

Three Fundamentals of the Introceptive Philosophy

Part 14 of 16

Franklin Merrell-Wolff

March 30, 1974

This tape will not be a continuation of the subject matter of the last tape, Number 13, on the subject of conduct, but will be a continuation of the subject matter considered in tapes Number 11 and 12 where we are trying to enter into some of the deeper or more subsequent implications of the doctrine that Consciousness, in the Root sense, is the all in all.¹

In James H. Leuba's discussion of the psychology of mysticism, he asserts one proposition which he does not attempt to prove and which might be questioned, and that is to the effect that trance is trance however it is derived.² There is a question here that leaves me inclined to doubt whether this is a self-evident fact. There is the trance state connected with inferior states of consciousness known as psychosis, also a trance state connected with hypnosis, as well as the trance states connected with mystical states of consciousness or with that which is known as Realization or Enlightenment. As a feature that may indicate that trance is not always the same, considered as a state apart from its content, I would like to report a personal experience. At one time I did submit to hypnotic treatment by a man in whom I had high confidence. While I never was in any deep hypnotic trance, I was in it in a small degree; and I did have the experience that is referred to as the elixir in which there is a sense of taste and smell combined as it were into one whole. It was in a crude way pleasant. But I have known this experience in connection with the exalted states that were initiated on August 7, 1936, where the elixir had a quality of very superior enjoyment. The difference between the two might be suggested by the difference between a coarse synthetic perfume and something like the attar of roses. This might suggest that there is a difference in trance from state to state apart from the consideration of content. However, for us the important element is the content of the state, and while this is a subject matter that calls for direct introspection and reporting and does not seem to be within the range of psycho-physiological research and is thus dependent entirely upon the inspective report, it is the phase which seems to be avoided as much as possible by the researchers in the field of altered states of awareness. Nonetheless, I submit that difference of content makes all the difference in the world.

The approach of James H. Leuba to the subject matter of *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* contrasts radically from the approach of William James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*. In the latter case William James deals sympathetically with various stages of the religious experience and particularly with that highest phase of

¹ See the audio recordings "Three Fundamentals of the Introceptive Philosophy," parts 11 and 12.

² James H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 181-183.

the religious experience which is known as mystical states of consciousness. He gives the latter a high valuation and recognizes that the authority of the consciousness content derived in this way is supernal and unconditional for the ones who have these imperiences and asserts that it has a right to have that status. And only in the end when he deals with the darker side of states of consciousness that involve the principle of trance does he touch the subject of psychosis and the experience of desolation. In the former case we have an experience of an unimaginably exalted state of consciousness and, in the latter case, a state of consciousness that is as deeply dark and despair producing as the former is exalted. Leuba, on the other hand, approaches the subject from the point of view of the psychiatrist, dealing first with these inferior dark states and, thus, as he approaches the mystical states of consciousness casts over them a pejorative affect. In my treatment of this subject in the fourth part of *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object*, I also approach the subject from the same angle that William James had done before, and I presented highly honored representatives of those who have been men of Enlightenment. The chapter in which this was done was headed "Buddha, Shankara, and Christ,"³ thus casting the coloring of high valuation over the approach to the subject matter, which I regard as the proper approach and that the pejorative effect produced by James H. Leuba is essentially invidious and unjust.

There is another point I would like to note in connection with this subject matter and that is in relation to apparent correlations between states of consciousness and brain states. There is evidence that states of brain function can be identified through instruments such as the electroencephalograph. This shows that corresponding to some state of consciousness there is a sensibly discernable process in the elements that make up the brain. But what is the nature of this connection? We admit that there can well be a correlation, but is the connection one of cause and effect? Is it rather, secondly, a relationship in terms of parallelism or synchronicity? I find that there is a tendency among the researchers in the field to think of the relationship or correlation as one of causality and also a tendency to view change of brain state as the cause of change in consciences state. Now, I question this very seriously. If we know a cause of any phenomenon, we can infer the phenomenon from the cause. This is a logical process, a logical deduction. Thus, for instance, where the cause in the field of physics is the attraction between bodies in space, we can infer the paths of those bodies in space as a logical deduction derived through the application of mathematics. But I find no pretense among these researchers to claim that from their knowledge of change of brain condition or brain functioning, a deduction of the consciousness content corresponding to it. The consciousness content is for the cognizing subject the immediate subject matter; and in our work here we take that as our base of reference as the most immediately known thing that we have. And while it may well be that there is a correlation with brain state, it would be a grievous error to conclude that the brain state is the causal source of the content of consciousness. Here the causal connection would be in part a logical sequence of derivation, in part a sequence by external association as in stream of consciousness production, but it is a great failure of understanding to equate brain state as the causal antecedent of the consciousness content. But on the other hand, there is no reason to object to the idea that there is a parallelistic activity taking place in the brain or the

