
UNIT 1 NATURE AND SCOPE OF EPISTEMOLOGY

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

- To introduce the students to the nature and scope of epistemology.
- To give a preliminary introduction to the course of epistemology and its relevance to philosophy.
- To acquaint the students with the preliminary history of epistemology.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Epistemology deals with the study of knowledge, or more specifically with what we know and how we know it. Therefore, we might say it is to do with justifying our knowledge. However, justified knowledge is also associated with the notion of truth, and the idea of belief. This is because people are not usually justified in claiming to have knowledge of things they do not believe to be true (E.g. Ask an atheist to explain what they know about God). The tripartite definition of knowledge is that “knowledge is justified, true, belief.” Of course, people all around the world differ in their fundamental beliefs about the nature of reality, and as a result they inevitably claim to be justified in knowing and believing many different things to other people. As such, epistemology tries to examine and establish the conditions for certain knowledge (knowledge which cannot be doubted by anyone), and also to establish the conditions for knowing a statement is justifiably true.

The Greek word ‘episteme’ is the root of epistemology or study of knowledge. This philosophical term is commonly associated with the inquiry of truth and knowledge. In fact it was Greek philosophers who initiated such a study and from their cultivation of epistemology, stem the growth of many sciences. The word may have few connotations. First, epistemology can be the quest for true and scientific knowledge as opposed to opinion or belief. Secondly, it may be seen as an organized body of thought about reality. In general it may be regarded that epistemology is the branch of philosophy that studies knowledge. It attempts to answer the basic

question: What distinguishes true (adequate) knowledge from false (inadequate) knowledge? Practically, this question translates into issues of scientific and philosophical methodology: How can one develop theories or models that are better than competing theories of knowledge? As a philosophical enquiry, together with logic, it sharpens our quest in all other philosophical domains like metaphysics, cosmology, ethics and philosophy of God. When we look at the history of epistemology, we can discern a clear trend, in spite of the confusion of many seemingly contradictory positions. The first or ancient theories of knowledge stressed its absolute, permanent character. But the contemporary epistemological theories put the emphasis on its relativity or situation-dependence, its continuous development or evolution, and its active interference with the world and its subjects and objects. The whole trend today is to understand knowledge not as a static, passive reality, but more as adaptive, participative and active process. (Refer <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/epistemi.html>)

1.2 HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF GREEK EPISTEMOLOGY

As stated already, the roots of epistemology can be traced to the Greek language. Therefore, a better understanding of the subject requires a brief historical account of the conditions in which Greek philosophers lived. The first groups of Greek philosophers are referred to as the Pre-Socratics. They include the Milesians, Ionians, Eleatics, Atomists, and Sophists. Important to this historical analysis is for us to realise how the importance changes from geographical to ideological. The change is caused by the conditions in society enabling Athens to become the center of teaching, reflection, wisdom and even governing.

The first philosophers were residents of prosperous cities. Since they travelled widely, they had the luxury that allows speculation and philosophical thinking. Besides trying to improve methods in farming and other occupations, these rich men could afford time for reflective thought. This reflection about nature produced conceptual questions laying the foundations for philosophy. They took up issues of existence, knowledge, and value. Important to their conclusions about nature is the fact they were based upon, what we call today, non-scientific methods of observation. Their speculation is based on few primary documents written by earlier philosophers, or more on secondary sources, oral traditions, and the known historical events.

1.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND IN GREECE

The peninsula of Greece (or Hellas) is located on the Aegean Sea, where the climate is very favourable for human habitation. Agriculture became widespread and early civilizations flourished. The three civilizations of the Bronze Age were the Minoan, Cycladic, and Helladic. These civilizations became the first high civilizations on the European continent; they constructed great palaces and writings emerged from there. On the Island of Crete, the Mycenaean rose to supremacy. The significance of the Mycenaean culture was their likeness to the Homer's *heros*. However because of invasion and various natural disasters the Mycenaean went into a dark age around 1450 B.C. This led to population shift to the Ionian Isles and may have resulted in the partial collapse of civilization. Further, the decline of their culture was

aggravated by drought, climate change, harvest failure, epidemic and civil unrest (Refer: Wikiversity).

The Dorians, a nomadic people, invaded the place around the end of the Dark Ages, at about 900 B.C. One of the first Greek historians, Thucydides, wrote about the Trojan Wars. Thus the written history emerged after a 400 year gap, from compilation of oral traditions and claimed that the Dorian invasion was the famous wars between Troy and Sparta. The Dorians were traditional enemies of the Ionians. During the Archaic period (900 B.C.) tensions created by war, economies, and religion made society fragile. Later, things began to settle down. Then trade expanded, the first Olympic Games began in 776 B.C., and small communities developed in geographically secured regions on top of alluvial plains surrounded by impassable mountains. Thucydides speculated that sanctuaries to the gods became permanent as early as the 8th century BC.

In any case by 6th century, cultural figures such as Lycurgus, author of the Spartan constitution, and Solon of Athens demonstrated a Greek society that moved beyond subsistence and was stable enough for viable trade and economic stratification. The diversity of economics gave rise to tyrants also during the 6th century. Thus the first laws attempting to structure society were Draconian Laws of 621B.C. These laws were harsh and savagery. By 594 B.C., these Draconian laws were replaced by the laws promulgated by Solon, a poet and statesman. His laws were more flexible and allowed the liberty of self expression. Paramount to the birth of western philosophy was the economic and social conditions of the times. The development of epistemology was, in fact, a process of civilization's progress. During these times of economic stability, conditions were prosperous enough to develop thought, including philosophical and epistemological thoughts.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What is the definition of "knowledge"?

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2. In general how do the ancient theories of epistemology differ from the present ones?

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1.4 THE EARLY GREEK PHILOSOPHERS

Miletus, a Greek colonial port city, is home to Thales (624-545 B.C.). He is generally recognized as the first philosopher since the written and oral records of western philosophy can be traced to him. A summary of Thales' contribution to philosophy suggests that all things are full of the gods, and that by some nature or principle all things come into being. He shows this by using the principle of a magnet. Because it attracts iron it must possess a soul. Further, everything has a prime mover, just as the magnet. The prime mover or *arche* of everything, according to Thales, was water because the "seeds of everything have a moist nature." Although his argument is based on observation of the natural world, Thales plants the seed that develops into the quest for knowledge, both scientific and divine. The concept that everything comes from an *arche* and thus returns to an *arche* is the origin of monism or belief in one substance.

Next was Anaximander (610-540 B.C.). Only very few of his writings survive. Specifically, his contribution was the idea that the universe originated from the *apeiron* or the boundless. Therefore, the *arche*, or ultimate underlying substance of all things, must be something other than the four elements of earth, fire, water, and air. If any one of these were limitless it would destroy the other. So the *apeiron* cannot be any one of these four. By his insightful thoughts, Anaximander was laying the foundation for the search for the boundless, that is, theology and the quest to identify with the divine.

Interestingly enough the next of the philosophers, the Ionian, Pythagoras was not even a mathematician. Rather he focuses on a doctrine of metempsychosis or belief that the soul is immortal. He believed the ordering of the natural world was in accordance with mathematic relationships and harmony. His teaching promoted a strict way of life including a strict vegetarian diet since his ideology incorporated that each human and animal soul is reborn.

His successor Heraclitus agreed with the Milesians on the cyclic nature of stuff, but claimed the *arche* was fire and that the flux in nature allowed the contraries of hot and cold to change each element into other. This applies to ideas as well for instance. According to him without strife there is no justice or without war there is no king. "Conflict is Justice, and that all things come to pass in accordance with conflict." This harmony of conflict sustains the world under a law of process and opposition. Logos, or proportion as used in the common language of the Greeks, was the standard for all things. However, he also uses it in a more technical term in which logos is an underlying organizational principle of the universe. This principle is "hidden and perceptible only to the intelligence." Therefore, Heraclitus is particularly important to the establishment of logos as a foundation in Stoicism and Christianity. In epistemology too this idea is significant since only through such a journey of the logos is the knowledge of the divine revealed.

The Eleatic, Parmenides, 5th century philosopher, conceptualized that being is neither changeable nor divisible and can be neither created nor destroyed. Further, he alludes to the dualistic nature of the cosmos. According to his epistemology it is only the being that can be named or identified. Therefore, there can be only one original being and everything else is illusory. Thus, everything is actual or perceived, likewise either true or false, a conclusion highly contested by Plato later on.

During the consolidation of intellectual and political power, Anaxagoras (500-428 B.C.), a Milesian, moves to Athens. He concluded that nothing can come into being or be perished. All

things are made up of ultimate realities of the four elements, taking the shape of the dominant element. According to him, creation was a mixture of elements stirred by nous, or father of all substances. Everything is as it is perceived, and there is no discrepancy between appearances and reality. Most importantly, he believed the mind does not mix with things because it is too fine. It is this separation that forms the foundation for mind and body dualism.

Empedocles rejects monism. He claims that the forces love and strife coupled with the four elements is the motivation for existence. There exist divine gods that are immortal and powerful but they do not influence being. In conclusion, these pre-Socratic philosophers sow the seeds for the origin of uncertainty that emerges in the study of epistemology. The pre-Socratics believed all things to be made of matter. They also upheld the view that it is only through reason that knowledge be found. Heraclitus fostered this hypothesis, but subsequent philosophers moved towards a concept that everything was in flux.

1.5 THE GERMINATION OF WESTERN EPISTEMOLOGY

The next set of philosophers had a great impact in the world of inquiry and epistemology. They develop styles of writing and rhetoric that challenge the beliefs and authorities of the civil society of those days. Democritus, the Atomist, wrote over fifty works that were destroyed in the 4th century A.D. Democritus developed the concept of the *atomos*, or indestructible, indivisible material of one true substance, which form into a complex mixture of atoms by colliding and adhering to each other. Democritus, together with Leucippus, hypothesized that there exists either a void of non-being or a spatially full being. In other words, nothing happens randomly. Rather things happen by the differences in atoms and their attraction to each other. Thus the properties of things are caused by atoms: their shape is caused by rhythm, order by contact, and mode by position, etc. The size and shape of the perceptible world is only perceived by senses and are thus conventionally given. In other words convention or “*nomos*” of the society is significant. This concept of “*nomos*” gives rise to the Sophists’ argument between convention and nature. “Sophia,” (meaning wisdom) was what the Sophists sought. Chrysippus believed the four virtues -temperance, courage, justice, and wisdom - were naturally occurring and not given by convention. Virtue (or “*arête*”) was the means by which happiness was to be found. Protagoras, the most famous of the Sophists, stressed that while keeping the appearance of virtue, one may use four types of speech (wishing, asking, answering, and commanding) to increase the power of persuasion. Unfortunately, this approach got a bad name since they used it to for financial gain and helped to discredit the moral objective of the Sophist. When Protagoras states, “Man is the measure of all things,” he implies that everything that is real is perceived by humans (like Plato's cave), in accordance with sense perception and convention. The Sophist contribution was to raise these issues justice (“*dikaiosyne*”) or virtue in ethical debate. Hence, the Sophist may be considered as the first to raise the epistemological question: How much of what we think we know about nature is objective and how much is human convention?

