

Further Thoughts on the Relation of Buddhism and the Vedanta with Special Reference to the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

Part 1 of 7

Franklin Merrell-Wolff
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There are other thoughts that have grown out of the discussion entitled “The Meaning of the Paradox” which I propose to offer under the heading “Further Thoughts on the Relation of Buddhism and the Vedanta with Special Reference to the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo.”

In the philosophic statement which I have presented in the volume *Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object*, there is an offering of the conception of a third organ of cognition in addition to sense perception and conceptual cognition, and this third function or organ, I entitled “introception.” Another name for this function which has been used extensively is that of Realization. The point is, that it was very evident to me, both from my own experience and from the reading of the literature on the subject, that the experiences or states of consciousness which are the source of the Oriental philosophies are not reducible to the two functions known as sense perception and conceptual cognition; that this involved, actually, a third function, which while not generally active among men as a whole, has, nonetheless, been active in the case of a minority of human beings, and has been, in fact, the basis of the great religious philosophies of the world.

Now, a word could be said about these three functions, faculties, or organs of consciousness that might bring them into clearer perspective. Sensual perception is characterized by *immediacy*. Conceptual cognition is characterized by a *mediate* consciousness, that is, a process of relating one item to another and arriving at conclusions by a process of ratiocination. The introceptual function, or Realization, is again *immediate*, but it differs from the immediacy of sense perception in important respects. Thus, sense perception is *particular*; it gives us items that are only and solely themselves as individuals. Conceptual cognition, on the other hand, is in its most central development, its most characteristic form, though not exclusively, a formulation of *universals*. The exception to this rule is in the case, for instance, of specific naming of individuals; thus, the proper name of a person has a unique, particular reference. But this is not the general characteristic of conceptual cognition. Thus, for instance, if we have the concept of a tree, it is not a particular tree; it is a form of which there could be in manifestation an infinite number of instances. Any one of these instances would be a case of a tree, but these instances when known perceptually would be known only individually. When conceptual cognition is developed into its highest degree of purity, it always becomes mathematics, and there, every concept, as those represented by the letters of the alphabet, is a concept of an infinite, potentially at least. In the case of

introception, we have a principle of universality which in this respect makes it akin to conceptual cognition. It is not, however, cognized in the same way, but by the action of a function which in the case of most individuals is latent and inactive, whereas, perceptual cognition is active in all, in some degree at least, and, at least also, the most simple forms of conceptual cognition are active among all persons who are capable of using verbal forms of expression.

It is characteristic of perceptual cognition that it is specifically *factual* and only communicated in very limited degree. The possible communication we see among animals is evidently this kind of communication. It is characteristic of conceptual cognition that it is highly communicable and is the immediate medium of our general social intercourse. When we come to introceptual cognition, again we have that which essentially cannot be communicated on its own level except by the principle which we have variously called contagion, osmosis, induction, and resonance.

A further differentiation between the three functions of cognition which is of premier importance consists in the following. Perceptual cognition is phenomenalistic. There is in this cognition the presentation before the senses of a world about with all of its various objects. Its orientation is specifically objective. So the key word with respect to this would be the word ‘phenomenon’ or ‘phenomenalistic’. In the case of conceptual cognition, there still is an object before consciousness, but this object is in the form of verbal concepts or of various symbols as is the case in the development of mathematics. It therefore deals with an objective content as does the perceptual function, but the content is of a different order. It is not phenomenalistic in the same sense as perceptual cognition. Perhaps the key word would rather be ‘representative’ or ‘representation’. Our concepts are a representation of a meaning which typically is not originally derived from the conceptual order of consciousness. In contrast, the introceptual order in its deepest manifestation—or its deepest meaning, not manifestation—is non-phenomenalistic, non-representational, but essentially original—that which *is* before any manifestation, representation, or phenomenal presentation took place. “Non-phenomenalistic consciousness” would thus be the key word for this function.

Now, I do not wish to suggest that the division of our cognitive functions is completely covered by these three divisions; rather, the point is to present the subject in a very simple initial form. Actually, there is implicit in this threefoldness a certain sevenfoldness, for if we have any three functions, or objects, or principles, or whatever, the sum of all the combinations of the three taken one at a time, two at a time, and three at a time becomes seven. And this may well be an underlying reason why sevenfoldness is so important in the arrangement of functions or qualities that we find spread so far in ancient literature. There are possibilities that grow out of these combinations that are not to be exclusively identified with any one of them alone. Thus, there may well be, and I am convinced there is, a hierarchy of cognitive functioning reaching from conceptual cognition up into the depths of introceptual cognition.

