

General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy

Part 7 of 12

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We have so far considered three Realizations which have been classified as mental Realizations in the sense in which Sri Aurobindo uses that term. And then in the last part, we produced a preliminary statement concerning the fourth Realization which would appear to be an authentic transcendental Realization. At this point, it may be appropriate to outline the reasons why so much attention is being given to the process known as Realization or Awakening. This is given such attention for the reason that it is fundamental to the present philosophy. Philosophies are based upon sources of knowledge; and as I've noted before, ordinarily the sources of knowledge are viewed as twofold, namely, that kind of knowledge which comes from sense perception, or in the terms used by Northrop are "aesthetic" in their character, and the knowledge which comes from conceptual cognition which supplies that which Northrop has called the "theoretic component." But in the present case, it has been necessary to identify a third source of knowledge which commonly has been called Enlightenment, Realization, Mystical Unfoldment, and by similar terms. These functions of the psyche—I prefer to call them psychical functions than psychological functions because they seem to transcend the limits of what we commonly understand psychology to be—these functions are viewed in the present philosophy as a source of knowledge. They are, admittedly, the source of values other than those which we would call truly cognitive, but for our present purpose, since we are dealing with a question of knowledge rather than with matters of feeling, or of delight, or of conation, we view them primarily as a source of knowledge.

William James, in his discussion of mystical states of consciousness, has noted the fact that for those who have had such states of consciousness, they are usually authoritative and have a right to be so. I emphasize the Realizations because I, too, regard them as being authoritative for the individual who has them. I insist that they transcend the authority of sensuous experience and of logical process, are immediate, just as sensuous experience is immediate in its domain, and carry, therefore, authority in the field to which they refer. The Realizations that are being now outlined are the basis of the philosophy which I have offered. They are authoritative for me, but I do not, therefore, imply that they carry authority for anyone else who has not had the same, essentially the same, Realization. I present them, therefore, in terms that are not categorical, as far as possible, but rather as suggestions to be entertained by him who may hear them or may read what I have written.

And another point that should be emphasized, though I have referred to it before, is this: that these Realizations as known to me may speak authoritatively to my own consciousness in the zone which they cover; they do not necessarily and in fact have not covered all possible cognitive values. I, therefore, include as material in the body of my thought that which comes from our sciences and from our arts in so far as they may have

value. I have not found that the Realization invalidates, in any way, scientific research in any field, but may delimit the value attaching to the conclusions drawn from such scientific research, for the Realizations are concerned with the very roots from which the processes of cognition which render an empiric science possible are to be found; that the Realization deals with these roots and is most capable of determining the range of validity of any merely empiric determination. Empiric determination deals with those facts that can be experienced through the senses and can be transformed into a conceptual logical system; but the Realizations deal with the very roots from which conceptuality and perceptuality flowers as a possibility in the sum total of our total cognition. The information or knowledge that comes from the source of the Realizations may delimit the zone of valid conclusion based upon sensuous cognition and logical development, but being derived from the root whereby sensuous cognition and logical development is possible, it is entirely beyond the range of valid discursive thought to sit in critical evaluation of these sources. They have an epistemological authority in the zones which they cover transcending everything that comes from the field of sensuous cognition and conceptual determination. This point must be understood as fundamental. Beyond this, epistemological criticism is regarded as perfectly valid in this philosophy. In fact, it is insisted upon. But this point must be made: that no individual who is outside the range of experience or ‘imperience’¹ of fundamental Realizations is in a position for their epistemic criticism for he does not know the material. No amount of knowledge based upon experience, or based upon logical acuity or epistemological analysis with respect to experience and logic, is competent to judge the knowledge value of imperiences of the type called Realization, Enlightenment, or Mystic Unfoldment. It is perfectly true that when a transcription is made from such imperience to a conceptual statement there has been an interpretation made, and in the process of interpretation an error may enter into the total formulation, but competency in criticism of this requires acquaintance with the source from which they come. Most criticism, such as that of James H. Leuba, is for this reason incompetent, for he shows no evidence of any acquaintance with this subject matter.²

Now, there are students of the subject of mystical states of consciousness who have granted their factuality but have denied their validity as a source of knowledge. I could name the following men as persons who have recognized the factuality of such states but deny its value as a source of cognition. There is John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, James H. Leuba, Delacroix, Cox, to name a few. They recognize that such states may affect the personal character of the individual who has experienced them, that they may lead to an enrichment of feeling quality and an enhancement of the moral principle of compassion, but deny that they are a source of knowledge. Therefore, I find it of imperative importance to insist upon their cognitive value, for I have so experienced them.

