DEFENDING INDIAN PHILOSOPHY FROM THE CRITICISMS OF STACE

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Abstract

In his, *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*, W. T. Stace denies to give Indian schools of thought a philosophical status. He gives three reasons for that—(1) Indian thoughts have practical motivation, (2) instead of rational explanation, it is content with symbolism, and (3) India lies outside the mainstream human civilization. In the defense of Indian philosophy, these three arguments have been countered in this paper from different perspectives. It has been shown that these arguments are rooted in *scientism*, extreme idealism, and *ethnocentrism* respectively. Stace has also argued that philosophy has four leading traits—(1) discussing the universe as a whole, (2) generalizing sciences, (3) idealism, and (4) non-practical motivation. For a proper defense, it has been shown that Indian systems share those traits. At

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the end, a conclusive remark has been given. It has been remarked that Stace's case is an example of ethnocentric bias and racism. It has also been suggested that the interaction of the philosophies of different civilizations is necessary for the very sake of philosophy. Though this is not the first endeavor to defend Indian philosophy, the literature review (conducted by the author) suggests that Stace's arguments haven't been criticized separately.

Objections against Indian Philosophy is nothing new. Or to put it in a slightly different way, objections against anything that are not western are quite old. The very process of European Imperialism required to hold the non-Europeans and almost every aspect of their civilizations inferior to justify itself. And as a result of successful colonialization, the west conquered over everything—be it fashion, culture, food or thoughts. And the legitimacy of this victory required raising objections against the won. So objections were raised. But I do not intend, in this article, to discuss the colonialism and its effect—this is a different study that I am not equipped to deal with right now. Instead I am here to defend Indian Philosophy from some objections raised against it. To be more specific, I am here to defend Indian Philosophy from the objections raised by W. T. Stace in his book *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*. I am here to criticize Stace for his "discrimination" against Indian Philosophy.

Walter Terence Stace (1886-1967) was a British civil servant and philosopher who is mostly famous for his work in

mysticism. Though *Mysticism and Philosophy* is probably his most famous book, *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy* is also read in several universities. In the first chapter of this book, Stace holds the view that philosophy originated in Greece. This very claim is subject to debate. But I would rather avoid the debate to focus on Stace's another claim. He goes a step further and claims that no other civilizations except the ancient Greece and modern Europe have produced any philosophy to speak of. (Stace, 1967, p. 13) Thus he denies the Roman Philosophy, the Chinese Philosophy, the Egyptian Philosophy, and so on. Though he takes only lines to reject the philosophical development of other civilizations, he takes paras to reject the idea of an Indian Philosophy. Because, for him, "The case of India is more doubtful." (p. 14) He observes that the reasons why this Indian "thought" is not philosophy are basically three—(1) philosophy in India has never separated itself from religious and practical needs; (2) it is rather religious as it is content with symbols and metaphors in place of rational explanations; and (3) whatever be its character it lies outside the mainstream of human development as it has been cut off geographical and other barriers that it has exerted little influence upon philosophy in general. I will call the arguments *The Religious and Practical Dogma, The Myth,* and *The Alien Land* respectively.

In my defense of Indian Philosophy, I will first try to criticize these three reasons of Stace and then will try to show that Indian philosophy possesses the characteristics which Stace holds to be the characteristics of Philosophy. And at the end, I will try to give my conclusive remarks on this matter.

Against The Religious and Practical Dogma

In this argument, Stace maintains that Indian 'thought' is an endeavor to escape from the problems of the world and this is practical spirit, not "scientific". And that's why it cannot be regarded as philosophy. Because practical necessity gives birth to religions, not to philosophies. Following Aristotle, he says that philosophy and science come from *wonder,* which is the desire to know and understand for the sole sake of knowing and understanding. (Stace, 1967, p. 14) But this view can be criticized from several points.

First, Stace considers wonder as the only root of philosophy (and science). But there is not one but many roots of philosophy— wonder, the need of adjustment, doubt, deficiencies of other world views. (Matin, 2019, pp. 6-7) The need of adjustment, for example, often results into science and philosophy. As man lives in a more or less hostile environment, they need to adjust with the world to live comfortably (and sometimes to survive). But this is not possible without the adequate knowledge of the world or the environment. As a result man thinks of himself and the world surrounding him, does experiments and tries to learn from them— and thus gives birth to philosophy and science. Dr. Matin aptly observes, "Hence man's inner urge to live happily and significantly has led him to think about the nature of life and the world. And if this is true of the past, it is far more so of the present." (Matin, 2019, p. 6) It is actually very basic common sense that the knowledge of science and philosophy would become meaningless, if they become fully unable to meet practical needs. Stace's own university probably wouldn't have had any philosophy program if it wouldn't produce any practical benefits.For example, Governments, private foundations, and

businesses fund researches so that the society or the businesses can benefit from them. Although they do not always yield immediate practical benefits, the point is—if there were no benefits, it would not have been supported. Those who do science or philosophy (including Stace) do not do it just because of the sake of knowledge. For motivation does not have one but, at least, two aspects—intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation causes us to participate in an activity for our own enjoyment rather than for any concrete, tangible reward. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, causes us to do something for money, a grade, or some other concrete, tangible reward. (Feldman, 2011, p. 313) When I read a book staying late at night, for example, because I enjoy reading the book, intrinsic motivation is prompting me; if I read the book, so that it will help me in getting a better grade, extrinsic motivation underlies my efforts. I would like to argue that the reading of the book would become more impactful, if I love that book and at the same time it will help in improving my grades. A struggling actor, for example, may keep doing her/his job of acting, even though s/he doesn't get much of an incentive, because s/he loves doing this job as s/he gets an internal satisfaction. But if s/he does this work for a decade and yet doesn't get any recognition and money, s/he is more likely to leave the job of acting and to try a job that will provide her/him with financial security. But if s/he is provided with due incentives such as money and fame, it is more likely that s/he will be able to provide more impactful works.

Then we cannot say that scientific and practical spirit are utterly different; It is true that practical necessity gives birth to religion, but it is not the only child—science and philosophy are also its cousins, if not siblings.

Second, Stace argues that the Indian systems should be excluded from philosophy because it has always been connected with practical and religious needs. But that being true, Stace himself would not have been able to advance his book from the Sophists onwards, for it may also be shown applicable for the philosophical systems of the west. The Socratic system, for example, was needed to bring order to the intellectual and moral chaos of his age—to set men right so that they could see things in their right relations. (Thilly, 1924, p. 50) It is also well known that the unjust trial and subsequent death of Socrates had driven his pupil Plato to develop a right kind of philosophy because it can show what is just in political affairs as well as in the lives of individual. (Ostwald, 1977, p. viii) The political philosophy of John Locke in his *Two Treaties on Civil Government* was meant to justify the glorious revolution of England. (Agarwal, 2007, p. 131) Rest apart the mediaeval age which is famous for its religion dominated philosophical systems, the religious needs are also found in other periods.

The Pythagorean system, for example, was primarily a religious sect and believed in the transmigration of soul and this belief later laid the foundation of their philosophy.[1](Stace, 1967, p. 32) British empiricist George Berkeley, also a Bishop, builds his philosophy to refute atheism. (Thilly, 1924, p. 335) and thus to save religion. These are only a few examples to show the religious and the practical affiliation of the western philosophy, the list can go on. But this affiliation doesn't make the western systems un-philosophical and it should not, because philosophy is not utterly excluded from practical and religious spirit. On the other hand, one might argue that the philosophical systems are based on practical

spirit. The Marxists, for example, claim that all the philosophies are nothing but systematic and theoretical formulation of society's class outlook. (Cornforth, 1952, pp. 12-18)

We can say, then, "philosophy in both East and West is motivated by both practical concerns and theoretical interests theoretical interests and that in neither case is philosophy to be confused with religion, no matter what the specific conclusions of the philosophical thinking may be." (Moore, 1961, p. 11) So denying the philosophical value of the ancient Indian systems because of its practical and religious affiliation seems nothing but a discrimination to the East.

Third, Stace's first argument against Indian philosophy may be rooted in two things—his excessive emphasis on the knowledge for knowledge's sake maxim and on the significance of science. Both of them have faced several criticism. Let us discuss the later first.

