

THE ULTIMATE REALITIES AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE WHITEHEADIAN SCHEME AND IN THE *NYĀYA—* *VAISESIKA* SYSTEM

It would be interesting to note that Whitehead's philosophy closely resembles the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* system of Indian philosophy in its realistic and empirical outlook. If some aspects of a theory in the current of western thoughts suggests comparisons with some aspects of a doctrine in eastern thoughts even of the past and vice-versa, such a suggestiveness may be viewed as a valuable feature of the theory under review—necessitating, for a critical study, serious attention to the comparisons. Something of such comparisons which may be expected during a development of the study of either Whitehead or the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* system may be stated here as a preamble.

I

I. One may not hesitate to remark that the entities termed "Sāmānya" (universal) by the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* are somewhat analogous to the "potentials" of Whitehead more technically called "eternal objects." The very special reason, that may be assigned with emphasis, for regarding a "universal" as a "potential" is that though any particular actual entity 'X' characterised by the universal 'A' goes out of existence, after a short duration, the same universal "A" is expected, while it is ingredient in "X", to be found in some future actualities. In other words, the 'universal' is potential for characterising some 'particulars' to come in to existence in future. A particular flower must wither away, but its colour 'navy blue' will remain conserved to reappear in another object. To state it in another form, a 'universal' is an 'eternal object', being something repeatable in the flux of nature. But how could there be sameness amid differences, 'permanence' in the fluent nature? The *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* has also to be confronted with this question because it admits that everything is distinguishable from every thing else in spite of its possessing a class-character. Whitehead would explain it by stating that reality is not merely a process, "that eternal things are required for the very being of the

process". Each actual entity, an ultimate constituent of nature, has a non-temporal aspect consisting of some 'eternal object' besides its aspect of 'passage' or flux. Though an actual entity considered in its temporal aspect, must come to an end, it is immortal in respect of the 'eternal object' ingredient in it (objectively immortal). A *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosopher would say similarly that a 'universal' does not exist in space and time. It is an abstract entity which subsists in some substance (i. e. some actual entity) existing in space and time. For the *Vaiśeṣika* thinkers, 'cow' and 'cowness', though appearing together, are two distinct types of entities. The same thing can be stated with regard to 'consciousness' considered by Whitehead as an "eternal object". Consciousness is a repeatable element in nature because of its non-temporal essence. Consciousness is not the stuff (not any event, i. e. not any spatio-temporal process) of which any conscious actuality is made. It is not a substance. Consciousness is an attribute ingredient in some actual entity. Whitehead and the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* thinkers are alike in considering consciousness as a quality which characterises a certain class of actual entities.

II. Whitehead and the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* thinkers agree, in the first place, in their common antipathy to nominalism and conceptualism that what is universal has a being of its own outside and independent of the subject prehending it, though the mode of being of a "universal" (which may be termed "subsistence") is conceived to be different from what is called "existence" in space and time. Secondly, both consider "universal" and "particular" as irreducible entities each having a distinct ontological being of its own.

III. Whitehead also resembles the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* thinkers in subscribing to radical empiricism by his contention that we can know "universals" by means of perception. A class-character is as much observable as the particular actual entities characterised by it. This offers a brilliant solution of the Mill's "paradox of induction".

IV. However, the mode of our perceiving an actual entity or an event (apprehension) is stated by Whitehead to be different from the mode of our perceiving the eternal object ingredient in the actuality (recognition). Whitehead emphasises, in this connection, the distinction between a sense-perception and a

