

Philosophical Inquiries: East and West

Philosophical inquiry can begin from anywhere. It begins with man's awareness of himself and his environments. Philosophical inquiries in the East as well as in the west, notwithstanding their similarities and differences, success and failure, are human attempts at understanding life and its experiences.

Either the subject or the object is made the content of philosophical inquiry which however aims at arriving at the finality that seems to explain both the subjective and the objective realities. The Upanisads question the reality of our apparent self-identity. The main thrust in the Upanisads, is the subjective world. The realists like the Nyaya-Vaisesikas, Sankyas etc shift their thrust to the objective, even though philosophical inquiry is never value-neutral to them. The phenomenologists like the Buddhists are not satisfied with the functional reality of either the subject or the object; so they subject the mechanism of human knowledge to ruthless criticism, which makes them arrive at their nihilistic and idealistic conclusions. Advaita Vedanta, on the other hand, shares the Buddhist criticism of the realistic world view, but attempts at consistently explaining the appearance of the world by pointing to a higher ontological reality, Brahman, ensuring thus the line of philosophical inquiry initiated by the Upanisads.

In the western thought, beginning with Greeks to the recent trends of philosophy, the modes of inquiry are more or less the same. The modern age in western philosophy begins with the Cartesian inquiry for a self-certain truth 'I think therefore I am'. But the old skepticism peeps into it very soon, and with Kant, philosophy again questions its metaphysical euphoria by pointing to its limitations. The logical positivists try to demolish even the very foundation of that which they profess.

Thus, philosophical inquiries are based on and are sustained by speculations, reasoning, belief systems, value systems, and, of course the peculiar idiosyncrasies of the person who makes the inquiry. We cannot help resist philosophers from conceiving even such a fundamental problem as what reality is so differently. Some like the Naiyayikas may conceive reality in a conceptualistic-realistic manner; others like the Buddhists may conceive it in a functional manner, whereas the Advaitins take it to mean non sublatibility in three times. They actually mean three different things and their systems of philosophy emanate from their world views which are never philosophically determined but are intuitively preconceived. The fundamental interdependence between validity of knowledge and the reality of its object is philosophically insoluble either in the East or in the West.

The value of philosophical inquiries does not lie on finding out any final truth, since the concept of truth and reality in different systems is quite dissimilar. However, they can solve the confusions in the logical plane and beyond that, they can awaken the questioner to the possibility of a higher state of reality that is as much beyond empirical knowledge as of discursive understanding. Thereupon the truth of Advaita shines, as remarked by Gaudapada: When the Jiva awakes from his beginning-less inexplicable sleep of self forgetfulness, he comes to realize his true non-dual nature, free from dream and slumber.

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