Stace identifies philosophical spirit to be scientific and advocates that philosophy presents its subject matter scientifically. (p.14) But science has been criticized by several group of people. Some anthropologists, for example, have opposed it on the basis of "arrogance" as it gladly assumes its superiority to the knowledge and beliefs of other cultures of the world. (Okasha, 2002, p. 121)   Too much emphasis on science or scientific spirit is often labelled as *"scientism"* by its critics. Scientism is defined as "the belief that science, especially natural science, is much the most valuable part of human learning— much the most valuable part because it is much the most authoritative, or serious, or beneficial." (Sorell, 1994, p. 1) Its critics use the word to describe 'science-worship' or at least to refer a privileged status given to

science. Though science-worshipping might be an exaggeration of the fact, Okasha observes that something quite like science-worship is genuine and it is often found in the Anglo-American philosophical trends. (Okasha, 2002, p. 122) It seems that Stace is indirectly advocating scientism or at least is a victim to that. The advocates of scientism opine that scientific methods are the best way to render truth about the world and reality. The idea is that scientific methodology can guarantee objective truth as it is independent from values or value-related considerations. But the critics argue that values influence the science and the scientists in several respects. Helen E Longino, for example, differentiates between two kinds of values in science— constitutive (values that are internal to scientific methods) and contextual (the social or cultural values); she argues that both the kind are to be found in science. If we look on the titles of the books in a science library, we can easily understand the influence of contextual values in scientists' problem choosing. Some researchers of history of science have argued that Boyle's conception of matter is connected with his political considerations. (Longino, 1983, pp. 53-56) Some argue that the so-called facts are always grasped through theories (theory-laden), and the theories are the creations of the members of specific culture and thus are never totally free of the values. (Salmon, 1999, p. 4)

Let us now discuss the epistemological aspect of this argument. Following Aristotle, Stace considers wonder to be the only source of philosophy and science. And by wonder he means the desire to know and understand for the sole sake of knowing and understanding. Thus Stace advocates the "knowledge for knowledge's sake" maxim. This maxim holds, "Knowledge is capable of being its own end. Such is the constitution of the human mind, that any kind of

knowledge, if it be really such, is its own reward." (Newman, 1888, p. 103) That is to say, knowledge should be practiced only for the sake of knowledge. If otherwise, it wouldn't be considered as 'true' knowledge. But this maxim has been attacked by educators. Such as, Ferdinand von Prondzynski, former Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Robert Gordon University, finds it to be "curiously empty formula." Prondzynski argues that this maxim is a metaphysical approach to knowledge which advocates its importance without knowing why. He suggests that knowledge should be pursued because it empowers, civilizes and innovates. The value of knowledge cannot be mysterious. Because learning has a stronger case, if its use can be explained clearly. He argues that this traditional maxim might have been persuasive when education and knowledge were mainly the property of a social elite who had no need to justify what they were doing. Today's society needs something more than that, and there is a lot to give. (Prondzynski, 2013) So, what Aristotle advocated (being probably in a relax mood being served by his slaves!) in the ancient time (and which Stace follows) might not be the right maxim but a false pretension of those who have little or no knowledge about the hardship of common people. But for the very sake of practical necessity, it would probably be wrong to reject the maxim entirely. As Mohammad Gani suggests that if one wants to gather useful knowledge, s/he is likely to remain ignorant; because s/he will ignore facts and causal linkages that may seem useless to her/him. But very often, knowledge that may seem useless later turns out to be the very important when someone figures out its practical application. So, he suggests that the starting point to attain knowledge is to know the truth, whether it is helpful or not (knowledge for knowledge's sake).[2] I want to proclaim that knowledge for knowledge's sake is "okay" only in so far it doesn't reject the notion of attaining knowledge for other reasons entirely,

which Stace does. Sometimes knowledge should be attained only for the sake of knowledge, otherwise, as Gani puts it, we may remain ignorant. But to point it as the only reason to attain knowledge will discourage most of the people in pursuing it, as motivation has at least two aspects (which has already been discussed earlier).

Therefore, it is not logical to deny the philosophical value of the ancient Indian systems because they sought philosophy to end the sufferings of practical life; on the other hand, if anything, they should be praised because they thought about human sufferings. What Leibniz said about Chinese philosophy is probably also applicable for Indian philosophy in this sense, "certainly they surpass us (though it is almost shameful to confess this) in practical philosophy…." (Perkins, 2007, p. 146)

Against The Myth

Recognizing the similarities between philosophy and religion, Stace says that they are identical in substance but different in form. Philosophy presents its subject-matter scientifically, while religion does it metaphorically. He claims that as Indian thoughts are content with symbols and metaphors, it is nothing more than religion. For him, philosophy is an attempt to get beyond this sort of symbolic and mystical thinking. Because symbolism is "the mark of an infirm mind. It is the measure of our weakness and not of our strength." (p. 12) But this view can also be criticized.

First, this view of Stace seems to be rooted in his conception about philosophy. Stace considers philosophy to be "essentially an attempt to rise from sensuous to pure, that is non-sensuous, thought." (p. 8) Though he doesn't say it directly, but it seems

that he means to say that philosophy is an attempt to realize idealism; because according to Stace, the root of symbolism is materialism, and symbols are used by those who cannot rise above a materialist level. Stace, in this sense, rejects materialism as philosophy and holds idealism to be the "true" philosophy. And to say so, I believe, is denying half of the contents of philosophy; because most of the philosophers in the history have either been a materialist or an idealist. To accept one of the two theories is probably an extremist attempt, especially for Stace, as a historian of philosophy. Materialists have criticized idealism in several ways, and I am going to avoid those well-known arguments so that I can focus on the current topic. However, Stace suggests that certain Indian thinkers have reduced everything to matter—even the mind is a subtle kind of matter, far subtler than any ever dealt with by the physicist and chemist. And on that ground, he almost makes fun of those Indian thinkers in a kind of inappropriate way. (p. 11) But to think mind as some kind of non-physical thing is to "adopt a particular philosophical theory about the mind, a very controversial one at that." (Shaffer, 1968, p. 3) Moreover, there are neurologists who claim that that mental function is nothing but brain function (Novella, 2020); they thus reduce mind to brain—and brain itself is nothing but a material object and its functions are subtler chemical reactions. So those Indian thinkers are not alone to make such a claim.

Also, for Stace, the only way to rise to the non-sensuous mental world is "introspection."[3] And introspection has been subjected to criticism.[4] There are, of course, philosophers and scientists who support introspection. But as it is not an article about epistemology, I do not intend to discuss the problem of introspection at length. And I, personally, won't like to deny introspection altogether; but

what I want to argue is that to consider introspection as the only reliable source to know the naked truth is probably not right, and denying the philosophical status of a particular school of thought on this basis is also not sound.

Second, to show how deep rooted materialism is, Stace draws evidences from language. He observes and probably rightly observes that language *always* seeks to express the mental by the analogy of the physical. For example, he says, when we speak of "clear" thinkers, "clear" is an attribute of physical objects; when we say "attention"—a mental habit, we mean to turn the mind in a special direction. Stace believes that this is due to the deep-rooted materialism within us; and if the mental world were more familiar and real to us, then language would have been constructed differently. And thus the human materialism is the cause of symbolism and mysticism. For symbol is always a material object or the mental image of such an object, and the reality it refers to is something non-sensuous. Stace asserts that the symbols such as "God is light of lights" have their meanings, but that is not the naked truth. And philosophy, for him, is beyond this sort of symbolic and mystical thinking—it is an attempt to get the naked truth—what lies behind the symbol in itself. (pp. 10-12)

I would agree with Stace that philosophy is an attempt to get the naked truth. And let us assume that Stace has reached to that naked truth. And when we ask Stace what the naked truth is and by which way we can reach to the naked truth; for the later question, Stace's answer is that the only way to reach to the naked truth is introspection (and it comes at manhood and youth and that too to a few people). But how do we express the naked truth? As Russell points out, "Both in introspection and in external perception, we try to express what we know in words." (Russell,

An Outline of Philosophy, 1951, p. 11) There is actually no other medium to express the naked truth except language. But normal language, as Stace says, is a manifestation of materialism, (and it leads to symbolism and mysticism). If Stace says that there is some kind of private language to express the naked truth, then later Wittgenstein would argue that there is no such thing as private language.[5] Then how are we supposed to express the naked truth, should we keep the truth to ourselves? Stace, then, will probably need to say that the naked truth cannot be expressed in terms of language and symbols as it is beyond them. And then Stace himself can be labelled as a mystic, the very mysticism which he has hitherto been regarding somewhat inferior to philosophy. In a restricted sense mysticism means, "the theory according to which the ultimate reality or God is known through a supernatural and obscure sort of experience." (Matin, 2019, p. 89) But in a wider sense, mysticism is "a doctrine or discipline maintaining that one can gain knowledge of reality that is not accessible to sense perception or to rational, conceptual thought." (Mann, 1999, p. 593) Etymologically mystery suggests "something secret or concealed." And if it is so indescribable in terms of language, then it should be regarded as some kind of secret or a concealed process and thus a mystery.