non-sensuous perception. The *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* thinkers would make a similar distinction between a *sāmānya-lakṣana* perception as belonging to the category of extra-ordinary (*alaukika*) perception and an ordinary (*laukika*) perception. Again, according to the *Vaiśeṣika*, "cowness" can be apprehended not by itself but only through some particular cow. Likewise, Whitehead is pointing out that the basis of our conceptual prehension of an eternal object lies in our physical prehension of the actual entity in which that eternal object is ingredient. In prehending a particular actuality one recognises the eternal object, viz. "green" ingredient in the actuality (sense-recognition), and then the perceptent is able to feel conceptually the eternal object as pure (viz., as greenness), dissociated from any particular matter of fact. A *Naiyāyika* would say that the universals inhering in perceptible objects are perceived by the senses which perceive their locus. When one sees the colour of a flower, one's eye comes in contact with the colour, through the medium of the flower. The colour lies as inherent in the flower which is conjoined to the eye. The sense-object contact of this type is called "samyukta-samavāya", i.e. a relation of inherence (of the object, viz., the particular colour) in what (the flower) in conjoined to the sense. Again, the sense-object contact is said to be more indirect in one's perceiving the universal such as "greenness" or "colourness" inhering in a particular patch of green as seen during a particular second of time, at a definite date. This kind of sense-object contact is termed "samyukta-samaveta-samavāya" (inherence in the one inhering in the conjoined). Here the object (greenness) is inherent in something (viz., in the particular colour as seen at a definite second of time and at a definite region of space) which is inseparably related to what (the flower) is conjoined to the sense. We have, here, a sort of what Whitehead calls "conceptual prehension" of a "pure potential" (viz., greenness or colourness) through a feeling of some "impure potential", i. e., of the eternal object realised as patch of colour on some particular actual occasion.

V. Whitehead further resembles the *Vaiśeṣika* thinkers in holding that each "universal" has a unique "individual essence" of its own. On the other hand, he asserts rejecting the theory of simple location that each event extends beyond itself throughout the whole range of space-time so that "in a sense every-

thing is everywhere and at all times". Consequently, in our physical perception of events, we apprehend their general character, namely, "extensiveness" (passage) which, like a "booming, buzzing, confusion" is likely to obliterate the distinctions among the different universals "cowness", "treeness" and "manhood". The *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika*, too, considers each individual (jivātman) as present everywhere (as omnipresent). In fact, however, as both Whitehead and the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* would admit, we do not perceive treeness in cow or cowness in man. Whitehead tries to avert the difficulty in this situation by affirming that the same physical prehension of an actual occasion involves in itself an "indicative feeling" which is the source of the perception of "passage" and "recognition" which is the source of perception of the distinguishing qualitative pattern of the actual occasions prehended. Whitehead also speaks of hybrid physical feeling of God enabling us to feel conceptually the eternal objects as they are in themselves dissociated from the particular actual occasions in which they are ingredient.

VI. Whitehead is averse to taking the "eternal object" as equivalent to "genus". The *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* seems to have adopted a similar position with regard to sāmānya conceived as "a feature or property common to two or more things and not like genus for a class of things exhibiting such a feature".¹

VII. The view of eternal objects as mutually distinguishable gives rise to the notions of compatibility and incompatibility among themselves. A may be more compatible with X than with Z. Hydrogen combines with chlorine (to form hydrochloric acid) more easily than with oxygen (to form water). Again one eternal object may be incompatible with another. In our feeling of the heat of fire, for example, we have a negative prehension of cold. But as every event is in every other event, a negative prehension is not a prehension of absence of any event but of absence of some quality from some event. The *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* thinkers have the same idea in their minds when they speak of perception of "negation". The proposition "there is no jar in the lump of clay" means that the particular spatio-temporal position characterised by a particular form of the lump of clay excludes jarness because of the incompatibility between the form as realised in the lump and the 'jarness' itself. There is, however, a probability for that lump to become a jar for the incompatibility here

referred to is not absolute. Hence the kind of absence called 'prāgabhāva' as illustrated above is said to have an end (anta). But there can be no end of an absence in the case where incompatibility is irreconcilable, for example, in the relation between air and colour. This kind of absence is called "atyantābhāva."

VIII. Though each "universal" is unique in its individual essence, it may be considered as of a narrower or wider extent. According to the Whiteheadian interpretation, we may consider any two universals as compatible or incompatible. Now, if the eternal object S be compatible with the eternal objects X, Y, Z, —X, Y, Z may be positively related with one another and organised under the form S. Though the form of organisation characterising the individual essence of S is unique, yet S may be analysed in respect of the components organised i.e. X, Y, Z. Again, the range of compatibility for S may be wider than that of another eternal object P. In that case S is understood as wider than P in its range of relevance for ingression in actualities. What is termed "creativity" and viewed as of the widest generality in the philosophy of Whitehead may be compared to what is called "sattā" or "being" in the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* system and considered as covering the widest range of space-time.

