

The Principle of Four-Cornered Negation in Indian Philosophy

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The principle of four-cornered negation, "S is neither P, nor not-P, nor both P and not-P, nor neither P nor not-P," is also called the four-fold negation by Indian logicians and metaphysicians. It was rejected by many' but many others accepted it. And those who accepted it use it for different purposes.

The principle seems to have been first used by Sanjaya, who may safely be assigned to a period earlier than the sixth century B.C. His name was known to earliest Buddhists, and he is thought to have lived and taught before Buddha, who is assigned to the sixth century B.C. Sanjaya is said to have given a negative answer to all such questions as: (1) Is it good? (2) Is it not good? (3) Is it both good and not good? (4) Is it neither good nor not good? These questions were generalized into the forms: (1) Is S, P? (2) Is S, not-P? (3) Is S, both P and not-P? (4) Is S, neither P nor not-P?

Those philosophers who gave a negative answer to all four questions were called "eel-wrigglers" by the Buddhists. It was impossible to fix their position either for approval or for rejection. They would criticize any new view, positive or negative, but would not themselves hold any. And it was difficult for a serious person to enter into any controversy with them.

Gautama, the founder of the school of Nyaya, which laid the greatest emphasis on logic and contributed most to its development, called such philosophers *vitandavadins*, or critics without a position of their own. His followers generally refused to enter any debate with them and regarded vitanda (or criticism without any opposition) as one of the fallacies of thought. Vitanda is destructive criticism without any constructive effort; it disproves every doctrine, but proves none. And this method was resorted to by many who wanted to obtain an easy victory over their opponents in controversy; but when asked to enunciate their own position, they would say they had none.

It was right for the followers of Nyaya refused to enter into discussion with those who had no positive doctrine of their own to set forth, but wanted only to obtain victory over their rivals. As mere destructive criticism, vitanda, though not formally a fallacy, may be philosophically useless. But the critic may be a sincere skeptic or agnostic. And Sanjaya was not always regarded as a light-hearted critic. Sometimes he would even deny a proposition, and would refuse to answer "Yes" or "No" to the question. It interested the author of the present paper to hear Professor McClure say that Pyrrho, the famous Greek skeptic, accompanied Alexander the Great when the latter invaded India, and discussed philosophy with many Indian philosophers of the time. Alexander belonged to the fourth century B.C. Since the principle of four-cornered negation is older than the sixth century B.C., and since it was the principle of the Indian skeptics and agnostics, it is not unreasonably to think that Pyrrho was influenced in his extreme skepticism by the skeptics of India. For Pyrrho maintained that " I am not only certain of the knowledge of any object, but also not certain that I am not certain of such knowledge." Sanjaya's position was strikingly similar. For he would not only not say a definite "Yes" to any question, but would also not give a definite "No."

Though the Buddhists nicknamed the followers of Sanjaya "eel-wrigglers" Buddha himself refused to answer questions about what he called the imponderables, such as "is there an eternal entity like the Self (Atman)?" Indeed, his followers took his silence for denial, and developed their philosophies with that denial as the basis. But his silence was really his refusal to say "Yes" or "No." The reason for Buddha's silence lay in the indefiniteness of the concept of the Self or Atman. When we are not sure as to what exactly the Self or Atman means, it would be useless to answer the question whether the entity meant by the word exists or does not exist. But Sanjaya would please the same reason for answering the question about the existence of everything. Buddha, for instance, enunciated the four Aryan (Noble) truths: (1) The world is full of suffering; (2) suffering has a cause; (3) It can be stopped; and (4) There is a way to stop suffering. Sanjaya would attack each of the four truths and say that each can neither be proved nor disproved. In fact, the greatest of the dialecticians of Buddhist philosophy, Nagarjuna, the author of *Madhyamikakarikas* (first century B.C. or A.D.) did actually show that that was so. The four Aryan Truths involve a belief in the doctrine of causation. But like Bradley, in his *Appearance and Reality*, Nagarjuna showed that causation is self-contradictory and so cannot be real. Thus, Sanjaya, though dead long before won a victory over the Buddhists.

