

# Perception, Conception, and Introception

## Part 2 of 2

Franklin Merrell-Wolff

March 1, 1970

This is a continuation of the discourse of last Sunday.

It is often inevitable that when we wish to produce a conceptual representation of a truth, or what purports to be a truth, that we have to use a schema of one kind or another. On the whole I tend to use a schema that is the natural expression of the Realizations upon which this philosophy is based; but at times I use other schemas, or correlate with other schemas, such as those of the Theosophical movement, or of Sri Aurobindo, and so forth. By schema I mean representations of the type of the seven principles of man. There is for instance, the organization presented in the book known as *Esoteric Buddhism*—there we have *Atma, Buddhi, Manas, Kama Manas, Kama Rupa, Prana, Linga Sharira*.<sup>1</sup> It is explained that the gross physical body is not properly a principle but an effect of these principles. There is also a schema used by the *Taraka yoga* which takes the form of *Atman, Karanaopadhi, Sukshmaopadhi, and Sthulaopadhi*. The *Karanaopadhi* corresponds to *Buddhi*; the *Sukshmaopadhi* corresponds to higher, lower mind, and *Kama*; and the *Sthulaopadhi* corresponds to *Prana, Linga Sharira* and the *Sthula Sharira* or gross physical body.<sup>2</sup> This one I have often been able to use as it fits my needs better than the sevenfold classification. It has this advantage—each of these *upadhis* can function, it is said, in independence of the others by a combination with the *Atman*. The *Atman* can combine with the *Buddhi*, or *Karanaopadhi*, and function upon its plane; or it can combine with the *Sukshmaopadhi*; and, finally, with the *Sthulaopadhi*, which would be a manifestation on this gross physical plane. There is also the implication, though this is not specifically said so far as I know, that this functioning could take place at the same time. This is useful for certain purposes.

Now, another schema that I have found useful is that employed by Sri Aurobindo. He classifies this way—that there is an entity which has three instruments. These three instruments are mind, life, and body, in descending order. These three instruments have two phases or aspects—the gross phase, that which is, functions in the external world, and a subtle phase known as the subtle world, the subtle vital, and the subtle mental. Then in addition to the correlation of mind with matter and with life and on its own intellectual plane, he classifies certain steps in mind above the head, as he calls it. These are higher mind, illuminated mind, intuition in its own proper sense, Overmind, and then, in the upper hemisphere, Supermind, which is not regarded as

---

<sup>1</sup> A. P. Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1912), 60-74. In this book, the seven principles are listed as: *Atma, Buddhi, Manas, Kama Rupa, Linga Sharira, Prana, and Rupa*.

<sup>2</sup> The schema to which Wolff is referring appears to be that found in H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Press, 1893), 181.

truly mental but from which the mental organs or instruments are derived and is defined as the activist principle of *Sachchidananda*.

Now, a study of the different schemas, not only these that I've mentioned but of others that one will find in the literature, reveals that it is not always easy or even possible to build a rigid correspondence between one schema and another. This, however, is not to lead to the implication that one or another is false but rather is the creation or development that grows out of a certain perspective. And even though they cannot be correlated, easily at least, they may be from their own perspective perfectly correct.

To illustrate the principle of perspective, we might refer to an event in the history of astronomy that was of premiere importance—the shift from what is known as the Ptolemaic system to the Copernican system. In the Ptolemaic system, the base of reference, or the system of coordinates that was assumed, was fixed with respect to the earth and then the relationships or motions of the planets and of the sun were given as they appeared from that base. This is perfectly valid procedure. The sun goes around the earth and so do all of the planets, but not in a simple curve, actually in patterns that are very complex involving epi-epicycloids and perhaps even elaborations beyond that. One would ask, is this a true picture? The answer is that if you take the base of reference fixed with respect to the earth, it is a true picture and it's one which we still use when we say that the sun rises or the sun sets, which implies that the sun moves. And from that base of reference of the earth, which is what we assumed, that is the truth of the matter. But we can establish a base of reference differently; we can make it fixed with respect to the sun and the plane of the ecliptic. The plane of the ecliptic . . . If, now, we ask the question, does the sun go around the earth or does the earth go around the sun, there is no intelligible or valid answer unless we know also the assumed base of reference. If we assume the base as fixed with respect to the earth, then it is false to say that the earth goes around the sun, for it is the other way around, the sun goes around the earth; and vice versa, if we assume the Copernican base of reference, it is false to say that the sun goes around the earth but true to say that the earth goes around the sun.

Now, what I wish to suggest by this is that in all of our speech, all of our thinking, we either assume implicitly and unknowingly or explicitly and knowingly some base of reference and our statements are true or false with respect to that base of reference. In careful thinking we have to bear this in mind. And that would explain why, from one base of reference in approaching metaphysical or transcendental Truth, it appears one way to one seer and another way to another. If there is not agreement in the schemas that result, that does not imply necessarily that one schema is false and the other true. It does imply that the truth of either is relative to the base of reference or perspective from which it is approached. There is no conceptual statement that is nakedly true in the sense of being absolute. It is true relatively only—relative to some base that is either assumed or explicitly formulated. This is an important point to bear in mind when reading any literature whatever and specifically in the field of the higher religious philosophy.

