

KANT AND THE IDEA OF EPISTEMOLOGY

I

Kant gave the world 'theory of knowledge.' But did he also give the world theory of theory of knowledge? Did he build up anything that may be called 'meta-theory of knowledge', i.e. meta-epistemology? The question is not asked here in the spirit of revelling with the number of meta-studies that one can go on constructing endlessly. It is a basic question: for the supposed meta-theory, the question would be 'what is theory of knowledge?'. If the question about meta-epistemology that we have raised is *not* to pave the way to an unending number of meta-studies, then the only way to forestall such possibility would be to understand what is/is not asked in raising the question 'what is theory of knowledge?': meta-epistemology—waiving the question how it is to be conceived—is concerned with understanding the present question. That is to say, the supposed meta-epistemology might be conceived to be a study which is different from and of a higher order than epistemology or theory of knowledge if theory of knowledge itself *is* regarded as belonging to a grade different from that of knowledge; but if theory of knowledge itself does not enjoy any such grade, then theory of 'theory of knowledge' or meta-epistemology too cannot stand on a grade which is different from and higher than epistemology. So we come to the central issue, viz, "What is the status of the preposition 'of' in the expression 'theory of knowledge'?" To put the same question differently, "Is knowledge *accusative* of theory in theory of knowledge?"

As Kant viewed it—and that rightly—, epistemology or theory of knowledge was a reflective study. It was also taken by him—and, in general, it *is* taken to be—a second-order study. Whether a reflective study is necessarily a second-order study is—if not the only—at least *one* principal subject of enquiry of this paper: perhaps, in the sequel, we may have to get Kant confronted with some such disjunction as 'either you are *not* giving an account of reflection proper or, if you are, you have to abandon the idea of epistemology as a second-order study'. But whatever

may appear in the sequel, we may at this stage of our enquiry say that Kant would return an affirmative answer to our question whether knowledge in 'theory of knowledge' is accusative of theory—which amounts to the view that epistemology is a second-order study. Now, what kind of matter was epistemology to deal with as it was envisaged by Kant? It had before it the gamut of the propositions constituting the body of knowledge of Nature presented by Newtonian Science. Newtonian science had made some presuppositions which required to be studied, so a theory of (Newtonian) Science had to be founded. This intended theory was just Kant's theory of knowledge: so that for Kant, 'theory of knowledge' was 'theory of science'. From the lexical consideration that the word 'science' is synonym of 'knowledge', Kant came to the conclusion that 'theory of knowledge' is 'theory of science'. And since, further, 'theory of knowledge' was conceived to be 'theory of science' and since it was conceived to be a second-order discipline analogous to the first-order discipline, viz., Science as a body of knowledge of Nature, 'theory of knowledge' came to be regarded by Kant as *also* 'Science of knowledge'.

II

What is to be noted is that Kant conceives epistemology as *analogous* to science. There is nothing wrong as such in founding a science. But then science has its distinctive view of knowledge which does not accord with the philosophical view of knowledge on which epistemology is based.

To put the matter straightforwardly, science leaves knowledge *unattended* to. This remark which is quite innocuous and is by no means intended to be an indictment of science or a pronouncement of any judgement upon science—may whip up controversy: it may be retorted immediately that it is epistemology which is intended to turn our attention to knowledge which itself is factward in attention. But the basic issue is not just one of the scientist's *not* paying attention to what he does or thinks, to his postulates, axioms, theories etc., in short, not turning his attention *inward*. It is not just the lack of reflective exercise on his part which lack might be made up by him but just comes to be made up by the epistemologist (as theorist of science) that constitutes the

