

Private universities: A logical argument

How the 2004 election is shaping up in USA

PROF. AHMED JAMAL ANWAR

IN higher education, the importance of logic and philosophy can hardly be overestimated. Logic, which may be broadly understood as the science of implications, has been described by Russell as "the essence of philosophy." Formal (or symbolic) logic is closely related to electronics and electrical engineering, almost indistinguishable from mathematics, and plays such a pivotal role in computer science that logic has been described as "the octopus of computer science." On the other hand, although philosophers differ among themselves about the function as well as the definition of philosophy, it is quite frequently considered the "science of sciences." This means that philosophy depends on the sciences, and hence is a metascience, which means after or beyond science.

The word "metascience," however, need not necessarily be taken to be equivalent to metaphysics which literally means beyond physics and is a critical study of the nature of reality. One particular perspective to looking at the nature of this metascience is known broadly as the analytical approach that roughly defines philosophy as the critical analysis of the fundamental concepts and assumptions of the sciences. Thus, strictly speaking there is no philosophy as such, but only philosophy of some subject such as philosophy of physics, philosophy of biology, philosophy of economics, philosophy of law, philosophy of language, philosophy of art, and so on. Indeed, there may be as many branches of philosophy as the number of distinct disciplines. Thus if we conceive of the normative sciences -- the sciences of what *should be* in accordance with the standard specified for each science such as logic, aesthetics, and ethics -- as opposed to the positive sciences -- the sciences of what *is* as a matter of fact such as physics, chemistry, biology, and mathematics, we can consider philosophy of ethics, generally known as *metaphysics*, as a branch of philosophy and legitimately subsume it under the general category of the "science of sciences." The philosophical approach gives us a better understanding of science and sometimes puts a science on a new foundation or gives birth to a new science. Because of this interdependence of science and philosophy, it is often said that "philosophy without science is empty and science without philosophy is blind."

In the western curricula of higher education since the time of ancient Greece, logic has always been, and still continues to be, an integral part. Plato rightly understood that

education does not consist of merely pouring information into the minds of students. Philosophers of education nowadays warn us about the dangers of "information overload." It is commonly claimed, and I think justly, that we now live in an age of information. In modern societies there is a continuous flow of new, changing, and even conflicting information. Information is important. But merely piling up heaps of information can only create chaos and confusion. The exposure to the massive amounts of new information increases the importance of developing an ability to search, find, analyse, interpret, evaluate, and apply relevant information to the solution of our personal and professional problems, and the resolution of different types of conflicts.

One can very cogently argue that any discipline taught without

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combining it with a proper training in the basics of logic is an education that is grossly incomplete and inadequate for creating worthy citizens capable of understanding and practicing democracy. It is often said that any two countries having McDonalds do not wage war against each other. This is certainly true. But the reason why this proposition is true lies obviously not in the eating of McDonalds burgers, but in something else, like the existence of democracy in both countries. The practice of democracy, however, requires a mindset moulded by logic. The proper study of logic creates a capacity for critical thinking and argumentation which is so essential for asking the right question, analysing socioeconomic and political problems and issues, criticising faulty arguments, presenting sound arguments, and making the right decision. A logical bent of mind of the masses makes it possible to create and sustain a peaceful and prosperous society based on healthy competition as well as reciprocal cooperation for greater mutual benefits rather than mutual destruction! This should not, however, lead us to falsely believe that a democratic country will refrain from exploiting an undemocratic

country by not making a preemptive attack on it, for example.

Quite understandably, the colonial rulers did not consider it necessary to put logic in its proper place in the curriculum of higher education in our country. In spite of having enormous resources and maintaining a standard of living that meets all the material needs of modern life for the majority of people, countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait remain surprising examples of third world countries. It remains a painful as well as a shameful fact that though students, procession-mongers, and even many educators and policymakers in our country, as in other so-called developing countries, often talk about replacing the colonial system of education for creating clerks with an appropriate alternative system, they only grope in the dark. Even our vocational and technical education

seems to be designed in such a way as to make the graduates capable only of following instructions from their western counterparts. I believe that a very deep knowledge of language can only partially compensate for the lack of absence of formal training in basic logic. Utter neglect of English by some of the autocratic rulers after the emergence of Bangladesh coupled with the traditional absence of philosophy as a common core course in the curricula has led to many long term and devastating consequences for Bangladesh. We now have a serious shortage of well-educated doctors, engineers, educators, civil servants, and foreign service personnel. But the graduates of our universities when put in a western society with freedom, responsibility, reward, and punishment, can overcome their limitation and engage in creative activities with distinction.

