On the Sat of Upaniṣadic Philosophy

by

Kumataro Kawada

I Introduction

One of the two main problems for the fundamental discipline of Buddhist philosophy, adhi-prajñāśikṣā or prajñāpāramitā is, at present age, the comparative study of Buddhist and European philosophies. With much time and labour, I have ascertained that the European philosophy is fundamentally two philosophies, that of τὸ ὄν and that of ὁ ὢν, though it is seemingly manifold or onefold and that the Buddhist philosophy is one from the view-point of its fundamental truth, though it seems to be just so many philosophies as there are different schools. The European philosophy is, generally speaking, knowledge of being and as such it has four fundamental problems, which are systematically related to each other, namely those concerning being, becoming, truth and characterizing designation. From the view-point of these problems the European and Buddhist philosophies have been scrutinized comparatively. And it was found that the two philosophies had proposed very different solutions of the problems. 1) Τὸ ὄν is physis and ὁ ὢν is hyper-physis. Therefore these two are different from one another, though the two may be expressed with one and same word being and thus many philosophers have overlooked the fundamental difference between the two. And the Buddhist philosophy insists on “na sadasat”, i. e. neither being nor non-being. The “na sadasat” is identical with pratityasamutpāda, dependent origination, which is the fundamental truth of the Buddhist philosophy. Thus the truth of dependent origination *is* or *exists*, because the entire Buddhist philosophy is constructed upon it. 2) As to the becoming, the philosophies of τὸ ὄν and of the Buddhists affirm the fundamental law of “ex nihilo nihil”, while the philosophy of ὁ ὢν does not accept it and insists

on “ex nihilo cuncta”, i. e. creation out of nothing. 3) The truth of the European philosophy is objective, though the “objective” has two meanings. The truth of the philosophy of τὸ ὄν is objective, because it pertains to the nature, which is found outside of the human being or is indifferent to it. The truth of the philosophy of δ ὦν is objective, because it pertains to the supernatural being, which is quite different from human being, and which has made out of it the ultimate aim of its creative activity. On the contrary the truth of the Buddhist philosophy is subjective through and through, because it pertains to the citta, mind, which is the being of every one of us. 4) The characterizing designation of the philosophy of τὸ ὄν is ontologia, physica or metaphysica. That of the philosophy of δ ὦν is hyper-ontologia, theologia or metalogica. To designate the Buddhist philosophy, a new word “metethica” should be coined.

It is indeed, so to say, comparatively easy to find out these differences, but they pose a difficult question: is there a third philosophy in the universal history of philosophy, which should play a role of mediator and make possible the mutual understanding of these different philosophies? I think, it would be the Upaniṣadic philosophy, the first principle of which is “sat”.

II Concerning Being

The Upaniṣadic philosophy posed the question, what was in the beginning, in order to find out the way of liberation from human existence as saṃsāra.⁽¹⁾ It will solve the problem of saṃsāra and of liberation from it with the first principle. There are answers such as “Non-existent was this in the beginning”⁽²⁾ and “There was nothing whatsoever here in the beginning.”⁽³⁾ If one interpretes these passages in their context and consults Śaṅkara’s commentaries, one attains the insight that the non-existence and the nothing are not what was in the beginning, and what is sought is “sat”, being. As to this point Uddālaka Āruṇi says most definitely, that in the beginning this was being alone, one without a second.⁽⁴⁾ Therefore the Upaniṣadic philosophy may be called the philosophy of sat, i. e. being.

Now, from the view-point of our concern the sat has following attri-

butes. 1) It is what thinks and is blissful, namely saccidānanda. 2) It is called brahman, in so far as it is the first principle of all beings and existences viewed from outside. And it is called ātman, in so far as it is the innermost reality of every one of us. The identity of brahman and ātman is insisted upon, because the liberation from saṃsāra consists in it. And this is the wisdom of Śāṇḍilya.⁽⁵⁾ 3) Both sat and brahman are grammatically neuter. In so far, the sat is equal to τὸ ὄν. But brahman, which is sat, is masculine, when it is in the rank of creator and is not brahma, but brahmā, who is also called Īśvara. In this case, the sat is “san” which is adequately translated into ὁ ὦν.⁽⁶⁾ 4) Śiva is identified with brahman, which is sat. In this case, the sat must be “san”, ὁ ὦν.⁽⁶⁾ In later ages, the same Śiva is matched with Umā,⁽⁷⁾ who is identified with her mate. In this case the sat must be “satī”, ἡ οὐσα.⁽⁸⁾ 5) Brahman is the inner controller of all that exists and is the intransgressable law of all saṃsārins.

