

Pujya Dr. K.C. Varadachari - Volume -
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PHILOSOPHY AND LIFE-II

Writing in the latest number of the Philosophy¹, Dr C.E.M. Joad pleaded for the return to the classical tradition in philosophy. The classical tradition according to him lies in the application of the principles of philosophy to life, even as Plato and Aristotle did. The fact that their theories may not have been true did not make them forbear from applying the principles of which they were convinced to the conduct of life itself. In other words, their ethical interest in life was greater than their purely metaphysical interest. It is all right to speak about the need for knowledge for knowledge's sake, but it is imperative in knowledge itself to get its sanctions and embodiment in the living tissue of civilization. Thus politico-ethical interest dominated their thought. If we further enquire into this tendency to apply the discoveries of thought to the plane of action, we find that it has been the one surest knowledge, knowledge that has arrived at that certainty of a workable proposition, knowledge which cannot but seek its realization in the concrete world of human experience. It is only the

abstract and theoretical interest in discovering the unities and constancies in the changing and fluctuating phenomena of the outer world and human life that precluded any application of these discovered principles to the ordinary conduct of the world. As a matter of fact, this abstract tendency of the theoretical interest went so far as to urge a complete separation from the application of those theories to practical conduct that has led to an anti-podal movement in both. It is true that disinterested discovery of principles is and should continue to be the fundamental purpose of philosophy and science, but it is equally urgent that these principles should be obliged to render account to the phenomena of life and conduct so that they should not lose sight of their matrix of expression and loyalty to the earth.

¹ October 1940.

It is a pity that the cooperation between the ideal and actual has been wanting, as we can witness in the constant opposition raised between the two. The earth and our life refuse to be moulded in the pattern of our interests. They reject the claims of thought to dictate to the world. This is an important fact, and reveals the impossibility of applying the ideals of philosophy to fact. If the ideals of philosophy are not other than the ideals of

science, which is pure and disinterested knowledge verifiable by experience, then science which has at present landed us through its discoveries in the present age of scientific self-slaughter, and philosophy which is unable to stem the tide of the progressive applied science, cannot be helped. On the contrary, it is very well recognized that philosophy and science are different, though they both seek knowledge, the one of the terrestrial and the other of the eternal which includes the terrestrial. The ideals of philosophy then embrace the ethical and the religious and cultural values more than the mere science, and thus grant a *direction* to the discoveries and inventions. The power of knowledge is granted by science as method, as Yoga is said to have done. But it is quite different when the ends are not the ends of wisdom. Yoga even might go astray, might lead to chaos in conduct and to reaction in social action. Thus mere knowledge that is not governed by knowledge of the fundamental unity of all life under the life of spiritual values is a foundation concept with which we have to begin to apply ourselves to the task of restoring the classical tradition in philosophy.

It is no less true of all true religious and mystical consciousness that the enlightenment or revelation or

vision leads immediately to the fulfilment in conduct of that which that vision imports. The command of God or the Vision to execute in the temporal context the intuited truths of the supramental vision is an imperative, a sacred calling which the mystic or the religious seer cannot even think of disobeying.

It is said of Buddha that at the moment after his enlightenment, he was tempted to give up all contact with the world, and escape into his own supreme Nirvana.

"Once, Ananda, I was staying at Uruvela on the strand of the river Neranjara under the ayapala fig-tree, immediately after I had attained the highest insight (sambodhi). Then, O Ananda, Mara the evil one came where I was; he stepped forward to my side and standing by my side, Mara the evil one said to me: Into Nirvana shall now, Lord, the holy one enter, into Nirvana the blessed one; now, Lord, it is time for the holy one to enter into Nirvana."

"After that speech, O Ananda, I said to Mara, the evil one, as follows: 'I shall not go into Nirvana, thou evil one, before I have monks as hearers, wise, disciplined, experienced, well-informed, who possess the doctrine of salvation, who have the calm corresponding to the

doctrine of salvation not until these themselves, after commencing their teaching office, impart, proclaim, teach, determine, explain, expound, correct: not until they have suppressed the protests of others which can be suppressed by the aid of the doctrine of salvation..!

This is so even in the case of those who have affirmed that to live here is living death, is illusion which must be got rid of. This is a precious inconsistency, precious because without it the knowledge of the superterrestrial cannot even filter into our consciousness, and form the basic foundation of our abstract speculation on the eternal as contra-distinct from the temporal and the phenomenal.

Such indeed is the vitality of the mystic vision that cannot but be the voice of the eternal, a voice not in the wilderness but a voice which is capable enough and profound enough to find resonance and acceptance in the minds and conduct of the living mass of humanity.

