

## DISCUSSION

### Professor Devaraja on the Emergence of Facts

The Concept of fact seems to be involved directly or indirectly, in most of the philosophical things Devaraja maintains in his recent book *Freedom, Creativity and Value : Humanist View of Man and World*.<sup>1</sup>

Devaraja is not a reasoning or arguing type of thinker, i.e. not one who considers a philosophical thesis worth maintaining if and only if it is supported by a clearly stated or stateable argument or reasoning.

He seems to be, on the other hand, a synoptic or holistic thinker. It is extremely difficult to locate or state his reasoning for any one of his conclusions, and he is so passionately committed or attached to his views that he does not hesitate to emphasize them time and again. It is not, therefore, easy to examine any one of his philosophical views in the way some of us are wont to. All this is very much true of his view about facts. I shall not, therefore, attempt to examine his arguments whatever they may be. I shall only try to find out the best way of understanding some of the things he says about facts.

There are certain obvious things which, we can say, go into the making of our concept of fact. These are the raw data which any philosophical talk about it must respect, or at least not ignore.

A fact is not an object, a property, or a relation. It makes no sense to say that the object called 'pen' or the property 'smoothness', or the relation called 'costlier than' is a fact. But it makes very good sense to say that it is a fact that my pen writes smoothly or that it is costlier than my neighbour's. When something is a fact, it is accidental that it is a fact. If it is a fact that my pen writes smoothly, there is nothing necessary in its being a fact. It might have been the case that my pen did not write smoothly. It is this feature of a fact that makes factual propositions accidental or non-necessary. Since it is not necessary that my pen writes smoothly, even when it is a fact that it does, the proposition 'My pen writes smoothly' is not a necessary proposition. Facts are not propositions, but those things which make factual propositions true or false. The fact that my pen writes smoothly makes true the proposition 'My pen writes smoothly' and false its denial 'My pen does not write smoothly'. A fact, therefore, cannot be true or false.

But there is a sense of finality in the concept of fact. If it is a fact that my pen writes smoothly, it is a fact that it does; if it is a fact, then it is a fact. If you disagree with me and question its facticity, either you do not know how to write with a pen, or are writing by holding the pen in a different way from the way I do, etc., or you mean something different by 'smoothness'. You *cannot say* it a fact *for* me and not a fact *for* you if your style of writing, or criterion of smooth writing, is different from mine. All that you can say is that it is a fact that my pen writes smoothly if it is held in a certain manner and 'smooth writing' means what I mean by it. And, in that sense, it is a fact, and *not* a fact *for* any particular person.

For Devaraja "Facts arise as we contemplate two or more objects, or two or more aspects of a simple object, as conjoined or separated by a relation" (p. 25). The two words 'arise' and

'contemplate' bother me. If 'contemplate' is used to mean what it ordinarily means, its meaning is nearer to that of 'thinking' and farther off from that of 'seeing' or any sense-experience word. Then, contemplating has nothing to do with something being a fact. I may be contemplating right now a visit to an old friend in the city, but from this there would not 'arise' a fact about my visiting him, or any fact whatsoever.

If we take 'contemplate' to mean something like a sense-experience, say, something similar to what seeing means, then Devaraja's 'arise' would not keep quiet. If I contemplate, i.e. see a bird sitting on the tree across the road, then it is a fact that a bird is sitting on the tree across the road. This fact does not arise out of my seeing/contemplating. I see the bird there and therefore am entitled to say that it is a fact that the bird is there. I am not seeing the fact; I am seeing the bird there. My seeing the bird there is a reason, for, or my authority for, saying that it is a fact that a bird is sitting. When asked, why do I say that it is a fact, I would say: 'Because I see a bird sitting...' and not 'Because my seeing gives rise to the fact that...'. Devaraja says that facts arise when we contemplate some aspects of an object or objects conjoined or separated. But if I see the bird having a black head, then it is fact that it has a black head. Similarly, if I see the bird conjoined with the tree (i.e. sitting on the tree), then it is a fact that the bird is conjoined with the tree. There occurs no process here like that of the fact arising, or my seeing giving rise to it. The fact of the bird's sitting on the tree can be said to have arisen only if it did not exist when I began seeing the bird on the tree. But if it did not exist, if it was not a fact that the bird was on the tree, then I could not have seen it there. On the other hand, if it was there, then it was a fact that the bird was there, and

therefore, we cannot speak of its 'arising' on account of, or on the occasion of, my seeing the bird there.

