

## THE LONGEST WAY HOME: LANGUAGE AND PHILOSOPHY IN DIASPORA

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*Pradeep A. Dhillon*

In this essay I take up the problem of doing non-Western, particularly Indian, philosophy in English if we take seriously the notion that language and thought are linked. In other words, I consider the problem presented for international philosophical discourse by the claim that language constrains our metaphysics. The strong version of this thesis would suggest that it is impossible to do Indian philosophy within an international context, since the metaphysics of such discourse would inevitably be cast in English. I wish to argue a weaker version of this thesis. English is undoubtedly the language of international philosophical discourse, however, this does not imply a single metaphysics driven by grammar.

If the learning of English facilitates philosophical and cognitive estrangements, it also serves a therapeutic purpose. Language, by its very nature, even when learned under conditions of imperialism, can assist in overcoming alienation. There are several strategies which could be taken up to achieve such an overcoming. One could, for example, adopt a Calibanesque strategy and use language to build a critique of epistemological and cognitive displacements. We could embark on a Foucauldian archaology of epistemes and make the project recuperative of the threads of non-Western thought within Western philosophy. Or we could pay attention to language use in relation to diasporic philosophical discourse. No doubt the question of intellectual freedom in an international context is a good one for philosophy, but surely it is a reasonable one to ask of language itself. Such a reflexive examination would be a task for philosophy proper. In approaching philosophical discourse in diaspora in this manner, I join efforts with those who have gone before and those still traveling on this long way home. Home at the end of such a philosophical journey would not necessarily be a decolonized intellectual space; a return to an anthropological 'India' or 'China'. Home is the domain of philosophy brought closer to its own ideals of universalism.

## Introduction

There is no other way open to us in the East but to go along with Europeanization and to go through it. Only through this voyage into the foreign and the strange can we win back our own selfhood; here as elsewhere, the way to what is closest to us is the longest way back.

This is the response offered by the Indian philosopher J. L. Mehta 1990 to Edmund Husserl's notion of the inevitability of the 'Europeanization of the earth'. Linking linguistic and philosophical estrangement to global capitalism in India, Mehta notes:

The coming of modernity to India signified not merely the impingement of an alien world of knowledge, ideas, and ideals upon the Indian consciousness, but of a world which was itself rapidly reaching out toward a newly conceived future, as well as spreading out its tentacles to encompass the whole world. Under the colonial origins of his modernization, the Indian encountered 'philosophy' and 'religion' and began forthwith the long journey of reinterpreting his tradition in terms of these Western categories. Most importantly, he began to think about it in the English language not just to expound it to English scholars, but as the principal medium of his own self-understanding.

As Socrates did in the *Apology*, I enter the forum of philosophical discourse as an exile twice over: exiled once from philosophy in the moment of modernity marked by Mehta, and twice in taking up the question of philosophy in diaspora. Struggling to express myself in this forum, I speak as a foreigner. That is, I speak in a language which is my own and yet not mine. In this chapter I seek to examine the significance of linguistic and geographic displacements for philosophical discourse.

Specifically, I take up the problem of doing non-Western, particularly Indian, philosophy in English if we take seriously the notion that language and thought are linked. In other words, I consider the problem presented for international philosophical discourse by the claim that language constrains our metaphysics. The strong version of this thesis would suggest that it is impossible to do Indian philosophy within an international context, since such discourse would inevitably be cast in the metaphysics of English. I wish to argue a weaker version of this thesis. While English is undoubtedly the language of international philosophical discourse, this does not imply a single metaphysics driven by grammar.

If the learning of English, as Mehta 1990 suggests, facilitates philosophical and cognitive estrangements, it can also be therapeutic. Language, by its very nature, even when learned under conditions of imperialism, can assist in overcoming alienation. There are several strategies which could be taken up to achieve such an overcoming. One could, for example, adopt a Calibanesque strategy and use language to build a critique of epistemological and cognitive displacements. We could embark on a Foucauldian archaeology of epistemes and make the project of

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The problem of a violated and violating universalism set for philosophy by history and geography is taken up by contemporary philosophy under the rubric of postmodernism. This theoretical development remains arrested not only because of its primarily normative reception, but also because it remains entangled by the very terms it wishes to discount. If the postmodern charge against universalism, which lies at the very heart of the philosophical endeavor, is to be addressed, philosophy proper and postmodern theory must do a little more than either stand steadfast or place themselves under erasure. Attention to particularity and concerns for establishing a universal discourse must engage each other.