Then comes Socrates, for whom wisdom is the cardinal virtue. In practice the Socratic Method is based on the assumption that understanding your knowledge is limited. This understanding creates the ground for an endless search for knowledge and in turn brings people to self realization. In the *Phaedo* Socrates makes distinctions between two types of knowledge, opinions and truths. In his quest for knowledge, justice is the underlying faculty for all subsequent

exploration. Plato was influenced by Socrates. In his quest for justice, he inadvertently opens the path to truth and knowledge. His main goal was ethics, but this search for ethics leads to epistemology. Plato's first argument in epistemology is made between true belief and knowledge. "You argue that a man cannot inquire either about that which he knows, or about that which he does not know; for if he knows, he has no need to inquire; and if not, he cannot; for he does not know the very subject about which he is to inquire." (Meno 80e)

Plato uses a theory of recollection (*anamnesis*) to build on Pythagorean theory of rebirth. He assumes that knowledge is innate. "Then it must, surely have been before we began to see and hear and use the other senses that we got knowledge of the equal itself, of what it is, if we were going to refer to the equals from our sense-perceptions" (*Phaedo* 75b-76). In other words, the innate ideas Plato refers to are ideas that found their way in a mind without the mind needing to experience anything. In this way he concludes that not everything is known through the senses, "Well, but we ourselves are part body and part soul...then soul is more similar than body to the invisible, whereas body is more similar to that which is seen." (*Phaedo* 79b) Another discussion of Plato between the opinion and truth is also epistemologically relevant: "So wouldn't we be right to describe the difference between their mental states by saying that while this person has knowledge, the other one has beliefs?" (*Republic* 476d) In his allegory of the cave, Plato explains "The point is that once you become acclimatized, you'll see infinitely better than the others there; your experience of genuine right, morality, and goodness will enable you to identify every one of the images and recognize what it an image is of" (*Rep* 520c). For Plato, justice and civic morality was his goal in his search, which is also epistemological. Plato's dialectic style of writing differs from rhetoric, as the approach is to enlighten, rather than persuade. For him the end product or "*telos*" (goal) is the structuring of an ethical city of virtue. Plato conceived a hierarchal structure in which the nous or intellect was the supreme reality or form. The above nuances and meandering debates of "how we come to know what we know" are the historical basis for epistemology in the Western tradition, as we know it today.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What was the contribution of Anaximander?

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2. What is 'atomos' and who proposed this idea first?

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1.6 THE BRANCHING OF EPISTEMOLOGY

Aristotle was a student of Plato for twenty years. He became the teacher of Alexander the Great, whose conquest and victory introduced many new ideologies and schools of thought in Greece. Aristotle establishes his school, the Lyceum, in Athens where the focus was on biological studies. Thus he becomes the father of categorical logic and taxonomies, the science of classification. This process requires rigorous and disciplined study to place things properly where they belong.

Aristotle's observation of natural things showed him that they perform various functions and have the potential to change. It is only by intellect can one distinguish between reality and things of convention or belief. Consequently, he concludes that some things are self-evident. He observes through language human beings reflect the world in terms of subjects and predicates. The problem is whether self-awareness comes by accident or is indispensable to understanding. For Aristotle reason was the way to self-knowledge and movement (including our capacity to actualize) was caused by a first principle. Aristotle bridges the gap between potentiality and actuality through nature.

As with other sciences, he treats knowledge as an organized body of thought, which has its own classification or taxonomy. In *Metaphysics*, he first divides *Episteme* into three groups. The first two are *praktike*, or action, as in how we make a choice, *poietike* or *techne*, meaning an applied science, or practical application of skill. The last, *theoretike* is again divided into three categories, *mathematike*, *physike*, and *theologike*. These will inquire into the mathematical, natural and divine realities. Consequently, Aristotle that broadens the branches of epistemology.

Following the death of Alexander the Great, the civil society degrades and a power struggle takes place. Three philosophies, Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Scepticism try to cope with the civil despair. Their individual goals are similar to the above philosophers in that happiness is the ultimate goal. Epicureanism or hedonism is seeking individual pleasure. Although virtue is still the foundation for hedonism (derived from the Greek "*hedone*" meaning "pleasure") the views were a misinterpretation and so later on it would become a perversion. Consequently, individual happiness takes undue precedence over community. These philosophies lead to rampant superstition, chaos and religious fundamentalism.

1.7 NATURE AND SCOPE OF EPISTEMOLOGY

Epistemology grew out of a social concern relative to the environment and the conflicts surrounding the civil society, particularly in ancient Greece, which at its high culture, provided structure that allowed the liberty of thought. In fact, epistemological questions can be traced to the root problems of every society or civilization. The very genesis of how reality is constructed, has given rise to conventions for expressing our origin and the forms in which we give name to. Thus a critical reflection regarding the source and essence of ourselves and of nature is undertaken in epistemology. This process of potentiality to actuality gives rise to the metaphysical root of epistemology.

Clearly the Pre-Socratic philosophers planted these questions. But it was Plato, schooled by Socrates' civic virtues, who turns his quest to establish a moral society into an ideal one. Plato's

epistemology evolved from his exploration of the apparent, imagined, and the recalled, which he found in his society. Thus the character of awareness and how we acquire knowledge, for example, through senses or apart from senses, expands the subject of epistemology. In turn, his student, Aristotle, lays the foundations for epistemology as a model discipline that will incorporate the practical application of science and the work ethic required for thought. He bases the thought in the real knowledge as opposed to the belief or mere opinion. In short, the goal of early philosophy was to seek a virtuous society that could live harmoniously as individuals and communities.

Thus right from the beginning the nature and scope of epistemology has been evolving, most of the time progressively. Depending on the society and its economic and cultural situation, the quest for knowledge and the basic intellectual foundations gave rise to various issues. Though epistemology generally revolves around human's search for knowledge, its particular nature and scope has been changing through history. Thus epistemology, which concerns with the nature and scope of knowledge, has its own evolving nature and scope. The horizon of epistemology is characteristic of the growth and maturity of a given society.

Epistemology enumerates potential realms of knowledge in all religious, political, mathematical, logic, scientific, ethical, or psychological. The scope of epistemology is extended to metaphysics, logic, ethics, psychology and sociology. Philosophy embraces metaphysics and epistemology as its two branches. While metaphysics studies what entities exist, epistemology studies what knowledge is and how it is possible.

The scope of epistemology is in the field of logic which is the formal science of the principles governing valid reasoning. Epistemology is a philosophical science of the nature of knowledge. For example, whether a given process of reasoning is valid or not is a logical question, but the inquiry into the nature of validity is an epistemological question. As Bertrand Russell said, 'the two great engines in the progress of human society are the desire to *understand* the world and to *improve* it.' Epistemology studies whether something is true or false, reasonable or unreasonable, justified or unjustified. In epistemology cognitive acts of human beings are evaluated and general principles are laid down for epistemic evaluations.

There are similarities and differences between ethics and epistemology. Epistemology and ethics help us to understand and improve the world by giving us guiding principles in understanding the world and improving it. When it comes to the relation between epistemology and psychology, a question arises in the mind, 'Where does the first end and the second begin?' However, in modern times psychology is establishing its independence. Psychology is a study of the mind and its processes. Hence, psychologists study phenomena such as perception, cognition, emotion, etc. The subject matter of psychology is *how* minds work, whereas epistemology deals with *what* the mind works on. However, the relation between the two is an intimate one because the subject matter of psychology (that is, the cognitive processes of perception, memory, and imagination) are the very processes involved, although in a different context, in the subject matter of epistemology. Psychology is an investigation into all mental states (including the subconscious), whereas epistemology investigates only cognitive states in relation to their cognitive meaning. In spite of partial differences we find a partial identity of the subject matter, which makes them interdependent sciences. Similarly, epistemology is related to sociology. In fact, there is a

special field in sociology called the ‘sociology of knowledge,’ in which the social conditions which lead to knowledge claims are studied. However, while sociology deals with these larger conditions of the social origins of knowledge, epistemology is more concerned with the cognitive status (that is, the validity) of the actual claims themselves.

As Aristotle said, ‘All men by their nature desire to know,’ people understand the importance and power of knowledge in human life. From very ancient times human beings have tried to *know* themselves and even the many natural and supernatural forces which confront them. Very often, the common person takes for granted that what he or she perceives to be true is true, although it is not so all the time. Epistemology reminds us of the power and the limits of the human mind, evaluates and challenges the way people think and come to know of things. Human beings desire to know the world and their place and role in it. Search for knowledge is not merely for an academic requirement but an existential concern to express ourselves. When we ask, ‘What can I know?’, we simultaneously ask, ‘What is real?’ Knowing the reality of the world and ourselves helps to achieve different goals of life and to make life beautiful. The primary goal of epistemology is to find truth that frees us from falsehood. Epistemology invites human beings to pursue truth thoughtfully by laying down principles by which one can accept something as true or reject it as false. It enables humans to identify and distinguish what is truth from falsehood.

1.8 LET US SUM UP

In this introductory unit we have seen the historical evolution of epistemology and its evolving nature and scope. The first theories of knowledge stressed its absolute, permanent character. But the contemporary epistemological theories put the emphasis on its relativity or situation-dependence, its continuous development or evolution, and its active interference with the world and its subjects and objects. The whole trend today is to understand knowledge from a static, passive view of knowledge towards a more and more adaptive, participative and active one. Aristotle, lays the foundations for epistemology as a model discipline that will incorporate the practical application of science and the work ethic required for thought to be based in the real as opposed to the belief. Altogether, the goal of early philosophy was to seek a virtuous society that could live harmoniously for the ultimate tranquility of each individual within a community. Though epistemology generally revolves around human’s search for knowledge, its particular nature and scope has been changing through history. In a word, the ‘uncovering of being’ takes place. And such true knowledge is necessary for wisdom. As Vincent G. Potter says, ‘To be wise does not require that we know everything about everything, but that we know the place of things relative to each other and to ourselves. It is to know what life as a whole is about.’ Accordingly, we can say epistemology assists human beings in realizing the Socratic maxim, ‘Know Thyself.’ Thus epistemology, which concerns with the nature and scope of knowledge, has its own evolving nature and scope.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What was Aristotle's basic contribution to epistemology?

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2. Comment on the evolving "nature and scope of epistemology"?

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1.9 KEY WORDS

Apeiron: In Greek, boundless. Hence the infinite, or formless, and the flux of opposites which need *peras* (or a principle of order) to be rendered intelligible.

Arche: The fundamental, underlying source of the being of all.

Atomos: The indestructible or indivisible material of one true substance. First suggested by Democritus.

Dikaiosyne: Justice

Episteme: The body of ideas that determine the knowledge that is intellectually certain at any particular time.

Hedon: Pleasure

Nomos: Convention

Nous: Intellect or the father of all substances.

Praktike: Aristotle divided Episteme into *praktike* and *theoretike*. *Praktike* is related to action, as in how we make a choice, *poietike* or *techne*, meaning an applied science, or practical application of skill.

Telos: Goal or purpose

Theoretike: One of the divisions of Episteme by Aristotle, is divided into three categories, *mathematike*, *physike*, and *theologike*.

1.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 2 DEFINITION OF KNOWLEDGE AND ITS BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

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- 2.9 Let Us Sum Up
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2.0 OBJECTIVES

- To provide the students with some basic notions of knowledge.
 - To introduce some complex issues of epistemology, like knowledge truth, certainty and justification.
 - To see the relationship among knowledge, reasonableness and justification.
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2.1 INTRODUCTION

Before we study epistemology, it is better to have a refined understanding of knowledge and truth. In this introductory unit we try to do precisely that. After having taken up the process of knowing, we relate it to truth and some basic assumptions for both of them.

