

Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Indian Philosophy and the Consequences of Knowledge: Themes in Ethics, Metaphysics and Soteriology*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2007, xiv + 176 Pp. £ 50. (Hardback)

This book is a collection of essays exploring the concern of classical Indian philosophy with the transformative consequences of knowledge. Much of the material has already been published elsewhere and the rather loose unity of the volume is mostly thematic (indeed it does not quite succeed in being a “book” in one rigorous sense of that word). But there is nonetheless much of interest here for students of Indian philosophy, with both close readings of technical Sanskrit texts and broader global philosophical concerns on offer.

The book consists of five chapters, focusing on three different areas in which the attainment of knowledge is vital for a greater end. Chapter 1 (“Multiplist Metaphysics and Ethics”) creatively develops some ideas central to Jaina philosophy in order to address crucial ethical issues about otherness, violence and toleration. The position Ram-Prasad presents (which he calls “multiplism”) is inspired by three core theses of Jaina philosophy: *syādvāda*, *anekāntavāda* and *nayavāda*. Together these three theses claim that a statement and its negation (when suitably conditionalized) can both be true, that reality is many-sided in a way that does not permit a single account of it, and that all truthful accounts of the world are also limited. The consequence of the Jaina knowledge of a multiplist reality is then proposed to be an ethic that (in the spirit of *ahimsā*) does not exclude, overcome or simply coexist with others’ schemas, but instead sees an affinity with others that still preserves their distance.

Determining the precise relation between Jaina metaphysics and their commitment to the ethics of nonviolence has long concerned scholars of Indian philosophy. Ram-Prasad makes it very clear that he is not making the exegetical claim that multiplism is what the classical Jaina philosophers “really said”. However, his multiplism is most definitely inspired by his close reading of the various classical Jaina texts to which he refers and he sees no reason why it is a position that a Jaina today should reject. His hope is that if multiplism is philosophically sustainable, it is sustainable as a Jaina position as well.

This chapter is rich and challenging, even if not always persuasive. Although Ram-Prasad certainly touches skillfully on traditional exegetical debates about how to understand the concepts of *syādvāda*, *anekāntavāda* and *nayavāda*, the central thrust of the chapter is to creatively present the relevance of these ideas as potential contributions to global philosophy. Thus multiplism, as built on the Jaina-inspired principles of conditionality, heterologicality and circumspection, is claimed to offer a more adequate response to the ethics of engagement with otherness. More particularly, it is claimed to offer a more adequate response than the toleration that is more usually taken to be an implication of Jaina metaphysics.

This is because Ram-Prasad takes intellectual toleration to be “incoherent” (p. 41). His argument for this alleged incoherence, however, is unconvincing:

[T]o tolerate someone’s views ... is to live with something with which

you disagree. But that is only to say that you take your conclusion to be correct and the other person's to be wrong. That is why there is conflict, after all. So whatever you actually do in terms of with putting up with the view with which you disagree, you do not actually accept the possibility of that view being correct. (If you did, then you would not really be in disagreement.) Since it would be inconsistent for you to assert the correctness of your view and at the same time allow for the correctness of another (i.e., conflicting) view, you could not make any commitment to its being correct in any circumstances. (You could make a commitment to someone having the right to hold it, even if you hold it to be incorrect, but that is not the same thing). (p. 41)

It is very unclear just what the logical problem is supposed to be here. Clearly the modality invoked in the fourth sentence of this passage cannot be *logical* possibility, since for any proposition p that I take to be contingent I can quite consistently both accept p and accept that not- p is (logically) possible. Might it be that the relevant modality is supposed to be *epistemic* possibility? But this seems wrong too: it is not obviously the case that whenever I believe p I am thereby committed to holding that not- p is epistemically impossible (i.e., that whenever I accept p it is thereby inconsistent for me to accept that, for all I know, not- p may be true). After all, belief arguably comes in degrees and it may be that although I believe p I attach a credence to it that is only marginally greater than the credence I attach to not- p . Indeed that is why although I assert p , I can also quite consistently allow for the epistemic possibility of not- p . But if this is so, then we have been given no reason yet to believe that intellectual toleration is incoherent and that multiplism is thereby the superior ethical response to otherness.

