

TWO INDIAN APPROACHES TO THE SUBJECT-PREDICATE DISTINCTION

The topic of categories has occupied a central place in both Western and Indian Philosophy. That this is really so and not an exaggerated impression of common philosophical concern created by the fact that the same term is used to designate doctrines which, at least in the Western context, do not always have much more than the nomenclature in common is an objection not without force. After all, what is the common reference of "category" as it is used by, say, Aristotle and Kant, and by Ryle in our time? Nevertheless this difficulty can be overcome by characterising the common topic so as to make it both more specific and less far-ranging, its centrality being retained by its still remaining a point of division in philosophy as fundamental as any other that might be named. Thus even a cursory reading of Aristotle's *Categories* ought to convince a student of Indian Philosophy that the Stagira's preoccupation with substance has a strong parallel in the Nyāya and Jaina doctrines of substance; their respective lists of categories have marked resemblances. Similarly the protracted dispute between the champions of substance like the Nyāya and Jaina philosophers on one side and the Buddhists on the other has unmistakeable parallels in Western philosophy in the debates between nominalists and realists in medieval philosophy and in 20th century philosophy, and those between empiricists and rationalists in the "Classical" period of modern philosophy.

Though this parallel is in my opinion extremely important, I do not wish to suggest that we should make a comparative study of Indian and Western Philosophies from this point of view. We have had enough of comparative studies for a long time to come, and I have no wish to make another addition to this list. For the present at least it will pay to be unhistorical and to worry in the main about problems only, to study philosophical problems in their Indian setting as obsessively as we do when we are doing philosophy and not concerning ourselves with obscure issues of somewhat antiquarian interest which tend to become charged with excessive emotion for reasons which are largely extra-philosophical.

The connexion between the subject predicate distinction and the categories may of course be seen in a variety of ways. I shall

begin at any rate with the form in which it comes down to us in Western philosophy from Aristotle and through the scholastics. In the *Categories* Aristotle assigns to first substance the primary place in his list of ten categories. This primacy consists in primary substance being characterizable in ways unique to it. He defines first substance as that which is neither present in a subject nor predicable of a subject. There are difficulties connected with the first part of this definition; but the second part of the definition is intended to provide an adequate criterion in itself. Even among philosophers who have not wanted to uphold substance there are many who argue that there are individuals which cannot occupy the predicate place without a radical change of sense.¹ Thus there is a well-established tradition in Western Philosophy which by linking together the subject predicate distinction and the particular universal distinction marks a fundamental difference which is both logical as well as ontological. Of course there have always been philosophers who have challenged or at least departed fundamentally from this approach. Thus Hobbes who held that a proposition was a concatenation of names in an extreme example of the opposite approach. This issue is too fundamental for one to talk about even in a related context without making commitments whose soundness will not appear unquestionable to others involved therein. I hope I shall be able to develop in this paper a fruitful theme without an undue measure of such commitments.

In modern philosophy the criterion of substance which has been most prominent has been that of independent existence. This does not receive explicit acknowledgement from Aristotle except in the dark saying, in the *Categories* and repeated elsewhere, that if substance did not exist nothing would exist. In fact, independent existence is for him a consequence of substantiality but is not a sufficient condition of it; thus a heap of stones has independent existence but is hardly a substance (what gives a substance independent existence is a union of form and matter; now a heap of stones, or an area in space is merely homogeneous and hardly articulated into a form.) The rationalists seem to have employed independent existence as the primary test of substance (though it has been claimed that this might not be true for Descartes).

Now it is obvious that this second criterion is not as precise as the first, for even if we can give "independent existence" a

workable application, there will be plenty of cases where it will be disputable whether or not something qualifies under the requirements which it is supposed to meet. But there is a much greater difficulty. Any worthwhile attempt to define substance must throw light on the nature of particulars, but the definition in term of independent existence puts particulars in very strange company without providing any means of making any interesting distinctions among them. (This shows itself in even time and space being included among substances in both Nyāya and Jaina logic.) Now someone might argue that this should not matter, for the aim of using independent existence is to pick out what predicates or attributes are or may be predicated of. But this won't do, for there is not much we can say of space and time; in fact even what is sayable finds application only *via* reference to other things (intervals of time or areas of space are quantitatively large only in terms of criteria which we impose on them). And when we say that something occurs at time t_1 , or in space p_1 , we are not predicating anything of t_1 or p_1 . To give the locus (to use a term Ingalls uses to mark certain Navyanyāya ideas) of something is, if anything to make a spatial predication of that thing.