II

I. It is, here, to be borne in mind that "creativity", though spoken of by Whitehead as the ultimate reality, can not be said to be corresponding to what Leibnitz had termed "Actus Purus" implying pure consciousness deemed by Leibnitz to be the highest reality in the world. Each actual occasion, regarded in the Whiteheadian philosophy as a mode of "creativity", need not therefore be necessarily conscious. However, all actual occasions must have been conscious, if they were modes of God as well. But, on the question of relation of God with the world, Whitehead sides with pluralism rather than monism. God is according to Whitehead, only one of the modes of "Creativity". A *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* thinker would say that consciousness characterises only one of the various classes of actual entities and is absent from the rest. Since both Whitehead and a *Naiyāyika* would equally demur to the Leibnitzian (or Hegelian) identification of consciousness with the widest category of existence, these philosophers should not be called Idealists.

II. Consciousness is considered by Whitehead to be only one of the forms of prehension (apprehension) by one actual entity or another. It is a kind of illumination upon experience illumination arising in the higher phases of one's development. Experience or act of prehension, which may or may not be illumined by consciousness, is therefore more fundamental than consciousness. A *Naiyāyika* also believes in the possibility of continuity of the life of a soul after separation from its body-in a state of unconsciousness. He also characterises the ultimate state of one's existence where one participates in "life beyond life unapproachable by death" (moksa) as devoid of consciousness. This is another way of saying what has been stated in the foregoing para that to be is not necessarily to be conscious.

III. For Descartes and Śankara, "consciousness" is the self-revealing essence of actuality. It has been further conceived by Śankara as absolute in the sense that it does not require any condition extrinsic to itself for its own manifestation and that it is present everywhere. Whitehead and the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophers, as we have already observed, does not think of consciousness as constitutive of the substance of any actual entity. It is, according to them, only an attribute which appears in some actual entity when that actual entity fulfils certain conditions of its development. "Consciousness" is an alternative (possibility) which can not be realised when and where some other alternative has been realised. Manifestation of consciousness must therefore be regarded as only contingent (not absolute). Besides, because consciousness is a form of prehension and since every prehension (response of a subject to some object, grasping by a subject of something external to the subject) has a subject-object structure, consciousness can not be regarded by Whitehead as well as a *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* thinker as only "self revealing". All types of conscious experience have been described as "intentional".

IV. The object towards which a conscious experience is directed is conceived, in any realistic system, as something lying external to the experiencing subject. The acme of the note of realism is reached in the *Vaiśeṣika* thought where it is asserted that even a "negation" (*abhāva*, i. e. absence of one thing from another) is a kind of entity (*padārtha* viewed as a type of relation) having existence of its own apart from the knowledge

of that negation. "In other words, absence of an object is not the same as the knowledge of its absence.² Whitehead also speaks of the object of any perception of negation as an objective fact, not a mere state of the perception itself. Such an object termed "negative prehension" is regarded as a bond of relation having contribution to the character of a positive fact. One of the factors contributing to the burning nature of fire is that fire is not cold. In prehending something consciously as blue, one is implicitly distinguishing it from the colours which it is not (vide *Process and Reality*, I. Ch. I. of the importance of the negative judgement in mentality). The *Vaiśeṣika* thinkers state more explicitly that a non-existence is adjectival to a positive fact so that it would be as much true to say that air has the property of "absence of colour" as to describe it as having the quality of touch. The non-existence of a jar on the ground may also be conceived to be a character (*viśeṣana*) of the ground.³

V. Again, both Whitehead and the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophers maintain, as radical empiricists, that the knowledge of absence is to be reached not by a process of inference or conceptual abstraction, but by observation. We are able, according to the *Vaiśeṣika*, to know directly not only *dravyas*, *gunas* and *karmas*, but also *abhāva* or negation. The non-existence of a jar on the ground is perceived in the same way as the attribute of a thing such as colour, size, etc. are perceived. However, the *Advaitins* hold, contrary to this view, that non-existence is known through a unique means of knowledge called "anupalabdhi" (non-cognition) which is neither perception nor inference. It is further interesting to note the contention of Whitehead that an object has to be prehended positively first in order to the eliminated from the field of attention of the prehending subject. The absence of any unperceivable object can not be prehended in any way. According to the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* view also, we can not directly know "abhāva" unless it is of perceivable objects. Atoms, for example, being super-sensuous, their absence can not be perceived.

