



Heterodoxical Ideologies of Some Philosophical ISMS

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ABSTRACT: An impartial analysis and spotlight on the philosophical 'Isms' clearly shows that not all the recognized behavioural sciences help us in day to day life and particularly in the trying situations. In fact the primary task of philosophy, traditionally assigned, is to study the nature of human existence and our relationships with each other. Having universally acknowledged the famous Aristotelean remark about human nature that Man is a Social Animal, the very next problem that arises is how to transform him into a cultured animal? Scores of Isms are available but not all have a true grip on human mind. A few of them can safely be ignored concluding that they have merely earned historical importance but the efficacy of even those in vogue needs to be examined. This is because the struggle of humanity as a whole and in particular, related to the sensitive souls has not ended. It is but natural to look at the Isms with a hope or expectation to get proper guidance. Needless to say, there is a sort of chaos and as scientifically proved there is a continuity at an incomprehensible pace in this entropic world. We have updated our knowledge from scientific research to gain comfort yet there is something missing owing to which complacency is shattered. That is why complex philosophies presented in a verbose manner may impress us for a while but in actual practice they do not serve a right purpose. Philosophical thoughts can get a response in an appreciative manner only when displayed through a simplified version. Philosophers and Thinkers are definitely benefitted from a huge repertoire of knowledge. But the issue is regarding the art of presenting the gist of it for a common man who eagerly seeks guidance from the philosophical Isms. Seekers of wisdom do not have narrow confines but they might face the problem of presentation. No doubt they have to sound academic for exhibiting their scholarship but the world is habituated to dwell on a utility based platform. This paper tries to focus on those Isms which have not only significance but also are usable and therefore, we need to be wary enough in selecting them for following or practising in life.

KEYWORDS: Aristotle's Idea, Practical Wisdom, Usable behavioural Sciences.

I. INTRODUCTION

Everyone has a common desire to excel in life by being successful in the profession voluntarily opted and also maintain amicable relations with the fellow beings. Learned people do accumulate knowledge by holding on to a regimental time-table but they too sometimes are at a loss for not knowing how to use the same for mundane affairs. Those who have not undertaken the academic study of philosophy and its various branches, are very hopeful of getting guidance for all their problems of life through the much publicised philosophical Isms. Accepting the facts of life as they are is the most healthy habit and rather a fundamental requisition which one can aspire for. It is unfortunate that with learning no doubt enrichment of knowledge does take place but a sort of arrogance also slowly creeps into the personality. Learning is like a theoretical aspect which one may master but using the same for practical purposes is an art by itself. That is why handling of life situations under trying circumstances even a less educated or least informed person with practical sense would prove more successful while the opposite might even fail miserably. There are many brief and lengthy definitions of the word 'Philosophy' available but none of them covers all aspects. A basic fact which we must admit is that no subject is under the custody of any person howsoever claimed as enlightened. No one is encyclopaedic. In every personality there are short comings. In "Pragmatism", William James wrote, "Philosophy is at once the most sublime and the most trivial of human pursuits. It works in the minutest crannies and it opens out the widest vistas. It 'bakes no bread', as has been said, but it can inspire our souls with courage; and repugnant as its manners, its doubting and challenging, its quibbling and dialectics, often are to common people no one of us can get along without the far-flashing beams of light it sends over the world's perspectives."¹ Every philosophical Ism has a few shades of its central teaching. Some of them sound to be very confident while presenting their postulates or salient features. But on close observation we realize that there is a lot of emphasis on reminding us how unpredictable this world is or can be. Therefore, how to combat with the events of life in all its phases remains the main concern. There are no rules and therefore, no single philosophy could ever solve all problems. The strong belief in the textual premises of



