

A REJOINDER TO REGINTON RAJAPAKSA

Reginton Rajapaksa¹ contends that my article² fails to establish the instructiveness of Hume's arguments on the problem of identity of objects. In this brief note I shall establish that his contention is unwarranted.

It is a mistake to assume, as Rajapaksa does, a strict two-way entailment between the concepts of instructiveness and constructiveness. I take the term instructiveness in a non-specialised sense to mean the power of giving information, and of teaching lesson(s) and thus, in my view, the one does not entail the other. These concepts are, however, related, but not in the way Rajapaksa supposes them to be. This relation, it must be pointed out, is not one of necessity, but of contingency. It follows, therefore, that an instructive account of theory need not only be constructive but could also be destructive.

I have endeavoured to show that valuable lessons could be learnt from Hume's mistakes. This is amply borne out by the following passage quoted from an important article of H. H. Price.

'Of scepticism with regard to the senses' is a *total failure* (italics are mine) its depth, scope and disciplined complexity make it one of the most *instructive* (italics are mine) arguments in the modern philosophy.³

This passage is self-explanatory and reflects Price's considered opinion that the whole section is instructive inspite of its failure

to achieve its objective. Being convinced that it is possible to learn and profit from the errors of Hume, I am concerned merely with the lessons that could be learnt from Humean argument, I might also point out that many philosophers consider the mistake of Kant to be more significantly instructive than even the achievements of lesser philosophers.

Rajapaksa is critical of Hume for failing to provide a criterion for identity of objects. He says :

"If Hume's view is an instructive one, he should provide a criterion for identity of objects, which assumes the possibility of identifying an object existing through a period of time and as the same object although with changing characteristics." ⁴

This criticism is unwarranted, because it is based on Rajapaksa's erroneous view that Hume's theory is constructive.

Rajapaksa commits another error by treating instructiveness and destructiveness as two mutually exclusive concepts. He fails to see that a theory could be both instructive and destructive at the same time. I am convinced this to be the case with Hume's theory, and I had substantiated this claim in my paper. I reaffirm my position here, and merely offer the following as further support to my thesis.

His (Hume's) theory being *destructive* (italics are mine) he need not be committed to the 'Even theory of continuance' or any other theory for that matter. ⁵

This was with reference to Price's criticism that Hume's analysis of identity goes wrong from the very beginning since Hume recognises merely the monotonous and continuous series of sensuously qualified particulars without any qualitative difference ignoring the variegated series with qualitative difference.

I have pointed out explicitly that Hume's analysis of identity is destructive in that he insists no serial-identity statement can be strictly true.⁶ Though Rajapaksa agrees with this, he categorically rejects my thesis that the concept of instructiveness and destructiveness can go together, because of his dogmatic assertion that these concepts are logically incompatible.

In conclusion, I stand by my claim that Hume's theory is truly instructive not merely to the upholders of 'the doctrine of the traditional empiricist philosophers', but to all students of philosophy.

Department of Philosophy, S. C. DANIEL
North Eastern Hill University,
SHILLONG 793 014,
Meghalaya (India).

NOTES

1. See. Reginton Rajapaksa : "The Problem of Identity of Objects In Hume's Philosophy", *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. XV, No. 2, April, 1988.
2. See S. C. Daniel : "The Problem of Identity of Objects In Hume's Philosophy", *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. XII, No. 2, April, 1985
3. H. H. Price : "The Permanent Significance of Hume's Philosophy" *Philosophy*, pt. II vol: 15, 1940).
4. Reginton Rajapaksa, *Ibid*, p. 170.
5. S. C. Daniel, *Ibid*, p. 193;
6. *Ibid*, p. 195.

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