The major mistake Stace makes here is that he has overlooked the aim of language and over-emphasized on its materialist connection. According to *Britannica*, "In most accounts, the primary purpose of language is to facilitate communication, in the sense of transmission of information from one person to another." (Robins & Crystal, 2023) In the case of language, then, it is primarily not the question of materialism or idealism, it is the question of expressing one's thoughts and expressing in such a way that

one can make it understandable to others. The very objective of language is to express what we think, and if we cannot express what we think—what is the point of any language? Stace is right as so far as he says that we seek to explain what is strange by means of what is well-know and what is well-known to everyone is the material world that we live in. And for this obvious reason most of the words refer to an object, and we symbolize, we give metaphors so that others can understand what we are thinking. And what is the point of philosophy if we cannot express it to others, if we cannot communicate with other about the truth we find out—doesn't this truth becomes meaningless to an extent? If Stace doesn't find it meaningless at all, then it is probably due to his over emphasis on 'knowledge for knowledge's sake' maxim which has already been criticized. But I believe Stace himself also wants his thoughts to be understood by others. That's why he has written this very book, so that what he knows about Greek Philosophy, what his thoughts are—he can communicate with others, i.e., his readers. And to write a book (also to give lectures, as this book is basically the written version of his lectures), he needed a medium through which he can communicate; and the medium is nothing but language. But Stace is wrong to emphasize (and that too probably forcefully) on the materialist connection; and he is more wrong when based on this connection he considers those somewhat inferior who use language and symbolization to communicate with others; and he is further wrong when he tries to deny Indian schools of thoughts a philosophical status based on this consideration. And if it is true that Indian schools have used metaphors, symbolisms; then they should not be criticized but praised, because they have tried to communicate properly, they have tried hard so that others can understand their thoughts clearly. This brings us to my third objection against The Myth.

Third, it is probably the natural tendency of a human that s/he wants others to understand her/his thoughts—be it a scientist, philosopher, poet or a religious preacher. So symbolism and metaphors aren't the features of religions only, it is found also in philosophy and science. Stace has mistaken as he has considered this as a feature of religion only and thus denied to give Indian schools of thoughts a philosophical status. And if we look carefully, we shall find that Stace himself refers to material objects, he himself is symbolizing (obviously because he also wants his readers to understand him).

Let us first try to find symbolism and metaphor in science; and for that let us take the scientific theory of atomism. Atomism is often explained by scientists by 'atomic model'—it is a model used to describe the structure and makeup of an atom. One of the most important atomic models is the Rutherford Model. It is also known as the 'planetary model' of the atom. Because it describes the atom with a positive charged nucleus at the center, in which nearly all the mass is concentrated, and around which the electrons circulate at some distance, which is analogous to planets revolving around the sun. In the gold-foil experiment, Rutherford found out that some alpha particles were deflected slightly, and other alpha particles were scattered at large angles, while a very few even bounced back toward the source. While explaining the experiment, Rutherford famously said later, "It was almost as incredible as if you fired a 15-inch shell at a piece of tissue paper and it came back and hit you." (Britannica, Rutherford model, 2023) Another famous example is found in quantum physics— Schrödinger's cat—a thought experiment proposed by Erwin Schrödinger which is used to describe the problem of quantum superposition. In that thought experiment,

a cat is locked in a steel box with a slight amount of a random radioactive element such that after an hour there is an equal probability that an atom will either decay or not decay. If the atom decays, a device releases a vial of lethal gas, killing the cat. However, until the box is opened and the atom's wave function collapses, the atom's wave function is in a superposition of two states: decay and non-decay. Thus, the cat is in a superposition of two states: alive and dead. (Bernstein, 2023)

Let us try to find such examples in philosophy. The first such example that comes to my mind is the concept of "tabula rasa" or blank tablet in which mind is compared to a blank tablet or paper. Such a comparison occurs in ancient Greece—in the works of the Peripatetics and the Stoics. (Britannica, 2023) This view, however, became famous with John Locke. Locke, in support of his empiricism, argues that the mind at a birth is like a plain paper, void of all characters, without any idea; and gradually our experience writes it impressions on this blank paper. (Locke, 1997, p. 109) Not only empiricists, such kind of symbolism may also be found among the rationalists. For example, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. In his theory of monads, Leibniz asserts that the basic individual objects of an acceptable ontology are all monads. As the monads can never have a causal connection with each other, Leibniz expressed that monads are "windowless." (Russell, 1995, p. 565)

Let us now try to find such examples in Stace's own writings. The most common one is probably that of using the term "father," For example, about Parmenides he holds, "He became the father both of materialism and of idealism." (1967, p. 49) Father, in this context, is obviously used as a symbol. Because the word 'father' refers to a sensuous or material object (a per-

son) and what it symbolizes in this case is the creation (which is non-sensuous) of idealism and materialism in the philosophy of Parmenides—and this is what symbols are according to Stace. (p.12) Again, a random page I open and in that page he remarks about Socrates, "Nevertheless, he used this profession of ignorance as a weapon of offence, and it became in his hands a powerful rhetorical instrument…." (p. 130) Note the term "weapon of offence"; ignorance is not anything sensuous and 'weapon of offence'—such as a sword— is something very sensuous and Stace still uses it to symbolize ignorance.

The above mentioned examples are only a few but the list can go on to show that symbols and metaphors are present also in science and in philosophy; and that too in the very sense in which "God is light of lights" is symbolism to Stace. And if in truth, symbolism is the mark of an infirm mind and it should not be regarded as nothing else than religion—is Stace himself of an infirm mind? Or should we say that all these philosophers and scientists had infirm minds and these theories are not scientific or philosophical theories but religious preaching? Should we say that symbolism demeans these scientific and philosophical theories? I don't think, we shall agree to say yes. Similarly, the metaphors and symbolisms in Gita doesn't make its deontology less valuable, rather it makes it interesting to its readers (and on a personal note, I think, reading Kant is boring but reading Gita is not and thus Gita can affect more than Kant's *Fundamental*). Then, why Indian philosophy should not be philosophy? And it is to be noted that I am not saying that using symbols and metaphors do not create any problem in science and philosophy; on the contrary, it is true that it may create misunderstanding and confusion while trying to make our thoughts clearer to the au-

dience. This is a problem and it should obviously be dealt with; but for that we cannot say that if any thought is expressed using symbols and metaphors, it will not be regarded as philosophy or science. And for this very reason, denying Indian schools of thought a philosophical status on the ground of symbolism and metaphors is nothing but a "step-motherly" behavior to it. (And look, I have just used another metaphor! Should this article, then, be denied a philosophical status?)

Against The Alien Land

I think this argument of Stace is at the same time most important and the most ridiculous one. Important because it shows the ultimate root of Stace's discrimination against Indian Philosophy; and ridiculous because we will find it absurd. In this argument, Stace argues, "Indian thought is usually excluded from the history of philosophy because, whatever its character, it lies outside the main stream of human development. It has been cut off by geographical and other barriers. Consequently, whatever be its value in itself, it has exerted little influence upon philosophy in general." (p. 16) Stace goes on claiming that the orientalist claim that Greek philosophy came from India is not true. Though he acknowledges that there might be a very little probability that the Pythagoreans got the notion of re-incarnation indirectly from India; but even if it's true, it proves nothing as re-incarnation is of very little importance for Greek philosophy. He also gives arguments to show that Greek philosophy is also not a result of Egyptian thoughts. And thus Stace concludes that none but the Greeks were solely responsible for the Greek philosophy. (pp. 16-17)

I am not going to debate on whether Greek philosophy is a result of Indian or Egyptian thought or not, rather I find Stace

almost convincing[6]. So, I will not consider this to be a part of "The Alien Land" and will only try to counter the quoted portion above.

