REALISM, ANTI-REALISM, AND QUIETISM: HAS PHILOSOPHY BECOME DISPENSABLE?

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Abstract: What is philosophy? Is philosophy a play with words? Is philosophy a game with concepts? If each philosophical theory is a game and if each game has its own set of rules, then different philosophical theories are played following different sets of rules. Each set of rules has its own set of prescribed moves. Understanding and delineating the concepts and their relationships are determined by the rules governing the respective game. If philosophical theories are like games, then does it make sense to claim the superiority of one theory over another? If each party has its own set of rules to play with, and if this set of rules determines the concepts and their relations generating truths in each system, then philosophers seem to be talking past each other. Philosophical debate, then, is a misnomer. Or is it really so? The present paper is an attempt to respond to this question. If a philosophical view is a matter of choice, remaining quiet in a debate seems to be the only option. Does it not lead to the death of philosophy, as it is generally understood?

Philosophy is famous for debates and disputes. Refuting different theories and defending some views lie at the heart of philosophy. Debates, however, presuppose that there is some truth that each is trying to arrive at. Moreover, the debating parties try to argue that their own views grasp the truth, while the others' theories fail. The problem with this philosophical picture is that philosophical propositions lack empirical content, unlike empirical truths. Consequently, there is no yardstick concerning which a philosopher could justify her perspective. It actually brings us to the question: What is philosophy? Is philosophy a play with words? Is philosophy a game with concepts? If each philosophical theory is a game and if each game has its own set of rules, then different philosophical theories are played following different sets of rules. Varied philosophical theses are arrived at, resting on varieties of rules. Each set of rules has its own set of prescribed moves. Understanding and delineating the concepts and their relationships are determined by the rules governing the respective game. If philosophical theories are like games, then does it make sense to claim the superiority of one theory over another? It sounds odd to claim that cricket rules are superior to the rules of football. It is also odd to set the rules of cricket, for example, against football. One cannot be viewed as opposing the other. So what is it that philosophers are debating? For a debate to occur, there must be a common set of beliefs shared by the debating parties. If each party has its own set of rules to play

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with, and if this set of rules determines the concepts and their relations generating truths in each system, then philosophers seem to be talking past each other. Philosophical debate, then, is a misnomer. Or is it really so? The present paper is an attempt to respond to this question. If a philosophical view is a matter of choice, remaining quiet in a debate seems to be the only option. Does it not lead to the death of philosophy, as it is generally understood?

It is widely held that science attempts to discover things as they are, independent of our likes or dislikes of these things. Ascription of properties like good/bad, nice/ugly involves projecting our subjective sentiments to the things in nature. The immediate problem with this thought is: how do we know the things as they really are independent of our relation to these things? To know is to have cognitive access, and to have cognitive access is to impose our epistemic apparatus onto things. It is also notoriously difficult to divide the so-called cognitive properties and non-cognitive properties, for the very idea of having a criterion to distinguish these two groups of properties requires locating ourselves beyond the conceptual frameworks embedded in the two sets of properties. Naturally, skepticism arises with regard to the divide, and we are at a loss to find our location in reference to the divide when we think of things as good/bad or otherwise. Questions could also arise about the nature of the arguments that purportedly prove the ascription of one set of properties to be falling on one side of the divide. The conceptual repertoire required to formulate these arguments cannot fall back on the denizens falling on either side of the divide due to the pain of circularity.

Philosophy essentially is a self-critical discipline. The history of philosophy is marked by a constant attempt to raise new questions and offer fresh perspectives to ancient and near past philosophical speculations. A good example of this is the contemporary debate about realism. One of the distinctive features of philosophical inquiry is its attempt to explore the relationship between human thought and the world that we live in. Though this issue has been reformulated more than once in the writings of many philosophers, it provides philosophers of past and present with a motif to engage in philosophical speculation. Realism seems to be the most natural, pre-philosophical conclusion that this discourse leads to. Contemporary discussion on realism derives from the post-Kantian disputes between realists and idealists and, less directly, from the medieval debate between realists and nominalists. For the scholastics, the question was whether universals exist "outside the mind." For nineteenth-century (and onward) philosophers, the question was whether the world as a whole is mind-independent or not.

I. Realism/anti-realism debate in Classical Indian Philosophy

In the present section, the author of this article would like to situate the classical Indian debate concerning realism in the present-day conceptual milieu. J. N. Mohanty traces the debate of realism and its opposition to Indian philosophy in the questions (Mohanty. 1992, 173): i. whether knowledge is self-referential and ii. whether knowledge takes the form of its object implying knowledge in itself is formless or not. The author shall explore the onus that an Indian realist has while addressing

certain important queries. If the core claim of any realist thesis is accepting the principle of bivalence -- the principle that every statement is determinately either true or false -- then we can legitimately demand an Indian realist to defend this principle. Any generalized account of the realism/anti-realism debate must recognize three distinct species of objectivity: i. objectivity of truth, ii. the objectivity of meaning, and iii. the objectivity of judgment. Let the author looks at how an Indian realist would account for these three kinds of objectivity.