The Charvakas or the Indian Materialists were not at first skeptics, but skepticism entered their philosophy as well later on. At first they accepted only perception as the source of certain knowledge. Inference, they said, is invalid because the major premise of the syllogism cannot be established and assumes the truth of the conclusion. Since God and the Atman (self) are not objects of perception, and since inference is not a valid source of knowledge, they contend, the reality of neither can be established. Later Charvakas went farther. They maintained that even perception could not be a valid source of knowledge, for practically the same reasons as those, which Russell, for instance, among contemporary philosophers, would advance. Thus the later charvakas tended to end in complete skepticism, which was at first attributed to Sanjaya.

It is difficult to say whether Sanjaya was only an eel-wiggler who offered answers that were either evasive or cut both ways, or a sincere skeptic, or a sincere agnostic, because we do not have enough evidence. But he is reported sometimes to have said "No" to both positive and negative questions like "Is S, P?" and "Is S, not-P?" And at other times to have kept silent. This denial later came to be expressed in the following forms:

1. I do not take it thus;
2. I do not take it the other way;
3. I advance no different opinion;
4. I do not deny your position; and
5. I do not say that is neither the one nor the other.

The fourth and fifth forms say in effect that neither of the two rival theories is denied. The third says that no third alternative is given. Everything is denied, and even the denial is denied. Then what is the result? Silence. Pyrrho was not even certain that he was not certain of the truth of any cognition! We find very close similarity between the two skeptics, if we call Sanjaya a skeptic.

Up to this point philosopher found that it was possible to doubt the truth of every statement, and even said that they could doubt whether they doubted. Do the "doubting and denial" and "the doubting and denial of doubting and denial" imply that there is no reality with a fixed nature? A thoroughgoing skeptic would say that we can doubt whether there is any reality at all, and deny the affirmative proposition, "there is reality." Of course, he would not say, "there is not reality"; that is, he would not assert a negative proposition, because even that could be denied. Denying a proposition would no be, for him, the assertion of his opposite or its negative. But one may say also, "there is reality, but every form of our cognition of that reality can be denied." One would then tend to be an agnostic; one's position would be "there is reality, but our cognition about it cannot be certain." Buddha's refusal to answer the question "does the Atman (Self) exist?" is interpreted by some modern scholars in this way. Yet there is another possible alternative to this position: "there is reality; its nature is such and such; still, it is possible to understand it in quite opposite ways." This was the position taken by Jainism.

Mahavira, the founder of Jaina religion and philosophy was a senior contemporary of Buddha. He and his followers had to enter into philosophical controversies with the followers of Sanjaya, as did Buddha and his followers. Through Jainism propounded definite doctrines of its own, it preached tolerance of opposite views and their appreciation. It therefore accepted the principle, that there can be a reason for denying or affirming any proposition. It maintained that, though its own philosophy was the true one, there can be a point of view from which its truth can be denied. Then it made a logical generalization and said that there is a point of view from which and proposition can be denied or affirmed; thus it formulated its theory of the relativity of truth. This meant for Jainism that all propositions, except the propositions of its own system, have relative truth. Thereafter it developed its doctrine of standpoints (*nayavada*) and the doctrine of conditioned predication (*syavada*) that is, every statement is true from one standpoint and false from another; every statement, therefore, is a conditioned truth. Thus both "S is P" and "S is not-P" can be true, though from different standpoints.