First, such statement of Stace is deeply rooted in 'ethnocentrism'. According to Baylor, "Ethnocentrism is a term applied to the cultural or ethnic bias—whether conscious or unconscious—in which an individual views the world from the perspective of his or her own group, establishing the in-group as archetypal and rating all other groups with reference to this ideal." She continues, "This form of tunnel vision often results in: (1) an inability to adequately understand cultures that are different from one's own and (2) value judgments that preference the in-group and assert its inherent superiority…." (Baylor, 2012)

If we analyze this argument of Stace, we will find that Stace doesn't care or dare to understand the characteristics of Indian schools of thought. Rather he uses his *masterstroke* that the character of Indian thoughts doesn't matter, what matters is that India is an alien land to Europe and its thoughts don't belong to the European tradition. And so it cannot be philosophy; to be philosophy it must belong to the European tradition. Because Europe is the main stream of human development; Europe is not cut off from other parts of the world but other parts, such as India, have geographical and other barriers! How sad it is that Stace is, as ethnocentrism supposes, regarding his own group to be the superior and based on the biasedness he doesn't try to understand the Indian philosophical tradition but rejects it entirely as a philosophical tradition. Paraphrasing Van Norden, I would like to say that it would be absurd to say that the view of Empedocles is philosophy when it says that the earth is made of earth, fire, air and water; but the Carvaka view is not philosophy when it

says that the world is made of earth, fire, air and water because the Carvakas do not belong to the tradition of Empedocles. Van Norden also presents the history of philosophical ethnocentrism (Van Norden, 2017, pp. 19-29) and remarks, "the exclusion of non-European philosophy from the canon (of philosophy) was a decision, not something that people have always believed, and it was a decision based not on a reasoned argument, but rather on polemical considerations involving the pro-Kantian faction in European philosophy, as well as views about race that are both unscientific and morally heinous." (Van Norden, 2017, p. 21)

Second, Stace considers that Indian thought should not be regarded as philosophy because whatever value it has in itself, it has a very little influence upon philosophy in general. Apart from the fact that this statement is a result of deep-rooted ethnocentrism due to which Stace means western philosophy to be 'philosophy in general', this is also a false statement. Because if we look carefully, we will see that western philosophers and their thoughts have been influenced by Indian philosophy.

I have avoided the ancient and medieval philosophical thoughts of the west. For avoiding the ancient period, one reason is that there is much debate regarding that—some claim that Greek philosophy was a result of Indian influence, while some argue against it. The other reason is the cause of this debate— to me it seems that there is not much of a conclusive evidence available regarding the exact nature of the connection; and I am assuming that as communication was not that easy at that period of time, the connection has remained somewhat distorted. While for the medieval period, it is mostly influenced by the Islamite and Christian thoughts. (Marenbon, 2023) So I will try to give examples from the modern and the contemporary era.

Proving the Indian influence in the modern era, especially of the early modern period, is difficult. One of the reasons is that most of the writers back then felt almost no obligation to give reference to their sources like we are giving right now; another cause may be that there was Chinese influence in everything which has sometimes been referred as Chinese craze. (Jacobson, 1969, pp. 27-28) Yet, the Indian thoughts are most likely to have influenced the modern European philosopher as Jacobson writes, "Indian, Buddhist, and traditional Chinese ideas, in process of synthesis over more than a thousand years in China, came into Europe with powerful impact upon the intellectual climate from before Leibniz to the French Revolution." (Jacobson, 1969, p. 30) Jacobson writes this in his endeavor to prove that it is very possible that famous modern philosopher David Hume was influenced by the Bauddha philosophy, and it seems that he has quite some merit in his claim. An exception in this era is probably Voltaire. He was among the firsts who saw Europe as nothing more than a small part of a greater global community. He highly held Indian knowledge, and believed that India had a lot to teach the world, especially in ethics and morality; also his writings about India became extremely widely read and influential. (Mohan, 2005, p. 173)

However, in the last decades of the modern period, the Indian influence is quite evident. The most famous example in this regard is Arthur Schopenhauer. He was so influenced by the Indian philosophy that at times he even called himself a Buddhist. (Abelsen, 1993, p. 255) F. W. J. Schelling was also influenced by Indian philosophy, and is known to regard Vedanta as the most exalted idealism or spiritualism. (Halbfass, Schelling and Schopenhauer, 2011, p. 163) Hegel is also known to make

full use of the translations, reports and investigations concerning India which were available to him at that period. (Halbfass, 2011, p. 142) Ralph Waldo Emerson is another philosopher of that period who became a leading exponent of Indian thought among the transcendentalists in the 19th century; as many of the transcendentalists at that time regarded Indian philosophy to be an antidote of rising American materialism. (Riepe, Emerson and Indian Philosophy, 2011, p. 221)

In the contemporary period, the influence is more noteworthy, not only among philosophers but also among intellectuals of different fields. For example, T. S. Eliot once said that the great philosophers of India "make most of the great European philosophers look like schoolboys." (Eliot 1933, p. 40) Anyhow, in the 21st century there is such a mingling between the West and the East that explaining it is not possible in a para, rather it would require a different field of study (e.g. comparative philosophy or world philosophy) with which I am not equipped right now. But that was not the case all along. Initially at the beginning of 20th century, as Marxism and logical positivism denied any metaphysical discussion, so Indian philosophy— with its large metaphysical content—had to go underground for a while. But soon an alternative viewpoint became necessary and Indian philosophy found its way again. In Europe, in the early 1920s, Russian philosopher Th. Stcherbatsky tried to build bridges between Buddhism and Western philosophy; he was probably the first western philosopher to take Nagarjuna seriously. German existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers tried to locate the Buddhist thoughts (along with that of Confucius) within the western thinking. (Clarke, 1997, pp. 111-14) In America too, there are many philosophers who have been

influenced by Indian philosophy. The most notable of them are probably William Ernest Hocking, William James, Josiah Royce, Irving Babbitt, George Santayana, and C. A. Moore. A detailed account can be found in Dale Riepe (1967).

So, excluding Indian thoughts from philosophy on the ground that it had no such influence in the west is not a tenable idea.

Philosophical Characteristics in Indian Thoughts

While trying to define philosophy, Stace admits that it is a difficult task as one school's philosophy hardly matches with the others. Rather he decides to discuss the leading traits of philosophy so that the readers may understand what philosophy is about. These leading traits, according to Stace are three—(1) philosophy deals with the universe as a whole; (2) it seeks to take nothing for granted; and (3) it is essentially an attempt to rise to non-sensuous thought. (p. 8) A careful analysis, however, will show that Stace (indirectly) emphasizes on another trait— (4) philosophy cannot have practical motivation. In this section, I will briefly try[7]to show that Indian schools of thoughts also possess these traits.

First, philosophy deals with the universe as a whole. Other branches of knowledge specialize in their discussion— astronomy deals with the heavenly bodies, botany with plant life and so on. But philosophy seeks to see the universe as a single coordinated system of things. (Stace, pp. 2-3) As philosophy deals with the universe as a whole, it is not of specialization but of 'generalization'. Generalization can have two meaning here. In one sense, it can be said, as Stace says, "It seeks to view the entire universe in the light of the

fewest possible general principles, in the light, if possible, of a single ultimate principle." (p. 3) In Indian systems, the entire Carvaka philosophy, for example, can be traced back to their epistemological principle. The Carvaka system admits no source of knowledge but perception. And as we do not perceive anything but the material world, the Carvaka holds materialism to be its metaphysical doctrine. And as there is nothing but the material world, the concept of heaven and hell is a myth, so there is no necessity to follow a religion. So the Carvaka ethics suggests that one should simply enjoy the life. (Chatterjee & Datta, 1984, pp. 25-26) Similarly, the entire Jaina philosophy can be traced back to its epistemological principle. (Chatterjee & Datta, 1984, pp. 26-29) The philosophies of the other schools also depend on one of its basic principles (metaphysical or epistemological or other).

Actually, the fact is that the Indian systems have discussed the problems of the universe from all the possible perspectives—metaphysics, ethics, logic, psychology, epistemology—but normally it doesn't discuss these approaches separately but in a generalized way. This tendency of Indian systems is sometimes referred to as its 'synthetic outlook'. This synthetic outlook has unified different sciences in philosophy, many of those sciences have been differentiated in the modern period (Radhakrishnan, 1999, p. 31); and this gives us the second meaning of generalization. In the second sense, it can mean, as Stace says that philosophy takes the thread of knowledge where science drops it. (p. 3) And as philosophy takes the thread, it "supplies science with a solid theoretic basis by examining and clarifying its basic concepts." (Matin, 2019, pp. 17-18) Then, as a generalization of different sciences, philosophy guides

different sciences. And as Kautilya puts it, in India, philosophy is "the lamp of all sciences." (Radhakrishnan, 1999, p. 23)

So Indian philosophy can be said to share the trait of discussing the universe as a whole.

