

A CRITIQUE OF REASON

The meaning or sense of the word 'reason' has historically varied with its uses. In the speculative tradition, reason has been the organ of knowledge, giving us, so to say, some sort of an insight into the nature of realities themselves. Reason has been compared and contrasted with sense—experience which, according to this tradition, can only give *opinion* or *belief* but not knowledge, cannot deliver things as they are, but only distortions or imperfect imitations of them. Realities are not 'given' to sense—they are 'given' to thought or reason which works as some sort of a non-sensuous intuition—an autonomous faculty, native to the rational self.

In the critical tradition, reason loses its autonomy in the theoretical sphere, and the possibility of a non-sensuous intuition is categorically denied. Speculative reason becomes reduced to some logical function of interpretations, and these, again, become limited to the 'given' of sensibility, without which latter, the former remains empty and inoperative. Reason here becomes a *complementary faculty* of knowledge having a distinctive nature of its own, but incapable of working by itself, without there being presentations of a sense-manifold through some other 'stem' of experience, such as, 'sensibility'. This dependence of theoretic reason as a logical faculty of interpretation on an alien¹ faculty of 'given-ness' is denied in the Hegelian tradition, and the speculative tradition is restored in all its aggressive vehemence, with the distinction between the faculty of 'given-ness' and the faculty of 'construction' being completely denied. Reason is admitted not only as knowledge of Reality, but also as identical with it nay, as Reality itself.

In the empiricistic tradition, the separate origin of reason or understanding as a faculty of judgmental construction is denied, and reason is looked upon as a later out-growth from given sense-experience. This development of reason or understanding from sense-experience is interpreted by some as psychological, by others as physiological or behaviouristic, but on either view, its formulations or constructions are made subject to the test in terms of

given experiences for their sufficiency or validity. In the contemporary analytic and linguistic tradition—which is equally empirical, the *meaning* or *sense* of whatever is said in language will have to be ascertained in terms of or by means of translatability or analysability into basic empirical structures—atomic propositions or protocol sentences.

The Indian tradition, with the solitary exception of Cārvāka materialism, seems not interested in the question as to the relative priority, independence, and the so called autonomy of the different contributory factors of knowledge such as, the sense, the mind, the intellect, and so on. With most of the Indian schools, the senses, the mind and the *buddhi*—all these jointly, suffice to give knowledge or experience. With the Sāṃkhya and the Advaita Vedānta, however, all these may only figure as components of the 'given', but without illumination by a transcendent principle of self-luminosity, there can be no experience or knowledge, and this principle is *cit* or pure consciousness, a *non-natural* principle. So, even reason or *buddhi* requires to be illuminated so that it can, as a synthetic principle, reveal the 'given' in borrowed and reflected light. It is striking that in the statement of the various sources of knowledge, called *pramāṇa*, reason by itself, or working unaided, has no place. Then, again, and here I want to hazard an opinion of my own, the distinction between *svārtha* and *parārtha*, traditionally drawn between inference as 'given' knowledge, and inference as a process of demonstration, can be extended to all other fields including presentative experience of the perceptual type also², and we can review all our knowledge in two ways—as 'given truths' and as 'demonstrated truths'. In the former kind, all the cognitive processes work more or less as *saṃskāras*, even the so called premises of mediate knowledge functioning as, unconscious tendencies, and delivering up a 'thought-out' content as a 'given' content. In the latter, that is, *parārtha* variety, even the credentials of my presentative perceptual experience can be reasoned out to you to win your conviction. As far as the mediate cognitions are concerned, it is in this *parārtha* shape that the various *avayavas*, are meticulously brought out and displayed for the purpose of demonstration, while in the *svārtha* type, they remain implicit and function as tendencies like the missing members of an