charge against the scientist. The scientist *cannot* really turn attention inward. This does not bespeak of any psychological inability on his part. What prevents the scientist from reflective exercise in the specific sense of 'reflection' in the context of epistemology as a *philosophical* theory of knowledge—is his initial commitment to a view of knowledge according to which knowledge springs from the attempt to contain, as it were, something *alien* or foreign to it. If this is how science views knowledge in its commerce with the world *and* if the epistemologist as theorist of science conceives his task on the analogy of that of the scientist, i. e., conceives it as that of 'knowing' science, then is not the epistemologist too debarred from the reflective view of knowledge which, whatever else it may or may not involve, at least turns attention to knowledge that was *forgetful* of itself, so to say? So it is not just an *accidental* fact that the epistemologist *comes* to indulge, while the scientist does not, in reflective exercise. He must first settle his mind in respect of the question whether the scientist can be his model. Taking the scientist as his model, the epistemologist (who regards himself as theorist of science) comes to conceive of his discipline as 'Science' of knowledge: he not only reviews science but also intends to found a science himself.

This immediately brings out the basic malady of his thinking. It is the malady of thinking that alienation or alienated consciousness is paradigm consciousness. It may be that the epistemologist as theorist of science wants to found a science of an order which is *higher than* the one (or ones) which is (or are) engrossed in the study of the world. But it is '*science*' *nevertheless*. 'Knowledge of science' and 'Science of knowledge' are *fundamentally* the same for the science-oriented epistemologist. It is the primal or initial science, i. e., alienated consciousness which is the last word as well in the thinking of the epistemologist as theorist or philosopher of science as it is in the thinking of the scientist. And if alienated consciousness is just knowledge or consciousness oblivious of itself, then how can it be claimed that the epistemologist as theorist of science can 'know' knowledge?

It may of course be claimed in favour of the view that reflection is reflection upon knowledge of the objective world that reflection *does* know knowledge,—it knows that an object is

known. In other words, it knows the object *as* known, i.e.; the 'known-ness' of an object just as one may know the colour, features, relations etc., of something. The 'known-ness' of the object may be claimed to be as good an objective feature of it as its *other* objective features. Now, it may be asked 'if known-ness is an objective feature, what is the need of reflection to discover it' ? In saying 'this table is known,' does one speak in the same sort of language, same "logical tone of voice" to use the Rylean expression, as one does in saying 'This table is brown' (or rectangular or large etc.) ? If one does, then where is the need of reflection ? But if there *is* need of reflection, then 'knownness' cannot be said to be known as a character like 'brown' etc., is known. It can be conceived to be known *without* the object. 'Knownness,' as Professor Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya has pointed out, is a 'floating adjective'¹. Truly speaking, 'known-ness' is an abstraction—an abstraction which emerges through the self's distinguishing itself from the object. *Before* the distinguishing, then, there *was* no knowledge, only object *in the sense* that attention was *engrossed* in the object. That there *was in point of fact* some conscious activity is not denied but then that activity *did not turn toward itself*. It was absorbed in the world. World-outlook is precisely another name for science. Science remains to the end of the chapter mundane. Contrariwise any attitude in which mundane attitude is overcome is the subjective attitude. And knowledge is just the attainment of the subjective point of view not *something* to be *located* in the world revealed in the mundane outlook. It follows then that any kind of reflection that discovers the conscious activity or activities rooted in the mundane outlook, rooted in the belief in science as such, i.e., belief in alienated or self-forgetful consciousness as the *type-consciousness* is not reflection on knowledge and so is not epistemological reflection : epistemological reflection is distinctively reflection on knowledge i.e., is attainment of the subjective viewpoint.

