

On My Philosophy: Extemporaneous Statement

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The following is an extemporaneous, impromptu discourse.

Because of certain thoughts concerning the structure of my own philosophy that have come to me this morning, I thought it would be worthwhile to postpone the playing of the third tape on “The *Tri-Kaya*” until a later time. Bear in mind, the discussion of the *Tri-Kaya* is a discussion of a Buddhistic subject matter. In contrast, much of the material on the tapes is devoted to the elaboration of my own individual philosophy; and while this material is discussed in many places throughout *Pathways Through to Space, The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object*, and in many of these tapes, still there are certain features that need emphasis because their bearing may not be well understood. Those who are formally trained in philosophic discipline will understand this bearing much better than those who are not. It may seem technical, and so forth, but they are of critical importance for one who is familiar with the story of philosophy both Eastern and Western. There are certain features in my own statement that are not typical of the presentations you find in the philosophic field. Maybe it would be of interest to go back to the occasion which led to this development including the search for yogic Realization.

I had been by 1912, somewhat familiar with what is known as Theosophy. I was by no means sure that this material was authentic at that time; but during the academic year of 1912 and '13, I was in the graduate school of philosophy at Harvard. There, among other items, I was part of a seminar in metaphysics guided by professor Bakewell of Yale, who came up from Yale to deliver two courses: one was this seminar; the other was the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I took both courses. And it might be of interest to note that in Northrop's book *The Meeting of East and West*, he refers to Professor Bakewell as first, one of his teachers, and then, one of his colleagues. He was, at that time, the chief representative of the Idealistic school of thought in America; Josiah Royce was no longer teaching because he had had a stroke.

In the midst of this seminar, one of the associates by the name of Rattray—and incidentally possibly the best dialectician I've ever heard in action—presented a thesis, when his time came for delivering a paper, that was a form of the Vedanta. He was able to defend the thesis successfully against the criticism of all the associates present in that seminar. This impressed me: that there was here something that went beyond the range of our Western recognized forms of cognition. This led to this consideration: it is a well established practice, both in Western and much of Oriental philosophy, to assert that there are only two organs, faculties, or functions of cognition, namely, sense perception and conceptual cognition. This is so emphatically affirmed by the logical school of the Buddhists that Dignaga placed it as an aphorism on the outside of his book,¹ and upon the basis of viewing the forms of cognition as two and only two, many of the conclusions

¹ Th. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1962)

that are reached in that logic become possible. But the thing that seemed to be impressed upon my mind is that there may be a third form of cognition, or three or more; actually in our own day, Sri Aurobindo has not only three, but several identified forms of cognition.

Now, the field of ordinary discourse, not involving anything in the nature of a Mystical Awakening or yogic Realization, does, in fact, involve only the two organs or functions, or faculties known as sense perception and conceptual cognition; but it occurred to me that if there is indeed a third, or more than three, such organs of cognition, then philosophic statements based upon two would be incomplete. We would have an inadequate knowledge of truth so long as we were so epistemologically restricted. Bear in mind, we're talking now of a special discipline in philosophy known as epistemology which is concerned with the questions of how do we know, what are the limits of truth, what are the limits of our possible cognition. These are epistemological questions, and the larger, more interesting question as to whether a transcendental or metaphysical knowledge is possible depends upon determining that there is some organ, faculty, or function of cognition other than sense perception and conceptual cognition. Immanuel Kant showed very conclusively in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that on the basis of these two functions, it is impossible to achieve a transcendent or metaphysical knowledge. His proof of that point is virtually an established fact. If there is, then, any possibility of a truly transcendent or metaphysical knowledge, it can only exist by the presence of a third, or more than three, faculties or functions of cognition.