Second, philosophy takes nothing for granted. It questions everything and there lies another difference between science and philosophy. Science takes certain principles quite for granted. For example, it takes the universe for granted. Philosophy, on the other hand, questions everything, even the existence of the universe. Thus philosophy takes up the thread of knowledge when science drops it. (Stace, pp. 3-8) Indian philosophy, sharing this trait, takes nothing for granted. It questions the universe, as in the hymn of the universe it is asked, "Who knows for certain? Who shall here declare it?" (Moore, 1961, p. 10) It is sometimes objected to Indian philosophy that it doesn't examine but is authoritarian in nature. But most of the schools of Indian philosophy—the Nyaya, the Vaisesika, the Sankhya, and the Carvaka—do not take authority for granted, but base their philosophy on experience so that they can themselves examine the truth. The Jaina and the Bauddha schools maintain it mostly. This objection may chiefly be labelled against the Mimamsa and the Vedanta schools as they put much importance to the authority of the Vedas. But the theories they have developed—supported by strong arguments—stand even without the support of authority. (Chatterjee & Datta, 1984, pp. 8-9) And these schools also question, even the universe. The Vedanta, for example, has questioned the existence of the universe and Sankara, in his 'advaita' (monism) philosophy, gives reasons to prove that the universe is nothing but an illusion created by God. So it is rightly said, "Throughout Indian philosophy, from the Upanisads down to the present day, not one single belief is

left unexamined." (Moore, 1961, p. 15) Yes, it is true that that there is some emphasis on intuition, perception, mysticism and authority in Indian philosophy. But the objection is based on the exaggeration of the fact. And these traits are not also new to the western philosophy and yet they retain their philosophical status. (Moore, 1961, pp. 12-20) So Indian thoughts are philosophy as they share this trait of rationalization and doubt.

Third, philosophy, according to Stace, is essentially an attempt to rise from sensuous to pure, non-sensuous thought. There are two worlds—the external and the internal mental world. We all are aware and surer of the external world, because we all see it; and thus we all are born materialists. But only some men—by the habit of introspection—realize the mental world. The evidence of our materialistic tendency can be found in language for materialism is the source of language. We speak in reference to the material objects, it leads to symbolism and metaphors. Stace believes that it is the mark of an infirm mind. So philosophy cannot accept this materialism—its symbols and metaphors—rather philosophy tries to know the naked truth as it is. (pp. 8-13) Thus a journey towards the sensuous to non-sensuous seems to be a journey form materialism to idealism. And regarding this as an essential feature is controversial; much of this view has been criticized in the section named 'Against the Myth'. Stace himself, in his later life, seems to differ with this view. As he writes in the preface of the 1967 edition of his book, "My philosophical views have been, for many years past, inconsistent with idealistic or semi-Hegelian position which is implied by certain passages in this book—which was written over forty-five years ago." (Stace, 1967, p. xii) But even if we take this idealism as a trait of philosophy, it would seem

"idealism is the dominant philosophy in India…." (Raju, 1955, p. 212) Indian philosophers have also wanted to know the mind or the internal mental world; as Radhakrishnan has remarked, "The history of Indian thought illustrates the endless quest of the mind." (Radhakrishnan, 1999, p. 25) It is true especially for the Upanishads, the Bauddha, and the Vedanta.[8] The advaita philosophy of Sankara, for example, is "an idealist monism." (Menon)

Fourth, Stace believes that philosophy cannot have practical motivation. He considers wonder to be the source of philosophy. This view of Stace has already been countered in the 'Against the Practical and Religious Dogma' section. But if it were true, Indian philosophy would have been found complying with this. For example, it is said in the Upanishads, "But one must… seek to understand (the truth)." (Jha, 1942, p. 398) Charles A. Moore's findings (Moore, 1961, pp. 9-11) are also relevant to this. Moore shows that the Nyaya system considers doubt to be the chief incentive of philosophical speculations. In the Rg Veda, it is found that its thinkers are not sure of the ultimate nature of the things, but they obviously seem to be interested in finding out the truth; they also do not accept the traditional or authoritarian view. So Moore remarks, "To their doubt they add curiosity and wish to know the truth, and apparently not because of any dominant practical concern." (Moore, 1961, p. 11) This doubt, added to their curiosity and wish to know is what Stace considers to be wonder.

It can be said, us Indian thoughts are philosophy as they share the same traits that Stace considers to be the features of philosophy.

Conclusive Remarks

As every person has her/his own ways of doing things, so does every race, every nation, every country, and every civilization. If a person A and then a person B are separately tasked to do program X, and both of them do it differently, we cannot possibly say that A did the task and B didn't or that B did it but A didn't. Similarly it would be wrong to say that the Europeans practiced philosophy but the Indians didn't or that the Indians did but the Europeans didn't—and the Indians and the Europeans aren't the only ones; there are the Chinese, the Africans, the Arabs, and so on. It would be wrong to say that one of them practiced philosophy but the others didn't. It is in the very nature of human beings that they wonder, they doubt, they feel the necessity to solve their problems, they want to adjust to live happily in this adverse world—and all of them has led humans to think, to ask questions, to explore. And this has paved the path of philosophy and of science (and of probably many other branches of knowledge) for people from all over the world—from all the civilizations. And as a person's decision and way of doing things are influenced by her/his particular situations, so is the case for a civilization. Because a civilization consists of humans beside of many other things, and the situations of the humans of a particular civilization are more or less akin to each other as their culture, their environment are more or less similar to each other. And that's why the views and thoughts—the philosophies—of members of a particular civilization is more akin among themselves than with that of another civilization. And due to this similarity within the thoughts of a particular civilization, it is given a name—so we have Indian philosophy, Western philosophy, Chinese philosophy, Muslim Philosophy, African philosophy, and so on. And as I belong (or would like to think

to belong) to a particular civilization, so if I claim that only the thoughts of my civilization have philosophical value—that would be ethnocentric bias, a case of clear & cut racism. And even if we try to snatch away their philosophical status because they differ from one particular philosophy, there will be no philosophy at all—no Indian, no western—nothing. Because the Indian schools of thought differ with each other, they are each other's rivals in philosophy. Sankara and Ramanuja—both belong to the Vedanta school—differ from each other almost on an extreme level. In the west, Plato and Aristotle differ from each other, the rationalists and the empiricists are almost at a war. Russell has remarked, "The definition of "philosophy" will vary according to the philosophy we adopt…." (Russell, 1951, p. 1) But I would like to add that it will vary that much that we will need to say, paraphrasing Sartre, that the word 'philosophy' has lost its meaning. And to solve that problem, I believe, it is time to incorporate the Wittgenstein notion of 'family resemblance'[9] in defining philosophy.

Such an incorporation is more needed especially in this era of globalization. Because the philosophies of the Indians, the Europeans, the Arabs, the Africans, and the Chinese—all are being mingled. Western philosophers are practicing what is 'traditionally' known as the Chinese or the Indian philosophies, the Indians are practicing what is known as western philosophy. The distinction between all the different philosophies of civilizations, if it is relevant, seems to be relevant only in the traditional sense now. And this mingling is necessary because this would make philosophy richer; as Thomas Aquinas had argued (Van Norden, 2017, p. 18) that the best way to discover the truth is through a pluralistic dialogue with all the major world philosophies.

Endnotes

1   The Pythagoreans believed that intellectual contemplation was helpful for the release of soul and this drove them to develop science and philosophy.

2   While answering to a question titled "Is the concept for knowledge for its own sake a weakness to the method of science?" in Quora. com, Mohammad Gani (Professor at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB)) gives this insightful reply. (Gani)

3   Stace doesn't discuss about this process of introspection at length. But for an understanding of introspection, an interested reader may read. (Schwitzgebel, 2019)

4   The most famous critic is probably psychologist J. B. Watson. (Watson, 1913)

5   Ludwig Wittgenstein (1986), discusses about private language and rejects the idea of such a language. As this discussion about private language is being avoided for obvious reasons (such as to keep focus on the topic of the article), an interested reader may go through the book, especially from section 243 and onwards.