Chapter 2 ("Consciousness and Luminosity: On How Knowledge is Possible") is a presentation of various theories of consciousness developed in classical India. The classical Indian epistemologists sought to understand the nature of both knowledge and the vehicle of knowledge, i.e., cognition (*jñāna*). But cognitions are states of consciousness and hence it was incumbent upon the Indian philosophers to offer theories of consciousness. Consciousness, in turn, is phenomenal: it involves a "what-it-is-likeness" that a subject of consciousness undergoes. This phenomenal feel of consciousness, Ram-Prasad suggests, is what the Indians called its "luminosity" (*prakāśatva*). He then goes on to outline five different conceptions of luminosity (two varieties of *parataḥprakāśa* theory and three varieties of *svataḥprakāśa* theory), drawing on a variety of texts from the different Indian philosophical schools.

Once again the exegetical work here is in the service of broader global philosophical concerns, this time an attempt to open up some of the riches of Indian thinking about consciousness in such a way as to allow for the possibility of their being appropriated as significant contributions to contemporary consciousness studies. This seems to me to be a wholly admirable philosophical ambition and Ram-Prasad has some very useful things to say about how classical

Indian hostilities to physicalism can be bracketed in such a way as to permit meaningful dialogue with the broadly naturalistic assumptions of modern consciousness studies. I have some reservations, however, about his mapping of the concept of “luminosity” (*prakāśatva*) on to the Western concepts of phenomenality and intentionality.

In contemporary Western discussions of consciousness the thesis that consciousness has phenomenality is equivalent to the claim that conscious states have a subjectivity to them, a “what-it-is-likeness”. The thesis that consciousness has intentionality is usually taken to be equivalent to the thesis that conscious states exhibit “aboutness” or are object-directed (as Ram-Prasad himself says on p. 57). However, it is widely recognized by philosophers of mind nowadays (though not explicitly by Ram-Prasad) that these two traditional characterizations of intentionality are rather different. Both seek to capture the notion that conscious states have content, but they characterize this feature of consciousness in distinct ways.

Ram-Prasad wants to rework the traditional Indian debate about the reflexivity or reflectiveness of cognition in terms of what it is for something to count as conscious (p. 55). Thus luminosity is to be interpreted as phenomenality/subjectivity and the Indian debate between the reflectivists and the reflexivists is to be seen as a debate about what constitutes the subjectivity of consciousness. Reflectionists (Nyāya, Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsā) are supposed to take the luminosity of consciousness to be defined by intentionality, while reflexivists (Yogācāra, Prābhākara Mīmāṃsā, Advaita) are supposed to take the luminosity of consciousness to be defined by reflexivity (p. 57). This reading is explicitly contrasted with Jitendranth Mohanty’s correlation of intentionality with the thesis of *saviṣayakatva*. For Ram-Prasad, “intentionality is not primarily about objective content (*viṣayakatva*) but the nature of phenomenality (luminosity or *prakāśatva*)” (p. 58). This is claimed to be demonstrated by the fact that the Indian reflexivists all want to secure the intentionality of consciousness, whether or not they are metaphysical realists.

But it is precisely here that the two characterizations of intentionality may come apart: arguably, intentionality conceived of as object-directedness might demand realism, while intentionality conceived of as “aboutness” might not. If so, all hands can agree that intentionality as “aboutness” is an essential feature of consciousness even though they might disagree about whether object-directedness is also an essential feature of consciousness. Moreover, even if phenomenality is an essential feature of consciousness, this feature is logically independent of both intentionality and reflexivity, whether or not the latter are indeed essential features of consciousness. (This is precisely why contemporary philosophers of consciousness often strongly disagree about whether consciousness is always intentional even when they agree on the essential phenomenality of consciousness.)

As to how the Indian *parataḥprakāśa/svataḥprakāśa* debate is better characterized, my own sympathies are with an account that takes luminosity to be primarily about self-awareness, rather about than the subjectivity/phenomenality

of consciousness. On this general topic Ram-Prasad acknowledges a debt to B. K. Matilal's discussion in his *Perception* (1986), though he worries about Matilal's "conflation of the issue of consciousness with the epistemological question of how one knows that one knows" (p. 55, n. 8). There is certainly some justification for such a worry, but Matilal also clearly understood the Indian debate to involve a disagreement about the nature of self-awareness: the reflexivists hold that self-awareness means that every first-order awareness is self-revealing, while the reflectionists hold self-awareness means that every first-order awareness requires a distinct awareness in order for a subject to become aware of it. Of course, in Indian epistemology not all awareness-episodes (*jñāna*) are knowledge-episodes (*pramā*), so Matilal's talk of "knowing that one knows" may mislead the unwary. But all knowledge-episodes (*pramā*) are awareness-episodes (*jñāna*) and thus all knowings of knowings do involve awarenesses of awarenesses.