The facing of this problem led to a radical change in my life plans. At the time when I was in Harvard, I had aimed at an academic career in the field of philosophy and everything was moving favorably in that direction. But this question became so important that it resulted in my abandonment of that plan and started a search for this possible third organ of cognition. That was, in effect, the yogic search. It resulted in twenty-four years of groping; but ultimately I found the aids that were necessary and there was a successful outcome on August 7, 1936. The answer to my satisfaction was that there is at least a third organ of cognition that is not reducible to sense perception and conceptual cognition. I invented a name for this third organ calling it "introception." And another word, which was contributed by someone else, applies to this; that the content from this source is akin to experience in the sense that it is immediate, but is not experience such as comes through the senses, therefore, the term is offered of 'imperience'. 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. It is not conceptual, in the sense that it is not a logically determined form of cognition, but an immediate form. Logically determined cognitions belong to the field known as mediate knowledge—all of mathematics, all of science, all of that which belongs to our common discourse, all of philosophic formulation is in conceptual terms and is therefore mediate knowledge, which has the great advantage that it is communicable; whereas, the immediate knowledge of experience or sense perception, in its immediacy, is not communicable, and the same is true of the introceptual knowledge, or imperience, that being immediate it is not directly communicable. In order to effect communication in either dimension or either direction, it is necessary to produce a conceptual transcription. This term 'transcription' is one introduced in the philosophy of Aurobindo. A transcription is a surrogate for the immediate knowledge. It is not identical with the immediate knowledge, and this point I can make very simply. If we take the concept 'tree', then you look about

you and you see a tree, you study the two, you'll find they are not of the same order at all; your concept is not the same thing as the immediate experience of a tree. This is evident in part in the following respect. Your immediate experience of a tree is something specifically concrete and particular; it is that entity which you see or touch in its concrete particularity. Your concept *tree* is a universal. Your percept is a particular; your concept is a universal. Your concept *tree* is a "pointer concept," which points to the experience of a tree, but of many trees, in fact potentially an infinity of trees. That's why we call the concept a universal.

Now, the principle of abstraction is involved in the concept, but you get out of the concept a power to manipulate. All of our engineering, our practical manipulation of the perceptual material—which is the mountains, the earth, and everything—does come from these concepts. You could not mine; you could not reduce your ores, and so forth, without a conceptual schema. But you operate upon a perceptual material which results in your having the immediate experience of certain metals. But if you could only use the perceptual or sensuous faculties alone, you would be in the same helpless position of the animal, who could not extract metal from the earth. This is just one of the illustrations. As a matter of fact, the supreme expression of conceptuality is to be found in pure mathematics, from which applied mathematics is derived, and the latter is the most essential tool for rendering possible all of our modern technology. Until this tool was evolved, modern technology would have been totally impossible. All of our knowledge of the astronomic world would have been totally impossible, with the exception of your immediate experience of some stars.

Now, this interrelationship between the immediate experience, which we call the percept, and the concept is a familiar fact in philosophy and in our sciences. We take it for granted. But I think most people haven't gone to the trouble of analyzing the difference between the two and perhaps overlook the fact that they step from one realm to another when they step from the conceptual order to the perceptual order. There is a point of discontinuity between the two, and that I might illustrate by a figure taken from mathematics: take, for instance, to us, the very simple concept of the square root of 2. I picked that up because historically the discovery of that number was something very important in Greek history. It led to a feeling of outrage in the Greek world when Pythagoras made this discovery. It outraged the Greek world because there was a religious feeling identified with their theory of number, and the conception of the divine was related to the notion that you could find a common measure between all numbers and that common measure had the meaning of the divinity. Now, it is true so long as you remain in the field of rational numbers—which consists of the whole numbers, both positive and negative, and the fractions, both positive and negative—it's always possible to find a common unit. It is impossible to find a common unit of measure between rational numbers and the irrational, such as the square root of 2. Later that includes the problem of the transcendental numbers. Now, there is a certain leap over to another order when you shift from the conceptual order to the perceptual order akin to that. There is an incommensurability between the sensuous and the conceptual just as there is between the rational number, which we here regard as akin to conceptuality, and the irrational number like the square root of 2, which can be fully expressed in rational terms only by an infinite number of decimal places. The same thing, I found, exists between the introceptual and the conceptual.