2.3 'TO KNOW'

Here we are, of course, concerned with a technical (philosophical or epistemological) meaning of the term 'to know'. In fact, most words, in all languages, have more than one meaning but not all of them are useful in a philosophical discourse. In English, 'to know' can mean, for example, 'to recognize or identify', 'to be acquainted with thing, place or person', 'to be versed in language, skill', etc. What are we to understand by 'to know' in an epistemological sense?

Some thinkers point out that it is not possible to give an exact definition of 'to know' (or 'knowledge'). They claim that like the basic words, 'to see' or 'to hear', 'to know' is such a primary fact of experience. So one can only describe the activity involved by giving examples. To a man born blind it is impossible to tell him what 'to see' means ; similarly to a man born deaf it is impossible to tell him what 'to hear' means. (of course to a man born totally an imbecile, unable to 'know' anything at all, it is not possible to tell him anything!)

Be that as it may, we can always suggest a loose definition for "to know". Or at least description of what understand by this term. The way we prefer to understand the term is this: 'To know' is 'to be aware that such and such is (or is not) the case.' This, obviously needs explaining.

1. To be aware: to be conscious of, to be alert to, to be cognizant of. For our purposes here, we need not go into a detailed analysis of 'awareness'. Suffice is it to point out that this commonly accepted understanding of 'awareness' implies a duality of subject (the knower) and object (the known). An interesting topic which we can discuss is whether the subject can ever

become aware of himself as subject but not as object. In other words whether there is such a state of object-less awareness. Many Indian schools of philosophy maintain that there is, no matter puzzling this may sound. Hence the distinction between *samvedana* or *sanjna* (object awareness) and *cit* or *caitanya* (object-less consciousness). For the moment, by 'awareness' we shall understand 'object-awareness'.

2. Such and such is (or is not) the case: This phrase refers to the 'object', what is known. It denotes a fact, a 'state of affairs', anything which one knows or claims to know. It includes therefore the existence, properties and relations of things and persons; past, present and likely future events, etc.

3. Is (or is not): this indicates a judgement – an affirmation or negation. In fact, unless and until there is such a judgement, there cannot be knowledge in the way we are meaning the term. To understand this point, we can relate 'knowing' with 'sense-perceiving'. Suppose I am given something in my hand, I can see its shape and colour, I can smell and feel its hardness or softness. Still I may not yet know what it is. Only when I say, "it's a mango!" does knowledge emerge. Of course, in the mean time, I have already come to know many things: for example, that I am holding the thing in my hand, that it is round in shape and reddish in colour, that it is soft or hard, even that it is not a baseball, etc. But notice that in all these fragmentary pieces of knowledge there is always entailed a judgement: it is the case that I am holding something in my hand; it is the case that it is round in shape and reddish in colour, etc.

2.4 SOME FURTHER REMARKS

A first remark would be this: the act of judgement implied in 'to know' need not – and often is not – explicit. When I get to know something, I may not be alert to the fact that I in fact am making this fact of judgement. In everyday life, we get to know things spontaneously. Only on reflection can I become alert to the fact that in every act of knowing, an act of judgement is implied. So this act is said to be at least implicitly implied.

A second remark would be this: 'is (or is not) the case' can, obviously refer to the past. Suppose, I say that I know that Jesus lived twenty centuries ago. This means that I am aware that it is the case that Jesus lived twenty centuries ago. Again when I say that I know that all human beings will be finally happy, I am saying that I am aware that it is the case that all humans will be finally happy.

A third remark would be this: to make a judgement is an act, a mental act where as we described 'to know' as 'to be aware'. But is 'to be aware' an act or rather a 'state'? 'To know' can refer either to the precise moment when one gets to know something – and in this case to 'to know' refers to more directly to the mental act. ('To know' would correspond to the moment when one 'understands' something.) But 'to know' can also refer to the time afterwards. Once one got to know something, he keeps on knowing it (till, of course, one is proved wrong or persuaded otherwise). In this case, 'to know' refers more directly to the state of awareness. But this brings us to say something about 'knowledge' (as a noun).

2.5 KNOWLEDGE

We have been speaking, for obvious reasons, of 'to know' and of 'knowledge' in one breath. In our understanding, 'knowledge' is simply the content of one's knowing, of one's understanding. Some Indian philosophers distinguish 'knowledge' from what is stored up, as it were, in 'memory' depending precisely on what each of them understands by the former term.

The question or questions which we would like to discuss here is whether the way we understand 'to know' leads us to understand 'knowledge' as necessarily true and reasonable. In other words is 'knowledge' – to be really 'knowledge' (in our understanding of the term) – either true and reasonable or no 'knowledge' at all? Does it make sense to speak of 'false knowledge' or 'unreasonable knowledge'? Aren't these contradictions in terms? (Later on, we shall discuss the topics of 'truth' and 'certainty', but what we shall be discussing here is necessary to complete our understanding of knowledge itself).

1. Knowledge and truth. For the moment, by 'true' (truth) we understand the following: 'true knowledge is that where what is asserted (or denied) corresponds to what the case is. If I say that the Principal is in his office and in point of fact he is not, my statement is not true but false. If I deny that I went to Mumbai yesterday and in point of fact I did go, my denial is not true but false.

Now suppose that I say that I know that the author of the one of the books in the Bible is St. John. Later on, in my studies of Scripture, I discover that this is not the case. On my discovery will I be able to say that formerly I knew that the author of this book in the Bible is St. John? Or rather that I thought I knew that this is the case, but that, as a matter of fact I was mistaken and did not know at all? Strictly speaking, then, if knowledge is really knowledge, it has to be true. In common knowledge, however, 'false knowledge' can still make sense but only to the extent that what is meant is that what one thinks one knows is false.

2. Knowledge and reasonableness. A further but connected question is this: Is knowledge, no matter how true, but which is based on false or inadequate reasons, knowledge at all? In other words, is knowledge, to be called knowledge (in our understanding of the term), necessarily reasonable (i.e. based on sufficient or adequate reasons)?

Suppose I say that I know that physical evil exists in the world and the reason I give for this assertion is that God could not have created nature in a way other than He has. Supposing that the assertion is true, but the reason given is false, can I still be said to really know that physical evil exists in the world? Or to take another example: I hear somebody saying that he knows that abortion is morally wrong and the only reason for that is that it is illegal. Can he be said to really know that abortion is morally wrong? Our answer would be the following: in both cases, given that, the claimed knowledge is based on false reasons, the speakers do not seem to know what they are really talking about. Hence, their claimed knowledge is no knowledge at all.

That was the case, when the adduced reasons are false. But let us take the case when the reasons adduced are not false but simply inadequate. My mother says she knows that sacraments confer grace and the reason for this is that the parish priest says so. We shall have to return to such a topic later when one's knowledge is based on the 'witness' of supposedly competent authority. But here our answer to the question raised would be this: given that the reason given is adequate (i.e. reasonable) even if not fully sufficient, the claimed knowledge is real knowledge but insufficient.

'Truth' and 'reasonableness', are therefore essential properties, defining characteristics, of 'knowledge' as we understand the term. But this conclusion raises in its turn another very serious

and important question. For if such is the case, can I be said to really know anything unless and until I am certain that what I know is true and reasonable? And is there anything which I can know in such a way? We shall try and tackle this question after we have discussed ‘truth’ and ‘certainty’ at some length later.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. How do you define ‘to know’?

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2. How is truth related to reasonableness?

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2.6 CONCEPTS AND PROPOSITIONS

We have said that ‘to know’ implies explicitly or implicitly a judgement – which we defined as an assertion or denial, as a affirmation or denial. We would like here to analyze a little further the nature of a judgment.

1. Unexpressed or expressed judgement. I can make a judgement in my heart of hearts, as it were, or simply ‘internally’. When I express it ‘externally’ (either to myself or to somebody else), I use words which together form a proposition. For example, “God exists”. The proposition is therefore the verbal outward expression of a judgement. Obviously this can be done either orally or in writing.

2. Analysis of a proposition. Every proposition is a judgement, an assertion or denial of a fact. Besides the duality of which we have already spoken and implied in ‘awareness’, there is in every proposition another duality – this time of whom or what something is affirmed or denied (the subject) and what is affirmed or denied (the predicate). The affirmation or denial itself is expressed by the verb ‘is’ – either explicitly or implicitly. A proposition, in modern Western Philosophy, is therefore to be distinguished from a non-propositional sentence (e.g. a command, an interrogation, an exclamation, etc.) it is clear that only propositions can be proved or said to be true or false.

3. Locutions and Illocutions: In modern Analytic Philosophy such terms have been common and they throw a certain amount of light on the epistemological questions with which we shall have to deal. ‘Locution’ stands for the utterance itself. ‘Illocution’ stands for what, besides uttering the words, I am doing. For, example, I utter the words: “God loves you”. Besides saying these three words (the first speech-act), I may be able to instill hope in somebody who is depressed. Of

course, one locution can have more than one illocution – depending on my intention and the situation. (Another term used is ‘*perlocution*’ – which, to avoid unnecessary complication we shall here overlook).

Following some philosophers, we can group ‘illocutions’ under four headings: the ‘*constatives*’, by which a certain ‘state of affairs’ is affirmed or denied; ‘*expressives*’ by which certain emotions like wonder, trust, love, gratitude, joy, wish, etc. are expressed; ‘*commisives*’ by which certain commitments, intentions, decisions, are made; and ‘*prescriptive*’ by which certain commands, recommendations, appointments, etc., are performed. It is clear that only ‘*constatives*’ correspond to propositions strictly so-called. We have just said, however, that a sentence can have more than one illocution. This means, therefore, that a given sentence may be considered a proposition in view of its ‘*constative*’ locution and a non-proposition in view of its, say, ‘*prescriptive*’ locution.

4. Concepts. If we analyze the proposition a little further, or for that matter, language in general, we discover that often we use such general terms as ‘man’, ‘animal’, ‘soul’, ‘tree’, ‘book’ etc. Now it is clear that ‘man’, ‘animal’ etc. do not exist in reality but only men, animals, etc. And yet we often affirm or deny things about them. For example, “Man is created by God”, “The soul of animal is different from that of man”. A term denoting a class of beings we call a ‘concept’. In Scholastic Philosophy, it differs from an ‘idea’ in that this simply stands for a mental representation of an object. Notice, however, that in Western Philosophy, these terms are used differently – often times in accordance with different philosophical assumptions.

Since a ‘concept’, as said, denotes a class of beings, it is a universal idea (i.e. of that whole class). The question just referred to, namely how is that we can affirm or deny things about realities which, as universal do not exist, has given rise, both in Western and in Indian Philosophy (significantly enough) to what has come down to be known as the “the problem of the universals”. All kinds of positions have been taken ranging from that which maintains that concepts are mere word, images of singular objects, constructions of thought (*apohas*) without any objective foundation in reality (Nominalism) to the other extreme position which maintains that concepts correspond to realities existing in themselves (*jati*) (Radical Realism). The problem is treated not only in Epistemology, Psychology and Metaphysics. In Epistemology the question is: “What is the epistemic value of ‘concepts’?” In Psychology the question is: “How do we really form ‘concepts’ in our mind?” And in Metaphysics we ask: “Does the concept refer to a universal reality itself existing in itself, i.e. externally to man’s mind? If yes, where and how?”

We shall refrain from discussing this problem. Already in the Middle Ages, an author cynically remarked that philosophers have spent more time discussing the problem of the universals than Alexander spent in conquering the whole world. What would he have said had he lived up to today? It is that kind of problem which has given to Philosophy a bad name and made it seem to many a much ado about nothing. Still, one cannot deny that the assumptions and conclusions of a philosophical stance taken on the problem have important consequences on one’s philosophical system as a whole. This will become clearer with an example. Suppose, for example, I say that all we can know are our sense-impressions or the images left on the senses by the objects. I would have to conclude, then, not only that the ‘concepts’ are mere images but that I cannot know anything at all which is not sense-perceptible. Can I know, then, anything about God?