So to offer independent existence as the test of individuality defeats its own ultimate purpose, for it cannot place the notion of attribution or saying something of a subject on any solid foundation. No wonder then that the notion of substance has been under heavy fire in modern philosophy, for what has independent existence need not be a substance. If we translate Aristotle's main problem into the terms of existence, then for him the main problem was not what has independent existence, nor even what kinds of things must exist if anything is to exist at all, but " what is the primary sense of existence " ? Aristotle answers the last question in two ways. The more successful, and complete, answer Aristotle gives it is in terms of his theory of form and matter; the other answer is in terms of a theory of predication which is not only incomplete but is also full of obscurity even where his recorded reflections on it are available to us.

Among Aristotle's failures in the latter regard has been listed² the penultimate in gravity—namely, that he went over to the two-term view of a proposition, which was surpassed only by Hobbes' view of the proposition as coupling of names. Whether or not

Geach is right in this conclusion about a philosopher whom he on the whole is very much in sympathy with is I think a matter for debate, but he is not dramatising when he refers to a mistake of this magnitude on the part of the most influential philosopher of the Western and Islamic worlds as a disaster comparable only to the Fall.

I want now to state categorically that I do not hold that the problem of substance, and more generally that of particulars, can be viewed mainly in these terms only. But it does seem to me that in Western philosophy even philosophers who are opposed to substance as a basic category see particularity as a kind of a symmetry in predication or in judgements, or as in recent philosophy in propositions. No doubt there are radical nominalists like Ramsay who put subject and predicate categorically on the same footing. But even for them facts, and so propositions, are autonomous. This no doubt amounts to a dark saying, whose purport I must now proceed to explain. And I shall do this by listing some of the different possibilities that are to be found in Indian philosophy.

If we consider the three main schools of logic in Indian philosophy—the Nyāya, the Buddhist and the Jaina—we find, at first sight at least, that though substance is an issue of primary importance to each of them, the topic of the proposition or judgement plays hardly a part at least in the first two of them. Subject and predicate are terms which in these two schools figure primarily as subject-term and predicate-term, i.e., as the terms of premises that can occur in a process of inference.³ There are two fairly straight forward points that may be noticed about treating subject and predicate as subject-term and predicate-term respectively. A premise is not something that is believed to be true or false, for in that respect it is indistinguishable from a proposition, but something from the assertion or admission of which some other proposition follows. That is a sufficient condition for something to be employable as a premise is that it is intelligible, and it does not have to represent even a possibility.

The second point that draws our attention is this in a premise though the subject-term may be singular by occurring in an inference the premise with such a term in fact functions as a universal. Thus in Barbara the minor premise "Socrates is a man" with the

singular term "Socrates" as subject is treated in the traditional "Aristotelian" doctrine of the syllogism as "All Socrates are men". This is correct because the validity of the syllogism depends on the subject-term being an instance of a universal of the right kind. So the reasoning is not about Socrates, except accidentally, but rather about any body who is like Socrates in the relevant respect. We might say that in the proposition "Socrates is a man", "a man" is only unimportantly predicated of Socrates because in figuring in the minor premise of a syllogism humanity belongs to no special individual except in so far as a general term is instantiated.