religions somehow has gained an upper hand and even today it continues. The reason for this is, in philosophy as well as in other subjects including Science, there is ever a scope for revision but in religions it is strictly denied. Anytime sincere revision definitely brings in progress and that is surely in the interest of the welfare of the society. Our impulsive dependency on the scriptural matters and reflexive senses takes us away from scientific or logical thinking. Accepting the physical and mental limitations of human personality, in general, would solve most of our problems. The tragedy is much owing to the fact that in order to induce confidence excesses are consciously permitted and that has created the whole mess. Expecting superhuman qualities as very much within reach, most of the people regale in the dreamy land focussing more on the hope kindled within than mustering courage to put in all efforts. Since there are many philosophical abstractions, usually supported by religious sentiments the practical aspect of life is lost in heavy measures. In fact, abstractions are surely needed for the progress of the subject but the condition would be, they should be handled by the right persons for interpretations. Failing this it would become a common habit to give away to wishful thinking and fresh conjectures. That is why totally condemning the abstractions is of no avail. A sharp distinction is really required. Bertrand Russell in 'The Scientific Outlook' writes, "Many people have a passionate hatred of abstraction, chiefly, I think, because of its intellectual difficulties, but as they do not wish to give this reason, they invent all sorts of others that sound grand. They say that all reality is concrete, and that in making abstractions we are leaving out the essential. They say that all abstraction is falsification, and that as soon as you have left out any aspect of something actually you have exposed yourself to the risk of gullibility in arguing from its remaining aspects alone."² Therefore, in brief we have to realize that any subject which helps humanity for its betterment is far superior to the ones which might have earned accolades for scholarly contributions. No doubt no subject should be criticized yet from the point view of practical application, we need to prioritize. The major issue is mainly due to the different strata in the society and their basic needs which differ widely. When it comes to philosophy obviously most of the problems of humanity are related to a sectional educated mass. However, just like religious discourses which soothe many even the philosophical Isms too extend help for living meaningfully particularly for those groping in darkness and are confused.

II. WORKABLE ISMS

In the mart of life nothing seems to be properly defined on even an academic front, chiefly because everything is subject to change. Furthermore, the change itself is not in the least uniform. It is a matter of common experience that the challenges of every decade or generation are not only varied but getting more complex. Therefore, most of the times the potential of an Ism seems to have severe limitations. This naturally brings in a disappointment for the zealous followers. Generally this occurs in case of the Isms that are derived from Religious sentiments. They are more metaphysically stuffed and quite impressive. That is why they easily generate an appeal. The claims are very high owing to which most of the psychologically weak persons are almost permanently trapped. As noticed, there are a little over 230 different philosophical Isms though most of them have their doctrines erected from mixed sources. Therefore within these philosophical Isms we find some of them connected to even political, social and moral doctrines. For a common man the main concern is philosophical Isms which when adopted should serve a practical purpose and not remaining with impressive, soothing and theoretical ideas. Any idea if it fails in practical life may be concluded as a mere reflection of own nurtured conjectures. We need workable theories or ideas, which suit the present generation at least. Granting almost an eternal status to any Ism would mean no possibility of progress in coming future. Let us examine in brief a chosen few.

III. MELIORISM

In Madhyamika or Shunyavada School from Eastern philosophical point of view the Universe is considered to be totally devoid of any reality. There is of course a correlation between the self, the object and the knowledge sought. Since there is a sort of interdependence, even if one of them is proved to be false the whole unit becomes meaningless. This is normal, without supporting evidence; but considered to be a Nihilistic approach in West. Madhyamika philosophy does not deny all the reality but at the same time is not ready to accept the apparent phenomenal world. It imagines beyond the phenomenal world and is convinced of the reality therein. Since reality is not characterised by the phenomenal attribute it is referred to as Shunya (roughly equivalent to zero). This view is also called the Middle path because it deviates from the extreme views which comprise of Absolute Reality and Absolute Unreality. "When we are young, we may have boundless optimism that good things will happen, without supporting evidence; but as we get older, we appreciate more that it is our beliefs about our capacities based on experience and feedback that is the best predictor of success."³ This is Melioristic outlook. The strong belief that the world we live in can be made a better or a worthy place



to live in may be taken as literal meaning of Meliorism. With all due regards to the religious sentiments we have to agree that this is not the best designed world. There is no sense in painting the world with gloom or gaiety and further claiming that as the only genuine picture or realistic picture. One episode or event, howsoever poignant cannot qualify itself to push everything under optimism or pessimism. Optimism is a sort of fostered quality to see that one does not submit to the adverse forces but as a contrast Pessimism drains out energy, discouraging us even to take a chance with required efforts. This eventually may lead to fatalism and worst of all inaction. At the same time, Optimism may also seem to be a sort of mockery of the existing reality filled with strife and imbalance. There seems to be no uniformity in the happenings around us. Despite this, Meliorism has an anti-entropic concept of the world with the trust in human Will power and efforts for the betterment. Meliorism is a doctrine indicating complete faith in the human capacity to eliminate sufferings. Majority times it is found that there are certain pre-conceived notions mostly imbibed from the socio-political scenes which paint the canvas with either extremely positive or negative picture. In fact that is wantonly done. However, gullible minds easily fall prey to such publicity. That is the reason as to why the human temperament swings between two extremes like a pendulum without levelling enough efforts to stabilize. Gaining an equipoise is absolutely essential and that is, needless to say, the chief aim of Meliorism.

