥ śraddhāṇ juhvati* – Eighteen Principal Upaniṣads. Vol.I. Ed. by V.P. Limaye, R.D. Vadekar. Poona, 1958, p. 271.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

continence (that already precede faith in this list) and knowledge (that follows it) (I.10).

Leaving aside the teaching of the paths of gods and ancestors, which is of great interest by itself (suffice it to say that here we have the immediate origin of the concept of *samsāra*), one could make two conclusions related to the theme of our immediate interest. Faith is conceived as primarily a possession of gods and not initially of men. By exercise of their faith, gods ensure the initial stage of circulation of the universal elements to be followed by other stages. Secondly, and that is a more important thing, the path of gods – as the way of obtaining imperishable and irreversible benefits – is accessible only to those who rely on faith along with truth and asceticism, whereas common sacrificers who place their hope in the usual rituals can at best obtain a more or less decent birth after inevitable wanderings in the world. It follows, therefrom, that faith together with the search for truth, asceticism and then continence is conceived as the lot of the chosen ones, and it is “aristocratized” in a sense. From an esoteric point of view, the majority have no special need of this, because properly conducted rituals are a sort of guarantee for only insignificant results. It is understandable that this attitude was not supported by Vedic specialists in rituals, since according to the *Baudhayana-shrautasutra* faith (*śraddhā*) is included in the list of five necessary components of any ritualistic ceremony – together with the Vedic verbal constituents (*mantra*), their interpretation (*brāhmaṇa*), and methodic regulations (*nyāya*), as well as the structure of sacrifice (*samsthā*) (XXIV.1-5). Here faith most probably means confidence in the effectiveness of the ritual.<sup>8</sup>

In the Shrāmana period of great intellectual ferment (the fifth century BC), Brahmanism was subjected to a very serious trial. The materialists like Ajita Kesakambala straightforwardly claimed that only fools and cheats talk of the other world and of benefits obtainable for one’s posthumous existence through rituals and charity. Moderate skeptics, like Sañjaya Belaṭṭhīputta, regarded as problematic all assertions (as well as negations) of man’s afterlife existence. Radical skeptics, like Dīghanākha, insisted on the falsity of every world outlook as such. The leaders of the Ajivikas Purana Kassapa and Makkhali Gosāla did not negate posthumous existence, but resolutely rejected the value of human deeds (be they very good or downright criminal) for the quality of this existence; Jina Māhavīra, who in polemics with them defended the inner efficacy of human deeds, unambiguously placed knowledge above any faith.<sup>9</sup> The Buddha was in

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<sup>8</sup> On that see, *inter alia*: Das Gupta M. *Śraddhā and Bhakti* in the Vedic Literature // *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 1930, Vol. 6, p. 322.

<sup>9</sup> So, in answer to his follower Citta’s question about what is better, knowledge or faith, Jina (in the Pali text his name is Nigantho Nātaputto) assures him that it is doubtlessly knowledge. – *Samyutta-Nikaya* IV.298 (here

agreement with him on this point, for he criticised materialistic atheism, all varieties of scepticism, the Ajivika determinism and Jaina relativism. He opposed also the faith of his followers as “well-grounded” (*ākāravatī saddhā*) to Brahmanistic faith as a “groundless” (*amūlikā saddhā*), making a clear distinction between individual spiritual experience and doubtful knowledge of the worshippers of the Three Vedas (*anussavika*).<sup>10</sup>

Since every action, as is well-known, causes a counteraction, the Pali texts give us reason to believe that those Brahmanists who took defensive attitude against the onslaught of the Shramana leaders became conscious traditionalists vindicating the beliefs of their predecessors. Some of them continued to uphold the idea that their precursors received the knowledge of the path to unity with Brahman from their precursors who, in turn, got it from their precursors, who, ultimately, received it directly from Brahman.<sup>11</sup> Others, as is testified by the *Brahmajala-sutta*, tried to defend an almost theistic model of the origin of the world from the one who is “the (most) estimable Brahma, the Great Brahma, almighty, autocratic, all-seeing, all-powerful, the lord, the maker, the best, appointer of lots, the sovereign, the father of all that is and is to be”, by whom “all these beings are created.”<sup>12</sup> But some posed the question of the very sources of knowledge. For example, Brahmin Pokkhasarati stated with absolute clarity that men aspiring to that spiritual knowledge and insight which are beyond human status are making senseless statements, for how could a common human being (*manussabhūto*) lay claims to such knowledge and insight?<sup>13</sup>

However, the Buddhists were very good at delivering target strikes. They compared the revered ancient genealogy of Rishis, the preceptors, by which the Brahmanic traditionalists set such a big store, to a file of blind men, where each is holding on to the one in front never doubting his firmness.<sup>14</sup> Time and again they emphasized that the first Rishis put together sacred hymns “on their own” and did not get them “from above”.<sup>15</sup> The Brahmanists’ claims that their preceptors knew the way to unity with

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and below volumes and pages of the corresponding editions of the Pali Texts Society series are referred to).

<sup>10</sup> *Majjhima-Nikaya* II. 211, 170; cf. I. 401 and *Anguttara-Nikaya* I.189. A detailed analysis of the notion *anussava* in the Pali texts is presented in: K.N.Jayatileke. *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (London, George Allen and Union LTD, 1963), p. 176-186.

<sup>11</sup> In accordance with the divine pedigree of the sacred knowledge as presented in the Upanishadic texts, it was Brahma himself who gave it to Prajapati, the latter transmitted it to Manu, and Manu to the whole human race, but only chosen ones, like Uddalaka Aruni could receive it properly. See the *Chandogya-Upanishad* (III.11.4, cf. VIII.14). With more details this sacral tradition is dealt with in the *Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad* (II.6, IV.6, VI.5).

<sup>12</sup> *Digha-Nikaya* I.17-18.

<sup>13</sup> *Majjhima-Nikaya* II.200-201.

<sup>14</sup> *Digha-Nikaya* I.239, *Majjhima-Nikaya* II.170.

<sup>15</sup> *Digha-Nikaya* I. 242, cf. *Majjhima-Nikaya* II. 169.

Brahman they likened to the optimism of a foolish person who asserts that he is in love with the most beautiful woman in his country whom he has never seen, or constructs a staircase to a balcony of a non-existing house.<sup>16</sup> As to the image of Brahma as God-Creator, in which it is hard not to see a gleam of the initial monotheism common to all mankind, it is satirized in the *Kevaddha-sutta* and *Pattika-sutta*,<sup>17</sup> while in the abovementioned *Brahmajala-sutta*, it is disavowed as a false projection of an ascetic's illusory remembrances of his past incarnations.<sup>18</sup>

K.N. Jayatilleke, a distinguished historian of Buddhist philosophy, was quite right when he pointed out that Buddhist criticisms of Brahmanist beliefs had influenced the actual rejection of the Vedas' divine authorship (later on to be supported in philosophy only by the Nayayikas) on the side of the Brahmanists in favour of the concept of their having no beginning.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the Mimamsakas did insist that faultlessness of a text can be guaranteed only by the absence of its author, since an author can always be at fault. Yet Buddhist disavowal of faith had even more far-reaching consequences for Brahmanism.

It would seem that this might be contradicted by some verses of the *Bhagavadgita* where the three *guṇa* attitudes of consciousness and modes of human actions are distinguished. Faith is of undoubted importance (XVII. 13, 17) because that sacrifice which is empty of faith is called the lowest one (i.e., *tāmasa*), while the penance practiced with utmost faith (*śraddhayā parayā*) is called the highest one (i.e., *sāttvika*). And, what is more, it is stated that faith is 'in accordance with the nature of every man (*sattvānurūpa*), this man is of the nature of his faith (*śraddhāmaya*), so what his faith is, that is he' (XVII.3). Moreover, Krishna explains to Arjuna that it is he who gives faith even to worshippers of other deities – so that they may get from them the desired benefits (VII. 21-22, IX.23). But here faith is added to the arsenal of means of inclusivist missionary activities (this strategy was borrowed again from the Buddhists),<sup>20</sup> in an attempt to convince the Buddhists, Jains and others that they, unknown to themselves, are anonymous devotees of Vishnu. More important, however, is the decreased status of faith as such among the priorities of "post-Buddhist Brahmanism".

Thus the same *Bhagavadgita* listing the virtues as attributes of soul of those born with divine nature (they are opposed to ones born with

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<sup>16</sup> *Digha-Nikaya* I. 241-244.

<sup>17</sup> *Digha-Nikaya* I.220-221, III. 29-30.

<sup>18</sup> *Digha-Nikaya* I.18-19.

<sup>19</sup> K.N. Jayatilleke *Op.cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>20</sup> On the Buddhist inclusivism see my paper: Shokhin V. On Some Features of Buddhist Missionary Work and Double Standards in Religious Studies // *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 2005, Vol.15, N 2, p. 133-154 (especially pp. 146-150).

demonic nature), points out fearlessness, purity of mind, right predisposition to learning and concentration, generosity, self-control, etc. (23 positive attributes in all), i.e. almost everything with the exception of faith (XVI.1-3). The famous *Manu-smṛiti*, while listing ten characteristics of *dharma* that have to be undeviatingly appropriated by the “twice-born” in all four stages of life (those of a student, householder, forest hermit and itinerant ascetic) includes in them all good inclinations of soul, from courage to the absence of anger – again omitting faith (IV.91-92). Faith is not to be found either in two lists of virtues (one containing ten, the other seven) in such an authoritative text of the *Dharmashastra* literature as the *Yajñavalkya-smṛiti* (I.122, VI. 92), or in the list of eight signs of dharmic nature in the *Gautama-smṛiti* (VIII. 22-24).

It is of significance that in the Pali Buddhist list of virtues, which are requirements for obtaining the highest liberation, faith invariably occupies the initial place and is always mentioned as the first member. Thus in the most stable of these lists *saddhā* is followed by moral behaviour (*sīla*), religious knowledge, learning (*suta*), generosity (*cāga*) and, at last, full understanding of the truth (*paññā*).<sup>21</sup> In another popular list it is followed by bashfulness (*hiri*), shrinking back from doing wrong (*ottappa* = *ottāpi*), great knowledge (*bahussuta*), resoluteness (*āradhaviṛiya*), ready attention (*upaṭṭhitasati*), and possessing of understanding again (*paññavā* = *paññā*).<sup>22</sup> There were also other lists which are concluded by meditative concentration of consciousness but introduced by *saddhā*. It seems that Jayatilleke is right here again when he states in connection with these lists that ‘this sequence cannot entirely be accidental and probably reflects that while *saddhā* or belief was a preliminary requirement, it finally led to understanding (*paññā*) which was reckoned to be of the greatest value’.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, *saddhā* has ‘much less value’. Moreover, right were also those Buddhologists who doubted whether *saddhā* have in general the same sense as faith in Christianity.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, we cannot enter into the carrier and evolution of the Buddhist notion of *saddhā* here.<sup>25</sup> What is important for us here is the very paradoxical situation that the Buddhists who were destroying the faith in our understanding in India provided it with a modest but considerably stable position, while with the Brahmanists who tried to

<sup>21</sup> *Majjhima-Nikaya* I.465, II.180, III.99; *Anguttara-Nikaya* II.66, III.6,44,181, IV.270, 271, 284, 288.

<sup>22</sup> *Majjhima-Nikaya* III.23, *Anguttara-Nikaya* II.218, IV.23, 38.

<sup>23</sup> Jayatilleke. Op.cit., p. 397.

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., Gyomroi-Ludwyk E. ‘The Valuation of *Saddhā* in the Early Buddhist Texts’ // *University of Ceylon Review*, 1946, Vol.V, p.32-49, or Nanamoli Thera. ‘Does *saddhā* mean faith?’ // *Wheel*, 1963, Vol. 52/53, p.11-31.

<sup>25</sup> For more details one may be referred to: Hoffmann F.J. The pradmatic efficacy of *saddhā* // *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 1987, Vol. 15, pp. 399-412 or Ergart J.A. *Faith and Knowledge in Early Buddhism*. Leiden, 1977.

support this 'heritage of the ancient Rishis' it was losing its previous advantages.

A certain rehabilitation of faith in the religious priorities of Brahmanism comes up in early medieval philosophical texts. Thus the famous Vaisheshika Prashastapada (the sixth century A.D.) considers, among attributes of substances, such quality of soul as the possibility of gaining *dharmā*, among the essential conditions for this it mentions the very faith in *dharmā*, non-injury, friendliness towards all living beings and ten other virtues (310). Yet Shankara (the seventh – eighth centuries A.D.), whose contribution to the consolidation of the new Smarta traditionalism is greater than anyone else's, in his textbook treatise *Upadeshasahasri* does not include faith in the basic predispositions required of a Vedantist whose goal is to "realize" his identity to Brahman (I.1.6).

True enough, in some Advaitist treatises ascribed (no doubt, falsely) to Shankara, faith is mentioned among other good predispositions of consciousness. In the *Aparokshanubhuti* it is numbered as the ninth (out of 11) following endurance of suffering and preceding concentration of consciousness (vs. 8), while in the *Atmanatmaviveka* it closes the list of five, this time following concentration of consciousness. In both cases, it is interpreted as devoted trust (*bhakti*) in the sacred texts and the words of a master. In the *Vivekachudamani* (not earlier, it seems, than about the tenth century A.D.) it is prescribed to study Vedantic texts with faith, devotion and concentration (vss.41-47), and here faith – *śraddhā* is grouped with attributes of "mixed *sattva*" – after modesty, abstentions, cultivation of proper orientations and before *bhakti* and aspiration for "liberation". But it is not included in higher dispositions of consciousness correlated with "pure *sattva*",<sup>26</sup> i.e. bliss and self-knowledge (vss. 108-123).

This humble place occupied by faith in these aretological lists<sup>27</sup> can be made sense of in the context of the insignificant epistemological space allocated to it by the basic world outlook of Brahmanism. Verities inaccessible for reason and even remotely reminiscent of theistic dogmas are absent here, since the basic positions determining Brahmanistic world picture, such as the law of karmic recompense, its materialization in *samsāra* (reincarnations), the possibility of escaping from it, cosmic periods with no beginning and no end, and the oneness of *Atman* and Brahman, do not have anything inaccessible for reason and requiring faith, as such. These

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<sup>26</sup> The conception of the three *guṇas*, i.e. of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* (the ultimate principles of the world which include characteristics of substances, attributes and movements but cannot be reduced to anything among them) was borrowed by the Vedantins from the Samkhya tradition. The sattvic dispositions of consciousness are considered as the highest and associated with mental enlightenment.

<sup>27</sup> Aretology, i.e. "the teaching of virtues", was an important section of Greek and Roman ethics, but the term may be safely used also in application to Oriental traditions.

are philosophical presuppositions (dogmas in the ancient Greek, not in the Christian sense) related to action and retribution, the possibility of cessation of effects upon the “exhaustion” of causes, “natural cosmology”, oneness of micro- and macrocosm – basically panentheistic in character.

3. Having considered the historical dynamics of the status of faith in Brahmanism in the light of Sanskrit and Pali sources cited in the paper, one could identify several large stages.

In the beginning faith – *śraddhā* is understood as magic, personified sacral energy necessary for the fruitfulness of sacrifice. Later it bifurcates in the view of the gnostics-esoterics and the ritualists: the former elevate it to spiritual energy needed for ascent by “the path of the gods”, the latter treat it as just one albeit necessary component of a proper ritual procedure. In the Shramana period of Indian history, the priority of faith in the divine origin of the sacred tradition of sacred knowledge and the opportunity of attaining through it unity with the Divine is half-heartedly vindicated by the Brahmanists against insistent and all-round encroachments of the new religions, primarily Buddhism. As the result of this, faith gradually loses its position in Brahmanism and becomes, in the course of time, definitely less ‘pretentious’ there in comparison with the significance of *saddhā* in Buddhism. It is “neutralized”, becoming just one of so many dispositions of consciousness and virtues required for realization of *dharma* and higher boons, if recognized at all in this capacity, and this fact cannot but be related to the final prevalence of paradigms of “natural religion” ousting the elements of a “residual theism” in the Brahmanistic world outlook.<sup>28</sup>

In the general historical perspective, the Brahmanist faith – *śraddhā* fully corresponds to those ancient lexemes that were selected to render the Biblical ones (*elpis* and *spēs* above all), but not at all to the basic dimension of Biblical faith that makes the deepest foundation of inter-subjective relationship between man and God. The coordination of aretological and epistemological aspects of faith in classical Brahmanism, when compared to the determinant place of faith in Abrahamic religions, first of all in Christianity, seems to be sufficient to substantiate the thesis that the idea of mutual convertibility of paradigms of world religions, so actively vindicated in contemporary religious studies, is totally out of keeping with standards of Orientalistic knowledge.

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<sup>28</sup> In this sense the relatively high position occupied by faith in Prashastapada’s list of virtues may be explained, at least to some degree, by theistic attitudes of this philosopher.



## CHAPTER VIII

# VEDANTIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONCEPT OF IGNORANCE

S. S. RAMA RAO PAPPU

A theory of ignorance presupposes a theory of knowledge. Typical questions which an epistemologist raises concerning ignorance are: Is ignorance a blank state of mind, where no thinking is taking place? Or is it a baffled state of mind, where one is confused and does not have any idea of what to say? Or is it when one thinks that one knows X, but cannot remember now? Or, one feels certain that one knows X, but it turns out that X is in fact false? Is “false knowledge” knowledge or ignorance? In Vedanta philosophy the problem of ignorance (*avidya, ajnana, aprama, maya*) and knowledge (*vidya, jnana, aprama*) is the most important one because for them knowledge is a means of liberation – rather being *is* liberation. To know is to be liberated, according to Advaita Vedanta. If knowledge is liberation, ignorance is bondage. Because Vedanta philosophy holds that philosophy is praxis, the problem of removing ignorance and thereby freeing the individual from bondage is of paramount importance.

*Jnana, prama* and *vidya* are the nearest equivalents of the English word ‘knowledge.’ *Jnana* refers to cognition or knowledge, both true and false. In certain contexts, *jnana* also means awareness. *Prama*, on the other hand, denotes only true cognition (*yathartha-jnana*). Apart from true cognition, novelty (*anadhigatatva*) is also a necessary property of *prama*. *Vidya*, however, is used in many senses – knowledge, wisdom, branches of learning, etc. The Upanishads, for example make a broad distinction between *para vidya* and *apara vidya*, including in the latter every branch of learning and in the former, Self-Knowledge. In the sense of “branches of learning” Indian scriptures classify the *vidyas* as fourteen (*chaturdasa-vidya*).

Two Sanskrit words which connote ignorance are (a) *avidya* and (b) *ajnana*.

Other cognate words which characterize ignorance are (a) *maya* (which is “cosmic ignorance”), (b) *bhrama* (mistaken knowledge), etc. Also when *jnana* is used in the sense of “awareness” or “consciousness” everything that has no awareness or consciousness is called *ajnana* and such terms as *pradhana, prakrti, avyakta, tamas*, etc are used to connote *ajnana*.

### *Epistemology of Ignorance*

Can I know that I am ignorant? The Vedantins maintain that we can know, because of their general epistemological position that we not only

know that we know but we also know that we do not know. According to the Vivarana school of Vedanta: "Everything is known either as known or as unknown." Here we should keep in mind the distinction between knowledge (*prama*) and awareness (*jnana*) which we have drawn above. The Vedantic position is not that we can have knowledge (*prama*) of ignorance, which is a contradiction, but we can be aware (*jnana*) of ignorance. Suppose I walk into a room and perceive the room to be dark. I therefore see nothing. I turn on the light and I see a chair in the room. Just as the light dispels darkness and manifests the chair there, knowledge dispels ignorance and makes manifest the objects. Ordinarily we interpret "perceiving nothing" as non-perception of anything. It is a blank cognition. In Indian Philosophy, the Mimamsakas (the Prabhakara school) and the Samkhyas hold such a view. For them when I see the absence of the chair, my cognition of the "absence of the chair" only means that I am cognizing say, the bare floor, and therefore the "absence of a chair" is reducible to the presumed locus (*adhithana-naram*) of the chair. The Nyaya school of philosophy, however, holds that the "absence of the chair" is not reducible to the presumed locus of the chair, viz. the floor. Rather, for the Naiyayikas the non-cognition of the chair would imply two judgments, viz. a. the absence of the chair as a negative fact, and b. the presence of the ground on which the chair would have existed, which is a positive fact. "Absence of the chair" does not mean that there is "nothing which denotes the chair," but there is something which denotes the "absence of the chair." For the Naiyayikas, the one cognizes the absence of the chair through the cognition of its locus, viz. the floor, because absence is a character (*visesana*) of the locus.

How do we become (perceptually) aware of objects? In Vedanta, when we perceive an object, the mind (*antahkarana*, *manas*) through the instrumentality of the senses goes out, reaches the object and assumes the form of the object. But the essence of the *antahkarana* is not consciousness and therefore by itself it cannot illuminate the object. The illumination happens through a mode of the *antahkarana* called *vrtti*, being illumined by Self (Atman) whose essence is consciousness (*cit*). It is the Witness Self (*Sakshin*) whose essence is consciousness which manifests both knowledge and ignorance in ordinary perceptual knowledge, the *cit* and the *vrtti* are so intertwined that they become indistinguishable like the fire and the wood it is burning. Awareness of absence must be immediate because the senses cannot perceive absence, nor can the *antahkarana* assume the form of absence without its becoming itself another absence. It is therefore said that our awareness of the absence of a thing is immediate and we do not need the instrumentality of the *indriyas* or senses, nor do we require past memory of absence. According to the view set forth above, *ajnana* being the non-existence of knowledge should be known, like other kinds of non-existence, through non-cognition. Some Vedantins, like the Vivarana School, however, do not accept this conclusion. According to them, *ajnana* can be divided into two classes, namely (1) absence of the knowledge of a

particular object (*jnana-visesabhava*) and (2) the general absence of knowledge (*jnana-matrabhava*). Of the two, the former alone can be known through non-perception. But the latter is directly revealed to the witnessing self (*sakshi-bhasya*). In other words, the knowledge of the absence of a particular object involves the knowledge (memory or some other kind) of the object at that time, but the general absence of knowledge does not need anything.

To continue, in Vedantic epistemology, awareness of ignorance or “non-cognition of an X” is as much a positive fact as awareness of “cognition of X”. The darkness which covered the chair, the “nothingness” which we see, is a positive fact just as the cognition of the chair after the darkness is dispelled. The Vedantins argue that awareness of nothing does not mean the non-awareness of anything. Awareness of nothing *is* another token of awareness, except that the awareness has not manifested anything. In addition, when an object is manifested by knowledge, my awareness is not only that I am aware of the chair, but also that I am aware of the non-existence of the chair in this room before the dawn of knowledge. For the Vedantins there are not two kinds of facts positive facts like the cognition of a chair and negative facts like the non-cognition of a chair. The non-cognition of a chair is as much a positive fact as the cognition of a chair, except in the non-cognition, we are aware of the absence-of-the-chair. Moreover when we turn on the light and become aware of the chair, we have not only the awareness of the chair in the present, but also the awareness of the absence of the chair before we became aware of it and also the awareness of what the absence of the chair would be in the future if the chair is to be destroyed. In other words, our awareness of nothing is not only of the present but also of the past and the future. Simply stated, in Vedanta “I see the absence of ‘p’” implies: **a.** it is immediately known without the instrumentality of the senses, **b.** the awareness of the absence of ‘p’ is a positive fact, **c.** when we become aware of ‘p’ there is not only the positive fact of awareness of ‘p’ now, but also the positive fact of the absence of ‘p’ before I became aware of it and also the (imagined) absence of ‘p’ in the future.

#### *Metaphysics of Ignorance*

In Vedanta ignorance is both epistemological and ontological. For example we cognize under the influence of *maya* and the object of cognition is also *maya*. We have seen that in our awareness of absence, absence is known as an ontological fact, i.e. as the *existence* of Absence. Does the non-cognition of a chair imply the non-existence of a chair? Not necessarily, because sometimes we may not cognize a chair due to a defect in our senses (*indriyas*) or due to the darkness which envelopes a room. It may even be the case that I never knew that someone kept a chair in my room. In such a case, the chair has an unknown existence. There are however cases where non-cognition implies non-existence like desires and emotions, pleasure and

pain, enjoyment and suffering for one cannot say that “I had enjoyed my drink though I was not aware of it”. In such cases non-cognition is non-existence. For the Vedantins therefore not every non-cognition would imply the non-existence of an object, but an appropriate (*yogyata*) non-cognition would imply the non-existence of an object, the appropriateness being determined by some test like “Had the chair been present, it would have been seen.” “Had I entered the room I would have seen the chair,” etc. In passing, it may be stated that the Upanishadic discussion of the *avasthana-traya* or the three states of consciousness, viz. waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep states, the dreamless sleep state (*susupti*) is a state of awareness, but an awareness of nothing. In the Mandukya Upanishad, it is described as full of bliss, where the subject experiences the bliss. If what I am aware of during *susupti* is nothing, and yet it is characterized as a state of *ananda* or bliss, in Vedanta “Ignorance is Bliss“ after all. If we ask the Vedantins how a state of deep sleep where we are aware of nothing can have the attribute of bliss, the Vedantins would reply that bliss is not an attribute of Nothing but the essence of the Self or the Subject.

Vedantic thought analyzes absence (*abhava*) into three kinds. (Naiyayikas add a fourth one). These are briefly: (a). *pragabhava* or antecedent non-existence. This is non-existence of the effect in the material cause, for example the non-existence of the chair in the wood. The chair’s non-existence before it is made by the carpenter is eternal, but its non-existence is destroyed once the chair comes into existence. In other words, the chair’s antecedent non-existence is beginningless but not endless (*anadih santah*). (b). *Pradhvamsabhava* (or simply *dhvamsabhava*) is posterior absence of a thing after destruction. This kind of non-existence has a beginning but is endless. (*sadiranantah*). Whereas *pragabhava* (a) above is beginningless but not endless, *pradhvamsabhava* has a beginning but is endless. (c) A third one is *anyonyabhava*. When we point out the difference between two objects, or the negation of identity, in such statements as “X is not Y”, “the tree is not a cow”, we have examples of *anyonyabhava*. The mutual non-existence between X and Y is eternal, even if X and Y never existed. (d) A fourth variety of non-existence recognized in Nyaya Philosophy, but not recognized by the Vedantins is called *atyantabhava* or eternal non-existence like “hare’s horn” “barren woman’s son” etc. The reason why the Vedantins do not recognize *atyantabhava* is because of their presupposition that nothing but Brahman is eternal. According to Vedantins, so long as there are hares, they cannot have horns, but the existence of hares is not eternal but contingent, and in a world where there are no hares, the question of the eternity of the relation between hares and horns does not arise.

#### *Ignorance as False Knowledge*

If *prama* is true knowledge, *aprama* is false knowledge. Knowledge is false when there is an error in one’s judgement. Error in

Indian philosophy is discussed in theories known as *khyati-vadas*. A *khyati-vada* typically discusses the cognitive content of the erroneous knowledge, how one misperceives predicates which do not belong to an object – for example, mistaking a shell to be silver, a rope to be a snake etc. Some important Indian philosophical theories concerning error are: (a) *Satkhyati-vada* (also called *yatharthakhyati-vada*) which says that which is perceived is real, but error arises when we mistake the part for the whole, propounded by the Visistadvaitins. (b) In *akhyati-vada*, advocated by the Mimamsakas, erroneous perception is interpreted as non-apprehension of the substratum. In perceiving the rope as snake, there is the perception of the substratum and a memory, and error arises when we mix them up. The Naiyayikas propound *anyatha-khyati* theory according to which what is perceived is real, but it is elsewhere – i.e. the snake which exists elsewhere is perceived as if it is here.

According to the (Advaita) Vedantins, error or false knowledge is *anirvachaniya* or indescribable for the object of our (mis)perception is neither existent (*sat*) nor non-existent (*asat*). In mistaking the rope for a snake, the snake is not non-existent, because it is perceived, nor existent because it is negated when we *know* it is a rope.

According to *anirvachaniya-khyati*, the illusion of seeing the rope as a snake arises when a defective sense-organ comes into contact with the rope making the *vrtti* or mental modification. Now because of the operation of *avidya* or ignorance which revives our memory of a snake and shows similarities between our memory and the present object, we perceive an inexplicable snake which lasts as long as there is the illusion.

### *Ignorance and Bondage*

How to explain false knowledge, how to account for error and illusion at an empirical level is an important issue for the Vedantins because it has implications for human bondage and liberation. A human being, according to Advaita Vedanta is both an Atman (Transcendental Self) and a Jiva (Empirical Self). The Atman appears as the Jiva – rather the Jiva mistakes itself that it is only a Jiva but does not realize the fact that it is truly an Atman. Atman or the True Self is characterized as *Sat* (Being), *Cit* (Consciousness) and *Ananda* (Bliss), but a Jiva is transient, finite, and suffering. Not only we mistake in identifying the Atman as the Jiva we also mistake Brahman (the Absolute), which is One without a second, as the world with all its plurality and finiteness. Now the Vedantins extend their theory of *khyati-vada* to also explain our mistake in experiencing Atman as Jiva and Brahman as the World. *Khyativada*, for the Vedantins explain the problem of knowledge and error at an empirical level (*para-vidya*), but when we rise to the level *apara-vidya* or Transcendental knowledge and cosmic error, it becomes *Maya-vada*. *Maya* is cosmic ignorance. Sankara's classic commentary on the Brahma Sutras starts with *adhyasa-bhasya* (theory of superimposition) where he says that it is because of ignorance

(*avidya*) that we fail to distinguish between the subject (*visayin*) and the object (*visaya*) and impose the qualities of one on the other. All forms of ordinary knowledge (*loka-vyavahara*) are erroneous because of *adhyasa*, and right knowledge (*vidya*) consists of knowing something as what it is (*vastu-svarupayadharanam vidyam*). The snake-characteristics, for example, because they are superimposed on the rope, the rope appears as something other than what it is, viz. a snake and is the cause of fear, etc. In the same way when plurality, finitude, etc. which characterize the World/Jiva are superimposed on Brahman/Atman, Brahman/Atman appear as something other than what it is and is the cause of our finitude, suffering etc. Knowledge in Vedanta is not an acquisition but the removal of ignorance. Ignorance is sometimes characterized as a “veil” as something which is “darkness” so that when we remove the veil, or when we turn on the light, we know what there is. A person who is ignorant does not know that he or she is ignorant. Hence the need for a Guru or someone who has knowledge to impart it. (Parenthetically, the word “guru” means “one who dispels darkness” i.e. *gu* = *darkness*, *ru* = *removing*). This point is made clear in such examples as “You are not a robber, you are a prince” told to a prince who was kidnapped and growing up as a robber, and “You are the tenth man” told by an onlooker to a group of people who after crossing the river were counting only nine people (excluding oneself) and lamenting that one of them is missing from the group, etc.

When the robber knows that he is not a robber but a prince, he has not *become* a Prince, he was always a prince except that he does not know his true identity.

By giving such examples, the Vedantins maintain that removal of ignorance is the same thing as the dawn of knowledge, that attaining knowledge is spontaneous and sudden, that knowledge is not mere cognition but is a transforming experience, that the state of our being is one of “fullness of knowledge” but covered with a (cosmic) veil of ignorance.

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CHAPTER IX

**KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH IN  
EARLY BUDDHISM:  
A SOTERIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>**

VICTORIA LYSENKO

In early Buddhism as far as seems to be reflected in the first two piṭakas of the Pāli Buddhist Canon, Tipiṭaka,<sup>2</sup> there is neither a clear-cut opposition between knowledge and faith as different approaches to the supreme religious goal,<sup>3</sup> nor any articulated parallels to such Western alternatives as “Faith above Reason”, or “Reason above Faith”. Not only is this kind of reasoning totally absent from early Buddhist thought, but these notions as such possess quite different meanings – religious as well as philosophical – as compared to their European counterparts. Faith is not faith in the fideistic sense according to which it neither requires, nor admits any justification, and knowledge is not knowledge in the rationalistic sense of pure theory. Since in early Buddhism the value of everything that belongs to human beings (thought, emotion, word, motive, practice etc.) is always measured by its pragmatic value consisting in soteriological efficiency, that is its ability to serve as an instrument of emancipation from saṃsāra, the question should rather be put in the following way: Is it possible to be emancipated through faith and is it possible to be emancipated through knowledge?

The Pāli term *saddhā*, which is often enough rendered as “faith“, has a much wider range of meanings (from belief and confidence up to certitude); as for rational knowledge obtained intellectually, there are many terms, but the most important of them seem to be *takka* – logic, reasoning, and *ñāna* – investigation, inquiry, pondering.<sup>4</sup> Emancipation with the

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<sup>1</sup> I express my gratitude to Professor Tilmann Vetter who kindly read this paper and sent me his comments and observations (I am referring to the most important of them in the notes).

<sup>2</sup> Though the two piṭakas were open for additions up to approximately 400 C.E., they do represent, for me, Early Buddhism, because their contents were generally acknowledged by all the schools of Traditional Buddhism, while the contents of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka differs from school to school.

<sup>3</sup> See Jan Ergardt’s work *Faith and Knowledge in Early Buddhism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977). He argues that faith and knowledge are not opposed to one another in early Buddhism.

<sup>4</sup> Both these terms and their respective meanings are systematically analysed by K.N. Jayatilleke in his *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (L., 1963).

help of either *takka* or *vimaṃsā* is never mentioned in Buddhist texts, because of the totally negative buddhist attitude towards the role of speculative knowledge.<sup>5</sup> But as far as *saddhā* is concerned, we should distinguish different cases. *Saddhā* does not find its place at the Noble Eightfold Path to emancipation, but it appears in some other lists like that of *indriya*-s (cognitive capacities), *bala*-s (forces) and factors of enlightenment (*bodhi*). By this it is acknowledged that *saddhā* plays a certain positive role in the spiritual progress of the Buddhist adept. There is even a category of adepts called “emancipated through faith” (*saddhā-vimutto*). It is mentioned, for instance, in the *Kīṭṭigirisutta* (MN 70). But as R. Gombrich has shown, a person “emancipated through faith” is not emancipated at all, because he still experiences some affects, enslaving him to transmigration. In fact, those who are “emancipated through faith” belong to the category of *sottāpanna* – those who made the first step to emancipation.<sup>6</sup>

In Christianity and other monotheistic world religions, the realm of faith is the realm of Divine intent, not accessible to human understanding. It is not the case with the Buddhist religion. Even if *nirvāṇa/nibbāna* is beyond human understanding and phenomenal existence, it may still be a subject of special meditative and yogic experience. While the Christian devotee receives his or her salutary faith from God, the *nibbāna* can be attained by the free choice of the buddhist practitioner and through his or her own efforts.

In what follows I will discuss the relationship between faith and reason, or in Buddhist terms, between *saddhā* and *takka-vimaṃsā*, in the soteriological perspective of early Buddhism.

In the *Sarigāravasutta* (MN II. 5. 10 – I make use of the French translation of this *sutta* by Mohan Wijayaratna who kindly sent it to me),<sup>7</sup> the Buddha mentions certain recluses and brahmins “who assert that they have realized the fundamentals of religious life (*ādibrahmacariyakam*), and abide there, having attained in this world the perfection of direct apprehension (*ditthadhammābhiññavosānapāramippatā*) through faith only

<sup>5</sup> As Frank Hoffman argues, “The approach taken in early Buddhism... is pragmatic in that it involves an initial openness to test things religious for oneself by personal experience, rather than trying to construct abstract philosophical proofs for religious beliefs”. Frank Hoffman, “The Pragmatic Efficacy of *Saddhā*”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 15 (1987), 399.

<sup>6</sup> R. Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings*. (*Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion*) (L.1996), p.103.

<sup>7</sup> According to Professor Vetter, this *sutta* is of the origin, because according to Chizen Akanuma’s Comparative Catalogue, like the *Carīkīsutta* which will be discussed further on, it has no Chinese parallels and also because of some philological evidences, like long compounds, and long sentences, some of which, as he remarks, are badly composed, from a grammatical point of view.



(*kevalam saddhā mattakena*). Like *takkī* and *vīmaṃsī* – reasoners and investigators”.<sup>8</sup>

This text contains, at least, three oddities. In what way may *takkī* and *vīmaṃsī*, who “base their knowledge on reasoning and speculation”,<sup>9</sup> and whom we can identify with a particular type of Buddhist rationalists, rely on *saddhā only* (even if *saddhā* is understood not as religious faith but more neutrally as confidence or belief)? How could these famous *takkī* and *vīmaṃsī* attain *abhiññā*, which is rendered by Jayatilleke and other scholars as “extrasensual cognition”? And in what way may extrasensual cognition be realized through *saddhā only*? In buddhological literature I found neither the answer to these questions, nor even the questions themselves.<sup>10</sup> But let us first recall what this *sutta* is about.

The brahmin, Saṅgārava, asks the Buddha: “Venerable Gotama, there are recluses and brahmins who assert that they have realized the fundamentals of religious life, and abide there, having attained here and now the perfection of direct apprehension. Of these recluses and brahmins... what has honourable Gotama to say?

The Buddha draws, then, a distinction among three categories of recluses and brahmins. All of them are characterized as persons who claimed that they have realized the fundamentals of religious life and abide there, having attained here and now the perfection of *abhiññā* – or direct apprehension. The difference between them lies in their peculiar way of attaining the *abhiññā*. The first category, Tevijja, the brahmins, who have learnt the three Vedas, did it through *anussava* (oral tradition), the second group (*takkī* and *vīmaṃsī*), as I have already said, through faith or confidence only, and the third through “knowing things not heard before, and by realizing them by themselves”. The Buddha himself sides with the third category and, in so doing he affirms and confirms his principle

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<sup>8</sup> Professor Vetter proposes a more explicit translation: “...they assert that they have attained perfection of direct apprehension, [and that therefore they abide in and are able to teach] the fundamentals of religious life”.

<sup>9</sup> K.N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, (L., 1963), p. 205.

<sup>10</sup> One may suggest that these oddities may be due to a mere mistake of the scribe or to some awkward later interpolation made by the editors of the Pali canon. In that case does it make any sense to raise such questions and try to answer them? It is an important matter which may provoke a serious disagreement between philologists and philosophers. The former have a tendency to reduce what may seem to them as inconsistency in the texts to a scribe’s fault, or to a negligent edition. The latter may create an imaginary problem on no grounds at all. In this paper, I am taking all the risks of understanding the texts, whatever their origin and date of composition, as meaningful units in their own right. Thanks to Professor Vetter, who read this paper and had done a research of his own through Chinese traditions of this and other *suttas*, the textological basis of some materials used in my paper is also present.

according to which only personal experience is a true way towards religious goals.

First of all, the Buddha himself, who discovered and realized his teaching in his personal experience, is being contrasted to those who, primarily, did not discover a *new* teaching, and, secondly, did not verify and confirm their teaching in their personal experience. That is more or less clear. What is not clear at all is the question: why the *takkī* and *vīmaṃsī* are associated with *saddhā only*? I would suggest the following answer: the Tevijjā held something to be true because it was transmitted by oral tradition, while the *takkī* and *vīmaṃsī* held something to be true because it was proved to be true by logical reasoning or was simply proclaimed to be true. Their confidence (or belief) did not incite them to further systematic investigations as the Buddhist *saddhā* is supposed to do (we will see this later on); they stop at the very beginning.

As for the second question (How could these *takkī* and *vīmaṃsī* attain “extrasensual cognition“?), we have seen that *samanas* and *brahmins* of all the three categories *proclaimed* they have attained the *abhiññā*. But is that true? Did all of them attain it? We know that this type of experience is designated in the Buddhist texts by such expressions as “I know and see” (*jānāmi passāmi*) or “This I know; this I see; only this is true; anything else is worthless”. Nevertheless, sometimes, as it is evident from certain Buddhist texts, those who use these expressions either may be mistaken or deliberately deceive others.

