



**ON THE POSSIBILITY OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**Abstract:**

We propose to speak on the possibility of philosophy. The consideration which led us to this choice is that the discussion of this topic can provide us with a proper context – the context of discussing in a connected and meaningful way – the subjects like *Samśaya*, *Pramā*, and the like.<sup>1</sup> Alternatively described our chosen context is Skepticism. Let us for the present agree to use the expression “knowledge” for *pramā* and “doubt” for *samśaya*. So it may be found that the themes under reference belong to the domain of epistemology. That epistemology or, as many view it, first philosophy involves essential reference to skepticism can be gathered or verified from the literature of modern or contemporary European philosophy (or epistemology). There, one is likely to find assertions like “theory of knowledge is primarily an exercise in skepticism”.<sup>2</sup> However, skepticism is not a matter of concern exclusively of the modern and contemporary European philosophers or epistemologists. Besides the form of skepticism which these philosophers discuss is not the only form which skepticism has or takes. The contemporary Euro-American philosophers and epistemologists are primarily concerned with what may be called modern (forms of) skepticism which doubts or denies that we can know the external world or other minds or the (human) past. As an abiding concern of philosophers of all time and all cultures skepticism is not restricted to only these three doubts. The literature of the Classical Greek Philosophy from the Pre-Socratic era and that of the systematic Indian Philosophy from more than two thousand years ago testifies to the truth of this remark. The scope of different forms of skepticism is different. Accordingly the modern skepticism may be viewed as the mitigated form or version of skepticism. In the history of Classical European and Indian Philosophy one meets with absolute or unrestricted skepticism also which doubts the possibility of knowledge as such including philosophical knowledge or philosophy. One should not immediately dispose of such skepticism as absurd since it denies the patent fact that we have experience and we could not live or talk if we did not have it. For no sensible skeptic denies the possibility or reality of belief (*jñāna*<sup>3</sup>); he only doubts or denies the knowledge claim we tend to make implicitly or explicitly in favour of many, if not all, beliefs that we have or can have. The absolute skepticism doubts or denies the possibility of knowledge (roughly *pramā* or *pramāṇa*); it doubts or denies the claim that there is or can be a belief which may be counted as knowledge. The reason may be that the skeptics think that no belief that we have or can have satisfies or can satisfy the definition or description which a thing must satisfy if it is to be considered a case of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> It may not be necessary or correct to ascribe to even the skeptics of Europe or India of the classical age the belief that it is false or doubtful that there could be any indubitable belief or that even truths of logic or mathematics or analytic statements are dubitable. On the contrary the famous contemporary American philosopher, who has forcefully argued that even the truths of logic and mathematics are revisable and hence is not necessarily true is not certainly a skeptic.



Be that as it may, according to the sensible skeptics of classical or modern period it is at least doubtful that there could be any factual belief which was true or an instance of knowledge. What follows is that Philosophy or Indian Philosophy in its standard sense is not and cannot be possible; it cannot be a body of (factual) knowledge nor can it give us synthetic knowledge or *tattvajñāna*.

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So far skepticism has been found to be opposed to philosophy. It does not allow philosophical enterprise to take off. And yet philosophy is there. Moreover history of skepticism is as old as that of philosophy.<sup>5</sup> How to understand this mystery, if it is a mystery? Careful consideration convinces us that philosophy owes its origin, continuity and growth to skepticism or to interaction with it. It is a myth that philosophy originated in man's lazy wonder. It originated when certain adverse or negative forces (represented by the *nāstikas*, *saṁśayavādīns*, *vaiśaṇḍīkas*, skeptics etc.) challenged the world view of a people and threatened the very foundation of their culture and society. Philosophy emerged as man's (the *āstika* people's) response to such challenge. The relevant sense of meeting the skeptic's challenge is not indulging in, dreaming or wishing that there is no skeptic or lazily ignoring them. Meeting the skeptics as the philosophers, understand their challenge rationally and theoretically defending the cherished world view of the people concerned and preventing the skeptics or the *nāstikas* from destabilizing the entire fabric of the personal, family and social life of the people concerned. Philosophers put up such resistance to skepticism. This makes philosophy a rational and theoretical enterprise which is extremely useful and relevant in all ages. For the skeptical thought never gets fully eliminated from society rather it continues to spread its seductive influence on unsuspecting men. Philosophers are, not only, not men of this sort but they also have won up the responsibility of freeing society of the menace of skepticism.