Looking at the instances that have been covered in previous parts, these facts may be noted: that the first one, formulated as ‘I am *Atman*’ did not change my philosophic

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.”

² James H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972).

position; it simply gave it an increased emphasis. The second one came as a surprise and led to an interpretation in terms of knowledge different from what I would have expected before hand; this applies to the Realization in the form, 'I am *Nirvana*'. The third one also came as a surprise which led to a degree of conversion of my valuation of reality, namely, that the real was there where the senses reported nothing at all, and that where the senses reported something, there, in reality, was a void. This led to a change in my philosophic outlook. The fourth one, which we are about to consider in detail, also was a confirmation of the first one, but involved a transcendental factor which quite transcended the first one and had features far beyond anything experienced, or imperienced, before that. The final one, as will be pointed out later, led to a real revolution in my philosophic outlook, all of which is a testimony to the fact that it is not true that inevitably the knowledge which one brings forth from a state of Realization is no more than that which he took into the state. I know, unequivocally, that states of Realization can produce persistent changes in ones philosophic outlook.

When I say that for me these Realizations are authoritative, I mean that their authority transcends that of any other source so far as I am concerned. It does not mean that they transcend all other sources for other individuals. Let us be certain on that point. And this means that no philosophic statement of anyone else, no scientific statement, no literary statement, no statement from any scripture, *shastra*, or *sutra* stands in a superior relationship of authority with respect to them. Nor does the statement of any individual, however high and exalted, carry a superior authority so far as I am concerned. And what I mean by such entities is beings such as Christ, Krishna, Aurobindo, Shankaracharya, and even the Great Buddha, all of whom are men whom I highly revere; nonetheless, though I listen to anything said by such men, and give it serious attention, nonetheless, the authority of these Realizations transcend what any of those may say so far as I am concerned. This is important. But I do not insist upon anyone else accepting them in this sense. I merely suggest them for their consideration. I recognize that there may be other Realizations illuminating other fields, other departments of nature, and of that which transcends nature, which are not covered by these Realizations, but for me to change a present point of view would require the entering in to some still more transcendent Realization.

I hope that this statement will render clear the epistemic basis of this philosophy. And as I said before, other material is accepted that does not tend to invalidate the authority of these Realizations. So I accept as part, and incorporate into the philosophy as part of it, material that may come from science, and from other religious sources, from the Great Ones that have gone before us and have rendered our present state more luminous than it otherwise would have been. I am responsible to these Realizations in my personal statement, everything else is subordinate, but may be recognized as valuable. And, in turn, certain things may be rejected; and let it be clear right now that I reject, thoroughly, the validity of every materialistic philosophy and of every philosophy that gives primacy to the testimony of the senses. The object has its place and the senses have their place, but it is strictly a servant place, not a master place.

Following this preliminary statement, let us return to the story of the fourth Realization. We had returned to southern California after a short sojourn in the northern part of the state, and on the following day, I was delving into *The System of the Vedanta*

by Paul Deussen. Because of a feeling of particular interest in the subject of Liberation, I turned to that section of the book and read it through. After this, while reflecting upon the material read, it suddenly dawned upon me that in as much as I was seeking the Self, which I am, there was nothing to be attained, for I knew that I already was that Self. It was a search, thus, for that which I already was, and, as a consequence, there was nothing to be attained. With that, I gave up the search and have sought no more since then, feeling that I had now solved the one point and that certainly that which one already is, is not something to be attained. I even expected that nothing special should happen within consciousness. There was a certain satisfaction, to be sure, in achieving this logical deduction. But, though I gave up all search, at that moment the Door opened, and, as it were, I seemed to ascend, of course not in the literal physical sense, but to ascend in consciousness to a point where I found myself above space, time, and law. Now, this seems to be very simple as thus stated, but then there began to unfold a monumental change in the whole orientation of consciousness. There was a precipitation of a state of inconceivable delight; there was a consciousness-quality which was quite ineluctable, that is, beyond the reach of possible communication.³ There was this deep sense that here Liberation had been achieved, that the metaphysical questions were solved, and that the goal had been attained. Now, it is true that the immediate *quale*, or quality, of this state cannot be communicated; consequences of the Awakening to this state can, in large measure, be communicated, and that is what I shall proceed to do.