Now such being the sat, a) it is evident that the philosophy of sat has something in common with the philosophy of τὸ ὄν. But the former has not the theory of ideas, which both the philosophy of τὸ ὄν and that of ὁ ὦν have, though the nāma of nāma-rūpa is similar to the ἰδέα. b) And also it is evident that the philosophy of sat has something in common with that of ὁ ὦν, though there is much difference between Śiva, the creator and the creative Trinity.⁽⁹⁾ Thus one who is well-versed in the European philosophy can understand the Upaniṣadic philosophy, if one does not shun the labour to make oneself acquainted with the literatures of the latter. And this holds true in the contrary case. c) The Buddhist philosophy of “na sadasat” behaves itself critically against the sat, which is the first principle. Thus, he who is well acquainted with the philosophy of sat, can understand the philosophy of “na sadasat”, if he bears in his mind the critical attitude of the latter. d) Lastly, as to the law of inner controller, the sat has something in common with τὸ ὄν, ὁ ὦν and the “na sadasat”. The physis or ἰδέα has the import of law. ‘O ὦν is said to be “lex aeterna”,⁽¹⁰⁾ eternal law. The pratītyasamutpāda is the law of causality. But of course the implications of each one of these laws are different.

III Concerning Becoming

The sat, which is brahman, becomes many and all existences, using one fourth of itself as matter. In this sense it creates or rather projects (sṛṣṭi). This becoming is coming into existence of the universe, which continues to exist for some time and is destroyed in due time and is absorbed by the brahman without rest. And the becoming, etc. are repeated infinitely. Therefore the universe is the wheel of brahman or a tree of saṃsāra, the root of which is on high and the top is beneath. And the meaning of the becoming, etc. consists in play or amusement of brahman. I. a) This Upaniṣadic creation is similar to the emanation theory of Plotinus. Therefore, he, who can understand the Neoplatonism, can understand the philosophy of sat. But he must be cautious, because the emanation theory is different from pari-ṇāmavāda or vivartavāda. b) The Upaniṣadic theory of becoming is different from that of the materialism of the philosophy of τὸ ὄν, because the sat is pure consciousness. It is also different from the theory of becoming, which is posited by the idealism of the philosophy of τὸ ὄν, because the efficient and material causes are one for the Upaniṣadic philosophy. c) But the philosophies of sat and τὸ ὄν prefer unanimously the fundamental law of becoming of “ex nihilo nihil”. That the Upaniṣadic philosophy does so is evident from the fact that Udāraka Āruṇi has rejected the non-being and asserted the being and that brahman is said to become many existences using one fourth of itself as matter. The “one fourth” is merely figurative and the import consists in the “ex nihilo nihil” and in the transcendence and immanence of brahman. II. The theory of becoming or creation of the philosophy of sat is quite different from that of the philosophy of ὁ ὢν. a) The latter prefers the fundamental law of becoming of “ex nihilo cuncta.” b) The creative Trinity is indeed the Reality, but in creating all things it does not use a bit of its reality as matter and the creation is creatio ex nihilo. c) Therefore it is utterly transcendent to the created things, while the sat is transcendent and immanent at the same time. d) The identity of efficient cause with material cause is denied by the philosophy of ὁ ὢν,