Naya originally meant for the Jains a way, an approach, a mode, a trope, an aspect or meaning of things. When we consider one aspect of a thing, one statement about it will be true and the other false; but when we consider another aspect, the first statement may be false and the other true. So no statement can be absolutely true; it only has relative truth. For instance if we say, "Cause is prior to effect," is true in the sense that cause is the logical antecedent of effect. But the statement can be assailed dialectically, as it has been by many dialectician in both India and the West. We may argue: every cause is a cause with reference to a particular effect; but how can it refer to the effect, if the effect is not prior? Then the statement, "cause is prior to effect," is denied; but the reason for the denial is not arbitrary. So both the affirmation and the denial of "cause is prior to the effect" are true, but they are true from different points view.

The Jaina logicians attempted to classify the *nayas* or standpoints; but we get different classification, which we need not discuss for the present. However, they formulated, as a result, their doctrine of even-fold conditional predication:

1. It is possible "S is P";
2. It is possible "S is no-P";
3. It is possible "S is both P and not-P";

4. It is possible "S is indescribable";
5. It is possible "S is both P and indescribable";
6. It is possible "S is both not-P and indescribable, and
7. It is possible "S is both P and not-P and also indescribable."

Now, indescribability means that S is neither P nor not-P. P and not-P are opposites and therefore cannot be applied simultaneously to the same subject. Then all that we can say about S is that no predicate can be referred to it. That is, there is no what or its negative, which can refer to the that. It is the same as saying that S is neither P nor not-P. The seventh form means that S is both P and not-P and is also neither P nor not-P. The Sanskrit word for "It is possible" is *syad*. The possibility asserted here is not bare possibility, which is the same as absence of impossibility' nor is it the psychological possibility of an assertion. It can be a conditioned or significant possibility. Naya supplies the condition. The proposition then would be a possible truth in the sense of a relative truth or an alternative truth. From the standpoint of absolute truth, which is actual and complete, it is a possible truth, because it is partial and relative, and does not fall under the usual forms of modal possibility.

The Jaina doctrine may further be explained by taking the example of an orange and the statement, "that is an orange." The object may here be viewed from the standpoint of substance or from that of qualities. If, Like Berkeley, we ask whether there is any substance besides the qualities and challenge the opponent to show it, he may say there is no orange but only a bundle of qualities. Then,

1. "That is an orange" will be true, from the standpoint of substance, if we accept substance as real.
2. "That is not an orange" will be true from the standpoint of qualities, if we accept the view that substance is nothing but a bundle of qualities.
3. "That is both an orange and also not an orange" will be true if we take the points of view of substance and qualities successively.
4. We may take a combined standpoint and may try to predicate "orange" and "not-orange" simultaneously. But no entity can have opposite predicates. Yet the entity is there in front of us. Then "that is indescribable" will be true.
5. "That is an orange and indescribable" will be true, if we combine the standpoint of substance and the combined standpoint of substance and qualities.
6. "That is not an orange and indescribable" will be true if we combine the standpoint of qualities and the combined standpoint of substance and qualities.
7. "That is both an orange and not an orange and also indescribable" will be true if we combine the standpoints of 3 and 4.

The doctrines of standpoints and the relativity of truth is the greatest contribution to Jainism has made to the growth of Indian logic. While Sanjaya and his followers either kept silent or denied both the poles of opposition, the Jaina logicians saw a relative truth in each pole and thus adopted a more positive and determinate attitude toward our cognitions of the world. While the former felt that every statement could be denied, they got puzzled and began denying every statement including their denial. But the Jaina

logicians faced the problem with courage, and tried to lift themselves out of skepticism and agnosticism by formulating the twin doctrines of standpoints and the relativity of truth.