Now, in what I said last Sunday, I spoke of three forms of cognition: perceptual cognition, or sense perception; conceptual cognition proper, which is of the type of which mathematics is the supreme expression; and introceptual cognition. The point that I wish to make is that this is a threefold schema. The whole thing as a statement is a conception, a conception that means something, to be sure, and in part means something or points to

something beyond conceptuality. So what we were talking about was really the conceptual view of the perceptual order; second, the conceptual view of the conceptual order; and third, the conceptual view of the introceptual order. The perceptual order, as it is in itself, is a matter of sheer experience and has no words at all. The introceptual order, as it is in itself, has no words either. It is a matter of direct Realization. But if we wish to communicate, we have to make use of the conceptual system for this purpose. It's important to bear in mind that the conceptual statement is not the reality, but the conceptual statement is a representation from some base of reference of the reality. It is a representation that points to the realities, but these non-conceptual realities are not to be confused with the conceptual representation of them.

This point in connection with the correlation between the conceptual order and perceptual order has been discussed at some length by Korzybski in his *Science and Sanity*. He introduces the term 'referent' as the meaning in the perceptual order of the words that are used. He denies the existence of concepts, a point on which I wholly disagree with him, and says there are only words. Thus, for example, if we take the word-concept 'table', what does it mean? We could try to give a conceptual definition by saying—take a plane surface produced by some reasonably resistant material such as wood, plastic, metal, or whatnot held horizontally and supported by three or more vertical posts which we call legs and that is what is meant by a table. But if you'll note, we haven't got, so far, a perceptual existence which is table. If you wish to step from this conception to the perceptual existence, then you do not use a conceptual definition, but you step over and, say, take your hand and touch the table and we'll say that is the meaning of the word, or concept, table. Now, what you have done is to step out of one order into the other when you touch the table and get a sensuous contact with it, you've crossed a certain barrier. You cannot conceptually think in terms of the sensation that the table produced.

Now, we have learned how to make the step across from the conceptual order to the perceptual order in our whole domain of applied science, of practical working, and so forth. We've learned how to make that leap from the one order to the other. Now, the bearing of this is that there is an implied step from the conceptual order to the introceptual order and that is where our principle concern lies.

Now, we could define the table, for instance, in the conceptual form that I gave and if we want to ask, go further, we might say, what do you mean by horizontal? So you work up some definition of horizontal. What do you mean by a material substance such as wood, plastic, or metal? You'd have to define that. What do you mean by three or more posts pointing up vertically? And you'd define that. And you'd have other terms introduced, you'd have to define those, and so on, so on until you become in a series that may have no end or it may be circulatory. You may ultimately reach the point where you defined your term by reference to one of your first terms. In that case you get into circular definition; you never get out of the conceptual system to an actual table.

Now, we don't have a problem of this kind in our relationship between the conceptual and the perceptual orders; we have worked that out. We do have it, however, in connection with the step from the conceptual order to the introceptual order. There is in this relationship the need also to step out of the conceptual order if you are to have actual Realization of the introceptual order. And here is where the student may be caught

for a long, long time. He may listen to a philosophy that is intended to orient the mind toward the introceptual order; it stirs in him a process of conceptual thought, and that can go on indefinitely. He finds ideas becoming clarified. He may spend years elaborating his thought, and he has not stepped out of the conceptual order. He has not attained Realization of the introceptual order. Now, a certain amount of this elaboration of thought can be helpful, but it also can become an end-in-itself which leads nowhere. One finds himself sealed in, as it were, to the field or zone of conceptual thought. He may even circulate in there and get nowhere. But the thinking can be valid in the sense that it leads to a key conception for that individual which can be the leaping-off point into the introceptual order.

Now, in my own experience the breaking of that vicious circle of conceptual rumination, which had lasted for many years, consisted in what you might call a deliberate non-completion of a proposition. I'd been laboring for some years with the identification of the Self—I am this—and I projected it as an object, a conceptual object before me, and I realized that that conceptual object which I called the Self was actually not the Self because I here was cognizing that there. So I took this I here again and put it out before me, and again I realized, in time, that I was cognizing an object out there which I called the Self but I hadn't gotten at the real cognizer. It was rather in the nature of an infinite series of regression that led nowhere, did not lead out of the field of concepts. I finally realized that the Realization of the Self is represented not by the statement, I am this or I am that, but I am. Refuse to complete the proposition or judgment, but just sink back into the "I," radically stopping the conceptual process that would have finished the sentence, and the Door opened. I found a way of leaping across the barrier between the conceptual order and what I later found to be the introceptual order.

This is a critical point. You're crossing a point of discontinuity, or a point of hiatus, which exists at the border between the conceptual and the introceptual. There is a point where thought must stop if one is to realize. Thought may be an aid, but there is a time when if it does not stop one is locked in to a conceptual circling that does not break through the walls. There's a point where it must stop in order that there may be a breakthrough. The critical problem in yoga, this is *Jnana* yoga, is to determine how that breakthrough can be made. And it seems that the favorable condition for one individual may be different from that for another individual. But there must come the time where he breaks away from his thought series. It need not mean, necessarily, the literal stopping of thought; it could mean, however, the disregarding of the thought, a sort of division in the mind where the continuing more or less autonomous thought process is set to one side while the central focus of the attention is turned toward that higher zone which is the domain of authentic transcendental or spiritual consciousness.