The contents of courses, the needs of society, and the patterns of choice of disciplines always keep changing with the change of time. But logic, which is the essence and distillation of all human experience and science, remains the constant standard of knowledge. Nowadays one may have to change one's career at least once

during one's lifetime. This means that one may have to unlearn some information and learn new and different information. But the knowledge of logic that is the most important and constant tool for dealing with all sorts of information does not have to be discarded. This does not, of course, mean that new, more general, or more sophisticated techniques of proof are not being invented in logic.

It is important to ponder the following questions. Why do universities in western countries attach so much importance to philosophy as to make it a *compulsory* component of the curriculum for Bachelors Degree in *any discipline*, technical or non-technical? Why do some universities in the United States require students to complete a minimum of as many as *three courses* in philosophy for earning a Bachelors Degree in *any discipline* in the liberal arts and social sciences, in the physical and life sciences, and in engineering and medicine? Why do some universities introduced graduate programs *combining philosophy with* such subjects as medicine, law, literature, economics, political science, and business administration?

I would strongly advocate for the necessity of developing non-government universities in Bangladesh which, I believe, may offer a better chance for quickly bringing about the long-felt and necessary changes and reforms in our higher education. Among other very important reasons for having private universities are halting the brain drain, creation of jobs, and saving foreign exchange often spent for poor education abroad. The long-term success of the private universities in Bangladesh to be judged by their quality of education crucially depends, amongst other things, upon an inclusion of appropriate courses in logic and philosophy in the various degree programmes offered. I strongly recommend the teaching of at least one compulsory course in philosophy by a well-chosen and suitable teacher. If possible, students might be allowed some option in choosing more courses in critical thinking. A single course that I would suggest for universities in Bangladesh is the one that could be entitled *Reasoning and Communication*. Such a course would, I believe, develop a critical thinking capacity of the students and enable them to raise useful questions about the data, select the relevant data, analyse them, derive correct implications from them, and thereupon make the right decision. (Or similar courses under slightly different titles are extremely popular and widely taught in the United States.

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A.H. JAFFOR ULLAH

THINGS are looking good for Democratic presidential aspirant, Senator John Kerry and his running mate, Senator John Edwards. The political pundits in America have opined that the November election will be decided in the "battleground" or tossup states. The following are a few of the tossup states: Ohio, Michigan, Iowa, Missouri, Louisiana, Florida, and a few more. The inclusion of Senator Edwards on the ticket was a logical one because the Republican Party has made inroads in many southern states, which used to vote for the Democrats until the 1960s. Senator Edwards is a southerner; therefore he may pull enough votes in a few of those states to bring one or two to the Democratic Party in November. But what about those industrial and western states?

The new poll results published on July 24 do not bode well for President Bush.

Two new polls taken in key tossup state, Florida, where Al Gore lost by only 500-600 votes in 2000, found the race deadlocked in a three-way race. That indicates the independent candidate, Ralph Nader, could again steal enough to make a difference. In other words,

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neither candidate can be sure whether he can enlist the state in his column at this stage of the game. The Democrats have blamed Nader for helping Bush to win the state in which Nader managed to obtain more than 97,000 votes in 2000. It remains to be seen whether there will be a reenactment of the 2000 election this time around.

In the last presidential election, the northern industrial states went for Al Gore while smaller states overwhelmingly voted for the Republican ticket. Will the trend be the same in 2004? Many experts consider Pennsylvania (23 electoral votes) to be one of the "battlegrounds" states. Al Gore won this state four years ago. Will the state go Democratic this time?

leading Bush 50 percent to 42 percent, while Nader has 4 percent, according to a poll by the American Research Group. If this trend continues then Oregon may again go into the column of the Democrats.