Any classical Indian philosophical system is a close-knit set of truths whose boundaries have gradually been sharply demarcated by the successive interpretations in the tradition that have continued for centuries. In such a well-knit system, it is often difficult to find out the specific space where one can begin the analysis of the arguments of the system. Should one start with the scriptural texts that later have been explained and justified? Should one start with some spiritual intuition and then engage in the conceptual elaboration? Alternatively, maybe, one could start with an examination of the *pramāṇas* and then arrive at the systematic exposition of the *prameyas* or *vice versa.* One could also start with the ordinary experiences (*lokavyavahāra*) and then analyze these, taking help from the available conceptual repertoire. Difficulties in settling these issues are enormous. Each individual philosophical system is such a maze that it is hardly possible to get hold of one string without pulling the others. Nonetheless, for our present purpose, we can start by focussing our attention on the close relation between epistemology and metaphysics. At the beginning of the *Nyāyasūtras* (I.ii.18-19), one finds a mention of the possible objection that since an account of *pramāṇas* and an account of *prameyas* are so interwoven that it is difficult to make sense of the beginning of the discussion of Nyāya. Nyāya's answer partly is that even to assert that validity of all means of knowledge cannot be coherently stated involves tacit acceptance of some *pramāṇa* that could validate this knowledge. Nyāya further argues that the following possibilities: 1. *pramāṇa* preceding the *prameya*, 2. *pramāṇa* succeeding the *prameyas*, and 3. *pramāṇa* being contemporaneous with *prameya* are all instantiated in our experiences. The first is when the cause of the knowledge precedes the object of knowledge; the second occurs when the object is there first and later known and established, and the third is when the two are contemporaneous, as in smoke being the cause of the inference of fire. The point of all this, according to Nyāya, is to draw our attention to the fact that philosophical conclusions cannot go against ordinary usage and ordinary experience. When a sceptic questions the validity of the universal premise in an inference, viz., all cases of smoke are fire, Nyāya alleges that the sceptic's position would go against the practice of humankind, that of production of smoke and fire. It is not to claim that philosophical conclusions are to be derived from ordinary experience, but the system, perhaps developed a priori, can be validated by reference to ordinary experience and ordinary usage.

This attitude of Nyaya is no more evident than in its defense of realism. Nyaya distinguishes the knowledge "This is a jar" from the knowledge "I see that this is a jar." For Nyāya, the two sentences express two different cognitions. The former cognition talks about the jar that is before me. The latter cognition talks about the former cognition. An analysis of the former cognition does not contain any reference

to the knowledge expressed by the sentence. In contrast, an analysis of the latter cognition must contain a reference to the original perceptual cognition. "This is a jar" expresses the perceptual cognition whose object is the jar; it describes the object jar. However, "the knowledge that this is a jar" denotes the original cognition, for this expression takes place only after the original cognition is known in a reflective mood. Thus, for Nyāya, cognition is not intrinsically self-referential. It exhausts itself in referring to its object. So in a cognitive state, the knower knows the object and not the knowledge itself. The knowledge itself can also be manifested only by another knowledge where the former becomes the object.

A popular objection to the Nyāya view is that since each member in the knowledge series can be an object of the succeeding knowledge, this would lead to an infinite series of cognition. However, this is not obvious why this should be so. For an object to be known, I need to have knowledge that has that particular thing as an object. I do not need to know the knowledge itself. The first level of knowledge is enough for acquiring the knowledge of the object, and any vicious regress is uncalled for. Of course, one can go to the second level of reflective knowledge, but one does not and need not go beyond this.

It seems that Nyāya wants to avoid two extreme views (Ibid, 48); 1. All first-order knowledge is necessarily followed by reflective knowledge, and 2. First-order knowledge is followed by reflective knowledge if there is a desire to reflect. Nyāya argues that if we accept the first thesis, then it would be impossible to have a continuous perception (*dhārāvāhika pratyakṣa*) of an object over a stretch of time. Also, there may be hindrances (*pratibandhaka*) to the arrival of reflective knowledge, like the person could fall unconscious or may die. Against the latter possibility, Nyāya argues that the desire to reflect on the first level of cognition would not even arise unless there was an acquaintance with that knowledge, and Nyāya precisely denies this. If cognition is not known, one cannot have a desire to know it at all, runs the Nyāya argument.

Of course, none of these arguments of Nyāya are free from problems. Nyāya's account of continuous perception runs counter to the kind of experience that we have, phenomenologically speaking, where we consider cognition as one cognition in case the object of the cognition continues to be perceived under the same description. Regarding the second point, Nyāya seems to concede that if there was no hindrance, then the first-order cognition could be followed by a second-level reflective cognition. In the same breath, Nyāya thinks that one cannot have a desire to know the first-order knowledge unless one is acquainted with that very knowledge, and Nyāya denies the latter possibility. Thus there is something wrong somewhere in the Nyāya account.

