

Psychology, Philosophy, and Religion

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We were recently in Phoenix, and we found that some of the young people, and some who were not so young, had undertaken a task that was of immense value to me, namely, a mimeographic preparation of a manuscript that I have had for many years called *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object*—a work of about 200,000 words. And now we have some volumes finished. But we had one meeting down there connected with this particular work where the main purpose was to interest one of the professional professors of philosophy at the University of Arizona at Tempe to give a review of it—something which he said he would be glad to do.¹ On the last two Sundays we have been presenting the material that was given that evening. It was in a sense a philosophic jam session in which only three of us really participated, although there were several philosophic students present. But they seemed to be a little bit embarrassed by the presence of one of their professors. I've been thinking this morning of a point that I did not take up at that time that might well have been taken up, and we'll add it to the tape. The discussion that night was wholly in the philosophical field, as was entirely proper as this particular volume is oriented primarily to the professional student rather than to the general public as was the case with *Pathways Through to Space*.

Consider three zones of human interest or concern, namely, psychology—primarily in the sense of depth psychology—philosophy, and religion. Let us use a method that was introduced by the mathematician Boole and represent by closed curves—circles, ellipses, or what not—the zones represented by these three fields so that one would represent all of philosophical concern, another all of psychological concern, and a third all that is of religious concern. Obviously there would be a certain overlapping of these closed figures. There would be fields in which philosophy and religion overlap, psychology and philosophy, also psychology and religion; and there would also be a portion in which all three fields are in common. And that I submit, that zone that is in common to all of these fields covers all that is of supreme concern and interest to humanity in the ultimate sense. I do not regard the transitory concerns of making a living or of having the conveniences of physical life as in any sense corresponding as to the most fundamental concerns of man, for the most fundamental concern of man goes far beyond this life here. One who has not prepared for the transition which we call death, while living, has failed in his most important task here, for our limited life, generally of less than 100 years, is a picayunish portion of the whole with which our consciousness will have to deal. These concerns are ultimate concerns and they're very much the business of philosophy, depth psychology, and religion. As I conceive it, the whole life here in animal bodies in this world is merely a prelude to something of well-nigh infinitely greater importance. Here we find no terminal values, only transitory, instrumental values. Nothing here is valid as an end-in-itself; all

¹ Wolff is here referring to Professor Robert Rein'l at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona. See audio recordings "Conversation with Franklin Merrell-Wolff, Dr. Rein'l, and Others," parts 1 and 2.

here achieves meaningful value when taken in connection with that which lies beyond life in animal bodies.

Now, the concern of psychology and philosophy and religion varies. It corresponds to different dimensions, as it were. Psychology, being a science, is concerned with judgments of fact, that which we call existential judgments. In contrast, philosophy is concerned with judgments of meaning; what does a certain factual sequence really mean? And religion, as I see it, is concerned primarily with judgments of value. This, I think, we can see very easily, for what is of greater value to a human being than such considerations as the solution of the problem of *suffering*, the solution of the problem of *bondage*, and the solution of the problem of *guilt*? Solutions, typically, of these problems are offered by three outstanding religious movements or manifolds. First of all, Buddhism is oriented to the solution of the problem of suffering, and it is achieved through a transformation known typically as Enlightenment; and, indeed, this is the fundamental meaning of the word 'Buddha' itself. The identification of the word with a particular entity in the past is derivative and not primary. And the solution to the problem of bondage was offered by Shankara in the Vedanta, where the goal was a liberating Realization. And, finally, in the Christian orientation you might say that the primary wrongness was viewed as a sense of guilt, a sense of sin, and release from this guilt was the objective sought in the Christian development. All three religious outlooks deal with a different facet of the conception of wrongness, and they all offer solutions. I submit that nothing could be more valuable to any human being than the resolutions of problems of this sort.

Now, in my field of thought and development I have not been concerned with a one-sided interest that was only religious, or only psychological, or only philosophical, but one that combined all three aspects. Incidentally, I'm not much interested in religion as a matter of ritual or as a matter of arbitrary dogma, but I'm profoundly interested in religion as a process or a way of achieving freedom from suffering, freedom from bondage, freedom from guilt. Everything else is subsidiary. Everything else is of value only insofar as it achieves these ends. The conception of a divinity is not fundamental. The conceptions developed in theology are not fundamental. They're entirely secondary to the achievement of freedom from suffering, freedom from bondage, and freedom from guilt.

