

An unknown paper by Theodor Stcherbatsky

The present text, written in English in Academician Th. Stcherbatsky's peculiar handwriting, has been found in the Russian Academy of Sciences Archives in St Petersburg* among the pages of his unpublished translation of the *Madhynāta-vibhanga* (parts II and III) on which he worked in 1936-38. The first part of this treatise, *The Double Essence of Ultimate Reality*, published in 1936, became the last issue of the famous series *Bibliotheca Buddhica* which was banned in 1937 as «a tool of imperialist and Buddhist propaganda». All Stcherbatsky's pupils were arrested as «enemies of the people», most of them were executed, and the brilliant Leningrad Buddhological School, which was founded by this venerable scholar, ceased to exist. In May or June 1938, the subject of Stcherbatsky's study, Philosophy of the Yogācāra School, was excluded from the research program of the Institute of Oriental Studies.

The nature and destination of the text remain enigmatic. The information that can be extracted from it is scarce. It was written in 1936-38 and not intended to be read aloud; Stcherbatsky addressed it to the reader, not to the listener. It is not an article either. There are clear indications that the text, titled «Kalpanā», is a fragment of an unknown monograph by Stcherbatsky. The author more than once promises the reader to dwell on certain issues elsewhere in the same work (e.g.: «The problem of the kind of relation of given representation to an object will be discussed once more on the occasion of Dignāga's theory of judgement and inference. The classification of the pure concept of the Reason, the table of Categories as it appears in its Indian garb, will be examined later on twice, in connection with the theory of perception and once more in connection with the classification of inferences and judgements.») Thus, this is a chapter (or an excursus) on the Indian theory of thought construction and its history, being part of some fundamental work on Buddhist philosophy. Might it be a fragment of his *Buddhist Logic*, excluded from the final text? This is quite unlikely because in that monograph the same issues are differently formulated and viewed in another aspect (e.g.: BL, vol. I, pp. 209-211). Most probably, *Kalpanā* is part of an unknown monograph which remained unpublished and unfinished. In the first issue of the *Madhynāta-vibhanga* translation, Stcherbatsky promised to publish in a following volume of *Bibliotheca Buddhica* (after having completed the translation) a study of the philosophy of this treatise. He could not have started serious work on this monograph before 1938, being busy with the translation and commentary. It is possible that at that time the original schedule changed and Stcherbatsky decided to present in his forthcoming book not only an analysis of the contents of *Madhynāta-vibhanga*, but a broader study of Yogācāra (Vijnānavāda) philosophy, which he then termed «Buddhist Idealism», in its early (Asanga's school) and later (Dignāga's school) stages. In all official documents of the Institute, at least, the subject of his research in 1934-38 was formulated as The Philosophy of Yogācāra School. Perhaps the excursus on *kalpanā* became necessary in direct relation with the contents of the *Madhynāta-vibhanga* (see, e.g., Chapter II of Part I: «The Universal Constructor of Phenomenal Reality») and with the major role played by the theory of Constructive Imagination in Yogacara philosophy in general.

For Th. Stcherbatsky's biographer, these pages provide unique evidence which has survived from the final period of the scholar's life when he was condemned to total silence and not a single line of his appeared in print. As to the value of *Kalpanā* for the history of Indian philosophy, the ultimate judgement is left to specialists in the field.

Only minor corrections have been made of the author's English.