IV. STOICISM

This Hellenistic Philosophy was founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium in early 3rd Century BC. However it was rigorously practised by Marcus Aurelius, Seneca and Epictetus. One of the best aspects of Stoicism is that it has maintained brevity in presenting its central teachings. It does not depend on any particular religion or scripture to get an attestation. Most of the useful Isms first go with the psychology of human nature and then draw their conclusions accordingly. There is a simple analysis and picking up of the common but factual situations. The acceptance of reality as it is becomes the foremost important step. Later how to deal with the reality is suggested. Virtues have been given the position of citadel, so that there cannot be any substitute. Similarly the world around us is described as unpredictable and crazy too. Owing to this, there is always a tough tussle between the positive and negative forces. In addition, usually an overlooked fact is that our life is numbered the day we are born. Slightly in a pessimistic manner it may be concluded that we are in the process of dying. So this life which we so earnestly guard is absolutely ephemeral. To make it a delightful stay on this planet, Stoicism advises us to be absolutely steadfast. Controlling the mind, which easily becomes wavered, is our prime duty. Ultimately, just as the source of happiness is within us same can be said regarding unhappiness too. As the external events which take place do not fall under our purview, we have no control over them. It is our response that matters and that lies under our capacity. With this one can surely get over the dissatisfaction getting periodically gathered. It is our own creation of the destructive emotions which drain us thoroughly and drag us to a concrete pessimism. The best part of Stoicism is that it permits no lengthy, superfluous and complicated theories; instead straightway hits on the head of the nail. There had been many famous personalities who religiously practised Stoic principles which involved clarity on what can and cannot be controlled, Time is precious, Source of happiness is within, Managing to stay focused, Eliminating ego and Vanity, Maintaining a journal of thoughts, Managing to remain steadfast, Visualising the possibility of the worst to happen and the best of all that rather soothes all Nothing remains forever. With these fundamental principles we can easily gloss over the existing facts to develop a proper personality adept enough to run the show properly by handling human relationships. Some of the old religions are stuffed with so many details that the study and understanding of even one religion in a thorough manner is almost improbable. That is why new religions remained quite synoptic and could draw attention of all. Later it was the turn of the Isms which had greater influence because they restricted themselves to the need of the hour and managed to look into the prevailing societal problems. Stoicism never showed any arrogance of scholarship but tried to reach the crux of the reality. "That is why Stoic Sage will continually attend to the source of virtue, his voluntary judgements and actions, which renders him unusually self-possessed in any given situation. One of the healthy passions cultivated in Stoicism is called EULABEIA, meaning 'caution' or 'discretion' can also be seen as a form of mindfulness."⁴

V. PHILOSOPHICAL PESSIMISM

Usually the terms Pessimism and Pessimist, are looked upon as serving only the defeated souls to find some consolation as they have no courage to combat with the adverse forces. Followers of Pessimism are described as those running away from conflicts avoiding contradictions and sheepishly shirking away from their duties. Dullness creeps in their mental frame slowly settling permanently. This is fine so long as we are taking out just the general implications of this outlook. It would be something like