What is more important for us to note here is that philosophy also owes its rational character to skepticism. Further this character and history of it, distinguishes systematic philosophy and does not allow it to become merely edifying philosophy which often tends to become a form of mysticism. This account of philosophy, which is informed by the classical Indian thought and culture, should be contrasted with the view of philosophy of a famous American philosopher according to whom when it is the question of what preserves and promotes our society we should remember: *Sophia* yes, *philosophia* not necessarily.<sup>6</sup> Anyway, skepticism (*saṁśayavāda*), if not *saṁśaya* also, is thus the greatest friend and enemy of philosophy (*darśana*). It is so, in so far as *darśana* (Indian Philosophy) and also philosophy in the view of many thinkers is a pursuit of knowledge (*pramā*) or better of reasoned truth (*nirṇaya*). *Tattvajñāna* in this sense is what the *dārśanikas* (the Indian philosophers of the classical age) aspire for.

Whatever may be true about lay doubt (mere *saṁśaya*) or wonder on the one hand and the otherwise indifferent (*udāsīna*) knowledge (*yathārtha niścaya*) on the other as well as the relation between the



two, it is not without reason that philosophy or epistemology is an exercise in skepticism. Doubt (*saṁśaya*) involved in the theory and practice of skepticism is closely related to philosophy as a rational and socially relevant enterprise.

It is oversimplification to say that skepticism consists in the attempt at just invalidating philosophy or making it impossible whereas philosophy is the uncommon trait of a few strange individuals who are obsessed with the thought of scoring triumph over doubt and disbelief. Skepticism is itself a philosophical theory; at least it will be so understood here. It is also not the case that philosophy is just a name for the faith or disposition of a few trusting individuals, that knowledge and philosophy are possible. Philosophy is indeed a quest for truth but it is more than that the pursuit of reasoned truth. Philosophy is not just an exercise in skepticism. Rather it consists in the exercise in rationality on the part of philosophers who are realist<sup>7</sup>. This cautious formulation is informed by the need to acknowledge that skepticism is also a philosophical theory or position.

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Though the two are related yet doubt (or *saṁśaya*) and Skepticism (or *saṁśayavāda*) are not the same thing; they are different. We need some more clarification as to the sense in which we do or should understand the expressions like *saṁśaya* and *pramā*. When translated respectively as doubt and knowledge and one takes epistemology to be the context of discussion, it may be thought that *saṁśaya* and *pramā* are two of the many different propositional attitude(s). Such risk is quite common when we use two different languages or conceptual frameworks. However there is reason to believe that in Indian philosophy, particularly in the Nyāya school of Indian philosophy *saṁśaya*, etc. are not necessarily understood as propositional attitude. These are not usually taken as dispositions. On the other hand though *saṁśaya* (doubt), *pramā* (knowledge), *bhrama* (error or false belief) etc. are taken as cognitive episodes yet their discussion in Nyāya does not make Nyāya a mere system of psychology. When Nyāya discusses *saṁśaya*, *pramā* etc. the thrust of the discussion is how cognitive states figure individually or as related to each other in the scheme of different possibilities which a certain cognitive state (*jñāna*)<sup>8</sup> has or can have. The four possibilities are true (*pramā*), false (*bhrama*), neither and both. Unlike what we usually think an erroneous cognitive state (normally a perceptual error) falls not into the second category of *bhrama*; rather it belongs to the fourth category ‘both *pramā* and *bhrama*’ – it is partly an error and partly knowledge. What about *saṁśaya*? One thing is certain it is different from *pramā*. So far it is not true (*apramā*). But it is not a case of *bhrama* or false belief either. *Pramā* and *apramā* are mutually exclusive. *Samśaya* is indeed a case of *apramā*. But *apramā* and *bhrama* are not the same thing. Is there any cognitive state which is neither true nor false? The right answer is in the affirmative. The characteristic of such cognitive states is that they can be causally related to cognitions that are true or false but they do not bear epistemic or logical relation to cognitive states that are true or false. There does not obtain among them epistemic-logical or ontological opposition (*pratibadhya-pratibandhaka-bhāva-sambandha*). For better and clearer understanding, cognitive states are first divided into two classes: definitive (*nīścaya* or *nīścayātmaka*) and non-definitive. The first class is exhausted by knowledge (*pramā*) and error (*bhrama*). *Samśaya* belongs to the class of non-definitive