III

It has already been said that, through the Buddhists ridiculed Sanjaya and his followers by calling them eel-wrigglers, one of the greatest of the Buddhist philosophers, Nagarjuna, adopted the same principle in order to prove his doctrine of the Sunya (Void). Now, in mathematics "Sunya" means, "zero," and in metaphysics it means, "that which is neither positive nor negative." In the arithmetical series of numbers, the zero comes midway between the positive and negative numbers thus:

-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Is the zero positive or negative in the above series? To say that a number is minus zero or plus zero makes no difference. The zero is therefore an indeterminate quantity in terms of plus and minus; and though an indeterminate quantity, it is still a number. We do not say that it is not a number but that it is an indeterminate number. Now, if it is not positive or negative, can we say that it is both positive and negative? No, the positive and negative are opposites and cannot be attributed to the same number. Then, can we say that it is neither positive nor negative nor other than what it is positive or negative. No, we cannot think of anything definite that is neither. To be something other than positive or negative, an entity must have a determinate nature; but we cannot think of any, and the zero is indeterminate. Thus the zero becomes a quantity of which all the four alternatives are denied: It is neither positive, nor negative, nor both positive and negative, nor neither positive nor negative.

We can best understand Nagarjuna's metaphysical conception of the Sunya if we apply the above mathematical conception of the zero. Unfortunately the word has a secondary meaning: nothing, nothingness, void, emptiness, etc. And in spite of repeated protest by Nagarjuna and his follower, even his own contemporaries took the word in its secondary meaning and accused Nagarjuna of Being a nihilist, a negativist, and so forth. And if modern translators and interpreters commit the same mistake, they may certainly be excused. Hegel, for instance, thought that Nothing, which is the contradictory of the category of Being in his dialectic, was the basic concept of the Buddhists, by whom he meant the followers of Nagarjuna, who all along have been protesting that their Sunya was neither Being nor Non Being and calling themselves madhyamikas or middle-paths. Buddha preached the doctrine of the mean or the middle path in ethics. So Nagarjuna wanted to do the same in metaphysics by asserting the mean between the positive and the negative, or Being and Non-Being. Reality is neither Being nor Non-Being and nor both nor neither. It is the negation of the negation of Being and Non-Being.

One would perhaps ask how, if Reality is neither Being nor Non-Being, the alternative "neither Being nor Non-Being" can also be negated. Nagarjuna's answer is that Reality, though not the same as Being or Non-Being cannot be different from them. So even the fourth "neither Being nor Non-Being" has to be negated without affirming

either Being or Non-Being. The whole expression ends as only a negation or the assertion of a negation without implying the assertion of an affirmation as the basis.

One might again ask: is not Nagarjuna violating the principle of contradiction? Is he not saying that there is a middle between the two contradictors, when he is denying both? His answer is that he is not asserting that there is a middle between the two contradictories; for he is denying even that middle by saying that it is not neither Being nor Non-Being. To say, further, that anything is, is to say that it has Being; but Beings denied.

If Reality is the negation of these four alternatives, what about Cause, Effect, Substance, Quality, Activity, Relation, etc.? Since ultimate Reality is Sunya or the four-fold negation. Nagarjuna applied this principle to every concept and thus turned it into a metaphysical principle. Thus what was in the hands of Sanjaya a principle of doubt, skepticism, or agnosticism became a metaphysical principle in the hands of Nagarjuna. What was a principle of method for the former became a principle expressive of ultimate reality for the latter. Like Bradley, Nagarjuna would dialectically analyze every concept and show that it is neither existent, nor Non-existent, nor both, nor neither. It is only Sunya.

Sankara, the founder of the Non-dualistic school of the Vedanta, and his followers made a different use of this principle of four-fold negation. Neither Sankara nor Nagarjuna would call himself a skeptic or an agnostic, because both of them say that they are certain of ultimate truth and give an expression for its nature. But while Nagarjuna says that this four-fold negation expresses the nature of every existent thing and therefore the nature of ultimate Reality, Sankara would contend that this four-fold negation is still a negation and therefore cannot be ultimate, for every negation must have a positive basis without which it would be insignificant. My judgment, "the pen is not red," is based on my judgment, "the pen is black." Had I not seen the black-nesses or some other positive quality of the pen, I could not have said, "it is not red." Then, if the four-fold negation is true of everything in the worlds, what does it indicate? It indicates the phenomenology of every entity. Substance, Quality, cause, Effect, Activity, Relation, etc., are phenomena, and in terms of Being and Non-Being, the four-fold negation is expressive of their nature. But since every negative involves a positive as its basis, the phenomenal involves the noumenal, which is Being or the Brahman.