dictionary definitions or a literal meaning but it is quite unjust. Philosophical Pessimism is totally different. It does not speak of diffidence at any level. On the other hand it tries to present the World we live in as it is. Emotionally or with Religious sentiments one may think that all that happens is for good but that is a big folly or self analysis with a devotional feeling of surrender to the Almighty. Philosophical Pessimism does not consider the World as having best paradigm nor human mind strong enough to embrace reality. There are severe limitations for the mind because of its unending craving that lasts for a fairly long time and therefore at any rate it is not appeased thoroughly. Philosophical Pessimism exposes our limitations, dragging us out of the illusionary picture held tightly by us. At the same time it also speaks of the deliverance from this self-created crippled state of mind. That is why we find the philosophers supporting this Ism which ultimately strongly suggests silencing our restless mind. It is our own idealism, which bereft of the existing reality, that handicaps a clear thinking and therefore blurs the vision. In this regard Arthur Schopenhauer's approach is always reckoned or rather stamped upon as Pessimistic. But on close observation anyone would agree that it is absolutely realistic and logical. Unfortunately most of the philosophers had been stuck up either with the prevailing philosophical idealism or a wistful thinking arising from own experiences. Burdening the weak human personality by ideologies had never served any purpose. Man is a bundle of wishes. Therefore it is the Will factor that forces him to take on new desires. Once a priority based desire is attended to, the next one immediately makes an appearance. There is no end to this process. Therefore, Schopenhauer writes, "All willing arises from want and therefore deficiency and therefore from suffering. The satisfaction of one desire ends it; yet for one wish that is satisfied there remains atleast ten which are denied... Therefore so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given upto the throng of desires with their constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subjects of willing, we can never have lasting happiness nor peace."⁵

VI. EXISTENTIALISM

There have been various meanings and interpretations to Existentialism. That is why it attracts many definitions too. However, the most common and to a great extent acceptable, rather a proposition is that 'Life is meaningless'. We are granted an uncontrollable freedom which finally yields helplessness, ennui and further all the responsibility for every act or wantonly performed deed. We cannot shift the responsibility to any other person or agency. As Jean Paul Sartre put it, "Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does."⁶ There is a strong feeling of being miserable and loneliness ever having an upper hand to hurt immeasurably This view in no way recommends any negative thought to get enmeshed into the web of Pessimism but educates us to know the physical and mental plane realities. There is absolutely no sense in painting future with great hope. The present scenario itself is a sort of guidance and a mirror image of the future. Running away from duties and blaming others for our plight has become a routine tendency for almost all which leads us nowhere but produces sumptuously self-pity and surely a temporary illusionary comfort. But one cannot escape from the facts of life. We may lie but this habit of hiding from others will also trouble our consciousness. The solution is to accept everything without alteration by a thought process and looking at everything in the world as an opportunity. The precarious condition of humanity is mainly because of its incapacity to handle the freedom in the world. In turn, unfortunately it produces only anxiety and inhibition. There is no direction as such nor any well defined purpose. Many have gone to the extent of criticizing Existentialism as not fit enough to be labeled as any sort of Philosophy. It is also said that this attitude is nothing but a neurotic escape. Preserving a solemn silence was a common practice among many philosophers particularly when the subjects like nature of God and his connection with the day to day happenings came forth. Owing to this most of the religio-philosophical writings looked impressive only in print but their value in practice remained doubtful. Somehow metaphysical concern became more important than the real living conditions of man. For existentialists the latter was of utmost importance and that is why the terms like justice, frustration, negation, freedom-personal and general were pronouncedly brought forward. Thankfully existentialists whether theistic or atheistic could dare to use philosophy directly for the benefit of humanity and prove its approach as one of those that try to guide for living in a world controlled by no particular discipline or rule. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), the French physicist, mathematician and religious philosopher in his short life span indicated genuine concern for human existence when he said, " When I commenced the study of man, I saw these abstract sciences are not suited to man, that I was wandering further from my own state in examining them than others in not knowing than...I think it is a good thing not to probe the theories of Copernicus; but this... it is vitally important to know whether the soul is mortal or immortal!"⁷



