

Chapter One:

Introduction

Generally, people understand philosophy as synonymous with Western philosophy, which causes Eastern philosophy to be ignored. Indeed, philosophy can be properly grasped if one could have the knowledge of Eastern philosophy as well as Western philosophy.

Indeed, it will be a contradiction to say that Western philosophy and Eastern philosophy have the same value, unless the word 'philosophy' is used in two different senses, firstly, as a wisdom that is connected to spiritual experience and secondly, as mental construct, completely detached from it.

It is claimed in 'Gandhi on Non-Violence' that *"There have of course been spurious attempts to bring East and West together. One need not review all the infatuated theosophies of the nineteenth century. Nor need one bother to criticize the laughable syncretisms which have occupied the talents of publicists (more often Eastern than Western) in which Jesus, Buddha, Confucius, Tolstoy, Marx, Nietzsche, and anyone else you like join in the cosmic dance which turns out to be not Shiva's but just anybody's. However, the comparison of Eastern and Western philosophy is, in our time, reaching a certain level of seriousness and this is one small and hopeful sign. The materials for a synthesis of science and wisdom are not lacking."*¹

In modern time, for a meaningful comparative philosophy to proceed, it is necessary for us to understand the

different levels of it, on which metaphysics, theology and philosophy are situated. It is required for the scholars to equip with the proper tools and knowledge of the profound differences between any traditional doctrines and the ideas of modern thinkers, to illuminate the similarities, as well as contrasts between the doctrines of the different religious traditions. It will adequately foreground the void space, which separates them and disclose the chance of fluent formulations of similarities which exist only at relatively superficial levels.

Furthermore, it is the case that *"Oriental doctrines can fulfill the basic and urgent task of reminding the West of truths that have existed within its own tradition but have been completely forgotten. Today it is difficult for Western thinkers to rediscover the whole of their own tradition without the aid of Oriental metaphysics. The fundamental doctrines and the*

accurate spiritual techniques are hardly accessible in the West; 'philosophy' has become totally divorced from the nature of the spiritual experience."²

The separation of metaphysics, philosophy and religion appears in modern times, as the metaphysical realm lies beyond the phenomenal plane. The validity of a metaphysical principle can be neither proved nor disproved by any kind of empirical demonstration, by reference to material realities. The ultimate reality of metaphysics is the Supreme Identity, in which all oppositions and dualities between subject and object, knower and known, being and non-being are resolved. The aim of metaphysics is to make doctrines intelligible and to demonstrate their consistency. It is concerned with a direct apprehension of reality.

Modern European philosophy tends to be dialectical and it is analytical and rational in its modes. From a traditionalist point of view it might be said that modern philosophy is anchored in a misunderstanding of the nature and role of reason, the idolatry of reason could otherwise hardly have arisen. From *'Understanding Islam'*, we find, Frithjof Schuon claims that *"Reason is formal by its nature and formalistic in its operations; it proceeds by 'coagulations', by alternatives and by exclusions- or, it might be said, by partial truths. It is not, like pure intellect, formless and 'fluid' light; true, it derives its implacability or, its validity in general, from the Intellect, but it touches on essences only through drawing conclusions, not by direct vision; it is indispensable for verbal formulations but it does not involve immediate knowledge."*³

Metaphysics is not held to be true by those who understand it, but it might be expressed in a logical manner because it is true, without its truth ever being compromised by the possible shortcomings of human reason. In *'Stations of Wisdom'* we find that Guénon claims that *"For metaphysics, the use of rational argument never represents more than a mode of outward expression and in no way affects metaphysical knowledge itself, for the latter must always be kept essentially distinct from its formulation; and formulation, whatever form it may assume, can never be taken as anything but a symbol of that which in itself is incommunicable."*⁴

In *'Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy'*, we find that *"The mode of apprehension is something quite other than the philosophical thought that believes that it can attain to an absolute contact with Reality by means of analyses,*

syntheses, arrangements, filtrations and polishing; thought that is mundane by the very fact of this ignorance and because it is a vicious circle which not merely provides no escape from illusion, but even reinforces it through the lure of a progressive knowledge which in fact is inexistent."⁵

Infact, metaphysics is directed towards those realities which lie outside mental perimeters and which are unchanging. Most metaphysicians are eager to reformulate some timeless truth so that it becomes more intelligible in the prevailing climate.