The only question is whether we can speak of applying the results of philosophy to the conditions of our life-time and thus influence a radical departure from its set and slavish habit. If it were so what are the discoveries which we have made which can in some measure be made to so influence the direction and end of the human

existence and culture. Are we sure that we have arrived at a workable unity in our knowledge of philosophical problems? What with the babel of tongues in philosophy, with its 'multifariousness of opinion' about problems, of subject, object, substance-attribute, the nature of the subject and the nature of the object, the knowledge of other minds, whether viewed from the pluralistic or the monistic or realistic or idealistic or organistic or evolutionary standpoint or the pragmatic or humanistic standpoint? Our problems having received diverse opinions, our attitude being undetermined and confused, thanks to the marvellous changes in the knowledge of the external universe, and the continued apprehension that they are not capable of giving us any final truths even regarding the nature of the physical world, we are in the words of Sir S. Radhakrishnan "hastening confusedly to unknown ends."

The counsel of Dr. Joad that it is better to apply certain principles assured to us and then to seek to find out the deficiencies even as the *a priori* thinker of the type of Plato did, is no better than the pragmatic claim to put into execution hypothesis based undoubtedly on axioms of supreme certitude. Indeed it is perhaps worse. We find that the theory of aristocratic difference between the

ordinary man and the philosopher who alone must be made to govern the country or the state is not acceptable to the democratically minded. And in a democracy then the race-aristocrat, or intelligence aristocrat or the expert has no chance of being heard. Nor are the methods pursued by these thinkers likely to bear a fruitful result. The total regimentation of consciousness of all individuals their lives and their bodies, to a set routine of emotional unity, however efficient in itself, is not going to make for the liberation of intelligence from its own fugitive and insular and isolated condition, which at least is the agreed goal of all philosophers. Nazism and communism have striven to implement the psychological truth in the method of conditioned reflex just as much as the ancient Manu and the law-givers of India are alleged to have done with such conspicuous success in regard to the homogeneous unity of culture called Hinduism. That **it is necessary to condition the consciousness of the individuals all through the world by a systematic, consistent, and uniform method of substitution of universal ends in place of the narrow parochial and patriotic motives must be conceded if life should evolve to a better order and plane.** Can these be done by pure persuasion all the time? Should not the means be of the same order as the end mystics of all ages have

affirmed. Sattvatas. Buddha and Gandhi for instance? The essential trouble is distrust of human motives and the configuration of these known as the personality-factor. Psychology is going to govern mankind more than philosophy. The Mein Kampf is a closely reasoned study of the psychology of the crowd. Nothing less than the application of the truths of psychology to the conditions of the human situation is needed at the present moment. The science gives us laws, but not the ends. The ends may be anything. As Professor Watson declared, we can make a child either an idiot or a genius, by applying the different environmental conditions. This is the trust of Plato, Nietzsche, Manu, Buddha, Hitler and Lenin too among our foremost thinkers. In the ends have these people differed, not in the means. The greatness of the prophets lay in the ideal trend of their psychological applications, the philosopher and seer in them has shown the movement of the inner purpose of mankind.

The philosopher, however, finds it difficult to admit the absolute truth or ideal construction and application of these ideals to the conduct of life even during temporary periods. The philosopher has to bend the world and its forces to the ideal of his thoughts and visions. He cannot step down truth to the level of compromise which really

surrenders the ideal. The implacable intolerance of the Jesuits, much admired by many, the unbending pursuit of the truth of the sastras on the part of the orthodox, the belief that cannot put up with any diminution in its strength, have always gained admiration and then approval. The psychology of admiration has always been based on the strength and uniformity of pursuit on the part of the follower which despite ridicule and repression has won at long last respect and a place under the sun. Compromise is impossible on the plane of universal values of human life, and these may be not what we are agreed upon. Liberty, in mind and body and movement in speech all these may be greatly needed for development of the personality. But are we certain about the modicum of liberty which whilst pursuing its helpfulness to personality does not infringe upon the total social context? In the excellent book *Civilization* by Clive Bell, he declares "Superstitious ages are inevitably cruel: one of their superstitions being, invariably, that pain is good as a means, a doctrine which commends itself especially to those who are ashamed to confess that they deem it good as an end. After all, the sadism of civilized eccentrics may be nothing more than a relic of barbarism" (p. 118 Pelican ed). There are two kinds of superstition, perhaps a natural biological pre-rational