cognitive state; as such it is neither *pramā* nor *bhrama*. There are other cognitive states which are like *saṁśaya* in this respect.

Keeping in mind what has just been said we should try to understand skepticism. An act of doubt is *saṁśaya* but skepticism is *saṁśayavāda* – a certain theoretical stand or position (and not doctrine)<sup>9</sup> which advocates doubt or disbelief (*saṁśaya*) of a certain sort. Skepticism or a skeptic doubts or denies<sup>10</sup> the legitimacy of man's claim to have knowledge. By this, is sometimes understood that a skeptic doubts or denies the claim of a man (whether a philosopher or not), that at least some of our beliefs are indubitable.<sup>11</sup> When skepticism is construed as the denial (*pratiśedha*) of knowledge claim it is more vulnerable to the decisive attack of the opponents, say the realists. This denial is neither *saṁśaya* (doubt) nor is it necessarily a case of *pramā*. It may be a case of *bhrama* (false belief) or *viparīta niścaya*. When their subject is the same, *saṁśaya* gets removed as much by the corresponding *pramā* as by *bhrama*. Both are cases of *niścaya* or definitive belief which alone has truth value- true or false. But *saṁśaya* is neither true nor false as it is not a form of *niścaya*. It is *apramā* (not knowledge) but not *bhrama* (definitive false belief) either. For it is not a state of definitive belief.

Skepticism can be of many different types and their scope is not the same. The scope of absolute skepticism is greater or wider than that of say the mitigated skepticism. The scope of the classical skepticism covered 'knowledge' (*pramā/pramāṇa*) as such (perhaps excluding the exceptions like truths of logic or mathematics). If the central concern of skepticism is to doubt or deny the possibility of knowledge, that of philosophy is to justify and legitimize man's claim that knowledge is attainable. This amounts to claiming that skepticism is false or that its truth (soundness) is doubtful. Thus doubt (if not denial which is epistemologically a stronger position) is central to both skepticism and philosophy; often people do not note this. Again some of those who note this think that doubt does not and cannot bear the same relation to both skepticism and philosophy. Philosophy and skepticism are opposed to each other. The truth however is that as a rational enterprise, as an exercise in rationality, philosophy involves doubt in its very constitution or structure. As such, doubt should be held to be one of the conditions of rational inquiry and hence of philosophy.<sup>12</sup> There is a broad agreement about the conception of philosophy and rationality in the two cultures – Indian and Euro-American. However there are differences in details, depth and clarity so far as the relation of doubt to philosophy (*darśana*) and skepticism is concerned. In other words there seem to be some important differences between the European and Indian philosophical traditions, when it comes to the conception of philosophy (*darśana*), skepticism (*saṁśayavāda*) and their relation to doubt (*saṁśaya*).

It needs to be noted that however central to philosopher's concern it might be, the issue of skepticism is external to philosophy. Philosophy cannot even begin without successfully meeting skepticism. But for all that philosophy does not end with doubting its possibility. On the other hand there is hardly anything more in skepticism than doubting. Normally skeptics do not have any positive thesis (of their own) to defend. Their only agenda is to challenge – doubt or deny – the knowledge claim<sup>13</sup> which philosophers are inclined to make. Philosophy proper