It is for this reason, it would seem, that the Buddha in the *Carīkīsutta* (MN 95) recommends that his listeners examine a *bhikkhu* who is saying “This I know, this I see”:

Are there in this venerable one any such qualities based on greed that, with his mind being overcome by these qualities, he might say, “I know,” while not knowing, or say, “I see”, while not seeing; or that he might urge another to act in a way that was for his/her long-term harm and pain?

That means that even the expression “This I know, this I see” should be not taken for granted. The superiority of personal experience over information coming from external sources is one of the fundamentals of the Buddha’s doctrine. Suffice to quote his famous words from the *Kālāmasutta*:

Come, Kālāma. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon

another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher' (AN 3.7.5).<sup>11</sup>

The Buddha's word is always confirmed by his personal experience. For instance, when he speaks about two extremes (attachment to sensual pleasures and ascetic mortification), he knows them from his own life in his father's palace and from his extreme ascetic practice. The Buddha's teaching – the *Dhamma* – does not stand in need of justification either by miracles, or by way of pure reason, as his rejection of the speculative methods shows. What kind of justification is then proper to it?

Let us examine the continuation of the *Sarīgāravasutta*.

The Buddha tells Saṅgārava about his first teachers, Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta:

Becoming a seeker of good and a seeker of the incomparable peaceful state, I approached Āḷāra Kālāma and said: 'Venerable one, I want to lead the holy life in this dispensation.' 'Come friend, the wise before long realize this teaching and abide like the teacher. I quickly learned that Teaching to acknowledge "I know and see" by uttering and reciting as the elders did. Then it occurred to me, merely with this faith, Āḷāra Kālāma would not acknowledge, "I know and realized this Teaching". Indeed, he abides knowing and seeing this teaching. [That means that the Buddha himself said "I know and see" only on the basis of memorizing words of his teachers, or by faith in the oral tradition – "as elders did". Most likely he may have been dissatisfied not only with the contents of Āḷāra's teaching,<sup>12</sup> but also with this purely mechanical way of learning. It is also strange that words that normally evoke a personal spiritual experience were used for the result of memorizing his teacher's words – V.L.]. Then I approached Āḷāra Kālāma and asked him. Venerable one, how do you abide knowing and realizing this teaching? Āḷāra Kālāma declared the sphere of nothingness [In other words, the Buddha asked at what level of meditation this doctrine may be experimentally realized – V.L.]. Then it occurred to me, it is not only Āḷāra Kālāma who has faith (*saddhā*), effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. I too have faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and

<sup>11</sup> Soma Thera tr. "Kālāma Sutta. The Buddha's Charter of Free Inquiry," *The Wheel Publication*, 8 (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> The doctrine of Āḷāra described in more details in Aśvaghosha's *Buddhacārīta* is regarded as a version of Early Sāṃkhya (Sanskrit Edition with English translation by E.S. Johnston, Lahore, 1936).

wisdom [these are the five *balas*, forces constitutive of a personal realization of the doctrine– V.L.]. I will arouse effort to realize this Teaching realized by him. Before long I realized that Teaching. Then I approached Āḷāra Kālāma and asked: “Venerable one, is it this much, the teaching you have realized”. “Friend, it is this much only, the teaching that I have realized, declare and abide in”. Then I said: “I too have realized this much and abide in it”. “Venerable one, it is rare gain for us to meet co-associates like you in the holy life. That the Teaching I have realized, you too have realized. So that, whatever Teaching, I know, that, you, too, know. Now the two of us are on equal grounds. Let us together guide this following”. Bhāradvāja, it was in this manner that my teacher Āḷāra Kālāma, gave me equal status. Then it occurred to me: This teaching does not lead to giving up, detachment, cessation, appeasement, knowledge, enlightenment and extinction. It leads up to the sphere of nothingness only. Not satisfied, I turned away from it (MN II 5 10. 100).

The same situation was repeated with Uddaka Rāmaputta.

In the context of this *sutta*, to learn through *saddhā* only<sup>13</sup> means to take something for granted without personal verification consisting of effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. Thus *saddhā* is not a religious faith, but rather a justified belief, or confidence which should be nothing but a starting point. We also may suggest that those who proclaimed to have attained an “extrasensual knowledge” not necessarily attained it as those followers of Āḷāra and Uddaka (the future Buddha as well) who

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<sup>13</sup> Professor Vetter remarks that the expression *kevalam saddhāmattakena* appearing in the second of the Buddha’s three differentiations of Saṅgārava’s basic sentence may have been taken from the story about the Buddha’s search for release that appears not only in the *Saṅgāravasutta* (MN II 211, 27 ff), but also, with some modifications, in the *Ariyapariyenasanasutta* (MN I 163, 9 ff), and, therefore, seems to be older than the *Saṅgāravasutta* as such. He also refers to a Chinese translation of a parallel of the *Ariyapariyenasanasutta* (T.26.775c8 ff) which contains the passage on Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta (776b9 ff). But, as he indicates, in it the passage is much shorter. As to the *saddhā*, it has no characters corresponding to *kevalam saddhāmattakena*; only *na kho Āḷārass’eva Kālāmassa atthisaddhā, mayamp’ atthi saddhā* (164, 160) and a similar sentence about Rāma, Uddaka’s father (165, 36) are represented (776b14 and c13). He thinks that the Chinese translation could have been based on an abbreviated version, but as Buddhist *suttas* normally expand, it may be more likely that the passage in the Pāli text has been expanded rather late, perhaps even after the completion of the Chinese Madhyāmāgama (T.26) about 380 C.E.

pronounced the words “I know and see” by uttering and reciting as the elders did. And it may be the answer not only to our second, but as well to our third question concerning the attaining of extrasensual cognition through *saddhā* only. It is clear that, in Buddha’s opinion, it is not possible.

The Buddha asserts that he has realized in his own experience the truth (the *Dhamma*) “not known before”. It is this very *Dhamma* that he preaches, and it is the realization of this very *Dhamma* in a special systematic meditative practice that he believes to be the most important means of attaining *nirvāṇa*. During his ascending to more and more elevated states of meditation (Sanskrit *dhyāna* or Pāli *jhāna*), the Buddha overcomes discursive thought (*takkā* and *vimaṃsā*) and arrives at the culminating *bodhi* (awakening).

The *bodhi*, while being without any doubt extra-rational, is in no way supernatural. From the Buddha’s point of view, it is a question of utterly natural capacities of mind which may be developed by every human being through systematic exercises, including, besides different sorts of meditation techniques, a critical examination in the form of rational propositions. (I will talk about it later on).

Now I would like to discuss the relation of this soteriological experience to faith and knowledge. The best presentation of the problem may be found in the *Carikāsutta* (MN II 164-167) where the Buddha talks with the brahmin Kāpaṭika.

Kāpaṭika proposes the following topic: «Master Gotama, with regard to the ancient hymns and strophes (*mantapadaṃ*) – passed down through teacher to teacher (*parampara*) and included in their canon (*piṭaka*) – the brahmins have come to the definite conclusion that “Only this is true; anything else is worthless (*idameva saccaṃ moghamaññan’ti*)”. “What does Master Gotama have to say to this?”»

The Buddha: “Tell me, Bhāradvāja, is there among the brahmins even one brahmin who says, ‘This I know; this I see; only this is true; anything else is worthless?’”

In other words, the Buddha wants to know whether the brahmins can prove that the truth to which they adhere is based on their personal experience. The same question is repeated with respect to the teachers of these brahmins, to the teachers of their teachers, etc. and even with respect to ancient *ṛṣi* – mythological seers. After the negative answer of Kāpaṭika the Buddha likens the *parampara*, or teacher-to-pupil transmission, with “a row of blind men, as it were: the first one doesn’t see, the middle one doesn’t see, the last one doesn’t see”.

The Buddha calls the *saddhā* (the conviction of these brahmins expressed in the phrase “Only this is true; anything else is worthless”) a groundless one (*amūlika*). He is not alluding to any deficiency of the oral tradition, but just to the fact that the first *ṛṣi* did not possess a direct knowledge of the brahmanic doctrine, and that others accepted it as their conviction or belief without personally verifying it.

There are five *dhammas* (mental states) that can turn out in two ways in the here-and-now. Which five? Faith, liking, oral tradition, pondering about reasons – [those are the reasons for accepting this or that *ditthi*, or opinions – V.L.], agreement with a considered opinion. These are the five *dhammas* that can turn out in two ways in the here-and-now. Now some things are firmly held in conviction and yet vain, empty, and false. Some things are not firmly held in conviction, and yet they are genuine, factual, and unmistakable. Some things are well-liked... truly an unbroken tradition... well-reasoned... well-pondered and yet vain, empty, and false. Some things are not well-pondered, and yet they are genuine, factual, unmistakable. In these cases it isn't proper for a knowledgeable person who safeguards the truth to come to a definite conclusion, 'Only this is true; anything else is worthless'.

Thus, according to the Buddha, conviction, liking, oral tradition, speculation about reasons, agreement with a considered opinion are not sufficient grounds to accept any given opinion (*ditthi*), because it may turn out to be false, or to reject it, for it may turn out to be true.

What does mean neither to accept, nor reject? Not to formulate any definite judgment like sceptics? In the Buddhist texts, the epoche of the sceptics is depicted rather ironically. Though the Buddha himself avoids, like sceptics, any positive or negative judgments about other teachers' doctrines, he does so because he prefers to talk about his own *Dhamma*. In the same way, he urges the others to verify his *Dhamma* in their personal experience.

Kāpaṭika asks the Buddha to explain what he means by a knowledgeable person who safeguards the truth. The Buddha: «If a person has the *saddhā*, his statement, "This is my *saddhā*, safeguards the truth. But he doesn't yet come to the definite conclusion that "Only this is true; anything else is worthless." ... But it is not yet an awakening to the truth».

The same applies to the other *dhammas* enumerated in the list.

According to Jayatilleke, *saccānurakkharā* is "a provisional acceptance of a proposition or doctrine for the purposes of verification".<sup>14</sup> I think that the best translation for *saddhā* in this context is "confidence". But as a matter of fact, the examination of a doctrine is tightly connected with the examination of the person who advocates it. As the Buddha explains further on,

There is the case, Bhāradvāja, where a monk lives in dependence on a certain village or town. Then a householder or householder's son goes to him and observes him with regard to three mental qualities – qualities based on greed, qualities based on aversion, qualities based on delusion: 'Are there in this venerable one any such

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<sup>14</sup> K.N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, (L., 1963), p. 391.

qualities based on greed that, with his mind overcome by these qualities', he might say, 'I know', while not knowing, or say, 'I see', while not seeing; or that he might urge another to act in a way that was for his/her long-term harm & pain? As he observes him, he comes to know, 'There are in this venerable one no such qualities based on greed... His bodily behavior and verbal behavior are those of one not greedy. And the *Dhamma* he teaches is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. This *Dhamma* can't easily be taught by a person who's greedy. (The same with regard to aversion and delusion)

When, on observing that the monk is purified with regard to qualities based on delusion, he places confidence in him. With the rising of confidence, he visits him and grows close to him. Growing close to him, he lends ear. Lending ear, he hears the *Dhamma*. Hearing the *Dhamma*, he remembers it. Remembering it, he examines the meaning of it. Examining the meaning, he understands and approves it. As there being an approval through understanding it, desire arises (to try it on himself). With the arising of this desire, he becomes willing. Willing, he contemplates (lit: "weighs," "compares"). Contemplating, he makes an exertion. Exerting himself, he both realizes the ultimate meaning of the truth with his body and sees by penetrating it with discernment. To this extent, Bhāradvāja, there is an awakening to the truth. To this extent one awakens to the truth. I describe this as an awakening to the truth. But it is not yet the final attainment of the truth.

Thus we have *safeguarding the truth* (conditional acknowledgement of truth), *awakening to the truth*: the first understanding resulting from the process of internal assimilation of the truth including, besides emotional (desire) and volitional (exertion) factors, rational understanding itself being the result of contemplation. Then the adept obtains a *paññā* – insight or intellectual intuition. But why is this *paññā* not identical with *attaining the truth*, and what is attaining the truth?

The Buddha: The cultivation, development, and pursuit of those very same qualities: to this extent, Bhāradvāja, there is the final attainment of the truth.

What is the difference between *awakening to the truth* and *attaining the truth*? I think that awakening to the truth is a single instance, a momentary and transient mental state. It needs to be cultivated and affirmed in a systematic way. It is this systematic cultivation that constitutes a process leading to *nirvāṇa*.

The process begins with the cultivation of *saddhā*, followed by visiting the teacher, growing close to him, lending ear to him, hearing the *Dhamma*, remembering the *Dhamma*, examining its meaning, understanding, approving it, desiring, contemplating, willing, exercising, etc.

In this context *saddhā* means a confidence or conviction, and not a religious faith. It is confidence in teaching as a result of the confidence in a teacher, or confidence in a teacher as a result of the confidence in a teaching. Both ways are acceptable, nevertheless in the *Alagaddepamasutta*, MN 22, the Buddha draws a distinction between those followers “who only have faith in me and affection for me... and the monks who follow my teaching, following through faith”. The first category is bound for heaven, the second for Enlightenment.<sup>15</sup> The more elevated position of the second category (of those followers who rely more on teaching than on teacher) is also evident from the case of Ānanda who seemed to have had too much *prema* (‘affection’) for the Buddha and for this reason could not attain arhatship.<sup>16</sup> In both cases the *saddhā* is not a sort of self-sufficient state of mind, but an urge, an impulse to experimental verification in personal experience accompanied by critical investigation (*vimamsā*). Buddha’s recommendations concerning the character of this investigation depend on the character of his audience. To the householders of Kālāma (the *Kālāmasutta*) he recommends relying on their personal experience and common sense: “Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: “These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,” enter on and abide in them.” (AN III 65, Translated by Soma Thera, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1981).

In *Vimamsakasutta*, where his listeners are Buddhist monks (*bhikkhu*), the Buddha suggests a series of tests to verify whether Tathāgata (“The Thus Gone One”), an epithet of the Buddha used by him when speaking of himself, is really the Tathāgata – The Perfect one (MN.I, 5. 7. 317-320, <http://www.mettanet.org/tipitaka/Sutta-Pitaka/2Majjhima-Nikaya/Majjhima1/047-vimamsaka-sutta-e1.htm>):

Bhikkhus, by the bhikkhu who has and investigated nature, [but] does not [directly] know the state of another person’s mind, the Thus Gone One should be examined on two things.<sup>17</sup> On things cognizable by eye consciousness and

<sup>15</sup> Cited from Richard Gombrich. *How Buddhism Began*, (L.1996), p. 107.

<sup>16</sup> See the paper of B. F. Ellison, “Ananda’s Hindrance: Faith in Early Buddhism,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, (1992), 20, 253-273.

<sup>17</sup> The translation of this phrase was proposed by Professor Vetter instead of the original translation (“Bhikkhus, by the bhikkhu who could examine the thought processes of another the Thus Gone”). As he argues, “Why should one examine the Tathāgata, if one [directly] knows the state of his mind”? He



ear consciousness, Are defiled things cognizable by eye and ear consciousness evident in the Thus Gone One or are they not? When examining, he knows. These defiled things cognizable by eye and ear consciousness are not evident in the Thus Gone One. Then he should make a further examination: Are mixed things cognizable by eye and ear consciousness evident in the Thus Gone One or are they not? When examining, he knows. These mixed things cognizable by eye and ear consciousness are not evident in the Thus Gone One. Then he should make a further examination: Are pure things cognizable by eye and ear consciousness evident in the Thus Gone One or are they not? When examining he knows. The pure things cognizable by eye and ear consciousness [are evident in the Thus Gone One...].

Then follows another series of tests:

Has the venerable one attained to these things of merit since long or were they attained to recently? Is the venerable one internally convinced of this attainment? Is there a possible danger evident? Does the venerable one not indulge in sensuality, through destruction of greed or through fear? On what grounds did the venerable one say that the venerable one did not indulge in sensuality because greed is destroyed and not through fear? ...Are pure things cognizable by eye and ear consciousness evident in the Thus Gone One, or are they not? I would declare: "Pure things cognizable by eye and ear consciousness are evident in the Thus Gone One..."

A teacher who says: "That is my path and pasture, but I do not make them mine" [that means that he is not attached to them – V.L.]. Bhikkhus, a Teacher who says thus, is suitable to be approached to hear the Teaching. He teaches leading one to more and more exalted states, showing the dark and white counterparts<sup>1</sup>. When teaching leading to more and more exalted states, at a certain point he reaches the summit and establishes faith in the Teacher: The Blessed One is rightfully enlightened, the Teaching is well proclaimed, the Community of bhikkhus have gone well.

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confirms this negation by referring to the Chinese translation (T. vol. II (no 26) 731b3).

In that case the *saddhā* is something stronger than simple confidence, it is a faith or firm belief, or assurance, certainty: “The faith of him, which is thus fixed, rooted and established on these reasons, grounds and features is said to be rational faith (*ākāravatī saddhā*), rooted in insight, firm and irremovable by recluse or brahmin, a god, Māra or Brahma or anyone in the world”.<sup>18</sup>

Jayatilleke renders *ākāravatī saddhā* as «rational faith». But to what extent may this faith be called “rational”? We have seen that the examination or investigation (*vimaṃsā*) suggested by the Buddha to the bhikkhu is not a rational or logical proof, but some kind of systematic sense observation (perceptual judgments) which may serve as a sort of “phenomenological” ascertainment. There is a series of tests, beginning with “the venerable one long attained to these things of merit, or were they attained to recently, which clearly demands a kind of ascertainment which could be provided only by penetrating in another’s state of mind, or by telepathy. The latter is quite at place in the “advanced” audience of professional “meditators” disposing of the *abhiññā* – superpowers, namely, the power of telepathic knowledge, which is defined in D. I.80 in the following way: “He comprehends with his mind the mind of other beings: he knows that a passionate mind is passionate, a dispassionate is dispassionate, a mind full of hatred is a mind full of hatred...,” etc.<sup>19</sup>

This power being totally superrational, is in no way supernatural or paranormal, because it may be developed by any normal human being through a process of mental concentration. In Pāli suttas, the information acquired in this way is appreciated on the same footing as the normal sense data, because it is considered to be principally reproducible, that is accessible to experimental verification. Does it follow from this that any kind of evidence based on the *abhiññā* is automatically considered to be true? The majority of *ditṭhi* listed in the *Brahmajālasutta* and defined by the Buddha as *ekaṃsika* (categorical) are based on the *abhiññā* called *pubbenivāsānussatiñāṇa* – retrocognitive knowledge – the remembrance of previous existences. The reliability of this experience is not being challenged. What is erroneous, according to the Buddha, is its interpretation connected with the false conception of the Self (*ātman, atta*). By this he suggests that *sassatavāda* (the doctrine of eternalists) and other erroneous *ditṭhi* may result from misunderstanding of yogic experience. Approximately a fourth part of all the *ditṭhi* in the *Brahmajālasutta* is ascribed to a special category of recluses and brahmins:

Here, a certain ascetic or Brahmin is a logician (*takkī*), a reasoner (*vīmaṃsi*). Hammering it out by reasoning,

<sup>18</sup> Tr. by Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, (L., 1963), p. 393.

<sup>19</sup> Tr. by Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, (L., 1963), p. 439.

following his own line of investigation, he argues: ‘The self and the world are eternal...’ (DN I 6.34).<sup>20</sup>

If this category of *takkī* and *vīmaṃsī* is typologically identical with one mentioned in the *Saṅgāravasutta*, the expression ‘*kevala*’ *saddhāmattakena* – “through *saddhā* only” is applicable to them as well. Those who are motivated by pure reason and follow investigation based on it are going into a blind alley which will never lead them to “I know this, I see this”. Thus *saddhā* in early Buddhism, unlike faith in Christianity, seems to be not a gift of God which should be taken as it is with gratitude and resignation, but rather a challenge or an invitation to personal verification and systematic examination. *Saddhā* is not something definite and stable, on which one could establish his or her religion, but a part of a dynamic and ever renewed effort to follow the Path to emancipation.

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<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note that according to Professor Vetter’s research, a description of persons as *takkī vīmaṃsī* is reflected in the Chinese translation of the *Dirghāgama* (T.1) made about 400 CE, but not in an earlier translation made probably about 240 C.E. and attributed to Shi Ken. That may mean that the theme of getting knowledge through reasoning arose later.



**PART III**

**ISLAMIC CULTURE**



## CHAPTER X

# CULTURAL DIVERSITY AS LOGIC-AND-MEANING OTHERNESS: THE CASE OF KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH

ANDREY SMIRNOV

Whenever we engage in a comparative study of any two cultures, we start with one of them and proceed to another. *Another* culture is always there whenever we speak about one of the two because the *otherness* distinguishes the two cultures under study. Such otherness always lets us know about itself, and a comparative study is in fact a study of otherness.

In this paper I will speak about a type of otherness that I refer to as *logic-and-meaning otherness*. Both sides, logical and semantic, are involved here. This means that when we speak about a concept of, let us say, 'knowledge' or 'faith', we cannot get to its content without taking into account the logic that builds it up and ties it to other concepts. We will not grasp the logic of reasoning that involves 'knowledge' and 'faith' without understanding its semantic substance.

It is quite common to speak about semantic otherness that distinguishes phenomena sharing common names in different cultures, such as 'knowledge' or 'faith'. It is not that common to speak about the logic that distinguishes the two cultures as they build up the varying semantic content of such concepts. I argue that in some cases this approach is crucial. Those are cases when the cultures under study are characterized by logic-and-meaning, and not just semantic otherness.

Such is the case of Western and Muslim cultures. I will speak about the way 'knowledge' and 'faith' are related to each other, bringing to light both logical and semantic aspects as interconnected. Needless to say, it will be a scheme, not more; yet we have to start with this scheme to develop it later into a full-scale picture.

Let me begin with something well-known. Islamic thinking does not divide the secular and the ecclesiastical in the way the Western society does. In classical Islamic culture we do not find 'canon' law separated from 'temporal' law, neither 'spiritual' poetry apart from 'profane' poetry, nor 'religious' art separated from 'secular' art, etc.

This does not mean that Islamic culture does not draw distinction between what belongs to the religious sphere and what belongs to the earthly life. On the contrary, such distinction is quite consistent. It is expressed respectively by the notions of *dīn* (literally, "religion") and *dunyā* (literally, "the nearby [world]"). This distinction presupposes, as well, the separation between the two; and, furthermore, an opposition between them.

Thus both Western and Islamic thinking point to the difference, understood as an opposition, between the two spheres. My question is: how is this opposition, so to say, organised? How is it built up? Further, the opposition presupposes a unifying concept. How is unification achieved in the two cases? These are the questions that I will address.

In the Western case, 'faith' and 'knowledge' make up a contradiction, because 'faith', from the logical point of view, ought to be understood and treated as 'non-knowledge', i.e., as a logical negation of 'knowledge'.

Thus, during the Middle Ages, philosophy acted as a servant of theology, allowed to study what faith did not cover. The Enlightenment reversed the subordination: it placed autonomous reason in a superior position, and limited faith to the areas from which it could not endanger the domination of reason. This logic, relating faith and knowledge, is more stable than the fluctuating content filling these categories.

Now, if faith is, logically speaking, non-knowledge, how is it possible to 'know by faith'? Or how can belief (which is something closely related to faith and falling under the same category of 'non-knowledge') be a basis for any piece of knowledge, as is the case of any theoretical construction? These are questions that arise *after* we have built up a logic-and-meaning cluster of the two notions, 'knowledge' and 'non-knowledge', and have related them to each other as a dichotomic opposition. Only then can we discover how amazing, and even paradoxical this cluster appears, since faith and belief, which are non-knowledge, could as well be considered knowledge from certain points of view.

However elaborated, those paradoxes do not in the least undermine the validity of the initial build-up. Rather, it is this logic-and-meaning relation of knowledge to non-knowledge that constitutes the ground for all those questions, problems and paradoxes, and without it they would simply cease to be.

Exactly this thing happens as we shift to the domain of Islamic thinking. Here, we see no dichotomy of opposites. This seemingly queer point was already hinted to by what we started with: distinction and opposition of 'religious' (*dīn*) and 'worldly' (*dunyawī*) is there, and yet we see no division of spheres that we would expect to be split into those two halves. This is the logical side of things; I will get back to it in a moment.

The semantic aspect comes to light when we discover that Islamic culture opposes 'knowledge' (*ilm*) not with 'non-knowledge', but with 'action' (*amal*). Accordingly, 'faith' or 'belief' simply cannot contradict knowledge, since they do not belong to the category which stands in an opposition to 'knowledge'. This brings us back to the logical side, and this back-to-logic shift of our discussion will help us understand why and how 'action' could be a logically consistent opposition of 'knowledge'.

It happens so because opposites here are not mutually exclusive. Rather they require each other as their condition. I mean this ontologically, not just logically: for an opposite to be, its counterpart should come into



existence as well. (This is clearly not the case for dichotomic opposites.) Moreover, the opposites here, so to say, *convert* into each other. This *conversion* (or, we could say, *transition*) is the reason for their mutual ontological necessitation.

So, knowledge and action in the domain of Islamic culture are opposites, which means, according to the logic-and-meaning rules of this domain, that they presuppose each other and convert into each other. Now we are ready to introduce another concept, that is, the one that ties those opposites together by unifying them.

This unity is produced by the mutual transition of opposites; moreover, we could say that it *is* that transition. Knowledge converts into action (or, one could say, brings action to life); action is determined and produced by knowledge. It is this mutual conversion of knowledge and action that unites them; this unity, which means necessitation of the one by the other, is ‘faith’ (*īmān*).

Faith eliminates opposition between knowledge and action and serves for them as the general term. The general is constituted by the transition of the ‘inferior’ oppositions into each other, yet it does not in any sense ‘include’ them, either in the sense that an idea includes a possibility for its individual embodiments or a synthesising notion includes the synthesised oppositions, or in any other sense.

This exposition serves to explain why, in the domain of Islamic culture, faith cannot contradict knowledge.

Transition of knowledge into action constitutes and establishes (*ithbāt*) faith. The very idea of reason achieving its autonomy by freeing itself from the dominance of faith is not just incorrect (in which case it would be possible to keep looking for other arguments). In Islamic culture, this idea is *meaningless*; according to the common English phrase, it simply *does not make sense* and cannot, therefore, be discussed. To ‘get rid’ of the ‘supremacy of religious faith’ and ‘liberate the mind from its domination’ would mean to eliminate the unity and coordination of knowledge and action, to disbalance them.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, under the logic-and-meaning rules of Islamic cultural domain nearly any piece of knowledge which is harmoniously connected to and leads to action creates faith. (The only *a priori* exception that comes to mind is the direct denial of monotheism as an explicit thesis.)

That is why Islamic theoreticians, past and present, claim, often so enthusiastically, that everything in Islamic culture is ‘illuminated by the light of faith’ and that any action, including the movements of a potter or carpenter, is ‘inseparable from faith’.

This thesis is correct – yet it is correct only if understood within the logic-and-meaning domain of Islamic culture. One should not interpret knowledge – for instance, the carpenter’s knowledge that goes into his

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<sup>1</sup> This is what the ideas that suggest ‘bringing Islamic countries close to Western standards’ boil down to, if treated theoretically.

hand's movements planing wood – as 'included into' faith and consequently – consequently for Western thinking – as 'religious' knowledge. By the force of the same logic-and-meaning rules, this could be opposed to 'non-religious' knowledge, thus producing opposition of faith and knowledge. That would be true from the Western point of view. As long as we remain in the domain of Islamic thinking, knowledge and action as such are 'outside' faith, and, therefore, cannot contradict faith.<sup>2</sup>

By the force of the same logic-and-meaning imperative, Islamic culture does not impede the development of scientific knowledge.<sup>3</sup> In the writings of the most important Islamic theoreticians, including contemporary ones, one can trace the desire to see the entire sum of science as one of the constitutive elements of faith, which – as an implication – in no way contradicts it.<sup>4</sup>

At the very end of '*Anna Karenina*' (Part 8, Chaps. XII-XIII), Leo Tolstoy describes in detail Levin's sudden insight – or, to be precise, his sudden and clear awareness – of what Levin had already known as 'spiritual truths which he had sucked with his mother's milk'. All his life, he had, inside, a sort of struggle between this prehistoric knowledge-faith and another kind of knowledge achieved by reason and verified by science. These two kinds of knowledge are incompatible because they express incompatible truths. A person can possess both but has to place them at 'different layers' of his or her personality. At the end, one of them wins. These two kinds of knowledge are faith (knowledge-by-faith) and knowledge (procured by reason) as the only authority in the matter.

This short piece nearly exhausts the problematic of the faith-to-knowledge relationship. Expressed in a few pages, Tolstoy's thoughts would take volumes if all their implications were to be unfolded. My task, however, is not to attempt such unfolding, successful or unsuccessful, more or less complete. My task is to point out the logic-and-meaning basis of any such unfolding, as well as of the ideas still undeveloped in Levin's inner monologue.

Islamic culture, *as well as* any other, can be explained as a set of logic-and-meaning clusters organised according to the rules that stay the

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<sup>2</sup> Knowledge of the nearby world' (*ilm dunyawī*), however, could contradict 'religious knowledge' (*ilm dīnī*). Yet, firstly, this happens only in the case of their direct (not implicit) contradiction, and, secondly, it is a conflict inside the domain of knowledge and not between knowledge and faith, which implies quite a different logic both of conflict and of its resolution. For this, Ibn Rushd's '*Faṣl al-maqāl*' serves as a good example.

<sup>3</sup> I do not speak here of well-known cases of extremism and fanaticism, which are exceptions that confirm the rule and which – one should understand it very clearly and use it accordingly – contradict the very logic of Islamic culture in its own right.

<sup>4</sup> For the last century, M. Iqbal is a bright illustration.

same within that culture's domain but could differ in another culture. The case of faith and knowledge is only one of many possible examples.

The same logic-and-meaning procedures apply to the 'body-and-soul' cluster. Body and soul, being mutually determined oppositions, constitute the human 'I-ness' (*'anā'iyya*) by virtue of their conversion and transition into each other.<sup>5</sup> The 'I-ness' (*'anā'iyya*) is an absolutely simple entity and does not in any sense 'include' body and soul as its parts. Absolutely indivisible, this entity is something in which both the body and the soul, external to it, come to unity that rules out any opposition between them.<sup>6</sup> Theories of psychophysical parallelism, the discussion of which plagues modern Western philosophy and psychology, simply lack any basis in this logic-and-meaning domain.

To comprehend the logic-and-meaning causation for a culture's identity is a long and painstaking work demanding constant attention to the operation of one's own mind. This is not, of course, free from the logic-and-meaning imperatives of one's mother culture. Yet this comprehension is the only way towards a real dialogue with a culture which stands to our own in relation of logic-and-meaning, and not just semantic otherness.

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<sup>5</sup> An excellent illustration of this logic-and-meaning procedure is to be found in the book by M.N. al-Attas "Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam" (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995, pp. 225-227). The author refers to Ibn Sīnā's theories, but this way of reasoning, as he rightly points out, is quite representative of Islamic thinking on the whole.

<sup>6</sup> This point needs some clarification. Body and soul are opposites if taken 'as such'. But when we treat them 'as such', we cannot speak about their unity in any sense. It means we can talk about either 'soul' or 'body', but not about 'human being', since the 'human being' is one, is a unity, and not just body apart from soul. Yet after we achieve such unity and grasp the human 'I-ness', the body and the soul 'as such' cease to be, and we can speak only of the absolutely simple and indivisible 'I-ness' as a unity of body and soul. Logically speaking, this unity transgresses any opposition between the two, and, semantically, it transgresses the semantic domains of the two: the 'I-ness' is devoid of any trace of the 'body' and [the] 'soul' seems 'inside' itself. Logical and semantic are mutually determinant, building up a logic-and-meaning cluster.



**CHAPTER XI**  
**SOME RATIONALISTIC PRECEPTS OF**  
**THE KORAN**

*TAUFIK IBRAHIM*

The Koranic discourse combines the revelational and the rational, underlining their harmony. Such epistemological orientation served as a point of departure for intellectualistic quests in Kalam, the leading school of philosophical theology in philosophical and theological schools in Islam, and partly for the Falasifah of Muslim Aristotelians. Today the revival of this rationalistic intention is a major tendency towards reforming and updating traditional Islamic thought.

*To Believe and to Reason*

The Koran representing divine Revelation naturally orients first and foremost to Revelation as the prime and the most reliable source of knowledge about God and His will. This is incarnated in the Law, i.e. a code of rules, to be used by people in their service for the Lord and in their interrelationships. Only through Revelation do we come to be instructed into *Ghayb*, the “Inmost” secrets of divinity: the essence of God, His names and attributes; into the world of spirits – angels, jinns and demons, and into the realities of the next world – the death trials, resurrection, the Day of Judgment, Scales, the Bridge, Paradise and Hell, etc. Therefore, *ayats* 2: 2-3 describe the Koran as

A guide for the righteous,  
For the believers in *Ghayb*.

The Divine Message transmitted to the Prophet Muhammad (and the former prophets) and fixed down, in particular, in the Koran (and pre-Islamic Scriptures), represents Revelation in a proper sense, sometimes qualified as a “supernatural” or “sacred” revelation. Insisting on the belief in a supernatural revelation, the Koran at the same time points to another variety of God’s self-disclosure – through things and phenomena of the world (with man in it). It is noteworthy that the Muslim Scripture uses one and the same word, “*ayat*”, for defining both a unit of verses in the Koran and a certain natural phenomenon. For example, in the second *surah* God points out:

Truly, in the creation of heaven and earth –  
*Ayats* are intended for the reasoning people. (2:164)

And *Surah* 41 reads as follows:

We will present Our *ayats* to them  
In the Universe and in themselves... (41:53)

The World (Cosmos, Nature) constitutes another variety of divine revelation – “general”, or “natural” revelation. Hence a divine revelation is incarnate in two Scriptures – the Koran and the Cosmos, characterized by thinkers of classical Islam as *al-Kitab at-tadwini* (“The Scriptural Book”) and *al-Kitab at-takwini* (“The Ontological Book”) respectively. In the case of a sacred revelation, it is prophets who ordinarily act as an “instrument” but, in the case of a natural revelation, it is human reason.

As in a refrain, the Koran calls for “reasoning”, “learning” and “examining” by using the expressions such as “can they be so unreasonable”, “for the understanding people”, etc. Combining sacred and natural theology, the Scripture repeatedly summons people to think over harmony and beauty reigning in the world as an evidence of the Creator’s wisdom. Drawing on rational arguments, it substantiates not only God’s existence (e.g. 2:164; 50:20; 67:1-4), but also His uniqueness (17:42; 21:22; 23:91), resurrection of the dead (18:48; 36:78-79; 46:33) and many other religious tenets.

The two complementary ways of God’s cognition – through “hearing”, i.e. by means of Tradition/Revelation (in the narrow, proper meaning of the word) and through “reasoning” clearly outlined in *Surah* 67 forewarning about the repentant words of the doomed sinners on the Day of Judgment:

If only we had listened (*nasma‘*),  
Or reasoned (*na‘qul*),  
We would not now be with the inhabitants of the blazing Fire!  
(67:10)

Later on, in Muslim literature these two types of knowledge – revelational and rational – were defined as *naqli* (or *sam‘i*) and *‘aqli* respectively. In the Koran God repeatedly mentions both ways of His guidance together, defining them as *kitab* (“book”) and *hikmah* (“wisdom”) (2:129, 231; 3:164; 4:54; 62:2; etc.). *Ayat* 16:125 instructs the Prophet Muhammad “to call people to the way of your Lord with wisdom”. And *Ayat* 2:269 proclaims:

Whoever is given wisdom  
Has truly been given much good!

God points to the superiority of knowledge/reason in his Koranic revelations such as: “Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?!” (39:9); and “God will raise up, to high ranks, those of you who

believe and those who have been given knowledge” (58:11). In his turn, the Prophet Muhammad called scholars (*‘Ulama’*) heirs to the prophets, and reason – God’s prime and supreme creature.

Drawing on these and other precepts of the Koran and Sunnah, the Mutakallims (masters of Kalam) professed the primacy of the rational over the revelational, i.e. the primacy of reason over belief/revelation. This priority is explained, in particular, by the necessity to resolve “*circulus in probando*” since recognition of the Divine Word (Scriptures) and prophets requires preliminary verification, first, of God’s existence and, second, of His sending the messengers, which is possible only by means of rational reasoning. Therefore, all the three foremost schools of Kalam – Mutazilites, Asharites and Maturidites – regard rational cognition, or speculation (*nazar*) as the Muslim’s prime duty. Their sole divergence lies in interpreting the character of this duty – whether it is rational or revelational.

The Asharites declare it to be an imperative of the revelational Law (*Shar’*), believing that only the Law is entitled to order anything in religious matters. References are made to the Koranic words: “Cognize that there is no god but God” (47:19), numerous *ayats* denouncing *taqlid*-epigonism (see below), the Koranic praise of belief in God and the promise of heavenly rewards for it, along with censuring disbelief and polytheism and threatening with hellish torments for the latter. On the other hand, the Koran says: “Nor do We punish until We have sent a messenger [to give warning]” (17:15) which, according to the Asharites, makes God’s cognition obligatory only with the arrival of Law/Revelation, since this responsibility cannot be imposed by reason alone.

The Mutazilites and Maturidites viewed God’s cognition as directed by reason itself, prior to the arrival of the revelational Law and irrespective of it. The difference in the two approaches is usually illustrated by the example of a man who has lived all his life in some remote place inaccessible to any religious call. This brings up the following questions: ought he to believe in God and ought he to be punished beyond the grave if he has died in disbelief? The Asharites’ answer is negative while the Mutazilites and Maturidites give a positive answer to the above questions.

The Mutazilites’ tenet on the possibility of a purely intellectual foundation of religious truths arises from their teaching on the objective and rational nature of ethical values. “Good” and “evil/bad” (Arabic *husn* and *qubh*) is the fundamental quality inherent in things/actions themselves, not depending on the will of God who could have commanded a different order by giving things different characteristics. Being immanent, the ethical qualifications are primary as regards the Divine Law: a thing is good not because it is pleasing to God; on the contrary, He is pleased with a thing because it is good. So, a virtuous life is possible on the basis of people’s purely intellectual capacities.

The Asharites shared the Mutazilites’ ethical objectivism/rationalism only in part. They recognized the epistemological power of reasoning and the possibility of rational cognition of ethical

values. But at the same time they categorically rejected its legalizing authorities, believing that the introduction of relevant norms lay within the exclusive competence of the sacred Revelation/religious Law. In this matter, as in many others, the Maturidites occupied a middle position between the two extremes. True enough, some “later” Maturidites-Hanafites were inclined to agree with the Mutazilites’ thesis.

#### *Versus Epigonism*

Rejecting Islam, the Meccan and other Arabian pagans used to refer to beliefs inherited by them from their ancestors. Therefore, numerous *ayats* in the Koran depose *taqlid*-epigonism, blind imitation of alien convictions and customs. As to the polytheists’ statements justifying paganism such as “We found our fathers following this religion: we do guide ourselves by their footsteps”, the Prophet Muhammad, acting at God’s will, queries:

Even though I bring you better religion  
Than that which you found your fathers following?! (43: 23-24)

or, according to another *ayat*:

Even though your fathers understood nothing  
And were void of guidance?! (2:170)

On the Day of Judgment, the outcast *Muqallids*-epigones would justify themselves by complaining:

Lord!  
We obeyed our masters and our chiefs,  
And they led us astray! (33:67)

Acting in the spirit of the Koranic pleas for critical thinking, the Mutakallims rejected *taqlid* in the theoretical sphere of religion (i.e. concerning the principles of belief), allowing it only in practical matters (as regards cult and law). As al-Maturidi points out, the advocates of each religion, as well as those adhering to different interpretations within the same religion, view their version of belief as true and the alien one as false while professing their belief by drawing on the *taqlid* of their predecessors (*Salaf*). A way out is possible only when everyone ascertains, by reason, the truth of the preaching. In this way, “the opinion of a majority” cannot serve as a reference point, since one may prove to be right while many others may turn out to be wrong.