Devaraja also says that "Facts arise out of the interpretation we put on objects and their configuration" (p. 63). Interpreting is not the same as contemplating or seeing. In contemplating or seeing mind is not active in the same manner, or to the same extent, as in interpreting. Interpreting is more deliberate, willed and even intellectual or rational. It is also less spontaneous or habitual than the latter. Looking at some wrinkles on her face in the mirror a one-time beauty may, without making any deliberate effort, start contemplating her aging figure. But she *cannot interpret* the wrinkles to mean the impact of aging, or to mean the impending loss of her charms, without some deliberate effort. If facts arise when we contemplate, the contribution of mind in their arising would be minimal, or very little. But if they arise when we interpret, it would definitely be very great. Of course, all this can be said only if it can be said that facts arise. But even if it can, Devaraja has to choose between 'contemplating' and 'interpreting'.

While speaking of interpretation, he speaks of "objects and their configuration". "Facts arise out of the interpretation we put on objects and their configuration". We can put an interpretation on an object and its configuration only when we are aware of the object and its configuration, just as we can put a cup on the head of a person only if we are aware of the head and its relationship with the body it belongs to. But to be aware of an object and its configuration is to be aware of at least one fact about it, namely the fact that it is located in a certain state of affairs. This fact, therefore, cannot arise out of any interpretative activity since it is presupposed by the latter. Therefore, there is at least one fact which is independent of our interpretative activity. Devaraja is not saying that we interpret facts, or con-

template facts. That we definitely do. He is rather saying that facts arise when we interpret or contemplate objects and their configurations. But the framework of his presentation implies that there must be facts before they arise, and this is a paradox. If a thing is of a type which arises, it cannot be there before it arises.

Let us grant, for the sake of argument, that facts arise when we interpret objects. "When interpreted objects begin to appear to us as bearers of meanings – empirical, pragmatic or spiritual. Now all such interpretation is related to our interests and so... is infected with subjectivity" (p. 63). By 'meaning' he means significance, importance, or value. He speaks of objects as bearers of meaning. But when interpreted objects give rise to facts then, does he mean to say that facts are bearers of meanings? Who are the bearers of meaning, objects, facts or both? This question he does not raise but seems to make no distinction between saying that objects have values and saying that facts have values.

It seems to me that he cannot say that objects have values. Objects, when contemplated or interpreted, he says, give rise to facts, and whenever we experience an object we do contemplate it, or put some interpretation on it. We, therefore, always meet with facts and never with unrelated objects, i.e. objects not housed in some facts. If we never meet an object, we can never ascribe any value to it. This means that all objects as objects are valueless. But this is an old consequence both axiologically and semantically. Values are, as per our evaluative experiences and practices, ascribed to objects, i.e. to things, experiences, actions, or persons, and not to facts. We call Shakespeare's *Hamlet* a great work of art, Bhīṣma's vow of celibacy a great sacrifice, or Yudhiṣṭhira a moral hero. We do not ascribe these value-predicates to any fact. Rather, we cannot because if we

did that would make no sense. It makes no sense to call any fact a great work of art, or a great sacrifice, or a moral hero.

A fact may be relevant, and some facts are relevant, to our ascribing some values to some objects. But that is a different matter. For a fact to be relevant to the ascription of a value to a thing is very different from its itself being the bearer of that value. That a man does not loose temper is relevant to calling him considerate, but the *fact* that he does not loose temper is neither considerate nor inconsiderate. No fact is morally right or wrong, aesthetically beautiful or ugly; a fact is just a fact. If a philosophy permits us to have only facts, and facts cannot have values, it takes away all values from us.

But let us grant that facts have values and facts arise, and ask what kind of entities, ontologically speaking, they are. Deva-raja calls them "subjectively objective" (p. 22). They are subjective because they arise as a result of our interpretation which is influenced by our interest. Facts have meaning and in assigning to them their meanings our interest plays a great role. "A fact enjoys being or being there only as long as it is seen or remembered; a past fact, lying buried in a document, may be reconstructed or resurrected with a view to reviewing or contemplating it by an interested party" (p. 26). I think what he means is that a present fact's being consists in being seen or perceived by an interested person. This position seems to be very much like Berkeley's. In fact he dittoes Berkeley when he says that "In a real sense their (facts') being consists in being perceived or apprehended" (p. 64).

A past fact, on the other hand, is reconstructed or resurrected. Reconstructing and resurrecting are not identical kinds of activities. To reconstruct a thing, say, a dilapidated house, is to construct it again when it does not exist in its original form

but some or all of its constituent parts are available in some form though not in their original form. To resurrect a thing is to bring it whole back to its earlier form, say, to bring back a dead body out of its grave to life. Can we speak of reconstructing a past fact? Let us make an experiment with the help of some examples.