–actual philosophizing – begins only after skepticism is overcome. For example before disproving skepticism philosopher cannot begin to discuss the internal questions, like how many accredited sources of knowledge are there or what is the criterion or criteria of knowledge. One cannot start asking or answering these internal questions before one has good reason to believe that philosophy or knowledge is possible or that doubt in their possibility can be overcome.<sup>14</sup> Skeptics doubt or deny that there is or can be any acceptable criteria of knowledge *pramā* or that they doubt or deny the legitimacy of all actual (or possible) criteria or definitions of knowledge. The debatable issue is whether it can be *proved* that there is knowledge – *pramā* or *pramāṇa*<sup>15</sup>. The issue involved is *prāmāṇyasiddhi* (*siddhi* of the *prāmāṇya* of *pramāṇa*), that is proving that the alleged *pramāṇa* (true belief) is really a case of knowledge.

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What has just been said shows that doubt is central to skepticism but not to philosophy. What is central to philosophy and or philosophizing is the strong belief and confident hope that philosophy is possible. However, it is more accurate to say that certain doubt is also integral to philosophizing or even to philosophy though philosophy begins with doubt and ends with knowledge – knowledge which results from the successful pursuit of it. Skepticism begins as well as ends with doubt. To put it differently in case of philosophy doubt is methodological and not systemic. Nonetheless the particular doubt in question almost defines philosophy in so far as it is a self-reflective theoretical enterprise. Though in this sense philosophy does and must entertain doubt about the possibility of philosophy yet what still explains the continuity of the philosophical enterprise is that philosophers never cease to remain sanguine that the pursuit of knowledge would come to bear fruit if not necessarily to a totally successful end. Against the background of what has just been said we can make sense of skepticism as a philosophical theory.

Otherwise the expression “philosophy of skepticism” or “skepticism is a philosophical theory” would have been dismissed as instances of oxymoron. Something similar is the case with the familiar expressions like “Nominalist’s theory of universal” or “Atheist’s view of God”.

The authentic practice on the part of philosophers (in general) – the philosophical enterprise or philosophizing – seems to entail a belief (*jñāna*) in the possibility of philosophy (or of philosophical knowledge). However as a self reflective theoretical discipline philosophy is committed to investigate into the possibility of philosophy or knowledge itself<sup>16</sup>, which in its turn entails that it entertains doubt in the possibility of knowledge. It follows that even if there were in fact none who actually doubted or denied the possibility of knowledge as such or of certain particular kind of knowledge, philosophy is committed to entertaining doubt about the possibility of knowledge (though not to denying this possibility). In other words the philosophers admit that the doubt that we may not attain knowledge is at least a theoretical possibility.





Some may think that it follows from what has just been said that the very concept of philosophy is inconsistent. Two beliefs that it entails – or the two beliefs that follow from the very nature of the subject – the belief in the possibility of knowledge and the belief in the possibility of doubting this possibility – conflict. Actually however, philosophy incorporates skepticism in the sense of a theoretical possibility of doubting as otherwise it cannot show through critical examination that such doubt is ultimately untenable. And till this is shown philosopher's *hope* that philosophy and / or knowledge are / is possible, cannot become a reasoned conviction. Philosophical pursuit is not the pursuit of just knowledge or truth but reasoned truth. In the vocabulary of Indian philosophy there are two expressions *Pramā* (knowledge) and *Nirṇaya* (reasoned truth). *Nirṇaya* results from rational and critical examination, which the philosophers (*dārsanikas*) practice. Even when skeptics are found to perform rational critical examination their purpose is to establish the negative thesis that it is not beyond doubt (even if it is not false or *bhrama*) that knowledge and philosophy are possible. Realists or philosophers conduct critical examination to defend certain positive thesis. Even when a philosopher argues to disprove certain position, say the position of the skeptic, he does so to indirectly defend his own positive thesis that philosophy and or knowledge is possible.<sup>17</sup> Even if there is not or there had not been any person who doubted or denied the possibility of knowledge, philosophy would still discuss skeptical doubt. To put it simple, philosophy would lose its character of being a self reflective and rational inquiry if it did not admit (its obligation to demonstrate that we can have knowledge, by showing that it cannot be reasonably doubted or denied that we can have it) the possibility of doubting that there could be knowledge or philosophy. As already said such acceptance of skepticism on the part of philosophy is a methodological stance. Unless one accepts skepticism provisionally one cannot demonstrate that skepticism cannot stand the test of reason. And till we do that, the possibility of skepticism would continue to haunt ordinary men as well as philosophers. Philosophy or philosophizing entails methodological skepticism<sup>18</sup>, which is perfectly compatible with the assertion or thesis that knowledge or philosophy is possible. And at least this particular piece of knowledge confirms beyond doubt that knowledge is possible or that skepticism is an untenable position. When we understand skepticism in this way we become convinced that skepticism itself is a philosophical 'theory' at least in the sense that it is implied in the very enterprise of philosophy.