A doubt (*shakk*) about all the inherited religious notions and all that has been acquired through *taqlid* is a prerequisite for cognizing the true belief. According to al-Ghazali’s “*Mizan al-‘amal*”, “It is doubts that lead



to the truth; those who have no doubt fail to observe; those who fail to observe will not see, and those who fail to see will remain blind and deluded.”

Therefore, each Muslim man and woman upon reaching maturity has to subject to critical examination the whole range of beliefs in which they have been reared and grown up. At this stage, as al-Ashari says, varying doctrines and the existing contradictory teachings should be viewed as equally true or false.

To the Mutazilites, Asharites and most of other Mutakallims, such overcoming of *taqlid* is a prerequisite for true believing since the belief based on *taqlid* is invalid. But Abu-Hanifah and the founders of other juridical schools-*madhhabs* recognized the *muqallid* (basing his belief solely on *taqlid*) as a believer (*mu'min*) but viewed him as a disobedient person (*'asi*) since he ignored speculation and verification.

The revelational (i.e. based on the Koran, Sunnah and the opinions of religious authorities) knowledge can be of absolute significance only in practical theology – *Fiqh*. But when solving theoretical, theological and philosophical questions, revelational argumentation can play only an auxiliary part. The Mutakallims are convinced that “revelational (*naqliyyah*) evidence does not provide certitude (*yaqin*).” This evidence cannot be fully reliable since it amounts to no more than an “opinion” (Arabic *zann*, Greek *doxa*) or probability knowledge. The trustworthiness of this evidence depends on numerous conditions whose satisfaction is extremely difficult. For revelational sources (primarily the Koran and Sunnah) have different aspects: external and internal (*zahir* and *batin*), literal and metaphorical (*haqiqah* and *majaz*), etc. Revelational texts may be also monosemantic and polysemantic (*muhkam* and *mutashabih*), abolishing and abolished (*nasikh* and *mansukh*), general or just specific in their meaning (*khass* and *'amm*), etc. Therefore, first of all it is necessary to establish the type of a given text (*ayat*, *hadith*) and how it ought to be interpreted. But the opinions on this subject are far from being unanimous. Besides, relevant information should be transmitted in a reliable manner (*mutawatir*), which is seldom the case.

#### *The Allegorical Approach*

The intellect ought not only to critically appraise relevant beliefs before accepting them. It also has to undertake the correct interpretation of divine revelations/Scriptures. In the Koran, as well as in other Scriptures, God addresses people in a language comprehensible to them, in conformity with their intellectual capacities, whereas most people perceive the truth only in sensual/material guise. Hence, among the Koranic descriptions of God, one comes across the typically anthropomorphic images – the face, the eye, the right hand, the throne, etc. God often resorts to metaphors and allegories (*amthal*): e.g. when He compares His light to a bay with a lamp in it (24:35) or compares Paradise to a garden with water, milk, wine and honey running in it (47: 15). Most probably, cosmogonic, anthropogenic

and many “historical” legends recounted in the Koran are also tinged with metaphorical imagery.

Symbols and metaphors reflect the existence of two planes/aspects in the Koranic revelations – external (literal) and internal, intended respectively for the ordinary people and the intellectual elite. The Koran itself attests to this dualism by speaking about two specific types of verses: *muhkamat*, i.e. clear, definite in meaning, and *mutashabihat*, ambiguous. The true, inner meaning of the latter is disclosed through an allegorical interpretation – *ta’wil*. *Ayat* 3:7 says:

Some of Scriptures’ verses are *muhkamat* -  
 These are the cornerstone of it;  
 Others are *mutashabihat*.  
 Those in whose hearts is perversity pursue *mutashabihat*  
 In their attempt to make trouble,  
 Interpreting them [in tendentious manner].  
 No one knows its [true] meaning except God  
 And those who have thorough knowledge.  
 They say:  
 “We believe in it, it is all from our Lord.”

Admittedly, we have translated the last three lines according to one of the two diametrically opposite interpretations. As there were no punctuation marks in written Arabic in the times of the Prophet, in the original Arabic text the conjunction “*waw*” is placed between the words “God” and “those who have thorough knowledge.” Some understand it as the connective conjunction (“and”), while the others treat it as the disjunctive conjunction (“or”). According to the second approach, the last three lines are translated as follows:

No one knows its [true] meaning except God,  
 And those who have thorough knowledge say:  
 “We believe in it, it is all from our Lord.”

The rationalists (including the Mutakallims and Falasifah) insist on the reading of the above *ayat* as proclaiming the right of people to the allegorical interpretation - *ta’wil* of the Koran because, as they contend, God would not have included verses incomprehensible to the human mind in the Scripture. The Fideists-*Hashwits* denying people’s ability for *ta’wil* adhere to the second reading/interpretation, reasoning according to the principle: “*Credo, quia absurdum*.”

The duality of external (popular, exoteric) and internal (elitist, esoteric) knowledge and a possibility of divergence between these two types of knowledge are illustrated in the Koran by a well-known story about Moses and the Righteous Man (Khidr, according to exegetes) recounted in *Surah* 18. Abu-Hurayrah, a famous narrator of the Prophet Muhammad’s

sayings, bears witness in the same vein, mentioning “two vessels” he has received from the Prophet: one vessel contained that what I have spread among Muslims, but if I had spread the content of the other vessel, you would have cut my throat.

The Mutakallims, giving priority to the rational over the revelational (*taqdim al-‘aqli ‘ala an-naqli*), instruct that, if the inferences of reason come in contradiction with the literal meaning of Scriptures, the latter ought to be subjected to allegorical interpretation to bring them in conformity with rational reasoning, for “reason is the foundation (*asl*), whereas the revelational is derivative (*far’*)”. According to al-Ashari, the one who launches into speculation (*nazar*) should begin with a study of rational arguments based on reason, assimilate them, and only then compare them with the revelational tradition (*naql*). If we find out something in the literal meaning (*zahir*) of the tradition which attests to its conformity with the rationale, it is exactly what is sought. Otherwise, we ought to know that in its inner meaning (*batin*) the tradition definitely conforms to that rationale.

#### “Sealing of Prophecy”

One of the most obvious manifestations of the Koran’s confidence in reason is its attitude to miracles (*mu‘jizah*), the traditional way for ascertaining the truth of prophetic missions and their divine origin. The adversaries of the Prophet Muhammad used to press him for confirming his mission by a supernatural miracle similar to those presented by the former prophets (e.g. 17:59, 90-95; 25:7-10, 21). This was all the more so as the Koran itself mentions such miracles describing, in particular, the Moses’ staff which was transformed into a dragon or how Jesus healed the incurables and even raised the dead. But the founder of Islam categorically refused to present similar miracles-signs, preferring to rely on completely different signs such as the Scripture, i.e. the Koran (2:23; 11:13; 17:88 etc.). By this “intellectualization” of a miracle, the Koran elevated religious consciousness to a completely new, rational level.

In the light of such reorientation we must also interpret the Koranic characteristic of Muhammad as *khatam an-nabiyyn* (literally: “seal of the prophets”, 33:40), i.e. the one who closed the long line of Messengers. Islam came into the world when humankind had already reached such intellectual maturity as to have no need for the past primitive – “prophetic”, “sacral-revelational” forms of communion with God and for cognizing the truth. From now on, we must rely exclusively on intellect and its ability for an adequate reading and interpretation of the Great Scripture – the Book of Nature.



## CHAPTER XII

# FAITH AND REASON IN THE THOUGHT OF AL-GHAZALI

*N.S. KIRABAEV AND M. AL-JANABI*

The famous philosopher, religious and political figure, Sufi Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058 – 1111), in his 34 years, began a deep study of philosophy that resulted in a serious spiritual crisis, related to doubt in his own faith. In his “Measured actions” (*Mizan al-‘Amal*), al-Ghazali wrote about the importance of such doubts, because “who does not doubt – does not think, who does not think – does not see, who does not see – stays in the state of blindness, confusion and error”. His works “The Intentions of the Philosophers” (*Maqasid al-Falasifah*) and “Inconherence of the Philosophers” (*Tahafut al-Falasifah*) were the result of al-Ghazali’s philosophical search, in the first of which three basic parts of philosophy (Logic, Physics and Metaphysics) were developed, and in the second one, which has a bright polemic character, he subjects to criticism Aristotle’s philosophy and the Arab-Muslim peripatetics.

The peripatetic philosophers proceeded from the possibility of subordinating practical to theoretical reason, on the basis of theory. In Europe this had received the form of “the dual truth” theory. In contrast, al-Ghazali affirmed the superiority of practical reason, proving, that al-Farabi, Ibn-Sina and their followers destroy faith, and thereby the moral foundations of the society. At the same time they show their inability to present an apodictic confirmation for those metaphysical provisions, to which they sacrifice this faith. In this discussion Al-Ghazali used the methods of “logic, rational and strict arguments”, but he was explicit, that it was not enough to have only reason to comprehend the highest truths. And, in the search of a different way of comprehending the Truth, he turned to Sufism.

For al-Ghazali, without accepting rational perception, God becomes a subject of believing knowledge, “taste” (*zauk*), implying the presence of divine world (*‘alam al-malakut*) – the goal and native house for a searching heart. In his work “The Intentions of the Philosophers” he affirmed, that as God was the unique “existence-necessary being in itself”, then this particular divine property belongs to the God only and is known to Him only.

“Logic of reason,” in al-Ghazali’s doctrine on God, gives place to “logic of love“. Love, al-Ghazali taught, is a derivative from knowledge (*maarif*) and perception (*idrak*). If the perceived complies with the nature of a perceiving subject, then the latter experiences pleasure from it, and there is love to it. And on the contrary, dislike will cover everything that is

unpleasant for perception. Therefore love is defined as natural aspiration (*mail'*) to everything which brings pleasure. But, from the point of view of purity of the resulting feeling, the objects of love are not equivalent but are divided into a number of levels: a man feels natural love for his existence and its perfection, completeness; for all that supports the extension of his existence, whether it be parts of his body, friends or sons; for all that is the reason of the good delivered to man, to all graces; for what is perfect in itself; and for those with whom man has internal harmony, intimate affinity (*munasaba*). This final, highest form of love finds its most pure display in love of the God, which, according to al-Ghazali, is a supernatural purpose of the natural hierarchy of love.

In "The Deliverer from Error" he wrote: "To put it briefly, there is the affinity (a man and God – N.K.), when for somebody it almost seems that they are diluted, for others – that they are joined, for the third ones – that they are reaching. But all of this is a mistake... And for the man, who experienced this state (*fana'* – N.K.), it is possible to say no more than: "What I experience I shall not try to say. Call me happy, but ask no more".<sup>1</sup>

*Fana'* means instant comprehension of "reality", under which al-Ghazali understands God and the whole sphere of his presence. To translate this into the language of Neo-Platonism, "the reality" is not that other, as the intelligible world led by the One. According to Plotin, the intelligible world exists in its complete unity with the One, with which it transcends all other kinds of existence. For al-Ghazali, original reality is also transcendental in relation to all the created. The principle of perception is concluded in reason (*'akl*), which he identified with heart (*kalb*), spirit (*ruh*) and soul (*nafs*). Due to reason the soul becomes an intelligible world and perceives itself as an object. Reason, which also belongs to the *malakut* world, has an ability for such perception, and nothing prevents it from that. The reason (or the spirit, soul) as the "supreme Ego", as selfness, is related to the realization of *fana'*.

Here a parallelism of the worlds plays an important role. "As it is possible to examine the sky, ground, trees and rivers in a mirror, as though they really existed there, and as though the mirror contained them, so it is similar with the divine presence in its entirety. Probably, it will be stamped in man's "Ego".<sup>2</sup>

So, according to al-Ghazali, in reality there is nothing besides God and his acts. God is not the One only, but also plurality. As this plurality as the one can be embodied in the "supreme Ego", then the latter becomes the Universum, which includes this plurality in itself.

For the Muslim thinker the doctrine on the unity of micro- and macro cosmos is a substantial context, where *fana'* is described not simply as a result of rational dialectics, but also as dialectics of love, underlying the "purification of soul". For al-Ghazali God is not only the "light", but also

<sup>1</sup> Ал-Газали, "Избавляющий от заблуждения," Григорян С.Н., *Из истории философии Средней Азии и Ирана* (М., 1960), p. 247.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Al-Mustafa fi 'ilm al-usul* (Cairo, 1937), pp. 17-18.

the “highest beauty“. Love thus is considered as a natural tendency of the soul to terrestrial and divine beauty. The source of love is an aspiration to contemplate the perfect, an aspiration to pure beauty.

So, if beauty is concluded in proportionality of appearance and in cleanliness of colour, then it is perceived by eyesight. But if it is concluded in a word, loftiness of a position, in high qualities and customs, in vesting all creations, in constant effusion of these boons on them, and in other similar hidden qualities, it is perceived by the feeling of “heart”.

Thus, for al-Ghazali the existence of the perfect is related with natural love. Love is represented as a final stage of the way, from one side, and the ground for perfection and perception of “the highest truth“, from the other. The grounds of the dialectics of love are a simultaneous belonging to divine and human life. It is necessary to note in the given case the principle of “similarity“, related to acts of self-knowledge. “Similarity” is considered in relation to man’s soul, which, due to its divine nature, leads to the knowledge of God. It is necessary to note, that by considering the ways of achieving *fana'* al-Ghazali treated the principle of similarity in two ways. First, the similarity of God and man means that man is gifted with the same attributes as God, but for the latter they are of the supreme degree. From here the first way of achieving *fana'* begins – the knowledge of itself as the centre and beginning of the attributes which are inherent in God. This is a psychological way. Al-Ghazali devotes his work, “True Meaning of Perfect Divine Names” (*al-Maqsad al-Asna fi Asma' Allah al-Husna*), to consideration of the given way. Concerning the first way of achieving *fana'* it is possible to tell that this way is not that other, as man’s self-knowledge, transferred to transcendent language, is thus completely aloof from it.

Also, the principle of similarity means that man, by means of mastering knowledge as an exclusive ability of reason, becomes the whole Universum. He is the centre of divine presence, intelligible world, in relation to which the man appears as Lord and similar to God. From here the second way of achieving *fana'* follows, also. The knowledge of himself as the centre of all that exists is a cosmological way. This way is possible due to the “knowledge” (*ilm*), which gives us a quasi-rule over the whole created Universum, by virtue of a sudden grasp of divine presence, though God continues to be a transcendental beginning.

“External knowledge“ is the knowledge of forms. Such knowledge, though it begins with experience, nevertheless, covers more than is contained in experience. Such a statement, as “A man cannot be in two places simultaneously or at the same time”, is always true, though our observation is limited to the present time.<sup>3</sup>

“Internal knowledge“ or “light“ is the knowledge of objects, events, acts at the level of experience and intuition. It includes the contents of knowledge as opposed to knowledge of the forms. “Internal knowledge” is subdivided in turn, into two kinds. The first kind of knowledge finds

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<sup>3</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' ulum ad-din*, Part 3, p. 14 and Part I, pp. 76-78.

increasing force and plays an increasing role in accordance with the accruing experience. The second kind of knowledge is the knowledge of spiritual realities only (God, His attributes, etc.). This kind of knowledge is based on intuition, but it has various degrees for various people. Not casually, alongside with reason, Al-Ghazali allocates intuition, or “internal reason”, “divine light”. Such knowledge, according to al-Ghazali, represents one of the main attributes of God, this is the “top of perfection”.<sup>4</sup> Therefore only a few achieve such proximate knowledge.

Finally for al-Ghazali, the identification of the “light“ with “knowledge“ and “wisdom“ led to the destruction of “knowledge” in traditional – theological sense, more exactly – to a certain interpretation of traditional knowledge. Here the influence of Sufism is obvious.

F. Rosenthal notes that the light and knowledge in particular were interrelated for Sufis, “constituting as though a conceptual basis of mysticism, where the first (light. – N.K.) acted as an emotional, inspiring, “illuminate” beginning, and the second (knowledge – N.K.) – as a systematizing, theoretical – scientific beginning, which became an integral part of Muslim mysticism”.<sup>5</sup> The attempt to consider Sufism as a science has resulted in al-Ghazali’s conclusion that the real and important discrepancy exists between the methods of Sufism, on the one hand, and the methods of speculative (“theological” and philosophical ones) sciences – on the other hand.

“External knowledge” is inherent, and “internal knowledge” obtained. Such splitting of knowledge into two levels by al-Ghazali is conditional only, for in effect they are the same. Knowledge as such is based, al-Ghazali emphasizes once again, on reason, for which theoretically there are no limits in knowledge. Probably for al-Ghazali it is related to the word “‘*aql*”, which he used in various meanings. Especially often al-Ghazali allocates the “internal reason”, or intuition, and the “external reason” as an ability, distinguishing the man from animals.<sup>6</sup>

Knowledge has two purposes: 1) comprehension of objects of this world and the other world; and 2) development of rules to improve human character. Accordingly reason is divided into theoretical and practical.

Theoretical reason (*al-‘aql an-nazari*) is related to understanding spiritual realities. It gives us various systems of knowledge, named sciences. The sciences are valuable under their relation to the goal. They are useful if they promote achievement of the goal, and are unsuitable if they interfere with achievement of the goal. The sciences provide two kinds of knowledge: one is necessary only for some, the other is necessary for all. That knowledge, which is realized by people not only as a demand of the sacred books, but also as the only true way of self-improvement, is considered obligatory. The obligatory knowledge is related to knowledge of

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Part IV. p. 300

<sup>5</sup> F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant* (M., 1978), pp. 166-167.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Ihya ‘ulum ad-din*, Part3, P. 3-4.



the human relation to God, relation of man to man and knowledge of the kind and malicious properties of the human soul. The achievement of such knowledge is, according to al-Ghazali, the goal of men in this world. With the perception of this knowledge the “*fana*” state is linked.<sup>7</sup>

The practical reason (*al-‘aql al-‘amali*) is based on the theoretical and the sphere of its application is in human conduct. It directs human actions, which are based on will, and is guided by moral ideals.

According to al-Ghazali, for al-Farabi and Ibn-Sina knowledge is the means of improving personality and achieving bliss; while actions, as they considered, are not so necessary for this purpose. However, knowledge in itself does not mean yet, in the opinion of al-Ghazali, the achievement of perfection. The action should be considered as a necessary component, not less important, than knowledge of perfection. “... The only way to happiness – the true purpose of philosophy – goes through a combination of knowledge (*‘ilm*) and action (*‘amal*)”.<sup>8</sup> Knowledge precedes actions. Action not only eliminates defects and their sources, but also establishes virtues, opposite to defects. In the opinion of the Muslim thinker, both action (practical medicine) and knowledge (cognitive medicine) are equivalent and necessary, but they are most efficient in their interaction. On this basis al-Ghazali denied ascetism and Sufi doctrine on “running away from this world”, believing, that neither the terrestrial world, nor riches in themselves are evil. They become evil, depending on what role they play in the lives of men. Muslim *faqihs*, by al-Ghazali, emphasized the importance of external observance of the orders of religion only, forgetting about internal man’s conformity with these writings. But Sufis paid attention to both internal and external conformity with the requirements of the *Sharia*. Al-Ghazali considered their concept of action to be wider and capacious. He emphasized that the solemnities of Islam acquire internal significance for man’s individual world. “Internal actions” are seen by him as directed to purification of the soul to make it perfect. Perfection means an affinity to the “Truth-God”, similarity to the angels. This affinity is qualitative, “internal”, but not spatial. Such affinity which is the Sufi’s goal can be achieved at the stage of mystical vision, and is linked with “*fana*”. Perfection and contemplation of God, fading of individuality, loss of self-consciousness, achievement of freedom – all of this indicates man’s immense knowledge of God. This highest step of perfection does not mean merging, and only intentional unity with God.

The problem of faith was formulated in the traditions of *kalam* and Sufism. Nevertheless, al-Ghazali did not consider it necessary to review in details ideas of various Islamic thinkers concerning the essence of faith, because he believed that the direct profession of the Truth was required “instead of a review of opinions, which in any way do not promote its

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 1, pp. 13-17.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Mizan al-‘amal*, p.191.

achievement<sup>9</sup>. He believed, that faith was an adoption by heart, a fruit of verifying (*tasdiq*) in the hidden (*batin*).<sup>10</sup> “The Essence of the faith” should be a subject of knowledge, but not of opinion.

In his opinion, faith has degrees; its ground is in verifying (*tasdiq*) by heart. When we say about an invalid man, that he is not a man, the sense it is that he simply lost the perfection of being human.<sup>11</sup> And the same occurs to a believer who does not practice his faith, – he does not have perfect faith, but we cannot say that it does not exist. Faith is infinite in its displays – this is not “one door, but more than 70”.<sup>12</sup> For this reason unequivocal determination of faith, in the opinion of al-Ghazali, is not allowable. Faith is differently shown in practice and in the field of knowledge, despite close interrelation between them. The source of knowledge of mortal sins is faith, but not the whole, because faith is knowledge which leads to actions. It is possible to assume the existence of a man, who believes in revelation in the sense of knowledge of God, His uniqueness and attributes, while committing sins. This indicates a lack of faith, but not its absence.

Faith for al-Ghazali is a general (collective) name, which has three degrees. The first one is verification by heart by the way of belief and imitation of tradition; the second one is what is meant by the verification and actions simultaneously; the third one – is true verification by way of revelation.<sup>13</sup> The given degrees differ only in their levels of perfection.

The statement above explains al-Ghazali’s attempts to link his Sufi system with theoretical and practical problems actual for that time, since the problem of correlation of faith and Islam within al-Ghazali’s system was related to the problem of the correlation between reason and religious law (*shar’*). He considered the given problem as an ethical and practical one. Its cognitive level was linked with a diverse comprehension of the idea of monotheism. When al-Ghazali touches upon the problem of repentance and its significance, he discusses an external aspect (*zahir*) of the Law (*shar’*), which defines repentance as returning from the way that takes away from God. As al-Ghazali said, “It only can be imagined by the one of sound mind. The instinct of reason achieves its perfection only after instincts of lust, anger and all other bad qualities quiet down”.<sup>14</sup> Hence, when reason follows religious laws it results in its development, or what al-Ghazali calls the perfection of the instinct of reason after the humility of all the other instincts. Here reason takes the form of true method. As regards the comprehension of the truth, the way of its practical realization, it is

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<sup>9</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Ihya’ ulum ad-din*, Part 1, p. 116

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 1, pp. 116-117.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 1, P. 120.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 4, P. 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 1, pp. 120-121.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 4, P. 9.

necessary here to address Sufism, since only Sufis can link knowledge with action in an integrated whole.

Al-Ghazali recognizes that the primary ground of faith is the inherent quality of man. Man was created free from any belief with the exception of the belief, that he had been created by the God. This means the original freedom of human nature from any belief. Hence, traditional<sup>15</sup> faith is what prevents man from comprehending the truth of faith; this is the faith inherent to the masses. The faith of all people, irrespective of their religious belonging (with the exception of Sufis), is a traditional faith, based on trust and obedience without comprehension of the truth, i.e. external, formal, fanatical faith.<sup>16</sup> But, at the same time, al-Ghazali says that faith is also a fragile core, subject to extreme doubts.<sup>17</sup>

Faith and its degrees are balancing between blind imitation of tradition, characteristic for the masses, and theoretical imitation of tradition, characteristic for Mutakallimins. The faith of the latter differs from the faith of the masses only by its inferential character.<sup>18</sup> The fact that al-Ghazali placed Mutakallimins' faith between traditional faith and faith of Gnostics does not contradict what he compares with the faith of the masses. Both of these faiths are free from personal efforts and experience, while such experience forms a source and specificity of the faith of the chosen (*hawass*). For this reason al-Ghazali defines the essence of the faith of the chosen as "the true verification on the way of revelation and consideration of reason with light".<sup>19</sup> He also considered such faith, as "consideration by means of light of truth" and "faith, obtained by disclosure of a breast by God's light".<sup>20</sup> If the verification (*tasdiq*) is a common basis for faith of the masses, Mutakallimins and the chosen, then for the masses it takes the form of imitation of tradition, for Mutakallimins the form of reasoning, for Sufis the form of contemplation. Al-Ghazali considered the third degree as a degree of true knowledge and true consideration. Hence, faith of revelation is the faith, which as a matter of fact contains (removes) the faith of the masses and Mutakallimins, but differs from them in that it is free of any mistakes.<sup>21</sup>

The faith of revelation is an internal faith and in this sense counters traditional faith. Such faith (of revelation) is internal and infinite, tested by one's own experience. Not imitating, it constantly denies itself, and is tolerant by virtue of understanding the divine mercy and rational by virtue of its basis and preconditions in the sphere of knowledge and practice. This is the result of Sufi experience. The essence of faith cannot be cognized

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<sup>15</sup> *I.e.*, belief, based on imitation.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 4, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 1, p. 120.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 3, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 1, p. 121.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 4, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 3, p. 14.

outside of personal experience. This is the result of practical Sufi experience, the result of constant comprehension of the infinite in the finite and the finite in the infinite as a process of comprehension of the divine truth in life.

To identify limitations of tradition, al-Ghazali used the term “veil” (*hijab*), as an encumbrance interfering with traditional submissions to overcome their limitation. The interests and passions, for example, by virtue of their transient, private, proprietary (*‘andiy*) character interfere with a man’s comprehension of the Truth. The imitation of tradition deprives the soul of the ability to reach Reality, as it (imitation) becomes a barrier between the soul and Truth. It becomes visible when referring to the belief of the masses, including the views of Mutakallimins. Nevertheless, al-Ghazali relates the impossibility of achieving the Truth not only to the reasons mentioned above, but also to what he terms wandering, i.e. ignorance of the way which would make it possible to find what is required. “Theoretical” reasons, which theorists usually use in their reasoning, actually are “tricks” located around the Truth, which in aggregate prevent a man from comprehending reality as such. Due to its nature man’s heart is suitable for knowledge of the Truth.<sup>22</sup> He is distinguished from all else by his ability to know. God has vested man with a superiority, which lies in “knowledge and monotheism”.<sup>23</sup> In al-Ghazali’s expression, the “veil” of life and knowledge prevents man; whereas the true faith finds out and breaks the veil between God and man. It opens in his heart a picture of this world and of the other world, transient and absolute, sensual and reasonable, finite and infinite, i.e. what al-Ghazali calls the main presence, as it covers all else. The faith of revelation is not only the faith of true verification based on Sufi personal experience, and hence not subject to increase and reduction, but is a permanent faith. Sufi experience means a continuity of knowledge of God, which becomes a synonym of real happiness. Knowledge of God, as al-Ghazali states, is boundless; since “comprehension of the essence of His greatness is impossible, this sea of knowledge does not have coasts”.<sup>24</sup> Hence, “The way to the God has no end. On God’s way there are no final steps”.<sup>25</sup> Therefore faith is considered not as a transient confession or a traditional belief, but as an ideal comprehension of the original reality in life itself, because in life there is nothing except for God and His actions.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 3, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 3, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 4, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 4, p. 27.

## CHAPTER XIII

# THE UNITY OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION ACCORDING TO IBN-RUSHD

N.V. EFREMOVA

Classical Arab-Muslim civilization is often characterized as “intermediate”. This is quite justified in the following three aspects: chronological, for its “golden” age coincided with the period between the Ancient and Renaissance civilizations; geographical, for it extended over the vast Euro-Asian territory; and culturological, for it united the spiritual traditions of the East – primarily monotheistic, Abrahamic religiosity, and of the West – Greco-Roman science and philosophy. In the intellectual sphere, a synthesis of Eastern and Western traditions was most obvious in the works of *falasifa*, representatives of *falsafa*,<sup>1</sup> Muslim thinkers developing ancient, mostly Aristotelian models of philosophizing, combining Platonic and Neo-Platonic elements.

Yet this synthesis proceeded not without conflicts. The dogmatic theologians turned against the *falasifa* thinkers for their rationalistic attitudes and their worship of pagan authorities (Aristotle, Plato). As early as the 9<sup>th</sup> century al-Kindi (died circa 860-870), “The First Philosopher of the Arabs”, repelled the attacks against *falsafa*/philosophy in his treatise *On the First Philosophy*. The next generation of foremost *falasifa* thinkers in the Muslim East, among them al-Farabi (died 950) and Ibn-Sina (lat. Avicenna, died 1037), touched upon a discrepancy between the principles of *falsafa* and certain tenets of the Islamic doctrine only in passing. Nonetheless, these philosophers were subjected to severe criticism by al-Ghazali (died 1111), a notable theologian, who on behalf of orthodox Islam took upon himself to disclose the invalidity and heretical nature of *falsafa* by identifying in his treatise *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahafut al-falasifa*) twenty of their “errors”, three of which deserved anathema (*kufir*) as absolutely incompatible with orthodoxy. These included their allegation about the eternity of the world; their teaching that God’s knowledge was only of general but not individual things; and their negation of bodily resurrection. In reply to al-Ghazali’s criticism, Ibn-Rushd (lat. Averroës, died 1198), an outstanding representative of *falsafa* in the Muslim West (Arab Spain), wrote several treatises, primarily *The Decisive Treatise* (*Fasl al-maqal fi-ma bayn al-hikma wa-sh-shari’a min al-ittisal*), then *Disclosure of the Methods* (*al-Kashf ‘an manahij al-adilla fi ‘aqa’id al-*

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<sup>1</sup> In the Arab-Muslim culture, the term “*falsafa*” also signifies philosophy in general.

*milla*), and later, an extensive work known as *The Incoherence of the Incoherence (Tahafut at-Tahafut)*<sup>2</sup>.

The first and third treatises were not destined to become accessible to the Latin West; otherwise Averroës would have hardly been labeled as a heretic who authored the “theory of the double truth“, allowing for the possibility of a contradiction between scientific philosophical conclusions and religious theological dogmas. For in his attitude to the basic epistemological problem in the medieval philosophy on a correlation between belief/religion and reason/philosophy, Ibn-Rushd adhered to the strictly monotheistic approach typical of Muslim Aristotelianism in general.

Al-Farabi and Ibn-Sina were the first to provide ontological substantiation of prophesy and, along with it, the unity of philosophy and religion. They identified Archangel Gabriel, venerated in Islamic tradition as one of the supreme commanders in mundane affairs and as God’s messenger of divine revelation to the prophets, with the Active Intellect (*al-‘aql al-fa‘‘al*) as the last one (nearest to Earth) out of the cosmic intellects. Through unity with this intellect the Prophet receives revelations/religious truths, but in allegorical form, while the philosopher receives philosophical/religious truths which are abstract in their essence. On these grounds, Ibn-Rushd could call philosophy and religion “milk-sisters”<sup>3</sup> and assert that “each prophet is a philosopher but not each philosopher is a prophet.”<sup>4</sup>

According to Averroës’s *Fasl*, philosophy is nothing but a study of all that exists as they bear witness to their Creator. That is why philosophy is not only acceptable by religion, but even ordained by it, because, in many verses (*ayats*) of the Koran, God summons the believers to ponder historical facts and natural phenomena (3:191; 6:75; 7:5; 59:2; 88:17-18, etc.). Philosophy applies the apodictic/demonstrative method of cognition, and its relevant inferences cannot disagree with revelational/religious dogmas “for truth does not oppose truth but accords with it and bears witness to it”<sup>5</sup>.

A conflict may arise only between a philosophical inference and a direct/real, literal meaning of the Scriptures. In these cases, as Ibn-Rushd assures, religious texts necessarily allow an allegorical interpretation that reveals their compliance with intellectual inferences<sup>6</sup>. The primacy is fixed, therefore, as belonging to reason/philosophy.

In *Fasl* and then in *Kashf*, Ibn-Rushd, for the first time in the history of Muslim Aristotelianism puts forward quite an exhaustive

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<sup>2</sup> Hereinafter we shall refer to these works as *Fasl*, *Tahafut* and *Kashf* respectively. The first and third treatises are cited from: *Falsafat. Ibn-Rushd. Beirut: Dar al-‘ilm li-l-jami‘*, s. a.; the second one, from its publication by S. Dunya (Cairo: Dar al-ma‘arif, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> *Fasl*, p. 35; *Tahafut*, II, p. 868.

<sup>4</sup> *Tahafut*, II, pp. 868-869.

<sup>5</sup> *Fasl*, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

conception of allegorical interpretation (*ta'wil*). Like other Muslim allegorists, he refers to the Koran, in particular, to the famous “*ayat about ta'wil*” (3:7). But Ibn-Rushd did not follow the way of Sufis and Shiites, who regarded the entire Koran as an esoteric text whose inner meaning (or meanings) are accessible exclusively to “the infallible *imams*” (with Shiites) or disclosed through mystical insight/illumination (with Sufis). In this respect Ibn-Rushd stands closer to the Mutakallims, adhering to rational interpretation, but only of those points in the Scriptures which provoke a conflict between reason and belief. However, he assigns the right to allegorical interpretation only to the philosophers but denies this right to the Mutakallims. According to him, they often fail to grasp the inner meaning and, moreover, sin against religion itself by divulging the allegorical interpretation results of the Scriptures to the general public capable of comprehending only their literal meaning<sup>7</sup>. From the fact that Ibn-Rushd ranks al-Ghazali’s *Incoherence of the Philosophers* among the cases of such harmful divulging, it is easy to see that his fideistic attitudes to the common people are explained not by his intellectualistic haughtiness but simply by his wish to guard philosophy against the attacks of an ignorant crowd, theologians included.

Stressing the unity/coincidence of the rational and the revelational, the author of *Fasl* does not consider the latter superfluous. In his opinion, as compared with the philosophical (all the more so, theological-*kalam*) methods of teaching, the Koranic methods have the advantage owing to their capacity to convince everybody<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, in *Tahafut* he repeatedly declares that there are things beyond one’s understanding, those that can be comprehended only through revelation<sup>9</sup>. But these things pertain to the practical rather than theoretical sphere. This is to be discussed below, where we shall tackle the problem of resurrection.

One of the most interesting and daring propositions in Averroës’s conception of allegorical interpretation is the actual denial of a fundamental institution in Muslim orthodoxy such as consensus (*ijma’*) in the theoretical field of religion. Also Ibn-Rushd includes the *falasifa* thinkers among the *ulama* scholars whose opinions ought to be taken into consideration when reaching any consensus. He believes that unanimity is possible only on the basic religious dogmas, e.g. God’s existence, prophesy, and retribution or reward in the next life; and only the denial of these dogmas, but not a deviation from their certain interpretation, may be treated as heresy<sup>10</sup>.

Ibn-Rushd complements the above general discourse aimed at substantiating the unity of philosophy and religion and protecting the philosophers against accusations of disbelief with an in-depth analysis of

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17, 26-27, 31; Kashf, pp. 96-102, 155-158.

<sup>8</sup> *Fasl*, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> *Tahafut*, I, 403; II, p. 758.

<sup>10</sup> *Fasl*, pp. 17-18, 22-23.

the philosophical propositions criticized by al-Ghazali, particularly the three which the latter denounced as “extremely heretical”.

The significance of the first of these three theses, namely, on the eternity of the world, is due to the fact that it contradicts not only the fundamental creationist dogma of the Koran, but also the proof of God’s existence characteristic of the Kalam, that is, “*e novitate mundi*”, which deduces from “the emergence/beginning in time” of the world (*huduth*) its “innovator” (*muhdith*), i.e. the one viewed as particularizer/specifier of the time of its emergence or of its relevant characteristics. Therefore, according to al-Ghazali, it is not up to the philosophers to talk about the Creator of the world since they consider the world as eternal. But as eternal the world has actually no need for a Creator and the concept of “creation” looks like a metaphor.

Similar to such Muslim Peripatetics in the East as al-Farabi and Ibn-Sina, Ibn-Rushd did not dare to give up this immanent thesis of Aristotelian philosophy. Moreover, in his non-polemic treatises (in his commentaries on Aristotle’s works, in particular, in the Large and Middle Commentaries on *Metaphysics*), as if ignoring the contradiction with the religious creationistic dogma, Averroës expounds Aristotle’s traditional arguments for the eternity of the world (“from the eternity of matter and forms” viewed as the constituents of the world, “from the eternity of time and motion”, and “from the eternity of substances” as the prime principles of being in the world of generation and corruption). In his response to al-Ghazali’s objections, given in *Tahafut*, Ibn-Rushd recognizes that some arguments provided by the Peripatetics to substantiate the eternity of the world fail to reach the apodictic level, but concomitantly he shows that the same can be applied to the counterarguments presented by al-Ghazali on behalf of the Mutakallims. As for the Mutakallims’ principal creationistic argument, Ibn-Rushd subjects it to criticism in *Kashf*. In this work, as in the *Tahafut*, he points out to the Mutakallims that, irrespective of recognizing the world as being either created or eternal, it nonetheless needs, in the philosophers’ opinion, an Eternal Agent. Besides, the concept of the omnipotent agent is more compatible with the *falasifa* teaching on His activity as *creatio ab aeterno* than the Mutakallims’ allegation about Creation as a single momentary act<sup>11</sup>.

Passing from defense to counterattack, the author of *Fasl* for the first time in the history of Islamic thought ventured to appeal to the Scripture to justify the thesis on the eternity of the world, maintaining that it was not the *falasifa* thinkers, but the Mutakallims, their opponents, who departed from the literal meaning of Revelation. As Ibn-Rushd stresses, “for it is not stated in the Scripture that God was existing with absolutely nothing else: a text to this effect is nowhere to be found”<sup>12</sup>. Hence, the words “It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six Days / His throne was on

<sup>11</sup> *Tahafut*, I, pp. 275, 284, 290.

<sup>12</sup> *Fasl*, p. 22.



the water” (11:7) taken in their apparent meaning imply that there was a being before this present being (the heavens and the earth), namely the throne and the water, and a time before this time, i.e. the one which is joined to the form of this being. And, as it is said in *ayat* 41:11, when creating the world God “turned to the sky which was smoke”, which presupposes the creation of the heavens from something. Such description of the world’s creation, as Ibn-Rushd develops his theory further on in *Kashf*, is characteristic of the Koran, the Bible and all other divine Scriptures. And it is this description that fully conforms to the conventional understanding of creation. As to describing the world’s creation as an extemporal process or its creation “*ex nihilo*”, it would entail the Scripture’s reinterpretation, which is furthermore incomprehensible even to the educated persons let alone the common people<sup>13</sup>.

As to a discrepancy in the understanding of God’s knowledge between *falsafa* and the Muslim religious doctrine, it stems from the Koranic view of God as the all-knowing: “not even the weight of a speck of dust in the earth or sky escapes your Lord” (10:61); and “No leaf falls without His knowledge” (6:59). God’s knowledge about all things is absolutely necessary for validating both the Providence and Retribution or Reward in the next life. But according to the Aristotelian view of God, even though He is characterized as the Intellect, He knows nothing outside Himself since, first, all the other things are inferior to Him in their dignity and intellection of these things would mean for Him perfection achieved through the inferior; second, if He had acquired the knowledge of things, He would have adopted their changeability and multiplicity; and third, continual thinking would have been difficult for Him. In general, as Aristotle points out, “It is better not to see some things than to see them”<sup>14</sup>. Contrary to al-Farabi who remained faithful to the Aristotelian standpoint on this question, Ibn-Sina brings Aristotle’s view of God closer to the Muslim attitude to Him. He believes that the Necessary Existent (God) is the prime cause (principle) of all the things in the world and since He perceives Himself as such, He perceives all these things as well. In contrast to human knowledge, which is secondary in relation to the things, in the world caused by them, God’s knowledge is the prime cause of all the existent. And this proposition of Avicenna was adopted by Ibn-Rushd whose Latin translations apparently paved the way for Aquinas’s well-known formula: “*Scientia Dei causa rerum est*”.