I turn to this problem with a focus on Indian philosophy, not through an unawareness of other traditions in exile or nostalgia. Rather, I turn my attention to Indian philosophy because I feel most comfortable speaking to a tradition I am reasonably familiar with. But also, importantly, because the cases of Indian and Chinese philosophical discourse, while complex to treat in this manner, are still the easier cases. These discourses have found a position, however uncomfortable, within philosophical discourse as it has come to be defined under conditions of modernity. A significant portion of the ways in which people make sense of and act responsibly within their worlds is engaged with so minimally, such as the major and minor traditions of the South American and African continents, within academic philosophical discourse that it makes sense to echo Eric Wolf and speak of the nonsense of people without a philosophy.

The separation of Indian thought into the domains of 'philosophy' and 'religion', based on a modern, secular, Western metaphysics by both Indian and European philosophers alike, marks one diasporic moment in the historical narrative of the relation between Indian and European philosophy. The subordination and incorporation of Indian philosophical discourse under conditions of colonialism marks a second. Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari 1994 note that, under conditions of global capitalism, philosophy is Greek, but all philosophers are strangers. The significance of strangeness, of displacements in thinking, marks a third dimension in thinking about philosophical discourse in diaspora.

What do these alien philosophers, these intellectual strangers, hope to find in the Greek milieu? They come in search of the pleasures afforded by sociability

through the formation of intellectual associations, the pleasures of unsociability through the enactment of rivalries, and a taste for opinion inconceivable in an empire, a taste for the exchange of views, for conversation. These strangers are said to be critical of the traditions they are fleeing from, and because of their strangeness, they are able to be critical of the traditions they flee to. Regardless of how such criticality is enacted, this position presupposes a distinction between philosophy and religion. Philosophy, in this view, would follow a method of open inquiry and epistemological skepticism while religion requires faith. Second, this claim limits philosophy to serving a primarily critical rather than a descriptive or political function. These are functions that have been taken up by Western philosophers like Wittgenstein and Marx. In other words, Deleuze & Guattari's 1994 claim rests on a view of philosophy which is parochial and narrow even within the Western tradition.

Various possibilities are offered for philosophy in diaspora by postcolonial theory. Given the ubiquitous, and arguably democratizing, presence of English in the contemporary world of letters, and the relationship between the Western and non-Western worlds which forged this presence, a note of despair enters this attempt at addressing the question regarding the relationship between language and metaphysics. Given history, then, it seems impossible to realize Indian philosophy on its own terms. Dipesh Chakravarty 1999 writes,

Since Europe cannot after all be provincialized within the institutional site of the University whose knowledge protocols will always take us back to the terrain where all contours follow that of my hyperreal Europe — the project of provincializing Europe must realize within itself its own impossibility. It therefore looks to a history that embodies this politics of despair.

Without giving in to this despair, yet facing the difficulties posed for Indian philosophy by global capitalism, what can we consider possible within postcolonial theory?

This theory seeks to intervene in dominant intellectual production with the full realization that it runs both with and against Western academic discourse. It resigns itself to a struggle which is to be fought in small increments. The model of freedom here is not that of a simplistic mode of resistance. Rather, through its struggle, it hopes to effect a mutation in dominant discourse. While its methods are derived from postmodern and poststructural theory, its hopes remain faithful to the ideals of progress, equality, and freedom; to the ideals of the Enlightenment which it also seeks to question. Postcolonial discourse has made great strides. Intellectuals of Indian origin such as Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Arjun Appadurai command a presence within the most prestigious institutions of higher education in the West. It can be argued, however, that much of postcolonial discourse arises from the existential condition of non-Western academics within Western academic institutions. Therefore, while postcolonial theory seeks to speak for other worlds, it remains, in the main, unreflective of the possibility of re-

producing the very categories it seeks to resist since the language of the producers of its discourse, as well as that of its audience, is Western. As I shall strive to show, this condition is not inherently problematic. I seek to steer a course between an unreflective attitude towards this relation between language and theory as also a too despairing understanding of such a linkage. Postcolonial theory, for all its gains, is not equal to the philosophical task before us.