6   Almost convincing because there are other thinkers such as Peter K. J. Park (Park, 2013) who argue the contrary.

7   I will discuss this section briefly because it has not been my primary endeavor. I have primarily tried to criticize the three objections raised by Stace; this section is a secondary endeavor to create a better defense for Indian philosophy.

8   For a comprehensive discussion on this topic, see (Dasgupta, 1933)

9   Wittgenstein argues that different games have different features, but they have something common in virtue among them and that's why they are games—a complicated network of similarities that overlap and crisscross each other. These

similarities are expressed by the term 'family resemblance' as different members of a family have various resemblances among them that overlap and crisscross in the same way. For a detailed account, see (Wittgenstein, 1986), especially from section 65-92.

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DEFENDING RUSSELL'S THEORY OF DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS AGAINST A STRAWSONIAN ATTACK

Shamima Akter[*]

Abstract

Although Russell's theory of definite descriptions is highlyappreciated in the area of philosophy of language, it has faced some objections from different angles. One of the major objections is known as the objection arising from incomplete definite descriptions. According to this objection, a speaker by his/her utterance of a sentence containing an incomplete definite description often succeeds in saying something true despite the fact that such a sentence always expresses a false proposition. This particular objection against Russell's theory arises because of an ignorance concerning the distinction between the meaning of a sentence and the assertion made by a speaker by using that sentence in a particular context.

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To address this distinction between meaning and assertion Scott Soames' theory concerning the connection between meaning and assertion has been adopted. With the help of this theory, it has been shown that the problem arising from incomplete definite descriptions does not pose a genuine threat to Russell's theory.

Introduction

Bertrand Russell's theory of definite descriptions is one of the most dominant theories in the area of philosophy of language. In spite of being a dominant theory, Russell's theory of definite descriptions has faced with some objections. There are opponents of Russell's theory who object the theory from different positions. Peter Frederick Strawson is one of the most prominent opponents of Russell's theory. In his paper titled "On Referring", Strawson, raised some objections against Russell's interpretation of definite descriptions. In this paper, Strawson argues that Russell's theory of definite descriptions commits some fundamental mistakes.He also tries to show the reasons behind those mistakes. Although the objections raised by Strawson have some significant impacts in the area of philosophy of language, it is hard to accommodate so many objections in a single paper like the present one. Therefore, I will address and then defend Russell's theory against the most important objection from Strawson's part which is known as the Argument from Incompleteness.

The Argument from Incompleteness: According to Russell's theory of definite descriptions, a descriptive sentence of the form ⌜The *F* is *G*⌝ expresses the following proposition: *exactly one thing is an F and whoever or whatever(if there is any) is an F is G.*This analysis of definite descriptions entails that a sentence

containing definite description always involves a uniqueness condition. That means that the definite description contained in such a sentence can be satisfied by exactly one object(if it is satisfied by any object at all). If there is more than one satisfier of the relevant definite description, then the non-compound sentence containing it expresses a false proposition. But we observe that there are many descriptive sentences in which the relevant definite descriptions are, apparently, satisfied by more than one satisfier. These kinds of definite descriptions can be called, following Kripke and Soames, *improper definite descriptions*.[1] And, a sentence containing an improper definite description fails to satisfy the uniqueness condition given by Russell in his theory of definite descriptions. If a non-compound sentence containing a definite description fails to satisfy the uniqueness condition, then that sentence necessarily expresses a false proposition. Now, the problem is that a speaker may use a sentence, i.e. ⌜The F is G⌝, containing an improper definite description ⌜the F⌝, and say something true; but the proposition expressed by this sentence, according to the Russellian interpretation, maybe false. To some philosophers this phenomenon poses a threat to the acceptability of Russell's theory of definite descriptions; for, it has been claimed by those philosophers that Russell's theory fails to capture this phenomenon. Strawson is one of those philosophers who focus on this problem of the Russellian theory. He thinks that the appraisal of uniqueness condition of

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[1] In his paper titled "Speaker`s Reference and Semantic Reference", Saul Kripke considers "the table" as an improper definite description (since it is satisfied by more than one satisfier). At the same way, Scott Soames in his paper titled "Why Incomplete Definite Descriptions do not Defeat Russell's Theory of Descriptions" considers such kind of definite descriptions as improper definite descriptions.

definite descriptions is problematic, because it sometimes fails to provide the correct analysis in determining the truth values of descriptive sentences. Strawson also maintains that it is not the case that a sentence containing a definite description always involves uniqueness. And, he does not agree with the view that a descriptive sentence always requires a unique existence of the object refer to at all times. Regarding this, he says:

> Consider the sentence, "The table is covered with books". It is quite certain that in any normal use of this sentence, the expression "the table" would be used to make a unique reference, *i.e.*to refer to some one table. It is a quite strict use of the definite article, in the sense in which Russell talks on p.30 of *Principia Mathematica*, of using the article "strictly, so as to imply uniqueness". On the same page Russell says that a phrase of the form "the so-and-so", used strictly, "will only have an application in the event of there being one so-and-so and no more". Now it is obviously quite false that the phrase "the table" in the sentence "the table is covered with books", used normally, will "only have an application in the event of there being one table and no more".[2]

In the above example, given by Strawson, the sentence "The table is covered with books" contains an improper definite description "the table". For, the definite description "the table" is satisfied by many satisfiers. Now, in Russell's interpretation "The table is covered with books" is such a sentence that always expresses a false proposition as the definite description contained in it, *i.e.*, "the table", is an improper definite description which is satisfied by many objects. Here, Strawson disagrees with Russell. He claims that it is possible to make a true assertion by

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using the sentence "The table is covered with books", though the sentence contains an improper definite descriptionin it. He argues that when a speaker utters the sentence on a particular occasion, he/she does not imply the unique existence of a table. Rather, the speaker refers to a particular table by uttering this sentence on that particular occasion. Here, if the table referred to by the speaker is covered with books, then the speaker says something true. So, it is possible for a speaker to say something true of something on an occasion by using a sentence containing an improper definite description.Now, the objection explained above can be summarized in the following way:

> According to the Russellian interpretation, a descriptive sentence containing an improper definite description always expresses a false proposition because the definite description contained in that sentence fails to maintain the uniqueness condition. But, according to Strawson, such a sentence can be used to say something true. So, Strawson claims that Russell is incorrect in his interpretation of definite descriptions.

Strawson's objection stated above seems to be a threat to Russell's theory of definite descriptions. For, it appears that his view conforms to the everyday uses of sentences containing improper definite descriptions. It is true that in our everyday use of language we often use sentences like "The table is covered with books" to make true assertion. And it has already been stated earlier that by using such a sentence the speaker does not entail the unique existence of a table; rather, he/she refers to a particular table in the context. This everyday phenomenon is captured by Strawson's view but it cannot be captured by Russell's view. It can be a genuine threat to Russell's theory. So, this apparent phenomenon needs to be investigated. In fact, the problem with incomplete definite descriptions in Russell's

theory has led to an important amount of research on how to complete improper definite descriptions and solve the problem. In particular, Sainsbury, Ludlow, Neale and others have come forward with a variety of accounts to find a way to deal with the above-mentioned problem. One way of dealing with the above-mentioned problem is known as the *Elliptical Approach*. Thus, here, it is important to examine this approach.

The Elliptical Approach: According to the Elliptical Approach,a sentence containing an improper definite description can be completed by adding the full form of the definite description *explicitly*; or, it may be the case that the context of utterance *implicitly* determines the range of the definite description.[3] Here, the former case is called the *Explicit Approach* and the latter case is called the *Implicit Approach*. According to the defenders of Russell's theory, on a particular occasion a speaker by her utterance of the sentence "the table is covered with books"does not claim a unique existence of a table. The reason is that the definite description "the table" contained in that sentence may be understood as an unsaid part of a complete description "the table near the window"; or, the domain of the definite description "the table" may be restricted by the context in which the sentence containing it is used. So, there are two different approaches to complete an improper definite description. And, many defenders of Russell's theory seem very confident that by these approaches Russell's theory of definite descriptions can be defended against the problem related to improper definite descriptions. However, a proper investigation shows that ultimately both of the approaches fail to answer the following questions:what is to be considered as the complete form of an improper definite description? Or,

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[3] Stephen Neale, *Descriptions* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990),95.

how a quantifier gets restricted etc.?Although initially the Explicit Approach and the Implicit Approach both seemed very attractive approaches, after investigation it appears that none of the approaches can give a satisfactory answer to those questions. As a result, they have failed to solve the problem arising from the Argument from Incompleteness. This failure of two well-known approaches, *i.e*., the *Explicit Approach* and the *Implicit Approach*, opens a challenge for Russellians in solving the above-mentioned problem of Russell's theory. As the present paper offers a defense of Russell's theory against the above-mentioned problem, it is important to inquire why this problem arises. Actually, this problem is rooted into a misconception concerning the distinction between meaning and assertion. The distinction between meaning and assertion has been properly addressed by Scott Soames. So, I will be using Soames' theory as a tool to defend Russell's theory against the above-mentioned problem.