What about the metaphysics of the zero or the Sunya, which is neither positive or negative? I have made use of the mathematical zero, as interpreted above, to explain Nagarjuna's position, because in Sanskrit both the mathematical and metaphysical zero are called by the same word Sunya. It is interesting to note that another word is used by the Sanskrit writers for the mathematical zero is Purna, which means the full and not the empty. Thus the Full and the Empty came to denote the same number. A Sankarite would say that the Zero, though without determinations is still not without value, but it gets its value from Being, which lies at its basis. He did not tackle the mathematical problem, but approached the metaphysical from the side of epistemology. He said that Being and Non-Being, or the positive and the negative do not belong to the same level. The negative presupposes the positive, but not vice versa. One would perhaps say that the judgment, "the pen is black," implies the judgment, "the pen is not red, etc." But one cannot say that the first judgment presupposes the second. For if some one makes the judgment, "the pen in my box is not green," we have a logical right to assume he knows

the definite color of the object. But if he says, "the pen in my box is black," we cannot say what negative judgment he has in mind or even whether he has any negative judgment in mind at all. A negative judgment therefore presupposes an affirmative, but not vice versa.

Hence a purely negative proposition cannot express the nature of ultimate Reality. Reality is Being. But the world we experience cannot be Non-Being; had it been Non-Being, we would not have experienced it, as an objective world that faces us and does not depend on our sweet will for its existence. The Non-Being we know is merely imaginary, like the horns of a hare or the son of a barren woman. Thus the world is not Non-Being either. Because Being and Non-Being are opposites, the world cannot be both. Then, if it is neither Being nor Non-Being, can it be a third entity, which is neither? No, it cannot be even a third entity, for there can be no third entity besides Being and Non-Being; that is, if anything is, it must be Being.

Though Sankara himself did not enter into minute dialectical clarifications, his followers propounded a fifth denial to characterize the Brahman or Being: the Brahman is not "neither Being nor Non-Being nor both nor neither." The phenomenal world is

Neither Being nor Non-Being nor (both Being and Non-Being) nor (neither Being nor Non-Being).

Then the noumenon is

Not [neither Being nor Non-Being nor (both Being and Non-Being)
Nor (neither Being nor Non-Being)].

By implication the proposition then becomes

The noumenon is either Being or Non-Being or (both Being and Non-Being) or (neither Being nor Non-being)

It cannot be Non-being, because I is said to be positive; it cannot be both Being and Non-being, because they are opposites; and it cannot be neither, because it must be positive. Thus the last three alternatives are negated and the first is retained.

IV

It is interesting to note another aspect of this negation. The noumenon is, according to Sankara and his followers, beyond the Logos and so beyond speech and thought. That is Being cannot therefore be directly expressed, but only as the negation of negation. Every categorical expression must be one of the four terms:

1. S is P
2. S is not-P
3. S is both P and not-P; and
4. S is neither P nor not-P (different from both P and not-P).

Sankara and his followers, like Nagarjuna and his followers, say that none of the four forms is applicable to the phenomenal world or any of its objects absolutely, because the phenomenal world is a world of relativity. Therefore they deny of the phenomenal world all the four propositions. Now, Nagarjuna says that relativity itself is the Absolute; but Sankara contends that relativity presupposes the Absolute and is therefore different from the Absolute. So his followers formulated the fifth denial, which is the denial of the four-fold denial. Now, the Absolute also, though being, is beyond thought and speech. To say that something is speakable and thinkable is to say that some determination or determinant can be assigned to it. But every determinant belongs to the realm of relativity and so cannot be absolutely true. Hence, instead of saying "the Absolute is Being," it is said, "the Absolute is not the relative," the relative Being the four-fold negative.