Another move that might be useful is to undertake a genealogy of modern philosophy in order to unmask the construction of philosophy as a closed and bounded system, innocent of contamination by the particularities of language. In the absence of such an historical approach, Western philosophy can write a long history of its development, tracing its lineage back to the Greeks, without recourse to any reference to the members of unruly classes, or women, or the citizens of the many nations it has encountered. Such a mode of inquiry could take two forms working either independently or with each other. First, one could use the methods of historical linguistics to develop etymologies of concepts. Thus the philosopher would seek to link concepts in modern philosophy to those that precede it with the aim of gaining enough distance temporally and spatially in order to be able to say something significant about the linkages between earlier, perhaps non-Western, conceptual forms and contemporary philosophy. This in turn would enable such a scholar to say something significant about the relationship between language and metaphysics. While such an analysis might prove very useful it rests on two assumptions both of which are open to question. These are: first, this mode of inquiry assumes a shared protosystem, for example a Proto-Indo-European system. Second, it presumes historical continuity.

A different genealogical strategy, one not based on these assumptions, would be to undertake a Foucauldian archaeology of epistemes — units of knowledge. Such an approach presupposes that all forms of intellectual production are based on the inescapable link between knowledge and power. Roughly, philosophical archaeology would involve the taking up of a conceptual system and unpacking it moment by careful moment, with all the historico-linguistic tools at hand, to reveal the teeming contestation of traditions, voices, and ideas. It is out of this contestation, such an argument would seek to show, concepts made victorious by the dynamics of power, arise seemingly serene, pure, unitary, and static. That is, politics, not nature, offers us a universal metaphysics. Though this approach is powerful, the problem is that it serves primarily as a corrective to the concerns of Western philosophy. Despite the importance of this task, it provides us with no way establishing a dynamic, vigorous, and independent way of doing philosophy within an international context. Not only does Indian philosophy stay linked to Western thought, it must always follow. It must pick its way through the debris of the edifices being deconstructed.

The issue of language and philosophical discourse in diaspora, the contours of which I have struggled to define so far, I take to be the central problem facing philosophy today. This is so not for intellectual reasons alone. If we seek to live in

a non-violent world, then our affiliations and conflicts are to be expressed and negotiated through language; through legal and political discourse. If such discourse is to be democratic at an international level then we must show that using a shared language does not imply shared values or beliefs. In other words, language need not constrain metaphysics. If we are unable to demonstrate this, then we are to live in a hegemonic world where democratic international cooperation is not possible.

I will now sharpen my delineation of this problem and strive to go some way towards offering a solution. In the course of elaborating these remarks I will use Wittgenstein's ideas on grammar and naturalism for philosophy in an international context. I will do this by paying attention to the specific arguments made by Jerrold Katz against both the internal naturalism of Chomsky and the full blown naturalism of an Husserlian phenomenology. In sum, I will question the moves in philosophy that seek to develop a strong intentional theory of semantics in an attempt to give us a metaphysics of meaning even as the world is becoming more overtly interdependent, but also more insistently democratic. Such a move may be useful if we take globalization to mean standardization. These are not useful, however, when thinking about meaning from a cosmopolitan, democratic point of view.

In a recent issue of the *Journal of Philosophy*, Jerrold Katz raises what he considers the central problem in twentieth century philosophy. The problem, he says, was raised by Wittgenstein very near the end of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*:

It is clear that the logical product of two elementary propositions can neither be a tautology nor a contradiction. The statement that a point in the visual field has two different colors at the same time is a contradiction.

These two statements, Katz 1998 argues, each plausible by itself, are none too plausible when taken together. To help make Wittgenstein's point, Katz offers the following example:

- 1) The spot is red and blue.

There is a problem here with the setting of the problem in this way. The terms of reference namely red and blue have opposing positions on the color wheel. A naturalized example would have made the problem harder to set in such clean terms and therefore harder to treat. Thus what if the example, Wittgenstein might say, Katz had picked had been 'The spot is blue and green'. In that case, Katz would not have been able to develop as clean an argument against naturalism as the one he offers.