Soames' Distinction between Meaning and Assertion: Before proposing his conception of meaning and assertion, Scott Soames addresses the traditional conception of meaning and assertion. Traditionally, it is believed that by uttering a sentence a speaker of the sentence mainly asserts the meaning of the sentence. This traditional belief about the relation between meaning of a sentence and the assertion made by the speaker by using that sentence can be called the **Traditional Picture of Meaning and Assertion**. Scott Soames discusses about this **Traditional Picture of Meaning and Assertion** in his paper titled "The Gap Between Meaning and Assertion: Why what we literally say often differs from what our words literally mean" in the following way:

> A sincere, reflective, competent speaker who assertively utters S (speaking literally, nonironically, nonmetaphorically, and without conversational implicatures cancelling the normal

force of the remark) in a context C says (or asserts), perhaps among other things, what S "says" in C (also known as *the semantic content of S in C*).[4]

According to this **Traditional Picture of Meaning and Assertion**, there is no difference between the semantic content of a sentence and the assertion made by the speaker of that sentence. That is, in a context *C*, a competent speaker by her utterance of the sentence *S* makes the assertion *A*. Now, according to the traditional belief, the semantic content *M* of the sentence *S* is identical with the assertion *A*. This traditionally believed relation between meaning and assertion also holds the view that to understand the assertion, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the sentence used. That means that the meaning of a sentence determines the assertion made by the speaker by using it in a particular context. This point can be better understood by an example. In response to the following question: "what games has your friend played yesterday?" asked about one of my friends who is good at indoor games and participated in a match yesterday, what I utter is:

(1) She played chess yesterday.

Here, the proposition semantically expressed by the sentence (1) is:

(1a) She played chess yesterday.

In the given context, what is expressed by the sentence and what is asserted by the speaker by uttering that sentence are the

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[4] Scott Soames, "The Gap between Meaning and assertion: Why What We Literally Say Often Differs from What Our Words Literally Mean", *Philosophical essays: Volume 1, Natural language: what it means and how we use it* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 278.

same. Here, by uttering a sentence the speaker actually utters the semantic content of it. But Soames finds this **Traditional Picture of Meaning and Assertion** problematic. He thinks that the **Traditional Picture** is not quite right because the meaning and assertion are not always identical with each other. That is, by literally and non-metaphorically uttering a sentence the speaker may make assertion which is different from the proposition expressed by that sentence. According to Soames, it may be the case that the semantic content or the proposition expressed by a sentence and the assertion made by uttering that sentence are not identical, and the same assertion may not be a part of the semantic content of the relevant sentence.[5] That means that by uttering a sentence a speaker sometimes makes assertions which may be different from the semantic content. For instance, suppose, in response to the question "What does Max do on Sundays?" I utter the following sentence:

(2) He plays chess.

Here, the semantic content of the sentence (2) is this:

(2a) He plays chess.

In the given context my primary intention is to assert that:

(2b) He plays chess on Sundays.

Here, what my primary intention to assert is not that "He plays chess" but that "He plays chess on Sundays". That means that the assertion (2b) is not identical with the semantic content of the sentence (2) and not even a part of it. Rather, the primary

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[5] Soames, "The Gap between Meaning and Assertion: Why what we literally say often differs from what our words literally mean", 288.

assertion (2b) is richer than the semantic content of the sentence (2). However, by pointing out that assertions are not identical with the semantic content, Soames has shown that the traditional conception of meaning and assertion is not right. He has strengthened his claim by pointing out that some assertions are not even a part of the semantic content of the sentence uttered; rather, in some cases they are richer than the semantic content.

Since the assertions made by the speaker are, sometimes, different from the semantic content of the sentence uttered, a question may automatically arise here: why something different from the semantic content of the sentence gets asserted? This particular phenomenon occurs because, according to Soames, there is a *gap* between these two, *i.e.*, meaning or semantic content and assertion. Soames observes that the traditional conception of meaning and assertion fails to identify the above-mentioned *gap*. Moreover, there is a belief that the semantic content of a sentence and the assertion made by uttering it holds a very strong connection between them. Soames not only identifies the gap between meaning and assertion, he also explains the nature of this *gap*. And to explain the nature of this *gap*, Soames introduces us with his idea of *primary assertion*. He does not rule out the possibility of semantic content for being an appropriate proposition to be asserted by the speaker. However, sometimes the semantic content of a sentence may interact with the contextual elements to generate a pragmatically enriched proposition. And, this pragmatically enriched proposition is considered to be the speaker's primary intention to assert by uttering that sentence.[6] Soames calls this pragmatically enriched proposition the *primary assertion*. Now, it may be the case that a primary assertion which is speaker's primary

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[6] Soames, "The Gap between Meaning and Assertion: Why what we literally say often differs from what our words literally mean," 280.

intention to assert is not always identical with the semantic content. The reason is that the primary assertion is supplemented by the contextual elements; on the other hand, the semantic content is not supplemented by the contextual elements. According to Soames, when the primary assertion is formed by the speaker by uttering a sentence, there may be other assertions that are also asserted (not the primary assertions). These assertions are considered to be asserted because they are "relevant, unmistakable, necessary and a priori consequences of the speaker`s primary assertions".[7] So, the proposition which is semantically expressed by a sentence is considered to be an assertion only when it is a consequence of the primary assertion. That means that the semantic content of a sentence may not be asserted even though it may be a complete proposition for being asserted by a speaker.

It may seem that the semantic content does not contribute in making assertions. So, a question may be raised here: does the semantic content of a sentence take part and contribute in making assertion? According to Soames, the semantic content of a sentence plays a very important role in making assertion. He says that what is asserted by the speaker is notdirectly determined by the semantic content but the semantic content interacts with the information supplied by the context to generate pragmatically enriched propositions. That is, the role of the semantic content is to provide the building blocks for assertions and constrains the way by which these building blocks are assembled.[8] So, the semantic content of a sentence

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[7] Soames, "The Gap between Meaning and Assertion: Why what we literally say often differs from what our words literally mean," p.280.

[8] Scott Soames, "Naming and Asserting", *Philosophical Essays: Volume 1, Natural Language: what it means and how we use it* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University, 2008), p.366.

can be viewed as something that constrains the assertions a speaker makes by uttering that sentence. But it should not lead one to think that the contextual supplementations are added after identifying the semantic content of the relevant sentence. Rather, a speaker may make assertions without identifying the semantic content of the sentence uttered. To understand this point, consider the following example[9], suppose, in response to the question: "how many children do you have?" a speaker utters the following sentence:

(3) I have two children.

A competent speaker may make assertions by uttering the sentence (3) even when she does not know what the semantic content of it is. The speaker who assertively utters the sentence (3) can be considered as a reliable judge of deciding what he/she asserts or others may assert by using that sentence. But the speaker may not have a reliable intuition on the basis of which she may identify whether the semantic meaning is "I have exactly two children", or "I have at least two children", or "I have at most two children", or something else. That means that the speaker may not know what the semantic content of the sentence is, bu the/she knows what assertions she makes by using that particular sentence. Moreover, the semantic content of a sentence is too *theory-laden* to be a part of speaker's knowledge. So, it is clear from the analysis that a competent speaker may know what is asserted by his/her utterance of a sentence in spite of the fact that the semantic content of that sentence is psychologically unavailable to her. The ideas discussed above can now be summarized and put in the following way:

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[9] Scott Soames, "Drawing the Line between Meaning and Implicatures - and Relating both to Assertion", *Philosophical Essays: Volume 1, Natural Language: what it means and how we use it.* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), p.308.

(a) The semantic content of a sentence generates a pragmatically enriched proposition along with the elements supplied by the context of utterance of the sentence in question.

(b) A   primary assertion is a pragmatically enriched proposition which is the speaker's primary intention to assert.