enthymeme. I bring out this point to show that reason functions in two roles here—as a constitutive, though implicit factor, of any knowledge as ‘given’ knowledge, and as an explicit and yet an equally component part of ‘demonstrative’ truths—which may or may not be a ‘given’ knowledge to one before whom the demonstration is laid out, everything depending on the arousal of *personal* conviction in him³. But while presenting reason or *buddhi* in its constitutive role, although implicit, in any ‘given’ knowledge, I must make a distinction in order to be faithful to the Indian tradition. The principal systems make a distinction between *nirvikalpaka* (indeterminate) and *savikalpaka* (determinate) knowledge or *pratyakṣa*. If we leave aside the Buddhistic and the Advaita accounts, knowledge proper⁴ seems to arise only at the determinate stage in which there is explication and elaboration of the presented materials of the indeterminate stage, and in this, *buddhi* functions in collaboration with other faculties or factors, and not by itself alone, in order to be able to deliver up a stage of ‘given’ knowledge. In the Buddhistic account, however, *buddhi* is looked down upon as a faculty of distortion, knowledge proper being limited to the *nirvikalpaka*, the apprehension of the *svalakṣaṇas* (self-defined particulars). In the Vedānta account, if *nirvikalpaka* is to mean the experience of the ineffable in the realisation of absolute identity of Ātman and Brahman, then, not only reason, but also the senses must be disarmed and disengaged in that knowledge. If, again, the *nirvikalpaka* is taken to mean knowledge of the *referential one-ness*⁵ of two contents shorn of their predicative qualities as seems to be the view of the Paribhāṣā in respect of identity-judgments, such as ‘That thou art’. ‘That one is *this* Devadatta’, then although, sense may figure as an external occasion⁶ for it, without any relevance in the emergence of the feeling of identity, *buddhi* with its whole armoury of concepts and categories must be shelved aside as a preliminary condition of such knowledge. Thus, in the Indian tradition, the function of *buddhi* and its categories seems mainly to be indicated in determinate knowledge, but there also *buddhi* cannot work by itself alone, but always in collaboration with other faculties in order to be a constitutive or contributory factor of knowledge. The conclusion to which I am led, therefore, is that, in the Indian tradition, reason is only *one factor among others* in knowledge as

a 'given' experience of the individual himself, that is, in *svārthānubhava* where it is latent, and that even in *parārtha anubhava*, in which any knowledge of a person's own experience can be demonstrated to convince another, reason cannot work by itself but requires premises which it itself cannot manipulate, and this is its fundamental limitation as far as knowledge or *prāmā* goes. No purely formal knowledge seems to have been admitted in the Indian tradition. All 'reasoned' truths or truths of demonstration are tied up with and based upon 'given' knowledge and truths.

But we not only have 'given' knowledge, we not only attempt demonstration of it in order to convince some others and try successfully or unsuccessfully to make our knowledge also theirs, but we also seem to know a good deal about our knowledge, of its different forms and possible conditions. In other words, we seem to be capable of thinking about the *nature* of our knowledge as also about the *nature* of the known. We claim to have not *one*, but a whole multitude of alternative theories of knowledge as also alternative theories regarding the nature of the given order. So a question may be asked: *how does this become possible?* It may also be asked: Can our speculations about the nature of knowledge about the nature of truth as also our speculations about the nature of the given order, called reality, *be admitted as knowledge in some sense?* To my mind, the most significant role or function of reason is connected with these questions. Neither epistemology, nor logic, nor philosophy-nor any enquiry or theory or postutational system, can claim to be any 'given' knowledge. Knowledge is 'given' inspite of one's own self. it also becomes 'given' only *in one way*, and if corrected, it ceases to be knowledge, and is replaced by another which, again, is 'given' in *one way only*. Knowledge does not seem to support alternation. Yet if epistemology, philosophy, logic or linguistics which admit of alternative formulations, are not allowed some status somewhere in the cognitive sphere, and if the conditions under which such enquiries can or are likely to originate cannot be explained, then it seems to me that the situation becomes absurd.

Trying to solve this difficulty, paradox or puzzle, I am led to *the concept of reflection*, and the proper function of reason seems to be connected with *reflection*. We not only have our 'given'

knowledge or 'given' experience, but we seems also to be capable of reflecting upon it, capable of *making it out* as *this* or *that*. Similarly, we not only have some content given to us in knowledge but we also *make it out* as *such and such*. *What knowledge is as given*, and *what it is made out to be* are distinct and different, although the latter stage seems to follow upon the former, nay, it seems to rise up or emerge from the former. This latter stage is reflection, and it develops from the 'given' knowledge due to the general *reflexivity* of all knowledges as 'given' experiences. The 'given' knowledge, to my mind, is the non-relational one-ness of what *subsequently* comes to be distinguished into act and content. Given knowledge does not bring the two together—it *starts* with their non-relational one-ness, and thereafter, in a reflexive taking of itself as an act, recoils upon its previous self as a fact or content in relation to itself. In this way, the given experience becomes bifurcated into an act and a fact. Reason or *buddhi*, which formed an original component of the 'given' knowledge, seems to generate this reflexive movement in the given knowledge, seems to free itself from its original state of envelopment in the given. Thus, reason issues forth as reflective thought or simply, as reflection. If we leave aside its original enveloped state in which reason was one of the components of the given or a contributory factor in the given experience, and fix upon its role as reflection, we can distinguish *three phases* of its activity or function. In the first phase, reason, freed from its original state of envelopment, contemplates its own nature and role in relation to the given as constitutive of it or contributory to it. This reflection of reason *on its own nature and function in given knowledge* is the ground of all epistemological theories. In the second phase, reason, having arrived at some decisions about itself and its conceptual patterns in the different fields of 'given' knowledge, immediate or mediate, next focusses itself as a logical apparatus of knowledge upon the *given order*, trying to articulate it and render it intelligible in terms of its categorial structure, and this gives philosophies of the given order or metaphysics. And every metaphysics has its root in some appropriate epistemology. In the third phase, reason as a critique of itself, and also as a critique of the given order of reality, reflects itself as an autonomous principle, not limited to *this* or *that*