III

The 'critique' of knowledge, however, which was at the bottom of Kant's philosophy could not be interested in the kind of reflection which has its tentacles in science, in the

mundane outlook. For what permeates the 'critique' of knowledge is Transcendental Idealism which, in the terms of the present essay, is the doctrine that reflection is subjectivity or knowledge itself. Here, i. e., in the 'critique' as rooted in Transcendental Idealism reflection is no enquiry either into logical presuppositions of experience or into hypothesis concerning our experience. The latter alternative is ruled out as presuppositions of experience cannot be either confirmed or disconfirmed by an appeal to experience. The former alternative again presents serious difficulties. For, it cannot be said that reflection discovers such presuppositions that *unless* they are admitted, experience cannot be made intelligible in the form in which we have it: we cannot, i. e., say that the relation between the presupposition and experience is expressible in the form of 'Unless p, then not-Q' or 'Q'. '-p' is contradictory (where 'p' = presupposition(s) and 'Q' = experience). Forms like these and the conceptions they embody are not only not faithful to the spirit of Transcendental Idealism but also positively misleading in respect of the intentions of Transcendental Idealism or critique of knowledge. They are not faithful because they represent the task of transcendental reflection as if it was one of *conceiving* presuppositions that would make experience intelligible: were *that* the task of transcendental reflection then it has to be pointed out that there is no *rule* which would decide which set of presupposition is unique and indispensable: one need only remember Körner's question if there is anything unique in Strawson's scheme of Descriptive Metaphysics to commend itself against i. e. Bohr's scheme or Whitehead's scheme or for that matter Burt's suspicion as to the indispensability of Strawson's scheme. So the foregoing forms cannot serve our purpose. They are also misleading because they are aberrations: under their influence we are led astray into thinking that the task of transcendental reflection is to unearth the presuppositions involved in experience whereas the proper task of such reflection is not to discover a presupposition (or some presuppositions) which might *not* be unique to what it is (or they are) presupposition (or presuppositions) of (i. e. experience) but to explicate the very consciousness or subjectivity which is reflecting *in* what is reflected upon. So that reflection retrospectively testifies to the reflected awareness as what is (i) *now*

revealed as (ii) not having attended to itself *earlier* – in double-tense so to speak. For transcendental reflection then there is no alienated consciousness, no self-forgetful consciousness, no consciousness *of* which presuppositions are discovered. As Professor Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya has pointed out transcendental reflection is consciousness of what is not distinct from the consciousness of it. ² To reflection then there is nothing *outside* reflection. Alienated consciousness is re-reflectively understood in reflection as itself having been non-reflective. What, therefore, is discovered in epistemological reflection is not *presupposition* of what is reflected upon but the explication of it.

IV

Reverting to the form in which presuppositions are 'sought to be made clear in the example already given, viz., 'Unless p, then not - Q', we can say that 'p' is but self clarification of 'Q'; this is not how a presupposition is understood in the logical context. A hint as to how presuppositions are understood in the context of transcendental or critical philosophy is given by the *direction* of our enquiry into presuppositions. Although as is usually pointed out, in transcendental reflection we proceed from the conditioned to the condition, i. e., from our experience or knowledge of the world to the presupposition of it, yet at the same time we can say that from the perspective of the level of consciousness we reach in knowing the condition (or presupposition) we have a new look at or a new orientation towards the conditioned (or experience of the world). Really, a philosopher who employs transcendental reflection *traverses twice on the same straight line* i.e., as well from the condition to the conditioned as from the conditioned to the condition. And once we understand this procedure involved in transcendental reflection, we understand *also* the difference between 'presupposition' understood in the logical context and 'presupposition' understood in the context of transcendental reflection or discovered through it. When, in the logical context, a concept or proposition is understood as presupposition of another concept or proposition, the idea that the former is self-clarification of the latter would appear to be as *odd* as anything out of place could be; whereas *that is how* presupposition is understood in retrospective reflective knowledge,

i.e., transcendental reflection. So transcendental reflection starts only when there is consciousness of subject as *what had been lost* in the mundane attitude of science (or commonsense). What Professor Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya says is well worth quoting in the present context : "...the very problem of the first critique-how knowledge and object of knowledge are possible-would be gratuitous and almost meaningless unless the object were already suspect in the light of a certitude higher than that about the object, and that certitude can only be a spiritual certitude". Thus the direction of transcendental enquiry is fixed by the initial consciousness of the subjective.