Two features in introceptual cognition that stand out with a peculiar force, from my own imperience, is a state in which the cognizer and the cognized become fused so

that there is an identity between the two.¹ This is a most powerful and convincing form of cognition. There is not even the degree of uncertainty that arises in the use of the most rigorous logic, which gives us the most certain knowledge we have in the field of conceptual cognition. Here one knows because he is identical with that which he knows. There is no distance. There is no possible error, so long as there is no interpretation in conceptual, artistic, or other terms. Just as soon as there is such an interpretation, then it is possible, and for profound theoretical reasons even inevitable, that a certain error shall enter into the formulation. But on its own level, it is unequivocally certain. Again, in conformity with my own imperience, it reaches to a deeper level where the subject to cognition and the object of cognition vanish and become subordinate or dependent parts of a pure Consciousness which preexists all selves and all objects. Thus, there is a complexity in the total picture, but it is not with that complexity that I am now concerned. Further, though I am dealing here with the field of cognition exclusively, I am not, therefore, implying that other aspects of the total consciousness of individual creatures are of no importance; on the contrary, we have affections and we have motivations. These are real. These are important. And they must be given their due place of importance in any yoga that aims at ultimate unity. However, their discussion belongs to another place and another time.

Let us now consider in more detail the nature of the cognition which is derived from each of these functions, faculties, or organs, first considering perceptual cognition in its purity. Perceptual cognition gives us the sensuously presented world about us; and before any interpretation there is no question as to the factuality of this presentation. If I do not name objects that appear before me, but take them in their purity, I do not see rocks, mountains, trees, brush, houses, streams, or whatnot, I see simply *that* as a complex presentation that has no meaning. It simply *is*, and in its primitive purity there's no question about its factuality. And note here, that in this sense, there is no difference between that which we commonly call a real presentation and that which we might call dream, hallucination, and mirage. Taking presentation in its primitive purity, the presentation in a dream is as real, in its factuality, as the presentation in the waking state; so, also, is the lake that ultimately we may determine is a mirage; and likewise, the snake that is in the rope. As sheer presentation, all of this stands upon an equal footing. It is a fact as a modification of our consciousness. Only when we come to the consideration of interpretation, do we have to distinguish between these different elements; and when we have interpretation, we have united perceptual cognition with conceptual cognition. We are making judgments, and as soon as we make judgments, then there is a question of true or false. But in the primitive presentation alone, there is no judgment involved. All presentations stand upon an equal footing, upon an equal factuality. There is no question of a distinction between real or unreal here. There is no distinction between true or untrue. It is interesting to note that if one proceeds to try to produce a state in which there is a cutting off of all the habit of judging these presentations, that then one induces a very interesting state that has a quality of feeling about it that in a measure suggests the

¹ For the definition of 'imperience', see the audio recordings "General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy," part 10 and "On My Philosophy: Extemporaneous Statement." In speaking of introceptual knowledge, Wolff says, "The third function therefore gives you imperience, not experience. It is akin to sense perception in the sense of being immediate, but is not sensuous."

mystical type of feeling. And it would seem that the methods employed in the Zen Buddhism are oriented to this line of approach.

Now let us consider the nature of the essential knowledge contributed by conceptual cognition. The essentiality here does not consist of the objects represented by words or symbols—auditory, visual, or otherwise—but of the relatedness between such entities. The essential knowledge, thus, is logical or mathematical. The assurance here is the assurance of implication, of deduction. This is pure conceptual knowledge. When we add terms, represented by words or symbols, we have added something that is derived from some other zone of cognition—most commonly the perceptual zone. If we had a conception such as that of “tree,” it is derived from an experience, an interpretation of an immediate perceptual experience, and if we then define ‘tree’, we have specified it in terms of other conceptions. But I’d like to note this fact, at this point, that the dictionary or conceptual definition of a term such as ‘tree’ merely gives us other conceptions and not the true meaning. The true meaning is a referent that exists perceptually. The word ‘tree’ is a sign meaning something that is outside the conceptual order. We do this so commonly that we may fail to realize that we’re dealing with two orders of cognition.

