

## Afterward

When I consider the material in the forgoing pages I am reminded of an analogy from Buddhaghosa, a Buddhist thinker of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> He asks us to imagine a heap of coins piled on a table, and three people looking at them: an ignorant child, a villager from the countryside, and a professional moneychanger. The child sees the coins as bright and ornamented, but has no idea that these objects are a valuable treasure. The villager knows not only that the coins are bright and ornamented but also that they are a treasure; but he would not know which coins are genuine and which fake. The professional moneychanger knows all that the child and the villager knows, and in addition also knows where the coin was made, who fashioned it, and so on. He has the wisdom to discriminate the genuine from the fake. The wealth of information contained in the foregoing pages, from various perspectives, could dazzle us as the child was dazzled by the coins; some might even recognize their worth. But what gives them unity and significance? Here are some possibilities:

1. “Truth”: It was a firm conviction developed by medieval Western scholastics that one truth cannot contradict another, and, therefore, the more one begins to inquire into any truth, whether empirical or sacred, one will come to see their unity. This idea has had a powerful influence on the Western mind, and many of our own contemporaries in different disciplines seem to operate under this paradigm. But is it a viable paradigm? While this kind of integration offered a live option as long as all learning was held together with a unifying metaphysics of the One, ever since that kind of metaphysics was undermined by empirical epistemology during the modern period, the viability such integration has been seriously questioned. The most sustained attempt at such integration of knowledge without a unifying metaphysics was undertaken in the twentieth century by the Vienna Circle. But their ambitious project of producing an

International Encyclopedia of Unified Sciences came to naught and had to be abandoned. Anyone who seeks to follow this model is going to be confronted with the question raised by S. Peppin in his observation: Where is the weaver in the web?

**2. Commitment:** The existentialists were the first ones to realize the impact of the breakdown of the traditional, unified metaphysics and its disintegrating effect on the modern outlook. Their solution was to replace the “objective” metaphysical foundations with the “subjective” foundations of passionate commitment. The life of a passionate lover becomes an integral whole, not because there are no other desirable women in the world, but because the passionate commitment of the lover has displaced all the others. Analogously, the source of integration, say the existentialists, is the subjective passion of the individual, whether it be the drive to be the superman (Nietzsche) or the drive to become an authentic Christian (Kierkegaard). While this kind of integration can be an admirable personal achievement, its ability to dialogue with differing points of view and other commitments seems problematic.

**3. Flux:** this is a kind of unity of no-unity or unity of permanent ambiguity. This is a typical postmodern approach advocated by the likes of John Caputo, Richard Rorty and others. A brief echo of it can be found in the khoratic space—a metaphysical space without determinations—advocated by Alphonse Nishant in his observation. While this solution carries its commitments on its sleeves, these commitments seem as idiosyncratic as that of the existentialists. It may be liberal democracy as in Rorty or the cause of dalits, tribals and women, as in Nishant. If such commitments look like Buddhagoshā’s villager, it is not surprising because they seem dictated more by the social agenda of the day than by any reasoned faith. What else could be expected when faith remains merely an openness to the future (Derrida) without the rootedness in any past experiences of the divine wherein one could dwell? Since this kind of faith has no historical instantiations, no Moses who saw the burning bush, no Buddha who attained Nirvana, no experience of the Word-made-flesh, it seems to lack any existential home to reason from.

Looking at these options leads me to envy our ancestors, as they seem to have had an easier time than we do. And by ‘ancestors’ I

mean the shining stars of both the Indian classical traditions as well as the Western Christian tradition (D’Almeida, Karuvelil). Not only were they brilliant reasoners who could split hairs with their *tarka* (reason) but also enlightened men and women of faith whose *śraddhā* (faith) illumined their reason; and they had the wisdom to know the difference. And among the ancestors, perhaps our Western forebears had an easier time as they were dealing with Christian faith, and therefore, their faith matrix remained more or less constant. Matters were more complex for our Indian ancestors as their faith matrix itself differed. Yes, they started by inviting noble thoughts from all quarters (*Rg-Veda*, 1-89-1), but they were under no illusion of being able to integrate them all into one unity, unless guided by a faith perspective. This led them, like those from our Western lineage, to warn about dry reason that is uninformed by faith. Dwelling in the existential home of one’s own faith, they studied what the others had to say, debated and argued with them, and even borrowed from them.

While there is an urgent need to go beyond scientism (Jayard), how are the various empirical disciplines to be woven into the existential fabric of our lives? Is not some version of “Naturalized Epistemology”<sup>2</sup> a good platform that offers an empirically informed approach to dialogue and argumentation? While more than one paper in this volume speaks about epistemology in a rather uncomplimentary manner, it is never clarified as to what is being disparaged as epistemology or what might take its place. Does the professed goal of promoting inter-disciplinarity call for a new approach to knowledge that places dialogue and communication at the centre?

Irrespective of how that question comes to be answered, there is another lesson we can learn from our ancestors. An important factor that contributed to their ability to integrate was not only having their existential homes, but also their clarity on the kind of knowledge they were after: they were after transformative knowledge. This provided certain methodological unity to their quest. Little wonder that even the very words used in *Fides et Ratio* (no. 65) for describing the twofold methodological principle (*auditus fidei* and *intellectus fidei*) look hardly different from the *śravaṇa* and *manana* of Śaṅkara.

Is this the wisdom that can carry us beyond the dazzle of empirical knowledge and the commitment of the existentialists and the postmoderns to a commitment that is open to dialogue with a *telos*, as done by our ancestors?

**George Karuvelil, SJ**

### Notes

1. Buddhaghosa, Henry Clarke Warren, and Dharmananda Kosambi, *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosâcarya*, Harvard Oriental Series, V. 41 (Cambridge.: Harvard University Press, 1950), chapter XIV, 3-7.
2. Most fundamentally, naturalized epistemology claims that the descriptive (empirical) and normative sides of epistemology cannot be separated from one another, as attempted by the post-Fregean epistemology. For a brief overview, see, Feldman, Richard, "Naturalized Epistemology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2012 Edition). <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/epistemology-naturalized>.

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