Let us now look at each of these closely, starting with the first. The former seems to be in the spirit of the Nyāya belief that everything that exists is knowable, for what is thinkable is presumably knowable in principle, and the thinkable is something wider in scope than the actual and the possible. Now it appears from the literature of Indian logic that inference is sharply distinguished from implication or the purely formal relations obtaining between propositions, and the former is viewed as an activity with its own purposes. But despite its purposiveness inference is still an activity and as such not any particular individual's prerogative. This means that however intensional Indian logic might be, it does not involve the impossible position of requiring in the inferential process itself a reference to the reasoner's own act of reasoning. We are now in a position to make a distinction between the *telos* of reasoning as an activity, or the *telos* of various kinds of reasoning and the reasoner's own end in reasoning in a certain manner. We assume that in the standard case an activity's own proper end and the performer's end must coincide but this assumption cannot be made in the present case. Why should I employ a form of reasoning, even if the activity does achieve a goal when successfully performed? Perhaps this question answers itself when the end of the reasoning is my good, and the question "Can I not desire my own good"? cannot be raised. But this could only be the case in the sphere of practical reasoning. We are thus forced to the conclusion that, for there to be a reasoner employing a form of reasoning there has to be concern on his part with particulars, for human purposes could only be expressed or realised by operations on particulars.

This means that we need a theory of reference as well as a theory of inference. But a theory of reference should not be confused with a theory of meaning. No doubt we are here operating in a very difficult and still largely uncharted area, but we are able to make certain valid points without a systematic study of the interrelatedness of these two topics. Thus while it is true that someone who says "A cat ran across the garden" will not have made a significant utterance unless he has satisfied certain referential conditions, nevertheless while the cat so referred to must be the cat he meant it will nevertheless not be the same cat included in the explication of the meaning of what was said on this occasion. But what about proper names, and uniquely referring expressions like, "the President of India"? Here again the conclusion is similar. We must not rush to embrace the position that because a proper name is not an unmeaning mark therefore this expression *means* the present holder of this office. It is only in a communicative situation or in an actual judgement or at least in entertaining thought expressible in a judgement that such a reference is at this juncture necessary. That the present President of India is Mr. N. Sanjiva Reddy does not belong to the meaning of any utterance which might include "the present President of India" as a constituent. In other words the principle that what might be a necessary condition of a successful employment of a form of speech need not belong to its meaning finds an illustration in this case.

Our second point is an analogous one—just as the particular which I refer to on a particular occasion when I use a referring expression is not to be included in an account of the meaning of the utterance which takes place on that occasion, but at best in what I then meant, the Socrates I refer to in the process of inference when using the stock example of a syllogism in Barbara can figure only in an account of what I then did, and not in the inferential process employed, where this particular individual has no place whatever.

Thus, the successful reference to a particular by the use of a referential expression does not imply that the inferential process in which a term of this nature is introduced must at some point contain a reference to this same particular, or in fact, some particular rather than another. In other words, that inference is not particular

referring is clearly not some kind of result achieved through some of kind procedure of selecting a suitable device or set of devices. But particulars can and have been kept out of discourse by employing a suitable mode of quantification (Quine) or, at least purportedly, by what Strawson calls "feature-placing" language. It is this latter which is of some interest to us, for it bears obvious resemblance to certain (allegedly?) Navya-Nyāya doctrines. Thus Ingalls says: "It is worth noting that Navya-Nyāya does not confuse, as Aristotle does, the predicates of members of a class with the predicate of the class itself. Aristotle would hold that in the statement:

(1) 'All men are mortal'

mortality is predicated of the class of all men, just as in

(2) 'Socrates is wise'

wisdom is predicated of Socrates.

But in Navya-Nyāya (2) would be represented by:

'Socrates is a locus of wisdom by inherence', whereas

(1) would be represented by: 'mortality pervades humanity', i.e., 'every locus of man-ness by H is a locus of death-ness by P'.

(pp. 75-76)

I shall leave aside the question whether Aristotle is guilty of the error in question (the charge itself is framed in an unsatisfactory manner) but it is not difficult to see that Ingalls makes a rather elementary mistake in describing the Navya-Nyāya position. As we have already seen, location does not necessarily mark predication; in locating something at a particular location we do not make a predication, though a contextual implication to this effect might be present (which is not of any relevance here). So the nature of the Navya-Nyāya distinction is not all clear from Ingalls' own remarks. Nor am I myself in a position to offer a better answer. But, since the Navya-Nyāya writers were preoccupied with *vyāpti* (pervasion) we could perhaps say that they were employing a notion which was neutral between the two kinds of language distinguished by Strawson.