Maybe a word here might help to elucidate. Although Dignaga, among the Buddhist logicians, said there was only two forms of cognition, namely, sense perception and conceptual cognition, the other leading contributor to the field, namely, Dharmakirti, did bring in this point. He said, dealing with this question of how do you bridge the gulf between the percept and the concept, it is done in this way: that with every moment of sense perception—and bear in mind that the Buddhist here distinguishes between pure sensation and perception, in that, perception is viewed as a complex of conceptuality acting through imagination upon sensuality, and as the result of that complex we see mountains, trees, rivers, houses, books, and so forth; but if we confine ourselves to pure perception,² we get only *point-instants* that have no extension in space or time and which are totally without meaning. Now, how do we make the bridge between that pure point-instant of sensation, that moment which is the first element in any perception you make—very hard to pick this up, say when you wake up in the morning an impact comes on you; if you watch the first moment you get no meaning from it at all, but a little later you get a perception. That first moment is without meaning. That they view in Buddhist logic as Ultimate Reality. Now, how do you get across from that to conception? Dharmakirti introduced this idea: that there is granted one moment of *intelligible intuition* following the first moment of *sensuous intuition*; and thus he conceives that the crossing is made. But the difficulty here is that intelligible intuition is not part of the equipment of the ordinary human being. It is only part of the equipment of the Saints, and the Saints are viewed as not human but superhuman beings. But, if you'll note, there is introduced here into the philosophy something of the essential thing which I'm bringing into it, namely, that element which is accessible only through yoga and not through the ordinary means of cognition.

Now, there is excellent reason to believe that there are philosophers in the past who have had something of Mystical Awakening. In general, they tend to hide this fact. William James noted this in connection, say, with the philosophy of Hegel. I think it was in *The Varieties of Human Experience*³ that he made this observation: that there seemed to be in the background of Hegel's consciousness a certain breakthrough into the mystical state of consciousness. I had the same impression about Hegel. I had the same impression in connection with the philosophy of Plato. Neither one, typically, refers to this. Hegel, I think erroneously, tries to reduce everything to a conceptual system. He even tries to reduce the sensuous order to a conceptual system—a point on which Schelling differed with him quite strongly and asserted that there was the image as well as the concept which is not reducible to the concept. And on this point I must agree with Schelling because there is an incommensurability between the two. In the case of Plato, there is to be found a confession about two-thirds along in his “Seventh Letter.” Most of you may not know the fact that they found seven extensive letters written by Plato. Incidentally, there was some debate as to whether Plato wrote them, but finally that was settled because there simply was no one else around in the world who could have written them. Toward the close of the latter half of this letter, he refers to this other way of consciousness, but he says you shouldn't talk about it. Now, that may be for the reason it

² Wolff may have meant to say, “. . . but if we confine ourselves to pure sensation . . .”

³ Obviously Wolff meant to say “*The Varieties of Religious Experience*.”

is said that he was an initiate and the Door may have been opened to him under the pledge of secrecy.

I had given no such pledge of secrecy, and in point of fact was urged by one whom I have called the Sage to give formulation. I debated on this for some time. When you bring into your cognitive system a source of knowledge which is not the common possession of human beings in general, you bring in an element that is not within the range of common debate. You cannot refer to it as part of the common experience—whereas, you can refer to sense perception as part of the common experience—and you render yourself vulnerable to certain not so happy forms of criticism, namely, the criticism that might come from the psychiatrist or the psychotherapist. I knew one person, who is still around, who had some initial mystical openings. He didn't understand them; and he went to a doctor, and the doctor classified them as an obscure form of epilepsy. That's the kind of thing they can do to you. The ignorance of our Freudian psychiatrists and psychotherapists is positively pitiful when they get beyond the ordinary domain. At any rate, you do render yourself a bit vulnerable; so I hesitated before I undertook to give formal expression to this source of knowledge. It's a little bit like stripping yourself in public.