True enough, trying to protect God’s knowledge against the contingency, multiplicity and changeability of individual things, Ibn-Sina believed that God knows individual things but “in general”, “in an aspect of them being universal” (like an astronomer knows the location of the celestial bodies and the general regularities in their motion and can predict any eclipse). According to al-Ghazali, this idea limits God’s knowledge to

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<sup>13</sup> *Kashf*, p. 119.

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, 9, 1074 b 20-35.

universals rather than particulars. In his reply in *Fasl*, Ibn-Rushd argues that al-Ghazali erred in his attitude to the Peripatetics by ascribing to the latter the statements alleging that God has no knowledge of individual things. But the Peripatetics recognize, for example, prophetic dreams coming from God, informing about the future individual things. However, philosophers insist that God's knowledge of individual things is not identical to our knowledge since our knowledge is gained through the cognizable, emerging and changing along with the latter's emergence and changes, whereas we have a completely opposite situation with God's knowledge: His knowledge predetermines the cognizable, i.e. the really created and the existent. Therefore, God's knowledge totally differs from ours, and not only in respect to the individual but also the general. Or to be more exact, this knowledge is much too superior to be described in terms of "universal" and "particular". So, there are no grounds for differences on the character of God's knowledge, i.e. for blaming or not blaming the philosophers for disbelief<sup>15</sup>. The discussion of the given question in *Tahafut* concludes with the following words: those who assess God's knowledge by analogy with human knowledge seem to view God as an immortal person and a human being as a mortal God<sup>16</sup>.

As to the negation of the bodily resurrection, it is worthy of note that al-Ghazali criticizes philosophers not only for its denial but also for their faith in the human soul being immortal. The point is that there is no clear concept defining immortality of the soul as such in the Koran (the word "*nafs*" encountered there, which later was used to denote "soul" as a spiritual substance, implies merely "a living creature") though it appears in the prophetic Tradition (Sunna) and afterwards came to be fixed down in popular religiosity and theological literature close to it. At the same time, in the Kalam aspiring to develop the orthodox theology of Islam and on behalf of which al-Ghazali claims to preach in *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, the view predominated that the soul is an accident of the body, perishing along with it. Hence, Resurrection was understood not as the fusion of an imperishable soul with the resurrected body but as the resurrection of a living creature as a whole.

It is significant, however, that Ibn-Rushd himself abstains from polemics on the soul's immortality in spite of his more advantageous position, owing to its better conformity to the notions prevailing among Muslims. Most probably, this is due to the philosopher's reluctance to focus attention on eschatological problems, wherein the rationalistic views of *falasifa* by and large are far from the orthodox doctrine of Islam. The latter fact is also evident in *Fasl* where the author makes just a general remark according to which only the refutation of fundamental religious principles ought to be qualified as disbelief, but not the erroneous interpretation of

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<sup>15</sup> *Fasl*, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> *Tahafut*, II, p. 711.

concrete aspects in these principles<sup>17</sup>, in particular, those concerning the corporal and spiritual or purely spiritual nature of happiness or unhappiness in the next life.

Ibn-Rushd's discussion of the bodily resurrection (the last of twenty "errors" listed by al-Ghazali) in *Tahafut* also counters the method used by him throughout this treatise, namely: the full reproduction of his adversary's arguments and their subsequent in-depth analysis. Protecting the philosophers against the accusation of their denial of the bodily resurrection, Ibn-Rushd appeals to the argument "*ex silentio*": as he says, we find no statements made by the ancient philosophers on this subject. Elaborating on this argument, Ibn-Rushd arrives at a conclusion which involuntarily brings up associations with Kantian pragmatism – the teaching on the existence of God, free-will and the soul's immortality as three postulates of practical reason. The attainment of happiness in this and the next life, as Ibn-Rushd points out, requires theoretical, practical (professional) and moral virtues. The first two types of virtues are secondary to the third virtue which, in its turn, rests on the adherence to dogmas and cults ordained by the respective religion. Therefore, it does not befit a philosopher to voice an opinion, either affirmative or negative, about the basic religious tenets – whether God exists or not; whether one should worship Him or not; if there is retribution or reward in the next life, etc.<sup>18</sup> It is unlikely that Ibn-Rushd himself failed to notice the disagreement of his last thesis with his thoughts expressed in his other philosophical, rather than purely polemical, works: specifically, on the primacy of theoretical virtues over practical ones and on the rational substantiation of God's existence.

In the pragmatic approach to eschatological realities, religion plays the role of a particularizer giving preference to one of the equally viable alternatives, either affirmative or negative. Therefore, to the question of whether any religion has an advantage over the others, Ibn-Rushd replies that a philosopher ought to select the best one for his time, though all of them are true to him. According to Ibn-Rushd, the good point in the Koranic eschatology is due to the fact that it presents the next life in more sensual images (as compared, for example, with Christianity) which are more capable of fostering moral virtues in the general public<sup>19</sup>.

Recognizing the bodily resurrection for practical purposes, Ibn-Rushd nonetheless rejects the notion predominating in the classical theology of Islam about the regeneration of the same, previous (material) body which one had in one's earthly life. For in our world the matter of one body can become the matter for other bodies – e.g., when the body turns into ashes or dust giving rise to a plant, which is used afterwards to feed man (the reference to the facts of cannibalism looks all the more convincing). The soul, as the philosopher believes, reunites not with the earthly body but

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<sup>17</sup> Fasl, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> *Tahafut*, II, pp. 864-866.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p.870; *Kashf*, p. 152.

merely with its simile<sup>20</sup>. In his purely philosophical works Ibn-Rushd, like other Islamic followers of Aristotle, upholds the spiritual, intellectual character of the next life, professing that only the “reasonable” part of the soul is immortal. But in contrast to Ibn-Sina and his followers who were inclined to assert the individual immortality, Ibn-Rushd is more prone to believe in the collective immortality – the eternity of the universal human intellect<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., II, pp. 871-872; Kashf, p. 154.

<sup>21</sup> For details, see the article: N. V. Efremova, “The Problem of Immortality in the Philosophy of Classical Islam,” *The Universals of Oriental Cultures* (Moscow, 2001, in Russian).

## CHAPTER XIV

# THE PROBLEM OF FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE IN *KUT AL-QULUB* (THE FOOD OF HEARTS), A SUFIC TREATISE BY ABU TALIB AL-MAKKI

I. R. NASYROV

As the problem of faith and knowledge is central one to each religious doctrine, the study of the approach to this issue shown by Abu Talib al-Makki, an outstanding Sufic thinker (d. 386/996), is of a special interest.

To expound his views on the problem of faith and knowledge, he makes use of the usual technique widely adopted in the learned circles of the medieval Islamic world, namely, he resorts to the interpretation of the concept of “knowledge” in the famous dictum (*hadith*) of Prophet Muhammad, “Striving for knowledge is an obligation (a religious duty) of each Muslim.”

Abu Talib al-Makki expounds different views on the nature of knowledge (*ilm*) as such in order to: (1) point out the difference between the “external” (exoteric) knowledge (*ilm zahir*) and the “hidden” (esoteric) knowledge (*ilm batin*), and (2) offer a Sufic treatment of faith and knowledge. He writes:

Someone of those ‘knowing God’ (*arifun*) said that the meaning [of these words of the Prophet] lies in the desire to [attain] the knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) and to meet the demands of the time in which man finds himself... One of the learned men of ash-Sham (Syria) said that the meaning [of the Prophet's words] lies in the desire for purity of heart (*ikhlas*) and for knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of troubles of soul (*nafs*), for knowledge of that which mars one's deeds – [to strive for] all this is a duty for him who deems purity of heart indispensable in all his deeds... One of (the ascetics) of Basra said: ‘The meaning of this is striving for knowledge of hearts (*ulum al-qulub*) and for knowledge of intentions (*ma'rifa al-khawatir*), because God tests man by instructing him and because one must fight [temptations of] the flesh in [his] soul, and also because intention is the beginning of each action, it is from intention that actions spring and it is owing to intention that [we] distinguish foes from angels, designs of the spirit from promptings of

the flesh[-induced] soul, [and that we] discern “certainty, true knowledge” (*yaqin*) and sparks of intellect (*‘aql*), [which enable us] to distinguish the precepts of the Law (*ahkam*)’.<sup>1</sup>

Conceding, in accord with the traditionalist opinion, that no true knowledge of God may exist, Abu Talib al-Makki still believes that it is humanly possible to attain a partial idea of His being by admitting a certain degree of divine quality in man – something that enables man to “become like god” (F. Rosenthal).<sup>2</sup> This divine quality is the light emitted by God, which, according to the Sufis, denotes – sometimes allegorically, sometimes literally – divine knowledge. Abu Talib al-Makki uses the term “certainty, true knowledge” (*yaqin*) to convey the idea of intuitive, God-given knowledge devoid of any sign of doubt (*shakk*), which is necessarily part of ordinary knowledge. He writes:

The Qur’an has common and special [knowledge], definite and vague [knowledge], ‘obvious’ (*zahir*) and ‘hidden’ (*batin*) [knowledge]. The common of the Qur’an is for ordinary believers, while the special [knowledge] is for the ‘chosen’; its ‘obvious’ is for the ‘men of the obvious’, while its ‘hidden’ is for the ‘men of the hidden [knowledge]’... When God purifies the heart [of him who became a believer] with the light of ‘certainty’ (*yaqin*) and helps [his] mind by aiding and strengthening it, man frees himself of mundane ties and cares, his innermost self becomes godlike because he commits himself to the Maker, his soul becomes free of passions of the flesh, his spirit is set in motion and ascends to the higher plane of divine command (al-Malakut), and his heart, with the help of the light of piercing certainty (*nur al-yaqin as-saqib*), uncovers in the secret world of the Heavenly Throne (*‘arsh*), the qualities used for the description [of God].<sup>3</sup>

The Sufis’ use of the term *yaqin* (certainty, true knowledge) as a synonym of the term *‘ilm* (knowledge) indicates that the term *ma‘rifa* came to designate a hidden, mystical knowledge, and that the once standard opposition *‘ilm/jahl* (knowledge/ignorance) was supplanted by the

<sup>1</sup> Abu Talib al-Makki, *Kut al-qulub*, (Cairo, 1932), Vol. 1, pp. 191–192.

<sup>2</sup> F. Rozental, *Torzhestvo znaniya. Kontsepsiya znaniya v srednevekovom islame*, (Moscow, 1978), p. 41 (Russian edition of: Franz Rosenthal, *KNOWLEDGE TRIUMPHANT. The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> Abu Talib al-Makki, Vol. 1, p. 85.

opposition *yaqin/shakk* (certainty/doubt).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, now the difference between knowledge containing errors and doubts, on the one hand, and certainty (*yaqin*) as a synonym of the truth and perfect understanding, on the other hand, is interpreted as the difference between empirically acquired knowledge and intuitive knowledge – the latter being implanted in the heart by God and free from doubt. Abu Talib al-Makki criticizes those who interpret knowledge broadly and believe that the meaning [of the *hadith*] is striving for some knowledge other than the inscrutable knowledge of God’s oneness, for knowledge of His commands, etc. Those people, he writes, believe that – aside from the above – there exists a vast knowledge, [beyond which] are multiple objects of cognition – the “known ones” (*ma’lumat*). He objects to this, quoting a diverging opinion: “Others said: ‘The meaning [of the *hadith*] is that striving to know things other than [Monotheism, God’s commandments and prohibitions] is not necessary; it is extraneous, needless’.”<sup>5</sup>

Abu Talib al-Makki leads the reader to the idea that the theorizing mind is incapable of solving metaphysical problems (relating to God, etc.), for all those things are objects of faith; therefore rational and scholarly knowledge (*ilm*) cannot form the foundation for proving God’s existence. His reasoning expresses a propensity “for a restricted application of rational knowledge (there is no absolute knowledge, *ilm*; there is only specific information on this or that, a familiarity with this or that)”.<sup>6</sup> He refers to Jundub, a follower of Prophet Muhammad, who advocated the precedence of faith in God over knowledge: “The Prophet taught us [first] faith (*iman*), and then the Qur’an. There will come a time when this [order] will be reversed.” By referring to the dicta of the Prophet Muhammad’s adherents or the “righteous precursors” (*salaf*), Abu Talib al-Makki endeavored to demonstrate that his own interpretation of the nature of knowledge fully corresponds to Prophet Muhammad’s understanding of its essence.

Abu Talib al-Makki’s Sufi attitude to the issue of faith and knowledge is revealed most openly in his interpretation of the central dogma of Islam – the principle of Monotheism:

Others say. ‘The meaning [of the *hadith*] is that striving to [attain] the knowledge of God’s oneness (*ilm at-tawhid*) is a religious duty, an obligation.’ However, they differ in their opinions as to how to attain that knowledge and what is the essence of that knowledge... Some said that [this is achieved] by deductive inference (*tariq al-istidlal*) and observation, others by study and exploration, still others by

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<sup>4</sup> F. Rozental, *Torzhestvo znaniya. Kontseptsiya znaniya v srednevekovom islame*, (Moscow, 1978), p. 170.

<sup>5</sup> Abu Talib al-Makki, Vol. 1, p. 193.

<sup>6</sup> Y.A. Frolova, *Problema very i znaniya v arabskoy filosofii (The Problem of Faith and Knowledge in Arab Philosophy)*, (Moscow, 1983), p. 77.

mutual accord and [reliance on] tradition... Others said that the meaning [of the *hadith*] lies in striving to [attain] a knowledge of [that which is] ‘doubtful’ and ‘toilsome’ (*ash-shubuhah wa al-mushkilah*), that is, when a doubt arises and a man cannot solve a problem single-handedly, in order not to share false beliefs, he must necessarily consult learned men to know the heart of the matter with certainty (*yaqin*), to believe in the truth and to get rid of the false (*batil*), to have no doubts regarding faith, to stray not from the right path, to avoid newfangled things (*bid‘a*), and to depart not from the ‘people of the Sunna and concord’ (*ahl as-sunna wa al-jama‘a*)... This is the doctrine (*madhhab*) of Abu Thawr Ibrahim ibn Khalid al-Kalbi, Dawud ibn ‘Ali, al-Husayn al-Karabisi, al-Harith al-Muhasibi, and of their *mutakallim* followers.<sup>7</sup>

Abu Talib al-Makki sums up the differing opinions he adduced stating that, despite merely verbal distinctions, all opinions are good and acceptable. They resemble each other as regards content, except for the opinion of the “people of the obvious knowledge” (*ahl az-zahir*). The latter – as he maintains – interpret the meaning of Prophet Muhammad’s *hadith* one-sidedly, reducing all knowledge to exoteric knowledge. In contrast, the “people of hidden knowledge” (*ahl al-batin*) interpret the essence of the *hadith* metaphorically, in accordance with their knowledge. However, this means – as Abu Talib al-Makki maintains – that “obvious” knowledge and “hidden” knowledge are two kinds of knowledge indispensable to one another; they are like *islam* and *iman*, i.e., formal religious practice and religious faith. In Abu Talib al-Makki’s opinion, the true meaning of the *hadith* is as follows: Firstly, striving to attain knowledge means the desire to know five duties that are known as “the pillars of Islam”: faith in Allah and His messenger Muhammad (*shahada*), five prayers performed daily (*salat*), payment of religious alms, tax (*zakat*), fasting in the month of Ramadan (*sawm*), and pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). Secondly, doing good deeds are possible only when one knows the meaning of the *hadith*; its knowledge is the beginning of a good deed. According to Abu Talib al-Makki, knowing the five religious duties, is the duty of duties. Knowledge of Monotheism (*‘ilm at-tawhid*) is part of that principal duty, since in its beginning is the profession of faith (*shahada*) testifying that there is nothing worthy of worship but the One God (*La ilaha ill-Allah*). He is worshipped through affirming His qualities, which are associated with His Self-Essence (*dhat*), and repudiating qualities that are contrary to Him. Other kinds of knowledge (like medical science, astronomy, etc.) are not embraced by the definition of “knowledge” as it appears in the Prophet’s *hadith*, for they

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<sup>7</sup> Abu Talib al-Makki, Vol. 1, p. 193.



belong to the duties of all members of community (*fard al-kifayya*), not to the duties of each believer.<sup>8</sup>

Abu Talib al-Makki precedes his dictum about preference of knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) and intuitive knowledge (*yaqin*) with a comprehensive criticism of the learned supporters of "external" (exoteric) knowledge, who turned their proficiency in religion into a professional means of gaining material prosperity. "Religious-legal decisions (*fatwa*) are made by three persons: the first [of these] is an *amir* (a *mufti*, i.e., an expert on judicial decisions), the second is a *ma'mur* (an anchorite who has resigned worldly life and made knowledge of faith and knowledge [of how] to incite [people to do] good his vocation), and the third is a hypocrite, a dissembler. That is a theologian-*mutakallim*."<sup>9</sup> Abu Talib al-Makki maintains that it is because of "wicked learned men" engrossed with the hunt for worldly goods that knowledge perishes. He is confident, however, that the earth will still be rich in those who work for Allah's sake to preserve God-given knowledge, and because of whom God keeps His reasons for humans: "They are the 'close [friends] of Allah' (*awliya*), working for His sake and encouraging [people] on earth to [embrace] His faith... Such are the learned ones [working for] the hereafter, such is knowledge of [that which is] hidden and of hearts (*ilm al-batin wa al-qulub*), but not knowledge of language."<sup>10</sup> Abu Talib al-Makki appeals to the common opinion that it is pleasing to God when people match their deeds to their knowledge: "The best way to preserve knowledge is to follow it instead of memorizing 'external' facts." However, he introduces his purely Sufic understanding of knowledge, referring to a pious account about the words of Ibn Mas'ud: "Knowledge is not [a sum of] many stories; it is the fear of God."

Thus, when a man turns to things of this world (*dunya*), it is a sign, firstly, of his lack of the "true knowledge" (*yaqin*)<sup>11</sup> of the nature of this world, which is nothing (*la shay*'), compared to the absolute divine being; secondly, of the limited nature of rational cognition – inasmuch as turning to worldly things, writes Abu Talib al-Makki, is an actualization of the inherently limited rational cognition that functions via the mind (*'aql*), by which he must have meant reason:

The promise and the coming punishment of God in the hereafter is not comprehended by the light of the mind, it is comprehended by the light of the 'true knowledge' (*yaqin*)... [Man] needs the 'true knowledge' (*yaqin*) in all his actions, save for the mundane ones, in which [his] heart leads [him] by the light of the mind (*'aql*). He upon whom

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<sup>8</sup> Abu Talib al-Makki, Vol. 1, p. 193.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Abu Talib al-Makki, Vol. 1, p. 199.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 162.

the ‘true knowledge’ was not bestowed will not behold the Great Kingdom, he will be enthralled by the lesser (earthly) kingdom, he will love that which is nothing (*la shay*), his intent will not be turned to [that which is] lofty (unearthly), and he himself will have none of the most exalted [things].<sup>12</sup>

Abu Talib al-Makki gives the “people of the mentioning [of God]” (*ahl adh-dhikr*), i.e., the possessors of hidden, mystical knowledge, another name – the “people of Monotheism and the mind” (*ahl at-tawhid wa al-‘aql*), emphasizing that the knowledge in question is not relative and acquired, since they obtained this hidden knowledge neither by perusing books nor by transmitting it to one another. “This [knowledge] is the scales of all deeds.”<sup>13</sup>

For Abu Talib al-Makki, knowledge and faith are related to one another in the same way as form is related to content, the outer to the inner: “Faith waxes and wanes owing to knowledge [received] from Allah... Also Faith is the root (*asl*), and contemplation (*mushahada*) is the highest branch. These phases are in the rays of faith. [First comes] faith (*iman*), then ‘true knowledge, certainty’ (*yaqin*), and then knowledge of God (*ma‘rifa*) [or cognition of God].”<sup>14</sup> Abu Talib al-Makki subdivides knowledge of God (*ma‘rifa*) into two parts: revelative knowledge of God (*ma‘rifa sam‘*) and “eyewitness” knowledge (*ma‘rifa ‘iyan*). He writes that revelative knowledge of God (*ma‘rifa sam‘*) is “proclaiming faith or recognizing it as true (*tasdiq*) from what one hears.”<sup>15</sup> Consequently, faith has two levels – esoteric and exoteric – and the latter coincides with the definition of faith (*iman*) employing the term *tasdiq* (proclaiming or recognizing [God etc.] as true), which is accepted in the prevalent (formulated by al-Ash‘ari) trend of theological thought. The second level of faith – “eyewitness” knowledge (*ma‘rifa ‘iyan*) in “contemplation” (*mushahada*) – is “the eye of the true knowledge or the essential verity” (*‘ayn al-yaqin*), and this mystical contemplation has, in its turn, two stages. The first stage is “deductive contemplation” (*mushahada al-istidlal*) preceding knowledge of God (*ma‘rifa*). This, he writes, is *ma‘rifa al-khabar*, i.e., revelative, acquired knowledge. Its language employs words, and its possessor receives knowledge from the words of Allah (from the Qur’an etc.) or, sometimes, from instruction delivered by those who possess “true knowledge” (*yaqin*). The second stage is “guiding contemplation” (*mushahada ad-dalil*) that follows knowledge of God (*ma‘rifa*) – it is the “eyewitnessing” [of the divine] and the “true knowledge” (*yaqin*). Its language is discovery (*wajd*), and its possessor is he who obtained closeness (*qurb*) to God.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 163.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 198.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 200.

<sup>15</sup> Abu Talib al-Makki, Vol. 1, p. 200.

Abu Talib al-Makki provides a classification of “true knowledge, certainty” (*yaqin*). It has three levels. (a) *Yaqin mu‘ayana* (certainty of eyewitnessing), which is possessed by those who in their cognition of God attained the level of *siddiqiyya* (that of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq). (b) Next, a little below, comes *yaqin tasdiq wa istislam* (certainty of committing oneself); this is the “certainty” and the “true knowledge” of those who became believers. One possessing knowledge of this level is a Muslim steadfast in his beliefs – such are saints, righteous men, etc. (c) One rank below, comes the level of *yaqin zanni* (certainty of opinion), which is strengthened with arguments and words of scholars and is weakened for lack of those. This kind of “true knowledge, certainty” is the “certainty of deductive inference [of knowledge]” (*yaqin al-istidlal*). Its lore is derived from that which is conceivable rationally (*ma‘qul*). It is the “true knowledge” of the *mutakallim* theologians who employ rationalistic technique in solving theological problems, of the exponents of rational sciences who resort to theorizing, and of the jurists who rely on “personal opinion” (*ra‘y*), including the method of analogy (*kiyas*), to make legal decisions.<sup>16</sup>

Everyone who “became certain” of God relies on knowledge (*ilm*) of Monotheism (*tawhid*) and on knowledge of God (*ma‘rifa*), but his knowledge – as Abu Talib al-Makki supposes – depends on the degree of his “true knowledge, certainty” (*yaqin*). His “true knowledge” (*yaqin*) is in accord with his faith (*iman*), and his faith is in correlation with his good deeds.

And the highest of all [kinds of] knowledge is the knowledge of ‘contemplation’ through ‘the eye of the true knowledge or the essential verity’ (*‘ayn al-yaqin*). This is the privilege of those ‘whom God made close to Himself’; its characteristic is the degree of nearness to Him... And the lowest of [the kinds of] knowledge is the knowledge of committing oneself to God and the verbal acknowledgement of one’s refusal to repudiate [the true nature of God] and the rejection of doubt. This is for the rest of the believers in God, and this is the knowledge of faith and acknowledgement of the true nature [of God] (*‘ilm al-iman wa at-tasdiq*). Between [those levels of knowledge] lie [lesser] degrees and ranks...<sup>17</sup>

Abu Talib al-Makki asserted that the human mind, which he designated by such notions as “the eye of the true knowledge or the essential verity” (*‘ayn al-yaqin*) and “the light of faith” (*nur al-iman*), rather than the authority-hallowed institution of “middle men” between man and

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 201.

<sup>17</sup> Abu Talib al-Makki, Vol. 1, p. 202.

God, is the supreme judge of human actions and the legal enforcer. Russian scholar, M. Stepanyants, justly observes that “it is important to take into account that the Sufis’ criticism of reason is explained by their refutation not so much of rational knowledge as of the reasoning [trend] in theology.”<sup>18</sup> The Sufis’ skeptical attitude to rational cognition did not amount to an affirmation of its inherent ineptitude in the domain of epistemology and morals. Outstanding Sufi thinkers themselves widely employed the rational method of cognition and – while criticizing its limited capacity – never denied that its use was quite appropriate within its own sphere.<sup>19</sup> The Sufis stood for the true expression of faith – individual faith based on the personal certainty and existential experience of contact with the divine reality. The true faith cannot be blind, but is always the result of obtaining certain “personal” truths. These one experiences with a great degree of authenticity and certainty. Such faith is the result of a profound spiritual rebirth, which goes through trials and doubts.

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<sup>18</sup> M. Stepanyants, *Mir Vostoka. Filosofiya: Proshloye. Nastoyashcheye. Budushcheye (Oriental World. Philosophy: Past, Present, Future)*, (Moscow, 2005), p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> A. Smirnov, *Velikiy sheykh sufizma (The Great Sheikh of Sufism)*, (Moscow, 1993), p. 51.

## CHAPTER XV

# THE CONCEPT OF FAITH AND REASON IN CONTEMPORARY ARAB PHILOSOPHY

YE. A. FROLOVA

The notion of *nahdah*, “renaissance”, is one of the central terms in the language of contemporary Arab philosophers. It became widespread in the latter half of the 19th century – a century of revival of the Arab world in all spheres of life. It reopened both to itself and to the West, and the new West opened to it. Dynamic cultural contact with the West and acquaintance with its cultural achievements brought about the desire to revive the once magnificent Arab civilization by educating the people and disseminating the newly acquired knowledge among them. The ideas of enlightenment affected, among others, the sphere of theology, in which the tendency toward a wider application of the principles of rational thinking and toward basing faith on reason was gaining more and more strength. However, the reformative ideas and reformative activity of al-Afghani, Kawakibi and M. Abdo failed to cause radical change in Islam. The understanding of faith and its very concept (in which it was equated with religion), likewise, underwent no changes. As early as in mid-1860s some thinkers (Sadiq al-Azm) protested against faith as a purely religious phenomenon. It was perceived exclusively as an ideological education, which opposed progress, i.e., the implanting of science and the replacement of religious consciousness with scientific consciousness. It was only somewhat later – when high hopes that science and technology were able to eliminate backwardness soon died, and with the obvious rise of Islamist and fundamentalist trends – that philosophers accepted religion as an undeniable fact and turned to analyse its basics.

During the last decades of the 19th century, *nahdah* was no longer associated with hopes of Western help, but with a search of the native potential and inner resources; with a revival of traditions which once brought Arab culture to radiant bloom; with a revaluation of such processes going on in religion as its genesis, its very essence and the establishment and evolution of the concept of faith.

As one might well expect, in the Middle Ages the concept of faith implied faith of a religious nature: *din*, *iman*, *‘aqidah*, etc. However, already Avicenna, al-Ghazali and certain Sufis had developed some notion of that essential element of knowledge, which is defined in modern epoch (starting with Jaspers) as “philosophical faith”. This was the intuitive activity of the mind (Avicenna defined it as rational intuition, rational gnosis, *‘irfan ma‘qul*) aimed at comprehending the outer, transcendent fundamentals. These determine all subsequent functioning of intellect and guide it toward

either religious or unreligious vision and interpretation of the universe. Avicenna wrote: “One cannot point at the Primeval, except by means of purely rational gnosis” (*Ish‘arat*, 481). The Primeval is indefinable – “at the moment of his union with the Truth, he (*‘arif*, i.e., a gnostic) withdraws from everything” (ibid.). In the words of al-Ghazali, the ego of a gnostic who is “immersed in the sea of contemplation” disappears. So also does everything except for the Contemplated, for if he noticed what he was contemplating, he would be distracted from the Contemplated (*Deliverance from Delusion*).

The gnosis in question is not a form of academic, verifiable knowledge. However, its verity is beyond doubt. It is such knowledge that, in my opinion, expresses the notion of “philosophical faith“. In fact, many Islamic philosophers, discussing today the problems of faith and reason, of faith and knowledge, show a propensity to such vision of faith, which transcends the limits of religion proper. However, this vision is present in their reasoning inconspicuously; it is implied in their treatment of more general problems – ideological rather than specifically philosophic. Such vision is present in the delimitation of the spheres of science and religion or, on the contrary, of their harmonious coexistence.

The treatment of reason as a product of post-modernism (M. Arkun), as critical reason, is one of the most interesting in the contemporary polemics of Arab philosophers. The most prominent of Arab thinkers of today, e.g., M. Arkun, M. Jabiri, H. Hanafi, write about the criticism of the traditional Arab (Islamic) reasoning, about the necessity of accepting the idea of *critical* reason – rather than reason at large – that would subject the former, overly enthusiastic concept of reason to a reappraisal (Hanafi, *A Critical Analysis of Contemporary Arab Discourse*, 1982; idem, *The Structure of the Arab Mind*, 1988).

Reason, the critical mind is involved here as something more than just an active principle of knowledge – it is the prime mover within it, which introduces corrections, revises former views and outdated knowledge, and aiming for the future. The critical mind assumes the role of atonement for the sins committed by the reason of the past ages and by the reason of the first *nahdah* (19th century). The latter got left behind in the realm of vague good intentions, educational movement and the tentative reforms of consciousness. The role of the 19th-century reason has received even harsher appraisals. While European philosophers accuse the modernist reason of such socio-political phenomena as totalitarianism and despotism, Arab authors (M. Arkun) hold it responsible for the advance of fundamentalism as a reaction against the negative trends in the civilization of modernism (*Jihad, Revenge of Allah*).

As for the reason of the post-modern epoch, it is the reason of philosophic anxiety. It calls for a re-evaluation of the very notion of “reason” and of all knowledge of previous epochs. This means going back to the origins of culture and, first of all, of religion in order to understand its genesis and to grasp its nature as a historical-cultural structure. Through that

analysis, we must substantiate contemporary religious, academic, moral, etc. principles. Therefore, the problem of whether the Qur'an has been created is posed – after being passed through the prism of knowledge and faith – once again. Relatedly, also discussed are: the issue of the concept of reason in the doctrine of the Mutazilites and of a possible merger – via that doctrine – of philosophic and political argumentation in its solution; the issue of replacing metaphysical arguments with coercion, which lead to the policy of *mihnah* (Islamic inquisition). The subject of creation of the Qur'an includes the theme of human intervention (the writing down, the canonization), which is being discussed once more. Human intervention causes the concepts and dogmata of faith to acquire a coercive quality; thus, to put it in the words of H. Hanafi, the profane becomes hallowed.

Fundamentalism proceeds from treating the Qur'an as an indisputable ultimate authority, though this authority emerged historically. This enables contemporary philosophers, who are concerned with the state of public consciousness in Islamic countries, to pose the question of a new interpretation of the “prophetic discourse” by turning directly to the original text. In this, they seemingly act as fundamentalists, but their “fundamentalism” is aimed at a totally different goal: by going back to the roots of Islam, they intend to reform it, not to restore the old religious attitudes.

The Egyptian philosopher, H. Hanafi, insists on the necessity of radical changes in the structure of consciousness, which implies, among other things, a fairly decisive break with the traditional past – i.e., its critical analysis, a revision of its main parameters, of the “model” of the past. He expresses this call for a kind of repentance in such words: “An educated Arab asks himself all the time: ‘What must we borrow from our legacy, and what from the West?’ But he never poses the question: ‘Who am I now, what am I?’ But we must begin, first and foremost, with knowing ourselves.” This statement of Hanafi's has several aspects, and I would dwell on one of them only: the problem of knowing oneself as a Muslim, of finding out what the faith of a Muslim really is.

This subject must be faced because the concepts of faith and knowledge, the problem of their correlation in metaphysical thought – an area completely dominated by religious consciousness – are of crucial importance. I would like to avoid, whenever possible, general deliberations on the faith/knowledge subject and expound it by using the example of several concepts most popular throughout the Arab world of the 20th century.

Even in the early 20th century, the dominant view on these matters differed but little from that which was widespread in the Middle Ages. The most prominent Islamic reformer of that time, M. Abdo, while advocating reason and knowledge, continued to substitute faith with knowledge, to pass off faith as knowledge, which results in something that I internally dub “faith-knowledge”, in which faith loses its specifics and knowledge becomes a system used primarily for the needs of religious doctrine. It was

only by the mid-20th century that – under the influence of (1) the Sufi heritage and (2) Kant's teachings – a new philosophic vision of these two closely interrelated but distinct phenomena began to form, and faith began to be treated as a philosophic category.

Contemporary thought recognizes several distinct levels in the notion of religious faith.

The first level defines faith as *iman* – which is the opposite of *tasdiq*, i.e., the establishment or authentication of the truth and the authority of the official, final and unalterable text – and makes that definition central. *Iman* is crystallized on the basis of the original, open text.

The second level regards the *iman* faith as certitude or belief, *i'tiqad* (English *belief*, German *Glaube*, French *foi*). This is an inner faith obtained through experience and transformed into an unshakable belief strengthened by rational arguments via philosophic meditations on knowledge and the nature of being. Intellectually, by exerting one's mind, one comes to the conclusion that it is impossible to comprehend the ultimate foundations of being; this impossibility was already postulated by medieval philosophers (the Mutazilites, Kirmani, Avicenna). Therefore, philosophical faith is a rational choice of a *standpoint*. This choice is defined by: (1) upbringing; (2) obtained knowledge, which either fits in with tradition or transcends its limits; (3) reinterpretation of tradition on the basis of new knowledge, new experience, new thoughts and feelings. Thus the chosen standpoint does not amount to blind faith in authority or to commending oneself to that authority – it is an intellectual choice. Grace, when viewed in the structure of philosophical faith, is also subject to analysis. Belief and understanding are interrelated here: understanding is conducive to faith, and faith – as belief – in turn helps us to comprehend the universe.

However, as soon as faith goes beyond the limits of “philosophical faith”, it finds itself in conflict with reason over primacy, and *reason is most likely to lose that battle*. Having acknowledged the ultimate unknowability of the universe, reason aligns itself with faith, regarding it as an equal partner. Faith, on the other hand, proceeds from reason's acknowledgement of its own powerlessness for the cognition of the ultimate truth. Since this is the realm of utter “not-knowing”, faith exploits the tolerance of reason and begins to assert its priority. Faith's predominant gnoseological status, yielded by contemporary reason, is the high ground used by faith for further ideological offensive: the principle of its priority over reason spreads far and wide, turning “philosophical faith” into purely religious faith. Such faith – even if it is obtained as a divine grace, by someone who was witness to a theophany, was miraculously cured, survived a tragedy or was delivered from evil – is far from philosophical faith. In a way, it is given in exchange for physical and spiritual anguish. This faith may bring peace of mind (it is not accidental that the notion of peace – as a sign of the genuine nature of feeling or knowledge – occupies a very prominent place in the system of religious thought). Revelation may also give one an outlet into new spheres of intellectual quest, a vision of new realities. The activity of prophets, the



creation of new religions and new trends within existing religions are perfect examples of such revelations. Such was the revelation that Muhammad brought to the future Islamic world. In the intensity of the experience and comprehension of revelation, in the permanence of this experience, the vision of new ethics, new consciousness, new social organization was taking shape.

This faith is productive; it is connected to the intellectual quest, to mental activity. Avicenna wrote regarding prophecy: "The sacred soul of great prophets is a cogitating soul... In their waking life, they grasp the foundations of the mystic world by means of thinking, and receive a revelation" (*The Book of Knowledge*). Pointing out the difference between a philosopher and a prophet, Avicenna observes that the prophet perceives the truth in the form of images ("The Proof of Prophecies and the Interpretation of Their Signs and Their Examples", *On Wisdom and Natural Sciences*). However, the next stage of his work involves interpreting those images, using his reasoning. Faith stimulates the activity of the mind – they reproduce one another.

In his time, al-Ghazali also wrote about obtaining the true faith through the anguish of one's flesh and spirit. Thirsting after the knowledge of the true nature of things (as he described his feelings), al-Ghazali realized that the genuine knowledge – the kind of knowledge with which he associated the genuine faith – is such a knowledge that leaves no room for doubt. No argument can shake it – not even turning stone into gold or a rod into a serpent. Due to such a vision of faith and knowledge, as observed al-Ghazali, the fetters of tradition are shed and the inherited dogmata shatter. Faith becomes open to knowledge, it lives and acts jointly with reason, striving to comprehend the true nature of religion and religious dogmata.

In order to find eventually the simple things that seemingly require no finding, to perceive the existence of the original principles, al-Ghazali has had to exert himself to the point of exhaustion. The reason for this was that his notions of the truthfulness of the senses and the qualities of the mind were perceived by him in the shape of meaningless fancies, and the values of this world were shown to be puny in comparison with the hereafter. These thoughts "burned" his soul until divine grace descended upon him, bringing a vision of simple things. Thus emerged the first reformer of Islam, who realized that the higher levels of revelation transcend the limits of the utterable and that, "should someone wish to express this, his words are bound to contain some flaw." One who has experienced a union with the divine (or ontological) Principle can say, according to al-Ghazali, only this: "It was what it was, though I remember not *what* it was" (*Deliverance from Delusion*). One who had no personal experience of this state, "would understand only the name of the true nature of prophecy."

This contact with the transcendental, which – while not providing academic truths – opened prospects for personal creativity, was vividly described by K. Jaspers.

We always want to have something intangible. Therefore we mistake philosophic thought for objective cognition. Time after time, we fall like a cat, landing on all fours onto objective comprehensibility. We fight the state of dizziness, which overwhelms us while we philosophize; we reject the urge to stand on our heads. Sticking to our objects, we want to stay, so to speak, ‘sane’ and endeavor to prevent our essence from being reborn in transcendental thought (*Philosophical Faith*).

If Jasper’s reproach to thinkers who fight “dizziness” is just, it is doubly so with respect to the mass of commoners who wish to stay “sane”. This is a very likely reason why many Arab authors – like Averrhoës in his time – rejected al-Ghazali’s doctrine as a mind-destroying influence that leads thought away from rationalism. The latter – partly via Latin translations of Averrhoës’ works – found its consummation in Christian culture: that was a union of faith and reason, in which faith rested on reason that was assisted by rapidly developing science. In Islamic culture, on the contrary, faith was retreating further and further from reason, as H. Hanafi writes.

This generalization regarding the history of Islamic thought needs correcting. Firstly, reason never ceased to be a source of guidance for it – the fact corroborated by the inclusion of philosophic postulates into the system of theology (al-Ash‘ari’s teachings) and into *fiqh*, by the social views and political attitudes of thinkers (A. Nawoiy and others), by the development of sciences (mathematics, astronomy). However, Hanafi’s opinion is correct when it comes to maintaining that rational thought became purely utilitarian, practical. Reason lost its creative potential and became a means of serving people’s daily needs, whereas philosophy began to serve religion, substantiating its dogmata.

That is why the issue of reviving that legacy, in which faith rested on reason and religion on philosophy, is being posed so urgently now in Islamic intellectual circles. Philosophy – which includes not only *falsafah* but also the doctrines of the Mutazilites and of the Isma‘ilites – defended the concept of its own God: the apophatic God, God as the Principle and as the Law (which can be either rationally interpreted or irrationally comprehended via uniting with him), the God that manifests himself through the World Soul. This legacy was the model of their unity, in which reason has been constantly awakening faith that was enshrouded in religious canons, reminding it of its essence, purifying it (this is also true of al-Ghazali, who is often accused of overthrowing reason).