(c) The other assertions (not the primary assertions) which are also made by the speaker are considered as "relevant, unmistakable, necessary and a priori consequence of the primary assertions".[10]

All of the above-mentioned ideas help Soames to put forward his own principle concerning the connection between the meaning of a sentence and the assertion made by a speaker by uttering that sentence. Soames' own principle is considered to be an alternative to the **Traditional Picture of Meaning and Assertion**. This alternative idea concerning the connection between meaning and assertion can be called Soames' **Alternative Picture of Meaning and Assertion**. Soames describes the **Alternative Picture of Meaning and Assertion** in the following way:

> If M is a meaning (or semantic content) of an indexical-free sentence S, then normal, literal uses of S (without conversational implicatures that force reinterpretation of the utterance) result in assertions of propositions that are proper pragmatic enrichments of M. When M is a complete

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[10] Mostofa N Mansur, "Bertrand Russell's Theory of Definite Descriptions: an Examination", (PhD dissertation, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada , 2012) ,171, https://philarchive.org/archive/NAZBRT.

proposition, it counts as asserted only if M is an obvious, relevant, necessary and a priori consequence of enriched propositions asserted in uttering S, together with salient shared presuppositions in the conversation.[11]

The above-mentioned principle illustrates that by uttering a non-indexical sentence *S* in a context *C* what the speaker asserts, *i.e.,A* is not identical with the semantic content *M* of the sentence *S*. That means that when a speaker utters a sentence (literally and non-metaphorically) she may assert something different from the semantic content of that sentence. This is the core of Soames' alternative conception of meaning and assertion and this significant idea can help one in defending Russell's theory by resolving the problem arising from the Argument from Incompleteness. In the following section, I will use Soames' alternative conception about meaning and assertion to deal with the above-mentioned problem of Russell's theory.

Dealing with the problem arising from the Argument from Incompleteness: In order to serve the purpose of the present section, I will begin with a summary of the problem arising from the Argument from Incompleteness:

According to the Russellian interpretation, a sentence containing an improper definite description, such as "The table is covered with books", always expresses a false proposition. But a speaker who utters such a sentence often succeeds in saying something true. So, the problem for a

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[11] Scott Soames, The Gap between Meaning and Assertion: Why what we literally say often differs from what our words literally mean", *Philosophical essays: Volume 1, Natural language: what it means and how we use it* (Princeton and Oxford : Princeton University Press, 2008), p.280.

defender of Russell's theory is: how a speaker often succeeds in saying something true by uttering a non-compound sentence containing an improper definite description, even though the proposition semantically expressed by such a sentence is false?

Now, this problem can easily be solved if we replace the **Traditional Picture of Meaning and Assertion** by Soames' **Alternative Picture of Meaning and Assertion**. It is appeared from his **Alternative Picture** that, on a particular occasion, the assertions made by the utterer by uttering a sentence and the semantic content of that sentence is different. This phenomenon allows a speaker to assert something true of something by using a non-compound sentence containing an improper definite description which expresses a false proposition. Actually, when a speaker utters a non-compound sentence containing an improper definite description, he/she utters it in a context and every context contains some elements to complete the assertion made in that context. So, a sentence containing an improper definite description requires contextual supplementations to generate pragmatically enriched proposition. This pragmatically enriched proposition is mainly the speaker's primary intention to assert, *i.e.,* primary assertion, which is different from the semantic content of the relevant sentence. Since the primary assertion is different from the semantic content, they can involve different truth values. So, it is possible for a speaker to assert something true by his/her utterance of a sentence whose semantic content is false. If that is the case then the afore mentioned problem does not pose any genuine threat to Russell's theory. And we have got an explanation of how a speaker often succeeds in saying something true of something by using a sentence containing an improper definite description. To make this point clearer,

consider the following example: suppose, a friend of the speaker asked: is there any space on the table to keep some new stuff? In response, the speaker utters the following sentence:

(4) The table is covered with books.

According to the Russellian interpretation, the sentence (4) expresses the following proposition semantically:

(4a) Exactly one thing is a table and whatever is a table is covered with books.

The proposition semantically expressed by the sentence (4), i.e. (4a), is false as there is more than one table exists in the world. But by uttering the sentence (4) a speaker can assert something true in the given context. Obviously, in the given context the speaker is not asserting that there is only one table in the entire world. Instead, in the given context, what the speaker asserts by uttering the sentence (4) may be one of the following:

(4b) The table near the window is covered with books.

(4c) The table with a flower vase on it is covered with books.

(4d) The table on which there is a copy of Bertrand Russell's *Human Knowledge:Its Scope and Limits* is covered with books.

…
…
Etc.

The propositions stated as (4b), (4c), (4d) … etc. are pragmatically enriched propositions. In the given context, the speaker by her utterance of the sentence (4) may mean any of

(4b), (4c), (4d) …etc. to assert something true. That is, if the table near the window, or the table with a flower vase on it, or the table on which there is a copy of Bertrand Russell's*Human knowledge:Its Scope and Limits* is covered with books or… etc. then the speaker has said something true, even though the semantic content of the relevant sentence is false (due to fact that there is more than one table in the world). This indicates that on the given occasion the proposition semantically expressed by the sentence (4) and the assertions the speaker made by uttering that sentence are not the same. The reason behind it is that the assertions (4b), (4c), (4d) … etc. are pragmatically enriched by contextual elements whereas the proposition semantically expressed by the sentence (4), i.e. (4a), is not pragmatically enriched by contextual elements. It is now understandable how the semantic content ofa sentence and the assertions made by the utterer while using that sentence are different and how they involve different truth values. Therefore, a sentence containing an improper definite description can be used to assert something true, even though the proposition semantically expressed by such a sentence is false. And, Russell's theory can accommodate this fact. So, the problem concerning improper definite descriptions does not pose any genuine threat to Russell's theory.

The above-mentioned solution to the problem arising from the Argument from Incompleteness may not seem convincing to the critics of Russell's theory. One fact is that the semantic content is the literal meaning of the sentence which stays the same in all contexts of its use; on the other hand, the assertions made by using a sentence may differ from one context to another and sometimes the speaker makes more than one assertion in the same context. So, a critic may raise the question that when

more than one assertion has been made how can one select a
proposition from a number of propositions as the speaker's
assertion by uttering a sentence? It is true that there is no
principled way on the basis of which one can select one or more
propositions from a number of possible propositions as the
speaker's assertions but this does not pose any problem for the
defenders of Russell's theory. This question is totally irrelevant
to the proposed solution of Russell's theory and a defender of
this theory needs not to worry about how can one select one
or more propositions as the speaker's assertions from a number
of propositions. For, Russell's theory is concerned about the
semantic content of descriptive sentences; it is not concerned,
here, with what assertions can be made by a speaker by using a
sentence on a particular occasion. A defender of Russell's theory
only needs to show that the semantic content of a sentence is
different from the assertion a speaker makes by uttering that
sentence. Moreover, the lack of any principled way to follow in
selecting one pragmatically enriched proposition from many of
them as the speaker's primary assertion is related to the assertion
which is an issue of pragmatics; and Russell's theory is a theory
that concerns semantics not pragmatics. Russell clears this point
in his article "Mr. Strawson on Referring":

> My theory of description was never intended as an
> analysis of the state of mind of those who utter sentences
> containing descriptions…I was concerned to find a more
> accurate and analyzed thought to replace the somewhat
> confused thoughts which most people at most times have
> in their heads.[12]

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[12] Bertrand Russell, "Mr. Strawson on Referring", *Mind* 66(1957):388.

Thus, it appears that many critics of Russell's theory have raised the criticism concerning the Argument from Incompleteness because of their misconception related to the connection between the meaning of a sentence and the assertion made by the speaker by using that sentence. By making it clear that the semantic meaning of a sentence may not be identical with the assertion made by the speaker by using that sentence, it has been shown that a speaker may say something true by using a sentence containing an improper definite description, even though the proposition expressed by such a sentence is false. Russell's theory can accommodate the phenomenon that it is possible to say something true by uttering a sentence that expresses a false proposition. Thus, the problem arising from the Incompleteness of definite descriptions does not pose a genuine threat to Russell' theory.

Conclusion: In fine, the objection arising from the Argument from Incompleteness against Russell's theory of definite descriptions is founded on an unawareness of the difference between meaning and assertion, if we keep in mind that the meaning of a sentence may be different from the assertion made by using that sentence, we can easily understand that this objection fails to pose a genuine threat to Russell's theory. The so-called problems arising from the improper definite descriptions are actually pseudo problems.

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