because He creates even the first matter out of nothing. e) Hence it reproaches the philosophy of sat for pantheism. But the reproach is valid only within the sphere of the philosophy of $\acute{o} \acute{\omega} \nu$ and it should not be applied outside the sphere of it, because it has nothing to do with the sat, whether it is called god or not. The sat is above gods and is their origin. And such sat is no misconception of $\acute{o} \acute{\omega} \nu$. f) Thus it is improper to translate $\varsigma \varsigma \eta \iota$, visarga, etc. into creation, because $\varsigma \varsigma \eta \iota$, etc. are rather projection. g) Lastly, the play or amusement, which is the import of the becoming of Upaniṣadic philosophy, might not be acknowledged by the philosophy of $\acute{o} \acute{\omega} \nu$, which sees in the universal history the history of salvation. III. The philosophy of “na sadasat” has in common with the Upaniṣadic philosophy the fundamental law of becoming. But the former has criticized and rejected the concept of sat which is the first principle. And also the theory of non-ego of the former might have resulted from the criticism of the ātman-theory of the latter. To be concise, the philosophy of “na sadasat” denies the being as the first principle and apprehends the becoming with the law of pratyāsamutpāda, standing from time immemorial. Thus it is the philosophy of radical phenomenism and not that of substantialism. Its negation of sat implies, therefore, the negation of $\tau \acute{o} \acute{\omega} \nu$ and $\acute{o} \acute{\omega} \nu$, as substance and first principle.

IV Concerning Truth

“Being is truth”; “truth is adequacy of thing and of intellect”; and “truth is that which makes the being known.” Such abstract propositions may be affirmed alike by all these philosophies. But viewed concretely, the differences cannot be overlooked. They shall be considered under the aspect of the fundamental proposition: being is truth. I. a) The being as $\tau \acute{o} \acute{\omega} \nu$ is physis, which is found out, so to say, outside of the human being. In other words it is not taken out from within the human existence. Thus it is objective truth. b) The being as $\acute{o} \acute{\omega} \nu$ also is found out outside of the human being, but it makes out of the human existence the ultimate aim of its creation. Never-the-less, it also is objective truth. c) On the contrary,

the truth of “na sadasat” is taken out from within the sentient being, a part of which is human existence. It cannot be found out outside of the sentient being. Thus it is subjective truth. II. The secret meaning of the sat consists in this, that it is satyasya satyam,⁽¹⁷⁾ the being of being or the truth of truth.⁽¹⁸⁾ And when it is said that in the beginning was brahman or ātman,⁽¹⁹⁾ the Upaniṣadic philosophers observe all existences from outside and find in brahman or ātman their first principle. In so far the truth is objective. But when it is said that ātman is not this, is not this, or that that thou art, the Upaniṣadic philosophers dive deep into the innermost spot of every existences, especially of man as saṃsārin, and find the first principle of them in ātman. In so far the truth may be said to be subjective. And Śāṇḍilya’s wisdom consists in the complete identity of the two truths, though there is the contention that ātman or brahman and individual soul are equally eternal.⁽²⁰⁾ Thus the truth of sat has something in common with that of τὸ ὅν, of ὁ ὦν and of “na sadasat.” And the sat can be a medium of their mutual understanding. III. However, considered exactly the fundamental truths of these philosophies are different from each other and can not be artificially synthesized or unified by an abstract principle. The characteristic of the truth of τὸ ὅν consists in “Es”,⁽²¹⁾ and that of the truth of ὁ ὦν in “Du”,⁽²²⁾ and that of the truth of sat in “Du” and “Ich”. The truth of “na sadasat” is characterized by neither Es nor Du nor Ich, but it is, in regard to ātman,⁽²³⁾ the truth of the womb of two non-ego of tathāgata or suchness which is made manifest by the voidness of two ego.⁽²⁴⁾

V Concerning Characterizing Designation

If the above mentioned with regard to being, becoming and truth is true of the sat, the philosophy of sat is brahmavidyā or ātmavidyā and it has no necessity of any other characterizing designation, just as the fundamental discipline of the philosophy of “na sadasat”, which is prajñā-pāramitā or adhiprajñāśikṣā, has not. But the latter has been called metethica to be distinguished from the European philosophy. From the same purpose the fundamental discipline of the philosophy of sat also should be designated

metethica, because the objective of the brahmavidyā or ātmavidyā is the same with that of the Buddhist philosophy: liberation from saṃsāra. a) Thus the philosophy of sat cannot be designated physica or metaphysica. And in this case, the Neoplatonism is excepted from among the philosophies of τὸ ὄν, because it was influenced by the philosophy of sat. b) The brahmavidyā seems to have something in common with the theologia, the fundamental discipline of the philosophy of ὁ ὢν. However, if one attains the knowledge of the difference between θεός and sat, one cannot designate the philosophy of sat thelogia. And again it is not metalogica which is speculative theology according to G. W. Fr. Hegel.

