

Meaning of the Paradox

Part 2 of 2

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We have presented so far one part, though a critical part, of the philosophy of Buddhism. Let us now turn our attention to a contrasting position given in the Hindu religious discipline known as the Vedanta, especially as developed by Sri Shankaracharya. It is characteristic of this discipline that the orientation is to the permanent within the impermanent, and the objective is classified as Self Realization. The Self, or the *Atman*, here is the supreme object of the yogic search. We have in the background this fact, that there is a Realization taking the form of *Atman* is *Brahman*. We may think, therefore, of the *Atman* and the *Brahman* as two approaches to the same reality—the *Brahman* being the objective view and the *Atman* the subjective view. The yoga here divides into two primary contrasting approaches; one is to the *Brahman*, the other to the *Atman*. The form which is oriented to the *Brahman*, to what we might call the divine object, is known as the *iti-iti* form of yoga; while that which is oriented to the *Atman* is known as the *neti-neti* form of yoga. In the *iti-iti* form, there is a progressive inclusion of everything that can be an object of consciousness as part and parcel of the ultimate reality. It is a systematic elimination of exclusiveness, of selectiveness. The diametric opposite form of yoga is a radical exclusion of everything that can be an object of consciousness, and it takes the form: I am not that which in any case stands before me as an object. The search in this case is for an ultimate which never stands before one.

Now, as contrasted to the Buddhistic position, the orientation here is to an existent, not to simply a stream of consciousness. There is implied in the idea of the permanent, something that is substantial, something that does not change, that persists through all vicissitudes, and that in this something or somewhat, there is the base in which inhere all phenomena whatsoever, all becoming whatsoever. We might call this a substantialistic form of philosophy, for there is in the very conception of *Brahman* and of *Atman* the sense of entity and of soul.

In this case please note that in this statement, I know *Brahman*, or I am conscious of *Brahman*, the value is given to the subject or *Atman*, or on the other hand to the object or *Brahman*, but not upon the tie between, the *conscious of* or the *knowing*. In the Buddhistic statement, it is an orientation to the stream of consciousness, not to the content or the subject to consciousness. This leads to a very different philosophic statement in certain respects. I might point out in passing that the *Brahman* is not to be considered as having the same significance as the God of the Christian or the Yahweh of the Israelite, for in the latter case we have a notion implying an entity that produces a universe and yet stands apart from that universe as something extracosmic. The *Brahman* is indeed part and parcel of the universe itself and therefore is not to be regarded as a God in our familiar Western understanding of the term. It is actually much more akin to the God concept in the philosophy of Spinoza where we have an identification of God with the substance, the root-substance, from which all is derived. Nonetheless, I think it is true

to say that the Vedantist conception is more easily grasped by one who is brought up in Western religious training than is the Buddhistic statement which we considered previously. Therefore, it is less necessary to develop this conception at length than was true in the case of the Buddhistic philosophy.

Now we're prepared to consider how these two points of view come into a form of a paradox. I will refer you now to a certain body of writing which was published in what was called the third edition of *The Secret Doctrine* and there listed as the third volume, which must not be confused with the third and fourth volume referred to in the Introduction by H. P. Blavatsky. Nonetheless, the material contained is material that was written by H. P. Blavatsky, and in it there is a section consisting of about eleven chapters called "The Mystery of Buddha" and is based upon certain texts derived from Tibetan sources. In this it is asserted that after Buddha had reached the end of his life, he had determined to return again to the very *Brahmins* who had persecuted his own disciples even in his lifetime as Gautama. In this case, there was an incarnation of a very special sort which I will not enter into technically since I have done so elsewhere,¹ but it is known as a *Tulku* incarnation, and in that case he was known as Sri Shankaracharya, who is the founder of what is called the sixth Indian philosophy, namely, that of Vedanta.

Now, the position formulated is that which I have so briefly outlined, and thus it would appear that we have the same entity, the one that we have known as the Great Buddha, or the Blessed One, in one case formulating a philosophy which is a radical form of positivism, and in the other case, a philosophy that is oriented to the conception of something substantialistic, namely, the *Brahman*, and also involving the conception of soul in the sense of a permanent *Atman*. Off hand, one would think of this as a contradiction, as a complete incompatibility. But stop and consider that here we have something that grows out of the very nature of dualistic consciousness itself. If the ultimate is truly one, or monistic, but it appears to us in the evolution in a dualistic form—and in fact all of our possibility of knowing either in the perceptual or conceptual sense is based upon the principle of contrast, thus we cannot know up save in contrast to down, we cannot know evil save in contrast to good, or vice-versa, and so on through all our cognitions whatsoever—the implication is that no statement in terms of any particular form, and all statements must take particular form, can be the whole truth. There is that which is the complementary other of any statement whatsoever; that the truth is a combination of that which to us seems as incompatible. Therefore, we might say that the ultimate meaning intended here is not simply a one-sided positivism, nor, on the other hand, a one-sided substantialism, but rather a positivistic-substantialism—a contradiction in terms and therefore a paradox. This is the whole point of the discussion of this third form of the paradox.