The last three chapters of the book focus on the topic of the relations between knowledge and liberation. These chapters are much more closely exegetical in a way that will be particularly attractive to classical Indologists. The interpretations that are offered of specific Sanskrit texts here are oriented to the concerns of the classical tradition rather than contemporary philosophical debates. Thus Chapter 3 ("Knowledge and Action: How to Attain the Highest Good") takes up the debate between Advaita and Mīmāṃsā over the consequence of certain types of knowledge. Advaitins claim that knowledge of the nature of the self is both the means to and the content of liberation, which is the highest good; Mīmāṃsakas claim instead that action is the means to the highest good. Both sides are agreed, however, that knowledge of the self is required in any life oriented towards the attainment of the highest good. Focusing particularly on texts by Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and Śaṅkara, Ram-Prasad brings out very nicely how this classical debate about the relationship of knowledge to liberation reflects the two schools' very different conceptions of liberation as the ultimate end.

Chapter 4 ("Liberation Without Annihilation: Pārthasārathi Mīśra on *Jñānaśakti*") is a subsidiary study of the Mīmāṃsā position, detailing how the later Mīmāṃsaka philosopher Pārthasārathi Mīśra responded to the Advaitin challenge by attempting to rework the Mīmāṃsā theory in order to find a place for the persistence of cognitive power (*jñānaśakti*) in liberation.

Chapter 5 ("Conceptuality in Question: Teaching and Pure Cognition in Yogācāra-Madhyamaka") takes up a tension in Mahāyāna Buddhism between the conceptuality-transcending nature of the Buddha's insight and the conceptuality-using nature of his subsequent teaching. Ram-Prasad explains how the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka philosophers Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla drew on notions of phenomenological and psychological purity to try to dissolve this tension: although cognitive purity is the culmination of the Buddhist path, one who attains it will, out of compassion, return to conception-laden consciousness in order to teach the path of attainment to suffering others.

Although it is not possible in a short review to do justice to the rich detail of these wide-ranging and thought-provoking essays, I hope I have said enough by now about this very interesting collection to whet the appetite of any potential

reader. Certainly, I can assure every scholar of classical Indian philosophy of finding much here to be read with profit and pleasure.

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Eliot Deutsch and Rohit Dalvi (eds.), *The Essential Vedānta: A New Source Book of Advaita Vedānta*, Delhi: New Age Books, First Indian Edition, 2006, ix + 421 Pp. Rs. 450. (Paperback)

This is a revised edition of the reputed Advaita book *A Source Book of Advaita Vedānta* (Eliot Deutsch and J.A.B. Buitenen, Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1971). The editors, in the Preface, state that there are several differences from the original edition stressing that the strength lies in its retention of the tradition of Advaita Vedānta. Because of its strong overtones of Advaita Vedānta, it is thoroughly and to its core an Advaita book.

The book consists of three parts and each part constitutes an introduction and selections of English translations of original Sanskrit texts. As the collection of English translations of the Advaita works presented in this book is the most valuable point, I think a discussion regarding the merits of the translations is necessary.

In Part I most of the translations are done by the editors. In Part II, where the only Sanskrit text is the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, the translation is taken from *Sacred Books of the East* (50 vols.) by George Thibaut, considered one of the most authoritative figures in the field. The selections in the Advaita texts in Part III might be considered the climatic point as it includes previous texts that have never been translated, stressing the increasing importance of Advaita texts since the original version was published nearly four decades ago. The translations and the authors of Part I, Part II and Part III are the following:

Part I: Translations from Veda and Upaniṣads: the *Rgveda*, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, and the *Bhagavadgītā*

Part II: Translation of the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* by Śaṅkara (trans. by G. Thibaut)

Part III : Translations from the Advaita Vedānta School:

Kārikās on the *Maṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* (Gauḍapāda) (trans. by E. Deutsch)

Upadeśasāhasrī (by Śaṅkara) (trans. by Sengaku Mayeda)

Brahmasūtrabhāṣya (by Śaṅkara)

Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣya (by Śaṅkara) (trans. by Swāmī

Mādhavānanda)

Bhagavadgītābhāṣya (by Śaṅkara) (trans. by A. Mahādeva Śāstrī)

Naiṣkarmyasiddhi (by Sureśvara) (trans. by A.J. Alston)

Brahmasiddhi (by Maṇḍana Mīśra) (trans. by R. Balasubramanian)