The pertinent question is how exactly skepticism figures in the methodological stance of philosophy. Does it figure as a form of doubt (*saṁśaya*) or denial of a sort (*viparīta niścaya* or *bhrama* which is different from both *saṁśaya* and *pramā*). The weaker formulation of skepticism as a particular form of doubt (*saṁśaya*) renders it more difficult to disprove. The corresponding stronger formulation in terms of denial (*pratiśedha*) is easier to reject. Where a denial is a case of *bhrama* the corresponding assertion is a case of *pramā*. Both these are forms of definitive (*niścayātmaka*) belief or cognitive state (*jñāna*).

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It may be asked, is a debate or dialogue between a philosopher and a skeptic possible. And if it is not



possible, then how the conflict between the skeptic and the philosopher can be resolved? Resolution in some other way or resolution of any kind may not be appropriate, to say the least, in the present context. On the other hand the resolution of this conflict, solution of the external question under reference, is the beginning of philosophy. However, there does not seem to be any possibility of the dialogue in question. The philosopher remains convinced that knowledge is possible, nay knowledge has already been obtained and the skeptic remains equally unconvinced that knowledge could be possible. In order that there could be authentic debate and dialogue, each party must be convinced or unconvinced about certain matter. But the conviction or the non-conviction should not be a morbid one. Just as morbid curiosity cannot lead to a stable and acceptable result, so also morbid conviction cannot ensure authentic dialogue or debate. On the other hand only an authentic dialogue or debate bears real fruit. If the philosopher finds that the skeptic's doubt (or denial) is idle or the skeptic finds that the philosopher's conviction is a mere lazy hope then no authentic dialogue can begin or no resolution of the conflict can be reached. If the situation turns out to be such then the philosopher is defeated. For, he will win if only the skeptic is defeated. The skeptic will be defeated in the required sense only if dialogue takes place and the philosopher succeeds in showing that the doubt or denial in the possibility of knowledge is indefensible. But such a dialogue is not feasible in so far as there is no common platform for the skeptic and the philosopher to engage in an authentic dialogue.

It will be a cheap and contrived victory if the philosopher uses to his own advantage, the disadvantage which the skeptic suffers for being the opponent in the debate. As shown by Quine the opponent in a (certain) debate does not even get to formulate his position without violating the requirement of consistency. In other words in the very act of expressing his denial<sup>19</sup> the opponent contradicts himself. Sometimes the paradoxical situation of the opponent, here the skeptic, is put in this way. Unless the skeptic admits knowledge or philosophy as the subject of denial he cannot formulate his denial or the negative position: there is no such thing as philosophy or knowledge. Some Naiyāikas have formulated the position in this way. Nobody can reasonably say or show that there is no knowledge (*pramā*) unless this particular piece of cognition is a case of *pramā*. So nobody can deny *pramāṇa* or knowledge as such. At the most one can deny or doubt the possibility of certain particular case of an alleged *pramāṇa*<sup>20</sup>. We will see later on (in the second part of this paper) that the Naiyāikas formulate the position of the skeptic in this way: beliefs claimed to be knowledge or perception etc. which are alleged to be *pramāṇa* are not really so. Thus they avoid the temptation of securing a fake or contrived victory.