Therefore, another revival of Islamic society, a new *nahdah*, is visualized as a state, in which the organization of modern life in its entirety is based on creative reason – which was inherent in Islamic culture of the past and which is interpreted anew under the new social conditions. Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani observed: “The decline of Islamic society cannot be

blamed on the true Islam; the real reason for this lies in the ignorance, on the part of the Muslims, of *what* the true religion is." Critical reason alone can achieve a breakthrough in the culture of today, in the public consciousness, in our understanding of the nature of religion and faith, and of their role in the life of an individual and society. Critical reason of which Arab philosophers write so convincingly must possess an additional trait – an arguing reason. The last decades of intellectual life in Arab countries saw a great number of conferences and symposia at which different viewpoints contend as well as frequent polemics in literature and the press. These polemics are aimed at finding concepts that would correspond to the contents of national culture, which – despite being criticized – is the foundation upon which the future is being built.

Therefore, despite the interest attracted by Western philosophy and despite the substantial knowledge of its newest trends, it is not exempt from criticism – it is passed through the prism of native Islamic culture, evaluated and analyzed; Orientalism is being contrasted with Western influence (H. Hanafi). In the 1950s–60s, Arab countries boasted a whole set of analogues of philosophic theories popular in the West, whereas nowadays Arab thinkers tend to employ only Western research and techniques of analysis to develop original theories that would meet Islamic social and cultural needs.

This may explain the interest attracted by the fairly original concept of *juwaniyah* expounded by the Egyptian philosopher Othman Amin in his book of the same name, which was published in the 1960s and is discussed to this day. This concept – at the center of which lies the issue of faith and reason, of knowledge and cognition – is interesting in that the author produced it spontaneously, as a result of accumulating life experience. Strictly speaking, it expresses his experience so that his knowledge is interwoven with the "fabric" of his life. Its essence is not expressed in the form of a complete and consistent system – it is revealed through impressions that emerge in the process of immersion in diary records. The latter constitute the bulk of the work, with conclusions following only toward the end.

O. Amin's concept organically combines tradition and modernity, the original faith of popular Sufism and the notions of contemporary science. Using a Latin base, one might render *juwaniyah* as "intralism", i.e., cognition attained by immersing oneself in an object or a phenomenon, the "in-sensing", the "partaking" or "tasting" (*dhawq*) of it. While *juwaniyah* employs the Sufic approach toward an object, it never leads the mind away from it, letting the object remain in the physical world. This is obvious from the way O. Amin discusses the current state of the world culture and science, the future of his country, and the need for revolutionary changes in it. However, this is not a call to revolution as a clean break with the past achieved by means of an armed conflict. Rather, he urges the need for radical changes in society, culture, public consciousness and religion, and for a new vision of faith. This must be personal, intimate, and based on the understanding of man and society. This advanced consciousness affirms a

new, rational role of religion as a primarily moral doctrine that functions jointly with science and rational knowledge, and that is directed by philosophy toward new rationality.

Once vividly expressed in prophecy, the subject of a productive faith finds a new interpretation in the idea of “leadership”. As prophecy is complete with Muhammad’s doctrine, within the religious system proper, its modification and renovation is achieved through the “purification” of faith, that is, by going back to the origins and their new interpretation in accordance with the demands of the time. However, Islam is also the *community* of believers, their social organization. Therefore, mere theories are not enough to introduce change into that sphere, currently combining economy and politics; to do that, one must possess real power capable of getting that complex machinery to run somewhat faster. A new Prophet is an impossibility, though a sort of substitute might emerge – a leader who produces a new idea, a slogan, mustering believers around it.

During the late 19th century, Arab lands were in turmoil, trying to get rid of the power of the Ottoman sultan and fighting British and French colonization. In 1881, a rebellion inspired by the *watanists* (“patriots”) broke out in Egypt. It was led by Ahmad Orabi-pasha, a lieutenant-colonel of the Egyptian army. It is interesting that one of the sheikhs supporting Orabi-pasha addressed the people, stating that the Prophet Muhammad came to him in his dream and promised that Egypt would be liberated under the leadership of Orabi-pasha. The belief that Orabi was descended from Muhammad himself made this claim seem more real. Though the rebellion failed, the desire to exalt its leader, uniting the people around him, was quite obvious.

The idea of such a leader has recurred on several occasions since; it is popular even now. Productive faith and blind (or nearly blind) faith combine to produce results that could be both positive and tragic (terrorism) for people, depending on the course taken by “productive” faith.

The concept of leadership is opposed by the concept of a gradual reforming of religion and society on the basis of moral principles. This direction was first formulated at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries by M. Abdo, who took part in the uprising of 1881 as an ideologist and, after returning to Egypt from exile, conducted certain reforms at al-Azhar University and in the *shari’ah*. Having experienced a predilection for Sufism in his youth and later regaining interest in worldly life (this resembles al-Ghazali’s career, though in reverse order), he directed his efforts at the elimination of superfluous “strata” covering faith and contradicting the teachings of Muhammad – such as extreme asceticism, the worship of saints, belief in miracles. The main emphasis of M. Abdo’s doctrine lay in giving rational knowledge and moral precepts a more prominent role within faith.

The intellectuals of today also undertake such efforts, though they expect much more of reason itself, as well as of faith.

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## CHAPTER XVI

# THE PROBLEM OF FAITH AND REASON IN THE TATAR METAPHYSICAL THOUGHT OF THE 19TH – EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

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Tatar metaphysical thought of the 19th and early 20th centuries represented a synthesis of Eastern (Arab-Muslim, common Turkic and Tatar proper) and Western (European, Russian) traditions. During the 19th century Tatar philosophy developed mainly in two directions, religious reform and enlightenment. The early 20th century saw the emergence of new trends: liberalism, conservatism and social democracy whose exponents had to some degree to address the issue of faith and knowledge. Jadidism, as a cultural-ideological movement the essence of which resides in reforming the *medreseh* system of education and in the idea of teaching, using a new, phonological method, represents only a part of the above-mentioned trends.

During this phase of the Modern epoch Tatar society and culture brought forth an entire stratum of thinkers. These were important figures educated at non-religious institutions, businessmen who began to recognize themselves as members of the Tatar nation and strove to raise the cultural level of the Tatar people to meet European standards. Tatars began to be aware of their ethnicity, to form an ideology of their own, and to establish national press and political parties. The problem of the correlation between faith and reason received a most thorough treatment in the work of such 19th century writers as the religious reformer and enlightener, Sh. Marjani (1818–1889) and the enlightener, Q. Nasyri (1825–1902). In the early 20th century, the issue was examined by the religious reformer and enlightener, R. Fahraddin (1859–1936) and the liberal theologian, M. Bigi (1875–1949).

The work of Marjani and Nasyri marks the starting point of the shaping of the Tatar metaphysical thought in its secular branch. The development of worldly tendencies, and the secularization of Tatar culture were accompanied by growing interest in Russian culture and science, by the desire to master natural sciences. However, the bulk of the Tatar Muslim priesthood, who retained their conservative attitude, stood against contact with Russian culture. By fair means or foul, they discouraged interest in secular knowledge, philosophy and natural sciences among the Tatars.

As a result, Tatar society split into two camps as regards their attitude towards mastering modern knowledge as something desirable/unwanted. One camp, represented by Marjani and Nasyri, advocated absorption of secular knowledge by Tatar culture and a peaceful coexistence of philosophy and religion. The other camp, which represented

the majority, insisted that Muslim education, based upon medieval traditions and propagating them, was essential. They professed submission and unquestioning obedience to spiritual authorities.

Discussing in his works many religious and philosophic issues, the Tatar thinker, Marjani, often addresses the problem of faith and reason. Without opposing religious and philosophic knowledge, he defines their respective spheres of functioning: "One ignoramus of the number of friends of Islam possibly thinks that faith of necessity wins when it refutes sciences, so he refutes them altogether. Thereby he consolidates his own ignorance with regard to secular sciences. He even denies [that] the causes of Lunar and Solar eclipses [are real] and maintains that those causes are contrary to the *shari'a*. In reality, they belong in the domain of things apodictic so that, once comprehended, they are incontrovertible. Geometric proofs show those causes to be true, leaving no room for doubt. Religion contains nothing that would prevent or contradict it."<sup>1</sup>

Marjani writes that the essence of religion is not provable by rational arguments: "As for rational considerations, ... the rightness of religion and the verity of faith are not based upon the examination and comprehension of their essence... On the contrary, their discussion is the sphere of proof, and it functions side by side with it (proof)." <sup>2</sup> Consequently, according to Marjani, it turns out that philosophy (scientific knowledge) deals with rationally comprehensible notions, which describe the existing world, whereas religion deals only with faith itself.

In the question of correlation of faith and knowledge, the Tatar thinker follows the views of the 12th century Cordovan scholar, Ibn Rushd, who held that religion cannot contradict philosophy, meaning that its dogmata and postulates allow of allegorical interpretation in accordance with the established facts of science. Marjani treated the matter in a similar vein: "And he who supposes that the present discussion is about religion has already transgressed against it and thereby compromised his [own] arguments. For these arguments, upon which rests scientific proof, leave no room for doubt by themselves. And he who learns them (arguments) and adduces proof in their favor, when told that this (the adducing of proof) is contrary to the *shari'a*, doubts not this; he doubts the *shari'a*... But the *shari'a* has nothing that would contradict them (arguments). And even if there is room for allegorical interpretation, it is more acceptable than the refutation of indisputable postulates."<sup>3</sup> Marjani proposed to subject to allegorical interpretation only those opinions that failed to stand the test of time and were no longer compatible with reason and science, not the religious dogmata postulated by the Qur'an.

In his *Nazurat al-haqq (A Survey of the Truth)*, he wrote: "Religion does not contradict philosophy, and philosophy does not contradict religion

<sup>1</sup> Sh. Marjani, *Muqaddima*, (Kazan, 1883), p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> Sh. Marjani, *Nazurat al-haqq*, (Kazan, 1870), pp. 14–15.

<sup>3</sup> Sh. Marjani, *Kitab al-hikma al-baligha*, (Kazan, 1888), p. 138.

because the two of them, like two twins, proceed from a common source of the truth and, in fact, go hand in hand.”<sup>4</sup>

Another 19<sup>th</sup> century Tatar thinker, Qayum Nasyri, came under a strong influence of Russian and European culture. Therefore his views on the problem of faith and knowledge are more radical than those of Marjani.

Religion occupies a place of some importance in Nasyri’s world outlook, but the secular stratum of his philosophy is far more important. Being a Muslim, he pinpointed the ritual-ethical norms of Islam that formed religion, while science played the principal part in his system.

Like all enlighteners, Nasyri held reason supreme in both the practical and spiritual activity of man. “All things have a limit,” he wrote, “only reason is limitless.”<sup>5</sup> “That which we call reason,” maintained Nasyri, “is in the brain” which is “an organ of thought and the senses.”<sup>6</sup> The effectiveness of reason is related, according to Nasyri, to practice: “Every affair requires intellect. But intellect itself needs practice. Intellect and practice interact in a manner resembling water and earth. For neither water without earth nor earth without water grows anything.”<sup>7</sup> The Tatar enlightener placed the mind (reason) over religion: “If you happen to talk to someone, think not about what religion he professes but pay attention to his mind. For his religion is important to him [alone], while his mind both to you and him.”<sup>8</sup> Nasyri was one of the propagators of the heliocentric theory. The scholar wrote on the Solar system, on gravitation, on the causes of Lunar and Solar eclipses, thus bringing the latest achievements of natural philosophy to the Tatar reading public.

The Tatar scholar rejected the Qur’anic tenet of the immortal soul existing independently of the human body. He wrote: “There are no two natures in man; the soul is inseparable from the body.”<sup>9</sup> He maintained that the idea of the soul was but a fable, a survival of uncultivated pre-Islamic beliefs.

Developing the ideas of his precursors, the famous religious reformer and enlightener of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, R. Fahraddin, wrote on the need to tackle the issue of faith and knowledge in accord with the spirit of time and the needs of social progress. “Though the fundamental laws of Islam are immutable and eternal,” he wrote, “certain laws and norms based on those canons ... may transform responding to the change of place and time they operate in, and may become supplanted with other norms...”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sh. Marjani, *Nazurat al-haqq*, (Kazan, 1870), p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> Q. Nasyri, *Qyryq baqcha*, (Kazan, 1902), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Q. Nasyri, *Munafiqhy eghza*, (Kazan 1893), pp. 46, 61.

<sup>7</sup> Q. Nasyri, *Fawakih al-julasa*, (Kazan 1884), p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> *Nasyri Qayum. 1825–1945.*, (Kazan 1948), p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Q. Nasyri, *Qyryq baqcha*, (Kazan, 1902).

<sup>10</sup> R. Fahraddin, *Dini wa ijtimai’i masalalar*, (Miras, 1995), Nos. 11–12, p. 187.

Defining the spheres in which faith and reason function, Fahraddin writes: “There is no harm when a certain man or a Muslim invents the steamer, railway, telephone or telegraph and, having subdued the forces of nature, contrives unheard-of innovations that have nothing to do with religion. Similarly, the building of *mektebs* and *medresehs*, the erecting of minarets and mosques, the publishing of books ... are all worldly affairs.”<sup>11</sup>

Reason was to Fahraddin the main tool of religious knowledge: “Reason plays the strongest and the most important role in Islam. It is its [most] significant element. To become a [true] Muslim, one has to activate one’s reason. A correct faith was and is truly possible due to reason.”<sup>12</sup> R. Fahraddin treats the problem of faith and knowledge in the spirit of Marjani’s reformative ideas: “While some of those (sciences) have to be grasped by reason, for others it would be enough to acknowledge the arguments of the *shari‘a*, provided they do not contradict reason...”<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, in developing Marjani’s ideas under new socio-economic conditions, Fahraddin substantiates the compatibility of reason (science) and faith (the *shari‘a*), believing that scientific knowledge does not refute religious knowledge – on the contrary, it is an attribute of the true faith.

Bigi, a more radical thinker than Fahraddin, also paid great attention to the issue of faith and knowledge in his work. He found a solution of that problem within religion by putting forward the thesis of the “universal grace (or mercy) of God”, which he publicized in a short treatise of the same name.<sup>14</sup> His views on that problem were not original, for many Arab Muslim philosophers greatly contributed to its discussion before him, including al-Ma‘arri (d. 1057), Ibn al-‘Arabi (d. 1240) and especially Ibn al-Qayim (d. 1350).

The place and time in which this concept was popularized are important. The Tatar society of the time was undergoing a radical restructuring of all spheres of spiritual life, in which Islam played a significant part. Therefore, Bigi’s address of a theological problem related to the very basis of religion was timely and necessary; it “exploded” the Tatar society from the inside. That is what he wrote concerning the *mejlis* of imams that discussed his concept: “The accusations of the last few days make the true picture perfectly clear. It turned out that, among the invited imams, there was no one capable of [properly] discussing this theological question... I therefore abandoned my [original] intention to assemble a *mejlis* of ‘ulema (learned authorities).”<sup>15</sup>

Substantiating his concept, Bigi wrote that Allah was so all-merciful that, sooner or later, He would forgive all people, believers and

<sup>11</sup> R. Fahraddin, *Jawami kalim sharkhi*, (Orenburg, 1916), pp. 434–435.

<sup>12</sup> R. Fahraddin, *Jawami kalim sharkhi*, (Orenburg, 1916), p. 294.

<sup>13</sup> R. Fahraddin, *Dini wa ijtimai‘i masalalar*, (Orenburg, 1914), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> M. Bigi, *Rahmat ilahiya borhannary*, (Orenburg, 1911).

<sup>15</sup> Musa Jarulla Bigiev, (Kazan, 2006), p. 44.



non-believers alike. Having started in the Tatar press, a controversy over the subject reached as far as Turkey where top religious authorities even banned several of his books.

Basing his reasoning on the Qur'an and adducing certain hadiths, Bigi affirmed in his treatise that the punishment in hell awaiting the sinners (according to the Scriptures) is not eternal, and in the end everyone would be acquitted. According to Bigi, the truth must be established not through the fear of hell, but through rational proof expounded in the Qur'an. Without discovering anything entirely new in theology, he nonetheless exhorted his audience to rely on reason when solving problems, and to interpret certain passages of the Qur'an, which are contrary to the spirit of the time, allegorically rather than adhere to the letter of the scriptures as most traditionalists of his day did.

Bigi never tried to present Islam as the best religion of all (anyone should come to this conclusion unaided), he was tolerant of all creeds: "We forbear to accuse a nation of apostasy or unbelief on account of its own religion or faith. If we decide to regard each religion as a link in the chain of development of a single religion, then there will be no need to accuse any nation of unbelief on account of its own creed or to harbor enmity towards it on account of its adherence to its religion."<sup>16</sup>

The Tatar metaphysical thought of the 19th and early 20th centuries began forming its own attitude to European civilization. The gist of ideas expressed by Tatar thinkers was to adopt everything positive in European science, while preserving Islamic cultural values. This intellectual movement was headed by the flower of the Tatar people – such thinkers as Sh. Marjani, Q. Nasyri, R. Fahraddin and M. Bigi.

Tatar reformers and enlighteners sang the praise of reason and scientific knowledge, though they were not as radical in their science-worship as the most consistent of Western enlighteners. Nurtured within the framework of a theological worldview, they subsequently managed to extricate themselves from many traditionalist interpretations of religion, borrowing a number of ideas from Arab-Muslim philosophy. Although the Tatar enlightenment thinkers of the 19th and early 20th centuries disseminated knowledge of the modern epoch, they never went so far as to reject traditional metaphysics, remaining faithful adherents of certain principles deriving from medieval Arab-Muslim philosophy.

Typologically, Nasyri's views on the problem of faith and knowledge were closer to the classic samples of European and Russian enlightenment thought than the opinions of Marjani, Fahraddin and Bigi who was especially strongly impacted by Russian and Western culture. On the other hand, the attitude of the three scholars just mentioned prevailed in Tatar philosophic thought, inasmuch as it corresponded more fully to the realities of Tatar society and was accepted more readily by the populace.

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<sup>16</sup> M. Bigi, *Rahmat ilahiya borhannary*, (Orenburg, 1911), p. 7.

Marjani and Nasyri were precursors of the jadidist movement (the “renewers”) in Russia. They laid its foundation by stressing the need for educational reform and the teaching at the *medresehs*, by propagating modern knowledge, and by helping the Tatar people to assimilate the latest achievements of culture and science. In the early 20th century, Fahraddin and Bigi put the ideas of their predecessors into practice.

Their life and work will always present an important contribution to the history, not only of Tatar but also of Russian socio-philosophical thought.

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**PART IV**  
**WESTERN THOUGHT**



## CHAPTER XVII

# BELIEF AND KNOWLEDGE IN MODERN CULTURE

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### I.

The relationship of belief to knowledge has always been a key problem in philosophy since the matter involves analysis of both the very possibility of comprehending reality and the ultimate grounds of human activity.

From its inception Western philosophy has set itself against mythological and ordinary beliefs. Philosophy criticized ordinary experience and at the same time served as a means for gaining true knowledge. However, in contrast to an opinion, as Plato proved, knowledge presupposes not only the truth of a certain judgment but also its substantiation.

Belief, even the most ordinary one, e.g., the belief in tomorrow's fine weather can be both true and false. At any rate, it cannot be completely grounded. Only thinking based on self-evident premises and guided by the rules of logic can lead to full-fledged knowledge. As for belief, even if it displays some thought, it is clearly inadequate to be knowledge, as an indisputable comprehension of the reality.

The understanding of this problem underwent a radical change in the Middle Ages. The relationship between belief and knowledge was interpreted differently; in any case as regards such type of belief as the Christian faith in God's existence and religious dogmas, it was understood as an adequate and supreme way to comprehend the divine ultimate reality. Christian theologians and philosophers stress that this faith cannot but be true. Yet, it is not based on the foundations ordinarily used in the acquisition of knowledge. According to this approach, religious faith does not deny but presupposes rational knowledge which, however, is not self-sufficient. Below I will treat in more detail the interrelationship between a religious faith and knowledge.

A fundamentally different context for philosophical discourse on this problem arose in modern times. In contrast to ancient philosophers, the focus was placed not on the deductive inference and validation of mathematical and philosophical knowledge but primarily on the verification of empirical knowledge, i.e., the knowledge pertaining to the incipient experimental natural sciences. Empirical substantiation presupposes finding, by experiment, some essential facts which by using certain logical techniques may help to acquire knowledge. Such essential facts were treated

by the empiricists as elementary states of consciousness, sensations ("simple ideas"). Anything that cannot be logically deduced from these elements of empirical data is just a product of belief.

For instance, David Hume maintained that any suppositions about the existence of the outer world detached from one's consciousness, the cause-and-effect connections of phenomena and of the ego are indicative of belief rather than knowledge. As Hume sees it, belief justifies itself in mundane practical matters, but not in the scientific field. Wherever genuine knowledge is concerned (which science is designed to gain), we have to discard the notions about the existence of a reality beyond our sensory experience, our need to look for the causes of phenomena, and alleging that the study of mental phenomena presumes recognition of the existence of an Ego. From this point of view, such beliefs may also prove untenable in some ordinary life situations precisely because of being beliefs rather than knowledge.

R. Descartes's idea of assigning immediate validity solely to the states of subjective consciousness made it logically impossible to substantiate a thesis about the existence of the outer world, one's own body and "other" minds. One has only to believe in this thesis. But, in contrast to Hume who finds practical (though not logical) justification for this belief, Descartes validates it exclusively through religious faith. Since God exists and cannot be a deceiver. One's senses should reveal the actual reality (according to Descartes, the existence of God is not only a matter of faith, but can be rationally substantiated by the so-called ontological proof).

At the same time there emerged the ideology (or, as it is sometimes called, a project) of Enlightenment in accord with which knowledge, primarily scientific knowledge, was gradually to force out beliefs in all its varieties. According to the enlightenment precepts, even if one has to be guided by belief in many life situations, in the long run it can and must be driven out by scientific knowledge. Only the latter makes it possible to disclose the real interdependence of phenomena, predict the effects of our actions and place natural and social processes (and even human behavior) under human control. According to Enlightenment ideas, both ordinary and religious beliefs comprise a set of prejudices which, even if these formerly had some useful meaning, gradually become obsolete along with the maturation of human civilization. It is knowledge, but not belief that makes man free. A free enlightened person should be critical and self-critical, take nothing on trust, reject any authority and rely exclusively on one's own intellectual resources.

## **II.**

Nevertheless, today the understanding of belief/knowledge interaction has been undergoing a marked change. It turns out that science not only gains knowledge, but in principle cannot do without belief. The

relations between belief and knowledge are not mutually exclusive but presuppose an interconnection and interaction.

Contemporary literature on the philosophy and history of science shows that belief plays an important part in scientific cognition: not only in the process of formulating paradigms, theories and hypotheses, but also in their acceptance by a scientific community. Knowledge presumes the substantiation of a proposed judgment. As we can speak about such complete substantiation only in some cases (at least, when the matter concerns not deductive, but factual sciences)<sup>1</sup>, scientific knowledge proves inseparable from the presence of some element of belief. This element may be large or small. It may be so minor that we have grounds for speaking about knowledge. This concerns primarily the established empirical dependencies and various experimental results, but nevertheless this element is always here. It attends, as well, the most ordinary perception, which makes perceptive illusions possible. This element is far more manifest in certain theories (even if they seem to be quite well-grounded by established facts) and, all the more so, in the accepted pictures of the world and paradigms, where knowledge and belief appear to be interlinked.

Some fundamental methodological rules and principles of scientific research can be taken on trust, though there is no pure belief in this case either, for principles, such as that of causality should regularly demonstrate their effectiveness. Neither can the production of scientific knowledge do without an authority: the case in point is the authority of a scientific paradigm or a research program. If this authority is to be continually questioned, research would be unfeasible.

Also, it stands to reason that belief itself may be more or less substantiated. Belief, as it were, cannot be substantiated too thoroughly, otherwise it would turn into knowledge. But if it is not absurd (and a normal person would never hold absurd beliefs), belief must be based on something.

Belief manifests itself in two forms in cognitive situations. First, it embraces various judgments, suppositions and assumptions (not necessarily uttered, but engaged in the process of perception as well). These hypotheses are verified by experiment and may prove to be either true or false. When well substantiated they turn into knowledge. Second, it includes fundamental trust attitudes indispensable for certain experiences. This matter involves not ordinary epistemic belief, but something fundamentally different: the method of constituting certain experience and certain cognitive practice. As long as we operate within the framework of the given cognitive practice, the question about the validity or falsity of a given trust

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<sup>1</sup> As for deductive sciences, in particular mathematics, it brings up the question of whether it pertains to knowledge at all. According to some viewpoints, mathematics is not knowledge but a kind of specific language. There is also the view that mathematics amounts to a specific kind of construction rather than knowledge.

attitude does not arise, for this attitude cannot be verified by the given experience since it generates the latter. This does not mean that an attitude of trust is absolutely infallible. But in case it fails, the matter involves not just the invalidation of a concrete supposition, but the abandonment of the given cognitive practice as a whole.

For example, research work presumes not only belief in a paradigm, a scientific program and a certain theory, but also trust in the experimental results of one's colleagues. Today research work is carried out by large teams. A major portion of knowledge accumulated by a researcher has been gained from others rather than from one's personal efforts. As a rule, this knowledge is not subjected to additional verification since that would be impracticable. Systematic cheating by those engaged in a certain research project would ruin their work.

But in our ordinary life the greater part of our knowledge is also acquired from others. Modern civilization is, with some justice, regarded as a civilization of knowledge, an informational society. This knowledge is provided by modern information technologies. We learn about the world news from newspapers, television and the Internet. Normal communication, which is an underlying factor in social processes, presupposes an attitude of trust to the interlocutor, just as education is impossible without the pupil's trust in the teacher's authority. If this trust fails, normal social life, reproduction and the support of culture (and consequently, human reproduction, as well) become impossible.

The process of cognition presupposes trust in one's sensory experiences (although some epistemic beliefs that are part of concrete perception may prove false) and trust in memory (although some memories may be misleading). The understanding of knowledge as referring to an outer reality, "inbuilt" in our cognitive activity, is not just ordinary belief having nothing in common with knowledge, as Hume thought, but a fundamental attitude of trust making the very process of cognition possible.

Modern civilization is not only a knowledge society but also a civilization facing high risks and the need to take prompt decisions in nonstandard situations. Therefore, in many cases action is not possible on the basis of thorough knowledge but with the help only of a more or less substantiated belief or supposition. In some cases despite lack of required knowledge one has to act promptly. The claims that one should act only on the basis of "firm knowledge" in these cases are nothing but fear to do anything and the unwillingness to assume a responsibility for the consequences. It is rather a strong belief in something that can sometimes bring about a certain reality in the social life (K. Popper called it the "Oedipus Effect"). In such cases belief proves to be true not owing to the previous existence of a certain reality, but because belief and relevant actions have created this reality.

Besides, one must bear in mind that some types of belief constitute human identity, forming the very core of a human personality. A case in point are beliefs that have turned into convictions, such as the beliefs in the



existence of moral values and standards, those concerning universal features in the world outlook and beliefs included in a self-image. When one's belief in tomorrow's fine weather proves false, it can easily be put up with. But if one loses belief in the existence of principles of social justice, in morally acceptable things or in important features of a self-image (if one suddenly becomes aware of being completely wrong in one's self-understanding), it would amount to a crisis of individual identity, which has to be surmounted by finding a way out, though its existence in all similar cases cannot be guaranteed.

So, belief is not something provisionally accepted for practical needs with a view to its subsequent complete supplanting by knowledge. In many cases belief is irreplaceable, as belief constitutes human identity, and belief as a fundamental attitude of trust is a prerequisite for man's life in a human community since it provides the very possibility of knowledge acquisition.

### **III.**

Nowadays some interpretations of the above-described facts are gaining currency.

Some interpret the close relationship and interaction of knowledge and belief as the evident absence of any boundaries between belief and knowledge and as the possibility of speaking about knowledge only by convention, since it is alleged that in principle there is no difference between the truth and falsity, reality and illusion. According to this viewpoint, the term "knowledge" may be understood as defining anything recognized at a given time by a given community (in particular, by the scientific community). The very acceptance of anything is determined, supporters of this position think, not by the relationship between a system of assertions and reality, but exclusively by interrelationships within a given community, including the relations of force, power and predominance. Further on, it is alleged that reality is not that which exists independently of consciousness and to which knowledge and beliefs refer, but something socially structured, with the given structures being culturally and historically relative. Modern mass media create the reality in which man lives and may even be involved in conscious mystification. But according to the advocates of this viewpoint, it is not so important, for there is no fundamental difference between conscious and unconscious mystification, since it is impossible to make a distinction between mystification and the true knowledge of social reality. In this viewpoint there can be neither genuine knowledge nor justified belief: man must trust neither reason, science, religion nor oneself. This approach ruins the hierarchy of cultural and cognitive values. Pseudo-science appears in this case no worse than real science, while the creation of PR myths is assessed no less than an honest study of the social life because, with regard to the influence on human behavior, the former can in many cases surpass the latter.

Actually, belief and knowledge for all their interconnection and interaction have never been mixed and cannot be blended. Cognition has always been and will be oriented to the acquisition of knowledge. Authority and influence within scientific communication cannot be detached from epistemic requirements. The problem of gaining well-grounded reliable knowledge is still of key significance for epistemology and the philosophy of science. Belief can also be more or less justified. But there are various types of belief. Lately attempts have been made to equate epistemic belief, especially belief in scientific cognition, with religious faith. Therefore, we will compare in more detail the interrelationship of belief and knowledge in science and religion.

#### IV.

Commonly it is said that religious tenets are taken for granted, whereas scientific assertions express established knowledge. The real picture proves to be more intricate. As mentioned earlier, belief plays an important part in scientific cognition. But an essential point is that the ideal of science presumes a strong possibility of turning the initial conjecture taken merely on belief into more or less substantiated knowledge. Science has always followed this way.

We have a completely different situation in religion. A religious faith and religious beliefs exclude knowledge. In religion one does not know the object of one's beliefs, and this lack of knowledge is realized. Judgments making up a religious creed may be logically interdependent so that certain judgments can be deduced from others. If a believer can reach such a conclusion, he knows that one judgment follows from another (this kind of conclusion is drawn in theological argumentation). But this does not turn the deduced judgments into knowledge: these judgments remain beliefs as before. Though, in the viewpoint of some theologians, those who have achieved the ultimate goal, saints and apostles, can know something in which the rest of believers have only belief (on this point we can refer to the writings of Thomas Aquinas). Yet, generally speaking, a religious belief excludes knowledge and cannot turn into knowledge. A short time ago I read a text by a contemporary Russian theologian asserting that it is religious beliefs that constitute absolute knowledge, but most theologians would hardly agree with him.

Another noteworthy feature of a religious belief is that it takes for granted the truthfulness of one's belief (whereas in science the truth is never taken on trust). Science allows that a certain belief may prove to be false. A religious belief is based on the assumption that one's belief cannot be false. A religious belief presupposes one's belief in the supreme all-knowing, omnipotent and absolute authority who hands down nothing but the truth. In science, an authority also plays a certain part, though a reference to one's competence does not exclude but presumes its substantiation by means of

facts and logical discourse. In science, authority does not imply its absolute security against errors.

Finally, it is necessary to point out once more, perhaps the most essential difference between scientific and religious belief, namely, that the relationship between belief and knowledge lies on the purely intellectual plane, and that belief itself is understood as a purely intellectual formation. Belief in science is an insufficiently substantiated assertion which when sufficiently substantiated (though the question of what should be viewed as sufficient may be brought up for discussion) turns into knowledge. We have a completely different situation in religion. The religious faith (including a number of beliefs) acts as a manifestation of all aspects in a human soul, including willpower and emotions. The acceptance of religious tenets as objects of belief constitutes not only an intellectual act but primarily an act of conversion with profound effect on one's personality as a whole.

V.

Today the opinion about a crisis in rationality and the concomitant crisis in belief in the contemporary western culture has gained currency. The understanding of rationality and knowledge has been undergoing marked changes. This does not necessarily mean their crisis, for we have to do with a new understanding of rationality and knowledge and their new forms. Also, it is clear from the above that belief and rational knowledge are interconnected and the recognition of rationality as a cultural value presupposes trust in it. Cultural development, social activity and scientific progress presuppose a trusting attitude regarding the world and within a human community. The crisis in belief and trust brings about not the cultivation of rational criticism, as it might be expected, but a paradoxical combination of mistrust and credulity: belief in parascience, social myths and ideological demagoguery. The creation of conditions for a harmonious combination of belief and rational knowledge is a pressing problem in modern culture.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

# **“SCIENCE AND OTHER FORMS OF THINKING”: AN EMERGING INTERDISCIPLINARY PARADIGM**

*I.T. KASAVIN*

In the last fifty years, a new area of research is taking shape in the humanities worldwide. It lies at the boundaries of two seemingly, absolutely incompatible disciplines, the philosophy of science and philosophy of religion. For various reasons, physicists, biologists, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, theologians and specialists in religious studies have become convinced that they should transcend their narrow disciplinary approaches. Scientists seek in religion a wider context for their research; theologians need scientific arguments to modernise the religious outlook; specialists in religious studies borrow sophisticated methodological approaches from philosophers of science, and philosophers develop cultural analysis and contemplate the possibilities for a global synthesis of ideas. As soon as a new world-view is needed, it becomes clear that each discipline by itself is, in principle, insufficient. This need is embedded in twentieth century culture, the dynamism of which is unrivaled.

This development is marked, first, by the incessant generation and change of cultural models, and second, by new interdisciplinary approaches based on non-traditional theoretical presuppositions. These approaches are the social history of science, transpersonal psychology, interpretative anthropology, discourse-analysis, quantitative studies and others, which relate to so-called “postmodernism”. They share a pluralist view of culture as an aggregate of various intellectual resources, which they combine freely for different purposes. The use and interpretation of resources depends on their current cultural and social contexts. For this reason, science and religion, knowledge and belief, logic and rhetoric, theories and metaphors, facts and fantasies can successfully interact and form unified conceptual systems. The leading role in providing institutional support for this movement belongs to the Christian Church, which itself is in the process of intellectual and organisational reform. It participates in promoting various charities and research projects. Today there is discussion that a new discipline, “Science and Spirituality“, should be introduced into lay education. The Vatican and charitable foundations<sup>1</sup> offer a number of scholarly and cultural programmes to scholars interested in topics outside their academic areas.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, the Templeton Foundation: <http://www.metanexus.net/tarp/index.htm>.

What are the conceptual and methodological presuppositions of such a discipline, if indeed it is possible? It is not the first time we face this question: it happened earlier with cultural studies, political science, the science of science, the science of religion, synergetics, etc. In each of these cases we are dealing with a particular type of research with an undefined disciplinary status, which brings together various subject areas, theoretical presuppositions and methodological principles and procedures. The philosopher's task is to analyse some basic concepts and to reconsider their meaning and interaction. The notions in questions are science and religion, knowledge and belief, research and revelation, proof and persuasion. Yet, as becomes clear upon closer view, these notions have constantly evolved and have been defined in concrete historical and socio-cultural contexts.

Thus, we find in the Bible at least two concepts of faith. The first is the faith of Abraham, which is based on an equal contract with God; and the second is the faith of Job, which resulted from painful suffering, disappointment and hope, that is, from self-knowledge. Abraham's faith comes from the world, where adequate knowledge and efficient action, including communication with God, are possible. By contrast, Job's faith follows from the break-up of the contracts which set both the rules for communication between tribes and the laws of events. Abraham's faith, which is grounded in sacrifice, cedes place to Job's faith, which comes accompanied by three "discoveries" (C.G. Jung). The first one is that the world loses its unshakeable order and allows for miracles according to God's will. The second one is that Man loses the ability to understand and respond to God and to be in a dialogue with him. But, thirdly, humiliated and suffering Man discovers in himself the ability for sophisticated reflection which God does not have, overcomes his suffering and becomes superior even to God. The faith in God as the source of an unchangeable natural and social order cedes to the faith in God's power and man's freedom from the social contract. Man believes that he is selected and that faith makes him powerful. The mode of relationship based on the unshakeable contract is therefore questioned, "The merchants are thrown out of the Temple", and the *contract* gives place to *faith*.

On the whole, religion is a stage in the evolution of humanity's cognitive attitude, a stage which is necessary both rationally and historically, without which there would be neither philosophy nor science. One may distinguish within it periods, dominated either by the cult of propitiation of gods or by magic activism. When magic activism replaces propitiation, "the conquest of the world" replaces the "concordance with being". Moral life no longer copies stable principles but becomes an endless spiritual growth. The harmonious, law-abiding Cosmos gives place to the chaotic and diverse nature which "likes hiding". Man is no longer satisfied by the knowledge of its laws, as set by the original contract, but wants to "question nature" in an independent and artful way. This particular change brings philosophy and epistemology to the centre of attention. As a result of secularisation, cognition and knowledge, for the most part, are transferred

outside religion, into science and philosophy. Similarly, contemporary studies of religion no longer look like confessional theology; they have become an interdisciplinary study of a specific kind of knowledge, which is both practical and spiritual. This is connected both with activity and communication, and is analysed with the help of social, psychological and epistemological methods and approaches.

During the last five centuries, science also underwent a long evolution. To understand its structure and functions, one needs to know its genesis. If we accept that Euclid and Archimedes had created the sciences of mathematics and mechanics, Leibniz and Newton could only have continued what had already been started in antiquity. In this case, science is identical to a “scientific idea” or “scientific theory”. By contrast, if we believe that science was born in the early modern period and that antiquity was no more than a propaedeutic, then by science we mean an intellectual movement which is based on a certain paradigm and requires a certain system of education and of publication of results. In yet further contrast, one might assume that science, in the contemporary meaning of the term, appeared only in the mid-nineteenth century, because only at that time did the intellectual movement acquire an institutional base, funding pattern, specialised education and independence from religion.

A similar disagreement exists also about the origins or roots of science: whether it emerges as a generalisation of practice, a criticism of mythology, a desacralisation of magic, a technical projection of a religious metaphysics, or as one of the ancient metaphysical speculations in the form of abstract natural philosophy. Here, once again, science is taken in general as a whole, although it is a constellation of different phenomena, like abstract pure knowledge, natural science, technological systems and social conceptions. It is obviously meaningless to look for their origins in the same place and in the same period. To do this would be to ignore the commonly shared view of science as a historically changing, diverse socio-cultural phenomenon. It is unacceptable even for those who analyse the inner logic of science.

Giving priority to cognition and examination, which is typical of science, is a relatively late historical product. Outside science – in myth, religion and morality – the individual learns through assimilating collective representations or through spiritual growth. Historically, the pursuit of learning, which is present in magic, in myth and religion goes behind the stage, and it returns only with philosophical and scientific knowledge. Having absorbed the results of pre-scientific and philosophical knowledge, the natural sciences developed one of the features typical of naturalist magic, namely *the search for and use of hidden powers of nature*. The opposition between the heavenly or divine world (regular, perfect, self-sufficient) and the earthly world (spontaneous, faulty, dependent) is at the root of other oppositions: order and chaos, cause and consequence, essence and appearance, law and fact, truth and error, the exact and the approximate. The heavens, with perfect motion, became a prototype for a scientific

theory, which emerged as a result of philosophical and scientific rationalisation of the cognitive process. The diverse and imperfect earth served as a prototype for empirical knowledge. The relationship between *the sacred* and *profane* is an epistemological prototype for the relationship between the theoretical and empirical. The sacred cognitive attitude, dominant in pre-scientific naturalism, helped shape norms and ideals of scientific knowledge, such as truth, simplicity, exactitude and objectivity, which would later become the standards of empirical research: repeatability, reproducibility and observability. Heavenly laws, superimposed on earthly events created the mathematical natural sciences or the Scientific Revolution.