According to a recent AP report, in Florida, a Mason-Dixon poll found Bush at 48 percent, Kerry at 46 percent, and Nader at 2 percent. A rival poll by the Los Angeles Times put Bush at 45 percent, Kerry at 44 percent, and Nader at 2 percent. The race therefore looks too close to call in Florida. It is going to be a real tossup state just like in 2000.

The Midwestern state of Ohio (21 electoral votes), is a swing state. This state has a perfect record as far as choosing the right

Right now Kerry is leading the state by only 2 percent. The readers should take note of the fact that any poll taken has a statistical error of plus/minus 4 percent.

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If Senator Kerry wins those industrial northeastern states, a few Midwestern industrial states, and the three Pacific states (California, Oregon, and Washington), then the only states he needs to wrap up victory are a few southern states. That is where Senator Edwards will come in handy. This is the strategy the Democratic Party is bracing for. Under this scenario, President Bush may win those smaller states in the South, Midwest, and mountain areas, but without carrying Ohio, Mr. Bush will run into trouble. The math is straightforward. Therefore, the election watchers should focus on battleground states such as Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Florida.

As they say, the election these days are fought in battleground states. It should be music to Mr. Kerry's ears that he is leading by a wide margin in one such tossup state (Pennsylvania). The election is more than three months away. There is no telling what damaging information may emerge for any leading candidate. If the economy improves significantly in the next three months, then the voters may go with the candidacy of President Bush. But if it remains as it is now, then there is a chance that Senator Kerry may come out victorious. Therefore, I for one would be looking at the economic data published by the Federal Reserve Bank and other governmental and private agencies. Also, the stock market performance may tell us the way the economy of this giant nation is heading. So far, market performance has been lackluster, which should give the Republicans a headache.

The 26th U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt once quipped, "The most successful politician is he who says what the people are thinking most often and in the loudest voice." In post 9/11 era the U.S. voters' mind is preoccupied with terror attack from outside. Messrs. Bush and Cheney are capitalising on it. Let us wait and see how this factor plays out in the next presidential election.

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Improving governance, performance and state of development

ABMS ZAHUR

THE most prevalent structure of public administration at the apex has been the organisation of government activities into a number of major departments. The structure of departments tends to influence decisions to which problems are "substantive" and also to introduce complex issues regarding the setting of priorities, allocation of resources and enforcement of coordination. Some countries have made efforts to resolve these problems by introducing superministerial departments. Some other countries have administrative units called "machinery of government" (organisation at the highest levels of administration under political direction) to settle these problems. However, the functions of these units have remained limited to dealing with minor issues such as allocation of new responsibilities among various departments and mediation of jurisdictional disputes among

departments. Some administrative analysts have observed that there is growing divergence between the emerging definition of the problems and issues of development, on the one hand, and the structure of the machinery of government, on the other. While development problems are increasingly viewed in terms of such matters as food, energy, stagnation, employment, quality of life, environment, human settlements, population and rural development, the structure of machinery of government remains organised in terms of classical departments. Changes in the content of public policies also create the need for revision of the machinery of government.

There are other considerations for changes in the machinery of government. To cite an example, there is a growing recognition of the need to promote the use of science and technology for development. However, for effectively pursuing of

this policy the respective machinery of government must include arrangements both for the elaboration and application of science and technology policies in general and for the design and use of specific technologies for various sectors. As most problems of development have international dimensions, it is necessary to incorporate in the machinery of government organisational arrangements to deal effectively with such problems. As there is no universally applicable criteria for organising the machinery of government, it is important that Bangladesh review its organisational structure at the apex to ensure that the administrative arrangements are commensurate with its aspirations, opportunities, resources and major concerns.