state when the superstition was a normal device of the mind to escape from the collapse of its action, and the other and second kind of the modern dictators which is an attempt to bring back to the rational mind, in its confused state the solace of the superstitions of the former age. The effective advertisement of the ancient superstition engenders unconscious vibrations, and loyalties spring up to this root-reaction of atavistic behaviour. The patriotic impulse which is sought to be awakened by theories of race, of culture, of religion all betray this appeal to the pre-rational unity of the consciousness, which has long since, lain dormant and hidden under the fine manners and platitudinous exterior of our rationality. Thus it is impossible to create myths and manners and mysteries as of old, nor even to appeal to the past in the same way as is being done by dictatorial psychology. To succumb to this pseudo-philosophical jargon of patriotism and other isms is to forsake the firmest foundations of our life. An accurate and piercing analysis of the triple ends of life shows that some kind of adjustment is constantly needed between the forces of freedom, equality and brotherhood of man, on the plane of reason and not on the plane of mere emotional life or instinctive ends. "Common sense and a respect for realities are not less graces of the spirit than

more zeal", says Professor T. H. Tawney (p.249 *Religion and Rise of Capitalism*. Pelican ed). But this respect for realities is not to be confused with the compromise formulas. There need be no betrayal of the rights of reason whilst we accept to apply the eternal principles in the conditions of the temporal. The philosophic dichotomy so constantly praised and pursued between the eternal and the temporal requires a firm and complete repudiation. Pluralism is the life and function of reason, but it is not certainly separativism or isolationism. Our realistic outlook tolerates and worships difference in functions as enriching the unity of its structural pattern, but it does not permit the isolated existence of any fact whatever without explanation. The unity that is striven after is at the basis of our interrelations, perhaps in the form of a inchoate organic unity, not indeed in the form and structure of the actual typical organism which we know, but the archetypal foundational plan of a unity. But to make it real and expressive of the dynamic, it can never be the permanent static concept of the Absolute, which knows no progress and permits none. The individuals should seek to rediscover on the plane not of myths and mysteries and superstitions of patriotic unity and identity and relationships, but on the broad and universal basis of equality and freedom of life of reason,

the unity of the Organic. There is no compromise if reason is that which pleads; there is always a faulty compromise when the terms are those which belong to two different planes. Compromise must be such that it never surrenders to specious pleas. Thus it is that we find that religious seers have always surrendered or compromised with what apparently are to us serious lapses, but have refused to yield on points which to us appear as unimportant and not fundamental. This apparent inconsistency in their activities and decisions, has not a little provoked uncomfortable feelings on the part of their disciples. Philosophers if they would but conjure up such a vivid sense of the important and the essential, will undoubtedly be able to carry their ideals into practice and execute their dreams on the canvass of the temporal. But such a faculty or ability or purposiveness is incident on the fundamental quality of intellectual sympathy with the real and the objective situations in the light of their possibilities. The eternal possibilities in the womb of the present may be indeed possibilities that have been engendered by the past of our life on the terrestrial plane, but it is the something more, the dire alternative of skipping back to the ancient and the atavistic behaviour that more often than expected has assailed mankind after every huge and terrific effort to

jump it over. The alternatives which psyche-analysis has promised have not the power to shew us anything that might be profitable to human evolution or shew the possibility of the ingression into the terrestrial scheme of the ideals which have been struggling for an embodiment. The theory of emergent evolution with its unpredictable emergence of novel and the unexpected has not been able to even make guesses at the future. What with the demolition of the logic of causality with its strict predictable future, there has come into being chaos or novelty. The giving up of the concept of finality has added to our troubles. We have now to restate our principles of causal continuity. Can we? The doctrine of suddenness has not been altogether sanctioned by the study of our pioneers in spiritual and prophetic consciousness. The study of the mystical consciousness shews nothing more than the feeling of peace, a transformation of the consciousness and the attitude to life as a whole, novel in itself but not capable of giving us a new philosophy. The cultural patterns of their environment have afflicted their rational cosmology, and we find them to be purely speculative if not merely unnecessary for the growth and development of human life. What to them is fundamental is the feeling and realization of oneness of all life, the togetherness of their

existence which is ultimate and inexplicable by any human terms or logical terms. The aesthetic feeling or reaction of total pleasure or essence of pleasure, *rasa*, this is the summit of their consciousness. Thus we find that whilst there exist great divergencies in their cosmological theories, on one point, namely the relationship of the individual to the total All, (God), there is no divergence whatsoever. There is a functional and foundational unity, a unity that realises even an identity at some points of deepest intuition, so much so one is enabled to speak those wonderful words "*So hamasmi*" "*Tat-tvam-asi*". "There is nothing else." Does this peak of intuitive realization bear the existence of the world, can it render itself in the figures of the objective? Can we ever project this inward and interior vision, non-sensuous and ecstatic into the temporal and the manifold changing, transient, clash of colour, race, interests and instincts? The application of the philosophical principles must be then realistic and not idealistic, for to speak of the idealistic trend of life might be right but not the idealistic application. No doubt "the practical man" with his business habits ingrained in him, counting his shillings and pence and looking eagerly at the market conditions does not represent our ideal of turning philosophers into practical men. In the words of G. K.