Conclusions reached about the relative and socially laden character of scientific truths, the negative consequences of scientific and technological progress and a certain “saturation” with scientific issues, have caused doubts about the special epistemological status of science and its intellectual power, which threaten to deprive science of much of its funding. The American philosopher, Paul Feyerabend, treated science as a tradition with no more right to power than any other tradition. Yet the interpretation of science as a tradition, together with the analysis of traditions in science, is a sensible one because it sets science in various cultural contexts.

Contemporary research on the social history of science makes one think that science is as old as humanity’s other achievements. A philosopher or historian of science should be sympathetic to the idea of expanding the concept of science and of legitimating forms of knowledge which are different from what we have been taught at school. Yet today we have already understood that human life, material as well as spiritual, is not limited to science and its applications. Moreover, this understanding is no longer in conflict with the dominant ideology. We can make one more step towards historical truth and examine the conventional and relative character of the terms “science” and “non-science”, in a way that by no means cancels the fact that science differs essentially from other cultural and spiritual institutions.

Were those people, who set up and solved the task of bringing ancient thought and culture back from oblivion, lovers of the classics or, rather, scholars of the Cabbala and Hermeticism? There is no straightforward answer, for anything like a sociological survey or a content analysis with a “citation index” is impossible. And who were these classic authors of ancient philosophy? They were not narrow people. Antiquity itself is far from the kingdom of enlightened rationalism. That is why the dialogues, “The Timaeus” and “Symposium”, also inspired the occultists, and numerous Pseudo-Aristotles were used in mystical metaphysics. Not the least because there are many interpretations, both potential and real, of Plato and Aristotle, did their ideas live through the centuries, and their authority was as great for Renaissance people as for the scholastics.

Thus, the birth of modern science, a phenomenon with which one usually associates the Renaissance and the early modern period, is an



ambivalent process. The new cosmology (astronomy) owes not as much to the expansion of empirical observations and mathematical analysis of data as to the new world-view, which is a combination of rational and magic elements. To a similar extent, the next stage, classical mechanics, is connected with Platonism, heretical theology, alchemy, astrology and cabalistic thought. The creator of the mechanist paradigm, Isaac Newton, laid in its foundation a mine, the theory of gravitation, which undermines the paradigm through a realisation that the Newtonian conception of the world is limited, and a wave of interest in magical metaphysics and what today is called “paranormal phenomena”, go hand in hand. Up to now, science has not completely eliminated myth, magic and religion: it *pushes them out*, to the sphere of alternative world-views. And as long as theory can serve instrumental and empirical practice, science can forget about the alternatives. A search for a broader outlook, including a search in the forgotten mystical and magical doctrines, coincides, as a rule, with periods of theoretical helplessness and disappointment, which are recurrent in the history of culture. Yet it is in these periods that chefs-d’oeuvres are created, social utopias emerge and scholars have great insights.

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## CHAPTER XIX

# THE AUTHORITY OF NATURAL SCIENCE: KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF ABOUT 'MAN'S PLACE IN NATURE'

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This paper begins from a simple premise: the comparison of knowledge and belief in different cultures must take into account the authority that natural science has in large parts of the world. This is all the more necessary because of the efficacy of the technology which science makes possible. All too often this does not happen, because of the institutional divisions between the sciences and the humanities in academic life, deference to the opinion that discussion of science requires special expertise, the prior assumption that natural science and religious thought have nothing in common, or whatever. These are perhaps excuses, but they are very poor reasons for not finding a place for questions about the authority of natural science at the centre of any comparative study of knowledge and belief.

In taking natural science into account, it is, I think, helpful carefully to distinguish discussion about claims to the authority of knowledge and claims to truth. The question which the evangelist of Christ, John, put into the mouth of Pilate, 'What is truth?' is not to be addressed in one short paper. Rather, what is required is understanding how particular people come to have their conception of knowledge or belief.<sup>1</sup>

The deeply ambivalent intellectual reaction to modern Western science in different cultures around the world makes all the more pressing the need squarely to face the claims of knowledge in the natural sciences. This reaction, in a general way, follows a familiar division between 'modernisers' and 'conservatives'. Two responses have existed uncomfortably side by side. On the one hand, some intellectuals have been willing to accept natural science as universally objective, trans-cultural knowledge, to which local traditions of thought must accommodate. The judgement that technology, and hence the economy, is dependent on this science greatly encourages its acceptance. On the other hand, the apparent

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the huge analytic philosophy literature on 'truth', there has been much discussion in the philosophy, sociology and anthropology of scientific knowledge on the question of relativism. I do not propose to go over this topic. But for a recent discussion, and criticism, of the relativist interpretation of science, see John H. Zammito, *A Nice Derangement of Epistemes: Post-Positivism in the Study of Science from Quine to Latour*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004).

materialism of modern natural scientific knowledge, or at least its exclusion of spiritual agency from the natural world, and its incapacity to ground values (including its own commitment to truth), has supported the maintenance of indigenous traditions of thought. The relations between these two responses is, unfortunately, often simplified into a cliché about the conflict of science and religion. The issues are far too complex for that to be valid or helpful. Not least, neither 'science' nor 'religion' denote one thing, but are words referring to human activities with family resemblances. Though, of course, there are serious enough conflicts in particular situations between religious and scientific ways of thought (as in the dispute about teaching evolution in schools in certain parts of the United States), there has not been, nor could there be, conflict 'in general'.

The ambivalence about how to respond to scientific thought is present in Western as well as in other cultures: it is not only the outcome of a reaction to Western pressures. In the West, one area of natural science knowledge – evolution – stands out as both of great public interest (and accessible to public understanding) and as an intellectual site where debate has encapsulated a good number of the main questions at issue. Some observers of Western thought, noting the enthusiasm for evolutionary accounts of the origins of human beings, have compared the scientific theory, taking into account its social status and function, to myth. That is, evolution has become *the story of origins* which explains why human life is the way it is. It is, therefore worthwhile to examine historically the shaping of the categories of knowledge and belief during the nineteenth-century debates which secured for evolutionary theory the fundamental place which it now occupies in natural science and public understanding.<sup>2</sup> This will provide the elements of a case study, which has had a central role in forming the status of knowledge in the natural sciences. Moreover, the case study comes ready-made, since historians have studied the origins of evolutionary thought from different perspectives and with painstaking precision. My suggestion will be that in the evolutionary debate – which Thomas Henry Huxley called the debate about 'man's place in nature'<sup>3</sup> – we

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<sup>2</sup> Speaking with somewhat more historical precision, we can separate three periods – the initial promulgation of evolutionary theories in the 1840s to 1860s, a period lasting from the 1870s to the 1930s in which there were many doubts about Darwin's particular views, and the period of the modern evolutionary synthesis (incorporating genetics) which has made Darwin's causal theory of natural selection central.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase was the title of Huxley's book, first published in 1863, which laid out the facts of the comparative anatomy of humans and the higher primates, including the recently discovered Neanderthal and Engis 'man'. It appeared in many editions and translations and was perhaps, for working people in Britain or Germany in the late nineteenth century, the single most important reading encouraging a naturalistic view of human nature.

can find significant roots of the modern English-language differentiation of 'knowledge' and 'belief'.

The relationship between 'knowledge' and 'belief', as these two words are used in the English language, is complex and has changed historically. There is no cut and dried definitional distinction; rather, usage plays on different shades of meaning in different contexts. Precisely for this reason, the terms are the instruments of debate and not the intellectual property of any one position.

All the same, an important distinction has developed historically. Modern usage frequently (but not always) implies a judgement differentiating claims about knowledge as more certain than claims about belief. By tradition, 'belief' denotes what is held to be true, on whatever grounds. It most characteristically, but not at all exclusively, refers to a religious system of thought. It also connotes a state of mind, a trust or confidence in a proposition, beyond what narrow experience or reasoning might justify. Thus, for example, a historian would refer to belief, not knowledge, in the divine right of the tsars. By contrast, 'knowledge' denotes a truth arrived at by reason or experience, and it thus connotes confidence that something is really the case (i.e., 'true') and can be shown to be so. Thus, for example, an ordinary person would assert knowledge, not belief, of a fact – but would assert belief that something is a fact. Much early thought about knowledge developed in the context of jurisprudence (as in the phrase 'legal cognizance'), and legal use of evidence to separate knowledge (justified belief) from provisional knowledge or opinion was followed by natural science. Legal thought also established a precedent for the common (but not exclusive) distinction between knowledge (which is definitely known) and belief (which may be right or wrong – 'mere belief'). In common contemporary usage, 'knowledge' (exemplified by natural science knowledge), often, but not always, refers to a proposition known to be true by reason and experience, while 'belief' refers to a proposition thought to be true but not necessarily confirmed by reason and experience. Often enough in everyday usage 'belief' denotes mere opinion.<sup>4</sup> Before the modern period, belief and knowledge were not contrasted evaluatively in this way. The modern contrast is the outcome of the rising authority of natural science. But of course this authority is far from absolute, and there are large and influential groups of Western people, like Protestant

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<sup>4</sup> The complexity of these words, not least because they can refer both to an action (as in 'getting knowledge' or 'having belief') and to actual propositions, is made clear by the entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. I take it for granted that the words are not open to simple definition and will therefore not repeatedly place them in 'scare quotes'.

evangelical or Russian orthodox congregations, who argue that belief has cognitive and moral priority and that true knowledge derives from it.<sup>5</sup>

There is a very interesting and illuminating example of usage in a famous television interview with the psychologist, C. G. Jung, made in 1959, two years before his death. The interviewer, John Freeman, sought to draw out Jung's wisdom. To the question, 'Do you now believe in God?', Jung answered: 'Now? Difficult to answer. I know; I needn't – I don't need to believe, I know.' And, playing the wise old man, he smiled enigmatically and said nothing further. We shouldn't conclude anything for certain on the basis of such words, but Jung at least meant that he had incontrovertible reasons and experience to assert the reality of God (whatever he understood by 'God') and that this assertion had a qualitatively different authority than the assertion of a belief. This reflected Jung's life-long aspiration that his study of the psyche should establish the science of psychology, and, though by the end of his life he was at least partly aware of the problematic scientific standing of what he had achieved, he forcibly asserted that he did, in important respects, possess knowledge and not belief. But it is indicative of modern usage that the interviewer, asking about God, asked about belief not knowledge. When asked a question about whether 'death is probably the end', Jung, more hesitant than in his response to the question about God, asserted: 'Well, I can't say. You see, the word "belief" is a difficult thing for me, I don't believe. I must have a reason for a certain hypothesis. If I know a thing, and then I know it, I don't need to believe it.'<sup>6</sup> The implication is that Jung was prepared to venture hypotheses and to state established knowledge, but he was not, as a scientist, prepared to entertain beliefs. This, I think, is now a common position.

There are surely many sources of this epistemological distinction separating science and knowledge from belief. Among them, the Victorian debate about Darwin's book, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859), and about the evolutionary theories to which it so decisively contributed, has undoubted significance. Argument for the reality of evolution, understood in the way biologists understand it, as a non-directed, material, law-like process originating new species by descent with modification from previously existing species, became, and has remained, emblematic of the authority of natural science as a whole. The early debate about Darwin's theory centred precisely on the relation between knowledge and belief. At issue was whether Darwin had sufficiently argued from the facts to have established knowledge of evolution, or whether he had merely put forward a hypothesis, which further facts might or might not confirm. And if he had established knowledge, or a good hypothesis likely to lead to

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<sup>5</sup> This is the justification, for example, for contemporary Russian attempts to transform psychology into the science of the soul; in this context, 'belief' about the soul is the basis for 'knowledge', the science of the soul.

<sup>6</sup> My transcription from a video of the interview in the series, 'Face to Face', (BBC television, 1959).

knowledge, did this change the status of belief, which had previously been held to be knowledge, about the Divine origin of species? Participants in the debate were conscious that behind the question about a particular phenomenon of nature, the origin of species, lay profound questions about the sources of truth and the role which knowledge and belief, if differentiated from each other, might play in arriving at it. Was Christian belief, understood as the source of knowledge of God's Providence in creating and sustaining the natural and human world, compatible with scientific belief, understood as empirical knowledge of the operation of natural laws?

What is historically important is that the decision in Darwin's favour, taken by large sections of educated society (with whatever reservations), enhanced a tendency to reserve the word 'knowledge' for the outcome of science and the word 'belief' for either opinion (or a not necessarily well-grounded hypothesis) or a claim held to be true on non-scientific grounds. The acceptance of Darwin's theory (that evolution is the source of the origin of species) was a pivotal moment: natural scientists acquired authority to pronounce, without influence by religious belief, on knowledge of the natural world. In addition, as it happens, Darwin's book became a model of scientific argumentation, exemplifying the manner in which scientific knowledge rests on the right use of certain principles of reasoning and not just argument from facts.

These principles of reasoning now appear constitutive of the authority of scientific knowledge, evaluatively distinguished from belief. The first is the principle of the continuity or uniformity of nature – the principle that natural law is universal, without exception. (This is ultimately a metaphysical proposition.) The application of this principle was of the greatest importance, in the nineteenth century, in drawing human beings and their affairs within the scope of evolutionary thought and hence within the province of natural science knowledge. The second principle is that the explanatory power of a theory does not so much depend on induction from the facts, though, of course, a capacity to explain facts is essential for any theory, but on the capacity to explain, along the same lines and in the same terms, previously diverse phenomena of nature. This was an outstanding feature of Darwin's theory, which brought together the evidence of the fossil record, the geographical distribution of animals and plants, taxonomy, comparative morphology and embryology, the reproductive relations of populations, and so on.

Huxley, who acquired a reputation as 'Darwin's bulldog' for his aggressive defence of evolutionary thought, referring to the *Origin of Species*, wrote: 'We do not believe that ... any work has appeared calculated to exert so large an influence ... in extending the domination of Science over regions of thought into which she has, as yet, hardly penetrated.'<sup>7</sup> Later (in

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<sup>7</sup> T. H. Huxley, 'Darwin on the *Origin of Species*' (1860), in *Man's Place in Nature and Other Essays* reprint, (London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1906), p. 366.

the context of English Protestant opposition to Catholic Irish nationalism), the physicist John Tyndall wrote that any systems of thought which infringe 'upon the domain of science' must submit to its control, declaring that scientists 'claim, and we shall wrest from theology, the entire domain of cosmological theory'.<sup>8</sup> Such statements emphatically asserted that only natural science can be a source of authoritative *knowledge* of nature, thereby displacing religious ways of thought about nature from the category of knowledge to the category of belief.<sup>9</sup>

As everyone understood, even when it was not explicitly stated, the further profound intellectual challenge of evolutionary theory was that it included human beings in the natural world. For proponents of evolutionary thought, it secured knowledge of human beings as the outcome of the cosmological process and, in accordance with the principle of the continuity of nature, integrated the sciences of man in the sciences of nature.

The evidence for evolution, that is, the facts over which Darwin had a brilliant command, appeared to require people, whatever their previous views, to accept knowledge of the place of human beings in the order of nature. This was how Darwin's champions, such as Huxley in Britain, Ernst Haeckel in Germany or D. I. Pisarev in Russia, promoted the cause. As Huxley said about the origin of species: 'The question is one to be settled only by the painstaking, truth-loving investigation of skilled naturalists. It is the duty of the general public to await the result in patience ...'<sup>10</sup> There was considerable argument about the facts on all sides of the debate – with Christians as well as non-Christians accepting that facts were decisive for knowledge. When, therefore, Darwin's critics failed to marshal persuasive facts against him, this enhanced the authority of the scientific approach to knowledge in general. During the course of the debate about

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For Huxley, see especially James G. Paradis, *T. H. Huxley: Man's Place in Nature*, (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1978).

<sup>8</sup> John Tyndall, 'The Belfast Address' (1874), in *Fragments of Science*, 8<sup>th</sup> edn, (London, Longmans, Green, 1892), vol. 2, p. 197, quoted in Bernard Lightman, 'Scientists as materialists in the periodical press: Tyndall's Belfast Address', in Geoffrey Cantor and Sally Shuttleworth, eds., *Science Serialized: Representations of Science in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals*, (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2004), p. 201. More widely, see F. M. Turner, 'The Victorian conflict between science and religion: a professional dimension', *Isis*, 69 (1978), 356-376.

<sup>9</sup> Historians often refer to Huxley's and Tyndall's way of thought as 'scientific naturalism', a term of which Huxley himself was perhaps the author. Earlier, both Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer had widespread influence through their attempts systematically to build theories of knowledge which defined knowledge on the model of the sort of knowledge the natural sciences had actually achieved.

<sup>10</sup> T. H. Huxley, 'Time and life: Mr. Darwin's "Origin of Species"', in *Man's Place in Nature and Other Essays*, reprint, (London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1906), p. 298.



evolution, the scientists successfully shifted the grounds of debate onto the field in which they themselves were the masters. As I have already suggested, however, there was much more to Darwin's theory than one claim, or even one set of claims, supported by the facts. His theory exemplified a way of thinking about life and human nature that scientists accepted, in the last analysis, because it was for them the only way they could do science. As G. H. Lewes, a self-taught physiologist and philosopher, observed, the appeal of evolutionary thought was its implication 'that everywhere throughout Nature – including therein all moral and social phenomena – the processes are subordinated to unchangeable Law'.<sup>11</sup>

Darwin's impact in the 1860s and 1870s centred on his picture of men and women as animals. This was why his work seized the public imagination, as many Victorian cartoons, with Darwin himself portrayed as a monkey, bear witness. Darwin wrote at the beginning of his account of morality: 'as far as I know, no one [until now] has approached it exclusively from the side of natural history'.<sup>12</sup> But such an approach to morality was precisely what was controversial and what his opponents would not concede in the first place; they did not accept that morality is a subject for 'natural history' or that the human essence is a subject for natural science. This was not, ultimately, a matter for *empirical* dispute but was a debate about *the terms in which it is possible to have knowledge* of human beings. Whatever the balance of facts and of principles of reasoning in the debate about Darwin's theory, however, the historical outcome was the rise to dominance in Western public opinion of natural science as the source of *knowledge*. The corollary of this rise was the devaluation of *belief*, of propositions not framed as the outcome of scientific work, as of less epistemological authority.

Many nineteenth-century evolutionists looked to their science to unify knowledge of physical nature and knowledge of human nature, and nearly all contemporary biologists and psychologists take this position. Nevertheless, there were, and continue to be, Western ways of thought which argue that there are different kinds of knowledge appropriate for different purposes, or different forms of understanding in different areas of human activity. Many social scientists, for example, argue that the language and the rule-following form of human social arrangements requires different kinds of explanation from those developed in the biological sciences. I have myself tried to restate the argument that historical knowledge is intrinsic to

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<sup>11</sup> G. H. Lewes, "The reign of law", *Fortnightly Review*, new series 2 (1867), p. 97, quoted in R. M. Young, 'Darwin's metaphor: does nature select?' (1971), in *Darwin's Metaphor: Nature's Place in Victorian Culture*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 124.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), reprint, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981), vol. 1, p. 71.

human self-understanding.<sup>13</sup> Beyond this, many forms of religious belief, to which some kinds of philosophical argument (as in certain kinds of philosophical anthropology) approximate, maintain that there are limits to the capacity of science of any kind fully to circumscribe knowledge. The challenge of creating dialogue between these positions very much parallels the challenge to create inter-cultural dialogue. There is no 'Western stance', even though natural science has undoubtedly established itself in a powerful position as the source of authoritative knowledge.

Is there a lesson, relevant to inter-cultural dialogue, to be drawn from this kind of historical study? There is – though it is far from straightforward. The historical example (and others which the history of science might provide) suggests that knowledge and belief are themselves categories with a history. It is simply not possible, in some general, abstract and ahistorical way, to compare, contrast and seek to reconcile, or indeed establish the dominance of particular forms of knowledge and belief. Rather, we must engage with the local or culturally specific ways in which people constitute particular claims as knowledge or belief. In a brief space, I have tried to suggest the lines along which natural scientists constituted knowledge as a category to which belief, that is Christian belief, could not contribute.<sup>14</sup> We must first interpret what knowledge is as a category before comparing different bodies of knowledge. There is little intellectually constructive dialogue to be had by opposing the facts claimed where there are different conceptions of knowledge, let alone constructive dialogue in contrasting the 'truth' attained in the light of one conception of knowledge with the 'mere belief' attained in another.

As happens, late nineteenth-century Western attempts to reconcile scientific knowledge of evolution with Christian religious beliefs generally accepted the category of knowledge which natural scientists accepted. This led the reconcilers to bring forward facts pointing to design or teleology in the evolutionary process. When these facts turned out, according to the consensus of later biologists, to be without foundation, this turned attempts to counter materialist evolutionary theory with religiously informed alternatives into failures as knowledge.<sup>15</sup> The arguments with much more

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<sup>13</sup> Roger Smith, *Being Human: Historical Knowledge and the Creation of Human Nature*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, forthcoming 2006).

<sup>14</sup> For reasons of exposition, I have deliberately excluded reference to the many rich ways in which late nineteenth-century intellectuals attempted to construct Christian versions of the evolutionary story. While some local contexts encouraged the rhetoric of 'conflict' between science and religion, there were also many examples of attempted reconciliation.

<sup>15</sup> This historical example would appear to be ignored in the recent revival, among Christian opponents of the modern evolutionary synthesis, of notions of directed evolution. It appears equally to be ignored by those proponents of evolutionary thought who hold that its status as knowledge establishes it as the only basis for human self-understanding.

long-term potential for assessing the scope and comprehensiveness of natural science knowledge came from questioning the category of knowledge which natural scientists had set up, and which Darwin's evolutionary theory exemplified. (This explains the importance and impact of philosophers, however different and however unsatisfactory in some respects, like Nietzsche and Bergson.) Dialogue becomes possible from engagement with the socially and historically specific ways in which different forms of understanding, variously represented as knowledge and belief, have acquired authority for particular purposes.

*UK–Russia*



## CHAPTER XX

# TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE (*PRAMAA*) BY TESTIMONY IN CLASSICAL INDIAN AND CONTEMPORARY WESTERN EPISTEMOLOGY

ARINDAM CHAKRABARTI

### INTRODUCTION

One important dictionary definition of the verb “to tell” is “to make known”. But when, if ever, can we confer the title “knowledge” on what we come to believe thanks to the tellings of others? That is the central philosophical problem regarding testimony. Although we mainly use “tell” as in the context of linguistic communication, we can also say that with a certain cry a baby tells its mother that it is time for a feed. This would be continuous with the sense in which, by a certain dance or a pounding of the chest, a bee or a gorilla tells other bees or gorillas something.

So, the basic issue behind the problem of testimony is whether and when one creature’s knowledge can be transferred or transmitted to another creature. For humans, being told by other humans seems to be an indispensable and basic way of coming to know certain things which could or could not be known otherwise. How else, for instance, could anyone know the date and time of one’s own birth or that a certain European symphony or an Indian raga (a melodic scale) is called what it is called? In spite of the risks of lying, embellishment, and self-deception, what other way do we have of knowing which particular complex thought a certain friend is currently entertaining except by relying on her report?

Under normal circumstances, if S herself knows that *p* and tells H that *P*, sincerely, in a language intelligible to H, and H understands and has no reason to distrust S, then H comes to be in a position to know that *P*. That, at any rate, would be the claim of a Nyaya theorist of knowledge who lists testimony (*sábdá*) as an independent sources of knowledge (*pramāna*). Of course, not all telling is knowledge-transmitting. Jokes are told; lies, fortunes and fairy tales are told as well. One could tell that *p* (when *P* is something bizarre) to invite someone to imagine that (or what if) *P* or to illustrate a philosophical point or make a thought-experiment. But somehow all such cases of mistake, mendacity, mockery, or make-believe seem to be parasitic on the standard case of spreading knowledge through language. Be it as gospel, gazette, or gossip, through manuals, messages, or manuscripts, language has been used to pass on knowledge since the dawn of civilization. Western Philosophy has very meticulously analyzed both language and knowledge over many centuries now. Yet, this crucial confluence between epistemology and philosophy of language, namely the theory of knowledge

transmitted through and gathered from communicative use of language seems to be only beginning to emerge as a major concern for Western philosophers. In classical Indian epistemology, on the contrary, the knowledge-yielding role of the words of truth-speaking authorities about empirical matters, as well as that of special scriptural sentences instructing their auditors on experience-transcendent matters (such as what ought to be done), has been a topic of highly sophisticated debate, argumentation and analysis for at least two thousand years. (See Matilal (1990) and Ganeri (1996)). Of course, I am assuming here that the Sanskrit word: “*pramāṇa*” is correctly translated as “knowledge”, and interesting doubts can be raised about this assumed translation.

One kind of knowledge immediately gleaned from a sentence of a known language has received a lot of attention from Gottlob Frege, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Paul Grice, Gareth Evans, Michael Dummett and Donald Davidson, among others. This is knowing what the sentence means or understanding what the speaker means by it. Though that is a variety of language-generated knowledge, it is merely comprehension or uptake. What we are concerned with here is credence or knowledge that it is in fact so, from a reliable reporter's say-so. Any simple failure to distinguish between knowledge of what is meant and knowledge by testimony can result in unsound deductions such as this one:

S knows what the sentence “Lenin was a bachelor” means.  
What that sentence means is that Lenin never got married.

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Therefore, S knows that Lenin never got married

Since (as some philosophers would like to put it, the proposition expressed by) the original quoted sentence is false, it cannot engender *knowledge* by testimony. Even if someone swallows the content of that sentence as part of Russell's biography, she is acquiring an incorrect belief by trusting a report, although there is nothing incorrect about such a simple truster's understanding or knowing what the sentence means. So there is good reason to separate understanding from trust. However, there exists a stronger, more committal, use of “understand”, as in “I understand from this morning's newspaper that Kabul has been captured,” where the distinction gets hazy. I shall come back to this deceptively simple distinction between understanding and knowledge by testimony in the last section of this paper.

There is a narrow legal use of the term “testimony” upon which only a courtroom utterance or equivalent written document done under oath can be called an instance of testimony. We are using the term in a wider sense which includes the legal sense but also includes any attesting use of a declarative sentence by a person who herself has knowledge of the subject-matter and is using the sentence to pass on part of that knowledge. It ought to be uncontroversial that the vast majority of our warranted beliefs about

the world, its past, its remote or microscopic details, including such simple things as what date it is today or when exactly one was born, are gathered from reading or hearing other people's reports with a reasonable lack of distrust.

Why is it then that most Western epistemology textbooks talk only of perception, memory and deductive or scientific reasoning as the major sources of knowledge, altogether ignoring testimony?

The answer seems to lie in the implicit individualism or egoism of classical Western epistemology. It is generally assumed in this tradition that part of being rational is being epistemically autonomous. This ambition of complete cognitive self-reliance, coupled with a good dose of scepticism and the steep standards of mathematical or axiomatic indubitability, rendered the theorist of knowledge revisionary in spirit. Her job seemed to consist in telling us how most of what we all call knowledge is not really knowledge. Even our lucid, daytime veridical, perceptual judgments had a hard time passing those standards. So it is unsurprising that credence placed on others' words, in the absence of further justification, would look like sheer gullibility or epistemic negligence rather than a way of gathering knowledge.

It was Thomas Reid's "common-sensical" appeal to the twin principles of veracity (of speakers) and credulity (of hearers) in his *Inquiry into the Human Mind* (1764) that first called into question this anti-trust revisionism of Western epistemology. More recently the work of John Hardwig (1985), C.A.J. Coody (1992), John McDowell (1993), Tyler Burge (1995), Robert Audi (1998), and others have sharpened the major questions in the epistemology of testimony.

In this paper we shall discuss four such major questions regarding the epistemology of testimony:

1. Is testimony a source of knowledge at all, or only a habitually relied-upon source of beliefs, or at best, of true beliefs? Does intake of information from written or spoken testimony ever count as knowledge proper?

2. Even if the word of the expert (*aaptopadesha*, as a *pramaana*) counts as an accredited source of knowledge, can it stand on its own leg as a basic source such as perception, deductive, abductive, or probabilistic reasoning or memory, or is it a secondary means of knowing always in need of bolstering or ideally replacement by one of those basic ones ?

3. How is understanding what has been said (comprehension) epistemically related to knowing that what has been said is the case (credence)?

4. Is knowing from others' words globally or occasion-specifically reducible to reasoning or inferring, or is it a *sui generis*, an independent source of knowledge?

### ARGUMENTS AGAINST TESTIMONY AS KNOWLEDGE SOURCE AT ALL

The view that testimony is never a respectable source of knowledge springs perhaps from the following simple train of thought. Knowledge cannot be blind. Trust in other tellers is typically blind. At the heart of testimony lies trust in other tellers. Therefore, testimony cannot give us knowledge proper.

But when we realize what an enormous part of our contemporary historical, scientific, even mathematical knowledge will have to go if we strip our trustfully received stock of beliefs of the title of knowledge, we feel the need to produce better arguments than the above crude one which leaves the notion of blindness and trust deliberately unclear (Hardwig 1991)

At a more sophisticated level, at least three major arguments have been used against testimony's claim to be a primary knowledge-source at all.

(A) First, only a belief which has the best available justification counts as knowledge. When an eye-witness of an event tells someone else what she saw, there is already a whittling down of the degree of justification as the belief travels to the listener who never perceived what he comes to believe. Hence, by being told, the hearer does not have knowledge but at best true opinion with imperfect justification. As we shall see later, the first and the second premise of this argument richly deserve to be questioned.

(B) Second, the right to be sure is something that each knower has to earn completely on his own. One can claim knowledge, as it were, only when one has done the seeing or evidence-collecting toil oneself. Yet testimony tries to pass the task of justification from the receiver and claimant of knowledge to the testifier. Typically, I claim knowledge because you have seen or you possess the warrant, and you have told me so. But warrant is non-transferrable. That is why testimony fails to count as a knowledge-source. Once again, the initial premise of this argument has been questioned by social epistemologists (Schmitt 1987) and some feminist epistemologists.

(C) Third, language 'denatures' (Welbourne 1986) knowledge because words do not directly stand for objective things and properties in the world. They primarily stand for subjective ideas in the mind of the user of words, and that is why language cannot give us knowledge about an objective world that both the speaker and the hearer can refer to in common. This last attack, needless to say, is based on an arcane ideational theory of meaning which has lost its popularity among philosophers. After Frege's demolition of psychologism and Wittgenstein's attack on the very possibility of a language referring to private ideas, no one thinks that my dentist introspectively refers to his own ideas of my molar when he tells me: "Your molar tooth is in a sorry state". Roughly, these three lines of attack have been pursued by Plato, Augustine, and Locke, the three great



champions of individualist epistemology. Interestingly enough, even Buddhist epistemology in India would share a similar suspicion of testimony as a source of knowledge.

Until recently, the ideal seeker of knowledge in Western philosophy had been a lonely figure. Using his own reason and his own experience and constantly fighting the sceptic within, the allegedly independent rational being should have to build his own edifice of knowledge (Descartes, the paradigmatic re-builder of such epistemic edifice, would insist that your “natural light“ is unsharably your own). Typically he is required to be too unsure even about the fact that other humans have any mind or knowledge to take their word for anything. That, at any rate, used to be the self-image of a post-enlightenment critical claimant of knowledge. Hence in discussing the avenues of knowledge-gathering, testimony was either underplayed, ignored, or rejected. But in practice, of course, all rational human beings, at all levels and areas of civilization, have had to depend upon others' knowledge transmitted through language, without which history, technical training in any complex art, science, medicine, legal institutions, journalism, military espionage and commerce would be impossible. Yet, amazingly, such titans of Western epistemology as Plato, St. Augustine and Locke explicitly disqualified testimony as a source of knowledge proper.

Of course, we gather true and useful beliefs from the say-so of eyewitnesses or experts, but such credence in hearsay, Plato would argue, does not amount to knowledge. In the *Theaetatus*, Socrates starts off the epistemologists' (interminable?) search for knowledge-defining conditions over and above true belief by pointing out how, even if the jury is 'correctly persuaded' by an eye-witness report in the court-room, they do not have knowledge on the basis of that testimony. What was knowledge for the eye-witness degenerates into merely true opinion when transmitted by words to the jury (*Theaetatus* 201). Such revisionism is not unexpected in Plato since he would not regard even sense-perception as genuine knowledge. But when a contemporary critical commentator on Plato (*viz.* Myles Burnyeat) is taken to task in the following rude words for observing quite plausibly that “in normal contexts of communication, knowledge spoken is knowledge handed on to another,” one is surprised at how much epistemological egoism still survives among the followers of Plato:

He (Burnyeat) means that if  $x$  knows that  $p$  and  $x$  says to  $y$  that  $p$ , then (normally)  $y$  thereby comes to know that  $p$ . Now I think that that is quite false – it is a lot harder to acquire knowledge than Burnyeat imagines. No doubt we all do pick up beliefs in that secondhand fashion, and I fear that we often suppose that such scavenging yields knowledge. But that is only a sign of our colossal credulity: The method Burnyeat describes is a rotten way

of acquiring beliefs, and it is no way at all of acquiring knowledge. (Jonathan Barnes, in *Aristotelean Society Supp Volume LIV*, 1980 p. 200)

One would expect that such a defender of the Christian faith as St. Augustine would at least indicate the irreplaceable role of knowledge (of, say, what Jesus did and taught) passed on through the words of the Bible. But the rationalist zeal for preserving the pristine autonomy of 'understanding for oneself' and the consequent rarity of knowledge gets the better of even someone as 'faith'-ful as Augustine. In his otherwise insightful dialogue, *The Teacher (De Magistro)*, he concludes: "From words we can only learn words". From a speaker's words, according to Augustine, we do not even learn what they mean, let alone the facts that they describe, or even the mind of the speaker. Extending this dismissal even to one's faith in scripture, Augustine fearlessly remarks that when we absorb information from the Bible we only *believe*, we do not come to *know* anything. Since understanding, as knowledge of meaning, is still a kind of knowing, Augustine ends up with a doctrine which would sound strange to most modern ears. He holds that one has to first believe the words of external authorities so that eventually one can understand them by one's own light. Most of us would feel that we need to understand first in order to decide whether to believe or not. Probably what Augustine means by "understanding" is something much richer than what we now mean by that word.

From British Empiricism, which ceremonially rejects Platonic innatism, one would expect an epistemological rehabilitation of knowledge by testimony, which forms part of our flow of empirical information from outside along with perceptual knowledge. But John Locke disappoints us there. He echoes Plato's distinction between knowledge and opinion when he remarks that the hope to 'know by other Men's Understanding' is as irrational as the hope to see with others' eyes because "what in them was Science, is in us but Opinionatry". Playing up the need for cognitive autonomy, Locke compares beliefs based on testimony to borrowed wealth or, even worse, fairy money, "which will be but leaves and dust when it comes to use". (*Essay*, Bk 1, Ch 4, Sect 24)

His distrust of language goes even deeper. He finds the very possibility that someone's use of words to make the statement that *P* could ever convey to the hearer the external fact that *P* to be rather remote. His notorious thesis in this connection is:

"Words in their primary significance stand for nothing but *the Ideas in the Mind of Him that uses them.*" (*Essay*, Book III, Ch2, Sect 1, emphasis Locke's)

When words do, occasionally, stand for external realities, Locke calls that use 'perverse', causing only obscurity and confusion. Perhaps anticipating an extreme form of communication-intention theory of meaning, what Locke seems to be saying is something like this: By hearing

the announcement: “The train will arrive at 5:20pm” a competent listener can at best come to know that the announcer has the idea (belief? intention to make us believe?) in her own mind that the train will come at that time. To judge on the basis of those words straightaway that the train will actually come at that time would be “perverse”, because the expression “the train” does not primarily designate an external real train and so on.

One notices here how, what Michael Dummett has disparagingly called “the code-conception of meaning” results in an individualist epistemology where no one can transmit or derive knowledge of a common objective world to or from anyone else. Speech is taken as a running commentary on what is going on in the speaker’s mind and, as a result, to be at best a very unreliable many-step-removed guide to how things are in the world.

The above charges against testimony have not gone unanswered. A rather clever general point made by the mediaeval Indian Nyaya epistemologist, Gangesa (14th century CE), is this: When the detractor of testimony *tells* us, “Others’ words never give us any knowledge,” how are we to take those words? Is he telling us simply that *he believes* in that negative claim? Then we need not protest, except by observing that those words do make us know something, namely what their speaker believes. Is he telling us that testimony to the effect that P is not a source of knowledge that P? If we accept that claim then we seem to have gathered *that* piece of knowledge from his utterance. If we reject the claim, then testimony can be a knowledge-source after all. Gangesa does not think this is any serious charge against the opponent of testimony. He uses it just to draw such a person into the discussion. The obvious way for such a sceptic regarding testimony to respond to this would be to say that the statement is expected to cause the hearer to consider and eventually accept the contention. But this is not because the speaker has said so, but because the hearer would find independent reason for accepting it that the latter is supposed to accept. Thus the view that testimony is no knowledge-source merges with the view that it is always dependent upon other sources of knowledge such as autonomous reasoning or first-hand experience.

Nevertheless, the underlying assumptions of the anti-testimony arguments have all been questioned in more recent times. In the mid-twentieth century, the British philosopher J.L. Austin’s classic paper “Other Minds” takes knowledge-claims defended by citation of authority as seriously as claims based on perception.

In a characteristically insightful footnote Austin dispels a common assumption of the phrase “second-hand” and remarks:

“Knowing at second hand, or on authority, is not the same as ‘knowing indirectly’, whatever precisely that difficult and perhaps artificial expression may mean.”

In the main text Austin anticipates Hardwig’s (1991) principle of testimony, which is:

If *A* has good reasons to believe that *B* has good reasons to believe that *P*, then *A* has good reasons to believe that *P*, but also allows for a recursive use of it.

“We know at second hand when we can cite an authority who was in a position to know (possibly himself also at second hand).” (Austin 1961, p. 82)

Obviously he does not require that for the hearer to gain knowledge by testimony, the speaker must have spoken from direct eye-witness knowledge. Indeed, Austin goes further in denying any necessary hierarchy of epistemic prestige between the “source” and the trusting knowledgeable, thereby showing a drastic divergence of intuition from the Lockean tradition:

If a murderer 'confesses', then, whatever our opinion of the worth of the confession, we cannot say that 'we (only) know indirectly that he did it'... Consequently, it is not correct, either, to say that the murderer himself knows 'directly' that he did it, whatever precisely 'knowing directly' may mean.” The statement of an actual authority, if it makes us know something for which we have no other evidence, Austin says “is a source of knowledge.

In a similar vein, Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* recognizes the inevitability and reasonableness of not doubting others as the default position (“The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes *after* belief”). This consequently resists the Humean pressure to reduce our knowledge from others' words to probabilistic inference from personally checked past reliability of the source.

Nor is it just from my experience, but from other people's, that I get knowledge from. Now one might say that it is experience again that leads us to give credence to others. But what experience makes me believe that the anatomy and physiology books do not contain what is false? (#275) As long as one does not have grounds for distrusting text-books of experimental physics, I need no ground for trusting them (albeit, fallibly). Wittgenstein's ultimate ground for claiming this reasonableness for doubt-free intake of information from standard experts and tellers flows naturally from his general spirit of describing rather than legislating upon actual linguistic practice: “And why shouldn't I say that I know all this? Isn't that what one does say?” (#288)

In the late 1960s, H.H. Price, in his Gifford Lectures entitled *Belief*, noticed the neglect of testimony by Western epistemologists. Explicitly bringing in considerations regarding the ethics and 'economics' of belief, Price makes some rather interesting philosophical observations (anticipating some Davidsonian insights):

a. Our ordinary practice is to follow the implicit principle: *Accept what you are told, unless you see reason to doubt it.*

b. There is something first-hand about acceptance of testimony itself. One needs to hear or read and understand the knowledge-transmitting utterances oneself. Saying, “I know because I have been told that there are 23 pairs of chromosomes in every cell although I have no idea what a cell or chromosome is, but I am sure those scientists who told me this know what they are talking about” would not do.

c. The more civilized and well-educated a person, the more vast is the amount that one knows from words rather than on the basis of one's own first hand observation or memory (of course one has to comprehend and retain what one has read or heard).

d. Since knowledge is a scarce commodity in high demand, to rely on nothing but one's own experience and reasoning therefrom turns out to be uneconomical. Therefore, human beings should adopt the information-gathering motto “nothing ventured, nothing gained,” rather than the skeptically circumspect motto “safety first”, while practicing cautious credulity and exchange of testimony by sharing information and believing each other unless there is incomprehension or good reason for doubt.