Now, I'll proceed to a fourth form which comes up in my own experience. That which we are concerned with here is a form of the yoga of knowledge as I am acquainted with it. It is not a discussion of the problems of the yoga of devotion or of action. Furthermore, there is the question of what is the status of the yoga of knowledge in the whole hierarchy of the different yogas. I follow the evaluation given by Shankara which takes this form: the yoga of devotion and of action is there viewed as propaedeutic to the

¹ See the audio recordings "On Tulku," parts 1 and 2.

yoga of knowledge, that they both lead to a position where one can take over into the yoga of knowledge, and that the yoga of knowledge is the only ultimate yoga. This, I will point out, is quite contrary to the evaluation given by Sri Aurobindo, who, if anything, gives priority to the yoga of devotion, but seeks to achieve what he calls a synthesis of yoga which involves the use of all three forms. I am not attempting to decide which view is more correct, simply that the position taken by Shankara is the position that naturally seems valid to me. Shankara says in effect that knowledge, in the sense of *jnana*, is not simply a means to Realization or Liberation, but is Liberation—an important point. But as we shall see, knowledge in this sense differs in important respects from the knowledge that we speak of when operating exclusively in the conceptual field.

In this yoga, the very most fundamental technical process, at least in so far as I know it, consists in a self-analysis, and the self-analysis aims at the isolation of what I truly am as distinct from everything else. The principle is this: that I am not any object whatsoever that can stand before consciousness. I am exclusively that which is the subject to consciousness. Now, the preliminary analysis is simple enough. I am not the body, for the body is obviously an object before me. I am not the mass of feelings, for they are something which I can represent and cognize. I am not the thoughts, for they too are something which appear before me, though they are subtler forms of objects than the other two. I'm not any of these things. And ultimately we come to the question of the ego; and the ego may be regarded as that which would be formulated as "I am I and none other." It is that which can be offended. It's that which can become inflated. It is a "me" that is distinct from all other selves. And we may accept Jung's statement that the ego is the center of our relative, personal consciousness which rides upon the back of the universal unconscious. Now, this egoism can be identified and can become an object before me. I can note peculiarities in it. I can recognize the egoism of others. So, therefore, it is a subject matter on which we can have discourses, upon which we can place judgments. But what is that which stands behind and in a subtle way perceives egoism? Clarity of analysis will show it is not the same as the ego, but a true subject of which the one function as we deal with it, which we can perceive, is the power to be aware, the power to cognize.

Now, right here is the greatest difficulty in the yoga of knowledge, and a point where I was stuck for some years, for I tried to carry the analysis to this true Self, and in effect, I placed it as a representation before me, and then had to note that this representation was not "I," for I stood behind and cognized the representation. And then one here is tempted to project again another representation, and can thus enter into an endless regression, and yet the Self is not yet found until one finally realizes that I am that which can never be an object before consciousness. Self-knowledge, therefore, is not cognition in the ordinary sense of conceptual or perceptual cognition. It is not that which stands before consciousness in being cognized. It is not and never can be an object before consciousness. To be sure, I may construct a symbol which represents the Self, but the symbol is not the Self, it is merely a representative of the Self.

Now, here we come to a very difficult transition, how do I know that which is never an object before my consciousness? For this reason we have a paradox, that the end of the yoga is the Realization or Knowledge of that which can never be known; and that is a paradox. How do you know that which in essential sense is not knowable? The little step here that broke the paradox I find really impossible to describe, but I may suggest

something of it: that it is a sort of checking or stopping the outward flow of the cognitive movement from a subject to an object, an inversion of the process, and one's just sinking back into the Realization that I am that and always have been that which I seek and therefore there is nothing to be attained, and drop the search at that moment. As it turned out, that was the key that immediately opened the door; and then all the rest followed—all of the delight, all of the wonder of a realm in which all is the most satisfactory and beautiful state that one can imagine and much more than any imagination could conceive. It was the key in my experience. I cannot generalize and say that this is the way others have gone, but this is the way that I know, and the final moment was the breaking of a paradox, the paradox of reaching the knowledge of that which cannot be known—cannot be known in the sense that it is never an object before consciousness, which indeed is what we mean ordinarily by knowing. It is a different kind of knowing. It is a knowing through identity. It is a knowing through being that which one knows. It thus is a radical dissolution of the process with which we are concerned.