Nevertheless, Katz 1998 asserts that this statement claiming that the spot is blue and green is the 'logical product of two elementary statements and hence according to the first statement in Wittgenstein's formulation of the problem it cannot be a contradiction. However, it asserts that a 'point in the visual field has

two different colors at the same time,' and hence according to the second statement it is a contradiction. For Katz, the COLOR INCOMPATIBILITY problem 'is a general problem about the vocabulary of the language and about all the semantic properties and relations of the language. 'The problem surfaces,' he says, 'whenever we try to explain the logical powers of extra logical words with a symbolism on which the logical form of elementary propositions affords no basis for their explanation. Not only did Wittgenstein raise this problem but he imposed a methodological and epistemological constraint on its solution.

It must be possible for the contradiction to show itself entirely in the symbolism. If I say of a patch that it is both red and green, it is certainly at most only one of these two, and the contradiction must be contained in the sense of the two propositions. A contradiction, therefore, must be displayed entirely in its symbolism. Furthermore, knowledge of such a contradiction requires apriori semantic knowledge of its constituent statements. Even though color vocabulary is only a special case of this problem it offers us what Katz considers the hardest case for the more general problem of meaning which totally transformed the discipline of philosophy in the twentieth century. Roughly, the general problem of meaning color incompatibility serves to exemplify is the tension between intuition and logic we often find in the ascription of meaning.

Following this, Katz 1998 makes a distinction between solutions and dissolutions in addressing philosophical problems. Solutions arise from questioning assumptions but accepting presuppositions. Dissolutions occur when presuppositions themselves are placed in jeopardy. Both Wittgenstein, through the *Philosophical Investigations*, and W. O. Quine's arguments are dissolutions. Nevertheless, he points out, Quine's orientation is scientific while Wittgenstein's is therapeutic. Katz sees his own attempt as a solution through what he calls 'decompositional semantics'. It is based on retaining a metaphysics of meaning by separating logic from meaning, and syntax from semantics.

I now take up Quine and Katz's inability to speak to what I think might become the philosophical issue of the twenty-first century. Let us first briefly take up Quine's theory of the indeterminacy of translation. This thesis rests on the idea that the richness of the contexts in which language is used makes it extremely difficult to link language-fixed referents. Translation between linguistic systems, then, is indeterminate and therefore, for worldly reasons open to the possibility of hegemony. An additional problem, and one that Quine does not address, is that this hegemony of translation may not be conscious. That even under the most charitable of intentions, we necessarily map our own metaphysics onto the alien, usually non-Western, philosophical discourse. Here are two sobering examples. First, consider how commonplace it is to conflate Buddhism and Christianity. This occurs despite Buddhism's strenuous efforts to resist God as a transcendental concept. Or let us take the acceptance of the classification of some languages of the world as part of the Indo-European family of languages and culture as first suggested by Sir William Jones. Sir Jones suggested this system of classification

of languages based on the regularities he perceived between Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit. But, keeping Wittgenstein's remarks on the interdeterminacy of explanation in commenting on Frazer's *The Golden Bough* in mind, and Quine's own thesis of the indeterminacy of translation, it might be possible to classify these languages in ways which would easily resist the label 'Indo-European'. This brings us to a graver inadequacy in Quine's theory of translation. His theory assumes closed, internally undifferentiated, linguistic systems. While this may remain a reasonable and productive assumption to make in the formal treatment of language, the field of sociolinguistics confronts the assumption with such empirical force that it is difficult to maintain even for those purposes. In other words, Quine develops his thesis as a monolingual-monodialectal speaker writing of other speakers of pure language.

The cautionary reminders about interpretation and explanation assembled by Wittgenstein and taken to an extreme by Quine certainly alert us to the significance of difference in thinking about meaning. However, when we think about the parallels between Panini's grammar and that of Chomsky, Nagarjuna's contributions to Mahayana Buddhism and the role of language in Wittgenstein's thinking about the gap between the ordinary and the real, we come to appreciate the motivation for finding a universal metaphysics of meaning. Such regularities draw our attention to the sharedness of human experience. Nevertheless, the philosophical position we are striving to lay out is a non-hegemonic treatment of language. Such a treatment would seek to negotiate between incommensurability on the one hand and the universalization of local concepts on the other.