We are now in a position to see that since what is said in respect of something is not necessarily, when so said, predicated of it we are faced with a whole host of problems in philosophical logic

of a most difficult nature. Aristotle was well aware of these problems, and there is plenty of evidence in his logical writings of how much he must have battled in grappling with them. But the results are not recorded in a satisfactory manner; in good part this is simply because very often he was far from being wholly successful in his efforts. Frege, in my opinion, was too good in his philosophical instincts not to have been aware of these problems, and in fact, this can be seen even from the volume of selected writings edited by Black and Geach. But the more formal of his interests seem as a rule to prevail in his work, so that not much help can be derived from him. Among contemporary writers, Grice clearly shows awareness of the need to investigate the notion of predication itself. I am surprised to find that a writer of the acumen of Geach (in *Reference and Generality*, for instance) is almost obstinate in refusing to see unsolved problems in this part of philosophical logic. He rightly hails Frege's discovery of the predicate calculus, but does not take note of the basic distinction which generates the bafflements. A proposition, he says, is divisible into two components, viz. subject and predicate; in this respect all propositions are alike. But, as Geach recognises, predicating is a propounding of a proposition (at least minimally of what may be believed to be true or false or placed in a certain relation to other propositions); this means that in a proposition not only are a subject and a predicate held together but also that something is predicated of the subject. Now the completeness belongs only to the subject and the predicate taken together but not to the subject and what is predicated of it. Thus "Socrates" and "is wise" are the two constituents of the proposition "Socrates is wise" but "wisdom" which is predicated of Socrates, does not complete this proposition as "is wise" does. There are different modes of predication in this sense (Aristotle's list of categories may be taken to be an attempt to classify these modes). The point I am trying to make is a valid one since the distinction between the substantive "predicate" and the verb "to predicate" is more than the distinction between a noun and its corresponding verb form.

I cannot of course hope to give a fully satisfactory or even an adequate account of this distinction. What I propose to do is to adopt the following course in the remaining part of the paper. I shall make a few further remarks very briefly with the purpose of

justifying the need to make the kind of distinction I have suggested, and then comment on the *Syād-vāda-manjari* (F.W. Thomas's translation : Motilal Banarsidass) in order to make a partial characterisation of what it is to predicate of a subject by trying to place this activity within its proper context.

As Geach points out⁴, while subject and predicate are linguistic items, so that the predicate is a linguistic item " attached to " another linguistic item namely the subject, but what that linguistic item stands for. Thus " is wise " is attached to " Socrates ", but is not predicated of the name " Socrates ", for it is Socrates who is wise and not his name. So it seems perfectly reasonable to assume that the activity of predicating must at least aim at attributing something of a subject that is taken to have reality. Furthermore, before there can be an act of predication there must be a subject already picked out, even if it is not the one intended. This means that what is already necessarily known in picking out a subject-term must place limits on the scope of what is predicatable of this subject-term; for predicating could not be an entirely pointless activity.

As against predicating we have what might be called " saying " or " thinking something " of a subject. We have already seen that what is said in respect of a term is not necessarily thereby predicated of it. But the notion I am now trying to explain, though analagous, is of the utmost generality; it is much more extensive in scope than the notion I want to contract it with. That saying or thinking extends so widely arises from there being a number of dimensions in which it can find scope. Thus I can be said to be not whatever is other than myself. There is so much that can become accidentally true of an individual; and there are no logical limits to what something with a distinct nature can be distinguished from. But these two descriptions do not designate an identical group. Only an unthinking dogmatism could lead someone to hold that all that can be said or thought in this way is to be described as one species or another of predication. Again that things take time to say or that our thought processes are time-bound provides another dimension in which what is said or thought can range almost without limit. Thus what I say admits not only of contradiction but even of incoherence in a way in which what is ascribed or attributed

cannot. The principal reason why this is so lies of course in predication not being itself in any way temporal.