V

Now an interlude. It may appear to be a digression. But it is not. On the contrary, it may be relevant. For, the present interlude *may stipulate those considerations which reflection dictates in epistemology* or a philosophical enquiry into knowledge. And reflection dictates those considerations in conformity with the direction of transcendental enquiry. As we have seen, a philosophical enquiry into knowledge arises when there is consciousness of the subjective i.e., consciousness of dissociation from the mundane attitude. So in asking 'what is knowledge?', we cannot just point to mundane *occurrences* or *cases* of knowledge : understood reflectively, knowledge is/has no case. So 'knowledge' is not known through empirical survey of *cases* of knowledge. *Secondly*, it will not do to point to the fact we *come to be* conscious of things, events, places etc. It is of course a *fact* that people become conscious of these. But the philosopher still asks 'what is knowledge?'. His question is not like a question as to what a particular kind of thing or class or property is. He wants to *clarify* the notion of knowledge. In asking the question, he wants to lay bare the considerations which can/cannot settle it. The question thus contains its solution, indicates it. It is not an empirical question which can be settled through *pointing* : nothing remains to be pointed to when reflection inspires the question. *Thirdly*, one cannot in the manner of the British Empiricists like Locke and Hume, appeal to notions of 'simple ideas' and 'impressions' to explain knowledge by tracing its origin. For those notions are nothing *outside*

knowledge. Rather than *explaining* knowledge they are *explained* by knowledge. They are either ascribed to consciousness or are nothing. Not that 'ascription to consciousness' and 'item of knowledge' are related in the way of "'p', 'Q' is contradictory" (where 'p' is 'X is item of knowledge' and '-Q' is contradictory of 'X is ascribed to consciousness.'). There is no *relation* here. 'p' is a self-elaboration of 'Q'. *Modus Ponens* and *Modus Tollens* are out of place here. It is 'Q' i.e., reflection which determines what should count as 'p' i.e. item of knowledge. Outside 'Q' i.e. outside reflection, 'p' is nothing. It is *extra-reflective* which has no place in theory of knowledge. *Fourthly* a speculative theory of knowledge will not do. What is to count as 'object' of knowledge is determined by reflection. But in a speculative theory of knowledge, 'object' is e.g., a Platonic Idea, a metaphysical entity. But epistemology is not metaphysics. Kant's Copernican outlook contains an important message for the epistemologist. *Fifthly* in asking, for clarification in reflection, 'what is knowledge?' appeal to (supposedly) paradigm cases of experience in a Strawsonian manner will not do: that would not conform to the reflective spirit in which the question is raised.

So all extra-reflective considerations are ruled out in epistemology. Extra-reflective considerations are factual, empirical, psychological, logical, platonic, metaphysical and Strawsonian.

After putting extra-reflections considerations out of our way, let us now see if epistemology can be regarded as *science* of knowledge, or for that matter, if there can be anything like science of knowledge at all.

Kant seems to have found a touchstone where with he could distinguish between what *should* count as knowledge and what should *not*. That was the idea of 'Criticism'. 'Criticism' is the bedrock of knowledge and the grave of metaphysics. Genuine, i.e., Scientific knowledge is no speculative construction but is restricted to what is given in intuition. If there is an intellect which is intuitive, we human beings, have no concern with it : Kant, for one, is concerned with *human* intelligence, epistemology for him is all-too-human. It is a necessary requirement of knowledge to be scientific that its matter comes from a source *other* than intellect. We cannot conjure being out of thought.

Existence cannot be manufactured. The dualism of concept and intuition is woven into the very structure of human knowledge. If knowledge could extricate itself from this dualism, it would not be human knowledge. Kant, scientist as he is; would be the last person to smuggle metaphysical considerations into epistemology.