In his discussion of the metaphysics of meaning, Katz wants to reject Chomskyan naturalism without letting go of Chomskyan formalism. If expressed in sufficiently general and formal terms, such an approach should fit the linguistic facts of all languages. Specifically, Katz wishes to develop a non-naturalistic intentional semantics based on a Chomskyan definition of grammar: an optimal generative grammar for a language L which generates all and only well formed sentences in L. There are three problems with Katz's position. First, while he is aware of the problems presented by Quine's monolingualism for his thesis of the indeterminacy of translation, Katz's own attempts at representing bilingualism are idealized representations based on a monolingual view of language. In other words, his philosophy of language suffers because it too remains uninformed by sociolinguistic research which describes the complexity of linguistic phenomenon. Katz seeks to block such difficulties by what he calls 'evidential controls' when faced with discrepancies in meaning. That is, he relies on extensionality to ascribe meaning to ambiguous statements. Finally, despite his valiant attempts to delink syntax from semantics, Katz's theory of decompositional semantics relies on the well-formedness of expressions. Such a reliance on well-formedness is normative and suggests a presupposed undifferentiated linguistic system. Such a hearkening to extensionality weakens, perhaps even undermines, Katz's attempts at providing us with an intentional theory of semantics.

Such a consistent return to extensionality in the ascription of meaning is significant not only for philosophy of language in general, but more specifically, for our purposes, for doing philosophy in an international context. Let us take the specific case of English. As the linguist Braj Kachru 2001 points out, English is indeed the global language. However, to equate this globalization of English with the emergence of a single, hegemonic, linguistic system is to misunderstand the creativity involved in the processes of the acquisition and use of English by populations other than in those places traditionally considered English-speaking. How does one explain this rather mistaken view of language in use?

Primarily such an error stems, as has been pointed out, from taking language to be a monolithic system. Even the most cursory examination of English used in places like England, Canada, the United States, and Australia, reveals enough differentiation to warrant the use of terms like 'Australian English,' 'British English,' and 'American English'. Now consider the widespread use of English in Malaysia, India, Ghana, Kenya, Bhutan, the Fiji Islands and so on. To speak of English as a global language is to speak only in the most economical and, if taken to be descriptive of actual linguistic conditions, deeply erroneous ways. In the attempt to recognize English as global language while acknowledging the unique ways in which it is realized within particular contexts, Kachru suggests that it is linguistically accurate to speak of 'World Englishes'.

It is certainly the case that the spread of English is tied to colonial processes which dislocated, marginalized, or even erased local linguistic and philosophical systems. Nevertheless, the language was taken up in different parts of the world in ways which, to follow Wittgenstein, were tied to local 'forms of life'. It is the specificity of the ways in which grammar, tied to the life-world, is realized which makes it possible for us to speak of Jamaican, Kenyan, and Indian English. These linguistic realizations, on the argument of the sociolinguist, are not impoverished forms of the norms for English set by British aristocracy, which is only one form of life among many. Rather, they are complex linguistic systems in themselves. In other words, the norms of standard English are not linguistically inherent, but appear so within specific historical contexts.

In addition, the spread of English is often seen as being hegemonic because the theories which drive explanation link language to power in an overly deterministic manner. The common users of English are represented as oppressed and alienated from language for historical reasons. Such explanations run the risk of reproducing the power relations they seek to undermine, for they deny creativity to the users of language in which these theorists of domination and subordination wish to argue. Moreover, such a view presupposes a romantic linkage between an essential 'self' and 'expression'. Regardless of the philosophical position we take on this presupposition, it is hard to maintain when considering language use in a world-historical context.

Let us take up the idea of World Englishes, language tied to local forms of life, in greater detail. Consider the following example from Indian English. The ut-

terance 'I am going to go' can be said to follow the same rules of syntax as 'I am going to read,' 'I am going to eat,' 'I am going to run,' and so on. Within the Indian context the utterance 'I am going to go,' presents no semantic confusion. A British or American speaker might need recourse to some Katzian 'evidential circumstance' in order to make sense of the utterance. By referring to the context, the utterance could meaningfully interpreted as 'Do not hassle me, I am leaving,' 'I most definitely, most certainly mean to go,' and so on. Even so, the expression is an emphatic in these cases as it is not within the context of Indian English. That is, in order to make the sentence not only syntactically permissible but also meaningful we have to rely on extensionality. This example provides us with a good opportunity to criticize Katz's valiant attempt at developing an intentional semantics even as it points us to the significance of context in the ascription of meaning. In other words, this example demonstrates that meaning is made in English in a manner which preserves the idea of a globally spread speech community while pointing to the local forms of life to which language use is tied.