What becomes of my religious belief? Any book or treatise on epistemology usually treats of this problem. As for us, we take the following stance – whose assumptions and conclusions will become clear during the rest of our study on epistemology. It agrees with the stance taken by Scholasticism and other Indian Philosophical Systems including Kumarila's Mimamsa, Dvaita, Saiva Siddhanta and Jaina.

Humans are capable both of having 'percepts' (e.g. when I see a particular, singular person) and of forming 'concepts' (e.g. of 'persons' in general). This is possible because of essential properties common to particular, singular objects. Human being is capable of perceiving these properties, 'abstracting' them from the objects, as it were, and think of them as identities applicable to many. Concepts have epistemic value- i.e. they serve in our knowledge of reality. Without them no language would be possible nor any progress in the natural sciences themselves. To deny this value to concepts would be to deny any cognitive value to the language by which this denial itself is expressed. As such (i.e. as universal ideas), concepts are the result of human being's understanding of reality – of objects in their singularity and in their commonality of properties. Now as the proposition is a verbal expression of a judgement so a noun is a verbal expression of a concept, a conventional sign which we use to refer to it. It can also be said to be a tool, or instrument, which we use to express the concept. But as in the judgement, so in the forming of a concept, much activity on the part of the knower is involved. By means of concepts and judgments, man 'constructs' reality making it intelligible.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. Which are the four headings under which 'illocutions' can be grouped under?

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2. How does a 'concept' differ from 'idea' in scholastic philosophy?

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2.7 KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH

In our understanding of the term 'knowledge' is essentially true. We saw that this corresponds to the Indian term '*Prama*'. We can claim that by 'true' we provisionally mean 'corresponding to what the case is'. Now, in the history of Philosophy, both in the West and in the east, we come across various understandings of the term 'true' (or 'truth'). From each we can learn a lot. So,

before we definitely settle for what are going to understand by 'true', it is good to examine carefully these various understandings. The question which is usually raised in this context is this: what is the criterion, or test, of 'truth'? That is how am I going to know that what I am affirming or denying is true or false? In any case, an understanding of one means by 'true' can help us answer the question which we already raised in the first chapter whether I can be said to really know until and unless I am certain that what I know is true (and reasonable).

2.8 GENERAL IMPLICATIONS OF TRUTH AND KNOWLEDGE

It is clear that no matter the different understandings of the term 'true' we are here concerned with the term as qualifying a judgment (expressed or unexpressed in a proposition – and of a proposition of the 'constative illocution' type,). In other words, we are here concerned with epistemological truth. In fact the term, 'true' can be used to qualify a person or a thing. (E.g. "he is a true patriot". Or "this is true whisky" – by which is meant, in the first case, 'ideal', in the second 'genuine'). In Metaphysics, one usually distinguishes, between this 'epistemological (or logical) truth' (as opposed to error), from 'moral truth' (as opposed to a lie) and ontological (or transcendental) truth' (as opposed to non-being). In logic, we take pains to distinguish between 'truth' and 'validity'. But please note that often, even in Philosophical Literature, these two words are used inter-changeably.

Now, speaking of the 'criterion' or 'test' of truth, we have to clarify the notion of 'evidence' for clearly that principle or standard (criterion) by which we judge whether a judgment is true or false is precisely 'evidence'. But what is 'evidence'? We have already spoken of a 'self – evident' truth as one which is seen 'directly and immediately', but at that stage, we took 'evident' in the generally accepted meaning of the term. Here we have to clarify the notion a little better. By 'evidence' we, therefore, mean that clarity (obviousness, conspicuity) serving to indicate attest to) the truth of the judgment. Roughly speaking, it can be called 'proof'. I say that Mr. X is in his room. What is evidence – or proof – that what I am saying is true? It may be that I just say him going into his room. For me it is 'clear' (evident) that what I am saying is true. Or it may be that I have just been told by a reliable person. In this case, for me it is 'clear' that what I am saying is true. Now since – as in the latter case – the reliable person may have been mistaken, and therefore what is 'clear' to me (subjectively speaking) may not have corresponded to the facts(i.e. to the truth objectively speaking), the question arises what kind, or degree, of 'objective evidence' is required – if this is at all possible! – For me to say that I am absolutely sure that what I am saying is true. This brings us, once again, to the problem of 'certitude' which we shall be treated later. Still, the notion of 'evidence' as expressed here is sufficient, we think, to follow intelligently the admittedly difficult problem regarding 'truth'!

Apart from the question about 'certitude', two other questions have to be distinguished. It seems to us that a greater agreement on this question regarding 'truth' could have been achieved in the history of Philosophy, whether in the West or in the east, if these questions have been distinguished. The first question (the semantic) is this: what am I going to understand by the term 'true'; the second question (the epistemological) is this: if the criterion of 'truth' is objective evidence, is this 'objective evidence' possible at all and if it is possible, what amount of clarity is sufficient and necessary for me to say that I am certain of what I am affirming (or denying)?

These two question (or sets of questions) are so distinct that I could for example find myself able to say that no 'objective evidence', in any field of knowledge, is at all possible!

Whereas in the West, (especially in more modern times) this distinction could have helped the context of the discussion about 'cognition' (*jnana*, *buddhi*), the question raised and enthusiastically debated was: what is the nature of 'true and valid cognition' (i.e., *Prama*). Most schools of Indian Philosophy agree on many points. But when the vexed question arises as to whether the truth or validity of cognition is 'intrinsic' or 'extrinsic' to it, opinions differ. Some say that cognition as such (*jnana*) can be either true or false, valid or invalid and hence truth is extrinsic to it (Nyaya). Others say that cognition as such is always true and valid and it is only accidentally (e.g. by the defects of the instrumental cause) that it can be invalid and false, and therefore truth and validity are always intrinsic to it and only falsity and invalidity are extrinsic to it (Mimamsa). Again, others say that cognition as such is always false and invalid and it is only through extraneous factors (e.g. like achieving an intended aim) that it can be true and valid, and hence truth and validity are always extrinsic where as falsity and invalidity are intrinsic (Buddhism). A very careful perusal of the points at issue can reveal that here the two questions (the semantic and epistemological) are dealt with in one breath whereas it would have been better to distinguish better between the two. In fact to ask whether truth and validity belong to cognition intrinsically or extrinsically can be resolved in to the question: But what are we going to understand by 'cognition' ? This is the semantic question. If we ask, What is the nature of cognition? it becomes a metaphysical question. Now if we agreed to call 'cognition' only true and valid cognition, then the question whether truth and validity belong to it intrinsically or extrinsically would not arise for it would have been solved by the very understanding (definition) of the term. Once we would have agreed what to call 'cognition', then and only then would we pass to the other question regarding the possibility and type of objective evidence sufficient and necessary to meet our already established meaning of cognition (the epistemological question). As we proceed to examine the theories of truth (in the west and in the East) we shall keep the distinctness of the two questions always in mind.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. Distinguish different kinds of truth in metaphysics?

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2. What is evidence?

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2.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen the four prominent theories of truth and spoken of error as related to and different from truth. 'To know' is 'to be aware that such and such is (or is not) the case.' 'Truth' and 'reasonableness', are therefore essential properties, defining characteristics, of 'knowledge' as we understand the term. A term denoting a class of beings we call a 'concept'. In Scholastic Philosophy, it differs from an 'idea' in that this simply stands for a mental representation of an object. In Metaphysics, one usually distinguishes, between this 'epistemological (or logical) truth' (as opposed to error), from 'moral truth' (as opposed to a lie) and ontological (or transcendental) truth' (as opposed to non-being). By 'evidence' we mean that clarity (obviousness, conspicuity) serving to indicate attest to) the truth of the judgment. Roughly speaking, it can be called 'proof'. We can group 'illocutions' under four headings: the 'constatives', by which a certain 'state of affairs' is affirmed or denied; 'expressives' by which certain emotions like wonder, trust, love, gratitude, joy, wish, etc. are expressed; 'commisives' by which certain commitments, intentions, decisions, are made; and 'prescriptive' by which certain commands, recommendations, appointments, etc. are performed.

2.10 KEY WORDS

Nominalism: The doctrine holding that abstract concepts, general terms, or universals have no independent existence but exist only as names.

Locution: The act of expressing, conveying, or representing in words, art, music, or movement.

Illocution: The intent or the intention of a speaker in saying a particular thing, e.g. naming, threatening, warning, etc. Illocutions may be further divided into: the 'constatives', by which a certain 'state of affairs' is affirmed or denied; 'expressives' by which certain emotions like wonder, trust, love, gratitude, joy, wish, etc. are expressed; 'commisives' by which certain commitments, intentions, decisions, are made; and 'prescriptive,' by which certain commands, recommendations, appointments, etc., are performed.

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UNIT 3 THEORIES OF ERROR AND TRUTH: INDIAN

Contents

3.0 OBJECTIVES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Our knowledge of things or ordinary objects of the world is generally expressed in the form of judgements or propositions. Truth and error are characters of judgements or of propositions which are verbal expressions of judgements. If there be any knowledge of any thing, which is not or can not be expressed in the form of judgements, then that knowledge cannot be said to have the character of truth or falsity in it. In considering the problem of truth and error, we shall be concerned with empirical facts expressed in the form of judgements or expressed in words as propositions. A judgement is an assertion about something which claims to be true, but may be false. A judgement may be affirmative or negative. It may either affirm or deny that a thing is such-and-such. But in each case it claims to be true. It proceeds on the understanding that what is affirmed or denied in the judgement is true, or that it is the real fact. Where in knowledge there is no such claim to be true, there is no occasion for truth and error. Doubt as a mental state is neither true nor false, because one who is in doubt does not claim that his doubt gives him the truth of the matter he doubts. Rather, he is in doubt as to what the truth of the matter may be. Now a judgement being a definite assertion that a thing is or is not such-and-such, no claims to be true; but it may be true as well as false. What makes one judgement true and another false? What do we mean by the truth and falsehood of judgements? How do we know that one judgement is true and another false or erroneous? With regard to truth and error there are two main questions, namely, how truth and error are constituted, and now they are known or tested. The first question relates to the nature of truth and error, and the second to the tests or criteria of truth and error.