V

Now, we may summarize the different applications of the four-fold negation and their implications.

(I) SKEPTICISM:

"the world is neither B nor not-B nor (both B and not-B) nor (neither B nor not-B)

"B" stands for "Being."

Implications:

1. Negation is not an assertion.
2. Negation does not presuppose an affirmative basis; in the way that "the pen is not red" presupposes "the pen is black."
3. The negation of negation or the denial of denial is not affirmation.

(II) It is difficult to say whether Sanjaya was at any time an agnostic or whether any of his followers was an agnostic. But we may formulate the position without reference to any particular philosopher.

AGNOSTICISM:

"The world is, but it is neither P nor not-P nor (both P and not-P) nor (neither P nor not-P)."

"P" stands for any determinant or determinate predicate, through which we can know any object. Here I have changed the notation from "B" to "P," because the agnostics do not deny that the world is, but only that it is knowable. We can know anything only through determinate predicates, if we can know it at all; but none of the determinate predicates is applicable to the world. And so the world is unknowable.

Implications: All the three implications of skepticism.

We should. However, say that agnosticism has not been logically worked out by any Indian philosopher. The above second implication may or may not be accepted by the agnostic. If he does not accept it, we can ask how he knows what the world is if not as the affirmative basis of the negative judgments. If he accepts it, we can ask how he can be an agnostic when he knows something as the affirmative basis of the negations. Agnosticism would thus contain an ultimate inconsistency. Sankara would escape agnosticism by saying that we know the affirmative basis, but not thought determinations. It is not rational discursive knowledge, but supranational.

(III) The Jainas did not accept skepticism. But for the same reasons as those for which the skeptics formulated their principle of four-fold negation, they formulated their seven-fold positive principle of the relativity of knowledge. Their doctrine is a doctrine of the relativity of knowledge but not relativism of reality. They hold that their own system is absolutely true and reality is absolutely what their system represents it to be. Now, the rival schools ask how the Jainas know that reality is actually what their system represents it to be. If knowledge is relative, then their knowledge of reality also can have only relative truth. However, we may formulate their principle of relativity of knowledge as follows:

S is either B or not-B or not-B or (both B and not-B) or (neither B nor not-B) or [both B and (neither nor not-B)] or [both not-B and (neither B nor not-B)] or [both (both B and not-B) and (neither B nor not-B)].

The word "or" means only alternation but not disjunction, because each alternative may be true and all the alternatives may be true at one and the same time.

This principle of seven-fold relativity is said to offer a good justification for the tolerance or rival views. But if it is possible to build up seven standpoints out of two opposite ones, how many opposites can there be in the world and how many standpoints can be built out of them? The Jainas say that the number of predicates that can be positively or negatively referred to any subject is infinite; but with regard to any predicate, the conditioned statements can be only seven. But here one would pose an objection. If we take B and not-B successively and refer them to S, we get two successive judgments but not a joining reference, as in "S" is both B and not-B." If, on the other hand, we make a joining reference, then B and not-B must have been taken simultaneously; and if they are not two and opposed to each other, we cannot get B and not-B. Thus, though the attempt at a positive formulation of the relativity of knowledge is praiseworthy, this method seems to lead us into some difficulties.

One would perhaps say that we can get a unitary standpoint for these positive formulations in the Absolute, which, as Bosanquet says in his *Meeting of Extremes in Contemporary Philosophy*, includes existence, Non-existence, subsistence, thinkable, unthinkable, etc. First, we may point out that the Jainas are not absolutists and never made an attempt to build up a system of absolutism. At this point, the Buddhists are unlike the Jainas. The Buddhists also started with relativity, but they built it up into absolutism, by turning relativity itself into Absolute. Instead of saying, "S is either P or not-P or both or neither, etc.," they said, "S is neither P nor not-P nor both nor neither." Why? Because we cannot take so many standpoints together as one. We can take only the standpoint of S and we are concerned with S. The essential nature of every S is none

of the four possible alternatives; and so the essential nature of everything or Reality is to be expressed as none of the four alternatives. It is common to every object, the same everywhere, so without a second, and so the Absolute.