³ Wolff meant to say, "Christ, Buddha, and Shankara."

nervous organism as a whole connected with consciousness states. The main point is that for our purposes this associated activity in the physical entity, as we understood it, is of only incidental importance. The real importance is the content.

After a presentation of tape Number 12 on March 31, there was a subsequent discussion and certain questions were raised which imply that there is a misunderstanding of the nature of the symbol called Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject. It was objected that in my references to this subject matter I had made a number of statements, in fact, something like 25 different statements had been identified, and that that produced a condition of confusion as to the nature of this state, this Consciousness. It brings up a problem that is part and parcel of logic and also involves problems of epistemology, and I shall at this time try to clarify the position here. A point that I shall make is that the Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject is a conceptual transcription of a state which is not conceptual but introceptual, and that the concept Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject is a pointer concept not a container concept; and, further, that this conception is a universal predicate. And to make this clear I believe it will be desirable to go into an examination of some of the principles of logic, and for that purpose we'll deal with a problem that is more pedagogical than simply a continuation of our present text.

I shall go into this subject only briefly, as the whole subject matter of formal logic is sufficiently large to constitute the material for a year's-long academic course. But I will direct your attention to the simplest form of a proposition, and by proposition we mean a formulation which is the consequence of a judgment but taken in isolation from the judgment itself. The formation of a judgment calls for epistemological and even psychological factors. This is not the proper subject matter of logic taken in isolation. We start with a proposition and consider the difference between valid thinking on one side and the production of erroneous thinking on the other, only with respect to its formal aspects, not with respect to the whole problem of truth determination for life or for consciousness. This is a perfectly valid discipline. We will consider the simplest form, namely, an affirmative universal such as all a is b . In this, a is called the subject, b is called the predicate, and the form of the verb to be, namely, *is*, is called the copula. The classical form of this proposition is that which has come to us from Aristotle in the form *all men are mortal*. Now, an important point to bear in mind is that the copula *is*, is not the same as the equal sign in mathematics. The equal sign involves a universal assertion, to be sure, but we could for example say that $2 + 3 = 5$ and then convert the equation simply and say equally well that $5 = 2 + 3$. In the case of the affirmative universal such as all a is b , or all men are mortal, the extension or denotation, or on the other hand the intention or connotation of the predicate, is larger than that of the subject. This can be very readily indicated. We cannot, for instance, convert *all men are mortal* simply and change it into the form *all mortal creatures are men*. All we can do in the conversion is to say *some mortal creatures are men*. This is illustrated by certain techniques of symbolic logic that are very simple. Let us make a large circle representing all mortal creatures, then another circle, smaller in diameter, is enclosed in the first circle which represents all human beings, or all men. Obviously the extension of the larger circle is greater than that of the smaller circle for it includes all mortal creatures, which involves all animals, all vegetable entities, and in a certain sense we may say all mineral entities

since they can disintegrate and become friable soil. And we might go on and include all entities not visible to man that there may be.