For the present, we would like to suggest that there seems to be at least two ways to overcome or bypass the impasse in which the skeptic and the philosopher find themselves, when they attempt to resolve their conflict by initiating authentic dialogue or debate. First, we stop viewing the dialogue in question between two historical persons or thinkers; one of them (the philosopher) is situated within philosophy while the other (the skeptic) stands outside that realm. Let us view or imagine the proposed dialogue as a dialogue between two notional or logical persons who are situated within philosophy and representing two opposite theses. In other words it is a debate of a philosopher with



himself. This happens in cases like critical thinking or *manana* in which a man argues with himself. The debate between the skeptic and philosopher is a debate of the philosopher with himself. The philosopher anticipates the opposite thesis and posits a person as a skeptic to represent the rival thesis. The very nature of philosophy, properly understood, provides room for such dialogue within philosophy and between a skeptic philosopher and a realist (non-skeptic) philosopher. A non-skeptic philosopher anticipates the criticisms – doubts and denials – which his counterpart, the skeptic philosopher may bring against him. The other way out of the impasse in question is to note that men are not born as philosopher; rather the philosophers are born as man. Both the skeptic outside philosophy and the philosopher are inhabitants of a common world – the common-sense world of ordinary men. Ordinary men share a large body of beliefs and practices. The common world as given, is constituted by or is reflected in these beliefs and practices. That these beliefs are there, as our common inheritance, is neither doubted nor denied by any one of the two parties in the debate. Using this as the *shared platform* the skeptics and philosophers can engage in debate or dialogue. They disagree about the status of these beliefs. The skeptics (the *saṁśayavādīns* or the *vaiṭaṇḍīkas*) hold that these beliefs or *jñāna* are not (and perhaps cannot be) cases of knowledge proper (that is, *pramā* or *pramāṇa*). The philosophers on the other hand hold that at least some of these beliefs are cases of knowledge proper. As already shown, both these views owe their origin in the shared common sense or ordinary beliefs and practices. It might seem too naïve, if we suggest that the large body of shared beliefs of ordinary common men do not incorporate the belief that at least some of these beliefs are true. It is to be admitted that the large body of common sense beliefs, also include the beliefs that there are true beliefs as well as false beliefs. Ordinary natural language contains its own meta- language. Similarly the body of common sense beliefs, contains critical judgments on these beliefs. How can then the skeptic, who begins by accepting commonsense, hold that there is not or cannot be any true belief or knowledge? Common experience does not provide any take off point for the unrestricted or universal skepticism. It will be in order if we clarify the matter a little more.

Common man is intuitively<sup>21</sup> aware that not only we have a large body of shared beliefs but also this body includes the belief that some of our beliefs are true and some of our beliefs false. Not only beliefs are given but also 'knowledge' and 'error' are given. So far no common man is or can be a skeptic. Skepticism is a theoretical stance which consists in admitting and advocating some general thesis, such as say, no belief is or can be true or at least no belief can be knowledge. This is not a common sense belief, but nonetheless it is a generalization, on the basis of common sense or ordinary belief, that at least some of our beliefs are false – or that they are not knowledge proper. The skeptic detects the implication of such commonsense belief which ordinary men fail to notice. Thus skepticism is not a matter of commonsense or intuitive experience but theorization on, and certain generalization on the basis of, commonsense. So far it is a theory or theoretical stance. However, it is not an ordinary empirical theory or a formal one. It is a philosophical theory based on interpretation, elaboration, examination and rational development of some commonsense experience and belief. To be more precise skeptic starts by accepting the commonsense belief that some of our beliefs are false. There





are perceptual errors or false beliefs. Given that there are (some) false beliefs, the argument proceeds, no belief can be trusted. Therefore no belief is true or that there is no knowledge. Knowledge claim, that we make in favour of some belief, is unjustified. Thus 'argument from illusion' is said to lead to skepticism, if not in the sense of doubt or denial of knowledge, as such, then at least of the knowledge claim in favour of the thesis which the supporters of physicalism advocate.

## II

Before we proceed further we may take a few examples of skepticism and debate between the skeptic and the philosopher from the philosophical literature of India. We will take a brief note of how the realist philosophers of the Nyāya School responded to mainly the skeptics of Buddhist school.