Ya. V. Vasilkov

Kalpanā

Th. Stcherbatsky

Very early in the history of Indian thought, at a time when there hardly has yet been any real philosophy, the prospective philosophers, the practitioners of mind concentration, the *yogis*, had noticed the fact that, previously to the formation in our consciousness of definite representations, there are some sub-conscious operations of the mind whose subsequent upshot is a definite representation or image. There is, previously to the construction of an image, which is always synthetic, «a running through the manifold and a holding of it together» (*vitarka-vikalpa*). The *yogi* by an effort of conscious will withdraws his senses (*pratyāhāra*) from all connection with the external world and makes thought steady. When the first degree of Trance (*dhyāna*) is attained, the operations of running through the manifold and of subsequently fixing the mind are stopped. The mind has become steady. At higher degrees it loses itself in pure, objectless thought, and thought is stopped altogether at the stage of catalepsy (*nirodha=samādhi*). Vasubandhu gives the following illustration of this double sub-conscious operation. When a potter has manufactured a series of pots, he examines their quality by the pitch of the sound they produce on being struck. He goes through the series giving a slight stroke to each pot and when he thus finds the defective one, he says «there it is!» The examination of the pots is like the operation of the mind, running through the manifold of sense impressions. The finding out of the defective pot is like the mind's fixation before the formation of the image. In another work the same author thus characterizes these two operations. They are semi-conscious, murmurs of the mind (*manojalpa*). The running mental element is called *vitarka*. The fixing mental element is called *vicāra*. Both when under the threshold of consciousness are mere volitional elements, mind's first awakening. At the moment when they just emerge on the surface of consciousness they are elements of conception, rudimental conceptions. The *Abhidharmakośa* accordingly assumes three varieties of the conceiving faculty of mind, the rudimental one, memory and full conception. Some rudimentary element of the conceiving state of mind is always present, in every state of mind, it is «natural conception». Consequently it is also present in every sense perception or sensation. Sensation of something, according to the early Buddhists, is produced when three elements coincide, an object, the sense faculty and the mind which in

this context means pure sensation. But an element of rudimentary conception is also present. The Buddhist early realists, just as the brahminical ones, did not admit a difference in kind between sensation and intellect as two heterogeneous sources of our knowledge. This was changed by **Dignāga**. The senses have according to him their own object. It is the particular. They have also their own function. It is to point out the presence of the object in the run. The intellect has another object. It is general. It has also another function. It is to construct the more or less vague image of the absent object. The former two functions of «running through» and «holding together» are replaced by the one of productive imagination. The recognition in a concept is not something different from productive imagination, as has been stated above, and will be told once more on the occasion of the theory of judgement. Since the external world contains particulars only, conceptions cannot be picked up by sensation in the external world. They must be carried out by the subject himself, because it is an act of its spontaneity. Thus sensation as pure sensation and conception as pure reason, although they empirically are inseparable, must be separated as two transcendently different sources of our knowledge, i.e., two sources which are impossible to observe separately, but which it becomes necessary to admit, because they are logically unavoidable. Some points in philosophy are admitted because they are observable, some others because they are unavoidable.

But in order to understand the rise and the implications of the idea of an autonomous pure Reason in India, the Reason which by its own spontaneity creates the picture of the external world, that is to say, in order to see **Kant's** Pure Reason in its Indian garb, we must go back to its origin in India and consider early Indian speculations about the driving force of the Universe in general. Indian speculation has always been averse to the idea of a God Creator. Gods there were, but no God Creator. The Universe was uncreated and without an origin. Even the later *Nayayiks*, the avowed champions of Indian monotheism, did not drop the idea of *karma* as an important Biotic Force, controlling the evolution of the Universe, and attempted somehow to patch it together with the new principle of an omnipotent God. The most orthodox *Mīmāṃsakas* were at the same time the most resolute atheists. Not only was the world for them uncreated, but their sacred lore, the *Veda*, was also uncreated, without an origin and eternal. Parting from the idea of an invariable concomitance between words and their meanings, between conceptions and their expression in language, they imagined a, so to say, linguistic Biotic Force, eternal *λογοι* which were the origin of all our ideas. Not only were our conceptions thus *a priori* conceptions, but