Now, as I said in our meeting in Phoenix in which we discussed the background that led to the writing of *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without and Object*, our treatment was wholly philosophical, thus wholly concerned with the problem of *meaning*. This is part of the whole, and an important part as I concede, but it appeals to a more or less specialized discipline. Relatively few among the human whole are deeply interested in philosophy; and I hoped, and still hope, that the book, *Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object*, may be seriously referred to in philosophic lectures and philosophic seminars so that the subject of Realization may be given serious attention. A central thesis of that volume is that the two forms of cognition with which are commonly familiar and which commonly make up the subject matter of our science and philosophy, are not the whole form of possible cognition. These two are sense perception and conceptual cognition. And it was proven long ago that with these two forms of cognition alone, it is impossible to have knowledge of a metaphysical subject matter. I introduced

the conception of a third organ, which I call “introception.” It lies latent in most human beings but can be awakened. It is awakened by what we know as yoga, which may be regarded as the very soul and heart of religion itself.

Just as an interlude or as a footnote I might say that the etymological consideration of the word ‘yoga’ and of the word ‘religion’ shows the close affinity of the two conceptions. ‘Yoga’ comes from a root meaning yoke, as for instance, in ordinary parlance, the yoking of two oxen, but it is applied in the sense of the uniting of the orphaned human here with his other self, the other part of himself which has a divine nature. Etymologically, ‘religion’ means binding back, and the binding back is to the Root Source from which we and all things come. So, that essentially the two words mean the same thing etymologically. Yoga is, thus, really the heart of religion, which has had many overgrowths, many of them not good, many of them leading to consequences that are anything but desirable; nonetheless, for the service of the highest good of man, religion provides the way.

Now, philosophy is concerned with anything that is thinkable in a meaningful sense. The problems of yoga and the problems of religion are a valid subject matter of philosophy. But philosophy deals with these subjects—as with other subjects like all science, all social problems, all of the problems of logic, and so on—it deals with these subjects in the sense of conceptions and does not go beyond that. For example, let us take three fundamental religious conceptions, namely, renunciation, self-giving, and sacrifice. The philosopher would be concerned with the ideas, but not the practice. I mean philosopher *qua* philosopher. Of course the individual human being who is a philosopher might also be very much concerned with the practice, but he would not in that case be *qua* philosopher. This is a technical way of speaking that’s characteristic of philosophy. He might be interested in the study of the importance of these three attitudes that are so important in religion. He might write discourses upon them and trace their importance in history. But as a philosopher he would stop there. If he applied these three attitudes of renunciation, of self-giving, and of sacrifice, he’d be stepping beyond the field of philosophy proper.

Now, incidentally, this is the sort of thing that the academician dreads. Typically he is perfectly willing to study any subject matter whatsoever so long as he can stand apart from that which he studies and not be personally involved. Unless you’re personally involved, it is not religion. When one actually renounces, doesn’t merely consider what renunciation means, but actually, himself, renounces, faces the pain of it; when he actually gives himself, and doesn’t merely entertain the idea of giving himself, but actually gives himself; when he renders a sacrifice, either in the ordinary sense of the term or in the etymological sense of ‘rendering sacred’, and does not restrict himself to merely considering the meaning of this, but actually does it; then he has become a religious man, however much he may also be in other parts of his total being a philosopher or a psychologist. It’s that that is crucial. One may know the theory of yoga completely, may have read every text that is to be found in the literature, but it will only be an idea, an ineffective idea, unless it is put into practice; and part and parcel of the putting into practice is the actual acts of renunciation, self-giving, and sacrifice.

And incidentally, all of this must be done, when it is done, because it is well, it is good, or seems to be good to the individual to do so. He must do it because that it is good, not because he hopes to get anything from it. And that is crucial. If one can attain to this position, he can forget about the techniques of yoga, all of the formal parts. He will have the essence of yoga—self-giving 100 percent, seeking nothing, but perform in these ways because it is good and right and for other reason. But, he who can do this will someday know that there is a return—a feedback in our modern terminology—that is far beyond his greatest hopes, or expectations, or even his possible comprehensions.

Now, that's the spirit of religion, and that is necessary if that which you have studied in the psychological sense or in the philosophical sense, is to become an effectuation. Religion is fundamental to effectuation. Philosophy and psychology stand as instrumental with respect to this.

Now that covers what I had to say this morning, and let's finish up with the other tape.