Rising above space, time, and law means fusion in identity with That from whence space, time, and law are derived. What we may call That is irrelevant, but, if one will notice, it is in some sense ascension to the Root from which one's own being was derived. Identity with that Root has been taught in certain philosophies as characteristic of all that is. There is no pretension involved, for even the humblest clod which lies upon the ground is also part and parcel of that Root, all consists of that Root, however much it may have been developed through a process of evolution of devolution, nonetheless, it is part and parcel of the Root. But in our normal state of consciousness we have lost awareness of this fact, and so, seemingly, in terms of our surface consciousness, *seem* to be separated from that Root. The significance of this Realization, therefore, means a re-establishment as a conscious fact of individual identity with the Root of all. In one sense nothing has happened, for that identity is original and eternal in point of fact, but has been forgotten as a truth for our surface consciousness. The Realization, therefore, is an establishment in the surface consciousness of knowledge of an eternal fact. In reality, no creature, no entity, no tiniest piece of matter, no atom, proton, or electron is separate from that Root. What is accomplished is simply a re-cognition of this fact, but it makes all the difference in the world. To *know* that I, along with every other Self that there may be, is One with the Root Source of all, makes all the difference in the world. There is then known an incommunicable delight. How great this is, is difficult to measure. As one reads the literature related to other experiences of this sort, one may feel that the statements are extravagant. They're so flowery. They're so lush. But let me assure the auditor that no statement of valuation of that sort is too extreme. I have formulated myself not so much in flowery terms as in mathematical terms, and actually have become

³ Perhaps Wolff meant to say, “. . . there was a consciousness-quality which was quite ineffable, that is, beyond the reach of possible communication.”

more extreme than the others, for I would say that as the transfinite is to the finite, so is the value of this Consciousness to the ordinary consciousness of the dweller in the world—not very flowery, but enormously large.

And at once, the metaphysical questions that are important are resolved. Let us consider the three metaphysical questions referred to by Immanuel Kant, which are indeed of perennial importance. The question of do we have ultimate freedom? Are we immortal or mortal? Is there a God? Now, the answers here are unambiguous and clear.

One knows that he is in his essentiality eternal. This is no statement as to the eternality of a structure in consciousness or otherwise. It is simply a knowing with respect to the eternality of the essential unconstructed, uncompounded, unmade. It says nothing concerning the eternality of an organism, or the eternality of an organized consciousness which we call a mind, but it says only that I, in my essentiality, am above the processes of development and decay that are characteristic of time and all that is conditioned by time. It means simply that I, in my essentiality, am unconditioned by time.

And as to freedom: we feel as we move within the world that we are conditioned by circumstance. We may find that when we follow the inclinations of our wishes or desires, that they are frustrated, more or less; that to some extent we seem to be able to do as we desire, but often fail to do so. And then the question arises, even though we are able to do as we desire, are we in so doing truly free? Are we perhaps conditioned and limited by that desiring and, therefore, not truly expressing essential freedom? With this Realization the question is answered, for he finds himself identical with That which conditions all forms that are. The Universal Conditioner is not bound by its own conditioning. The Universal Conditioner however conceived, whether as Law, or God, or in some other term, is not bound; although, it may bind through the action of Law all parts of its manifestation. One finds himself free, with the freedom of That. And whether there is on the level of manifestation a certain subordinate degree of freedom, is a question that can become less demanding in its requirements, and indeed may become as the lawyer would say, moot. Essentially, I am free, and so is every other Self—free with the freedom of That from whence we all come. That becomes certain.

And is this that one realizes upon that height identical with what men mean by God? Very promptly I can answer: there is nothing in this experience that suggested any theological conception of God. If one uses the term ‘God’ in the psychological sense of the supreme value, without thereby implying any metaphysical definition of its attributes or qualities, but merely the fact that the value was supreme, then, in that sense, one could call it the Realization of God. But to me this seemed more like a principle, a Law, that, nonetheless, had an intimacy of relationship to one—and a relationship that was supremely happy. And so the metaphysical question as to whether there is an entity called God became wholly otiose and irrelevant.

Though this Realization, as it is in itself, was wholly undifferentiated, yet, when reflected through the differentiated consciousness, had certain very discernible qualities. Thus, as I have said, it was an experience of supernal *delight* or *joy*; but in this, it filled qualities of various sorts as discerned in our relative consciousness. It was, among other things, of a well-nigh inconceivable *sweetness*; one felt this, through and through. All that we can possibly foreshadow through words like sweetness, and loveliness, and so forth,