Well, I've undertaken it and I've done it with full statement and grounded the philosophy fundamentally upon what I call yogic Realization. The result was that many of the reviewers of *Pathways*—those to whom Mr. Smith sent the book, the regular reviewers—were baffled. They didn't know what they had. They were afraid of adversely criticizing it because they didn't know but they might be sticking their necks out, so they took up some minor detail and spoke in a complimentary way of that and missed the whole point of course. But you must bear in mind, if you read *Pathways* or *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without and Object*, fundamental to the whole thesis is this third organ of cognition. You're not in a position—unless that is awakened in you individually, and in most people it is not—you're not in a position for critical evaluation. That was the problem of the reviewers.

Now, maintaining that there is such a third organ, and being explicit about it, involves the problem of giving a proper place to the whole field of cognition based upon sense perception and conceptual cognition alone, in other words, the whole field of the scientist. There is no difficulty so far as I see here. The work of the scientist is accepted so far as I'm concerned, only the philosophic interpretation of what he's studying is radically changed. Taking, for instance, one of my fundamental theses, that substantiality is inversely proportional to ponderability, or reality is inversely proportional to appearance—the principle represented in that mandala—it would mean this: that the scientist is studying relationships not between real substances, but between relative voids or nothingnesses. His assumption of matter as real in itself is rejected completely. But his system of relationships, terms in relation, in other words, is valid. As a system of terms in relation, the work of the scientist is perfectly valid, but he's totally wrong when he conceives that he is studying something substantial. In that way, I accept the determinations of all of the scientists.

Now, this is the fundamental and the most radical feature in my philosophy: that there are at least three organs, faculties, or functions of cognition; that the supreme mark of the third, or introceptual function, is “knowledge through identity.” And it is affirmed

that this knowledge through identity is the only certain knowledge that there is. In its purity it is immediate and incommunicable, but its transcription can be made from it in conceptual terms which can be communicated; but every such transcription involves of necessity an error. Therefore, any conceptual transcription is only in part true, but also involves error. All conceptual knowledge is, as Bertrand Russell has even said, no more than probable knowledge. Therefore, every conceptual categorical is false. A categorical is a statement presuming that it is certain. There is no such thing as a completely certain concept. Even your most certain concepts, those of mathematics, are based upon fundamental assumptions which are not proven. Bear that in mind. Your logical process may be free of all error, but your total subject matter has at its root, unproven fundamental assumptions. I can just make these statements to you, but if you were familiar with mathematics you'd recognize all of this as true.

Now, that is enough to cover the epistemologic basis of the philosophy. And that's enough to make the philosophy deviate from most systems that exist. The subject matter of the philosophy is drawn from these introceptual imperiences primarily. I have formulated three fundamentals as marking this philosophy. The one that I've been discussing so far, the three organs of cognition, is one of them. Out of them, another fundamental which is substantive in meaning is this: that consciousness is original, self-existing, and constitutive of all things. Bear in mind, this is consciousness in the sense of *Rig-pa*, the Tibetan term, or consciousness in the sense of what Jung calls the collective unconscious. Fundamental here is the point that to predicate an existence of anything which is outside of consciousness in every possible sense is a totally meaningless predication. Practically we act as though this world about was a real self-existence; that's our habit. If we could break that habit, Realization would be very easy. But actually the mountain does not exist, save some consciousness is aware of it. I'm not the only one who's ever said that. You'll find Dr. Jung says the same thing. To be, to exist, depends upon being known. To predicate the existence of the totally unknown is a meaningless combination of words that is as valueless as the Buddha's reference to the barren woman's son, or the hare's horns. Those are combinations of words that mean nothing. Equally, the assertion of existence of that which is outside consciousness in every sense is just as meaningless; although, we engage in that habit all the time. Your root reality is not the object in consciousness, but the consciousness itself.