Now, in connection with the entity which we call Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject, we would have to say it is a predicate of all propositions. It is not the subject that is contained in any other predicate. It is the universal container. So that we could say, for instance, the Root of all that is, is Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject. We could say that the total of all entities is contained in consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject, and so on through an indefinite number of predications. In fact, we may say that the number of predications is potentially infinite in the case where the Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject is always a predicate, always the container. It is a symbol representing the same thing that is indicated in the Vedanta by the capitalized word That, or in Buddhism by the capitalized word Suchness; but whereas the That and the Suchness contains no positive value, I am seeking to give a certain degree of positive meaning to the Ultimate rather than approaching in the negative sense. There has been the negative approach in the past in which there is a universal negation of any concept whatsoever or of any experience whatsoever as adequate representation of That. And if the objective is the withdrawal to a *nirvanic* state of consciousness, a ceasing to incarnate or have anything further to do with the *Sangsara*, this may serve as an adequate methodology. But we are not here seeking simply withdrawal into the freedom and delight of a *nirvanic* state of consciousness, but rather to achieve a comprehension of both the *nirvanic* and the *sangsaric*, in which case we retain the powers that have value in the field of manifestation. And for that purpose I believe in a positive approach rather than a negative approach toward the Ultimate is helpful, although I recognize that there are logical difficulties and that there is the problem of approximation as the only achievement possible, that no conception whatsoever is adequate.

And here we come to the use of a *pointer conception* as contrasted to a *container conception*. A container conception may be illustrated by the case of mathematical conceptions. It has been said that any conception which is completely determined by a finite number of specifications is a mathematical conception.⁴ It is clearly defined as such, and the meaning is contained within the conception itself. These are the conceptions with which we ordinarily work. In contrast, a pointer conception is one which indicates something beyond conceptuality as such. In our familiar experience a pointer conception could indicate a sensuous experience, and this was a point developed by Korzybski in his *Science and Sanity*. The point that ultimate meaning of the conceptions oriented to objects in the sensuous field is not that which the dictionary defines them to be, but rather indicates a stepping over into another mode of consciousness, in this case the sensible mode of consciousness. Consciousness-without-the-object-and-without-a-subject is a pointer conception aimed at the introceptual order—that order which transcends both conceptuality and sensuality and is attained only through the function of Realization. Its primary form of cognitive action is through *knowledge through identity*, or *knowledge by identity* to use the form employed by Sri

⁴ *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 15 (Chicago: The Werner Company, 1894), 629: “Any conception which is definitely and completely determined by means of a finite number of specifications, say by assigning a finite number of elements, is a mathematical conception.”

Aurobindo. You do not treat a pointer conception as a goal, but as a pointing to a goal, a pointing to something beyond itself. This must be borne in mind in all our work. At times we do use container conceptions, but at other times we employ pointer conceptions.

Now, we come to a further point. The mind would like to contain everything. This it cannot do. It is what the Buddhist calls an effort to grasp without changing oneself to include all within one's own cognitions. This cannot be done with respect to transcendent Reality. We can use the conceptual instrument simply in the pointer sense. In strict logic, everything that can be conceived and also everything that can be sensed is not that transcendental Ultimate, but this bare statement leaves one without anything to move upon, so we employ pointer conceptions to indicate that which lies beyond. I know perfectly well that the mind wishes to contain everything which comes to it. It cannot contain Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject, but on the other hand is contained by That.

Here we come to a step in yoga that is perhaps the most difficult step of all. It involves self-surrender; in the form of *jnana* yoga, preeminently the surrender of the mind to permit itself to be contained by an Other which is vaster than itself. This is the mystic death, and one may face this experience as something involving all of the potentially tragic elements of a death experience. It calls for faith and confidence to make this crossing because one does not know beforehand that there is any value beyond He does not know that it could not be an entering into a state of complete non-consciousness. He moves by faith until he has arrived and then he has knowledge. Before that, he has no certainty. We are using conceptuality here as an instrument to achieve this objective, but it is no replacement for the experience of the mystic death. Indeed, the mystic death is followed by rebirth, and thenceforth the reference of the 'I' takes a new meaning. One may have faith that this is true beforehand; he cannot have certainty beforehand. Therefore the way does call for courage. But we present a philosophy that is derived from something of that which lies beyond. It is guided by that which I have called the *transcendental function*; and the theory of its action is this, that by devoting oneself to the understanding of the philosophic statement there would be a tendency to arouse an inductive Realization of that from which the philosophy is derived.

