

Notes and discussions

ARE ALL INDIAN PHILOSOPHERS INDIAN PHILOSOPHERS ?

Daya Krishna has been hounding me for many years now about what Indian philosophy is. He has kindly shared with me his new piece,¹ and invited my response, which I am happy to give. Basically, it is simple. Daya charges me with irresponsibility (not 'academically proper', 'prejudicial', he avers)² for predicating the use of the term 'Indian philosophy' in the *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy* on an interpretation which he thinks mistaken though standard. My response is simply that the term 'Indian philosophy' is ambiguous as between philosophy done in India or by Indians and philosophy as *darśana*, i.e. undertaken in the service of liberation from *karma* and *samsāra*. It is the latter meaning that is standardly assumed by writers of textbooks, histories and other writings devoted to the classical *darśanas* of India, as Daya himself points out. He says that this reading 'is treated as axiomatic by almost all who write on the subject.'³ Since that is so, I submit it can hardly be irresponsible for a project (the *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy*) which attempts to summarize the philosophy in the *darśana* literature to understand 'Indian philosophy' that way. Quite the reverse. To do otherwise would be irresponsible. It would be as if someone writing a history of western philosophy deliberately left St Thomas, St Augustine and other religious philosophers out of his history because he deemed that philosophy should not be in the service of religious goals.

Daya, however, argues that since 'philosophy' means or ought to mean conceptual analysis, 'Indian philosophy' should mean conceptual analysis carried on by Indians. If one were then to write a history of Indian philosophy in that sense, or an encyclopaedic treatment of it, one would not confine oneself to the *darśana* literature alone, but would presumably summarize conceptual analysis wherever they occur—in art, law, politics, astronomy, geometry, and the several other disciplines which were practised in India's distant past, with myriad additions as comes closer to the present. This would be a salutary project, one I hope someone essays. It is not the project essayed in the *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*. Just as a history or encyclopaedia of western philosophy cannot responsibly exclude figures like St Thomas and St Augustine, who are paradigm cases of western philosophers, so a history of encyclopaedia of Indian philosophy cannot responsibly exclude Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and their kind, for they are also paradigm cases of Indian philosophers.

Perhaps, however, Daya would agree to include both St Thomas and

Śaṅkara, say, since both of them engage in conceptual analysis, albeit in the service (at least as they themselves understood it) of goals such as salvation or liberation. 'But', Daya might say consistently with what he has written, 'I shall only admit those persons insofar as they have proposed conceptual analyses.' However, that would be to presume a very doubtful distinction. I doubt that one can disengage a philosopher's conceptual analyses from the purposes in his inquiry which make those analyses cogent.

Daya's own view on this point is, or was, different from mine. In his book *The Nature of Philosophy*,⁴ published thirty years ago now, Daya argues at length that philosophy is not, as science is, about the nature of reality, but rather concerns conceptual problems, indeed, conceptual confusions; and that its proper methodology is clarification, conceptual analysis. Philosophy, he claims, is not about actual or even possible states of affairs, is not about any propositions that might be verified. Philosophical problems are not formal or logical in the way that mathematical problems are, either. Philosophical propositions are for Daya a different kind of proposition from either empirical or logical truths or falsities.

Now this is a view about the nature of philosophy which has gained wide acceptance in the wake of various persuasive spokespersons of it. I do not wish to be misunderstood as supposing that all propositions must be either empirical or logical. But I must confess I do not follow Daya's insistence on the extreme difference between the occasions for conceptual analysis and the occasions for empirical or logical inquiry. While I am sympathetic with the view that inquiry regularly involves conceptual clarification of conceptual problems, it seems to me that those problems arise in the course of inquiries involving all three kinds of elements: empirical and logical as well as conceptual. The philosophical state of analysis is that stage in any inquiry at which the most searching questions are asked, and clarification of concepts address those most searching questions. The clarification of concepts which is philosophical and not dilatory is that which arises in the course of trying to answer problems that have relevance to inquiries undertaken by men with purposes in mind. These purposes are sometimes quite specific, in other cases vaguer and broader, and they intertwine in ways difficult to characterize easily. To identify a given problem or proposition as empirical rather than philosophical seems to me unrealistic given the nature of inquiry. To put it another way, the notion that philosophy is a different enterprise entirely from science or religion or any other kind of inquiry results from elevating a possible division of labour (between philosophers and scientists, say) to the status of ultimate disinvolvement with the human context in which an inquiry occurs. That philosophers make a specialty of conceptual analysis does not entail that conceptual analysis has nothing to do with anything else.