our words were also, so to say, *a priori* words. Against this theory the Buddhists and the Nayayiks made a common front in maintaining that the origin of words was due to an arbitrary agreement. In early Buddhism, no personality at all being admitted, the evolution of the world, as well as its formation into things and their concepts, was ascribed to the same Biotic Force named *karma*. It was a substitute for a personal will, as well as for the will of the Universe in general. In Sāṅkhya philosophy this same Biotic Force under the name of *vāsanā* was imagined as result of former deeds and the germ of future life sticking to the migrating ethereal body as a kind of perfume. In the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system traces of former deeds and thought were admitted to lie dormant in the eternal Soul, being subject to an unobservable process of maturation and capable of producing new ideas and things when they had reached maturity. The Monistic systems, the brahminical Vedānta, as well as the Buddhist school of the Mādhyamikas, converted this Biotic Force into a force of transcendental Illusion, producing the illusion of a pluralistic empirical world. The Idealistic Buddhism admitting the reality of our knowledge and of introspection, on the principle «cogito ergo sum» denied the hypothetical external world and maintained that the passing thought is the only thinker that psychology requires and the stream of changing thought the only Biotic Force needed to explain existence. Finally, the Buddhist logicians, the school of transcendental reality of the external world and its empirical phenomenality, recognized in the spontaneity of our Reason the only Biotic Force that shaped the logical and syntactical edifice of our cognition of the external world. This school had to fight on a double front. Against the extreme idealists, against, so to speak, the Indian Berkeleyans, they maintained the transcendental reality of the inferred external world. Against the realists who maintained the reality of time, space, qualities and relations they launched their critical epistemology which detected all the absurd implications of consequent realism. They were the maintainers of the Force of the Reason. The Realists were maintainers of the Force of Experience. The categories of substance and quality were, first of all, the creation of our reason, they were logical categories. Causality, so far as it was admitted between objects having duration, not between moments, was also the creation of the Reason. The other categories are dependant on these two fundamental ones. To admit their objective reality means to admit the objective reality of the Universals and to be then landed into a series of inextricable absurdities in which consequent realism must [*one illegible word*] be involved.

If a certain degree of parallelism between **Dignāga's** Constructive Force of the Reason (*vikalpa-vāsanā*) and **Kant's** Pure Reason in its

office of constructing the fundamental forms of our knowledge, the Categories, previously to, and independently of, any experience, can hardly be denied, the same applies to Kant's idea of an original Apperception, that is our faculty which makes it that all our cognitions are accompanied by the by-play of the idea of «I think». That there is no subject, no Ego, no Soul, no personality, has been, as we have seen, the starting point of early Buddhism and its most characteristic feature, a feature which makes the non-Ego theory another word for Buddhism. But early Buddhists recognized subjective elements, the six subjective faculties, five faculties of the outer sense and one faculty of the inner sense of the mind, that were destined to replace the Ego. The reality of this composite Ego was undermined in the Mādhyamika school by the idea of universal Relativity. In the idealistic school it had been changed into a store-house consciousness, a sort of Ego engrossed by the residues of all former experience and containing the germs of all future ones. **Dignāga** and Dharmakṛti repudiated this store-house consciousness as a Soul in disguise. But they replaced it by a sort of original Apperception, an original act of Constructive Imagination which creates the subject and the object, and creates them, of course, previously to, and independently of, every experience. The subject and the object are fictions, are constructed, are the fundamental categories of our understanding. But then, the reader will certainly ask, and has in fact asked, in India and in Europe, what about the external world? If the object is a fiction, if there is no object, is it not pure Idealism? If the object and the subject are correlative, the one impossible without the other, is it not pure Relativism? You are an Idealist! You are even more, a relativist, a nihilist, a Mādhyamika, and an advocate of the Void! Yes, answers **Dignāga**. From the standpoint of Absolute Final Reality, there is only «Thisness», pure and undifferentiated bare Existence, it is the uncognisable, unutterable Absolute. It is differentiated by an original act of our Reason into an object and a subject. The differentiation is the first step in our cognition; it is already a construction. We call the external object ultimately real only so far as it represents the element of Thisness, it is the point-instant of efficient reality, the thing in itself. At this extreme point of our analysis subject and object coalesce in the thing in itself. That it really is so appears clearly out of the contest between the Buddhist and the Realist on the problem of a difference between the act and the resulting content of our knowledge. The Realist maintains, just as Professor Brentano and Professor Husserl, that cognition is an act of being **intent upon** an object, and that it is different from the thing achieved by that act. The Buddhist answers, just as Mr. B. Russell, that there is no such thing as an act of knowledge representing