Now Bradley, after dismissing every concept as an appearance and unreal in the first part of his Appearance and Reality, attempted to bring them together into the Absolute, which is to be the only individual. But could he combine the different standpoints from which each concept was torn into bits and declared an appearance? This would be the criticism that the Buddhists would advance. So if relativity is positively formulated by accepting a plurality of standpoints as the Jainas did, we can integrate the relative bits into a unitary whole only when we succeed in integrating the standpoints, which we find difficult to accomplish.

Implications:

1. Negation is an assertion.
2. Negation does not presuppose an affirmative basis; but negation and affirmation can be counterparts asserted not from a single standpoint from two opposite standpoints.
3. Double negation is affirmation. When both B and not-B are ascribable to S, they say that S is unpredictable. They do not question the affirmation of S, but Nagarjuna and Sankara would question it. For these two, "neither B nor not-B" means something other than B or not-B. This difference is due to the positive and negative formulations of relativity.

(IV) Some space has been given to the Jaina doctrine, because it is the formulation of the principle of relativity, which arose out of skepticism, but was made positive. But Nagarjuna's formulation of relativism as the principle of four-fold negation falls in the line of the argument of this paper.

Metaphysical Relativism:

"Reality is the essence of the world and is neither B nor not-B no (both B and not-B) nor neither B nor not-B."

"B" here again stands for "Being." Beings also a determination, determinant, a determinate concept like any other predicate, according to Nagarjuna. Being and Non-Being imply each other and are on the same level. "The pen is red" implies and presupposes "the pen is not red" and vice versa, and so the positive and the negative are counterparts or counter-positives of each other. Yet the negative judgment, "the pen is not red," does not imply the affirmative judgment, "the pen is black," as the affirmative basis.

Implications:

1. Negation is an assertion, because there is ultimate reality or truth.
2. Negation and affirmation imply each other on the same level and are counterparts of each other and so both can be negated. But negation does not have an affirmative basis.
3. Two negatives do not always make an affirmative; otherwise, the four-fold negation would involve self-contradiction.

(V) Metaphysical Absolutism and Phenomenal Relativism:

"Reality is not the phenomenal world; and the phenomenal world is neither B nor not-B nor (both B and not-B) nor (neither B nor not-B)."

Therefore, "Reality is not [neither B nor not-B nor (both B and not-B) nor (neither B nor not-B)]"

This is Sankara's position.

Implications:

1. Negation is an assertion.
2. Negation presupposes and is based on an affirmation. The judgment, "the pen is not red" presupposes as its basis the judgment, "the pen is black," but not its counterjudgement, "The pen is red"
3. Two negatives do not necessarily make an affirmative.

VI

In the four-cornered negation, the negation of both B and not-B may appear to be a little puzzling. But it can be explained with the help of the difference between contrary and contradictory opposition of western logic. Two contraries can both be negated, but not the contradictories. Sankara takes Being and Non-Beings contraries: Reality is Being; Non-Being belongs to the imaginary world of objects like horns of a hare, the son of a barren woman, etc., and the phenomenal world is not Non-Being; so in between Being and Non-Being are the only two concepts in terms of Being; and so the phenomenal world is not even neither. To be so relatively related to Being and Non-Beings is the nature of the phenomenal. Thus Sankara would argue.