Another place to look for realism-idealism controversy in Indian philosophy, according to Mohanty, is the debate whether knowledge (consciousness) is formed or formless (Ibid, 34). Form (*ākāra*) can be understood in terms of the structural arrangement of the parts of a thing. Material things that are made up of parts are, in this sense, formed. The Nyāya argument is that consciousness is not a substance but a quality or an action, and since only substances are made of parts, consciousness must be without parts. The opponents argue that consciousness always has a form, and they have in mind the individual events of consciousness. It is these individual experiences

of consciousness that our mental lives consist of. So, for these philosophers, the cognitive event of the form "This is blue" is actually consciousness-of-blue, and here being-of-blue is constitutive of it. Due to their nominalist leaning, these philosophers are not ready to talk about consciousness. They are happy with individual conscious events, and each conscious event is different from another. This being-of-blue as a constitutive feature is the very form of the event of consciousness of blue. This feature of being-of-blue is a feature of the conscious event; this does not belong to the blue object outside. The Indian realist, of course, thinks that whatever form knowledge seems to possess is derived from the form of its object. Though consciousness is of a blue object, one cannot claim that being-of blue is constitutive of that state of consciousness. Thus, for a realist, consciousness is not the kind of thing that could have the form of an object; it cannot be blue, rectangular etc. Consciousness is not like a mirror where the object is reflected. Once we accept that consciousness takes the form of its object, then our knowledge of objects as 'near', 'far' would be impossible, since it is the form of consciousness that we are directly aware of. Consciousness and its object are of completely different kinds, so much so that it would be absurd for one to have the form of the other. Also how could one know the form of the consciousness, if consciousness has a form at all? The same object can be said to have different forms, depending on the modalities of its perception. It is only through cognition that one can come to know the form of the object, and cognition can present, to us, different forms of the same object. What a thing is, is known only through the way it is present to us. If one mode of presentation is proved incorrect, it is proved incorrect only through a later presentation. The contents of different modes of presentation must somehow belong to the thing itself.

As we have seen earlier, knowledge is formless, for it is not a substance. The rule is that a substance that is not composite must be eternal. Knowledge is non-eternal. Knowledge is not action, for it is devoid of motion; it does not involve spatial displacement. The realist contends that knowledge is a quality, a quality that is characterized by being-of-an-object (*svābhāvikaviṣayapravaṇatā*). According to Mohanty, these two doctrines, viz., that knowledge is not self-referential and that knowledge has a form only in a derivative sense, implying that knowledge actually is formless, jointly suggest a realistic ontology. The Indian idealists, on the other hand, claim that knowledge is self-manifesting and knowledge has its own immanent form. Viewed in this way, the cardinal tenet of Indian realism seems to be that the cognitive experience derives its status by looking at the object. Nyāya's account of an analysis of knowledge suggests that epistemic objects have their corresponding ontological status. Moreover, if epistemic objects vary depending on the analysis of cognition, then perhaps one has to abandon the idea of the availability of a final list of categories, leading to the thesis of *aniyatapadārthavāda* as advocated by some later Navya-Naiyāyikas. Nevertheless, Mohanty thinks that admission of pre-predicative, non-propositional knowledge, where direct access to the object bereft of any epistemic characteristics is gained, is crucial for Nyāya realism (Ibid, 174). This pre-predicative awareness of objects, their qualities, etc., is presented separately from others.

Contrast this with the idealist position that "This is a jar" and "I know this is a jar" are equivalent; the latter does not express any new cognition. Every cognition is self-referential and self-manifesting. An idealist does not deny that knowledge manifests an object; it can manifest only that with which it identifies itself by taking up its form. On an idealist account, "This is a jar" should be analyzed as

> (i) My consciousness has assumed the form "This is a jar." It can be better rephrased as
> (ii) A mental state of the form 'This is a jar' reflects my consciousness (like a mirror reflects sun rays). It can still be understood better as
> (iii) Consciousness (which is in itself one and devoid of difference) as limited by the predicate
> "belonging to me" and consciousness as reflected in the mental state of the form "This is a jar" are identified.

Notice how consciousness is explained as knowing in all these idealist formulations, though subject to limiting conditions from both subjective and objective sides. Thus all knowledge is self-knowledge, though under different modalities. For the realist, everything is a possible object of knowledge, whereas, for the idealist, ultimately, there is no object of knowledge except consciousness itself; everything else is a modification of it.

From the above description of the realist account, it seems that realism involves both modesty and presumption.[1] Its modesty consists in the admission that humans confront a world that is not their making, and many of the features of this world may remain unknown to them. However, it also presumes that we humans, more or less, can acquire knowledge of the world under favorable circumstances. Thus realism ascribes to us the ability to form the right concepts for the classification of the features of the world and the ability to come to know the true statements of the world which are expressed by cashing on these concepts. Skeptics and idealists are the natural opponents of realism. Skepticism leans towards modesty by questioning whether there is any warranty in our description of the world getting the status of knowledge. Is there any rational basis behind our confidence that we get to know the world as it is? Idealism, on the other hand, is more presumptuous than realism. The former reminds us that it is an error to think that we confront a world independent of our conceiving and conceptual coloring in our cognitive practice. Reality cannot claim to be more original than the image in a mirror. Thus there remains no possibility that things and facts outstrip our epistemic capacities.