Kachru's 2001 argument for World Englishes suggests the creative ways in which people learn and use languages, even under conditions of imperialism. Such creativity should be far more in evidence after colonialism. Kachru's discussion of language offers another strategy for undertaking international philosophy: for doing philosophy after colonialism. It makes possible, and legitimates, philosophy in Indian English: the language directly tied to the forms of life out of which the concepts it seeks to articulate emerge. However, since philosophy is undertaken in English, these linguistic systems might be different, but are mutually intelligible. In other words, Kachru's arguments within linguistics make possible the global articulation of local philosophical concepts. His view of the global use of English naturalizes the metaphysics of meaning. The possibilities and limitations presented by the spread of English for Indian philosophy form the bitter-sweet legacy of colonialism.

Let us take the case of the modernization of Chinese. In response to communicative and educational technologies like typewriters, the printing press, and the new electronic media, the Chinese writing system has slowly started to change away from a strictly ideographic system to one that is more alphabetic. The protocols and regimes of these emerging technologies of communication might require a shift to sentential syntax, since the architecture of many of these systems rest on sentential logic. Such emerging shifts in grammar occur as a result of changing forms of life which require a shared metaphysics in order to share meaning. Such sharedness, however, does not necessarily imply cultural atrophy, or even death. To insist on such attenuation is not only to refuse the creativity of the users of language, but also the possibility of occupying many metaphysical positions using one linguistic system. As pointed out so well by Neil Tennant 1997, it is not enough to criticize Whorfian surprise at the Hopi exhibition of an Einsteinian metaphysics. It is just as important to note that English speakers are not doomed to inhabit a non-Einsteinian world; that it is just as easy to say space-

time as it is to say space and time. In other words, grammar may not be metaphysical destiny.

Kachru's linguistic analyses of English taken up from a Wittgensteinian perspective offers hopeful and constructive strategies for doing international philosophy after colonialism. In all the alternate strategies taken up in this essay, Indian thought remains inextricably linked to Western philosophy for reasons of grammar, history, and geography. Most of these strategies are unequal to the task of giving us a way to think of doing philosophy in a democratic international context. They remain inadequate primarily because they rely on a monolithic view of language. Thinking about language and metaphysics in an international context returns us to Wittgensteinian naturalism. In other words, if naturalism made for the critical, deconstructive, moments in Wittgenstein's philosophy, it also opens the door for a therapeutic metaphysics firmly tied to a language and a grammar.

If Wittgenstein posed the central questions of philosophy in the twentieth century, as Katz tells us, then he may well be the philosopher we have to turn to in solving the riddles faced by philosophy in an international, diasporic, context. But, this should not surprise us at all. After all, it does not take great imagination to see that Wittgenstein was a multicultural, diasporic, international philosopher. Wittgenstein was a man who witnessed great suffering around issues of identification and exclusion and who thought philosophy was charged with the task of healing. Seeing him thus enables us to catch a glimpse into the earnestness with which he argued for thinking about the role of grammar in philosophy, the significance of history, and his insistent resistance to a metaphysics, and hence a politics, too quickly seized upon. The question we are left with is this: Why did we not naturalize our greatest philosopher of naturalism? Could it be that he is so hard to read because his philosophical investigations resist a metaphysics tied to an unreflective monolingual form of life?

Under conditions of more overt forms of globalization, it could well be that Indian philosophy, as form of non-Western thought, is made an artifact to be displayed in the museum of philosophy. The quest then is no longer to seek a way home to Indian thought. Rather, the idea is to labor intellectually in a manner which not only resists the 'museumification' of Indian and other philosophical traditions, but to return philosophy to its tasks proper. Philosophy can no longer be tied to a singular form of life, but must itself become diasporic and enable us all to feel at home in the world.

#### NOTE

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