However, it should be said that the classical Sanskrit logicians didn't have separate words for the contrary and the contradictory. They carried on their controversies over the principle of double negation, however. We may say that if the principle of double negation is applicable to an opposition, it is contradictory; otherwise contrary. In the case of propositions with quantified subjects, it is easy for us to determine which is a contrary and which is a contradictory negation. But in the others it is extremely difficult, as in the following example:

When X says to Y, "there is no pen on the table," what is it that X is denying? You put the question in the terminology of the Sanskrit logicians, what is the counter-part of the negation of the pen for both X and Y? X is negating every pen on the table. So every pen is the counter-part of the negation of the pen; that is, the class of pens is negated on the table. What then should be the negation of this negation? We negate this negation even when there is one pen on the table. But what was at first negated or the counter-part if the first negation was the whole class of pens, not merely this particular pen. So some logicians concluded that the negation of negation is not the affirmation of the original counterpart that two negatives do not necessarily make an affirmative.

It might be said that what is first negated is not the class of pens as a whole but "any pen" and that we should not confuse the class concept with the concept of "any member of the class." This objection was advanced by those Indian logicians who

accepted the principle of double negation. In answer it is that this distinction does not solve the problem. When X makes the first negation, he negates "any member." Y also understands by it the negation of "any member." Now, suppose Y is not looking at the table. X places some pen on the table and negates the negation. X now knows that the pen on the table is, for instance a particular black pen. But because any member indifferently is negated originally, does not Y have the right to affirm, through the second negation, any member he can think of but not coinciding with the pen, which X has before him? What was negated is "any member of the class" but not "some one member of the class." If some particular member had been negated, the judgment would not have been "there is no pen on the table," but "some particular pen is not on the table." So while the first negation negates "any member of the class," the second negation affirms "some particular member of the class." The first negation is a universal negation, but the negation of negation is a particular affirmation. What is negated by the first is a universal or class, but what is affirmed by the second is a particular. Further, if two negatives make one affirmative, they must make the same affirmative to both the speaker and the listener. But they say not. Hence, double negation is not necessarily the original affirmation; it may be so in some instances, but not in all.

This difficulty may perhaps be overcome of logic and is formalized, if negation is treated as an expression of falsity, and if falsity of falsity is treated as the truth denied by the first negation. We shall then have:

1. "There is a pen on the table." Call it the proposition p.
2. "The proposition p is false." This is the negation of 1.
3. "(The proposition p is false) is false." This is the negation of 2, and so the negation of the negation of 1.

But 1, 2, and 3 are propositions and not epistemic acts in actual knowing. The ancient and classical Indian logicians thought of negation as an epistemic act. The scheme does not suit the actual process of knowing. For instance, the second proposition implies that there is the first proposition, which it has to falsify. But we may not have a corresponding judgment. When I say, "the pen is not red," we should not assume that I first asserted, "The pen is red," and then said, "The pen is not red," or "(the pen is red) is false." On the other hand, I must have asserted to myself, "the pen is black," and then, as red suggests itself, said, "the pen is not red."

"However, the followers of Sankara, like Nagarjuna, did not accept the principle of double negation. One would perhaps ask, how then can the negation of the four-fold negation result in Being for the followers of Sankara? They got it because of their principle that negation must have an affirmative basis. The affirmative basis of a negation is not the same as that negation but what is other than that negation. The basis or locus of the negation of the pen as well as of the negation of the negation of the pen is the table. The four-fold negation exhausts all the alternatives and expresses the relativity of the phenomenal world. Reality, or the Brahman, as the basis of the phenomenal world, is the basis of the four-fold negation and so is its other. Since it is the positive basis, we do not need for it another positive basis.

Now, are the followers of Sankara contradicting themselves when they deny the principle of double negation and yet say that the negation of the four-fold negation gives the affirmative Brahman, or that the negation of the negation here results in affirmation?

They would meet this objection by making an important distinction: the positive counter-part of negation. The positive counter-part of "there is no pen"; but the positive basis of this negation is not the pen but the table, which we see and on which there is no pen. Reality or the Brahman comes in only as the positive basis and not merely as the counter-part of the four-fold negation. Some of the followers of Sankara, in fact, say that this negation is of a different kind from the first hour.

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