There have been those who've insisted upon the careful definition of our conceptions. I'm sympathetic with this point of view, but it can be carried too far. One can achieve a false and deceptive precision. Rigorous definition produces, if carried through completely 100 percent, leads to a condition that is completely locked in to the conceptual order. A completely defined term or concept does not supply the base for leaping into the beyond. Complete definition means you understand certain conceptions in the light of other conceptions and not in the light of something beyond the conceptual order. Thus, for our purpose, we have to use terms that are only partly defined, only

defined by indicators rather than by comprehensive statements. We might distinguish, thus, between two orders of concepts—the completely determined concept, such as those used in mathematics, and the dangling or pointer concepts which are not completely defined but attain their fulfillment in the higher order, not within the conceptual field.

My most important dangling or pointer concept is the concept of ‘consciousness.’ This is a concept cannot be defined; it can be indicated. Oh yes, the dictionary will substitute the word ‘awareness’, or the word ‘perception’, for it; but then you ask, what is awareness and what is perception, and so you get driven back and you haven’t found out what consciousness is. To really get an indicator of what consciousness is you have to refer to experience. Now, I’m speaking in terms of ordinary consciousness, at this moment—what we are when we wake up as contrasted to what we were before we awoke when sleeping, or when under the influence of an anesthetic drug—that difference is consciousness versus unconsciousness. Now, this is indicating consciousness by reference to an experience, not by simple conceptual definition. What we are more and more as we come out of the anesthetic sleep, that is consciousness.

Now, I think this is enough to indicate to anyone what I’m talking about when I speak of consciousness, but this is only ordinary consciousness. This is the consciousness that flows from my self—any “I”—toward some content, the world about. I’m aware of the various objects about, which I call the world. The awareness is the consciousness. The content of that consciousness is that world. Incidentally, that world that I’ve contacted is only a psychological image. Whether it has corresponding to it something that is non-consciousness and non-psychical, we cannot know, for the act of knowing is drawing it in to the psychological field, and a non-consciousness existence out of that psychological field is an eternally unknowable. Because of that, in my philosophy I dispense with the conception of a non-conscious thing corresponding to the psychological image because there is no way of knowing it, there’s no way of defining it—since knowing involves consciousness, since defining involves consciousness. The non-conscious somewhat is—we cannot say even that it’s non-existent or that it is existent. All we can say is that the notion of it is meaningless, and therefore we dispense with it.

But in the development of the Realizations that led finally to the High Indifference, it became necessary to alter the meaning of ‘consciousness’. At the highest level, consciousness came to mean a self-existent Consciousness which persisted by itself and was not the function of an entity that was conscious; but, rather that the entity was a projection or emanation out of that Pure Consciousness. Now, the conception of consciousness has become greatly changed from that with which we started. We started with it as a, in the sense of our ordinary consciousness, that which we have when we wake up from sleep or from the anesthetic drug and which appears to us as a function of a conscious being aware of a world of objects; and we arrived at the conception of consciousness, now using the same word, as self-existent and as the source of all worlds and of all selves. Consciousness in this latter sense becomes the supreme principle, a principle higher than any God whatsoever. The conception of the gods does not become therefore meaningless, but the conception of God or gods must be viewed as derivative. The gods and God may be realized as experience—mystic experience. But it is not the highest mystic experience. On a higher level, all gods and all selves are seen as

derivative. And as I've said before, this is the key to the understanding of the teachings of the great Buddha and of the other Buddhas who followed him.

Now, the point here is that the word 'consciousness', if it were defined conceptually, in the complete sense, would no longer serve us for our present purpose. We get a sort of partial grasp of what we're talking about by my reference to the difference between sleeping and waking up, but don't define it beyond that. Word defining doesn't help. On the stream of consciousness, one attains. We have to introduce the notion that there are different kinds of consciousness—maybe many kinds—and that the relationship of one kind of consciousness, that we might call *A*, to another kind of consciousness which we might call *B*, would be such that to *A*, *B* would seem unconsciousness, and also vice versa, that to *B*-consciousness, *A*-consciousness would seem to be unconscious.

Thus the blanket term of the 'collective unconscious' of Dr. Carl G. Jung is valid up to a point as expressing a relationship of another order of psyche with respect to our ordinary order, which is the relationship between a knower and a known. But it would be incorrect to say that this unconscious, in itself, is a non-conscious state. It would be truer to say that it is another kind of consciousness and can be realized, in partial or even in complete degree, as consciousness by the appropriate yogic steps. 'Consciousness' is my great term—the central one in all the philosophy—but a term which cannot be defined. And if anybody defined it, it would cease to be a useful term. It would be a term actually contained by the real consciousness that defined it and not the Truth itself. This is my fundamental message.

That will do for today.