something different from its content. The Realist maintains, in every act there is a subject, an object, an instrument and a procedure, the attaining of the object is the result. Just as when the action of cutting down a tree is produced, the object is the tree, the instrument is the axe, the procedure is the lifting of the axe and the result is that the tree is separated in two pieces. The subject is the man, the cutter. In cognition the subject is the Ego, the object is the external thing, the instrument — the organ of sense and the procedure is the fact that the faculty of vision in the shape of a ray of light travels to the place where the object is situated and grasps its form. When I perceive a patch of blue colour all that really happens is this patch of blue and nothing more. The remaining is imagination. But the imagined procedure is real for the Realist. When he sees a patch of colour, he thinks: «there it is!», «it is my object!», «it is outside me!». In reality it is inside! «My faculty of vision leaves its home!». It travels to the place where the object resides, seizes its form, and with this booty travels back into the eye and communicates the form of the object to the Soul where it will be dormant in the shape of a «former impression» which will be awakened by memory when its time comes. So there is subject, object, instrument and procedure, imagination, Construction, Categories of the Reason!» says the Buddhist, «There is nothing real but a patch of colour!»

After the subject, or the Ego, has been converted into an original Apperception, a subject-object construction as it is styled by the Buddhists, whether there still remains any vestige of an external world, I gladly leave it for others to judge. My business is, by way of comparisons and contrasts wheresoever they may be found, to shed the best light I can on Indian speculative philosophy. Kant has been accused of Idealism and has made great efforts to repudiate this accusation by thoroughgoing changes in the second edition of his great work. In India we have a position offering some remarkable points of analogy. A theory which assumes an uncognisable and transcendental thing in itself as the basis of all real cognition, which declares the forms of knowledge to be an original construction of the Reason or of the Force of Productive Imagination was accused of being pure Idealism, notwithstanding the fact that it denied all reality to concepts to which experience can never supply any corresponding objects because they are not thought constructions referring to some ultimate particular, some point-instant given in sensation. **Dharmakrīti** himself calls the system of **Dignāga** Idealism. He means by it that there is no other cognition possible than by the way of constructed conceptions that are images, and images are always images, that is to say, dreams, dreams about reality. «Who is the universal monarch,» exclaims he, «by whose decree one set of images

should be real and the other unreal?» By a decree of logic all are unreal, since all are images. The difference is only that one set of them is in a direct contact with the absolute reality revealed in sensation, in the others this connection is remote and blurred by sleep or other morbid conditions. The problem of the kind of relation between the image and reality, the relation of given representation to an object will be discussed once more on the occasion of Dignāga's theory of judgement and inference. The classification of the pure concept of the Reason, the table of Categories, as it appears in its Indian garb, will be examined later on twice, in connection with the theory of perception and once more in connection with the classification of inferences and judgements. At present in connection with the Indian theory of the Force of Constructive Imagination we wish to point out the fact that in Indian philosophy there is a general tendency towards a kind of Monism. Just as in the Vedānta system there is the unique spiritual reality of Brahma and with it a by-play of the Force of Transcendental Illusion, just so in Buddhist Idealism, in its first phase, there is the unique reality of pure Self-consciousness and the by-play of a Force of Illusion, producing the passing streams of thought; in its latest, critical and logical shape, there is the transcendental reality of the thing in itself and its by-play, the Force of Constructive Imagination. The outcome is a kind of neutral Monism.

Note

- Russian Academy of Sciences Archives, Stock 725, file 1, No 119.