Another formulation of this paradox can take the following form. There is reason to say that the Realization of the Self, of the *Atman*, is the equivalent of the attainment of *Nirvana*, for indeed Shankara does say that to realize the Self is to awaken to *Moksha*, and *Moksha* is but another name for *Nirvana*. But *Nirvana* is that which can never be attained, for any cause set up in the universe of objects, the *Sangsara*, or the evolution, produces effects which lie wholly within the universe of objects, or *Sangsara*, or the evolution. Therefore no amount of merit, no amount of study, no amount of meditation as a process in the field of the universe of objects, or *Sangsara*, or the evolution, will open the Door of *Nirvana*. Only he who is a *Nirvanee* already can enter the state of *Nirvana*. The problem so stated appears as though it were impossible. But there are two possible answers here: one is that the practice of merit, and of study, and of meditation, and of penetrating into the meaning of things, ultimately leads one to the guru who already is a *Nirvanee*, and he, by initiation, or what we would call “induction,” opens the Door. The causes set up, thus, lead one to the guru who has that power; but there is the other possibility, that one can actually dissolve the paradox, even without the help of the guru, though that calls for an enormous subtlety.

As a sort of postscript, or incidental thought, I wish to make this suggestion, that the Door to Self Realization or the state of *Nirvana*, is only opened by the action of a triple key, or perhaps we might say by the use of three keys, analogous to the use of two keys for the opening of a safe deposit box in a bank—one key owned by the customer and one by the bank. These keys would consist of the fruits growing out of previous lives which form a possible key for the opening of that Door. Second, the key under the control of the other side, something that rests in that which Dr. Jung calls the collective unconscious, something that Aurobindo would call the Divine, and something that the Buddhists might call the action of the Universal Buddha. And the third key is that which the *sadhaka* himself wields as the result of self-effort. And the Door opens only after the three keys have been turned. Thus it might happen that one had prepared his own key adequately and the Door would not open yet because the right cycle had not rolled around. But I think we may feel certain that since in this day the need for those who have passed through that great Realization and returned to men is so great that the opportunity for finding the Door opening on the part of the *sadhaka* once he has built his key and

turned it, will be more than usually great. This is just a side thought apart from the discussion of the meaning of the paradox.

Now, let us consider a certain consequence growing out of the paradox as such, having outlined four very different forms of it. This discourse is becoming long and so we shall have to move rapidly and schematically. Let us first consider the paradox underlying mathematics. I will draw your attention to the work of Bertrand Russell here. He perhaps stands as the most prominent member of the logicist's school in the interpretation of what is mathematics.² The position he took was that mathematics is nothing but logic. This, in other words, implies that the effort is made to reduce the whole of mathematics to a purely conceptual construction divorced from any abstraction from the perceptual world of experience and from any Vision descending from that transcendental or introceptual domain. It thus becomes an effort to render the conceptual order as an isolated self-contained order. It's an effort, thus, to separate the conceptual from its roots, and this I submit is where the trouble lies. In actuality, conceptuality does not exist as an isolated self-contained whole; but, on the contrary, has a dual root—one of which is imbedded in the perceptual order of consciousness and the other in the introceptual order of consciousness. And as a result, when this zone is taken in isolation from its roots, you have something which is essentially self-destructive, something which is essentially empty. And it is for that reason that we find ourselves, at the base, dealing with radical contradictions.

I will not take up the case of the physical paradox. I'll leave that to our physicist friend. But now let us look at the paradoxical contrast presented by the two religio-philosophical disciplines of Buddhism and the Vedanta, which I called a sort of positivistic-substantialism. I submit that the paradox here lies in the fact that all of our formulations are dependent upon the characteristics of dualistic consciousness, upon that character in our cognition whereby we are unable to know anything save in contrast to its other. The implication is that any statement, any self-contained, logically coherent statement, is of necessity partial only. If in part it reveals a truth, yet in part, by its one-sidedness, is of necessity a falsity; and that then in order to arrive at a higher order of completeness we must consider a contradictory religio-philosophic position, and thereby we have a self-correcting complex. This in a few and rather simple words is, I submit, the resolution of the paradox. Truth, as it is in itself, can only be known by him who abides in a state of absolute dumbness. If by truth we mean a statement that is wholly true, then every statement ever uttered by any of us, or by any of all mankind—spoken, written, or thought—is a lie. We are all liars when we speak or think, and know and are the truth only when in the state of absoluteness dumbness.

Now, having brought you to this most unsatisfactory and depressing conclusion, I shall leave you to your painful ruminations and wish you good luck.

² Wolff meant to say, “. . . member of the logicist's school . . .”