3.2 INDIAN THEORIES OF TRUTH AND ERROR

In Indian philosophy the problem of knowledge is generally considered under *Pramanas*. There are different views about the number as well as the nature of these *Pramanas*. Some accept one, others two yet others three, a few others four and some even six. The *Pramanas* accepted in Indian philosophy are: *pratyaksha*, *anumana*, *upamana*, *abhyasa*, *arthapathi* and *anupaladhi*. *Prama* is called right knowledge and that which produces right knowledge, *Prama*, is called *Pramana*. *Prama* is knowledge of an object as it is *yathavasthita* and as is conducive to life or in consonance with experience, *vyavahara-anuguna*. Unless and until knowledge is conducive to the furtherance of our material, moral or spiritual ends, there is no proof that knowledge has come into being. So knowledge must have a purpose. If knowledge of an object must be about the object as it is, it must be free from faults like doubt, *samsaya*, or error, *viparyaya*. Doubts arise when we see an object before us, but are not able to know decisively what it is since it appears to possess qualities that pertain to other objects and are therefore mutually contradictory. Since the conflicting cognitions proceeding from the *Pramanas*, belonging either to the same class or different classes, are equally poised, a person is not able to decide and he is in doubt. This stands in the way of right knowledge. Similarly *viparyaya* or error also is an impediment in the attainment of right knowledge. This error is of two kinds – wrong apprehension, *anyathajnana*, and misconception, *vipratijnana*. In wrong apprehension an object is cognized, but a quality that belongs to it is sublated or a quality that does not belong to it is attributed to it. In misconception, *vipratijnana*, the object itself is mistaken for another, for example, mistaking a shell for silver. The distinction between misconception and wrong apprehension lies in the fact that in the latter, i.e. wrong apprehension, the object with its attributes which defines its essential nature, *svarupa-nirupakadharmas*, is rightly cognized, but there is error with reference to the qualities that belong to it, *nirupita-svarupa-visesana*. That is to say, this is a case of *dharmaviparyaya* – error regarding the quality or the attribute. In misconception, *vipratijnana*, the specific quality defining the essential nature of the object fails to be cognized and that of another is apprehended with the result that the object itself is mistaken for another, for instance, the shell-silver. Here the object which is the ‘shell’ is seen, but

not known as such. It is cognized as a piece of shining silver. So, this is a case of *dharmiviparyasa*, error regarding the substratum or *dharmi*. Therefore *Prama* is that kind of knowledge which steers clear of faults. That which is the producer of this knowledge is *Pramana* or instrument of knowledge.

3.3 PERCEPTION: NIRVIKALPAKA AND SAVIKALPAKA

In perception there is sense-object contact. When we look at an object for the first time, it is cognized by us as having some form, *rupa*, and some qualities, *guna*. This is called *nirvikalpaka pratyaksa* or indeterminate perception; because in this cognition, our knowledge is restricted to that one object before us and to the qualities that inhere in it. At that moment there is no thought in our mind whether there are other objects similar to that and belonging to that species. That the qualities do appear along with the object even in this first cognition, *nirvikalpaka pratyaksha*, has to be accepted since, if it is knowledge it is always experienced in the following form – ‘this is thus’, *idam ittham*. The term ‘this’ refers to the object cognized, and ‘thus’ to the qualities and form that are inseparately connected with it. In *savikalpaka pratyaksha* or determinate perception the object is cognized along with its specific form and qualities. The difference between the two perception lies in the fact that in the former, *nirvikalpaka*, only that one object is cognized whereas in the latter, *savikalpaka*, the thought that the object is similar to the one that was seen already and therefore the object is one of the several objects belonging to that particular species. Thus whether the perception is determinate or indeterminate an object is cognized is being invariably qualified by some inseparable attributes, but never as a mere something devoid of form or qualities. The Nyaya classifies perception as *laukika*, ordinary, and *alaukika*, extra ordinary. We have *laukika* perception when there is the usual sense – contact with objects present to sense. In *alaukika* perception, however, the object is such as is not ordinarily present to sense, but is conveyed to sense through an unusual medium. Perception again is of two kinds, namely external, *bahya*, and internal, *manasa*. The former is due to the external senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. The latter is brought about by the mind’s contact with psychical states and processes.

3.4 CRITERIA OF TRUTH

In the western epistemology there are four main theories of truth and error. These are known as the intuitionist, the coherence, the pragmatist and the correspondence theory of truth and error. According to the intuitionist theory, while truth is intrinsic to one kind of knowledge, error or falsity is intrinsic to a different kind. This means that some cases of knowledge are intrinsically true, while others are intrinsically false, so much so that we immediately apprehend the truth of the one class and the falsity of the other. Among the Indian systems of philosophy, we find that the *Samkhya* system accepts the intuitionist theory in respect of both truth and error, while the *Mimamsa* and the *Advaita Vedanta* systems accept it in the case of truth, but reject it as regards error. According to the *Samkhya* both truth and falsity are internal characters of different cases of knowledge. If one knowledge is true and another false, that is so because of their own internal conditions and with out reference to any external tests like correspondence, coherence etc. Truth is latent in some cognitions and errors in others, from the very first moment of their occurrence and these are immediately apprehended by us at that moment. A true cognition is true and known to be true by itself, and it can never be made false. Thus the *Samkhya* holds that both truth and falsehood are internally conditioned and immediately known. This is the theory of *svatahPramanya* and *aPramanya*, i.e. the intrinsic validity and invalidity of knowledge. The *Mimamsa* and the *Advaita Vedanta*, however, take truth as intrinsic to all knowledge, *svatahPramanya*, and error as an abnormal phenomenon due to certain external and vitiating factors in the conditions of some cognitions, *paratah a Pramanya*. While truth is intrinsic and organic to knowledge, falsity or error is accidental and externally conditioned. Any cognition is true so far as it reveals its object; and it is immediately known to be true so far as it is uncontradicted, *abadhita*.

The correspondence theory of truth and error holds that the truth consists in correspondence to fact and is indirectly verified by experience. But the Nyaya view of truth is logical and agrees with the correspondence theory. For Nyaya truth consists in correspondence, but the criterion is coherence in a broad sense, *samvada*. The Nyaya coherence is a practical test and means the harmony between cognitive and conative ex The Nyaya coherence is a practical test and means the harmony between cognitive and conative exeinces, *pravrttisamarthya*, or between different kinds of knowledge, *tajjatiyatva*. That there is truth in the sense of correspondence can not as a rule, be known directly by intuition. We know it indirectly from the fact that the knowledge in question coheres with other experiences of the same object as also with the general systems of our knowledge. Thus the perception of water is

known to be valid when different ways of reaction or experiment give us the same experience of water. According to Nyaya the truth of knowledge consists in its correspondence with objective facts, while coherence and practical utility are the test of truth. It defines the truth of knowledge as a correspondence of relations, *tadvatitatprakarakam*. The Nyaya view is a kind of logical realism because it believes in an independent world of objects standing in certain relations to one another. Though Mimamsa uphold the realism of Nyaya-vaisheshika, it dispenses with the need for testing the truth. The Mimamsa believes in the authority of Vedas which are self-evident. The Vedas are the words of utterances and therefore eternal. The relation between the words of Vedas and their meanings are natural, necessary and eternal. We ought not to think that things were there already before they were named. The world and the thing it names go together and it is impossible to think of either as having had a beginning in time. But we must carefully note what in this view is meant by the terms 'word' and 'thing'. In order to know the character of the former, it is necessary to distinguish first between *varna* and *dhvani*. A *varna* is an articulate sound. It is conceived as integral, *niravayava*, and omnipresent, *sarva-gata*, and therefore also eternal, *nitya*. A word, *abda*, is two or more of these *varnas*, and is regarded as merely an aggregate, *samudaya*, and not as a whole, *avayavin*, distinguishable from each of its constituent parts and from all of them. The *dhvani* is a 'tone' or means of revealing *varnas*. As regards the 'things' signified by words, we are not to understand the particular facts of experience which come into being and disappear, but the corresponding universals which are eternal, and of which the passing individuals are nothing more than signs. That is, the significance of the word is general though, when associated with other words to form a sentence, it may come to denote a particular. The word and the meaning being both eternal, the relation between them also is necessarily so. The Mimamsaka believes that only vedic texts are eternal and beginningless handed down from teacher to pupil with scrupulous care. Though Kumarila and Prabhakara accept the realistic theory of knowledge, they differ with regard to 'memory' in the validity of knowledge. According to the Bhattachas, recollection is not valid for novelty is the necessary condition of validity. Truth should not only be not contradicted by subsequent knowledge, *abadhita*; it should also point to something not hitherto known, *anadhigata*. Prabhakara does not accept this condition, for all experience, *anubhuti* – whether the object be already known or not – is valid for him. Even the so called error satisfies this requirement. If all experience by its very nature is valid, it may be asked how error arises at all. Kumarila and Prabhakara differ considerably in their answers to this question and their explanations are known respectively as *vipartya-khyati* and *akhyati*.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. What is the definition of truth in Indian philosophy?

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2. What is the correspondence theory of truth according to Nyaya school?

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3.5 KHYATI-VADAS

Khyati-vada, theory of apprehension, if all knowledge is said to be right knowledge and then of valid, how are we to explain the occurrence of illusion in the world? *Prama* or *Pramiti*, right knowledge is the knowledge of reality as it is and that leads to successful activity. It is distinguished from erroneous cognition which does not end in such successful activity. It must be understood at the outset that in regards to the illumination of an object there is no difference between *Prama*, right knowledge and *aPrama*, false knowledge. But right knowledge differs from erroneous knowledge in respect of the difference of the volitional and emotional aspects of the percipient's personality. Indian philosophers have critically discussed the nature of erroneous cognition and have proposed different theories of it. The term '*khyati*' is used to refer to erroneous cognition. Five theories have been mentioned

as theories of error. In other words, they are five types of *khyativada* as Indian theories of error. They are. *Atmakhyati*, *asatkhyati*, *akhyati*, *anyathakhyati* and *anirvacanatyakhyati*.

3.6 ATMAKHYATI

According to the follower of *atmakhyati* human soul is of the nature of cognition. Hence it is known internally. Cognition and its object are not different. An imagined external object is also of the nature of cognition. The perception of a snake in a rope or the perception of silver in the shell is in fact nothing but cognition. Hence error is another form of cognition. The *vijnanavadi* Buddhist, a type of idealists, are the supporters of *atmakhyati*. The upholders of this view have not denied the fact that some of our experiences of external objects are correct and some of them are incorrect. In order to give an account of this phenomenon they have accepted the imposition of cognition on imagined external objects. According to them an imagined snake or a piece of silver is unreal, *asat*, if it is considered as different from cognition. In an erroneous cognition, a rope is cognized as a snake. It is due to error that a rope-cognition is revealed as a snake. It is to be noted that in an erroneous cognition, a rope is not cognized as a moving snake. What is cognized is a stationary snake. This type of error is an error of cognition. For this reason the *vijnanavadi*-Buddhist are called *atmakhyativadins*. According to the Vedantins the waking life is not the same as dream experience. Therefore they are critical of the *atmakhyativadin's* view on cognition. Moreover perception of an external object like a pot can not be a property of cognition. We apprehend the largeness of a pot when our visual sense-organ is in contact with the object. If objects are momentary, as held by the Buddhist, then it is impossible to perceive the largeness of objects. This is due to the fact that the objects cease to exist when we perceive their largeness. For this reason the thesis of the Buddhists that everything is momentary cannot be established. According to the followers of the *vijnanavada* the snake which is of the nature of cognition is imposed on the external rope in an illusory cognition. It is the very nature of a cognition that it appears as another cognition. It is the very nature of a cognition that it appears as another cognition. The Jain philosophers are the upholders of seven forms of judgements, *syadvada*. They have accepted two types of cognition, viz., *pratyaksha*, direct and *paroksha*, indirect, which are not being contradicted. Their view is similar to that of *vijnanavada*.

