PROBLEM OF BELIEF-ASCRIPTION

The next problem of belief is that of belief-ascription. In "Knowledge and Belief," N. Malcolm says that ascription of knowledge depends in part on having grounds for assertion. It may take two forms - ascription of belief to others and that to oneself. It may appear at the outset that self-ascription of belief is of a different kind and much more correct than the other-ascription. The reason is that everybody has direct access to his or her own introspective field. But on closer scrutiny, it is revealed that the difference between the two is a difference in degree only, not in kind. As the nature of the two types of ascription are not foreign to each other, they are to be explained by the same model. To be specific,

when we consider a case of other-ascription of belief, viz. 'Mr. X believes what Mr. Y says' where Mr. X and Mr. Y are different persons, we virtually consider the model of explaining a case of self-ascription by replacing Mr. Y by Mr. X in the same example. Self-ascription therefore can be introduced as a kind of other-ascription of belief. Hence it appears that it is better to start with the problem of other-ascription of belief. One thing is important to be remembered here. Belief may be treated as a disposition to behave, or habitual pattern of behaviour, but ascription of belief to any person - be it oneself or any other else - it is sufficient to make observations upon the person alone.\footnote{This point has been mentioned by A. C. Danto in Analytical Philosophy of Knowledge, p. 82. To quote him, "... if a belief is a mental trait, observable solely on account of m's infallible reflective introspection, then m and m alone can say with certainty what he believes and that he believes it. Or if belief is a habitual pattern of behaviour, ..., so that m is in no specially privileged, and perhaps even in an unfavourable position, and must, as you and I, read his beliefs off the surface of his behaviour, it remains m alone upon which observation must be made in order to certify ascriptions."}

4.1 PROBLEM OF ASCRIPTION OF BELIEF TO OTHER PERSONS

It is a fact that when we ascribe a belief to somebody, the ascription is based either on his verbal evidence or his bodily behaviour. Prof. Ginsberg draws our attention to two groups of reasons for belief-ascription. One deals with the process of belief-generation, the other with the process of
effectiveness of beliefs in bringing about particular behaviour, state of the behaviour.

Let us consider the first reason. Here we distinguish between two types of belief - simple and sophisticated. We can give two examples of ascription of simple beliefs to a person and to a mute animal viz. a cat. It is highly controversial whether ascription of belief to a mute animal is possible at all, but we shall refer to it in chapter 5. In this context, we only can say that a particular non-verbal behaviour of a cat cannot but be a clear evidence for a particular belief entertained by that cat.

The first case is that of my friend Sraboni who looks at a picture depicting a woman with a particular hair-style and comments that such a hair-style now-a-days is obsolete. Now, the belief (we shall call it Bl) is that the woman in the picture has a particular hair-style. In this case, we can say that the belief Bl is generated as a result of her looking at the picture.

The second case is that of a cat which comes close to its master and moves its tail every morning. All these are signs of pacifying the master. This non-verbal behaviour allows us to ascribe a belief to the cat, viz., it believes that its master will give some food. In this case we can simply say that it is the past experience of the cat of having food from its master in the morning that generates its belief of having some food.
There are sophisticated beliefs which can be ascribed only to person with linguistic capacity, viz., the belief that India is considered by many to be a nation faced with the problem of lack of national integrity among the different states.

We may return to the case of Bl. Prof. Ginsberg makes two important points here. First of all, the reason for generating Bl, i.e., in our example, the seeing of the picture is not to be equated with perception. Seeing the picture is to know the meaning of a picture, a woman, a particular hair-style etc. Seeing, therefore, involves classification, making judgements, etc.

Secondly, a linguistic evidence is a stronger evidence - though not the only evidence - for ascription of Bl. Here is however, a reservation regarding the claim. Experiments have been made with rats\(^4\), where rats jumping from a platform at a card with a circle drawn on it are given electric shock and those jumping from the platform at a card with a triangle drawn on it are given food. It is found after some arbitrary jumps, that the rats consistently jump only at the triangle card. This behaviour compels us to confer the power of discrimination between triangles and circles on the rats, resulting in the ascription of the concept of triangularity to the rats. There is a very high controversy as to whether such behaviour of

rats really allow such an ascription. This controversy cannot be discussed here for this will involve a digression from the point at issue, and we return to our problem with the remark that mere linguistic evidence is not the only evidence for ascription of a concept to somebody.