Philosophers of the Cārvāka School advocate limited skepticism; their thesis is *nānumānam pramāṇam*<sup>22</sup> that is, knowledge claim in support of inferential (and some other) belief is unfounded. These thinkers are realist and philosopher (and not skeptic) in respect of perceptual belief and they hold that perceptual beliefs alone constitute knowledge proper. Their position is known as *pratyakṣaika pramāṇavāda* which contends that the knowledge claim in favour of perceptual beliefs alone is justified. Only perceptual beliefs are or can be *pramāṇa* (pramā). Udayanācārya, of the Nyāya School of Philosophy, before Gaṅgeśa rejected this limited skepticism of the Cārvākas. A part of his argument is that one cannot doubt or deny knowledge as such.<sup>23</sup> Gautama in his *Nyāyasūtra* and Vātsyāyana in his gloss on this text discussed another case of limited skepticism (this time of the Bauddhas) which contends that there is no perceptual knowledge or *pratyakṣa pramāṇa*; the so called perception is a case of inference. The argument of these skeptics puts forth that a perception is *anumāna*; if and in so far as it is alleged to be a *pramāṇa* or a case of knowledge then the belief in question should turn out to be a case of inference.<sup>24</sup> Take another case. Vātsyāyana begins his *Nyāyabhāṣya* by responding to unlimited or absolute skepticism of some Bauddhas who appear to doubt or deny knowledge (*pramāṇa*) as such. The very first sentence of Vātsyāyana's commentary on *Nyāyasūtra* reads "... *arthavat pramāṇam*". Here he asserts by way of responding to the *saṁśaya vādīns* (perhaps of some Bauddha School of thought) who advocate unrestricted skepticism. Vātsyāyana says that *pramāṇa* (like perception, inference and so on) which is alleged, by the skeptic, to lack the character of a *pramāṇa*, does have the character which a thing must have if it is to be really and actually a case of *pramāṇa* or knowledge proper. The character in question is 'to be related to the object it reveals (knows) by the relation of 'non-discrepancy'' (*avyabhicāritva*). *Arthavyabhicāritva* (being non-discrepantly related to the object known) is the defining mark of a *pramāṇa* and perception, etc (which are accepted in the Nyāya School to be *pramāṇa*) have this character. The point of the Nyāya philosopher is that the skeptic is wrong when he says that there is no *pramāṇa*. This last assertion amounts to doubting or denying (either or both) that there is knowledge (a belief which is true etc.) or that there is any accredited source of knowledge. The Sanskrit expression *pramāṇa* is understood to mean one or the other of these two things according to the context.



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The realist philosophers of the Nyāya School responded to the skeptics of the Buddhist school; the lineage of debate between the two is long. The response of the two realist schools of India namely the earlier Mimāṃsā School and later day Navya-nyāya school, to skepticism, could be compared in developing an understanding of the issue. Realism in Indian philosophy broke new grounds and made real advances, which demand a careful analysis. Thus the discussion in context of the themes of *Samśaya* and *Pramā*, could be turned into the study of the development of Indian philosophy, particularly Indian realism, over the centuries.

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#### Notes and References :

- <sup>1</sup> There may be many other such contexts as well.
- <sup>2</sup> Ayer, A. J.
- <sup>3</sup> We will show later that the word belief is not the accurate translation of the expression *jñāna* when it occurs in the literature of Nyāya philosophy.
- <sup>4</sup> In the literature of Indian philosophy, the Vaitaṇḍika (skeptic of a sort) of different schools of Indian philosophy like Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta, critically examined the definitions of *pramāṇa* that a philosopher does or can offer and showed that all these definitions are unacceptable.
- <sup>5</sup> We find evidence of skeptical thinking even in the Veda.
- <sup>6</sup> Quine
- <sup>7</sup> Unlike the skeptic, these philosophers believe that knowledge and philosophy is possible. It is in this sense we say philosophers are realist, meaning non-skeptic.
- <sup>8</sup> It seems to be more accurate to translate the word *jñāna* as cognitive state rather than as belief. *Samśaya* is a *jñāna* but not a belief in the standard sense. Similarly (a) *nirvikalpāka pratyakṣa* is indeed an instance of *jñāna* but it is not an example of belief in the usual sense. When we do not take into consideration all the four possibilities noted here (but restrict the possibilities to only two – *pramā* and *bhrama*) we tend to translate *jñāna* as belief and *pramā* as knowledge. We ourselves have done so in some of our works. However it is more accurate to translate *jñāna* as cognitive state and belief as *niścaya* or *niścayātmaka jñāna*. A *niścayātmaka jñāna* like belief has only two possibilities. It is either true or false. But a cognitive state or *jñāna* can belong to both the class of