It is to be noted that the contemporary debate concerning realism and its opposition is not one debate. There are many disputes, each focusing on a specific region of discourse. It is true that anti-realist arguments would see their triumph once these arguments are successful globally. However, even if anti-realist arguments were found wanting globally, this does not make the realist free from the responsibility of the task of offering her arguments for her preferred area of discourse piecemeal.

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[1] For much of the following discussion, the author draws heavily on Crispin Wright, *Meaning, Realism and Truth*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1987. See especially the Introduction.

Moreover, it is not totally unexpected that the realist arguments in various regions of discourse may have various degrees of success. The classical Indian debate regarding realism and its opposition is a global dispute. It is not evident that the Indian realist is concerned with defending realism as a preferred area of discourse. For the traditional realist, anti-realist philosophers totally misconceive the nature of truth. The realist thinks that there is no area of discourse where the anti-realist interpretation would be acceptable. The author of this article is harping on this point because, in the contemporary debate on realism and its opposition, one could be a local realist without subscribing to global realism (Quine could be an example). In the modern formulation of the debate, anti-realist does not quarrel with the realist in so far as effectively decidable statements are concerned. In recent times, the focal point of the debate has been the realist thesis that truth may intelligibly transcend evidence. The Nyāya realist would not be sympathetic to this view, for they hold that everything is knowable (*sarvam prameyam*). Knowledge is backed up by evidence, and universal extension of knowledge implies the universal presence of evidence and so truth, whatever this means, falls within the scope of available evidence.

Moreover, there is no immediate path from denial of evidence transcendent truth to denial of what is essential to realism, viz., truth as made up of a *fit* between beliefs, statements, etc., and the features of an independent reality (Ibid. 3). One can well think of a determinate world in thinkable ways but unascertainable. Thus one can speak of truth in correspondence with autonomous states of affairs and still concede the idea of evidence transcendent truth. So it is not apparent that the only way to understand the truth in terms of correspondence is to accept evidence of transcendent truth. One could interpret Nyāya realist as understanding truth in terms of correspondence but not accepting evidence of transcendent truth. Here, it seems, by refusing to accept the mystifying idea of evidence transcendent truth, Nyāya realism is on stronger ground. It is an enlightened realism. Suppose one takes the lesson of Quine's underdetermination thesis seriously. In that case, one can be driven to the claim that even the most refined techniques and methodology of science may fail to discern the articulations and determinations in the world. It does not make a scientist give up a correspondence version of the truth.

Suppose one agrees with the claim that the Principle of Bivalence (every statement is either determinately true or false) is the core thesis of realism. In that case, the realist has to account for the presence of vague expressions in ordinary discourse. The realists can either deny realism as applicable to vague discourse or claim that holding on to the thesis that every statement is either determinately true or false is not inconsistent with the presence of vagueness in a statement. The author's hunch is that Nyāya realists would go for the latter alternative. Nyāya would explain the meaning of the vague statements in terms of the larger discourse they form part of and the context of the utterance. For Nyāya realist, vagueness would not deter from accepting bivalence.

It will not be out of place to propose that behind the realist/anti-realist debate, there lies the notion of objectivity in all its facets (Ibid, 5). One can detect three aspects of objectivity here. When a realist claims that there are sentences that are intelligible to us, but determining their truth-values lies beyond our cognitive powers,

she can be said to believe in *the objectivity of truth*. In this view, truth is not our making, for truth defies our apprehensive power. Related to this is the *objectivity of meaning*, where it is held that the notion of meaning is a constraint (may be a self-imposed collective constraint); our determination of the truth-value of the sentence may conform or fail to do so. If certain statements are undetectably true, then their meanings extend to the region we do not have access to. Then there is what can be called *objectivity of judgment*, where statements can be said to state/misstate the features of the world, and these features of the world can be understood by any creature that possesses appropriate cognitive powers. If one accepts that the world confers potentially evidence transcendent truths to statements, then one cannot but accept that the world contains features of the appropriate kind. The critical project for a realist is to give an account of our understanding of the statements that are not effectively decidable, keeping the objectivity of judgment in mind. On the other hand, an anti-realist has to give an account of effectively un-decidable statements without talking of verifying transcendent truth.

If one is at all tempted to arrange these three facets of objectivity in order of primacy, then the author would like to take the objectivity of meaning as central, from which two other aspects of objectivity can be derived. Now rejection of objectivity of meaning can lead to two different lines: i. one can reformulate the notion of the normativity of meaning and can distance oneself from the inter-subjective contractual notion of meaning; ii. one can totally reject the notion of meaning and instead invoke some other concepts to account for our linguistic understanding *a la* Quine.

