

A Critical Study on the Buddhist and Kantian Approaches towards Epistemology with Special Reference to '*Madhupinḍika Sutta* and *Critique of Pure Reason*'

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Introduction

Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge) has been derived from Greek two words '*episteme*' and '*logos*' to mean the study of knowledge in philosophy. Knowledge is given a prominent role in any field of study and the ways we construct and interpret the knowledge are seen having immense differences to each field. Nevertheless, we are able to observe some similar observations there have been interpreting the human process in which knowledge is constructed in history. However, Buddhism and Kantian viewpoints regarding epistemology are considered as a volcanic two philosophies in history of philosophy to have given a highly philosophical base in constructing knowledge. Buddhism gave a novel background to knowledge changing existed social system into a more prominent situation in human history. Before the Buddha, knowledge had been interpreted in different ways and a great validity of gaining knowledge was given to religious scriptures and to almighty god-powers. The Buddha entirely changed all kinds of interpretations regarding the knowledge construction stating that humans construct the knowledge based on their 'six senses' (including mind as a sense organ) and they must be responsible for what they experience through senses. In this regard, both reason and experience play an important role together with the 'Mind' in Buddha's view. This Buddha's exposure is well defined in the '*Madhupinḍika sutta*' of Majjhima Nikāya. Further, the '*Madhupinḍika sutta*' notices the psychological framework of the sense knowledge (*Indriyañāna*) that is formulated due to one's signs of the past, future and the present starting the contact of sense organs with the external world and thus it ends up with *papañca* as it is the last ground of the sense perception. Thus in this process of sense knowledge the Buddha too emphasized that both reason and experience are similarly important instead advocating one side alone is adequate to construct knowledge.

Immanuel Kant is a well-known German philosopher of 18th century who represented a transforming era of western philosophy from Modern to Contemporary era. His major thesis was to reconcile the pre-existed two different theories concerning the theory of knowledge namely Rationalism and Empiricism. This each approach in epistemology, in Kantian sense, does not provide adequate interpretations as to understand how knowledge is indeed gained or constructed. Therefore, Kant gave a new viewpoint as the Buddha did in eastern world long ago. Kant's approach is also having the same intervention to this norm and he advocates that reason is highly demandable in

constructing knowledge while experience is supportive to it. Hence, he suggests that sensations alone cannot create a knowledge since they are supposed to be raw or meaningless percepts of the external world. As his first Critique provides, these raw and meaningless data become percepts with the help of reason and also with both of time and space. As suggested by empiricists, mind is not empty in its original form since it has time and space. However, thus after the mind is filled with these raw and meaningless materials they have to be mingled with the 'a priori forms of understanding' which are said to be four in number as Quantity, Quality, Relation and Modes. With the help of these four and other twelve categories of understanding of these four, those raw and still meaningless materials get conceptualized then percepts become concepts. Using these concepts, we build propositions and they are claimed to be 'units of thinking' in Kantian philosophy. These understandings are then supposed to be phenomena (phenomenal world) of one's own experience.

Research problem

This research paper would be further presenting a critical and philosophical analysis to understand the Buddha's and Kantian epistemological influences over the subject field of epistemology in philosophy and how this each philosophy touches the actual demand in contemporary philosophy and science.

Objectives

Kant, in his firstly compiled book the '*Critique of Pure Reason*', brings his epistemological interpretations to explain that our knowledge is constructed through 'five senses' by amalgamating both reason and experience to have phenomenal understanding varying from that of Buddhist approach while Buddhism is more conveniently speaking about six-senses bases including the Mind to have *papañca* (phenomenal understanding by conceptualizing). In these two philosophies, if observed carefully, can be seen some phenomenological similarities on the construction of human knowledge although there are differences too in each method.

Theoretical Underpinning and Empirical Evidence wherever Necessary

Theoretical drownings in defining and explaining the subject related issues will be directed in relation to the topic discussed above and critical and analytical based logical investigations may be further made over showing the findings and arguments to be more evident wherever necessary.

Methodology

Since this is a philosophical inquiry, this depends entirely on a method of literal as well as a critical investigations basing on the original and secondary scholastic works done by several academicians in relation to the topic. For that, analytical and critical evaluations will be used to discuss the matters further in detail.

Conclusions

However, Buddhist *papañca* now seems to have clearly a negative advocacy and it is noumenal based teaching in other words, it requires us not to have such kinds of phenomenal proliferations and it is a hindrance of gaining the ultimate goal of Buddhism.

Kant does not go further and says we cannot know the exact reality of things due to these limits of mental formations and we are just the agents who try to see the things as our mentality creates with the help of time and space. Anyhow, these both in the way presenting the external world into our senses are having similar connections to certain considerations. And also these two suggest a clear epistemological viewpoint to understand the means of knowledge in constructing our worldly knowledge.

Thus our empirical knowledge, according to Kant, is a reconstruction of what we experience in our daily life. In other words, our experience is a distortion of the true appearance of the external world and it is due to the limits of our sensations. This can be seen well-compared to the Buddha's notion of ignorance (*avijjā*) giving rise to the misunderstanding of our perception of the world. Hence, to see something without ignorance is to see the empty nature of all things.

Keywords: Buddha; Kant; Knowledge; Sense Perception; Phenomena and Noumena

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