Chesterton "A man must have his head in the clouds and his wits wool gathering in the fairyland." whilst he applies himself to the task of extricating the world from its barren practical mindedness, for the practical man is a creature of the circumstances and creatures of the mere animal desires cannot be expected to take an idealistic view which demands competent execution. The lunacy of the practical and the economic is too much with us. It is undoubtedly high time that utopians take their turn. It is always the impractical man who has made the impossible possible. Thus the unpredicted comes into actual operation due to the faith in his vision of that one man. Laugh the world may its fullest. But the man with his faith in his wonderland has made the impossible, the unpredictable came into existence. Because verily he is the master of that secret unity of the vision and the real here, the vision that is an impossibility far the ordinary man with his practical-mindedness with his mind enclosed within the particular facts incompletely linked together without that saving knowledge of the progressive movement inherent within them requiring just that amount of faith to stimulate the achievement of result. This saving knowledge is the vision, the imperative of the prophetic insight, that promises despite all calculations to the contrary, the realization of it in

terms of the temporal which according to definition is ruled out. The vision is never wrong, it is the definition of the relationship between the temporal and the spiritual and the eternal that is verily wrong and requires a recasting. When therefore the emergent evolutionists, moral evolutionists, creative evolutionists speak about the unpredictable nature of the creative activity, it is perhaps true of the lower species, but looked at from the point of view of the prophet and the seer here too we have the predictive possibility. It is the two-fold instruction of the path of prophetic insight that it points out only two ways, the way of death and the way of light, the one pointing out the summit in clearest language and the other showing the results of defeat of light, and the peril our consciousness is in. Is all this untrue even from the philosophical standpoint? Not so if we view the dialectic of Hegel from the standpoint of the realist or the evolutionist. It was Sir Radhakrishnan who beautifully said that the "evolution happened in the animal, it has to be willed in the human." Moral responsibility to choose the good, the religious responsibility to be dependent on the Highest Ideal or God we know who albeit may be conceived even in the manner of Ahura-Mazda as fighting for the restoration of the Good, the mystical responsibility not to yield to the

lower and the comfortable path of mere acceptance of the present conditions, all these show that man cannot, must not keep quiet--He must take sides in this activity of life for the sake of the triumph of the vision, which he has been vouchsafed. It was said: "If thou canst not be a saint of knowledge, be thou at least its warrior" and aptly. The Philosopher cannot now refuse to choose to act. It is perhaps to instruct this great truth the Lord in the Bhagavad Gita says "even a little of this knowledge makes you cross over great fear." *svalpamapyasya dharmasya trayate mahato bhayat.*

Thus we find that whilst the application of the finding of philosophy to current problems of the world cannot by any means be final, yet to start on this work is all to the good and indeed imperative. The laws discovered by the sciences have a neutral or ambivalent nature capable of being used or misused. Thirdly we cannot speak about the unpredictability of the future with any sense, as that is to lose sight of the ability of the saving knowledge achieved by mystic and religious and philosophic insight to plan and save humanity and lift it up to the higher levels of consciousness. The fundamental vision must be there to be dynamic and imperative in a total sense, than the mere economic imperative, or emotional imperative

or geographical or racial imperative or moral imperative even. It is the total-imperative of the knowledge of Organic Unity of Spirit that can further life's progress and achieve it. The faith in the *Purna* the fullest, in the All, the *sarva*, in the *Ekam*, the Unity of all, in the Light and transcendent Reason, it is that which makes the philosophic utopian, the most practical. The failure of Plato, Socrates and others is grand. It is immortal. It is their faith that must find a dynamic content for it is that lack which made their failure possible. Reason is and must be enthroned. But greater than reason is the Life of Spirit, that fundamental solace of human relationships in the universe. Thus we return to the beginning. Philosophy must be rescued from airy nothings. Its most abstract truths must be and perhaps are truer than the less abstract which are untrue alike to truth and to abstractness. The gain that we have registered in philosophy so far has been negative, critical. It has not yet found the positive, the constructive. Even the so-called constructions have an air of mechanical patched-up affairs. There is no life or movement possible nor could life and movement be breathed into them, as Christ is said to have done in regard to the birds he made of mud.

A synthetic or organistic standpoint, or rather a total stand-point of the Spiritual which embraces all the terrestrial and the cosmic, temporal and the fluxional must be our one aim. In which case action is implicit in that dynamic totality, and life becomes an emergence out of this totality in complete harmony with its total nature. Life then becomes transformed, even divine in the true sense of the term. It would be perfect action, spontaneous, and self-fulfilling or rather self-manifesting in the whole as also in parts. The specious doctrine that the imperfection of the parts is consistent with the perfection of the whole will not find a place in it. Is this a possibility at all, it may be asked? Let our seers answer.