III

I. The *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* thinkers emphasise the requirement of a living body of a soul (*jivātman*) for manifestation of consciousness in it. The soul, apart from its body, is unconscious

according to them. It may be stated, in the Whiteheadian language, that physical prehension of any actual entity furnishes the basis for its consciousness. Consciousness can not arise without a propositional feeling;⁴ and any propositional feeling is said to be derived from some physical feeling. The *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* points out, however, that all physical bodies, are not necessarily associated with consciousness. Soul, which is the "mental pole" according to Whitehead, is dormant almost to the extent of absence, in the atoms of matter. The *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* draws our attention to the distinction between the organic and inorganic bodies and declare that only organic bodies can be abodes of souls. It adds that conscious souls are recognisable in the highly developed organisms only. As expressed in terms of physiology and the evolutionism in Whitehead's philosophy, the "mental pole" becomes increasingly pronounced and articulate with the gradual development of the nervous system, and the individual can not be said to be capable of conscious response unless his nervous system has been attenuated enough to have evolved the brain which is adequate for his propositional feeling.

II. Both the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophers and Whitehead hold that God is always conscious, though consciousness is not essential to His being as an actual entity. "Eternal Consciousness", according to the *Naiyāyikas*, "is only an inseparable attribute of God, not his very essence, as maintained by the *Advaita Vedānta*". Whitehead's philosophy describes God and the actual occasions (i. e. actual entities other than God) as in a sense all-pervasive and mutually immanent without admitting that every actual occasion is necessarily conscious. The *Naiyāyikas* also regard God as well as individual selves (*jīvātman*) as omnipresent. But while consciousness may or may not characterise *jīvātman*, God is ever-conscious, according to them. Charles Hartshorne has suggested, attributing pantheism to Whitehead that the Whiteheadian God is an all-pervading actual entity. "The total state of deity now, as surrelative to the present universe, has nothing outside itself".⁵ He further states that Whitehead's doctrine of God implies a "cosmic present" which is "the defacto totality of all actual occasions as present in the divine immediacy". If this interpretation be correct, what would logically follow is that every finite actuality which is a

part of God must be conscious to some degree. But the common contention of Whitehead and of the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophers that many actual entities (the bulk of the actual world) are not conscious swings opposite to what is expected. How could the all-pervading God be conscious as a whole without being conscious in His several parts and elements ?

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NOTES

1. M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*. P. 233
2. M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*. P. 237
3. D. M. Dutta. *The Six Ways of Knowing*. P. 163
4. A propositional feeling is a feeling of some hypothesis about the character (attribute) of any actual entity physically prehended (sensed) by the feeling subject. It is derived by an integration of a physical feeling and the conceptual feeling obtained from the same physical feeling. One perceives a green leaf with one's physical sense. This exemplifies one's physical prehension. Then, the same percipient subject conceives pure "greenness". This is a conceptual feeling. Next, he may have the propositional feeling i.e. a feeling of the supposition, that the leaf which has been physically prehended, between a tenth of a second and half a second ago, yet continues to have the same character "green". In the language of psychology, a propositional feeling belongs to the acts of interpretation during a perception by some developed organism. We have something (sensation) and then interpret it as a flower or a leaf or a bird.
5. C. Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*. PP.88.89
6. The apparent paradox common to both the systems may be dispelled by considering the relation between God and the world in the light of the specialised meanings in which Whitehead speaks of all-inclusiveness, infinity and immanence of God.
7. In addition to the above mentioned authors of the statements quoted, I remain obliged to Prof. J. Mohanty, Prof. I. Leclere, Prof. W. Mays, Prof. A. H. Johnson and Prof. D. Emmet whose works on Whitehead's philosophy have furnished me with the background required for the writing of this essay. My greatest obligation here is to Prof. P. B. Chatterjee, Head of the Department of Philosophy, Calcutta University, for his very valuable suggestions in this connection.