Let the author ends this section by alluding to an oft-repeated argument brought against realism, viz., "acquisition argument." This argument asks: how are we to form an understanding of what it is for a statement to be true if the state of affairs that would make it true is, *ex hypothesis*, something beyond our experience, which is completely divorced from any impact on our mind? Obviously, one cannot respond to this query ostensively. Nor can one take recourse to description, for our very ability to describe that which would make the statement true is in question. If the author's understanding of Nyāya realism, as has been explained here, is correct, then this anti-realist argument does not hit Nyāya realism. The upholder of the acquisition argument actually demands an account of our understanding of the evidence that would make the statement true, evidence that transcends our grasp. Nyāya realists can very well deny the evidence of transcendent truth. If everything is a possible object of knowledge and consequently permeated by evidence, there is little room for evidence of transcendent truth. However, as the author has mentioned earlier, this does not strip Nyāya of its realism, for a Nyāya realist understands the truth in terms of correspondence.

II. Quietism and the Realism/Anti-realism debate

Naturally, one way to address this debate is to reduce the concepts falling on either side to the concepts falling on the other side. Another attempt has been made to suggest that claims made by the advocates on either side do not make any truth claims; rather, the claims are expressions of some other kinds. These claims could be

viewed as not talking about some mind-independent reality; rather, they could be understood as constructing the reality that they talk about. Another response to the debate could consist in the claim that at some point in the debate, one could see that the debate is not a real one and that each side in the debate offers some perspective from which one could profit the way one likes. In this attitude, the question of the truth/falsity of each side is irrelevant. They are not making any truth claims. They are making some proposals, proposals that could benefit us. This attitude is called "Quietism" by Simon Blackburn. (Blackburn. 1984, 146)[2] A quietist does not take any side, not because each of the sides is false, but because they are not truth-apt claims. Not all claims are claims about truth/falsity. Many philosophers argue that moral claims are not directed to truth/falsity; they are expressive of attitudes and emotions. So quietism denies view from nowhere, from where one could judge whether things are known as they really are or whether they come to us with clothing. If philosophy takes a quietist turn, a philosopher becomes non-committal and refrains from engaging in the debates. This ascetic non-involving attitude also has its metaphysical connotations, as we shall see later.

One could place both mathematical and ethical statements on the same plane and argue that these kinds of statements are imperative in nature. Thus, neither of these is a genuine proposition and does not express genuine truth. In this view, any attempt to defend the truth/falsity of either of these statements is out of place. One could, however, on the other hand, argue that both the kinds of statements are truth-apt. So both the kinds of statements are parasitic on a general notion of truth, but these statements display some fine-grained distinctions and features that the general notion of truth cannot portray. The latter perspective might acknowledge that each discourse has its own set of rules to be followed, and consequently, each has its paradigm of permissibility. Consequently, each study area plays with its own idea of truth and assertion. The very nature of these ideas makes them commensurate with the rules of that particular linguistic-conceptual scaffolding. It would conclude that varied disciplines, following the minimal constraints relevant to each discipline, could claim to arrive at truths and try to justify these truths.

Suppose we think of two extremes like i. Claiming that the external world contains features like a necessity, etc., logic and mathematics are trying to grasp this feature that lies out there in the world, and ii. Claiming that a description of mathematical practices of humans is what explains logico-mathematical statements, then there could be a middle ground claiming that talking about the features of logico-mathematical statements must be understood in terms of the perspective from which one uses these notions. (Mcdowell. 1998, 215) Necessity might then be understood from both perspectives, each having its own standpoint. Our craze for objectivity arises from our muddled understanding that the rules and their applicability in an area of discourse must be settled independently of human perspective. Something completely external to us and that we somehow are in a position to have cognitive access to this world of rules and their application. Thus, in between a robust, substantive transcendent objectivity and a complete denial of objectivity by making room for

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[2] Simon (Blackburn. 1984, 146) *Spreading the Word*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, p.146.

natural, regular human tendencies, we end up with a set of rules created and followed by the participants. Moreover, these rules make their presence felt only within the moves made by the participants. Notice that this middle way treats both extremes as fallacious. The former entertains a philosophically indefensible idea of transcendent objectivity. The latter smacks of a complete denial of rule-following, consequently rebuffing the very idea of objectivity altogether. If Platonism lulls us into false security, the skeptic rejects any intellectual practice, resulting in self-destruction.

The advocates of both extremes rely on a messed-up idea of objectivity, Platonism locating it somewhere independent of human access and the skeptic dispensing with the idea of objectivity. The middle way then undermines the debate; it shows that the debate is really a non-issue. However, for the middle way to succeed, one has to interpret realism (a modern avatar of Platonism) as always claiming transcendent objectivity and antirealism to be insisting on doing away with transcendent objectivity. Doubts have been raised concerning the claim that realism always involves falling back on transcendent objectivity. (Wright. 1992, 208) Suppose the differences between two rival theories can be formulated in terms of the vocabularies of one of these theories (and not in terms of the vocabulary of a third theory). In that case, this does not necessarily imply a theoretical failure, for there is no intrinsic connection between the conceptual apparatus of a theory and a theory transcendent cognitive accessory. It all really depends on the nature of differences (between the theories) that are said to be under investigation. Suppose some differences between the rival theories can be understood in terms of the vocabularies within a theory. In that case, the claim that realism always involves falling back on transcendent objectivity does not stand. Thus, the claim that realism necessarily suggests a god's eye view falls flat. It is to argue that the assertion that the middle way undermines the realist/anti-realist debate is deceptively simplistic.