In short, I don't believe that conceptual analysis operates in the sort of vacuum Daya implies it does. Conceptual problems arise in the course of inquiries dictated by human needs, and conceptual analysis, along with empiri-

cal and logical ones, are ultimately criticized as being successful or unsuccessful through satisfying or failing to satisfy those needs. Indian philosophy should be thought of in the same way. Daya, I gather, believes that those who are said to practise it deceive themselves about what philosophy really is when they view it as developing as a moment in the inquiry arising in connection with the attempt to achieve liberation. I take it he would determine what is and what is not Indian philosophy by identifying conceptual analyses taking place in India. Leaving aside the earlier point that this procedure would, if it were feasible, leave out of 'Indian philosophy' the largest portion of what has historically been thought to be comprised within it, I would raise the question whether such a procedure is even feasible. It would involve distinguishing those conceptual analyses which are engaged in as a way of discovering the nature of reality, or which lead to achievement of values considered ultimate, from conceptual analyses engaged in for no purposes whatsoever, for their own sake as it were. But I see no way of making this distinction applicable in deciding whether, say, Nāgārjuna's clarification⁵ of the notion of illumination—surely one of the clearest analogues to western conceptual analysis one can find in the Indian literature—is 'pure' conceptual analysis or conceptual analysis employed in the service of a purpose. What is clear is that it is conceptual analysis employed for at least the purpose of refuting an opponent's argument; but that doesn't show that it is 'pure', since analyses are regularly used to refute opponent's arguments in the context of inquiry (e.g. serving other religious purposes).

Daya is a professional philosopher, a line of work with a tradition he thinks of as an honourable one. It is, he thinks, at least a western tradition. He would like to see it as being not just a western tradition but a universal one, so that Indian philosophy would be philosophy as practised in India, just as western philosophy is philosophy practised in the West. Potter comes along and points out that what Indian writers have themselves called 'Indian philosophy' doesn't exactly correspond to the tradition of western professional philosophy, since it is confined to those places—the *darśanas* that speak of *mokṣa* as their ultimate concern. Daya doesn't give a fig for *mokṣa*. He would like Indian philosophy not to be tied to *mokṣa*, and he is irritated that these *darśana*-wallahs have presumed to take over the mantle of philosophy which, he thinks, belongs to those who do the kinds of things he and other professional philosophers do. So, since he feels strongly that philosophy ought not to be confined to *mokṣa*-seeking inquiries, he argues that it isn't. Since it is aggravatingly the case that Potter is not alone in equating philosophy in India with inquiries connected with *mokṣa*-seeking, he insinuates that the equation he wishes weren't so only seems so because of a plot by religious types using persuasive rhetoric to feather their nest. He searches in the scholarly literature to find evidence of the truth that he feels must lie behind the window-dressing. For example, he finds scholars who think that the later defenders of *darśanas* may have conflated non-*mokṣa*-seekers like Gautama

and Kaṇāda with the tradition of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika by slipping appropriately *mokṣa*-oriented *sūtras* into their texts.⁶ He denies that Navya-Nyāya logicians had any concern for *mokṣa*. He denies that *mokṣa* is a *puruṣārtha* in the same sense as the other three, despite the India-wide understanding of four *puruṣārthas* of which *mokṣa* is the supreme one. He hints that the common understanding is rhetoric, 'the rhetoric of the *puruṣārthas*,'⁷ but that Potter and others shouldn't be taken in by it. He concentrates on these points and conveniently ignores the massive evidence that a very large portion of those texts, called philosophical by scholars, explain themselves as written in the *mokṣa*-seeking context he wishes didn't exist. In short, he manages to convince himself that philosophy in India has nothing particularly to do with *mokṣa*, led on by his belief that it shouldn't be so circumscribed since philosophy is pure conceptual analysis.