Thus it is necessary to coin a new word metethica to characterize the philosophy of sat, just in the same manner as to the philosophy of “na sadasat”. However, one cannot overlook the identity and difference between the two philosophies, even though they are designated by the same word metethica. While the one is ātmavidyā, the other is, so to say, nairātmyavidyā. But the gnoseologic principle that one who knows brahman becomes brahman is, as to its form, the same with the gnoseologic principle of prajñāpāraṇitā, because the prajñā as nirvikalpajñānam is equal to and identical with its object, pratītyasamutpāda. There is no knowledge there owing to the cessation of mental actions and speech, just as Yājñavalkya says that if one has gone to it, there is no knowledge.

VI Conclusion

I have here considered comparatively the four philosophies within the limit of ontology and gnoseology, the fundamental disciplines of philosophy. If my aim had been attained or at least the role of a third philosophy of the Upaniṣadic philosophy had been suggested, the objective of the essay would have been realized.

And pursuing the line of such a study many points have come to be noticed. Among others, 1) if the fundamental truth of the philosophy of “no sadasat” is misconceived or misapprehended, this philosophy can readily be transformed into that of sat. And the misapprehension consists in this,

that the pratityasamutpāda or cittam, i. e. mind or vijñānam, i. e. consciousness is taken for substance. And such misapprehension is alluring, because man is by nature prone to substantialistic thinking. And misapprehensions of such sort are often observed. 2) And even if one misapprehends it and makes out of it “non-being” or “nothingness”, this philosophy cannot be transformed into the philosophy of sat, which has definitely rejected the non-being. And the concept of non-being or nothingness is very far from being the fundamental thought of both philosophies. A philosophy which has non-being as its fundamental thought is the Taoism of Lao-tze. The non-being of his was assimilated to “na-sadasat” around the end of twelfth century by a Chinese priest of Rinzai-Zen school. And since then the false assimilation has had a deplorably confusing influence, which must be repugated, nothing to say of misconstruing the “na sadasat” as nihilism. 3) The Pure Land school of Buddhism is said to be similar to Christianity. But the similarity is merely superficial. And if one dives deep, one will come to find out the fundamentally different concept of “na sadasat” and *ὁ ὢν* and one will have to have recourse to the philosophy of sat as mediator of their mutual understanding. It is not enough for the purpose to be merely a genuine and sincere Buddhist or Christian.

Documentation; (1) Kaṭha, I. 3. 7-8; Śv. VI. 16; BU. IV. 3. 33-IV. 4. 1-25. (2) Tait. II. 7. 1. (3) BU. I. 2. 1. (4) ChU. VI. 2. 1-2. (5) ChU. III. 14. 1-4; Śatapathabrāhmaṇa, X. 6. 3. (6) Śv. III. 1-4; I. 7-16. (7) Kena, III. 12. (8) Mahānirvāṇa Tantra, ed. by A. Avalon, IV. 4-6; XXIV. 112-122. Cfr. Saundaryalaharī, v. 1. (9) Augustinus: De Vera Religione, VII. 13. (10) Augustinus: De Libero Arbitrio, I, XIV. 30; XV. 31. 32; XVI. 34. Cfr. DCD. X. 7. (11) BU. I. 4. 10-17; ChU. VI. 2. 3-4. (12) ChU. III. 12. 6; Kaṭha, II. 2. 9. (13) Śv. III. 2. Cfr. BS. I. 1. 2. (14) Śv. I. 4-6. (15) Kaṭha, II. 3. 1. Cfr. Bhagavadgītā, XV. 1-5. (16) BS. II. 1. 33. (17) BU. II. 1. 20; Maitrī, VI. 32. (18) BU. I. 4. 10. (19) BU. I. 4. 1. (20) Cfr. BS. II. 3. 42. (21) Śv. II. 15. (22) Śv. II. 14. (23) Laṅkāvatāra, ed. by B. Nanjyo, p. 79. (24) 佛性論 (A Treatise of Buddhahood by Vasubandhu), cfr. Taisho, vol. 31, p. 794 a. (25) Muṇḍ. III. 2. 9. (26) Madhyamaka-Kārikā, XVIII, vv. 7,9. (27) BU. IV. 5. 13-15.