3.7 ASATKHYATI

According to the *Sunyavadi* Buddhists and the *Carvaka*, everything in this world is unreal. In an erroneous cognition an unreal object is imposed on another unreal object. Since all the elements are unreal, this view is called, '*asatkhyati*.' The followers of this view accept the erroneous cognition of objects such as the sky-flower, the son of a barren woman etc. According to the *Carvakas*, everything is not unreal but objects or persons such as God which are not amenable to the senses, are unreal. Since the *Carvaka* philosophers have accepted the erroneous cognition of unreal objects, their view is also called *asatkhyativada*. Some of the followers of *astika* school also have accepted the cognition of unreal objects. When we cognize unreal objects we understand the meaning of expressions such as 'sky-flower.' But the followers of the *Nyaya-vaisheshika* do not accept the cognition of an unreal object, *asat*, when the meaning of a sentence or an expression is understood. The *Samkhya* does not accept *asatkhyati*. The *Samkhya* View is called *sadasatkhyati*. The *Madhyamika* school of Buddhism, *sunyavada*, accepts the view of *Asatkhyativada*. According to *Nagarjuna*, a *Madhyamika* Buddhist everything is not unreal. According to him, *sunya*, (i) is not real, (ii) not unreal, (iii) not both real and unreal, and (iv) not different from both real and unreal. Since the followers of this type of *sunyavada* have accepted two types of truth, they are closer to *Advaita Vedanta* in some respects. According to *Sankara*, Brahman is a real entity. It is neither free from all the four alternatives of *sunyavada* nor is it a momentary entity. Though *Sankara* refutes *Sunyavada* he has been considered as a Buddhist in disguise. For *Nagarjuna* the existence of an object is imaginary. It is called *samvrtasatta*. The word *samvrtasatta* means imaginary. Hence the view of *Madhyamika* philosophers such as *Nagarjuna* can not be identified with *asatkhyativada*.

3.8 AKHYATI

The term '*akhyati*' means 'absence of error'. *Prabhakara* is the proponent of the theory of '*akhyati*.' He does not accept illusory cognition. In fact, there is no error. In the perception of a rope as a snake and the shell as silver, there are two cognitions. First we have perception, and then memory cognition. In other words, two types of cognition take place and both of them are true. There is no one unitary qualificative cognition; instead there are two cognitions, perceptual and memory; there is no need to accept erroneous cognition. This view of *akhyati* is criticised. It is asked why there is fear in the case of snake rope example if there is no erroneous cognition. In other words, if there is no qualificative cognition, then it is difficult to explain the psychological attitudes or the behaviour associated with erroneous cognitions. In reply, it is said that the cause of psychological attitudes such as fear is not

one unitary qualitative cognition. According to the followers of *akhyati* non apprehension of the difference, *bheda-agraha* between two objects – the rope that is perceived and the snake that is recollected is the cause for the psychological attitude of fear. If there were two cognitions, there would have been mental perception of these cognitions. Since there is no mental perception of these two cognitions, an erroneous cognition can not be said to be two separate cognitions. This theory goes against empirical facts.

3.9 ANYATHAKHYATI

Anyathakhyati is also known as *viparitakhati*. The Nyaya-Vaisesika schools of Indian philosophy have accepted *anyathakhyati*. Jayanta Bhatta the author of *nyayamanjari*, and Gangesa Upadhyaya, a Navya-Nyaya philosopher, have established the theory of *anyathakhyati*. According to the Nyaya philosophers, in the case of an erroneous perception of silver in shell, both the silver and the shell are real. The shell is in front of the perceiver, but the silver is elsewhere. The silver which is elsewhere appears in the locus of the shell. Hence the shell, without appearing as shell appears as something else. In this case it appears as silver. For this reason the theory is called *anyathakhyati*, 'appeared in a different way.' The perception of silver in shell is as type of extra ordinary perception. With respect to shining there is similarity between shell and silver. The cognition of shining gives rise to the memory of cognition of silver. The relation of this type of perception is extra ordinary. It is called *jnanalaksana sannikarsa*, cognition as relation. Since there is no material cause for silvers, the Advaitins refute *anyathakhyati*. According to the Advaitins the shell appearing as silver is due to ignorance. But according to the Nyaya philosophers ignorance does not belong to the type of object to which silver belongs. An object of a different type cannot be material cause. For example, an earthen jar can not be made out of gold. More over, the Nyaya philosophers claim that there is no evidence in favour of the Advaita conception of ignorance. Patanjali calls the modification of the mind, *citta vritti*, as *viparyaya*. He is in favour of the theory of *Anyathakhyati*. In his *igoga-vartika*, Vijñānabhikṣa has also developed this view. The cognition of the elsewhere snake in the rope is *anyathakhyati*. According to this view the cognition of the rope qualified by snakesness is true, but the cognition of the snake in the locus, which is a rope, is erroneous. This view has also been criticised. It is claimed that if the previously observed snake is perceived in the locus, which is in front of the perceiver, due to some defect in the visual sense organ or in the objective conditions such as darkness, then the place where the snake has been observed would also be cognised. If that were so, there would not be any error. It can be seen that *anyathakhyati* is the under lying principle in *asatkhyati* in the sense of the presentation of the *sat* for the *asat*; in *atmakhyati* in the sense of the presentation of the extra-mental objects instead of the ideas; in *akhyati* in the sense of the presentation of the attributes of something as those of some other; and lastly in *anirvacaniyakhyati* in the sense of the presentation of appearance instead of reality.

3.10 ANIRVACANIYAKHYATI

Sankara propounded the *Advaitavada*, the theory of non-dualism by establishing Brahman as the ultimate locus of cosmic illusion. The *Advaitavada* cannot be substantiated without establishing imposition, *adhyasa*. Everything is imposed on Brahman. The reality is Brahman. The world appearing as real is due to *maya*. Due to ignorance we consider the world to be real. This ignorance cannot be said to be real, *sat*. Nor can it be unreal, *asat*. But it can be dispelled by knowledge, *jñāna*. *Anirvacaniya* means that something can be described, indescribable. When we see rope as a snake the quality of a snake is imposed on the rope, *adhyasa*. As the snake is imposed upon rope, so the rope is imposed upon Brahman which is of the nature of consciousness. Hence ultimately, the locus of the snake which is indescribable, *anirvacaniya*, is the consciousness qualified by the rope. Here the word, *anirvacaniya*, indescribable, means 'mithya,' false. If something is *anirvacaniya* or *mkthya*, then it can not be determined either as real, *sat* or as unreal, *asat*. If the snake imposed upon the consciousness qualified by the rope were real, *sat*, then the cognition of the snake would not have been contradicted by the true cognition of the rope. If the snake were unreal, *asat* like the sky-flower, then it would not have been cognized. Again the snake can not be said to be both real and unreal, because an object cannot have opposed properties at the same time. Therefore our cognition of the rope as snake is a kind of imposition, *adhyasa*. The snake is imposed on the rope. Therefore the locus of the snake is *anirvacaniya*, indescribable.

3.11 SATKHYATI

Ramanuja in his *Sribhasya* discusses about *satkhyati* or *yatharthakhyati*, true apprehension. Since his view is coupled with a non-apprehension, *akhyata*, of some aspect of the object perceived, his view is *akhyati-samvalita yatharthakhyati*. In *yatharthakhyati* there is the presentation of the comparatively smaller elements of silver instead

of the greater elements of the shell. At first sight when the smaller elements alone are perceived, it is taken for silver. In the subsequent cognition when the greater elements of the shell in the same object are grasped, the object is cognized as shell. The activity of the percipient to appropriate it to himself is arrested at first sight; for he realises the silver element that is in it is too small to be of any use. Visistadvaita propounds the theory of *satkhyati* or *yatharthakhyati* according to which all knowledge is real. The correctness of *satkhyati* is explained with regard to some of the experiences in the world which appear to be illusory. First let us take the shell-silver-illusion, *sukti rajata jnana*. Silver is classified under the element of fire or *tejas*, and shell under that of earth. As a part of *tejas* exists in *prithvi* after tripartition, silver has its existence in the shell, but comparatively in a small proportion. Under normal circumstances the preponderating part alone is grasped in an object by the sense-organ. So, the shell is cognized as such by the eye generally. Sometimes on account of some defect in the sense of sight, the shell-art fails to be cognized and the silver part alone of the shell is apprehended. Then a person in quest of silver goes to take it in obedience to the volition of the mind. When the defect disappears and the shell part thereby is cognized, he concludes it is not silver and his activity in regard to silver ceases. The perception of silver, however small it may be, in the shell in the first cognition is real since there is some silver part in the shell which was seen. Therefore this perception is called *satkhyati* or *atharhtakhyati*. But at that time, the shell part of it though comparatively greater, was not apprehended due to some defect. Therefore there is *akhyati* or non-apprehension as well. Thus when a person mistakes a shell for a silver, we have to grant the existence of two kinds of apprehension or *khatas*, namely, *satkhyati* and *akhyati*. Hence the correctness of the view of ramanuja that it is the case of *satkhyati* qualified by *akhyati*, *akhyati-samvallita-satkhyati*).

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1. Explain *Atmakhyati*?

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2. Describe *Satkhyati* of Visistadvaita philosophy.

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2. What do the Indian schools speak in general of the correspondence theory of truth?

The Indian schools of philosophy are also divided. Two main trends appear: one says that truth is 'self-validating' (*svatah-Pramanyavada*), the other says that truth has to be validated by something other than itself (*paratah-Pramanyavada*). We do not intend to enter into the details of these two trends (the former, best represented by Samkhya, Mimamsa and Vedanta, the later by the Nyaya- vaisesika), but we make some reflections of our own.

In India a similar approach to 'truth' can be discerned, as could be expected, in Carvaka, the Indian Empiricism par excellence. As we have seen, this school of Indian Philosophy – like its counterpart in any part of the world – accepts perception alone as source of knowledge. But we are not to suppose that the Carvaka philosopher was so stupid as to refrain from cooking his food because of his skeptic philosophical stance regarding the possibility of knowing for certain that whenever one puts his food on fire, the fire cooks it (something known by inference and not by

perception)! Any knowledge obtained in any other way except perception does have value – only practical (pragmatic) value. Thus Jayarasi who even denied the truth of perceptual knowledge (and the existence of the four physical elements generally accepted by the Indian Materialists) is not unaware that in spite of all denial of theoretical knowledge, practical life can and should go on.

When, however, modern commentators on Indian Philosophy speak of ‘pragmatism’ in Indian philosophy, they single out Samkhya as its best representative, or at least which attaches more importance to the practical value, or ‘workability’ (*arthakriyakaritva*) of true cognition. But isn’t there a big misunderstanding here? Samkhya, like for that matter all the schools of Indian Philosophy, (except, Carvaka of course) considers valid (*yathartha*) cognition as one which corresponds to the facts – and therefore these can all be grouped, in one way or another, under the “Correspondence Theory of Truth”. But when they – all of them – speak of the test of truth as ‘successful activity’ (*pravrttisamarthya*), do they mean this in an epistemological sense or in a religious (and in a way ontological) sense? It has to be constantly borne in mind that these schools of Indian Philosophy are chiefly interested in the attainment of ‘*Moksa*’. So the test of true (in the sense of ‘genuine’) cognition is whether such cognition is or is not conducive to the desired end. Its ‘pragmatic’ character has little to do with the Western meaning of the term!

In India all the Schools of Philosophy accept, of course, that true cognition is characterized by ‘self-consistency’ (*samvada*) and ‘uncontradictability’ (*abadhitatva*) – by which latter term is meant ‘not being contradicted by another true cognition; in other words, coherence with other known truths. But as far as we know, the Logical Positivist theory which reduces ‘truth’ only to coherence of a proposition with a set of other propositions previously accepted as true is not found in India.

UNIT.4. THEORIES OF TRUTH AND ERROR: WESTERN

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 The Correspondence Theory
- 4.3 The Pragmatic Theory
- 4.4 The Coherence Theory
- 4.5 The Performative theory
- 4.6 Truth and Error
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Key Words
- 4.9 Further Readings and References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

- To familiarize the students with the four main theories of truth from Eastern and Western perspectives.
- To encourage them to question the sources of truth and error in knowledge.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

How do I know? Can I be sure of the various ways of acquiring knowledge? How is error related to truth? In this unit we see mainly the different classical theories of truth and reflect on them philosophically. We take only four main theories of truth as given in Western Philosophy and give a critical account of them, where we introduce some related Indian concepts too.