If the middle-way advocates a non-participatory attitude to the realism/anti-realism debate, thereby encouraging quietism, one could also imagine a participatory engaging attitude to this debate. Suppose one thinks of the "Sceptical Solution" as understood by Kripke while explaining the "rule-following considerations." In that case, one starts by accepting that the skeptic's assertions are unanswerable. However, nonetheless, our ordinary practice is defensible, and it does not require the kind of justification that the skeptic demands. (Kripke. 1982, 66-69) The skeptical solution's value shows that our ordinary beliefs can be defended in a certain way. One accepts the force of the skeptical argument and offers a skeptical account of the meaning of something. One does not try to silence the skeptic by pointing out that the skeptic overlooks some fact or some condition that obtains in the world. The skeptical solution does not deny that we all use language by meaning something and not others. Moreover, we are perfectly right in doing so. We follow the rules, and there is nothing improper about this. The skeptical solution makes us aware of certain metaphysical absurdities that philosophers tend to attach to our usage of words. Suppose the skeptical solution claims that there are no facts of the matter concerning the meaning and following rules and that the kind of evidence that the skeptic demands is an unjustified demand, then the defender of the skeptical solution could be seen as one engaged in the realism/anti-realism debate not by trying to fulfill the demand of the

skeptic, but by questioning the nature of the evidence that the skeptic demands. It is different from the claim that the debate is not real. If one undercuts the debate, the other casts doubts on the nature of the claim that one of the parties in the debate makes.

The problem with the line of thinking following the "Sceptical Solution," according to Crispin Wright (Wright, 1992, 208), is that it turns all discourses about meaning and rules minimally truth-apt. It implies that any talk about meaning and truth is valid only within a theory, resulting in the general view that the confines of a theory bind meaning or truth. One feels that if there are no facts regarding meaning and truth, which the skeptical solution concedes, then one wonders how quantified conjunction could be regarded as true when there remains no fact of whether one of the conjuncts is true. (Ibid, 213) Moreover, if the skeptical solution really claims that the skeptic's demand is unjustified, that the evidence that the skeptic demands will never be available, then this 'no fact of the matter' would infect both meaning and truth. So it would be impossible even to formulate the claims of the disputing parties in the realism/anti-realism debate. It definitely sounds odd. It is one thing to claim that there is no real dispute, but another thing to claim that the dispute never existed. To start a therapeutic analysis, one needs to appreciate that problems need to be addressed. It is only after this realization that the problem could be dissolved. And so, in order to formulate the problem from either side of the realism/anti-realism debate, one at least is required to make a distinction between which the participants in the debate are advancing particular claims and whether the claims are justified.

Suppose the skeptical solution convinces us of non-factualism of truth and meaning. In that case, it could easily slip into global non-factualism, and this has some bearings on the nature of truth that are difficult to digest. (Ibid, 214-220) Even if non-factualism could be a valid position concerning a set of questions, this by itself does not necessarily imply that all talk of truth and meaning are divested of any relation to objectivity. For in a dispute, even to formulate the claims of the rival parties and not assess the truth-claims of the views of the parties involved, one is required to understand the content of the rival claims. For this, one is required to fall back on truth and meaning, transcending the bounds of the rival theories. Moreover, this certainly goes against the spirit of non-factualism. Even to have cognitive access to the rival claims, one needs to take help from the idea of theory transcendent truth and meaning.

The rule-following considerations, to which quietism owes its origin, could be seen either as 1. preventing the very birth of the realism/anti-realism debate, or 2. drawing our attention that both the parties share wrong assumptions or 3. as siding with a minimalist view of truth and meaning. The foregoing discussion shows that the rule-following considerations offer another alternative through the skeptical solution. It might not be philosophically wise to claim that there is no point in the realism/anti-realism debate, that the debate is not a real one.

III. Quietism a la Nāgārjuna

So far, we have been talking about the attempt to understand the realism/anti-realism debate and have been trying to see whether and to what extent quietism does justice to the debate. Quietism in this context takes a non-participatory stance in the debate holding that the debate is a non-starter because of entertaining certain wrong conceptions. A quietist remains neutral in the debate not because she has another solution to the problem but because she thinks the debate is wrong-headed. This non-participatory attitude of quietism gets a metaphysical twist in the works of Nāgārjuna, the classical Buddhist philosopher of India. Buddhists are famous for their distrust of language. According to Buddhist philosophers, language misleads us in conceptual construction that generates an attitude of attachment and clinging on to the objects, ultimately trapping us in the web of suffering. Buddha himself, it is told, remained silent when asked about the nature of self, the origin of the world, etc. Attempts to reply to these questions, after all, would not make one free from suffering. It is more of a pragmatic approach to addressing the problem of suffering. Nonetheless, the ideas of silence (*tūṣṇīṃbhāva*), or stopping of conceptual proliferation (*niṣprapañca*) are in vogue in Buddhist vocabulary.