Let us now take a look at Syād-vāda-manjari, the celebrated Jaina work in logic. Jainism is often described as relativist in approach, and more recently some would suggest that its logic is many-valued. I do not know whether these suggestions are based on sound reflection or whether they arise from a measure of thoughtlessness; in the absence of close study of works such as the above mentioned, we are in no position to assess such claims or even to give them any precise sense. I shall comment on just two crucial chapters in the *Manjari*, namely chapters 23 and 28, which are on the 'seven-nuances view' and the *nayas* respectively. Even these I cannot do justice to, for they call for the kind of study which chapters in, say Plato's *Republic* or Descartes's *Meditations* have received. I shall confine myself to a few of the broadest remarks. The two doctrines, of the seven-nuance view and of the *nayas* are said to be in harmony. I suggest that they are in fact so, and by virtue of offering a doctrine covering both what I have called "saying" and "predicating" in a marvellous sweep of comprehensiveness. The seven-nuances arises, in Hemacandra's words, from "distinction of expression", and the seven nuances are made up from affirmation, negation and unutterability. (In the following chapter *Mallisena* says that "non-existence, existence, and unutterability" are "the chief, and the remaining nuances are, as due to combination, simply included in these", p. 142). They are made up into their list of seven by the introduction of tense. This schematism is a fairly formal one, for the operations performed are affirmation and negation or combinations formed from these by employing temporal distinctions. Nevertheless the whole theory is firmly tied to reality by giving statements giving "the own-form" and "substance-meaning" primacy. Thus the two doctrines are ultimately complementary, despite their radically different orientations.

Now let us look at the chapter on the *nayas*. It is said that though the methods are infinite, the number seven has the same primary application here too. Thus: "And to this effect the ancients, 'As many as are the ways of statement, just so many are the Method-statements'. Nevertheless, the ancients by working

out a purport of seven- as all-embracing formulated only seven : As follows : Naigama (market place), the comprehensive (sam-graha), the conventional (vyavahāra), the straightforward (rjusutra), the verbal (śabda), the etymological (samābhirudha) and the ' just so ' (evāmbhūta). (p. 154).

Let us note the following :

- (a) The " all-embracing " purports are said to be seven. This implies that the possibility of other purposes is recognised, and that to a certain extent looseness in the formulation of the doctrine of methods is implied. We might also say that the actual seven included in the list are in need of scrutiny. Here clearly there is much scope for disagreement and dispute.
- (b) We must disabuse our minds of any simple opposition such as realism vs. nominalism or conventionalism. All the seven methods are descriptive of reality; they are all partially valid, which means that they are partially revelatory of truth. It is only where they are misapplied that we are liable to error. When correctly applied they attain their ends fully and are in themselves complete. To say that they are partial is in effect to say that they are what they are and not another thing.
- (c) A division is made between the first four and the rest. In the former category, each successful application gives us what is " ultimately real ". We may want to grade things that are ultimately real, but this is not to derogate in any way from their ultimate reality. The point of attaching *quodammodo* (in a way) in each of the seven cases lies in directing attention to the errors perpetuated by other schools. If there was no liability to such errors everything said in these modes would be taken to be what it is.
- (d) Though the other three methods are less important as sources of knowledge, they are no less essential in so far as we are the kind of knowers that we are⁵ (This is extrapolation on my part). For that things are called by the names they are given is important to us, even when it is not to what is called by the name it has received. Even here both the verbal and etymological methods are

not seen as in any way arbitrary. Though names are given by us they are not just somehow given. That Indra has the names he has is perfectly intelligible. (When we call a sickly and moronic looking child "kind of lion" the institution of naming is being abused. And thus even the etymological method retains a measure of sanity. Here we have therefore a very important notion. Naming not being altogether arbitrary, calling has a descriptive role. That something is called by a certain name marks not merely a historical fact of naming and the pragmatic one of human convenience, but also something in the field of ontology. So if we can speak of predicating even in the vestigial area of etymology the whole doctrine of the *nayas* can be viewed as a doctrine of predication.

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NOTES

1. The asymmetry between subject and predicate is also stressed by Plato, e.g. in the *Sophist*.
2. By Geach in his inaugural lecture.
3. See Appendix notes a and b.
4. *Reference and Generality*, pp 22-23.
5. I have some doubts about the "just so". It suggests the notion of form (which is pretty basic) and also that of context or occasion which can be minor