Now we know that Sraboni, after seeing the picture, has the concept of a picture. It is possible, we can say, for her to see what she sees as a picture. But we cannot claim that she really sees it as a picture, because there are the conditions of her attentiveness, absence of any anxieties and other conditions. So her PPEs have a specific ordering in order to permit her to see what she sees as a picture.

Her seeing also depends on other factors. If she is emotionally perturbed, or physically tired, or undergoes a type of nervous breakdown, then she cannot properly experience a particular PPE. Thus there are positive as well as negative determining factors relevant for her experiencing those PPEs. Having the concepts of a picture, a woman, a particular hair-style are the positive factors, whereas not-being psychologically upset, or not-being physically exhausted are the negative factors that make the ground for belief-ascription to Sraboni. This is the model of explanation of generation of belief.

The second evidence is the manifestation of some belief. In our example, the evidence for ascribing B1 is her comment which is the manifestation of the belief. Sraboni, in that
context, may do many other things, such as touching her hair, but touching the hair is not the relevant manifestation. She may have the habit of occasionally touching her hair during the whole day.

That her comment is the relevant manifestation is a claim which is to be proved. And to prove it, our course of enquiry is to explain the case, where Sraboni makes the comment and yet does not have Bl.

It may be the case that Sraboni shuts her eyes all along and has not seen the picture. But she makes the comment when she hears somebody describing the picture. It appears from the situation that as she has no PPE regarding the picture, she does not have Bl though she has made the comment. The fact remains that there is an intermediary step between her hearing the description and making the comment. This step is that of having Bl. Her Bl is generated by learning the comment of the co-viewer.

Regarding this belief-generation, it is also possible to give an alternative explanation. It may be the case that Sraboni hears no comment from others and at the same time does not look at the picture. Still there are other co-viewers who have the hair-style same as in the picture. Sraboni personally does not consider it to be fashionable. This particular sight of another viewer having that hair-style aches Sraboni's eyes, she shuts her eyes and makes the comment. This is possible only if she has the Bl. In the view of
Prof. Ginsberg, the former explanation supercedes the second, because there is an explanation of contrast between the hair-styles of an older age and the present.

This is the model for ascription of belief to others. We have already said that self-ascription of belief is just a variety of other-ascription. It is therefore time to deal with the case of self-ascription of belief which however has its own problems.

4.2 PROBLEM OF SELF-ASCRIPTION OF BELIEF

Before entering into the actual problem, it is necessary to make some comments. First of all, there is a distinction between a man's having a belief and his believing that he has that belief. For convenience, we shall later on refer to them as first-order and second-order belief respectively. It is obvious that self-ascription is found in the level of a second-order belief.

Secondly, belief is not a PPE. In fact, if we follow the Humean line of argument, it seems to be an easy task of explaining self-ascription of belief. To make the point clear, Hume explains belief as a thought which is present in the phenomenal field of a person, i.e., his field of consciousness. In so far as a person has direct access to his own phenomenal field, the self-ascription of belief also is a direct process, far from being incorrect.
But evidently there are objections against such an analysis from the point of view of belief in sleep where there is no consciousness and also from that of a post-hypnotic suggestion. So there remains the possibility of wrongly describing one's own PPEs - though the possibility is rare. In fact, having a belief cannot be equated with having a perception. So belief is not a PPE.

The third point to make here is that most of the empiricist thinkers concern themselves with the problem of belief regarding perceptual field, i.e., regarding the worldly objects. Some deny like Hume the existence of external world, some realists say that we have knowledge of the external world. Prof. Santayana calls the belief an animal-instinct. We however concentrate on the cases where beliefs are not regarding perceptual world. We may take an example of a belief (B2):

B2: One's father is the final arbiter on all matters of importance to the family (in which one grows up). We should keep in mind that we are concerned with the self-ascription of belief, not to the determination of the justifiability of beliefs.

I may imagine a conversation held among some of my friends. The conversation is about the family power structure and in this context, my friend Nandita makes the comment that she believes that her father is the final arbiter on all matters of importance to the family (in which she has grown up). Thus she ascribes B2 to herself. Now, mere assertion is
not the complete evidence for having a belief. An assertion is the manifestation of some belief or other, but it is not necessarily a manifestation of the belief concerned. So the question is: How Nandita's assertion that she holds B2 can be explained?