Area and administration: The local government and territorial organisation of a country generally pre-date the establishment of field offices by sectoral ministries. The growth of urbanisation also tends to make local government jurisdiction inadequate to deal with emerging problems. The commonly used approaches to tackle these problems are reorganisation and rationalisation of local government, regionalisation of development planning and administration and creation of development authorities. The role of local government in national governance in most of the developing countries (Bangladesh included) for various reasons, such as (a) overall scarcity of financial resources, (b) the tendency to concentrate the available resources on capital projects and in a few major cities, (c) reluctance of national authorities to share power, (d) administrative short-comings (of local governments), and (e) tendencies of industrial development and trained manpower to gravitate towards major cities. The effective involvement of local governments in national governance requires conscious and strong efforts through adopting measures such as decentralisation, allocation of greater administrative and financial resources to local authorities and introduction of incentive plans.

The phenomenon of depressed areas within nations poses special problems. Many countries have handled them through deconcentration of national offices, introducing special grants and subsidies and extending incentives for industrial growth with particular emphasis on building physical infrastructure. The efficacy of such measures to solve the problems of depressed areas however remains doubtful. More innovative

approaches for assuring a greater flow of financial and other resources for the development of depressed areas are urgently needed to bring them up to a par with the national standards.

Public enterprises and authorities: In many developing countries the organisation of public enterprises as public corporations has been the dominant approach. Although the public corporation as a device for implementing various development functions is still popular it is not without its problems. To some critics these have been used sometimes indiscriminately, particularly in non-industrial activities, to skirt the basic problems of reorganisation of public administration. Questions have also arisen about the relationship of public corporations to relevant functional departments and to legislative and political authorities. These bodies need rationalisation and clarifications to (a) establish criteria under which a function, programme or activity is to be organised, (b) formulate sets of standards about the organisation, (c) clarify the role in the national development process. The problems of para-statal bodies like joint ventures are even more complex in terms of their overall management and coordination.

Organisation of public services: The organisation of public services in many cases is literally a combination of hundreds of systems involving different classes, jurisdictions, specialisations, professions and remuneration systems. Current systems of organisation tend to impede allocation of personnel where most needed, to create inequalities and frustrations and to make it difficult to recruit and to accommodate persons with newly required skills and specialisations. What is needed is the rationalisation and redesigning of public service systems to (i) recruit and retain persons with requisite skills for the formulation and implementation of development programmes and plans, (ii) mobilise and allocate trained staff in accordance with development requirements and priorities, (iii) motivate public servants to put their best performance, (iv) avoid the dangers of bureaucratisation, (v) allow maximum use of nationally available expertise, and (vi) ensure congruence between organisational structures and patterns of public service systems, public management and the use of modern management techniques.

Historically, public administration has been more concerned with due process of law and legal techniques

than with the expeditious achievement of results. In fact, public administration has to function within legal frameworks and in full observance of due process of law. This is particularly true in matters affecting citizens' rights and obligations.

The advent of many commercial, industrial and economic activities in the public realm as part of the state's role in national development calls for public management capabilities that historically were associated with the working of the private sector. While public administration even in these instances must function within legal frameworks, there is considerable room for use of modern management capabilities of national systems. A variety of modern management techniques such as cybernetics, operations research, systems analysis, cost-benefit analysis, programme evaluation and review technique (PERT), critical path method (CPM), and behavioural science have come to dominate the management literature. Bangladesh also use such techniques but she should be careful as to use them within the constraints of public law and policies.

Many modern techniques are based on the use of computers. However, it would not be advisable to introduce them indiscriminately either because of their assumed prestige value or because of external pressure of one kind or other.

Project formulation and implementation: It is considered very important to improve considerably administrative capabilities to identify, develop and implement development projects. In case of major development projects many developing countries including Bangladesh frequently rely on outside consulting firms and enterprises. It is important that they build their own capabilities for the management of major projects to ensure effective negotiations and supervision even when the projects are actually carried out by outside contractors.

Regulatory administration: This has assumed new importance with the determination of developing countries to exercise effective economic sovereignty over their national resources, and to ensure that their use is in harmony with nationally desirable objectives. The regulatory systems will, however, have to be designed and constantly watched so that these activities do not become conservative or begin to create bottlenecks in the development process.

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