Nāgārjuna advocates quietism in the sense of not having a thesis or a position of his own. If one does not have a position to defend, she cannot be said to uphold a wrong thesis simply because she does not have any thesis at all. It is definitely more radical than holding the view that it is better not to participate in the debates where the parties involved are unreasonable etc. However, what is wrong with having a thesis? Having a thesis implies using language, and using language involves using concepts. Using concepts implies belief in things having an essence and intrinsic features. These features are said to be residing in things independent of our knowledge. Moreover, according to the Buddhists, this way of projecting the world is profoundly mistaken. Nāgārjuna himself, of course, does not offer any positive argument to reject the language-induced conceptual construction (mis)leading towards the belief in the intrinsic nature of things. This attempt would have been against the no-thesis view of Nāgārjuna himself. Instead, he refutes all the possible philosophical positions he encountered in his days.

One could understand Nagarjuna's no-thesis view as i. Recognition of the failure of language and conceptual construction to reach the Reality; ii. Exposing other views to different fallacies, but not expressing one's own views; and iii. Arguing that any attempt to express a thesis requires falling back on a realist theory of meaning which cannot be accepted.[3]

In so far as the first interpretation is concerned, this definitely suggests that the reality is ineffable. There is a long-standing tradition in the classical Indian religious literature that the real, the source of the entire creation, cannot be known through

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[3] This is originally introduced by Jan Westerhoff as mentioned by Tom J. F. Tillemans in his 'Philosophical Quietism in Nāgārjuna and Early Madhyamaka', in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy* (ed. Jonardon Ganeri), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, p.115. I draw heavily on this article by Tillemans while explaining Nāgārjuna's version of quietism.

language. Whatever else it is, language is part of the world, part of human existence. Talking about the origin of this means moving beyond the creation; talking about something that is the foundation of all creation and language fails here.

One of the common claims present in many religions is that reality (ignoring for the time being the controversy about the nature of reality) is ultimately ineffable. Reality lies beyond our language. So no matter how sincerely one tries, one would always fall short of describing the reality. Similar is the nature of our experience of this reality. Our linguistic apparatus is incapable of expressing or depicting our experience of the divine. Moreover, this is where mysticism comes in. Notice that here when somebody speaks of ineffability, she does not take it to be a contingent matter that some bit of experience just happens to be indescribable or that since one does not have a sufficient grip over the language. One fails to describe it. Here ineffability is viewed as a matter of principle. The very nature of reality or the nature of our experience is such that language would necessarily fail to grasp and describe them (the author is talking about linguistic description only). Language, in some meaningful sense, gives us a distorted picture of reality or that of our mystical experience. Ineffability is in the constitution of the real or the mystical.

Furthermore, the argument goes on since reality and its experience does not involve the medium of language; it gives us a direct and deeper insight into truth. The immediacy involved here is the "fancifully fanciless unvarnished medium of truth" (to use Quinean expression). The knower-known dichotomy collapses in the case of mystical experience. The knower does not take a third-person perspective. The knower herself gets involved and is metamorphosed in the cognitive process. The knower claims to be elevated to a different level; her whole being changes. Transitoriness does not affect her anymore. She feels as though she has been able to grasp something eternal, which is not affected by the ever-changing empirical world. Language, being a product of the changing world, is ill-equipped to get hold of the experience of the real. However, the author is aware that ineffability could arise in cases other than religious ones. However, for now, the author is concerned with ineffability as it is found in religion.

Despite all this talk of ineffability, mystics have not stopped describing their experiences. Nor can they resist describing the real. Man is a language-using animal. However, how can they describe the indescribable? One could find three ways the mystics have tried to do this: i. Using metaphor, ii Using paradoxical sentences, and iii. Using negative descriptions. The examples of these different kinds of expressions as found in religious literature are too well known to mention. Notice that none of those mentioned above instances involve literal truths. If I do not know what a metaphor is, then coming across a metaphorical expression would make me believe it is a patently false sentence. If I say that the face of my beloved is like the moon on a full-moon day (remember that metaphors vary from culture to culture), then, assuming that you do not know what a metaphorical use is like, you would very likely be reacting "what are you talking about"? How can the face of a human being look like the moon? Paradoxical sentences are even more puzzling. They are universally false statements. How can the same thing move and not move simultaneously, whatever you mean by "move"? The religious literature is full of these kinds of

statements. Moreover, according to the mystics, the reason behind using these statements is to drive home the point that when language tries to describe reality, it miserably fails. It is like using a tool to do something for which it is not designed. However, there is a positive side to this use of language. These expressions give us some hints as to what reality is like. They give us some broad suggestions as to the nature of reality. An atlas of a country can give you some idea of the country, but this is a completely different experience once you go there. So these expressions are like an atlas of the empire of the divine. Negative descriptions, however, belong to a different category. They are not patently false; they look incomplete because they induce the hearer/reader to expect a fuller description. Furthermore, "fuller" here means a positive description of what the thing is like. So, negative descriptions do not have any structural inadequacy. Logically and grammatically, they are not objectionable. They seduce the hearer/reader to inquire further about what those expressions talk about. And, of course, the idea of language being incapable of grasping reality is there.