In order to answer the question we have to be acquainted with the concept of an operant belief. If there is some belief that is relevant in explaining some other belief or event, then the former is called operant belief. This relevance, in Ginsberg's view, is not causal-relevance. To quote Prof. Ginsberg, "... in cases in which a given belief would be called upon in bringing us to an explanation of a given phenomenon, was partially efficacious in bringing about that phenomenon, etc., I will talk of that belief as being operant." 5 We may again follow Ginsberg's treatment of the relation between the operant and generated belief. "Suppose that a given conjunction of beliefs, B_g (to suggest "generating beliefs") establishes a belief B_r (to suggest "resultant belief"). (B_g establishes B_r if and only if either B_g entails that B_r, or it is highly probable on the basis of B_g that B_r.) Given this, we can state our thesis as: A given conjunction of beliefs B_g can generate a resultant belief B_r if B_g establishes that B_r." 6

Now, it is easier to give an explanation of the generation of self-ascribed beliefs. Let us suppose that B_r stands for a

5. Ginsberg, op. cit., p. 52.
6. ibid., pp. 53-54.
self-ascribed belief, i.e., a belief that a man believes that p. If this $B_R$ is established by some $B_g$ which is an operant belief, then $B_R$ is generated. This is how self-ascribed beliefs are generated.

We may symbolically represent it as follows: Let $A$ be an individual and $B_A$ means all beliefs of $A$. Manifestations of $A$'s beliefs are represented as $\text{Man}(B_A)$. This $\text{Man}(B_A)$ may also generate beliefs, i.e., we have $B(\text{Man}(B_A))$. These manifestations are evidences both for themselves and for the claim that one has that given belief.

Actually, beliefs about one's beliefs are just species of belief. It becomes clear if we consider Ginsberg's view: "(T_g) If $x$ believes that $p$, then under favorable conditions, and unless there are some factors which prevent that belief from being manifested in the judgement that $p$, $x$ will, upon considering whether or not $p$, judge that $p$ (is the case)." Ginsberg shows that this 'p' may itself stand for the expression 'x believes that s'. The result is:

"(T_h) If $x$ believes that he believes that $s$, then, under favorable conditions, and unless there are some factors which prevent that belief from being manifested in the judgement that he ($x$) believes that $s$, $x$ will, upon considering whether or not he believes that $s$, judge that he believes that $s$." It proves that the same principle works in both cases, the principle of generation therefore is the same in two cases.

7. *ibid.* p. 56
8. *ibid.*, p. 56.
We can therefore trace the operant beliefs in our example in the following way:

(B3) There are many important discussions in the family of Nandita.

(B4) Nandita's father speaks a lot in those discussions.

(B5) Nandita's father makes long authoritative comments on those topics.

(B6) Nandita's father's comments are finally obeyed by all members of the family.

Now, these beliefs are caused by the respective events experienced by Nandita. Not only these, Nandita herself also has some wants, viz., a want to contribute to the present conversation held by friends. The total impact of the accumulation of (B3) - (B6) and the wants is the establishment of (B2).

If (B3) - (B6) are operant beliefs, then they jointly generate (B2).

Let us split the different steps. Nandita believes that she has (B2). 'Nandita has B2' is the first-order belief and her belief that she has (B2) is generated by the manifestation of the former. The manifestation of the first-order belief is thought or judgement. If the first-order belief is unconscious, then it has no direct manifestation. This first-order belief, by itself, is not sufficient for the generation of self-ascribed belief. The former generates the latter only through the medium of its manifestation, i.e., through its being operant. Self-ascription therefore depends on the nature of
the first-order belief as being operant or not.

There are various manifestations of the second-order belief. It may be manifested in the PPEs. One of its manifestations is the ascription of the first-order belief. This is how self-ascription of belief is explained. The next question is: What is the ground for correctness of self-ascription?