VI

We ask : can the idea of legitimate knowledge square with epistemology? It is perfectly legitimate to make this requirement for epistemology, viz. that it must not make room for anything unwarranted in knowledge. Kant thought this requirement puts metaphysics out of court and secures autonomy to epistemology. Metaphysics is building castles in the air,—it is imaginative construction. But epistemology, while it is not metaphysics, may not be science either. Metaphysics may make unwarranted assertions, but it does not follow that epistemology's warrant is secured in the scientific way. The critique of knowledge, to be worth anything in philosophy, must rescue epistemology alike from science and from metaphysics. The 'critique' seemed initially to relieve Kantianism of the tension within knowledge through the idea of intuitive warrant of the content of knowledge. But the critique also contained the doctrine of the foreign source of intuition. The argument in favour of this doctrine consists in pointing to the impossibility of intuitive intelligence on the part of human beings. Now, it is no psychological impossibility. Were Kant stating a psychological impossibility, then he would have stated a contingent truth. But it is a necessary truth that Kant claims to be stating. For no situation can be conceived in which any human being is fitted with intuitive intelligence; no situation in other words can be conceived in which human intelligence is not truncated by or limited down to what is given in intuition. The 'critique' then cannot be said to derive its doctrine, viz. that the source of human intuition is foreign to its intelligence from an empirical survey of human intelligence. On the contrary, it is through philosophical reflection that the 'critique' comes by this doctrine. And if it is philosophical reflection, then the 'critique' of knowledge is really knowledge's reflection on itself; it is knowledge as reflecting on itself that tells knowledge that

it cannot know—by itself and in advance of intuition—any content of intuition.

Now what a strange admixture of philosophy and psychology we get here in Kantianism! If the 'critique' is a doctrine and not a mere method—it is the story of knowledge as reflecting on itself. And the story has to be told in a language which appears to be a triviality, viz., that 'knowledge is knowledge'. Waiving the question whether it is really a triviality or not, whether or not it yields any gain in understanding 'knowledge,' this little at least the 'critique' yields to us at this stage of our study, viz; that knowledge as reflection cannot have anything to do with intuition: it (i.e. knowledge as reflection) is plainly indifferent to story that knowledge by itself cannot secure the content of intuition. For this is a story made on the basis of the empirical survey of different cases of knowledge. And knowledge as reflection is/has no cases. Saying, then, that the 'critique' is a philosophical doctrine and saying at once that the 'critique' brings out the limitation of human knowledge or intelligence amounts to conflating philosophy with psychology. One half of the Kantian account, viz., knowledge is reflection, is the story of the 'critique'; the other half, viz., knowledge cannot a priori know the particular, is outside the 'critique' and belongs to psychology or physiology of human mind.

It might, however, be said that this way of making short shrift of the Kantian teaching will not do. It might be insisted on, for Kant, that reflection not only testifies to knowledge but also testifies to it as—limited—by intuition. Our contention will be that reflection is a distinctive methodology which is anything but review or survey or even introspection as ordinarily understood in psychology. For what is obtained in reflection is understood, after it has been thus obtained, as hanging on to reflection. Reflection is consciousness of itself: truly speaking this 'of' is rendered nugatory when we understand that what is discovered in reflection is discovered in the process of consciousness being conscious of itself. There is no such attainment on the part of consciousness when a content is neutral to consciousness as when, e. g. I witness something in the full consciousness that it was there and will be there independent of its discovery. Armed with this perspective regarding reflection, we

can now say turning to the Kantian theory, that the fact of consciousness 'being' conscious of its limitation is essentially different from the reflective process of consciousness 'being' conscious of itself; in the former case, 'being' signifies state whereas in the latter it signifies achievement of, i.e. achievement of consciousness itself.