Now, certain things result from the combination of these two orders of cognition. The question of reality or truth does not arise with pure perception; there’s no question at all in that case. The modification of consciousness or of conscious content which we call perception of a world about is simply a fact, and in its primitive purity, has no meaning. But when we combine the two forms of cognition, then there arises a test of relative status of parts of this primitive perception. And thus we have a distinction as between dreams and waking states of consciousness. When one dreams, and so long as he dreams, there’s no question as to the reality of the modification of the consciousness by the dream images. But when he shifts to another state of consciousness which we commonly call waking consciousness, and remembers the dream, there arises the habit of forming a judgment as to whether the dream consciousness or the waking consciousness is true or whether one or the other is truer. Here we have added a process that belongs to conceptuality, superimposed upon the material given through perception in the dream state and the waking state. If there were no addition of this sort, then there would be no distinction between a dream state and a waking state. They would stand upon equal footing as simply being factuality appearing before the perceptual consciousness; and there would be no way of saying one was real and the other unreal; or saying that one is important and the other unimportant. They would have equal footing, equal support, and the sense of equal factuality. The same thing applies with respect to the mirage that may be seen upon a desert—a city perhaps or an apparent lake. Just as, in its purity, there is no question as to the fact of its factuality, the mirage is a fact of perceptual experience. Only when we make a judgment about the mirage implying something more than its pure factuality, namely, its meaning, then we can make a statement concerning it which is true or false. If we make the judgment that the mirage is a lake, then we will find that we are in error, that we are in a state of illusion; for, as a result of the judgment, this is a lake, we may proceed toward it expecting to derive all the values that come from actual water, namely, the quenching of thirst, the feeling and being able to use a liquid for bathing and otherwise, or that we could swim in it. If we proceeded on this line, we would approach the mirage, the experience that looks like water, and we would find it unverified. We would find that there was nothing there that could be drunk, that would enable us to

quench our thirst, that we could not bathe in it, that we could not swim in it, that it would not wet us. We would, therefore, conclude that the judgment was in error. And this may be the true meaning of the word 'illusion' or '*maya*'.

This is, in fact, the Kantian use of the conception of illusion, and does seem to differ from the Indian usage that we find, as for instance, in the philosophy of Shankaracharya where *maya* is presented as the opposite of *reality*. Rather, the state of illusion or *maya* is the result of an erroneous judgment. It is the opposite of truth, rather than the opposite of reality. Here we have a distinction between truth and reality which seems to differ from the usage in Oriental philosophy.

The same analysis applies to the experience or sensing of a snake which turns out to be a rope. In this case, we find that the snake disappears and that what there remains is a harmless piece of rope. I once had the rare opportunity of perceiving the disappearance of the snake that appeared in a sinuous piece of wood. The snake came back into my own eyes and thus verified that it actually was a projection. But if I test this apparent snake by a process of mental checking, then I'll find that it does not justify certain conclusions, namely, that it carries a threat of danger to me as an embodied individual. The actuality is as harmless as the rope which appears after the dissolution of the hallucination. We have here then, I think, a basis for a restatement of the theory of *maya* that may be of importance for us later.

Now we come to the question of the nature of the knowledge given by introceptual cognition. As I pointed out before, it is *immediate*, and in that way akin to sense perception; but it does not consist of a sensual content. Nor does it, in its purity, contain a conceptual ideation. I shall attempt to recover the state in as pure a form as possible and to give that which is indigenous to it, unmixed with anything that comes from the perceptual or conceptual order. This is not exactly easy, but we'll try to do as best we can.

Most impressive is the fact that in its purity, as near as that can be recovered, it is a sense of a nonsensuous, but luminous Consciousness; a sense of nonlimitation in that Consciousness; a sense or feeling that it is the resolution of all problems; an overwhelming sense of security; a state in which there seems to be no space, no time, no law, no thing, no idea; but, a sense of a Consciousness that is unborn and undying. And there, thus, is an overwhelming assurance that all the problems of life are here resolved; that here is absolute security; that here is the answer to all that in life proved to be so unsatisfactory. There is the sense that there is no other need; that one could abide eternally here and have all that he might wish for. And coloring the whole state of Consciousness is a sense of inconceivable delight; a sense of uncontaminated and uncontaminable purity and of immeasurable value. Of course I'm using conceptual terms to try to convey an *immediate* meaning and inevitably in so doing, I'm involving a certain distortion. But the problems that badger life are here resolved. And when one draws back out of the state, that remains with the individual, at least so far as I know the state. I know now that all within and all above is as it should be; that there is no problem, no difficulty anywhere; that there is no possibility of any loss in the stream of time. These are effects that come into the sense of knowing and of feeling that remain. Though one draws back out of the Consciousness into the world of action and into the domain of phenomena, yet there remains this assurance in the depths. In the pure Consciousness, as near as I can