4.3 CORRECTNESS OF SELF-ASCRIBED BELIEFS

It is commonly held that the correctness of self-ascribed belief is due to the direct immediacy of the manifestations of one's own beliefs. When I ascribe (B2) to Nandita, I have to depend on the manifestation of her first-order belief. In addition, I have to collect various informations about her such that, it helps me to ascribe (B2) to Nandita. But regarding ascription of (B2) to herself, she is in an advantageous position to get a lot of information about herself. So self-ascription is more correct. Ginsberg remarks that both of us are in the same epistemological position, but in this context, she has epistemological priority. The more I get information about her, the more will be the possibility of correctness of my ascription of (B2) to her. There remains even the possibility that on the basis of maximum information, my ascription may merge with her self-ascription of (B2).

In fact, it all depends on the insight of the person who ascribes belief. Insight means greater grasp of the known
beliefs and better and stronger understanding of the original beliefs of the believer.

The only strong evidence against the correctness of self-ascription is found in cases of self-deception. Self-deception is a case where a man ascribes some belief to himself, while he actually does not have that belief. This wrong ascription is sometimes not deliberate. But it has reasons and here we meet with the concept of unconscious beliefs.

An unconscious belief is that which a person possesses, though of course not in the conscious level of his mind. It is a belief that a man refuses to accept as his own belief. The individual never asserts it, i.e., unlike other conscious beliefs, it is indirectly manifested in some other ways. It means, this manifestation cannot normally be recognized to be the manifestation of this belief. So it is never ascribed to oneself. The person finds some other beliefs to be connected with this distorted manifestation, beliefs which he does not really hold.

Explaining the causes of unconscious beliefs, Freud points out that some beliefs which are socially or morally inadmissible, cannot find an outlet in the conscious level of mind because of the fear of punishment. But they are actually possessed by the individual, and so are to be accommodated in the unconscious level of the psyche. These banned beliefs express themselves symbolically. This language of symbol is constructed by the mind without being known by the individual.
Freud refers to a process of repression in the existence of unconscious belief. The term 'repression' is familiar in the psychoanalytic theory. Ordinarily repression is not a voluntary process. It is an inner defense mechanism. It replaces a motive that is never gratifiable like similar gratifiable motives. The repressed motive is provisionally successful when the pattern of its gratification changes.

This is definitely a challenge to the correctness of self-ascribed beliefs. If self-deception can be properly explained to be a genuine case, then it affects the aforesaid correctness. The issue is therefore whether the assertion of a belief really proves the possession of a belief. We can pose our problem in this way: if cases of self-deception are explained to be genuine cases, then self-ascription is nothing better than other-ascription. There are two explanations to prove the genuineness of the cases of self-deception.

A. The First Explanation

In the case of self-ascription if the primary belief is itself the object of a secondary belief, then the object of the primary belief can be judged true. Let us consider \((T_j)\) as is found in Ginsberg's writings: "(Tj) If x believes that s, then, under favorable conditions, and unless there are some factors which prevent that belief from being..."
manifested in the judgement that s, x will, upon considering whether or not s, judge that s.  

To understand the tie between asserting or judging and possessing a belief, let us assume that A₁ stands for 'X judges that s' and A₂ stands for 'X believes that s'.

The claim of Tj is this: If x believes that p, then under such and such conditions, x judges that p is the case. Now, this p may mean some proposition in ordinary language such as 'this table is brown'. p may also mean 'I believe that this table is brown'. In both the cases, the same principle is working, i.e., A₁ entails A₂. But the principle of Tj is such that if p standing for the second alternative is the object of belief, then x judges that the table is brown, and not that 'X believes that the table is brown'. It means that X asserts or judges that the table is brown, but cannot judge whether X believes that the table is brown or X does not.

Here, A₁ does not entail A₂ and this is how the case of self-deception is explained. In self-deception, he asserts some belief while he does not hold it. Tj gives the explanation that in any assertion, what is asserted is the object of a particular belief, viz., 'this table is brown', but not the belief about a belief. In case where X ascribes the belief 'there is no God' to himself while he actually believes in God, Tj explains that he is here merely asserting that there is no God and this mere assertion never permits the claim that he believes that there is no God.

9. ibid., p. 69.
What the discussion attempts to explain is this: if assertion does not entail holding of a belief then so far as the correctness of belief-ascription is concerned, self-ascription is no more in a better position than other ascription. There is also a second way of explaining the cases of self-deception.