However, the East-West encounter produces some important and beneficial results. There are many benefits that might issue from a properly-constituted comparative study of Eastern and Western metaphysics. Comparative studies allow each side to illuminate the other. At a time when the world is

rived with all manner of inter-cultural and inter-religious misunderstandings and tensions, any effort to promote mutual understanding amongst different intellectual and religious traditions is to be applauded.

Now, whether motion is acceptable or not is a long standing debate among philosophers of the East and the West. Questions relating to motion, have always attracted the attention of philosophers and scholars and since the ancient times, they find it very difficult to provide a convincing answer to the question of motion. However, they find out that motion and change are qualities different from any other quality and therefore, they pay special attention to it and propose different ideas in this regard. At first, we have to understand what motion means. In our common sense, motion implies

movement of an object from one place to another, which is possible because of change.

Aristotle (384-322 BCE) claims that Motion means change of any kind. For Aristotle, motion is '*entelecheia*', a transition. He uses the word '*energeia*' as a synonym for '*entelecheia*'. The root of '*energeia*' is '*ergonó*', from which comes the adjective '*energon*', i.e., active, busy or at work.

Sir David Ross claims that '*entelecheia*' means 'actualization,' not 'actuality'. St. Thomas Aquinas claims that actuality and potentiality do not exclude one another but co-exist as motion. Not only that, an actuality is also a potentiality, as it is a motion and whether an actuality is a motion, it is a potentiality. The two seeming contradictions cancel each other in the dynamic actuality of the present state which is

determined by its own future. But Ross and Thomas failed to explain how motion differs from rest.

In ancient Greek philosophy, we can see that while Anaximander, Anaximenes, Leucippus, Democritus and Epicurus admit the possibility of motion, Parmenides and Zeno of Elea deny it. Anaximander argues that motion is beginningless. For him, particular things are divided or separated due to motion. The root cause of the creation of the world is the process of separating out of the opposites. Indeterminate, non-particular, shapeless primary element due to motion, divides itself into two parts, viz., hot and cold through an uncertain process. Cold becomes moisture. This moisture material element accepts the form of earth which is situated in the middle of the universe. The water of the earth slowly

vapourised by heat and creates a layer of air, surrounding the earth.

According to Anaximenes, fundamental stuff of the universe is air. There are two qualities in the air, viz., unlimitedness and continuous motion. Air extends in space with having these qualities. It is changeable. He claims that the ability to be with motion inheres in the air and it is the motion by which world is created from air.

While, Anaxagoras admits intelligence in explaining motion, for atomists like Leucippus and Democritus, motion is due to the movement of atoms in empty space. Democritus and Leucippus argue that the world consisted of two things, namely, vacūm and matter. Matter is divided to tiny and indivisible particles called 'atoms'. In fact, they have attributed the origin of changes in things to their internal motions.

Leucippus claims that without empty space motion is not possible. For him, space is filled with many small substances or particles which are non-perceptible for their smallness, but they are in motion in empty space. The creation, destruction and rest of things are possible due to the connection, abstraction and interaction between these small substances. Indeed, Leucippus accepts a beginningless and endless motion. Though motion of atoms can be explained in terms of their weight, Democritus, instead accepting their shape and size, does not attribute them with weight. Later Greek philosopher, Epicurus attributes atoms with weight to explain their motion. Epicurean philosophers think that it is the weight for which atoms fall continuously towards bottom in infinite space. But Democritus does not admit top, bottom or middle place in empty space by arguing that these are our imagination but do not exist in reality. In explaining the view of Democritus, Aristotle says

that atoms move as like as sunrays, scattered everywhere from the Sun.

Heraclitus is so obsessed by the world of motion and change that he regarded instability and becoming as the origin of everything and deny the existence of anything stable in the world. He assimilates the world to a river that is always in a state of motion and has no rest even for a single moment. He claims reality as change, flux and becoming.

Pythagoras defines motion as absolute otherness and becoming and tries to show that the state of the thing in this very moment is other than its states in the previous and the next moment. His definition asserts that although motion in things causes changes in their states, the existence of change in the world does not mean motion, since when compared with each other, the quality of change applies to all existents.

Some philosophers define motion in terms of otherness since it leads to a change of states and causes transformation in the already existing thing. However, they are unaware that what causes change is not necessarily otherness and what causes something is not necessarily the same as that thing. If otherness were motion, every other thing would be a moving thing whereas it is not the case.