These points made by Price gesture towards a sort of pragmatic justification for treating testimony in general as an independent knowledge-source, although for individual cases of trusting information-intake Price tends to recommend some strategies of topic-based empirical checking of the testifier's trust-worthiness.

### **IS TESTIMONY-DERIVED KNOWLEDGE A SECOND CLASS CITIZEN IN THE REPUBLIC OF REASON?**

Though our senses sometimes mislead us, we cannot even begin to detect our perceptual errors unless we presume, as a default position, that what we perceive with our normally functioning senses is more often the case than not. Similarly, it has been argued by Tyler Burge, following Thomas Reid, that we are entitled to accept as true something that has been intelligibly presented as true unless there are stronger reasons not to do so. In spite of this parallelism with perception, there remains something secondary or derivative about knowledge by testimony which is captured by calling it “knowledge at secondhand”.

Two such factors can be separated out: First, what is known by testimony by someone, most often was known originally directly – perceptually or inferentially – by someone else. As Plantinga (1993) puts it: “In the typical case, if I know something by testimony, then someone else must have known that proposition in some other way” (p. 87). In the ancient Sanskrit (Nyaya) definition of a trustworthy testifier, therefore, we find the phrase “One who has directly witnessed the phenomenon one is talking about.” Except for special 'facts' like the fact that “Snow“ means snow in

English, which there is no way of *seeing* for oneself, it does not sound right to say that facts are originally and exclusively knowable by testimony alone. The perceptual process, happening as it were on the spot, has a claim to revelatory primacy which testimony, like memory, being separated in time and space, derivative, and preservative, does not. Second, in order to know from words, the listener has to first use auditory or visual sense-perception, because there is no comprehension or credence without first hearing or reading the utterance or the text.

But a couple of contrary points must be borne in mind about this dependence of testimony upon the original source's direct perception. First, there often is no hierarchy of possessors of primary direct knowledge and possessors of derivative knowledge by testimony. The part that I have seen you may hear from me, whereas the part that you have seen but I missed you may hear from me, and between the two of us we may claim to know the entire thing. There are cases of co-operative or social knowledge where no one knows the whole thing first hand, but everyone knows a bit, and the rest is taken in trust from others. Hardwig gives the example of a scientific article written jointly by 99 authors. No one university or laboratory – let alone an individual – could have conducted all the measurements of 300,000 interesting constituent events which were required to establish the results. Thus one cannot always insist that what is known by testimony must be knowable by perception or personal reasoning by someone else. Second, if understanding and getting verbally informed are dependent upon listening and looking/reading, the reverse dependence also goes very deep. To take Strawson's example, we could not see by means of the the petrol-gauge that the car is low on gas or hear the clock strike twelve unless our seeing or hearing were themselves saturated with trusting intake of language-encoded information. An ignorant tourist who has personally been to Cairo may know considerably less about the geography and culture of Cairo than an Egyptologist who has never been there. The vividness of experience often does not compensate for the paucity of classifying articulation and information. Recognizing a particular flower-bush as a rhododendron is a case of "direct observation" which is deeply indebted to testimony for all but perhaps the person who first named that species of flowers (and therefore could not be said to have *recognized* them as rhododendrons). Thus, words may be empty without experience. But experience without connecting, characterizing and classifying words, to make a Kantian point, is utterly blind. Even if we give a language-eschewing account of concept-possession, most of our adult seeings and hearings are informed by background linguistic knowledge in such a way that we would not be experiencing a certain smell or sound, as of kind F or G, unless we had background knowledge from handed-down tradition that the label "F" stands for the kind F, and so on.

"Understanding" is a deeper epistemological paradigm for all knowledge, including sense experience, and acceptance of testimony through belief-sharing with a community is the initial condition of that kind

of understanding whereby “light gradually dawns on the entire system”, so that critical questioning of one’s own observations also begins to make sense. Hence, even observation itself could be construed as a kind of “listening” to the objects of perception or “reading” the book of nature, in reversal of metaphors.

No knowledge is possible without true belief, one could argue. And no belief is possible without some conceptual representation of a situation of the world. No conceptual representation is possible without some linguistic classification as to what is correctly called what. There is no other source of knowledge about what is correctly called what except testimony of the experts of a community. Thus elements of testimony seem to be interwoven with all other forms of knowledge – including direct perception! Though this admittedly quick chain of reasoning has its weakest link in its third premise which requires use of language for belief- or concept-formation, it seems to be implicit in the following remark of Strawson, directed precisely against the view that testimony is a secondary or derivative source of knowledge, if it is a source of knowledge at all:

In any community of language users, perception, memory and testimony are not only equally *essential* to the construction of the belief-or-knowledge-systems of its members. It is also true that all three are on an equal footing in that there is no possibility of a general reductive analysis of any one of the three in terms of the others...The interdependence of all does not entail the reducibility of any. (Chakrabarti and Matilal, 1993 p27)

### **CAN KNOWLEDGE FROM TESTIMONY BE REDUCED TO INFERENCE?**

If one conflates the process of gathering knowledge with the process of defending a knowledge-claim once it is challenged, then all knowing could be trivially reduced to inferring. A claimant of knowledge, especially when challenged, must be ready to provide a proof, give a ground, offer a justification. If giving *reasons* or evidence (construing the evidence as a premise) for a belief (which, in turn, is treated as a conclusion) automatically counts as *reasoning*, then we could call even perceptual knowledge or, surely, a *claim* to know something by perception, inferential. But knowledge from testimony gravitates towards an inferential reduction in a more substantial and non-trivial manner. After all, to hear the sentence “It is snowing in Zurich” even from a totally trusted teller is not to see or be in the presence of snowing. Externalists about justification take it to be possible that knowing by being told could *have* justification, that is, could be actually caused by a testifying that has a truth-tracking pedigree, without the trusting hearer/knower’s knowledge of that justificatory causal story. Yet they cannot insist that knowledge of what the sentence asserts is

injected directly into the heads of simple trusting listeners like some belief-inducing chemical agent that works unbeknownst to the believers themselves. Hence, an inferential reductionist could argue as follows against the very possibility of a non-inferential account of testimony-generated beliefs:

A] Even if the authority of the speaker need not be established first, the utterance has to be recognized as an assertion.

B] To master the notion of assertion is to be aware of the possible gap between *it being the case that p* and *it being asserted that p*.

C] One who does not see the need for any argument to bridge that gap and pass from one's seeing that something has been sincerely and coherently asserted to knowing that what has been asserted is, indeed, the case is not aware of that gap and hence fails to even comprehend the speech-act of assertion.

Therefore, any non-inferential direct account of extracting belief that *p*, from a telling that *p*, would render that belief "blind" in the sense that it would not be based on understanding of the telling.

It is, of course, in step C that the above sort of argument becomes contentious, as we shall see later when we come to the question of presumptive right. Even when we perceive something to be the case or remember something to have been the case, we are implicitly aware of a possible gap between our senses making something appear and its happening out there objectively, between our memory and the real past. What that awareness boils down to is our readiness to recognize that the claims of perception and memory are defeasible. But, if this recognition of fallibility does not amount to a need to construe all perceptions and rememberings as cases of inference, then the argument from the gap between a teller's act of assertion and the fact asserted also fails to legitimize the reduction of all knowledge from telling to inference.

It goes without saying, of course, that we do draw many inferences, more or less spontaneously, when we converse with people or 'process their messages' communicatively. When someone makes a remark, on a perfectly nice morning: "This is the worst day of my life," we may infer, with the right kind of background information, that the speaker is in a foul mood. But that conclusion is drawn from the fact that the speaker has made the assertion, on a perfectly good day, in a particular tone of voice, etc. It does not count as our believing that it is the worst day of the speaker's life because it has been said to be so. Indeed, very often, a Gricean conversational implicature is inferentially gleaned from a telling precisely because the telling fails to count as a straightforward testimony for what is told. An eighteenth century British orientalist writes some sensational story about exotic Hindu customs. A contemporary South Asian reader draws interesting inferences about his colonial motivations from the fact that he wrote such things, precisely because his telling us that such and such



practices took place in India at that time is not taken as evidence that such an such practices did take place there at that time. If testimony has to be shown to be reducible to inference, then our coming to believe that p on the basis of being told by someone else that p will have to be shown to be a case of inference.

However, the following sorts of inferential reduction (IR) of an actual piece of word-generated knowledge are quite obviously useless:

IR #1 a. S is generally reliable, i.e. whatever S says is likely to be true.

b. S has said that p

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Therefore, p is true.

or

IR#2 a. On this occasion and topic, S must have spoken from knowledge

b. On this occasion S has said that p

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Therefore p.

The first inference overshoots the evidential requirement and delivers a degree of justification that falls far short of actual cases of deriving good beliefs from testimony. It overshoots in the following sense: I do not need to establish a certain dentist to be globally a true-believer and truth-teller (about all subjects) before I can take his word for the fact that I have got two cavities. Yet the mere likelihood of his being right in this case is not enough justification for my actual end-belief that I do, indeed, have two cavities. If the “occasion” specified is individuated in terms of the understood utterance, then the first premise of IR#2 requires that we know that S has spoken from knowledge that p when he said that p, which makes the argument hopelessly circular.

A third and clever reductive strategy has been tried by Fricker (1987), who proposes a local rather than a global reduction of testimony to inference. Two distinct links need to be established inferentially if a reductive account is to succeed. The first is the link between the normal meaning (and speech-act—which is perceived, according to McDowell and Fricker) of the utterance and the belief of the utterer (this is the link that lying, joking or tricking sometimes disrupts). The second is the link between the speaker's belief and facts of the world (this is the link that the speaker's incompetence or mistake can break). Noticing the important distinction between these two links, Fricker gives a non-circular three-step formulation of the ideal inference that a rational hearer should draw:

IR # 3 a. S is sincere on this occasion, i.e., if S is saying that p then S believes that p.

b. S is competent on this occasion, i.e., if S believes that p, then p.

c. S is saying that p

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Therefore p.

Before we scrutinize this third attempt at inferential reduction, let us back up to David Hume's famous thesis that our alleged knowledge (e.g. that Christ performed such initially improbable miracles as making the blind see) from the testimony of contemporary spectators is the commonest variety of "reasoning" based on our repeated observation of the customary connection between what certain veracious people tell and what actually happens.

There is a story about Aquinas who apparently got up, gullibly, to see when some fellow-monks tricked him by saying "Look Thomas, a pig is flying". Unmoved, he is said to have formulated his ethics of belief in the following words "I would rather believe that a swine could fly than believe that a friar could lie". Aquinas's shaken faith in the friars' veracity was naively apriori. It should have weakened with further experience of misinformed and misinforming priests, but it was, after all, a matter of balancing the strength of evidence on either side.

Hume's famous discussion of miracles was designed to show how the empirically assessed improbability of the alleged natural-law-flouting events outweighed the empirically supported predisposition to take human reports as generally faithful to facts. For this, Hume needed to prove first, that it is the believer's own individual repeated experience of correspondence between others' assertions and facts of the matter that grounds the inference in any particular case from testimony to trust. Since, as independent events, human reportings and the occurrences that they describe have no intrinsic connection at all, whatever tendency we may have of passing from one to the other must be derived from our repeated experience of reports of that kind found to match occurrences of that kind (observed by ourselves). Apart from personal observations and inductive inferences therefrom, we have no epistemic warrant to pass from someone telling us that p occurred to p having occurred. Thomas Reid diverged sharply from Hume on this issue. It is not human experience but God that implants the innate tendency in us to perceive asserted contents as fact, he insisted. Our experience, if it teaches us anything, teaches us how often people are misinformed, dishonest, and unreliable. To observe human nature is to replace the initial presumed trust in others' words with cynicism and suspicion. So our natural presumed trust in others' words cannot be based on our experience of general human veracity.

The biggest crack in the reductive thesis that our reliance on a trustworthy text or teller is inductive reasoning on the basis of *our experience* of regular connection between reports and facts shows up when we ask what the crucial phrase "our experience" means. It either means a single person's experience or it means the compared and collated experience of an entire community. If it means the former, the thesis is simply false,

because no single person can directly observe the enormous number of facts of very specialized kinds required to establish, inductively, the topic-specific trust-worthiness of a scientific or historical source, let alone of speakers in general and facts in general. Especially since no individual can recall experiencing both the events of the remote past, as well as the intelligible reports by a certain past authority (under what general kind shall we assess the reliability of that sort of reporter?), it is absurd to require that my reliance on such reports be proportional to such personally observed correlation. If it means the latter, the reductive program is rendered hopelessly circular because the only way we can use other persons' experience as evidence is by first trusting their avowals. Thus there is no testimony-independent way of empirically confirming the belief that other people's or certain specific persons' reports are generally reliable, and to supplement my personal experience with what others have observed is to sneak in reliance on their "observation sentences" (See Chapter IV on Testimony in Quine & Ullian (1970) *The Web of Belief*). The Humean reductive program, thus, falls into pieces. (See Coady (1992) chapter 4 for a detailed critique of Hume and Welbourne (2001) chapter 5 for a critique of Coady).

In more recent times, Donald Davidson has shown us how we cannot ascribe beliefs and meanings to other people and their declarative sentences unless we presume that most of their beliefs are true. Those beliefs could not be (intentionally) about this world (about which they are sometimes found to be false), unless most of the time they were true about it.

Fricker admits that our general trust in people's words cannot be globally reduced to inductive inference. Thus, at the developmental stage of learning a language and getting one's grip on the picture of a shared world that we are talking and writing about, we do have to rely on presumptive trust on fellow-speakers, elders and experts.

But acknowledging my general and irreducible debt to past testimony, I may, nonetheless, want to trust no new informants unless I have grounds to believe them trustworthy. ... Confronted with a particular person telling me a particular thing, I need only to establish, without assuming that very thing, that she is on this occasion sincere, and is competent about the subject matter of her assertion, in order rightly to believe. ... This is a far less daunting prospect than... establishing the general reliability of testimony as a category. (Fricker 1995, p404).

This is what she means by local, as against global reduction to inference. Along with this she also proposes that the problem of justifying our unavoidable but cautious reliance on testimony can be tackled only when we "disaggregate" the mixed bag of people's tellings or testimonies,

instead of treating all tellings on a par. Testimony is not a unitary category. Some testimony deserves to be immediately trusted, with provisions for defeasibility conditions, e.g. what a radiologist or a botanist says about X-rays or plants. Some testimony is never trusted unless corroborated by other sources of knowledge or more respectable testimony, e.g. mere gossip or tabloid reports. Some communications start with incredulousness and grow into reasonable acceptance under the influence of internal coherence, background beliefs about lack of motivation to distort or deceive on the part of the teller, etc. The psychology of giving and receiving testimony is no less fascinating and complex than the epistemology of it, as has been shown by Audi (1997).

Recent work by Alvin Goldman (Goldman 2001) on the problem of providing local justification for accepting particular testimonies has strengthened the case for a mitigated reductionism about testimonial justification. Careful establishment of the particular expert's track-record can very well serve as an empirical inferential process which brings out the inner epistemic structure of our reliance on specific instances of expert testimony in the sciences, though the "looming clouds" of scepticism keep coming out of actual and possible disagreements between equally trustworthy experts.

I have myself criticized Fricker's local reduction program in Chakrabarti (1993). But now I agree with her that it is perfectly possible that we can or even ought to be critical and in need of further supporting reasoning for justifying our claim of knowledge in cases where suspicion of trust-defeating conditions is routine. But one can still hold on to the irreducibility thesis that at the ground level of actually obtaining knowledge (that is, claiming that *p*, because I have been told that *p*, rather than claiming that *I know that p*), testimony is an irreducible *sui generis* source of knowledge.

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## CHAPTER XXI

# REFLECTIONS ON METAPHILOSOPHY AND THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF METHODOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN MODERN COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

*ANTANAS ANDRIJAUSKAS*

Under the conditions of globalization and humankind's rapid transition to an entirely new, metacivilizational stage of evolution, the cognition of possibilities and long-term prospects of development of various traditions of thinking – as well as of the modes of their possible interaction – becomes extremely important and timely. These problems increasingly shift to the focus of modern comparative philosophy.

The early stages of comparative philosophy saw the establishment of a direct simplistic opposition of the supposedly uniform East (which never existed in reality) to the homogeneous West. This approach could never produce the expected results, since it rested on overly broad generalizations.

On the other hand, many non-Western philosophic phenomena tended to be compared to their Western analogues on account of superficial similarities alone. Therefore Western models of thinking were being mechanistically transferred to comparative study of non-Western traditions of thinking, and attitudes and principles that had originally nothing in common with them were being arbitrarily imposed on them. It is in this that one of the major faults of the classic comparative philosophy of enlightenment lay. This school proceeded from the idea of the universal nature and the a priori superiority of the Western mode of thinking and world outlook. Therefore, many phenomena of non-Western philosophic traditions that found no direct correspondences in the West were either simply ignored or deliberately overlooked.

Works of F. Max Müller, P. Deussen and French Indologist and corporatist P. Masson-Oursel – who defined the object, main problems and methodological approaches of comparative philosophy in his crucial work *La philosophie comparée* – mark an entirely new stage in the development of comparative philosophy. Masson-Oursel stressed that all major traditions of thinking known to us raised the same fundamental problems, they only differed in the conceptual tools of cognition each of them employed. That is why the radically new positive comparative philosophy ought to employ

creatively all the variety of modes of thinking created by humankind in the course of its history.<sup>1</sup>

Comparative philosophy is presented here not as one of philosophic disciplines, but as the capacity of an independent, all-embracing philosophy, in which the object, the main methodological approaches and the individual research tools all serve a single purpose – cognition of the whole range of various traditions of thinking and their contribution to world philosophy.

The new, non-classic methodological approaches that had been clearly formulated in the works of the founders of the non-classic school were adopted by the supporters of post-modernism. The more widespread the term “post-modernism” was becoming, the clearer its “inflation” and its vagueness were perceived. For all that, the term in question actually reflected important shifts in the Western philosophic consciousness and in the new, post-colonial world order.

While the strictly stylistic (aesthetic) aspect of the term “post-modernism” was given undivided attention, its profound historiosophic (civilizational) meaning – bearing on humankind’s transition from a co-existence of several local civilizations to a radically new global metacivilization – was lost. In the domain of theoretical reflection, this marked the transition of classic Western philosophy from the previously dominant Eurocentric worldview to the post-modernist (post-colonial), polycentric model of the world.

Developing the anti-classic tendencies typical of non-classic philosophy French post-structuralists (R. Barth, M. Foucault, J. Deluse, J. Derrida) and their numerous followers strove to establish more flexible strategies and research methods in comparative philosophy. They rebelled against the dominant attitudes of classic philosophic comparativism, which relied on rationality, systemic approach, universality, strict values hierarchy and the postulate of an absolute truth. Having rejected the schematic dogmatism of the universalistic premises of classic comparativism, they supposed that following a single direction oversimplifies the cognition of complex philosophic phenomena, since it ignores their multi-layer structure. This resulted in the rejection of the extremely rationalized methodological approaches, logocentrism, causal determinism, linear understanding of civilizational processes, which were firmly established in classical comparative philosophy. This monopolized all thinking and prevented its unorthodox trends from creatively employing different strategies and methods in each individual case.

Certain ideas and methodological principles of the post-structuralists had much in common with theories of post-colonial comparative philosophy (A. Said, A. Abdel-Malek, N. B. Dirks, R. Inden, et al.) whose exponents attempted to take a new look at the underlying causes and hidden forms of Western hegemonism in different strata of the cultural dialog between East and West.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Masson-Oursel, *La philosophie comparée* (Paris, 1923), p. 17.



A markedly intellectual criticism rejecting the traditional academic mode of thinking became the most important distinguishing trait of the new generation of thinkers. To the established universals of the classic comparative philosophy they oppose unique cultural and cogitative idioms, discontinuities in tradition and marginalism, they stress the importance of cognition of local phenomena. This is the theory of communication and comparison of different philosophic traditions and types of thinking, which takes an interest in everything that deviates from the classic, academically established norms.

Hence the tendency to modify the style of intellectual discourse, and thus many non-classic features and game-like nuances are attributed to the process of cognition. A new space of conceptual discourse is being created; different research strategies and methods are being introduced; new territories of philosophic comparativism are being explored. A pluralism of opinions and standpoints is acknowledged here as an indisputable value.

In the process of establishing these methodological principles, it becomes increasingly clear that post-modernism is an entirely new, post-Eurocentric cultural and philosophic phenomenon, which represents a new stage. This is more than just a reaction to the classic modes of thinking and to the modernist worldview, values system and symbols – this is a major breakthrough, a radical change of cultural paradigms and spiritual guidelines, a change whose import is not as yet fully realized. Thus, radical changes introduced into metacivilizational culture and philosophy, transcending local significance, attain a global historiosophic meaning. We witness the destruction of the established classic patterns of thinking in the Western culture of today.

The most recent comparative philosophy is characterized by rejection of rigidly preset rationalistic patterns and habitual models of logical thinking. They are supplanted by recognition, in principle, of the multi-layer nature of cultural and cogitative symbolism, of the value of co-existence of different viewpoints, by delving into the complex and creative process that involves solving problems which might have more than one solution. During this process, traditional thinking patterns are rejected: there are no more predefined and immutable entities; ideas often figure as urgent problems demanding solution; openness of thinking is declared as a principle – a thinker should be able to embrace the whole range of phenomena in their ever-changing nomadological essence.

Under the influence of globalization-related processes, different traditions of thinking gradually penetrate each other. Thus *the germs of future universal metadiscourses begin to grow, which are conducive to the shaping of an entirely new all-planetary metaphilosophy.*

We use the term “metaphilosophy” to describe an intellectual construct related to the forming of a planetary philosophy – post-philosophy, which overcomes the universalistic ambitions of various local traditions of thought. The prefixes “meta-” and “post-”, when applied to an entirely new philosophic universalism, do not lose their problematic quality,

since the extremely problematic project of the new universal philosophy comes to the fore.

It becomes clear that, as regards its semantics, the term “metaphilosophy” is closely related to such notions as “universal philosophy”, “philosophy of syncretism”, “superphilosophy”, “dialogical philosophy”, “post-colonial philosophy”, etc. The critical ardor of supporters of the concept of metaphilosophy is directed, first of all, against intellectual provincialism, i.e., non-critical and unconditional preference of one’s own intellectual tradition or perspective of thinking interpreted as the only conceivable one.

Various traditions of thought in the East and in the West display – even to a not very perceptive observer – more points of similarity than of difference. The “East–West” dichotomy, which is so widespread in comparative philosophy, is (as aptly put by H. Nakamura) far from being real. This is because, as facts from the history of civilizations inform us, similar concepts of being and similar intellectual problems, giving rise to kindred methodologies of solution, tend to emerge in different regions of the globe during different historical epochs. In other words, it is possible to state that, during concrete historical periods, universal intellectual quest gains a high priority.<sup>2</sup> This general system of ideas expresses man’s specific attitude to the world around him, to other people, cultures, their symbols and values, which are then included in the problem field of metaphilosophy.

Speaking of further prospects of metaphilosophy, we by no means suggest that individual traditions of thinking are going to be leveled out or mechanically crossbred, or that there will be a need to abandon age-old principles. Metaphilosophy would primarily involve openness and willingness to consider different ideas, principles and views, as well as recognizing not only competition between them but also their ability to co-exist, searching for common ground and fostering especially promising tendencies.

The flexible use of the most recent comparative methods and noticeable shifts in various spheres of the humanities and social science provide philosophers with a far wider scope of possibilities to use in comparative research of various traditions of thinking. Scholars promoting the theory of a universal world civilization – metacivilization – and the projects of planetary philosophy (or metaphilosophy) related to it gain even more influence in contemporary comparative philosophy. They merge Western and non-Western traditions of thinking into a single stream, rejecting pro-European and pro-Asian tendencies alike.

The newest post-colonial comparative philosophy has been, more and more definitely, freeing itself of the overly rationalized binary oppositions deeply rooted in the classic Western philosophy (reason–intuition, center–periphery, rational–irrational, analysis–synthesis, determinism–voluntarism) and establishing a new non-classic, pluralistic

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<sup>2</sup> H. Nakamura, *The Comparative History of Ideas*, (Delhi, 1992), p. 30.

methodology. Each tradition of thinking is viewed not as an isolated entity but as a phenomenon open to change and external influence. Thus, *Eurocentric pseudo-universalism is supplanted here by post-modernist polycentrism with its typical exceptional attention to non-classic phenomena and unique cultural idioms*. Besides, post-modernist ideology, which underscores the significance of cognition of marginal phenomena, promotes relativism in contemporary comparative philosophy.

The essence of contemporary comparative philosophy is determined by three major principles. Firstly, it proceeds from the premise that all traditions of thinking known throughout human history have, for all their differences, contained many common structures and features that can be subjected to scholarly analysis. Secondly, it acknowledges the profound differences between historical epochs, civilizations, cultures, peoples, traditions of thinking and their principal traits. And, finally, it admits of the possibility of a correct comparison and correlation of different traditions of thinking.

Comparative methodology, in which empiricism and theory are nowadays connected, tends to view purely speculative manipulation of abstract, global notions unrelated to solid historical facts as a fruitless occupation. Aspiring to embrace all traditions of thinking in their entirety and compare several of them simultaneously is, to be sure, commendable and worth trying to achieve. However, “the broader and more complex the object, the harder it is to comprehend. We learn only aspects of reality, not things themselves; parts, not the whole.”<sup>3</sup>

Academically correct comparative research of traditions of thinking presupposes a system of categories that would be at once ideologically neutral and universal. Phenomena of thinking, their vital traits and elements ought to be compared: (1) within strictly defined intervals of historical periods; (2) with all their changes in time taken into account. Consequently, one might confine oneself to researching either temporally fixed phenomena or the process of their evolution. Drawing a clear distinction between these two is a crucial prerequisite for comparative research. Hence another important condition: the phenomena under comparison are to be incorporated into a single frame of reference before a general strategy of research is formulated.

Comparative philosophy is an integrated, interdisciplinary academic sphere; therefore, in addition to their main tool (i.e., comparative method), its followers resort to operations, techniques and methods employed in other fields of study as the need arises. The choice of concrete tools and its nature directly depends on the problems that must be solved, the general program of research and the phase of its completion.

Despite the wide range of opportunities that the methodology of contemporary comparative philosophy has to offer, we have to admit that

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<sup>3</sup> L. Dumont, “Anthropologie, totalité et hiérarchie,” *Philosophie et anthropologie* (Paris, 1992), p. 141.

they are not employed fully even to this day. This is an extremely complex sphere of intellectual activity, demanding of the researcher erudition in the sphere of the humanities, adequate methodological tools and profound knowledge of the history of different traditions of thinking. Out of the many comparativist works published in the post-war period, only a few have stood the test of time and won recognition in the academic world.

In intellectual discussions over the prospects of the development of comparative philosophy, theoretical thought often returns to the possibilities of metaphilosophy. This is hardly surprising, since problems of universal philosophy keep popping up now and then in the battlefield where ideas of different traditions of thinking conflict. The modern globalized world, caught in a mesh of interconnected ties in all spheres of life, moves towards forming an entirely new universal system of symbols, values and mentality. It creates not only a common platform for the co-existence of various traditions but also a ground for their cultural “poly-dialog”. Therefore the dominant trend, along which thinking develops in the epoch of the emergent metacivilization, involves not mutual isolation of different traditions of thinking but their convergence and the establishing of a common intellectual hermeneutic perspective; it moves contrary to intellectual and cultural provincialism.

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## CHAPTER XXII

# NICOLAS OF CUSA: ON BELIEF, KNOWLEDGE, AND WISE IGNORANCE

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In the manner of the “street-wise” Socrates, Nicolas of Cusa’s arguments start from common opinion and sense experience, and they never leave that experience completely behind. In its multifaceted richness, sensory experience antedates and pre-shapes rational analysis; and even under the aegis of rational analysis, it remains potent as an anticipation or “fore-taste” of a more than rational, that is, an un-knowing or ignorant wisdom.

In summarizing his discussion of Cusanus’s philosophical approach, Ernst Cassirer comments: “The mind can come to know itself and to measure its own powers only by devoting itself completely and unconditionally to the world.” This means that “sensible nature and sense-knowledge are no longer merely base things, because in fact they provide the first impulse for all intellectual activity.” Thus, the movement of understanding – although proceeding to rational insight – always departs from pre-understanding and hence passes “through the world of the senses.” Cassirer quotes at this point a passage from Cusanus’s text *The Layman on Mind/Spirit (Idiota de Mente)* which reads in his translation: “The human mind/spirit is a divine seed that comprehends in its simple essence the totality of everything knowable; but in order for the seed to blossom and bear fruit, it must be planted in the proper soil, which is the soil of the sensible world.” Elaborating on this passage and deriving from it a broad lesson, Cassirer states that the basic character of the “copulative theology” sought by Cusanus lies in the “reconciliation of mind and nature, of intellect and sense.”<sup>1</sup>

The understanding offered by sense experience can also be called a sensory “belief” – a belief which needs to be tested but can never be fully uprooted or replaced by rational cognition. In his posthumously published book, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty opens his investigation by centerstaging the notion of “perceptual faith” and its complex relation to rational reflection. In its resonances with Cusanus’s

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<sup>1</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 44-45. For the reference see Nicolai de Cusa, *Idiota de Mente—Der Laie über den Geist*, Renate Steiger ed. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1995), pp. 34-35. (Cassirer’s translation of the Latin text is quite free.)

thought, Merleau-Ponty's formulation is sufficiently intriguing to be cited here:

We see the things themselves, the world is what we see: formulae of this kind express a faith common to the layman and the philosopher, the moment he opens his eyes; they refer to a deep-seated set of mute "opinions" implicated in our lives. But what is strange about this faith is that, if we seek to articulate it into theses or statements, if we ask ourselves what is this *we*, what *seeing* is, and what *thing* or *world* is, we enter into a labyrinth of difficulties and contradictions.

For Merleau-Ponty, perceptual faith is a belief which is not simply mistaken; it is a pre-judice or pre-judgment which can be clarified but never erased by rational analysis (or what he calls philosophical "reflection"). Differently put: perception of the world does not deliver cognitive truths, but it does provide cues or intimations which cannot simply be discarded. The task of analytical reflection is to translate experiences into propositional statements, sense belief into "warranted belief" or knowledge – a task which is incumbent on philosophers but also ultimately elusive. "The movement of reflection," Merleau-Ponty writes, "will always at first sight be convincing: in a sense it is imperative, it is truth itself, and one does not see how philosophy could dispense with it." The question is "whether this movement has brought philosophy to the harbor, whether the universe of thought to which it leads is really an order that suffices to itself and puts an end to every question." Together with Cusanus, the French thinker does not believe that rational reflection is the end of the story. Such reflection, he adds, "thinks it can comprehend our natal bond with the world only by *undoing* it in order to remake it, only by constituting it, by fabricating it. It thinks it finds clarity through analysis."<sup>2</sup>

It is commonly agreed that Cusanus's quest for knowledge or wisdom proceeds through three stages which are variously labeled "sense-experience, reason (*Verstand*), intellect (*Geist*, *Vernunft*)" or else "sense, intelligence, and learned ignorance." Cusanus himself alerts readers to this tripartition in several of his writings; thus, his *De Beryllo* states explicitly: "There are three modes of knowing: sense experience, reason, and higher intellect (*intelligentsia*)."<sup>3</sup> In his study devoted to Cusanus, Karl Jaspers

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<sup>2</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible, Followed by Working Notes*, Claude Lefort ed., Alphonso Lingis trans. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 3, 31-32. He continues by saying (p. 33): "Reflection recuperates everything except itself as an effort of recuperation; it clarifies everything except its own role."

<sup>3</sup> See Nicolai de Cusa, *De Beryllo—Über den Beryll*, ed. and trans. Karl Bormann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1987), p. 7.

makes this tripartite sequence a cornerstone of his discussion. The stages in his (somewhat simplified) treatment are: “*Sinn, Verstand, Vernunft (sensus, ratio, intellectus)*.” Sense experience, he writes, aims with all sensory organs at “real” phenomena; reason, in turn, supplies “categories (forms, types)” for the comprehension of phenomena, while intellect draws “through the shipwreck of reason” closer to the divine. By itself, sense experience is amorphous and ambivalent; by contrast, reason introduces clarity by relying on “distinctions, oppositions, and the exclusion of contradictions.” Higher intellect, finally, opens the path – through the “coincidence of opposites” – to the realm of “learned ignorance.”

Using a different formulation, Jaspers observes that sense experience is wholly positive and affirmative, whereas reason “affirms and negates” (in accord with rational criteria); intellect finally moves “beyond affirmation and negation” in the direction of coincidence. An important aspect of Cusanus’s teaching – he adds – is that each of the stages of knowing has its own integrity and significance in the ascent toward truth. By the same token, none of the stages is by itself complete or exhaustive; rather, truth can only be found in the interrelation and interpenetration of stages – a relation which is not so much a linear sequence as rather a circular movement (akin to the hermeneutical circle). This point is underscored in a passage from *De Coniecturis* which states that reason and intellect need to be nourished by sense experience which generates “wonder”: “Thus intellect in a circular motion returns to itself.”<sup>4</sup>

The passage cited by Jaspers is taken from a chapter which deals with “human nature,” more specifically with the nature of the “human soul” or psyche. In line with Platonic and neo-Platonic teachings, Cusanus distinguishes there between three psychic levels or dimensions, corresponding to the three modes of knowing mentioned before. At the same time, in line again with traditional speculations, the chapter invokes the distinction between “possibility” and “actuality” (*potentia* and *actualitas*), linking that distinction with the levels of the soul. Proceeding in this manner, the text clarifies or pinpoints the relation between belief and knowledge by stipulating, in a nutshell: that pre-cognitive, sensory belief constitutes the condition of possibility of higher knowledge, while at the same time such belief is drawn or catapulted – through the medium of fore-taste (*prae-gustatio*) – toward truth which constitutes its telos, fulfillment or actualization. In Cusanus’s words: The sensible region of the soul is intelligible truth “only as a possibility” (*in potentia*). This possibility is rendered possible or empowered by the “light of the intellect” which descends into “the shadows of sense experience”, just as sense experience gradually ascends to the light of truth. Thus, in relation to the intelligible

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<sup>4</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Nikolaus Cusanus* (Munich: Piper, 1964), pp. 48-49. The reference is to Nicolai de Cusa, *De coniecturis-Mutmassungen*, ed. and trans. Josef Koch and Winfried Happ (Hamburg: Felix Mernie, 2002), p. 189 (Part 2, Chapter 16).

realm, human understanding remains in the mode of possibility, while in relation to the lower, sensory experience it has “the states of actuality” (*in actu*). By means of sensation, human understanding is aroused from its slumber and moved to the perception of the possible and probable (*verisimile*). In this manner, higher intelligence is prompted to intervene; propelled beyond a merely “dormant possibility”, it is awakened to its proper task: the search for genuine knowledge which is the search for the “actuality of knowing” or the actual knowledge of truth.<sup>5</sup>

In its ascent toward truth, human understanding moves through the stage of reason or rationality which Cusanus associates mainly with calculation and measurement and which he regards as a step (but *only* as a step) toward knowledge in the mode of learned ignorance. This movement or ascent is discussed in several of his writings, but with particular eloquence in *De Docta Ignorantia* which explores the relation between knowing and not-knowing (or un-knowledge). “Every inquiry,” the opening chapter states, “relies on comparison and utilizes the method of comparative relation or proportion.” Employing the rules of reason and logic, inquiry seeks to establish comparative values and relationships, whether in simple or in difficult matters. Now, since comparative method reveals “identity in some respect and difference (or alterity) in another respect,” such inquiry cannot proceed without number or quantification. Harking back to Pythagorean and Platonic teachings, Cusanus finds a close connection between comparative logic and mathematics. “Number,” he emphasizes, “encompasses all things which are related comparatively.” This includes all things which can be compared in terms of bigger/smaller, higher/lower, longer/shorter, stronger/weaker, and the like. Hence, being a necessary condition of comparative-logical method, number is present “not only in mathematics but also in all things which in any manner whatsoever can be the same or different either substantially or accidentally.” The text at this point pays explicit tribute to the Greek roots of this conception by stating: “Perhaps it was for this reason that Pythagoras deemed all things to be constituted and understood by the power of number.”<sup>6</sup>

Although important in its own domain, comparative rationality cannot yield full knowledge of truth and, when claiming to be final, may actually obstruct further inquiry. The reason is that, beyond all comparative measurement, there is an un-measurable dimension which escapes the

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<sup>5</sup> Nicolai de Cusa, *De coniecturis—Mutmassungen* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1987), pp. 184-187 (Part 2, Chapter 16). In this text, Cusanus sometimes departs from his usual terminology by subordinating intellect to reason (*ratio*).

<sup>6</sup> Nicolai de Cusa, *De docta ignorantia—Die belehrte Unwissenheit*, Paul Wilpert trans., Hans Gerhard Senger ed. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1994), vol. 1, pp. 6-9 (Book 1, Chapter 1). For an English translation (which I have slightly altered) see Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance* (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1981), p. 50.



categories of more or less. This dimension cannot be plumbed by calculating reason as such; yet, despite this barrier – which is the barrier between finitude and infinity – it constantly calls upon human understanding to transgress itself in the direction of ultimate truth. In this dimension, we find the notion of greatest or “maximal” bigness – but outside any measurement, relationship or comparison. This bigness or “maximum” comprises all possible beings; but not being subject to comparison, it actually coincides with the “minimum” which likewise inhabits all things. This coincidence, in turn, points to an absolute realization where possibility and actuality converge – a domain which is not fully accessible but also not fully inaccessible to understanding, *provided* we approach it in the manner of Socrates who confessed knowledge of his ignorance (*se nihil scire nisi quod ignoraret*). In the words of Cusanus: Since the desire for understanding cannot be baseless or in vain, “we assuredly desire to know that we do not know (or to know our un-knowledge). If we pursue and achieve to fulfill this desire, we will attain to learned ignorance (*docta ignorantia*).” This kind of learned ignorance or knowing un-knowledge is the highest mode of truth which is attainable by human beings. “It is evident,” the text adds, “that, regarding ultimate truth, we cannot know anything but this: that we know it as incomprehensible in its fullness.” This means that the essence of things or the truth of beings cannot fully be understood – a circumstance which is not so much the end as rather the beginning of genuine understanding. Basically, the more deeply we understand our ignorance (or non-understanding), “the closer we approach the truth.” Differently put: “The more a person knows his or her un-knowing, the more learned he/she will be.”<sup>7</sup>

As can be seen, truth for Cusanus is not simply an abyss of un-knowledge – a negation which could be dismissed or discarded by understanding – but rather an intelligent or knowing abyss which ceaselessly prods or “calls upon” human understanding to explore its depths.<sup>8</sup> His writings are replete with, and famous for their explorations of

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<sup>7</sup> Nicolai de Cusa, *De docta ignorantia—Die belehrte Unwissenheit* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1994), pp. 8-15 (Book 1, Chapters 1-3); Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance* (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1981), pp. 50-53.