*pramā* and *bhrama* or to none of these two classes. A cognitive state which realizes the possibilities 'both' or 'none' is *apramā* but not necessarily *bhrama*. In philosophy we need to be careful so that we do not to confuse *apramā* with *bhrama*. *Samśaya* or doubt is *apramā* but not *bhrama* in the usual and standard sense in which the Naiyāyikas use the expression.

- 9 Skepticism should not better be construed as a doctrine of doubt.
- 10 In the literature of Indian philosophy, like Nyāya, there is discussion about (who are called) vaitaṇḍikas as well as of those who are called *saṁśaya vādīns*. Vaitaṇḍika stands as rejectionist in relation to the doctrines that different philosophers advocate from their respective positions. When a certain philosopher, unlike a vaitaṇḍika, rejects the position of a rival philosopher, his rejection contributes at least indirectly to defending or justifying his own position. Since he has a position of his own and has need to defend it against his rivals his approach and attitude is positive. He is not just a rejectionist. A Vaitaṇḍika has *no position* of his own (to defend). He does not and cannot have a positive agenda. He is just a rejectionist. Sometimes in his eagerness to reject certain position, a Vaitaṇḍika unscrupulously makes use of deceptive and pseudo arguments.
- 11 People who hold the sort of belief in question, that is the belief which skeptics doubt or deny will be referred to as realists. Realism has many different senses; for example, those who hold the view which the phenomenologists reject are also sometimes called realist.
- 12 Critical philosophical inquiry called by different names like *vicāra*, *manana*, *nyāyacarcā* and so on has *saṁśaya* as a precondition. *Samśaya* is said to be the *purvāṅga* of *vicāra*.
- 13 The scope of Skepticism can be broadened to include the doubt or denial of certain other possibility claims as well– the claim say that man can ensure through his own effort, the attainment of life's highest and best fulfillment.
- 14 In one's own case and shown to be unsound when a different person entertains the sort of doubt in question.
- 15 As hinted earlier the word knowledge is not the exact synonym of *pramā*, whereas under certain grammatical analyses the word *pramā* and *pramāṇa* mean the same thing.
- 16 Those who take a practical attitude may argue that philosophical enterprise does not need to initiate, investigation into the possibility of knowledge and its positive outcome, in order to start philosophizing. The test of pudding is in the taste. Just begin philosophizing and see if it succeeds. However if philosophizing is a case of *niṣkampa pravṛtti*, then prior certainty of its possibility is necessary.
- 17 With the realist doubting the possibility of knowledge, or the *saṁśaya* in question, is more a



methodological stance than systemic position.

- 18 There are many other familiar forms of methodological doubt, such doubt that there could be any indubitable truth.
- 19 Situation is little better for the opponent, if he chose to doubt the tenability of the proponent's position instead denying it.
- 20 As Udayana says *na pramāṇye virodhataḥ*.
- 21 He does not have a theory of knowledge and hence he does not have theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of knowledge. He does not have a criterion to distinguish knowledge from false belief.
- 22 This formulation is found in Gaṅgeśa's *Tattvacintāmaṇi*.
- 23 *Na pramāṇye virodhataḥ*, *Nyāyakusumañjali* 1/17.
- 24 *Nyāyasūtra* 2/1/31. This is not exactly what some European idealists contend. According to them, all inferences are developed perception and all perceptions are incipient inference. See B. Blanshard's *The Nature of Thought*.