present it, there is no specific confirmation of any religious dogma or any philosophic interpretation; but, if one is bathed or born within the midst of a traditional interpretation concerning these ultimate values, it would tend to confirm them. Thus, it is God; it is *Parabrahm*; it is *Paramatman*; it is *Alaya Vijnana*; it is *Tao*; it is *Buddha Nature*—but none of these exclusively. It is the Supreme Value. And all of these names for the supreme value actually appear as irrelevant so far as the *immediacy* of the state is concerned. There is no need to give to this state of Consciousness any formulation; it is completely adequate, and one could abide here without any craving or yearning for anything more, for it exceeds every possibility of the imagination.

Now, I know that this is less than a pure portrait; for, any representation whatever inevitable involves some degree of distortion. The conceptions of Self and of not-Self ultimately vanish, but an undying, pure Consciousness remains. And one returns from that state with the metaphysical questions answered, so far as his individual life is concerned. Now, if one wishes to communicate something of this value and seeks to present it in language of one sort or another, then terms do enter into the picture that are more or less adequate. I have found the language of higher mathematics really the most adequate, but I recognize that as an individual peculiarity. If by ‘God’ we mean simply the supreme value without conceptual definition in any positive sense, it’s all right to call it God; but that is not the definition of Yahweh, of Allah, or the God of the Christians—all of which conceptions are conceptually conditioned. Nor is it *Parabrahm*, in its purity; yet, if we use this conception as a symbol, or the conception of the *Paramatman*, or the conception of *Tao*, or *Alaya Vijnana*, and realize that these are only pointers towards a reality which can never be contained by any conceptual definition, then it’s all right to use such pointers.

For him who has been so fortunate as to have had a Fundamental Realization, here lies the ultimate authority. It transcends all that which is written in books or has been communicated by speech. Here, for him, is that which is Truth. This being so, the evidence that comes from perceptual cognition and the criticism that comes from conceptual cognition is irrelevant. But the question arises, what authority does this Realization have for others, for those who have not participated in such? This is a question that was handled, I think, very wisely by William James in his [The] *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and I shall quote from what he has said at the close of his chapter on mysticism. Quoting from p. 422 and what follows:

I have now sketched with extreme brevity and insufficiency, but as fairly as I am able in the time allowed, the general traits of the mystic range of consciousness. *It is on the whole pantheistic and optimistic, or at least the opposite of pessimistic. It is anti-naturalistic, and harmonizes best with twice-bornness and so-called other-worldly states of mind.*

My next task is to inquire whether we can invoke it as authoritative. Does it furnish any *warrant for the truth* of the twice-bornness and supernaturality and pantheism which it favors? I must give my answer to this question as concisely as I can.

In brief my answer is this—and I will divide it into three parts:—

(1) Mystical states, when well developed, usually are, and have the right to be, absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come.

(2) No authority emanates from them which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically.

(3) They break down the authority of the non-mystical or rationalistic consciousness, based upon the understanding and the senses alone. They show it to be only one kind of consciousness. They open out the possibility of other orders of truth, in which, so far as anything in us vitally responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith.

I will take up these points one by one.

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As a matter of psychological fact, mystical states of a well-pronounced and emphatic sort *are* usually authoritative over those who have them. They have been “there,” and know. It is vain for rationalism to grumble about this. If the mystical truth that comes to a man proves to be a force that he can live by, what mandate have we of the majority to order him to live in another way? We can throw him into a prison or a madhouse, but we cannot change his mind—we commonly attach it only the more stubbornly to its beliefs. It mocks our utmost efforts, as a matter of fact, and in point of logic it absolutely escapes our jurisdiction. Our own more “rational” beliefs are based on evidence exactly similar in nature to that which mystics quote for theirs. Our senses, namely, have assured us of certain states of fact; but mystical experiences are as direct perceptions of fact for those who have them as any sensations ever were for us. The records show that even though the five senses be in abeyance in them, they are absolutely sensational in their epistemological quality, if I may be pardoned the barbarous expression—that is, they are face to face presentations of what seems immediately to exist.

The mystic is, in short, *invulnerable*, and must be left, whether we relish it or not, in undisturbed enjoyment of his creed. Faith, says Tolstoy, is that by which men live. And faith-state and mystic state are practically convertible terms.²

² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Modern Library, 1902), 422-423.