Now I agree with the specific points that Daya raises, with certain qualifications. I recognize the scholarly evidence concerning the possibility of multiple authorship of the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika *Sūtras*, though I think he should recognize that evidence is hardly conclusive of tampering. In any case, the *sūtras* are viewed in the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika *darśanas* as of a piece with those systems' *mokṣa*-seeking concerns. I agree that Navya-Nyāya logicians were primarily interested in epistemological issues and not primarily in *mokṣa*, although I believe it would be fairer to say that those logicians only occasionally thought and spoke of *mokṣa*—they did so sometimes, as witness the *Mukti-vāda* section of Gaṅgeśa's *Tattvacintāmaṇi*, for instance. I admit that *mokṣa* is a late-comer among the *puruṣārthas*; and that some of the literature, identified with certain *darśanas*, is not philosophical in the accepted (my) sense of the term, e.g. the *Mīmāṃsāsūtras* along with Śabara's *Bhāṣya* thereon, which hark back to an understanding of *Mīmāṃsā* as mere scriptural exegesis in a context where *dharma*, not *mokṣa*, reigns supreme as a human goal. Later on, however, *Mīmāṃsā* in the hands of the Bhāṭṭas and Prābhākaras becomes *darśana* too.

But admitting agreement with Daya on these points to this extent does not, I'm afraid, change the obvious fact that classical Indian philosophy, as the literature so described is understood by those who study it today, was addressed to *mokṣa*. It's not a question of what we'd like the case to be. Daya thinks I am a part of, or at least an unwitting dupe of, a conspiracy of religious types out to spiritualize what is not really spiritual at all. I have no interest in interpreting anybody or anything as spiritual, either in Daya's sense (which seems to me what we more normally call 'idealist', one who denies the mind-independent reality of matter) or in the more common sense of one who recognizes supernatural forces beyond our understanding. There are spiritual *darśanas*—in both senses, but there are also *darśanas* which are not spiritual in either sense, e.g. Ābhidharma schools of Buddhism, Jains, Īśvarakṛṣṇa's Sāṃkhya. It is Daya who identifies *darśanas* with spirituality. I don't.

Indeed, where Daya thinks 'my' account has trouble with Nyāya, Vai-

śeṣika and Pūrvamīmāṃsā, my own view is that the prevailing account of Indian philosophy, which is perforce mine, has trouble with those who deny *mokṣa* altogether, e.g. Cārvākas, and those who view *mokṣa* as only a penultimate goal, e.g. Vedāntic thinkers of Śrīvaiṣṇava persuasion who think of service to God as the ultimate goal to which attainment of *mokṣa* is only a possible, not even a necessary step. Both Cārvāka and later Viśiṣṭādvaita are often spoken of as *darśanas* despite these discrepancies. But both Cārvākas and Śrīvaiṣṇavas can be accommodated, I believe, within the accepted view of Indian philosophy (my view, the one Daya decries) through understanding the Cārvākas as addressing themselves to the most searching questions about *mokṣa* and giving ultimately negative answers, and understanding the Śrīvaiṣṇavas by seeing the philosophical portion of their system (the part pertaining to *mokṣa*, the *darśana*) as a part within a larger whole which is itself a devotional and not a philosophical system. The devotional movement in the past few centuries creates a serious tension between philosophy and (devotional) religion; and it is a remarkable legacy of the power of traditionalism in India that devotional sects continue to speak of themselves as committed to a *darśana*, given the force of that tension.

The term 'Indian philosophy' as *darśana* becomes inapplicable, however, when addressed to inquiries, such as are standard nowadays in India, in which the entire world view of *karma*, *saṃsāra* and *mokṣa* is clearly not in point. While such inquiries may well be philosophical and may be carried on by Indians, they do not constitute Indian philosophy as that subject has been understood in the literature on Indian philosophy. But then, 'American philosophy' meaning pragmatism, transcendentalism and other peculiarly American contributions is a different use from 'American philosophy' meaning anything philosophical carried out by an American. I am an American philosopher, but probably not an American philosopher! Can't Daya be happy being an Indian philosopher who is not an Indian philosopher?

NOTES

1. Daya Krishna, 'Indian Philosophy and *Mokṣa*: Revisiting an Old Controversy', *JICPR*, vol. ii, no. 1, 1984, pp. 49-65.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Daya Krishna, 'Three Conceptions of Indian Philosophy', *Philosophy East and West*, 15, 1965, p. 37.
4. Daya Krishna, *The Nature of Philosophy*, Prachi Prakasan, Delhi, 1955.
5. Nāgārjuna, *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, verses 33-39. Nāgārjuna argues that 'to illuminate' means to cause something to become lit up, and that since that is so, the opponent's notion that fire lights itself up along with the objects in the vicinity is indefensible, since it would, e.g. imply that fire was dark before it became lit up.
6. Daya Krishna, 'Indian Philosophy and *Mokṣa*', *op. cit.*
7. *Ibid.*