4.2 THE CORRESPONDENCE THEORY

This theory says that truth is “the adequation of the mind to the object”. In other words truth is the correspondence itself between what I affirm or deny to what is really the case. This has been our provisional understanding of ‘truth’. The majority of Indian schools of Philosophy agree that ‘*Prama*’, knowledge, must correspond to what really the object of knowledge is in itself. Some, however, raise the question: how can I know that what I can affirm or deny really corresponds to what the case is? In other words, how can I know that the object as known corresponds to the object as it is in itself? For if I have to turn my attention to this very ‘correspondence’ I would still know it as known, but would it, in its turn, correspond to what it is in itself? And so on and so forth ad infinitum! I cannot jump out of my mind, as it were, so as to be able to ‘compare’ what I know and the object of my knowledge as it is in itself and thus to see whether they correspond to each other or not.

Kant holds that we do not need to worry, since we can never know the object as it is in itself (*noumenon*), for this remains always unknown and unknowable; we can only know the object as known (*phenomenon*), as it appears to you and moulded by certain forms of your mind (categories). The scholastics say: Don’t worry, you do know the object as it is in itself; in fact the object as known is really a kind of ‘sign in which’ (*signum quo*) not the image of the object as it is in itself is known, but directly the object itself. On this particular topic, the Indian schools of philosophy are also divided. Two main trends appear: one says that truth is ‘self-validating’ (*svatah-Pramanyavada*), the other says that truth has to be validated by something other than

itself (*paratah-Pramanyvada*). We do not intend to enter into the details of these two trends. (The former is best represented by Samkhya, Mimamsa and Vedanta, the later by the Nyaya-Vaisesika).

But the way we understand ‘correspondence’ is to see in it the ‘definition’ of what we mean by ‘truth’ and not as some modern commentators of Nyaya, for example, as a ‘test’ of ‘truth’. We make use of the ‘test’ or ‘proof’ to see whether the judgment (all propositions) is true or false. If I manage to obtain sufficient and necessary ‘evidence’, then I know that the judgement is true otherwise I may either still be doubtful, or if the evidence is sufficient and necessary that my judgment is false, I know that it is false. But then, supposing that I know fully know that my judgment is true, I do not need to have ‘test’ the already established ‘truth’ of my judgment by some other non-cognitive means (e.g. by its usefulness). If I do still feel the need to have further tests, it means that I am still doubtful about whether my judgment is true or false. And if I simply want to show why (not whether!) my judgment is true, then I have to initiate a process of reasoning which I can come to see finally rests not on any non-cognitive consideration (e.g. usefulness) but on some ‘self-evident’ truth.

Still some fail to disentangle themselves from the difficulty regarding the possibility of ascertaining whether the ‘correspondence’ is itself true or false, or simply whether it is true at all. (For it may happen that I may not be able to see that it is false, and yet I may not be able to see that it is true either). So they seek to find some other meaning of ‘truth’. The epistemological difficulty leads them to solve the semantic question differently. Notice already the two semantic and metaphysical questions getting involved with each other.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

1. How does correspondence theory of truth understand truth?

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2. What do the Indian schools speak in general of the correspondence theory of truth?

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4.3 THE PRAGMATIC THEORY

Pragmatism (from Greek ‘*pragma*’, deed) is that doctrine, or trend of thought, according to which the value of an assertion lies solely in its practical bearing upon human interests. In this sense, it can also be called utilitarianism (from Latin ‘*utilis*’, useful). So concretely, suppose I asked whether it is true that fire heats, the pragmatists would answer: well, if you put water or

food on it, will it heat or not? The answer is definitely yes. So, according to the pragmatists, all you need to know to see whether what you are saying is true or false is whether it serves you a good purpose. If it does, it is true; if it does not, it is 'useful'. Or more precisely still, the question whether "fire heats" corresponds to objective facts or not is either considered as impossible to ascertain or as use-less. At first sight, this may seem a very attractive (and practical!) idea, if universally applied it can have disastrous consequences not only in the realm of Philosophy but and especially in that of Religion, as we are going to see. Still, a lot can be learnt from such a trend of thought.

In the West, best known for pursuing such a trend of thought are C.S. Peirce (the "Father of modern pragmatism" and the coiner of the term), J. Dewey (calling his Philosophy "instrumentalism") and William James. C S Peirce, a scientist and logician, applied his theory mostly to scientific assertions (and also ethics). If a proposition yields results in the field of scientific enquiry and as such is accepted by the scientific community, that proposition is true. J.Dewey applies his doctrine not only to scientific assertions, and thus to the formation of a scientific theory, but also to all assertions we use in the solution of everyday problems. If our solutions are useful and if our theories by which we try to reconstruct the ever-changing flow of life are verified by life itself, our solutions and theories can be called true. William James speaks more in terms of 'meaning' or 'view' of life. If an assertion, and the view of life which is thus made up of such assertions, function satisfactorily in my life, if, in other words, it gives meaning and purpose to my life, then that assertion and view of life are true. Of course they may be 'true' to me and not to you. James applies this also to religious propositions expressive of religious beliefs. And in this he is followed by others more recent thinkers of whom we shall speak later in a related but different context.

A lot can be learnt from an epistemological pragmatic approach to 'truth'. We can speak of the value of a 'working hypothesis' in scientific enquiry. Not only that but, as we point out too, of the set of hypotheses which make up a theory – and this too in religious knowledge – one cannot really ask whether they are true or false but whether they are appropriate or inappropriate, arbitrary or well-grounded, reasonable or not. Till, of course, reasons ultimately founded on some self-evident truth, do not provide sufficient evidence to prove them true or false, they are to be considered 'true' in this pragmatic sense. 'Truth' is here understood, rightly, as 'usefulness'.

Reality, after all – from the smallest atom to the highest 'God' – is so mysterious, at times so puzzling, that we have to be humble enough to admit that in most things we know things only "in so far" as we can and in accordance with our limited capacity of known. This approach far from being a skeptic one, ore purely a subjectivistic one, equips one with a certain oneness to ever-present but ever-eluding Truth. As St. Augustine says, "We look to find, we find to look again". Much of our knowledge of reality is a 'construction' of it in such a way as to make it intelligible to us, but in such a way too that remains always provisional, hypothetical.

And this is particularly true when from the level of 'facts' we pass on to the level of their 'significance'. That there is a somebody in front of me is a fact, and it is a fact too that she is of such and such description. But is it a fact that "she is the most beautiful girl in the world"? Is this a "propositional judgment" subject to be proved true or false? If not, is it not 'true' to anybody, including to her passionate lover? If it is 'true' to him, what is meant by 'true' here? Does it not mean 'significant'? Take such other judgments: "my work is my life", "my family is my world",

love is my breath”, “humanity is a community”, “history has a purpose”, “good and evil are in perfect harmony”, “God is a loving Father”. What is ‘true’ here and what is ‘false’?

Further still, what does it profit a man to know all there is to know if finally all his knowledge serves him for nothing, least of all to be, or become, what he is supposed to be or become? Can I really call that true (i.e. genuine, worthwhile, knowledge)? If not what is then ‘knowledge’? Is it not that purposeful knowledge, that knowledge which alone can serve him truly to achieve his final destiny? And what is the meaning here of ‘true’ and ‘truly’? Is it not that knowledge which serves no useful purpose, which does not, or cannot, result into a fruitful activity, a sterile knowledge? And if it is, can it still be called true knowledge?

All this is, of course, is true – and profoundly so. We shall return to these questions later when we shall deal with language and its functions, especially religious language. But from the epistemological stand point, the Pragmatic Theory of Truth needs, according to us, to be severely qualified. Firstly, scientific ‘knowledge’ and scientific ‘truth’ cannot, without much further ado, be taken to be the paradigm of ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ in general. To do so would presuppose certain presuppositions which would be themselves subject to non-scientific ‘proof’ – and hence to a non-pragmatic concept of ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’. Secondly, from a semantic, point of view, it would be arbitrary to define ‘truth’ stipulatively since there is a conventional (everyday) meaning of the term. All one could say is that in such and such field of knowledge, or in any kind of ‘hypothesis’, it would be inappropriate to speak of ‘truth’ but of something else – something which we did ourselves – or, that in such a case, one cannot come to know the truth at all! Thirdly, from a religious point of view, belief, no matter how ‘significant’ it is, or should be, would lose all its, religious value (and therefore its ‘significance’). If it could be shown to rest on no real foundation – i.e. with a basis in reality. A false conviction may still be ‘significant’ to somebody but this does not make it ‘true’. Fourthly, to say that ‘truth’ is relative (i.e. known only progressively, and in accordance with the capacity, and ‘interpretation’ of the knower and as ‘significant’ to him or not) shows only that one has to distinguish between different fields of knowledge, different functions of language different levels of understanding, and different kinds of ‘illocutions’. Relativism (which says that no objective truth can be known to all, and therefore, in no sense at all, can one say to be absolutely certain about anything) can be shown to be like Skepticism, evidently self-contradictory.

4.4 THE COHERENCE THEORY

Because of the difficulty we discussed with regard to the ‘correspondence’ theory, some interpret ‘truth’ as coherence between a proposition and other well-established true propositions. If it can be shown that this proposition does not contradict these well-established propositions, then it can be called ‘true’. As is clear, this theory presupposes that before we start asking ourselves whether a proposition is true, we would have already agreed, explicitly or implicitly, on certain other – propositions as being true. For example, we ask ourselves whether the proposition, “abortion is murder” is true or false, we shall have first to agree on whether the following propositions are also true or false, namely, “to kill a person unnecessarily is murder”, “the unborn child is a person”, “abortion is to kill a person unnecessarily”. Now supposing that we agree that these propositions are true, it follows that our original propositions can be seen to be ‘true’. In other words, it is logically implied by, not in conflict with, coheres with, the previously agreed-upon truths.

In its simplest form, this theory equates 'truth' with logical positivism. As could be expected, logical positivism (about which we shall be speaking later) renounces all idea of truth as correspondence with facts and interprets it as correspondence or coherence with presuppositions themselves. Or to put it differently, for it the 'facts' are the propositions themselves. But in its more radical form, this theory is the epistemological aspect of that more general theory according to which the laws of thought not only are the laws of being itself in the sense that they correspond to them, but are the laws of being in the sense that they are their origin. So the primacy is given not to being over thought but to Thought (with a capital T) over all beings. And if Thought is essentially consistent, then if one could work out a logically consistent view of Reality, this must necessarily reflect Reality as it is in fact. And a given proposition, or judgment, if it coheres with this whole logically consistent view of Reality, is true, otherwise false (Idealism, e.g. that of Spinoza, Hegel in the West, to a certain extent that of Sankara in India).

Here again we have a lot to learn from this theory. When a judgement is expressed in a proposition – in a proposition which is made up of concepts, notions, etc. – it is expressed in fact in a particular 'linguistic field' where not only the truth of the propositions but also the meaning of the concepts themselves are mutually related. And there are more than one 'linguistic field' (or as it is sometimes called 'universe of discourse') such as the scientific, the aesthetic, the legal, the economical, the moral, the religious, etc. For example, the proposition "Human being is composed of body and soul" may be true in a Scholastic philosophical 'linguistic field' (where 'human being' 'composed', 'is', 'body', and 'soul' have a specific meaning and the truth of the judgement depends on the truth of many other related judgements, like "being is composed of matter and form", "spiritual acts cannot intrinsically depend on matter", etc.). But that same proposition may be either false or at least unintelligible in another 'linguistic field' (as in Samkhya's or in materialism, etc.). A proposition in an Euclidean geometrical 'linguistic field' may be false or unintelligible in a non-Euclidean one; a logical proposition in a two-valued logical 'linguistic field' may be false in a three-valued logical one, etc.