And now to see if the thesis that 'knowledge is knowledge'—which may be said to represent the genuine or philosophical part of the 'critique' as different from its spurious or psychological part—is a triviality. The answer is already indicated in calling the spurious part psychological one. It is the psychological part and, therefore, does not belong to theory of knowledge. In theory of knowledge there is no place for any extra-cognitive consideration; for theory of knowledge is its own criterion; that, then, of which knowledge is knowledge has warrant within knowledge and not outside knowledge: 'outside' knowledge everything is non-reflective. So, then, in ruling out extra-cognitive considerations, in finding knowledge to be its own criterion, in finding the warrant of knowledge within knowledge—our apparently trivial tautology does yield some fruit. It indicates the outlook of a theory of knowledge. If in epistemology extra-cognitive considerations are ruled out, if knowledge cannot be explained in terms of anything outside knowledge, then science of knowledge is just a misnomer. In so far as 'science'—as Kant understood it—secures its data from 'intuition' that cannot be manufactured by our understanding, it—from the point of view of epistemology or 'critique' of knowledge—plainly adopts the non-reflective viewpoint. 'Science' is not really 'knowledge'—it is seeking information or putting knowledge to use. It is the predatory outlook of science towards knowledge which is sought to be transcended in epistemology. Even so-called pure science is not exempt from this outlook; for pure science is either regarded as value in itself or for some use extraneous to the knowledge of it. And if pure science is regarded as valuable in itself, then all that is meant is that one is interested only in the disinterested pursuit of it. But disinterested pursuit which is an enjoyable value is still not 'knowledge' par excellence. For 'knowledge' is reflection in itself, i.e., the consciousness of being consciousness, whereas, even in the disinterested pursuit of 'pure' science, there is no enjoying consciousness of consciousness itself: even

there knowledge is enjoyed as a value. But 'value' as such is transcended in 'knowledge' or reflection.

Epistemology of 'critique' of knowledge, then, is no science of knowledge, all that is extraneous to knowledge being inadmissible in epistemology.

As Professor Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya has pointed out "An epistemology must itself be a body of knowledge..." To Kant, knowledge is limited to phenomena: an unknown and unknowable thing-in-itself is ever haunted by knowledge. The consummation is not going to be achieved in knowledge, according to Kant, 'knowledge' is constitutionally confronted with an alien reality: epistemology as such is rooted in alienation. To Hegel, however, the alien reality which was unknown comes to be 'known': 'knowledge' is just the process of progressively removing the alienation in respect of the 'unknown'. To Kant, however, think of a Hegelian Absolute in which cognitive alienation comes to be finally transcended is to smuggle metaphysical considerations into epistemology, a study that is human, perhaps all-too-human. May it not be possible to interpret the consciousness of alienation or of 'limit' in a manner which is as little agnostic or Kantian as it is metaphysical or Hegelian.

In so far as both the Kantian and the Hegelian conceive of the 'limit' in question from outside knowledge, they transgress the very spirit of epistemology or theory of knowledge. The question of the limit of knowledge is, of course a philosophically interesting question. In our own days, Professor Strawson has credited Kant with having engaged himself in the task of setting limits to what we can think or conceive of. Strawson's way of conceiving the task is of course different from Kant's. As he says, "In order to think of a limit, it is not necessary to think both sides of the limit. It is only necessary to think up to it." Familiar as the modern student of philosophy is with all these i.e., the Kantian or the Hegelian solution to the present problem or even the Strawsonian emendation to Kant, he may still be in doubt as to where exactly the limit of knowledge is to be drawn. Our answer will be: nowhere. The present question is not factual but philosophical or epistemological. And therefore, the proposed limit is to be drawn, according to the dictates of epistemology. We are apt to conceive the

present problem on a spatial analogy since we do not take into reckoning what epistemology dictates to us. What really does it dictate? Truly speaking, it dictates that the 'limit' is to be understood as the border where there is the parting of the ways between epistemology on the one hand and all sciences on the other, between Knowledge proper on the one hand and imagination, fancy, computation, construction, manipulation, etc., on the other—in a word, the whole gamut of the value-seeking or end-seeking activities of man, his factual and material interests not excluded.

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NOTES

1. 'The Subject as Freedom' included in *Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. II, Calcutta, Progressive Publishers, 1958, p. 34.
2. *Studies in Kant in Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 301.