<sup>8</sup> Compare on this point also the passage in Nicolai de Cusa, *Tu quis es (De principio)—Über den Ursprung*, trans. and ed. Karl Bormann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2001), pp. 26-27, 30-31: “We do not call God the ‘one’ as something fully known, but because prior to any knowledge our yearning/desire is directed toward the one. ... And although (ultimate being) cannot be cognitively grasped, we are yet not in complete ignorance, because we ‘know’ what we desire (*scit ipsum esse quod desiderat*). Our intellect which knows that ultimate being exists as incomprehensible, is all the more perfect the more it realizes this incomprehensibility. For the access to the incomprehensible lies in learned ignorance (*scientia ignorantiae*).”

these depths. One of his last texts, titled *De Venatione Sapientiae* (*On Hunting for Wisdom*), mentions, among others, three main fields or “hunting grounds” where wisdom might profitably be pursued: the fields of learned ignorance, of actualized possibility, and of “non-otherness.” Regarding the first field, the text basically reiterates insights familiar from earlier works, especially the point that ultimate truth is neither completely unknowable – that is, inaccessible even to intimation or “fore-taste” – nor completely accessible to human reason. As Cusanus states, using theological vocabulary: “In their very being all things testify to God’s being, or differently put: everything derives its being from the divine ground.” This ground, however, is also an un-ground – echoes of Meister Eckhart – exceeding human cognitive competence. Hence, just as God’s being cannot be fully plumbed in its depth, so also “the essence of all things in their depths remains shielded from our cognition,” leaving us in a state of inquiring ignorance. It was for this reason that Aristotle described the essence of things as something “always looked or searched for” (*semper quaesitam*) as an unending horizon. Human wisdom or learnedness can in fact be gauged by this standard of knowing ignorance: “The more someone realizes that the ultimate cannot be known, the more learned or wiser he/she is.”<sup>9</sup>

The second field explored in the text is that of actualized possibility or fulfilled being (*possesit*). Cusanus distinguishes here between all the things which have become or are in the process of becoming, on the one hand, and the ground (or unground) of all becoming. “None of the things which can become,” he writes, “is ever free of the further possibility to become other than it is. Only God is actualized possibility or full being (*possesit*) because God is in actuality what can be (*actu quod esse potest*).” The domain of becoming is marked by distinctions, differentiations, and “alterations,” in the sense that things can become other from what they were before. In the field of actualized possibility, by contrast, all distinctions drop away – even (echoes from Meister Eckhart again) the distinction between being and non-being. As Cusanus writes, in a bold formulation: “God is prior to all differentiation: He is prior to the distinction between actuality and possibility, prior to the distinction between possible becoming and possible making, prior to the difference between light and darkness, even prior to the difference between being and non-being, between something and nothing, between difference and indifference, and so on.” This field lies

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<sup>9</sup> Nicolai de Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae—Die Jagd nach Weisheit*, ed. Paul Wilpert and Karl Bormann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2003), pp. 44-51 (Chapter 12). As Cusanus adds, most past philosophers, with the possible exception of Plato (as interpreted by Proclus), have missed or fallen short of this standard. Thus, those “philosophical hunters” who tried to “hunt down the essence of things” and to transform the telos of all inquiry into “an object of knowledge,” have “labored in vain, remaining outside the field of learned ignorance.”

clearly beyond traditional, especially Aristotelian, logic with its emphasis on the law of non-contradiction. Philosophers clinging to this logic, the text states, have not been able to “enter this hunting ground” and hence have failed to “taste the fruit of highly delectable hunts (*delectabilissimis venationibus*).” Supposing that their search must obey the principle of non-contradiction and of the mutual exclusion of being and non-being, such philosophers have “failed to look for God – who antedates and transcends this principle – in the field of actualized possibility (*possest*) where the difference between possibility and actuality vanishes.”<sup>10</sup>

The third field or “hunting ground” mentioned by Cusanus is that of the “not-other” (*non aliud*). This field is particularly intriguing in light of recent speculations insisting on the “radical otherness” of God or the divine – speculations which obviously prompt the question how a God who transcends the dichotomy between sameness and otherness can yet be “radically other.”<sup>11</sup> Grappling with this question, Cusanus prefers to use the term “not-other” precisely for what some recent thinkers call “otherness.” “In searching for what precedes possible becoming,” he writes, “our intellect must be attentive to the fact that the target of the search precedes also the ‘other’ (*aliud*). For, what precedes possible becoming cannot possibly become ‘other’, given that otherness comes later.” For Cusanus, the term “not-other” designates both itself and everything else: “If I ask ‘What is the not-other?, one may appropriately respond ‘The not-other is none other than the not-other.’ And if I ask: ‘What then is the other?, one will answer again rightly that the other is none other than the other. Hence, the world is none other than the world.” To avoid misunderstanding, the text adds a passage which some contemporary philosophers – especially those familiar with “deconstruction” – will no doubt appreciate: “You should note, however, that not-other does not simply mean identical or same. For whereas the same is none other than the same, the not-other precedes the same and everything that can be designated.” Hence, if one wishes to call God the Not-Other (because He is not other regarding any other), “nonetheless he is not identical with anything.” For example, being not-other regarding heaven, “He is yet not identical with heaven.” Wedded to

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<sup>10</sup> Nicolai de Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae—Die Jagd nach Weisheit* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2003), pp. 50-55 (Chapter 13). Compare also his longer treatment of this argument in *De possest—Dreiergespräch über das Können-Ist*, ed. Renate Steiger (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1973).

<sup>11</sup> Compare, e.g., Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) and *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989); Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); also Dominique Janicaud, “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology,” in Janicaud et al., *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), pp. 3-103.

traditional logic, most philosophers have again failed to enter this unique hunting ground “where negation does not contradict affirmation, since the not-other does not stand opposed to any other.” As Cusanus concludes, stunningly: “Even nothingness is none other than nothing. In the exquisite words of blessed Dionysius (the Areopagite): God is ‘all in all and nothing in nothingness’.”<sup>12</sup>

There are many lessons that can be derived from Cusanus’s arguments regarding belief, knowledge, and learned ignorance. One is the importance and irreplaceability of sense experience and ordinary belief (or pre-judgment). Another is the crucial significance of rational cognition – and its ultimately arid character. Finally, there is his notion of knowing unknown and of the transgression of all oppositions – a teaching which was not unfamiliar to Nagarjuna and which has been revived more recently by Martin Heidegger and his heirs.

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<sup>12</sup>. Nicolai de Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae—Die Jagd nach Weisheit* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2003), pp. 56-61. As Cusanus adds, again in a remarkable passage (pp. 60-61): “God does not stand in opposition to any determination since He precedes the difference of opposites. It would be a less appropriate way of speaking if one described God as a living being in contrast to non-living things, or as an immortal being in contrast to mortal beings. Better to describe Him as the Not-Other who stands in opposition neither to anything other nor to nothingness, since He precedes even nothingness.” For a fuller discussion of “not-other” see his *De li non aliud—Vom Nichtanderen*, ed. Paul Wilpert (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1987); and for an English version Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-Other* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1979).

## CHAPTER XXIII

# THE REASONABLE FAITH OF LEO TOLSTOY

*A.A. GUSSEINOV*

L.N. Tolstoy created an original and, as far as I can judge, unique conception of faith. He regarded faith as a fundamental category of human existence, related to the ontological status of the human being, rather than to a particular human feature. To understand people properly is to understand them as having faith. At the same time, he held, faith opposes neither knowledge nor reason. Moreover, people reveal their rationality only by having faith. This is Tolstoy's general idea. This study concerns the circumstances in Tolstoy's life and the arguments which led to this idea, and its main content.

### WHY TOLSTOY BEGAN TO STUDY THE PROBLEM OF FAITH

Tolstoy's conception of faith resulted from a purposeful, thorough, all-embracing study of actual experiences of faith in the way in which billions of people have them and in which they are represented in the main religions – above all, for Tolstoy, Christianity – and summarised in theological and philosophical doctrines. The solidity of Tolstoy's research is testified to by the fact that, in order to do it properly, he refreshed his Greek and learned Hebrew. His interest, however, was not just to learn something new. He was solving a personal and deeply existential puzzle. Not only was his ability to find truth tested, but his whole life was at stake.

Tolstoy occasionally had some odd psychological experiences which he called “stoppages of life”, states of bewilderment about the purpose of his life. He described them many times, in the most complete way in his “Confession” (1882) and in the most striking way in the “The Memoirs of a Madman” (1884). In his own words, it sometimes happened that he was under the spell of an obsessive thought which would appear from nowhere. He would suddenly feel that death is coming and at the same time he would be sure that death did not exist. Afraid for his perishable life, Tolstoy would be overwhelmed by horror. On the eve of his fiftieth birthday, these states became a real panic: he could not say what everything he did was or if it would end up in ashes. The meaninglessness and vanity of existence possessed him, as it did the Biblical Solomon. As Tolstoy put it, he no longer had anything to “live with”. He was obsessed by a thought of killing himself; this temptation dragged him away from life with the same urge as earlier life used to attract him.

When this spiritual break happened to Tolstoy, he had everything that is usually associated with human happiness: bodily and mental health, a

loving wife, children, everybody's attention, the world-wide fame of a great writer, who had already published "*War and Peace*" and "*Anna Karenina*". The crisis could not be resolved by simply adding more to his life, which was already of a fullness of which many people could only dream. There was a single way out – if even that – left to Tolstoy to understand what was going on, namely, to penetrate the very meaning of life. Thinking that if he did not solve this puzzle he would yet have time to settle up with life, he set out on this path.

Tolstoy was looking for an understanding of life that would change his own. There is something more in it than just a willingness to test one's judgements on oneself – which, for instance, a physician does when he himself tests medications before giving them to patients. With Tolstoy, it was a matter of life and death: his life depended on whether he would be able to achieve the true knowledge of life. Tolstoy did not just run a risk: he was in deadly danger, having become a target for a hunter who had never yet missed. He was more like a physician who sought treatment for his own lethal disease. Tolstoy's main work about faith is titled "What Is *My* Faith?" (1884) and not "What Is Faith?". He did not want just to learn about the truth; he wanted to witness it. He would say afterwards: "I did not think it up, I have seen it" (XVIII, 184)<sup>1</sup>. He sought knowledge of faith such that it would become his own faith and allow him to be reborn spiritually.

Having asked what is the true faith out of all people's beliefs, Tolstoy boldly rejected the most common opinion that originates in the well-known place in *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (*Hebrews* 11, 1). He was not satisfied with this formula because, in its first part (as the substance of things hoped for), it takes faith beyond the framework of individual responsible behaviour, and, in the second part (as the evidence of things not seen) beyond the framework of rational and critical thinking. Faith is not a human business and humans therefore are reduced to passiveness. This explanation can satisfy the one who is in the boat but not the one who is drowning. The latter could not be happy with a promise of rescue, this person needs a life belt.

## A PERSON CANNOT NOT THINK

Humans are conscious and rational beings. Life becomes a problem

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<sup>1</sup> References are to two Tolstoy's editions: 1. Л.Н. Толстой. *Полное собрание сочинений в 24 т.* (М., 1913) [L.N. Tolstoy. *Complete Works in 24 Vols.* (Moscow, 1913)]. Roman figures before the comma are for the volume number; figures after the comma are for the page number; 2. Л.Н. Толстой. *Полное собрание сочинений в 90 т.* (М., 1928-1958) [L.N. Tolstoy. *Complete Works in 90 Vols.* (Moscow, 1928-1958)]. Arab figures before the comma are for the volume number; figures after the comma are for the page number.

and is questioned when seen in the perspective of a conscious and rational existence. Tolstoy realised that the crisis, which took the joy of life and his life energy away from him, was the crisis of consciousness. And he reflected on what it meant to live a conscious life and to give it a reasonable meaning.

Life is conscious not only on occasions, when people reflect, read and write books, i.e., work intellectually. In all their activities, including above all everyday life, people are conscious beings. “Whether man eats or abstains from food, whether he works or rests, escapes from danger or submits himself to it – if he is a conscious person, he acts the way he acts only because he thinks it necessary and reasonable: he thinks that truth is in behaving this way and not the other way” (XVIII, 139). Human behaviour is of course determined in multiple ways: by man’s biological nature, social laws, concrete circumstances, and endless other causes. Viewed from outside, human acts do not conceal any secrets. As Kant used to say (and Tolstoy completely agreed with him), one can in principle anticipate and predict them with the same precision as in anticipating and predicting eclipses of the moon. But, this said, human activity has a feature which alone makes it human: all its visible and invisible causes come to a single point where the acting person has the last and decisive word and where everything depends on what he or she believes right and true. And only there, at this particular point, do people have the complete power to master and control their lives. And for this reason alone – because they are able to do it – their lives are conscious.

To be conscious is a fact of human life, and not an imperative. “Life emerges only when consciousness appears and comes to this stage. Once it has come, it always stays” (XVIII, 207). If a person loses consciousness, as the ability to take decisions and to act in correspondence with and on the basis of what he or she considers right and true, this person loses the ability to live. Of course, under the conscious surface, there is also the pressing underground of irrational desires, the frightening darkness of the unconscious. Tolstoy knew better than anybody else about the hidden part of the iceberg named “man”. In a number of works, in particular, “Father Sergei” and “The Devil”, he described the incredible sweetness and power of irrational impulses. And the spiritual crisis that embraced him witnessed the unknown depths of human vitality. Yet, Tolstoy looked at people as a moralist or a person who wanted to straighten his own life rather than as an unbiased observer. He longed for the truth of life for the same purpose that a man lost in the desert longs for water – in order to save his life. That is why he emphasised the importance of consciousness, considering most essential *that* human feature which can influence one’s life. Only one question can interest people in a serious and responsible sense: “how to organise life when to do it is in our power” (XVIII, 216). To answer this question, one should examine representations of what people think is right or wrong and how these truths guide their choices. And to do this is the business of reason.

Reason comprehends the world and investigates conditions and forms of human life in order to find out what is good. The longing for the good, argued reasonably, is the main feature of human life. Tolstoy believed that contemporary science left it out and that ethics, which should be central in studying human destiny, was squeezed to the margins. No knowledge of the laws of nature can tell man “what he should do with the piece of bread he has in his hands: whether to give it to his wife, to another person, to the dog, or to eat it himself, whether to save the piece or to give it away to the one who begs for it. And human life consists of answering these and other similar questions” (XVII, 240). If it were not for the need to know how and what to live for, where to direct one’s conscious efforts, if not for the need to answer these questions in the concrete circumstances of the constantly changing world, it would be unclear what reason is for at all. Yet, European reason attached an independent value to knowledge. It was attracted to mathematical truths, to science in the narrow sense, to writing operas, comedies, to heraldic and Roman history. It was attracted to anything except the doctrine of life, “which, before our European society, every people considered the most important” (23, 412). Tolstoy believed European reason stood on the wrong path.

The human ability to learn differs from the same ability in animals because humans are not limited by instincts; they are, therefore, relatively freer from the framework of time and space required for their physical existence and reproduction. By adding reason to instincts, the human being transcends the limits of the animal being. Originating in reason, knowledge expands to the endless world out there. For instance, a bee that gathers honey for the winter cannot have any doubts about whether this is right or wrong. The bee is identical with its activity and limited by its spatial and temporal parameters. For a person taking care of his or her nourishment, this is different. A person cannot help thinking of various issues that go beyond what the person is doing: whether he or she harms nature or takes food from other people, what will happen to the children whose well-being worries him or her, and so on. And the more important the issues, the more diverse and contradictory the consequences that one’s reason tells one to take into account. They are impossible to trace one by one. Reason puts a person in front of an endless prospect impossible to embrace with the degree of precision typical of rigorous argumentative proofs. Human reason presupposes, requires and reveals itself in the fact that people are able to integrate factors influencing their actions and to relate to the entire world, in its infinite spatial and temporal dimensions, along with the nearest, easily calculated causes and consequences.

“From ancient times on, human reason sought a good for the people which their mutual struggle, suffering and death would not destroy” (XVII, 216).

The global perspective— the ability to see oneself from the perspective of infinite life — is both characteristic of, and intrinsic to, human reason. Tolstoy called this dimension religious. One should emphasise that



he distinguished between religion in his own sense and in the common sense of the word. He gave his notion a precise, definitive meaning:

“True religion, – he wrote, – is man’s relationship to the world, which, in agreement with reason and knowledge, directs his actions and connects his life to infinite life, to eternity” (35, 163).

Thus, taken in its foundations and its relation to the world, reason becomes religion.

Religion is considered as the universal form of the reasonable being’s relationship to the world. By virtue of being human, the human being cannot help being religious.

Those who deny religion are in their own way religious:

the religion of people who do not recognise religion is a religion of submission to the powerful majority and everything it does (23, 445).

#### **FAITH IS AN AWARENESS OF THE MEANING OF LIFE**

In Tolstoy’s interpretation, religion is above all an answer to the question about the meaning of human life, assuming that the question is understood correctly. Reflecting over one’s life, one wonders if it has a meaning which is not destroyed together with one’s life. By this very question, one recognises that there is no meaning in the mortal forms and boundaries of one’s existence. For this reason the thinkers who claimed that life has no meaning simply repeated the question without giving an answer. As Tolstoy emphasised, they identified the limited with the limited and the infinite with the infinite, which is clear without their efforts. Yet by asking the question about the meaning of life, one reflects over different issues. How to identify the limited with the infinite? Is there anything immortal and eternal in one’s own mortal and limited existence? Is there a meaning that stays when one’s life ends?

If the question about the meaning of life is understood correctly, neither logic nor ethics justifies a negative answer. This is erroneous logically not only because of the tautology mentioned above; it is erroneous because it collapses into a paradox. Reason is a fact of life. Admitting that life is meaningless and unreasonable, reason denies its own meaning and rationality. Reason, which refutes its own rationality, is no longer reason. It can be trusted no more than the Cretan man from the famous paradox, who claimed that all the Cretans are liars. Philosophical pessimism is also vulnerable ethically, because it does not accept its own statements in their morally abiding sense. If those who say that life is meaningless and, in its meaninglessness evil, believed it seriously and responsibly, they would first have destroyed the evil inside themselves. They would have quitted life before they started speculating that it is evil. “Nobody prevents us, – wrote Tolstoy, – from denying life together with Schopenhauer. But then one should kill oneself and not bother with thinking. If you do not like life, then

kill yourself. And if you live and cannot understand the meaning of life, you should terminate your life and not rush around telling everybody in a colourful way that you cannot comprehend life” (23, 30).

The doctrine about the meaning of life is more than a mere curiosity, it is a necessary and essential element of human life. People always enact some understanding of life, whether they realise it or not, just as when they follow the laws of physiology disregarding whether they know these laws the way they are formulated by the science of physiology. When one takes the decision about how to behave and what to do with the piece of bread, which Tolstoy wrote about, one makes a choice based on values, fills one’s action with a particular meaning rather than performing a technical operation. A personal action is at the same time a procedure inscribed in an objective system and has a description; it is a spiritual act that provides space for meaning. The former is impossible without the latter. Without a series of concrete conscious acts, human life cannot not have meaning, that is, cannot not connect the limited and the infinite. Similarly, a person cannot make a step, cannot move, without moving in a particular direction. Before moving and in order to move, one has to decide where to move. Before doing anything and in order to do it, one has to decide what to do it for.

Included in one’s unmediated conscious activity, religion – or the doctrine of the meaning of life – represents faith. Religion, the meaning of life and faith are the same reality in its different aspects. “Faith is one and the same as religion, with the difference that we call religion something that we observe from outside and we call faith the same thing when experienced from inside” (XV, 301). “The foundation of faith is the meaning of life” (XV, 137). In a word, amongst all the truths (pieces of knowledge, judgements) in which one grounds one’s decision to act in some way or another, the first and essential condition is the truth about the meaning of life which represents faith. In Tolstoy’s view, faith is an awareness of life. Faith and conscious life overlap so completely that one may say: where there is human life, there is faith; when faith disappears, life becomes impossible. In general terms, one can thus specify the place of faith in life: “Faith is an awareness of the meaning of one’s life, and one lives as a result of this awareness. Faith is the life power. As long as one lives, one believes in something. If one did not believe that there is something to live for, one would not live” (XXIII, 35).

### **ONE BELIEVES IN WHAT ONE DOES**

One cannot live without a doctrine of life. In the same way, one cannot act reasonably without faith. “As the body without the soul is dead, faith is dead without deeds”; “all deeds follow from faith” (XV, 135).

One should distinguish between the actual faith as it is revealed in one’s life experience and expressed in the language of one’s deeds, on the one hand, and what one thinks faith is and does in agreement with it, on the other hand. One usually thinks well of oneself and tries to mean well while

acting effectively, which of course is hard to achieve. Discordance between different levels of consciousness is unavoidable. Faith is the axiological root of all deeds, and consciousness often hides and distorts rather than reveals faith, although it is precisely in the question of faith, a very intimate and personal business, that one longs to be completely open and sincere.

The dramatic disagreement between Tolstoy and the traditional interpreters of faith in the Russian Orthodox confession was focused on the issue of the balance of faith and concrete deeds.

Tolstoy believed that various churches distorted and perverted the notion of faith. This they did by transforming faith into a particular business, which exists alongside, separately, in addition to and often in opposition to everyday life – into a business of Sunday prayers and incomprehensible mysteries. Faith became identified with trust in someone or something particular, a given attitude to life. In the 1901 decree by the Holy Synod, the main reproach against Tolstoy was that “he preaches, with a fanatical zeal, the overthrow of all the dogmas of the Russian Orthodox Church”. That was, indeed, the case. Tolstoy summarised his disagreement with the official church in a nutshell by saying that the church replaced the Sermon on the Mount, which teaches true faith, by the Creed. Substituting true faith by false faith, or prejudice, led to the changes that transformed a living religion into a cumbersome institution alien to people. The church as an institution is founded on three statements: a) there is a special kind of people who mediate between God (or gods) and other people; b) the truthfulness of what the mediators say is confirmed by miracles; c) God’s will is expressed by particular kinds of texts which are considered holy (see 35, 167).

By converting to the church faith, a person transfers responsibility for his or her life to someone else. Adam is guilty and Christ is the saviour, although not Christ as a person – neither his efforts nor his good deeds play a role. And tying faith to absurdity which neglects the laws of nature and reason makes it completely incomprehensible. Tolstoy thought that the church version of faith is a deception; it contradicts both the core or essence and the way Jesus actually understood faith. When people asked Jesus to fortify their faith by some external means – for instance, by a miracle or a promise of a reward, he replied that it was impossible. This very request shows a misunderstanding of what faith is. It actually means that the person who asks for a miracle or reward, in fact, professes a different faith while thinking it possible to accept Jesus’ faith without denying one’s own. Tolstoy analyses an episode when a woman, the mother of the Zebedee brothers, begs Jesus that, in the kingdom to come, her sons would be seated next to him, one on his right and the other on his left side. Jesus replied: you do not know what you are asking for. The request comes out of a distorted faith that directs life towards a personal good, towards becoming first and achieving the highest fame, and this is precisely the kind of faith Jesus fought against. His own faith is in principle different: it is fulfilled by good deeds, which have their reward in themselves and are not done for the sake

of future rewards. Jesus says, and shows many times, that faith is inseparable from deeds and that nobody can come to believe in his doctrine before and without following him. A rich youth does not have another way to faith which leads to salvation than to sell his fortune and give everything away to beggars. In Tolstoy's words, "Faith is a particular state of the soul rather than hope or trust. Faith is one's awareness of one's place in the world which imposes responsibility for certain deeds" (XV, 300).

Faith is not simply embodied in deeds. It directs them and determines their moral quality. "The evaluation of all life phenomena is faith", wrote Tolstoy (23, 406). As the answer to the question about the meaning of life, faith illumines the path one should follow. It plays the same role in human life as a compass in a sea journey or a lantern in the hands of a man walking through the night. Tolstoy called the questions, what man lives for and whether his is the right life, the voice of the infinite, good and reasonable source inside each of us (see XXI, 7). Faith is good and guides human actions towards it. Nevertheless it is not a category of ethics. Faith becomes morals, continues in them, but faith in its own right is larger than morals.

Faith as an awareness of life signifies that life is good. And it strengthens the good in life by not leaving any space for evil. Faith is a concrete recognition of the fact that evil has no substance. Evil is admitted solely as an absence of good, or death; faith annihilates evil. Human life as evil is impossible; becoming evil, it destroys itself and ceases to be. Faith, as an expression of the good meaning of life, is the source and foundation of morality. First, it precedes the classification of deeds into the categories of good and evil and gives a criterion that makes such a classification possible; second, it allows breaking through and going beyond good and evil.

### **FAITH CANNOT CONTRADICT REASON**

We all know, though we do not always understand, Kant's words that man has to limit (*aufheben*) knowledge in order to open the way to faith. In relation to Tolstoy, this phrase can be altered: Tolstoy limited faith in order to open the way to knowledge and reason. As an awareness of life which reveals itself only in action, faith has nothing in common with miracles, vain hopes, illusory expectations, absurd fantasies and other verbal and psychological speculations that do not confine themselves to experience and logic, to observation and precise rational thinking. Tolstoy believed that, amongst all the definitions of faith, the least acceptable and the most outrageous is the one that characterises it as an absurdity or nonsense. "True faith is never unreasonable and never in disagreement with existing knowledge, and – by contrast with what one of Church Fathers said, *credo quia absurdum* – it cannot have supernatural or nonsensical features" (XV, 301).

As has been already emphasised, faith is not a particular individual state, whether of an intellectual, psychological or somatic nature. It is the

person herself, in her existential determination. One cannot live without faith, Tolstoy said, meaning that faith is the way one lives. It coincides with one's deeds and actions taken as a whole which has a particular direction and meaning. This circumstance is the most essential for understanding faith, and it makes it possible to define its epistemological status – its relation to rational knowledge. The substance of faith, that is, what one does and how one does it, cannot be separated from faith itself. One cannot relate to the substance in any other way but by faith. Faith is revealed exclusively by the way one lives, by one's deeds, which themselves can only happen because they are the deeds of faith. It precedes the separation of reality into subject and object in knowledge. Faith in its own right is not an epistemological category. Even the expression, "I believe (have faith)", which we use together with Tolstoy, is not correct in the strict sense of the word. It is a tautology, because *the self* is identified through faith. Faith constitutes the human self as a concrete life. When a person says, "I believe", this is a very responsible statement, the truthfulness of which is measured only by its unconditional, morally obliging power. Indeed, how are we to distinguish between "I believe" and "I think", and "I wish", "I suppose", "I hope", "I expect", etc.? For that, Tolstoy said, there is only one criterion. One should take a look at how the person lives: not at particular words or actions, but at all the person does, at the intimate direction or meaning of his or her life. One believes in the way one actually lives.

As an awareness of life, an integral characteristic of the entire conscious life and activity, faith can be interpreted as a kind of knowledge – of how to live. Faith as knowledge has the following features.

First, the question about the meaning of life, which leads to faith, lies at the foundation of a particular class of questions hard to avoid. A definite answer to this question is a condition for and the basis of conscious action and decision-making. One cannot avoid this question by saying that it is a hollow issue with no interest or that one would rather do something else. By contrast with purely informative questions, which do not have the same urge and are always conditional and local, a clear view at the truths of faith is a necessity to the same degree as life itself. In other words, faith is that awareness of life which is identical with the knowledge of the meaning of life.

Second, although the concrete content of reality which faith deals with is beyond the boundaries of trustworthy knowledge, the very existence of this reality is not in doubt. "What *is* without doubt but cannot be explained by reason, one can only believe in" (XXI, 40). Faith emerges on the boundaries of reason. Reason confirms the fact that the world is endless but cannot formulate the purpose of life in its infinite moral and temporal dimensions exactly because of its endlessness. This is similar to the fact that, it is impossible to give the infinite number, a concrete example of endlessness, though nobody doubts that endlessness exists. Faith originates in this knowledge, realises it and fills human life with the meaning that

transcends the boundaries of one's mortal existence. In a short essay, "The Green Stick (Magic Wand)" (1905), Tolstoy uses the following metaphor to explain that one needs meaning for direction in life. If, he says, after a long sleep a person has forgotten everything which happened before and wakes up amidst some unknown creatures who are constantly busy with something, they would first try to understand who put one in this strange place, why and how to behave there. One may never learn who put her there and why, but one knows for certain that someone did it for some reason, and this knowledge is the basis of one's faith.

Third, although the truths of faith are not provable by scientific knowledge, they are exceedingly trustworthy and morally obligatory from the subjective point of view – more than the truths proven by rational knowledge. Moreover, the very inability to prove them reflects on and follows from their unconditional and authentic character. The truths of faith have their own base of proof, more serious than the outer world. This base is human conscious life, which these truths inspire and direct. When Tolstoy says: "The true faith is in God, not in people" (XXI, 48), he wants to say that people, with their limited abilities, do not inspire the same unconditional faith as is required for the truths of faith. For orientation in the ocean, the compass, with its tiny hand, is better than large visible objects and even better than the stars; in a similar way, personal faith is a better guide in life than all the knowledge of the world.

Fourth, besides informing us about the need for faith, reason is also instrumental in finding the degree of its truthfulness, for one "always learns through reason rather than through faith" (XVII, 310). As soon as one comes across some other faith competing with one's own in truthfulness, one faces a need to argue rationally. As a horse does not know where it goes but knows very well if the direction is wrong because of pain from the bridle and the whip, a person, even ignoring the goal, still can know whether the direction is right or wrong. One knows it by the suffering and lack of joy one experiences and causes in others, if faith is false. Finding whether faith is true requires a rational critique of its consequences. "The statements of the genuine faith, though they cannot be proved, never contain anything contradictory to reason and opposite to people's knowledge; by contrast, they always clarify what otherwise would remain unreasonable and contradictory" (XV, 301).

Tolstoy's faith looks odd. It does not have anything mystical about it. It is almost a paradox: Tolstoy teaches that we should take nothing for granted except faith. And one can take faith for granted owing to reason, with the help of it rather than in opposition to it. There is no logical contradiction in this thought: perhaps a tautology, but not a contradiction. Indeed, if faith is the boundary of reason, than reason can only lead to faith. Here is a completely clear and revealing statement by Tolstoy about the particular character of knowledge of faith: "I shall not seek an explanation of everything, I know that the explanation of everything, just as the origins

of everything, is hidden in the infinity. But I want to understand in such a way that would bring me to the inevitable and inexplicable. I want things be inexplicable not because my intelligence fails (I cannot comprehend anything beyond my mind's rules), but because I can see the limits of my own mind and want to understand each inexplicable proposition as a necessity of reason rather than an obligation to believe" (23, 57).

In Tolstoy's doctrine, faith and reason have the same scale. Both are a kind of knowledge. Faith is a direct knowledge, immanent to the conscious life realised in concrete individual actions. Reason is mediated by the knowledge of the world and unfolds into a universal true content. These two notions form a circle: faith is the limit and the foundation of reason, and reason leads towards and justifies faith. Tolstoy could accept the position of neither Augustin nor Anselm of Canterbury reflected in the thesis, "I believe in order to understand". Nor could he accept the view of Abelard, "I understand in order to believe". Tolstoy believed in order to understand and understood in order to believe. Faith checks and tests reason, and reason checks and tests faith.

#### **WHAT DID TOLSTOY COME TO BELIEVE**

As has already been mentioned, when he analysed faith as a philosopher, Tolstoy did not pursue academic goals. His task was to find a way out of a deep spiritual crisis. And he found it: he created a conception of faith which became the guiding light for the rest of his conscious life, when the great writer became a great philosopher and moralist. (Although – I should note in parenthesis – everyone recognises his greatness as a writer, while not everybody yet realises his greatness as a philosopher and a moralist.)

Tolstoy terms God the absolute infinite source of life that reason inevitably leads to when one reflects over the question where one comes from and why one is brought to this world. The notion of God marks the boundary of rational knowledge. With this notion, reason completes the process of integrating the infinite variety of causal actions and potential consequences of human life, which, without this completion, cannot be conscious. The notion of God means that the person accepts life in all its originally given and inexhaustible goodness. Through one's relation to God, one expresses the relation of one's mortal individual life to the infinite life and the world as a whole. In God one finds the basis for a meaningful existence.

Reason can justifiably claim that God exists, but it cannot say *what* God is. Reason cannot supply this claim with content. One cannot know anything about God because the only feature of this notion, which one can rationally demonstrate, is that it signifies the limits of knowledge and lies beyond anything we can make responsible claims about. The epistemological status of God can be defined as knowledge of something that we do not know.

On the one hand, because human life is conscious and reasonable, it must relate to God, which is the infinity of life and the world. On the other hand, we do not know and cannot know anything about God except God's existence. The only reasonable solution for this contradiction that can be argued rationally is to set up a relationship with God and accept God as an absolute and unconditional goodness, incomprehensible for us. The relation to God can only be religious. It means that one accepts God as the good source of life that gives meaning to life, though one cannot know what it is.

Characterising one's relation to God, Tolstoy uses the analogy taken from the Gospels, comparing it with the son's relationship to his father or the worker's relationship to his master. The son's virtue is to listen and obey his father, even in the case, and above all in the case, when he does not understand why the father forbids him something and when he does not like it. The son behaves like a son, adequately to his position of a son, when he behaves out of conviction that the father knows better what good is. And the worker's virtue is in doing what his master tells him to do, though he may not know the master's general and final idea; the master is a master because he knows better than his worker what he should do and why. As the son follows his father's will and the worker follows his master's will, people should trust God where the meaning of life is concerned and follow God's will unconditionally.

Tolstoy considered himself a Christian. He saw his faith as an adequate understanding of Christ's life and teaching, the quintessence of which is the Sermon on the Mount according to the Gospel of St. Mathew. One should emphasise that, for Tolstoy, Jesus is neither God nor the Son of God in the literal sense of the word. He thinks that the one who truly believes in God cannot consider Christ God. Christ is the great spiritual reformer who penetrated the truth of life and outlined the summit of a free meaningful existence that humankind has failed yet to climb. Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God in the same sense than every person is God's child. He differs from all other people only because he realised the truth and made it a law of his life.

In the most precise and complete way, Jesus' relationship to God is made clear by what he said awaiting execution. Jesus, of course, was afraid of it, all the more afraid given the terrifying kind of execution it was – the most frightening people of his time could invent. He, of course, could not comprehend its meaning: the more unjust it was the less he could understand – the most unjust of all capital punishments which ever happened on earth. And despite this, Jesus says to his God and his father: "Not as I will, but as thou wilt" and goes to the cross. Jesus accepted the most terrifying and the most unjust treatment because it was God's will.

Moses carved his commandments on stone tablets and then broke them, outraged when he saw how those, for whom these truths were destined, defied them. Jesus discovered this truth and wrote it down in such a form and in such a place that it cannot in principle be defied. This is the truth of a genuine life imprinted in the very core of human life, in one's soul



and heart. It cannot be defied not because it cannot be torn from life or killed with life. It cannot be defied because, in these extreme cases, it reveals its truthfulness in the most complete way. When the truth of life is separated from life, it demonstrates its truthfulness by the fact that the life that was left behind becomes miserable and ruined, as was the case with Tolstoy himself when he approached his fiftieth birthday. When the truth of life is defied together with the life that it inhabits, it in fact triumphs: truth affirms itself as a value superior to and greater than passing and accidental forms of life. When the Synedrion sent Jesus to the cross and the malicious crowd cried during the execution, "He saved others; himself he cannot save", he asked God to forgive them for they did not know what they did. In fact, Jesus confirmed the truth of life so convincingly and came closer to God's perfection than no mortal had done before.

The formula of the relationship to God, which Christ gave and Tolstoy fully accepted, is the formula of love. *Not as I will, but as thou wilt*, where "thou" is the one whom we love – this is the disposition towards the other in love. The formula means that instead of being equal or inferior to the other, one should see the other as one's goal, should voluntarily put oneself in the service of the other and prepare to sacrifice oneself for the other's good and find it a pleasure and joy. In all forms of love, its specific feature and criterion is considered loyalty that goes as far as a sacrifice for the loved one. Such is a man's love for a woman: in order to prove that he loved truly, Don Quixote was ready to fight with lions. Such is the love for one's people and the motherland, for the sake of which Hector fought Achilles, knowing that he would die. Such as the love of God: in order to demonstrate it, Abraham was ready to sacrifice even more than himself – his son.

The point of tension in love is finding what the other's good is, rather than finding one's own good in doing good to the other. A reflective person always faces the question whether the will, which we are going to submit ourselves to, is, indeed, a good will. Someone said that it is impossible to love one's country with one's eyes shut. But how to love it with one's eyes open? Who can talk on behalf of the motherland, and how are we to find out what is good for it and what is evil? More problems and doubts arise when the matter is about the love for those people who are closest. What can be more sincere than parental love? But who has not met parents for whom "love" is a sophisticated way of imposing their own will on their children or, the opposite, a way to indulge children's laziness and caprices? Love is not guaranteed from degrading into perverted forms. Strictly speaking, there is only one will to which one can give oneself without becoming a victim of illusion, mistake or deception – it is God's will. It is good by definition because it is the good source of life. Only by following it, does one person realise what is one's good. Loyalty to God is a pure case of love. And this loyalty gave love a formula: "Not as I will, but as thou wilt".

Besides being the only will to which we can give ourselves

entirely, God's will is the only one of which we know nothing and cannot in principle know anything. God is an absolute, and any form of God's representation, any statement that pretends to express God's will is false. Hence, in the formula of the relationship to God, which is also the formula of love and a norm of responsible meaningful behaviour, only its first part is revealed: "Not as I will". People do not have any other opportunity to show their love for God except by refusing to live and act as if they themselves were gods, refusing to impose their own will on others in those areas which are the competence of God – in the issues of life and death, and of good and evil. Tolstoy put his newly acquired faith in a very short phrase: "I believe in the doctrine of Christ". And he added: "Christ pointed in his commandments to the temptations, with which I destroy my own good" (XV, 174, 175).

The main lesson, which Tolstoy received from Christ, was the prohibition to fight evil by using violence against people. According to Tolstoy, to use violence is "to do to the other what he does not want" (28, 190-191). The formula of violence is, "Not as thou wilt, but as I will". It is not hard to see that it is the opposite to the formula of love. It means that by rejecting violence and giving up the right to judge those people who are close, one follows God's will and shows love for God in the only form given. Understood as the limitation of self-will, as in the first half of the formula, "Not as I will", love is non-violence.

Non-violence, or, in Tolstoy's own words, non-resistance to evil by violence, is the conclusion of Tolstoy's teaching. In this conclusion, he gives concrete expression to the basic statement of his faith, that life is good. Thus he expresses in concrete terms that faith ends up in very definite and easily identifiable deeds and that it directly becomes morality. The ban on violence outlines the area of good behaviour. To go from the religious teaching about the meaning of life, to faith and from faith, to the moral virtue of non-violence – this is the logic of Tolstoy's thought, which is the logic of conscious human life and activity.

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## **THE COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH IN VALUES AND PHILOSOPHY**

### **PURPOSE**

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Studies in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

In sum, our times present both the need and the opportunity for deeper and ever more progressive understanding of the person and of the foundations of social life. The development of such understanding is the goal of the RVP.

### **PROJECTS**

A set of related research efforts is currently in process:

1. *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change: Philosophical Foundations for Social Life*. Focused, mutually coordinated research teams in university centers prepare volumes as part of an integrated philosophic search for self-understanding differentiated by culture and civilization. These evolve more adequate understandings of the person in society and look to the cultural heritage of each for the resources to respond to the challenges of its own specific contemporary transformation.

2. *Seminars on Culture and Contemporary Issues.* This series of 10 week crosscultural and interdisciplinary seminars is coordinated by the RVP in Washington.

3. *Joint-Colloquia* with Institutes of Philosophy of the National Academies of Science, university philosophy departments, and societies. Underway since 1976 in Eastern Europe and, since 1987, in China, these concern the person in contemporary society.

4. *Foundations of Moral Education and Character Development.* A study in values and education which unites philosophers, psychologists, social scientists and scholars in education in the elaboration of ways of enriching the moral content of education and character development. This work has been underway since 1980.

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