The second interpretation of Nāgārjuna's quietism is best looked at as a reasoning strategy. If there are four alternatives regarding the truth of the content of a statement (being, non-being, both being and non-being, neither being nor non-being, as discussed in the Buddhist tradition)), and none of the four alternatives is tenable. All the alternatives have been shown to be fallacious. It implies that none of the available theories is tenable. One should, however, remember two points: i. There is a scope for further discussion on the nature and scope of the four alternatives. These four alternatives might not exhaust all the alternatives, or these four alternatives might not be mutually exclusive. If these are open questions, then arguing that the theories defy all the four alternatives does not necessarily imply a no-thesis version of quietism. It is logically possible to develop another new theory with a different set of conceptual repertoires that might not be amenable to any of the four alternatives above. ii. If showing fallacies in the different theories implies a no-thesis view, then it would be deceptively naive to call it an attitude of disengagement. At least in this context, the defender of quietism seriously engages with the theories laying bare the significant details of the theories and unearthing all the fallacies that lurk behind them. It demands a great amount of participation in the debate, although not necessarily to defend a thesis, but to prove the fallacies in theory concerned. This brand of quietism is certainly participatory in nature. Moreover, once again, one could raise the issue of interpreting the object theory (which will be proved incorrect) in terms of the conceptual vocabulary of the interpreter's theory, especially where the theories are incommensurable. Do we then fall back on the available transcendent objectivity idea, cutting across the theories? If the answer is yes, then the quietist claims that, at one point, debates do not really seem to be threatened.

On the third understanding of Nagarjuna's quietism, it could be claimed that all the contents expressed by language (as articulated by different theories) rest on the idea that concepts/names (embedded in language) are directly hooked on to the things in the world. Furthermore, this requires us to assume that things have unchanging intrinsic essences. This idea of things having essences is profoundly mistaken. So everything sieved through language or manifested in language fails to give us

knowledge of the reality. It is a version of the no-thesis view, for one does not formulate one's own theory because the moment one tries to do it, one would end up subscribing to the wrong view about things having essence. In this understanding, quietism implies not having any theory of one's own. Having a theory commits oneself to a metaphysical blunder. Notice that this understanding of quietism rests on a particular conception of the relation between language and world, a particular idea of truth. Unless Nagarjuna is ready to defend this metaphysics of non-essentialism and the corresponding theory of meaning, his quietism will not stand. So even quietism requires a non-quietist participatory debate to stand on.

Remember, quietism started its journey by arguing that the realism-antirealism debate is not a real debate. Both parties misconceive some basic concepts being at play in the debate. One moves ahead and claims that quietism actually undermines the debate and holds that the debate is misplaced. However, suppose one follows the Kripkean "Skeptical Solution" to the Wittgensteinian rule-following considerations. In that case, the quietist is a participant in the debate and is likely to fall back on an idea of transcendent objectivity. Nāgārjuna's quietism resembles the Kripkean skeptical solution in the sense that both the Kripkean and the Nāgārjunian quietist are participants in the debate. It argues (Kripke argues that the kind of evidence the skeptic demands is unjustified, and Nāgārjuna argues that all theory constructions rest on a false metaphysical view) that quietism results from a critical evaluation of epistemological and metaphysical theories. So, after all, quietism does not seem to give philosophy a place. Let there be thousands of voices from which the symphony of philosophy resonates.

Conclusion

Quietism started its journey by arguing that the realism-antirealism debate is not a real debate, for both the parties misconceive some basic concepts being at play in the debate. One moves ahead and claims that quietism actually undermines the debate and holds that the debate is misplaced. However, suppose one follows the Kripkean "Sceptical Solution" to the Wittgensteinian rule-following considerations. In that case, the quietist is a participant in the debate and is likely to fall back on an idea of transcendent objectivity. Nāgārjuna's quietism resembles the Kripkean skeptical solution in the sense that both the Kripkean and the Nāgārjunian quietist are participants in the debate. It argues (Kripke arguing that the kind of evidence the skeptic demands is unjustified and Nāgārjuna arguing that all theory constructions rest on a false metaphysical view) that quietism results from a critical evaluation of epistemological and metaphysical theories. So, after all, quietism does not seem to give philosophy peace. Let there be thousands of voices in which the symphony of philosophy resonates.

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