was there, but raised to a height beyond the conceiving of our relative consciousness. And so also was it *beauty*, beauty that rendered everything in this mundane world which here we call beauty, no more than relative dregs, as crudities, approximations, like unto the drawings of a very young child, for the beauty was the absolute perfection of beauty in every dimension. It was not, however, beauty as an attribute of something other than itself; it was beauty as a self-existent quality—a beauty which could be cast upon the world of things like a sheath which renders all those things so that they become beautiful. It was *purity* in a degree of absoluteness quite beyond the conceiving of our relative consciousness—something so pure and fine that it could not be stained by anything. It was absolute. There is one experience within the relative domain which I have known that in some measure foreshadows it; it is the experience of purity that one finds in pure mathematics—a state of consciousness which is not concerned with approximation and compromise, nor with becoming, but a state that is absolute, complete, full, and utterly rich. It is the consciousness of that which we designate by the word *love*, in its state of ultimate purity and completeness, a quality that is more than benevolence and compassion, though these qualities are derived from it, but is the absolute richness of this supreme quality of our feeling—too pure to be imagined by mortal man, too rich to be conceived by a poverty stricken humanity. And, in special degree, this is a consciousness that is fully *luminous*. The mind seems filled with light, and light pours through the being illuminating it through and through. The dark recesses of the receptacle where one has deposited the knowledge he has gained in life become luminous so that all can be drawn upon if one so wishes; not necessarily a sensible light as has been reported by certain mystics, especially St. Paul and St. John of the Cross, but one inevitably speaks in the light figures, the words that use light images. It is, almost before all things, a luminous state of consciousness. Also, it is a state of an unbroken *harmony* where all parts stand in a perfect blending, a perfect relatedness; however distorted, and crude, and dissonant, and even discordant may be the seeming of the play on the surface in the *samsaric* world, yet behind that veil there is a harmony unbroken and unbreakable; and this, one knows. It is an experience of absolute perfection. All, everywhere, is as it should be, in absolute completeness and beauty. There is no place here for mere becoming, and approximation, and compromise. It is, on the contrary, completeness, now and forever, in every respect.

This is a state of more than the *aesthetic* qualities which may first dominate one's consciousness, and which have been elucidated in what has just been said. It has, however, enormous significance in terms of *knowledge*, in terms of the relatedness of parts, in terms of the syntactical in the whole of things, and, in especial degree, it has the profoundest relationship to all that we call knowledge, in the sense that it determines a base of reference from which, henceforth, all is viewed—a new base quite different from that which had existed before. The base of reference as used in mathematics is a zero point from which all things are considered; and as is well known, shifting of the base of reference may make all the difference in the world with respect to the form of one's knowledge. It is, therefore, immensely important as a knowledge determinant. I need but recall your attentions to the shift from the Ptolemaic system in astrology,⁴ where the world was taken as a base of reference, to the Copernican system, where the sun and the ecliptic were taken as a base of reference, and the opening of the doors of understanding that were, thereby, rendered

⁴ No doubt Wolff meant to say, “. . . the Ptolemaic system in astronomy . . .”

possible. This is one of the most important significances of this whole experience. One is transformed from a sense of being an entity, a self, in an environment in the world, to a sense of Self which embraces all that is, like a vast, illimitable sphere; and I am That. And I am not in any way particularly close to this person to which I ordinarily refer when I say 'I', but am there present as the center of all creatures; and oft it seems as though I am as much there in those others as in this one. And, therefore, the base of reference is shifted from the mundane world, symbolized by the Ptolemaic point of view, to that supermundane domain, symbolized by the Copernican orientation.

And then we must consider how this relative world, this *Sangsara*, this universe of objects, appears from that lofty perspective. One thing which stands out preeminently in this connection is that the view of *Sangsara* is as of a mere phantasmagoria having no substance, no reality. I am not, here, pronouncing the final judgment as to whether there is reality or not in the universe of objects, but I'm reporting how it appears. All value ceases to exist in the objects and the activities of the *sangsaric* world. They are meaningless—a meaningless phantasmagoria worthy of no serious attention. And as one looks down, back into that world, it appears utterly sordid, like a vast sewerage system or a vast cesspool; and thoroughly cruel in its relations between man and man, between man and the lesser creatures, and between the lesser creatures and each other. And, in addition, it appears like an immense ugliness, unalleviated by any redeeming feature—totally without value. And the men and women within that realm seem much like pigs wallowing in mud or hyenas eating carrion with horrid laughter; so appears this netherworld below.

I must here warn the hearer that what has just been said is not a detached, impersonal, considered, rational judgment. It is, rather, a report of the feeling valuation which emerged from the imperience. The statement is true to that valuation; but what is the ultimate truth? What are the facts of the matter? Is there another way of viewing it? The answer is that in the fifth, and final, Realization, there was an enlargement of perspective with respect to all this; and the hearer should wait till then to learn of the final evaluation. This imperience, that is here reported, is essentially of the religious sort—less of a philosophic sort. In the final Realization, the philosophic element is reestablished in a stronger position. This that we have now considered is the sort of imperience that moves one through and through, that stirs the very depths of one, and answers, for him, the personal questions as to whether there is an abiding truth and value behind the veil.