B. The Second Explanation

This second explanation differs from the former in three respects. First of all, here, in contrast with the former, there is a tie between asserting a belief and holding it. To quote Prof. Ginsberg, "In this 'A judges that s' and 'A earnestly asserts that s', both, either singly or jointly, entail, 'A believes that s'"10.

Secondly, this alternative has a presupposition that every case of self-deception is a case where the psyche is confronted with two mutually inconsistent beliefs. The third point rather is a corrolary of the second. It claims that the believer himself does not realize that they are inconsistent. It is therefore necessary to be acquainted with the nature of these mutually inconsistent beliefs. Keeping in mind the entailment relation stated before, let us follow Ginsberg's formulation of the notion of reactive belief in this context:

"If x judges that s, x believes that not-s, and not-s is an.

10. ibid., p. 69."
unconscious belief, then x believes that s, and s is a reactive belief." 11

"If x earnestly asserts that s, x believes that not-s, and
not-s is an unconscious belief, then x believes that s, and s
is a reactive belief". 12

There are many grounds, i.e., various decisions and judgments made by the believer so that we can very well ascribe the
unconscious belief to him in spite of the fact that he claims
to have the reactive belief and also shows manifestations of
that reactive belief. Ginsberg remarks that we do not have
either full control or full knowledge regarding our psyche
and accordingly, cannot lay down even the possible manifesta-
tions. Ginsberg criticizes classical rationalistic and classical empiricistic view that all contents of our minds are
directly accessible to our own introspection.

To take a concrete example, I may believe that my friend
Mitali tells me lie, which is an unconscious belief. I may
show various manifestations of this belief such as acts of
non-cooperation with her during the time I meet her. But in
this situation I want to ascribe another contradictory belief
to me, viz. 'I am very much sympathetic to her in all situa-
tions'. This is the reactive belief. I do not recognise those
manifestations of the unconscious belief, viz., the non-
cooperative acts as the actual manifestations of that unconscious
belief and I rather go far to say that those actions are odd

Freud says that unconscious belief is repressed because it cannot be permitted to come to conscious level to manifest itself. The reason is that, we are over-conscious about our self-image or the ego-standard. Ginsberg refers to Prof. Brenner who calls this repression a sort of forgetting. Forgetfulness is the failure of memory involving the loss of the power of recalling something known or learnt in the past. Forgetfulness is generally regarded as a liability, but in the context of immoral beliefs, it is rather an asset. So it is not totally a weakness of biological organism.

Freud believe in conservation of memory. So nothing is really forgotten, what is temporarily forgotten can be revived by the help of free association. So Freud's notion of forgetfulness is this: forgetfulness is voluntary, because it is due to unwillingness to remember. The biological explanation behind forgetfulness of physical pain is the need for retaining equilibrium of the organism. Psychologically the reason is that, we forget, because we want to forget. This is obvious when we remember our cheques but forget our bills.

Returning to our example, it is important to refer to Freud's notion of reactive reinforcement and reactive thought. To quote Freud, "Contrary thoughts are always connected with each other and are often paired off in such a way that the one thought is exaggeratedly conscious while its counterpart is..."
repressed and unconscious... repression is often achieved by means of an excessive reinforcement of the thought contrary to the one which is to be repressed. This process I call reactive reinforcement, and the thought which asserts itself exaggeratedly in consciousness and cannot be removed I call a reactive thought." 14

So there are contradictory thoughts and there is a need for repression of one of them, and the need involves reactive reinforcement. This process yields an uncomfortable position of having both an unconscious and a reactive belief.

Thus I actually believe that Mitali tells me lies and as it is an unconscious belief, I believe also that I am very much sympathetic to her in all situations, which is a reactive belief. This is how cases of self-deception are explained.

The result is, self-ascription is in no better position than other-ascription of belief. Actually, ascription of a belief - be it self-ascription or other-ascription - does not depend merely on the believer's behaviour, it also depends on the believer's verbal behaviour. In all respects, such ascription presupposes a sincere insight into human nature and prior knowledge regarding the person concerned. In this sense, even knowledge regarding one's own mind is not an advantage for that person, because of the complex character of human psyche.

14. Ginsberg refers to this quotation in Mind and Belief, p. 75.