For Parmenides, only Being is, not being is not and cannot be thought. Change means something to be created, to be with motion. But for Being, these are impossible; Being is not created, non-destructible, complete, motionless and endless. It is motionless, because, to be with motion, it has to move on empty space but empty space is void and there is nothing as void. Motion and movement are kinds of not being and it is impossible to be created something from that which is not. He

regards the world as consisting of the same substance everywhere and deny the existence of any kind of motion and instability. He considers motion and change as being illusory and unreal and believes that stability and unity govern the world, Being is always immutable and motionless. For him, what is seen as plurality and change is nothing but an illusion, since believing in the reality of multiplicity and change leads to contradiction.

Aristotle introduces Zeno as the founder of indirect reasoning. Zeno, with some famous example, argues against motion. For him, within a limited period of time unlimited distance has to be passed, which is not possible. He tries to show that a line is made up of unlimited numbers of points and anyone has to pass unlimited length of distance, which is not possible. He claims that an object cannot remain at two places

at the same time. But remaining at a place means remaining static. Therefore, it remains at a place as equal to its length at every moment and so, it is motionless, static. Aristotle says that Elea's philosophers do not accept motion, because, it is impossible to explain motion without the imagination of empty space and the imagination of empty space is not possible.

Zeno argues in various ways that there is no motion. According to one of his arguments, the arrow in flight is always at the same place, therefore is always at rest and so, never in motion.

F. H. Bradley claims that relation presupposes quality and quality presupposes relation. Change is a quality. If any relation between an object and its successive states (e.g., object1, object2 etc.), is not accepted then the object cannot change. For him, change has no reality; it is only an

appearance. As, to be in motion, an object requires to change its place either in time or out of time, without change motion is not possible.

Bradleian formulation signposts a modern conception of metaphysics shared by a good many people, philosophers and thinkers. There is no single modern philosophical posture on the nature and significance of metaphysics. Some see it as a kind of residual blight on the tree of philosophy, a feeding-ground for obscurantists, whereas some grant it a more dignified status.

The concept of motion has also been an important issue in the Eastern thought. Nāgārjuna, the great thinker of Eastern (Indian) thought, the founder of the Mādhyamika Buddhism, denies both, motion as well as rest. According to him, motion begins not at the place 'already traversed', not in



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the place 'yet to come' and even not in the place like the 'being traversed'. It is difficult to think whether the mover can be understood with or without motion and whether motion resides in a body which has nothing to do with motion. A denial of motion implies that of rest. The mover cannot rest as moving is impossible without motion, the non-mover cannot rest as it is already static and there cannot be two rests as it would involve two static bodies. Rest cannot begin when someone is at rest or not at rest.

The early Buddhists however, hold that everything is in perpetual flow, reality is pure flux. They deny the existence of any mental substance or a mover behind the movement, but they assert that all created things are changing and have characteristics of origination, duration and cessation. However, some early Buddhists, e.g., the Sāmmittīya and the Vātsīputrīya,

admit not only the reality of motion but also that of a mover or some kind of mental substance behind the movement.

The Vaiśeṣikas also admit three things, namely, substance, quality and motion. For them, motion is a reality. They think it as a duration which lasts till the cessation of motion. Motion is something different from the moving thing.

Thus, we find that there is a great controversy regarding the reality of motion in Western as well as in Indian philosophy. The present dissertation is an humble attempt to analyse and critically discuss the negative views on motion as found in the theories of Zeno of Elea, Bradley and Nāgārjuna.

Notes:

1. *'Gandhi on Non-Violence'*: Mahatma Gandhi: Thomas Merton (ed.): Mark Kurlansky (Prefaced by): New Directions Paperbook: Canada: Penguins Books Canada Ltd: 1st Published: 1965: Reissued: 2007: p.6.
2. *'Conditions for a Meaningful Comparative Philosophy: Philosophy East and West'*: Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Vol.22, No.1: University of Hawai'i Press: 1972: p.59.
3. *'Understanding Islam: A New Translation With Selected Letters'*: Frithjof Schuon: Mark Perry & Jean-Pierre Lafouge(Trans.): World Wisdom, Inc.: Bloomington, Indiana: 1st ed. in French:1976: Last ed. in English: 2011: p.12.

4. *'Stations of Wisdom'*: Frithjof Schuon: World Wisdom Books, Inc.: Bloomington, Indiana: 1995: p.18-19.
5. *'Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy'*: Harry Oldmeadow: William Stoddart (Foreword by): World Wisdom, Inc: Bloomington, Indiana: 2010: p.112-113.