The third fundamental involves a position of relative divergence from the Buddhist's *Anatman*. It is this: that the subject to consciousness transcends the object of consciousness. If you go back into primitive Buddhism, you'll find that they give to the objective component a relative reality, but always from the beginning up to the latest statement of Buddhism, we have the doctrine of *Anatman*. Now, this involves substantial complication. Buddhism here diverges radically from the Vedanta. The Vedanta, as formulated by Shankara, and as reformulated by Aurobindo, on these points agree: that the *Atma-Vidya*, or the Realization of the Self, is fundamental. The Self appears in the Vedanta as an invariant. Now, I'm getting into Western terminology here, now—something that belongs more to the theory of relativity—which incidentally involved a search for the invariants; that's the most fundamental thing Einstein was interested in. For the Vedantist, the Self is the invariant. Now, we must bear in mind that the Self is not *ahamkara*. The *Atman* is not *ahamkara*. *Ahamkara* is egoism. The sense in which my interests are at variance with your interests and we come into conflict is based upon

egoism—*ahamkara*. The *Atman* is the Self in the sense of the subject to consciousness, an epistemological conception rather than a self-interest conception. Both in Buddhism and Vedanta, *ahamkara* must be transcended. Without *ahamkara* there is no war, there is no conflict, there is no competition. Incidentally, competition—athletic and businesswise—is merely a form of war, and when we ultimately become civilized instead of glorifying such things, we will condemn them because they accentuate *ahamkara*. But Vedanta asserts the reality and the ultimate reality of the *Atman* in the form of the *Paramatman*. Now, the *Paramatman* is the conception of only one *Atman*. It's a principle of unity. And one can have this imperience so strongly impressed upon him that he does not see any difference between the "I" in me and the "I" in thee. This can actually happen. For the *Paramatman* which is reflected as the *Atman* in each entity is one and the same *Paramatman*. The *Atman*, the Self, becomes not a point, simply, in an environment, but rather becomes an illimitable sphere which embraces the whole environment. I'm reporting an actual imperience, not a theoretical construct here. I've had that imperience.

Now, there are in the imperiences which I know, in the fifth Realization, a stage in which the *Atman*, in the sense of the *Paramatman* even, is transcended. And at that point, one begins to affirm the Buddhist position, but rather as the crown of the philosophy, not as the beginning of the philosophy, as it so appears in the history of Buddhism. The subject to consciousness transcends the object. You may think of consciousness as representing the causeless cause of all, and the subject to consciousness, that which you refer to when you say "I," as the first logos, and the object before consciousness, which is all things around us, is the second logos. And it's in that sense that I say the subject to consciousness transcends the object, but is transcended in turn by Pure Consciousness. And the ultimate is this Pure Consciousness which the Buddhist calls the Void, or *Shunyata*, or Emptiness. Things exist in and for consciousness; they have no existence other than this. The mountain exists as part and parcel of my consciousness. This is something each of you can say. It does not exist in itself, alone. But because this is a collective unconscious,⁴ it is objective to my individual consciousness, and I cannot move that mountain so that it disappears unless I am fused and identical with the collective consciousness; and then it becomes a possibility—but as individual, no. I must come to terms with that mountain as individual, and only by that transcendental state where I become identical with the collective consciousness is it possible to say to that mountain, be thou removed; and it will be removed. So there is an objectivity; it's not simply subjective. But the objectivity is not in a supposed nonconscious *thingness*. It's an objectivity in the collective consciousness, which appears to us, ordinarily, as the collective unconscious.

Now, this implies a restatement of my whole philosophy as abstracted into a few words. I think you'll agree that it is rather revolutionary; that while there are points of agreement with different philosophies at different points, there probably is no one other philosophy, so far as I know, anywheres, that is in agreement with it on all points. If you can grasp what I've said today, you will know what I'm talking about in what I have written and what I have said elsewhere. But bear in mind, the foundation stone, the basis of the search, was an epistemological question. So you might call it the epistemological yoga.

⁴ Wolff may have meant to say, "... collective consciousness ..."