It is a fact that I am writing this note right now. To put it accurately, we can say it is a fact that RP is writing at time T on the day D the note N, 'T' denoting this time, 'D' this day, and 'N' this note. After I have stopped writing, it would become a past fact which an interested person according to Devaraja, can reconstruct or resurrect. I shall take up the attempt at reconstruction first, and to give to it maximum plausibility, assume it being made after a lapse of several years. Suppose some one, in the year 2001, after going through the various things I have written, and placing together some relevant items or data about them, concludes that RP wrote N at T on D. How would he state his conclusion? He would say that it is a fact, or seems to be a fact, that RP wrote , depending on his assessment of the available evidences. If he thinks that they are authentic and complete he would say it is fact that and if he thinks that they are only plausible, he would say it seems to be a fact that... He would *not* say it *was* a fact, or it seems to *have been* a fact... This fact *is about* something past, and the pastness of what it is about is indicated by the tense of 'wrote', the main verb occurring in the that-clause.

To take another example, we say it *is* a fact that Gandhi was killed by Godse. We *never* say, *nor can* we if we speak truthfully, that it *was* a fact that Gandhi was killed by Godse. To say it was a fact would mean it is no longer a fact and that would amount to saying something untrue. Facts could be about past things but that does not mean that they are also past in the

sense in which the latter are past. A fact is a fact whether it is about something present or past. What we reconstruct is the evidence for saying that something is a fact, and not the fact itself. A reconstructed fact seems to be a contradiction in terms. A reconstructed building is not the same old building but it is very much like the latter. A reconstructed fact would also, Deva-  
 raja might say, be like the original one. Even if it is it is not the original one. But it would not be a fact at all and, therefore, the question of its being like the earlier one would not arise.

A reconstructed fact could at the most be a hypothesis and a hypothesis is not a fact. We can verify a hypothesis but not a fact. It makes no sense to verify a fact. When we ask someone to verify or check his facts we mean not his facts but what he *believes to be* facts. To verify what one believes to be a fact is to verify a *belief* and *not* to verify a *fact*. Facts are the verifiers of beliefs or hypotheses; they themselves cannot be said to need verification. We can bring a fact into existence by doing something. By killing Gandhi Godse made it a fact that Gandhi was killed by Godse. But doing this also is not to verify a fact. A reconstructed fact cannot be even a candidate for being a fact. Being only a hypothesis, or a belief, it could only be a candidate for being a true or confirmed proposition.

Let me now explore the possibility of resurrecting a past fact. Devaraja conceives of it as lying buried in a document. If it lies buried, then we may say that it may be taken out of its grave and thus resurrected. But what remains buried in a document is not a fact but a statement about or referring to a fact. A document is a *record* of some facts, and facts get recorded by being put into language, i. e. being stated, referred to, described, catalogued, enumerated, etc. We can discover, collate, piece together, or interpret a set of statements contained in a document to justify the belief that something is or is not a fact. But



this is not to resurrect a fact out of its grave, but only to use the grave as a source of evidence. Indian history does not contain the fact that Gandhi was killed by Godse, nor does it contain the events connected with the murder. It contains the relevant pieces of information, descriptions of the relevant events, etc. It may not even contain the statement 'Gandhi was killed by Godse', or one equivalent to it. But still we can use a set of relevant statements occurring in it to authorise us to say it is a fact that Gandhi was killed by Godse.

After the short detour, let me return to the subjectivity-objectivity of facts. That some facts are subjective is not denied by philosophers, nor it is merely this obvious truth which Deva-raja claims to uphold. His is a claim that all facts are subjective, or have a subjective component, because to call any fact a fact involves human interpretation and interest. But there is also an element of objectivity in facts derived from the shareability of our experience of facts.

The interpretative activity, which leads to the emergence of facts, is not arbitrary, he says, because it is a fact that the human interests which guide it "are rooted in man's actual constitution and the objects can be made to bear only some meanings relative to those interests" (p. 64). Because these interests guide the emergence of facts and are *constitutional* to a human being, it follows that no human being can cease to have them or alter them without ceasing to be a human being. They have, therefore, to be necessarily used in the emergence of facts and when a fact emerges, it necessarily emerges, since there is no other way for it to come into being. This means that all facts are necessary and, therefore, all factual propositions which truly refer to them, or are about them, are necessarily true. With this picture of the world of facts and of factual language. I believe, even Devaraja would

not feel comfortable. In fact, he should not because in such a necessitarian universe creativity and freedom would evaporate.