In Philosophy of religion, we take pains to show how a religious tenet (e.g. "Christ is the Son of God" in Christianity, or "Atman is Brahman" in Vedanta) can either be made intelligible and much less said to be true or false except within the whole context of its respective religious tradition, which is, as it were, its "matrix". Hence the meaninglessness of trying to understand a 'text' out of its 'con-text'. Hence too the misunderstandings which can arise if one tried to compare and contrast different philosophical, religious, etc. opinions, beliefs, doctrines, before one has made sure that one has first understood each in its respective 'linguistic field'.

All this is therefore very true. Still does logical coherence enough to say that something is 'true' (in the generally accepted meaning of the term)? We have already remarked that to give a stipulative definition to an already conventionally agreed-upon meaning of a term is arbitrary. But apart from this semantic question, it is clear that proponents of the logical coherence theory of truth are led to such a definition of theirs because of the epistemological difficulty we discussed with regard to the 'correspondence theory'. More directly still, one could point out that this theory does not solve this same difficulty. For its presupposition (that before we start asking whether a proposition is true or not we have to have already agreed to consider other proposition as true) requires that we would have already settled the logical coherence of each of these latter

propositions with still other propositions. The 'infinite regress' would be required here too. (And it would be no answer to say that as a matter of fact, we 'inherit' the truth of these propositions from society. The question here is not how in fact we come to know from the time of our childhood up, but how we can philosophically understand 'truth'!). Recall that we too required self-consistency and coherence in any 'good' (i.e. appropriate) hypothesis. But we added too that precisely because as such a hypothesis remains a hypothesis, it would be out of place to ask whether it is true or false. Or in other words, we did not consider hypothesis as such, in spite of its logical self-consistency and coherence, necessarily true.

So while 'true' can in the formal sciences (Logic, Mathematics) be considered to be the equivalent of 'logical consistent' precisely because formal sciences, by their very nature, do not refer to any specific object(fact, state of affairs), it cannot be so considered elsewhere. So, can we at least agree that if a whole system of philosophical understanding of Reality (i.e. not simply of propositions) is in fact self-consistent and coherent, it does mirror it as idealism believes? The difficulty here is that it is not impossible to imagine two perfectly self-consistent and coherent systems of the sort which are not compatible among themselves, or even contradictory to one another. In this case, when we have two or even more such systems, the question arises which of them is one to call 'true' – supposing that in virtue of the principle of contradiction, they cannot be all called true. There could be many answers to this question. One could, for example, say that on further analysis one can always discern in what one had at first sight mistaken to be a perfectly self-consistent and coherent theory, inconsistencies, in such a way that one would finally realize that there can be only one logically self-consistent and coherent view of Reality. Or, one could answer, Reality can in fact be mirrored in two or more such systems, provided that they are perfectly self-consistent and coherent, even though they are not compatible (but not contradictory). Again one could answer that what seems to be contradictory on a logical, epistemological level, need not be contradictory on the meta-logical, trans-empirical level (i.e. the level of Reality as a whole in its ultimate causes), etc. All this would be interesting to discuss (as we do in Philosophy of Religion) but it is clear that ultimately, on the epistemological level, if a self-consistent and coherent view of Reality is to be said to be true, whether or not it is the only possible one or not, it is not just because it is so but because it would have been shown to correspond to what the case is, i.e. to the nature and structure, etc. of Reality itself.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

1. Describe what truth is for William James.

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2. What is truth according to coherence theory?

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4.5 THE PERFORMATIVE THEORY

To understand this theory, we must go back to what we said about ‘illocution’. We recall that these are kinds of ‘speech-acts’ which we do – perform – when we say something. Now when I say, for example, “It is true that the world is round”, do I do anything more than when I say “The world is round”? According to some (e.g. F.P. Ramsey), I am certainly not giving any more information about the world in the first case than in the second. All I am doing more when I add, “it is true that ...” is adding emphasis, style, or indication as to the position the statement has in the whole of my argument.

Others, however, are not slow in remarking that this is a confusion between a ‘first-order assertion’ (in our case, ‘the world is round’ where something is said or stated about the ‘world’) and a ‘second-order assertion’ (in our case, ‘it is true that the world is round’ where something is said or stated about the whole proposition as a whole, namely, ‘the world is round’). Now some philosophers like P.F. Strawson while pointing out that ‘true’ (or false) occur only in a ‘second-order assertions see in the use of the term ‘true’ a sign of the speaker’s affirmation (and in the use of the term ‘false’ of his denial). Thus, to keep to our example, when I say , “It is true that the world is round” (“That the world is round is true”) what I am doing is indicating that I agree (believe, am convinced, concede, affirm) that the world is round. Hence the ‘performative’ function of the term ‘true’ (and correspondingly of the term ‘false’).

The distinction between ‘first-order assertions’ and ‘second-order assertions’ is useful and well-made. In Logic we speak of the distinction between ‘first intentions’ and ‘second intentions’ – but that was with regard to ‘concepts’. As a ‘second intention’ concept is a concept of a concept, so too a ‘second-order assertion’ is an assertion of an assertion . In “The world is round”, the logical term of the proposition serving as its ‘subject’ (the ‘what ‘ something is said about) is ‘the world’; in the proposition “That the world is round is true”, the logical term is not ‘the world’ but the whole proposition “the world is round”. Something is said about this whole proposition – and what is said is that it corresponds to what the case is.

Now it is undoubtedly true that when I say “It is true that the world is round” I am doing something more than giving information about the world. I am doing something more, namely, I am indicating that I too believe, affirm, agree, etc. that the world is round. It would make no sense to say , “It is true that the world is round, but I do not believe it (or am not convinced of it).” If I was not convinced of it, I would not say that it is true in the first place. Not only are the two propositions not identical, but their ‘illocutionary load’ is different. Whereas “The world is round” has one ‘illocution’ (a constative), “It is true that the world is round,” has two: the constative and the expressive, the former affirming something about the world, the latter expressing some attitude (in this case, of belief, agreement, conviction, etc.) of the one who affirms. It is only of constatives that the question of ‘truth’ arises, as we have seen. So by reducing a constative to an expressive is neither logically nor epistemologically sound, and the question of ‘truth’ remains unsolved.

Other authors (e.g. A.J. Ayer) similarly reduces moral propositions (e.g. “abortion is murder”), esthetic propositions (e.g. “this girl is beautiful”), indeed religious propositions (e.g. “God exists”) to mere expressive. We shall return to him later. But the same criticism could be addressed to him as the one we are addressing to the Performative Theory of Truth in general. Still, one big lesson we could learn from it is that even in religious language, propositions do often have a big expressive illocutionary load (and not simply constative). When I say, for example, “God is a loving Father” I am not simply making a statement of fact (or of an alleged fact) but I am expressing some attitude, or attitudes of mine!

4.6 TRUTH AND ERROR

When one discusses ‘truth’ one cannot help mentioning ‘falsehood’ is the opposite of ‘truth’ (in all senses, ontological, moral and logical). If, in the logical, or epistemological sense, ‘truth’ is the correspondence between what is affirmed or denied to what the case, ‘falsehood’, in the same sense, is the non-correspondence between the two. If a true judgment (or proposition) is that which corresponds to what the case is, a false judgment (or proposition) is that which does not, etc. And if the ‘truth’ lies, strictly speaking, in the judgment, as we have said, so does ‘falsehood’. – now when I pass a true judgment, I am right, when I pass a false judgment I am wrong. In the latter case, I commit an error, I am mistaken.

The very possibility of perceptual error could at least partially account for the many trends in Western Philosophy which sought to base knowledge, or at least to finally explain it, on purely rational grounds and not on sense-perception. We already have had the occasion to touch on this point in a different context when we referred to Rationalism and the fundamental role of ‘reason’ in the ‘re-construction’ of the objects of perception. But in this particular context, we wish to refer to all kinds of trend of thought in Western Philosophy which in a kind of Idealist way sought to base knowledge on an ‘apperception’ of universal and abiding ‘Ideas’ like Plato, or on some absolutely sure and indubitable “clear and distinct ideas’ like Descartes – or , in a different sense, on the ‘a-priori’ forms of the mind itself, like Kant, etc. All of these distrusting the reliability of sense-perception because of the possibility of perceptual error and the ever-shifting nature of our knowledge based on sense-objects and perception , looked for a surer footing for knowledge. Seeing that the ‘formal sciences’ do not depend on sense-perception for their truth and justification, Spinoza tried to build up his whole philosophy “in the manner of geometry” (starting with axioms and definitions and proceeding with theorems) and modern Logical Positivists do not hesitate to take Mathematics as the paradigm of all knowledge.

Speaking of sense perception: No matter how perceptual error is to be explained, it is to be noted that if we can speak of perceptual error at all, i.e. if we somehow or other can come to detect it and show that it is an error, it is because, paradoxically enough, sense-perception is fundamentally reliable. In English, however, by ‘error’ we do not mean perceptual error alone. We can commit errors – be mistaken – in drawing false conclusions from given data (in ‘inference’), in believing unreliable witnesses, etc. But here again, if we can speak at all of ‘error’ at all it is because of our capacity for truth! The ‘primary datum’, then, whether in perception or in any other way of coming to know, is our capacity for the truth! But the ever-groping mind for the truth, the wonder and mysteriousness of Reality and the admittedly limited means to attain it, the spatio-temporal conditionings and historicity of human beings, the

physical and psychological barriers (disease of the senses, weariness and laziness, bias and prejudice, inadvertence and non-chalancy, etc.), remains always subject to error – but also and at the same time capable of recognizing the error and overcome it! But this means too that our knowledge of Reality remains always partial, imperfect, relative (not ‘relativistic’!), certain up to a certain extent and uncertain up to another!

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

1. What is a ‘second-order assertion’?

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2. How do we show that perception is fundamentally reliable?

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4.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen the four prominent theories of truth and spoken of error as related to and different from truth. The correspondence theory says that truth is “the adequation of the mind to the object”. In other words truth is the correspondence itself between what I affirm or deny to what is really the case. Coherence theory of truth interprets ‘truth’ as coherence between a proposition and other well-established true propositions. If it can be shown that this proposition does not contradict these well-established prepositions, then it can be called ‘true.’ By pragmatic theory of truth William James speaks more in terms of ‘meaning’ or ‘view’ of life. if an assertion, and the view of life which is thus made up of such assertions, function satisfactorily in my life, if, in other words, it gives meaning and purpose to my life, then that assertion and view of life are true. Of course they may be ‘true’ to me and not to you. James applies this also to religious propositions expressive of religious beliefs. And in this he is followed by others more recent thinkers of whom we shall speak later in a related but different context. No matter how perceptual error is to be explained, it is to be noted that if we can speak of perceptual error at all, i.e. if we somehow or other can come to detect it and show that it is an error, it is because, paradoxically enough, sense-perception is fundamentally reliable.

4.8 KEY WORDS

Correspondence theory of truth: “The adequation of the mind to the object”.

Noumenon: An object as it is in itself independent of the mind, as opposed to a phenomenon (Kant)

Samvada: self-consistency, one of the characteristics of truth.

4.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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