VII. PRAGMATISM

This philosophical approach may be considered as not only a total deviation but almost a revolt against the theoretical ideologies. It is sad that most of the people are satisfied and convinced by the rosy picture presented in theories with the help emotive language stacked with hopes. The practical consequence is ignored at the cost of the likely disappointments and sufferings. When subjected to the test of validity in routine life, many of the much publicised theoretical assumptions collapse instantly. In short, such impractical ideas which are in circulation must be dismissed in the interest of humanity. An ideal state with regard to any concept is certainly good if it is reachable and later usable as described. Otherwise it all sounds like the result of wishful thinking only. Further its dangerous consequence is a total misguidance to the society. There is no sense in adopting abstract principles knowing fully well that in practice they cannot stand the harsh realities of life. Therefore, the chief aim of Pragmatism had been to check the efficacy of the concepts or hypotheses or theories presented before the masses. They cannot and also should not be accepted just because they are traditionally revered or have some religious/mythological background. They have to be real and serving our interests and needs. Therefore, many times it is our temperament which is responsible for the happening of the events. It would always be wise to know our limitations on both the planes, i.e. Physical and Mental. Generally we accept the former but regarding the latter, it's our ego which intervenes providing a falsifying picture. William James who classified temperaments on the basis of Toughness and Tenderness of mind put it very bluntly as, "The history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments."... He means that the conclusions of Philosophers come more from their personal biases than any subjective findings. Their theories, perceived as "Tough-minded" or "Tender-Minded", are a reflection of their emotional makeup and basic view of the world."⁸ William James found that the greater percentage of people being unhappy is due to the lack of purpose in life. Obviously a purposeless life which goes mechanically, at any point can enthuse human mind. It is only the wise people who are happy because their life is directed towards a specific goal which so well defined for them. William James first being a psychologist understood the knack of keeping self happy is only through holding on to a sense of belonging for a worthy aim or purpose in life. Therefore, higher purpose is the main requisite in life. At times for an onlooker the purpose pursued by us may not give any justifying reason, yet getting oriented towards it is necessary. His famous quote, "Action may not bring happiness but there is no happiness without action" indicates that unless we are in the path of the pursuit of happiness, we cannot achieve it.

VIII. CONCLUSION

A fact which even Aristotle endorsed that everyone has his/her own choice to good life. The selection of a pathway for the same depends on one's own temperament and personality as a whole. Obviously there is no standard formula or route suitable to all. Had the early Philosophers or Religions provided a single universal truth to match all temperaments the topic of discussion would never have cropped up. Philosophers and Psychologists alike with a rational outlook have been insisting on the very fact that there is no uniformity in Nature itself and therefore expecting all as equal is a wrong conclusion. It is not possible on any parameter. Therefore the majority would taste failures in an attempt to gain happiness and literally torture self. The behavioural sciences have understood this reality and owing to that suggested various pathways which could help the seekers. Although many criticize wealth, status and close family relationships as never the ultimate sources of happiness, yet one has to accept the fact that they do have a sizeable potential to evolve happiness though not in a complete measure. They are surely the certified contributors to happiness in their own capacity. Finally leading a meaningful life is of utmost importance. On strict perusal we realize that most of the philosophical Isms do recommend practical wisdom as an essential component for gaining happiness. Life has many shades. It is highly improbable to satisfy the demands of every shade. Therefore, when an overall view is taken, it becomes mandatory to pick up or follow an Ism suitable to our age, needs and the goals fixed up. Aristotle's stress on Eudaimonia which is usually equated to happiness, definitely requires our efforts so that the resulting product or a by-product could be happiness. It is, however, sad that idealistic schools have flighty ideas which no doubt have earned a great deal of appeal from the masses but cannot withstand the realities of life. There is absolutely no sense in blindly following any Ism or providing any passage to the extreme approaches like Pessimism and Optimism. Knowing and then accepting the world as it is needs courage and should remain the main focus. Later on combating with the adverse forces would mean almost a project. Therefore, Melioristic attitude grossly silences the restless mind and Pragmatism assists in eliminating theoretical judgements which have no practical results as claimed. Similarly Stoicism encourages the followers to neatly draw a scheme for living while Philosophical Pessimism slightly with Existentialistic viewpoint exposes the transient nature of the World we live in. There are two types of forces which cause uneasiness and unhappiness. From Arthur Schopenhauer's



view it is our Willing process which is internal and circumstantial, that are from outside. To tackle with the former an exclusive moral platform with confidence is needed while for the latter it is necessary to deal with a pragmatic outlook only. Therefore every Philosophical Ism would definitely help us but a fact to be always remembered is that we have to take the initiative, responsibility and practice the principles. It is ever our responsibility to manage complacency despite the opposing force is always on its toes. There are many other factors too, to contribute to the agony faced by commoners. Scientifically speaking there is no motion without friction. So every act is bound to face resistance. Every driving force has to combat with an opposing force. Therefore depending on the situation it would be wise to get equipped with workable Isms than having merely knowledge which cannot be applied anywhere. At the same time, one has to use every Ism with its ideology quite sparingly, separately and of course on time!

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