sphere. It takes, so to say, an 'over-view' of itself as an operative principle of the world of revealed and self-conscious knowledge, and this kind of reflection is an aesthetic enjoyment.

The next question is: Can this reflection on the given knowledge-situation which gives rise to the various epistemological theories, be regarded as a knowledge just as given knowledge is called knowledge? If knowledge, why not uniform instead of being multiform? Is the reflective determination of the given order by self-conscious reason in terms of its various categories which goes by the name of the philosophy of the world also knowledge? If so, why alternative philosophies? Reason in the sphere of reflection is multi-dimensional, or as Śāṅkara observes, *puruṣamaṭivaisvyar pyṛt*. Again, there seems to be no regulator no controlling agency in reflective thought or enquiry, nothing to check it from running riot-*utprekṣāyāḥ nirankuṣatva*. Reason liberated from its limitation to a 'given' experience or knowledge reason as reflection seems always to be undecided in its aim and objective. Can it claim to be knowledge of any form in this sphere where *reason works as reason*, and *not* as one of the contributory factors of 'given' knowledge?

There are several things which can be said with respect to this situation. What works as a deciding factor in controversies is either a given *experience*, that is, a given knowledge, or an act of the will. So it can be said that reason left to itself *as reflection*, is, *ex-hypothesi*, undecided. It requires to be guided or controlled either by a 'new kind of knowledge' being given to it, or by an act of will and personal choice. Secondly, it can also be said that when reason *as reflection* reviews its role in the knowledge-situation, or by means of its conscious determination of itself seeks, to take a view of or measure upto reality, and gives rise to a philosophy, it is not entirely free, since it reviews its own participation along with the participation of the mind and the senses in given knowledge, and these latter, particularly the mind with its latent tendencies, define its attitude and compel it to work under some *samskāra* or *presuppositions*, and that this factor lies at the back of the so-called multiformity of reason, at the back of diverse philosophies of knowledge and philosophies of the knowable. Although I do not completely cut myself off from any of these alternative suggestions regarding the solution of the riddle, I would like to

subscribe to a still somewhat different line of treatment. To my mind, each theory, epistemological or metaphysical, can be looked at from three angles of vision. First, from the stand-point of the investigator himself, secondly, from the angle of a disinterested spectator not actively engaged in the thinking-game, and lastly, from the side of reason itself as taking an 'over-view' of the situation. From the angle of the investigator himself, it can be said that *his reason* or *reason in him*, is not at all undecided, he is serious about his theory, and not only claims truth for it, but makes an *absolute* claim. Reason in him corrects and renovates itself at every step, and following the line of self-consistency, presses on towards a solution, and to him, what he aims at is *knowledge* and *truth*. To a spectator, the efforts of the rival theorists appear as mere exercises in language, in making alternative linguistic recommendations in the description of the very *same* phenomenon already defined *a priori*. To him, however, the investigators themselves may say that *they have agreed upon nothing*, that *nothing has been settled or defined a priori*, that they are looking for solutions from their individual angles, and are not dealing in alternative languages at all. To reason again, taking a reflective view of itself in the diverse spheres of its activities, the whole panorama may appear as the field for the sportive enjoyment of its autonomy in terms of infinite modes of its operation which is not limited to any. My stand is the stand of the investigator, since I am myself actively engaged in determining the nature and function of reason, in framing an epistemological as also a philosophical theory, if I am allowed to say so. My reflection, as I see it, is *not* knowledge, since it is not a 'given' knowledge, but it is nevertheless a *claim to knowledge*, a *claim to truth* which is insistent and imperative, but yet a knowledge-claim or truth-claim, and not an accomplished knowledge or truth in which my mind and the reflective faculty could be at rest; but I am still restless and will be so until a 'new experience' helps me to find a decision. Reason is *to begin with* experience and *to end with* it.