Devaraja says that "Depending on how we choose to view one or more objects, they may give rise to a number of facts" (p. 65). Our choice would certainly, if possible, open a window to let creativity and freedom enter into our world. But we cannot choose our interests since they are constitutional and they would not let us choose which facts to make arise or emerge. Had they been non-constitutional they would have been under our control and non-dictatorial in the emergence of facts. He says that when we interpret, for example, the relationship between a chair and a table, depending upon our different interest, different facts like the following emerge : "(a) the table has a better polish than the chair; (b) the table is too high for this chair; (c) the chair is three feet away from the table; (d) the table is three times as heavy as the chair, etc" (p. 65). But none of these facts involve or exhibit an interest which we can claim to be rooted in our actual constitution. Of the interest in the relative polish of a table and of a chair, the interest in the relative height of a table and of a chair, the interest in the distance between a chair and a table, and the interest in the relative weight of a table and of a chair, none is a constitutional one. These are all ephemeral, variable, interests which may differ from person to person, or even with the same person at different times. Such non-constitutional interests, being themselves accidental, will not transport any element of necessity in our perception or interpretation of objects and their configurations. But they need not be intersubjective or shareable by all, or a group of human beings and therefore will not do what Devaraja wants interests to do. He wants them to crown facts with objectivity by being intersubjective and shareable. If intersubjectivity and shareability are dropped, noth-

ing would, in his scheme of things, be available to entitle us to say that any fact is objective.

"The objectivity of a fact consists in that its apprehension is common to all or a number of persons" (p 59). This is possible in spite of facts being infected with subjectivity because this "subjectivity is not the subjectivity of the individual, but that of the species" (*Ibid*). When the apprehension is shared by all human beings, the apprehended fact has the highest grade of objectivity, and when only by a group, it has a lower grade of objectivity. A group can consist of even one person; it would be what logicians call a unit class. In monistic theism God is a unit class. It means, then, no fact would be absolutely subjective. If only one man apprehends a fact, it has objectivity of the lowest grade, if two men then one of a little higher grade, if three, of a still higher grade, and so on, so forth. But if nothing is subjective, nothing could be objective. It is the contrast between the subjective and the objective which is necessary for the meaningful employment of both the terms. If one becomes vacuous, the other will also *ipso facto* do.

Devaraja's calling the interests involved in the emergence of facts constitutional introduces another unwelcome feature in his theory. It means that facts would be shared or shareable by all human beings because what is constitutional would be constitutional to all human beings, i.e. to all members of the human species. All facts would then have only one grade of objectivity. We cannot call it one of the highest grade because no grade lower than it would be possible. We cannot say that fact F is shared by a group consisting of  $n$  number of persons and fact G by a larger group consisting of  $n+m$  number of persons and therefore G is more objective than F. All this we cannot do because the interests which are constitutional to human beings would be constitutional to all human beings. It seems to me,

therefore, that Devaraja cannot say all of the following things : (a) that the interests involved in facts are *constitutional*; (b) that facts are *shareable because of* the interests being constitutional; (c) that shareability *constitutes* objectivity, and (d) that objectivity admits of *gradations*. He may have to drop or modify some of them.

The constitutionality of interests seems to be, consequently, unfriendly even to the doctrine of the gradations of subjectivity. If involvement of constitutional interests makes facts subjective, then all facts would be equally, and not more or less, subjective. They would be subjective in the sense that they would depend on some interests of the cognizer. A cognizer's interest is his interest even when it is common to all members of his species.

*Shareability of facts* is very crucial to Devaraja's scheme of things. But it too seems to me a naughty notion. How to decide the shareability of a fact? Suppose I say that Russell is a mathematical logician and I take it to be a fact that he is. How can I know that you share this fact? I cannot look into your mind to check whether you have the same interest as I have. Moreover, you can share it even when you do not have an interest similar to mine. You may be hating mathematical logic and admiring traditional logic. Therefore, you single out its pioneer to condemn him. On the other hand, I love mathematical logic and single out its pioneer for extolling his contributions. This shows that we can share a fact even if our interests are non-constitutional. The interest in mathematical or traditional logic is definitely not constitutional even to all philosophers. One way out of this situation is to make an appeal to behavioural congruence. We may say we test whether or not two persons share the same fact by finding out whether or not they behave with regard to it in a congruent manner. I think this a safe enough way. But then the importance which Devaraja attaches

to constitutional interests, or to interests, will get very much watered down.

I conclude with the submission that what I have done in this short note is only an exercise in drawing, as coherent a picture as I can, of the main philosophical things Professor Devaraja says about the concept of fact in the book. It is very likely that I have mistaken some genuine embellishments of his theory as impairers of its elegance. This danger is very often there when one is discussing a theme, however central it may be, presented in the style of a book like Devaraja's *Freedom, Creativity and Value*.

Opposite Stadium,

Rajendra Nagar,

PATNA 800 016 (Bihar).

RAJENDRA PRASAD

#### NOTE

1. Indus Publishing Company, Delhi, 1988.