Now, there's another point that was brought up in the discussion of March 31. I had in the tape of that day made certain criticisms of empiric science, that is, the science of our physicists, our chemists, our geologists, of those that are in the life sciences, and those who are engaged in the psychological sciences. The point of the criticism was not to say that these sciences were all wrong by any means. As a matter of fact, I get some of my principle help in formulation from some of these sciences, most especially mathematics but also from physics—not much from the development in the life sciences or the psychological sciences. I respect the achievements here; but, nonetheless, the sciences constitute our principle barrier at the same time, not because of the observational efficiencies or because of the logical element, but because of prejudicial tendencies in the selecting of a certain class of hypotheses for interpretation. I pointed out how the potential in explanatory hypothesis was actually potentially infinite and a tendency to select a certain type of interpretative hypothesis reflected the prejudice of the scientific community. It is this prejudice that constitutes a barrier. That is the point I want to make, and it is a barrier that must be removed.

I shall complete this tape by presenting a preliminary statement of a rather daring conception. What is the ultimate element out of which the universe of our experience is produced? You will remember that in the case of the logical Buddhists this original element which was called *Paramartha-Sat*, or Ultimate Reality, or what we might call the building block of all that is, was called point-instant sensation. It is something like the infinitesimal of differential calculus. Theoretically it should be derived from an immediate imperience. I have not found that that was claimed, and it certainly seems to be like a speculative concept. Certainly I do not find in my own experience, though I have tried to do so, any such picking up of a point-instant sensation which has no meaning whatsoever and yet has the potential of a building block, which combined with the creative power of the conceptual mode of our consciousness, produces the whole world of our experience. But I have found another building block, and to introduce this I will refer again, as I have in the past, to the principle of base of reference and of the shifting of a base of reference from one position to another.

You will remember how this occurred in the famous case where the shift was made from the base of reference given fixed coordinates in the earth that was characteristic of the Ptolemaic system and with respect to which the sun made a rotation around the earth every twenty-four hours, and so did all the stars and galaxies of the universe. This was purely a geometric statement and from that base of reference it is true. But the Copernican shift consisted in establishing the base of reference as fixed in the sun and also in the ecliptic, and with respect to that, it is true that the earth goes around the sun, and our current astronomy is based upon that shift. But this was an enormous transformation that affected not only astronomy but the practical and religious orientation of mankind at least so far as the Christian part of humanity was concerned. Formerly it had been maintained that this planet was the center of all things and that the sun and moon and stars were simply servants, as it were, to the humanity upon this earth. When the earth was viewed, as a result of the Copernican change, as simply one among other planets rotating around the center, and then beyond that, finding the sun as only one member of a vast assemblage of stars, there was then a major shock for the whole Christian community. It seemed as though man was demoted from his supposedly royal position and was no longer the center of interest of all the powers behind the cosmos. That illustrates how important can be the effect of simply changing one system of coordinates to another system of coordinates—a familiar process in mathematics. There were many practical results growing out of this Copernican change. Many problems connected with astronomy became easily resolvable which could be handled only with the utmost difficulty when the base of reference was fixed with respect to earth as in the Ptolemaic system, and might even be incapable of solution at all.

Now, it very often happens in our approaching of problems that are too difficult to resolve from one's perspective that by changing perspective a resolution is much more easily and perhaps very easily achieved. This can happen not only in the mathematical physical world, but also in the world of thought. And I'll refer again to the great instance of this that happened in the stream of Western philosophy. You'll remember, if you remember my tapes on the subject or have learned it from your own studies of philosophy, that when the modern period began one figure stands as the initiator of that period both in the field of mathematics and of philosophy, and that figure was Renee Descartes. He founded not only a new way of approaching mathematics, but he also

founded a school of philosophy known as the *rationalists*. This was carried out through the labors of four great thinkers: Renee Descartes himself, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Christian Wolff. Now, there is a certain power and certainly a very great beauty about this line of thought, but there was a fundamental weakness in it. It led to the deducing of consequences from sheer conceptions without investigating the authority of the conceptions. Innate ideas were affirmed without proving how they could arise.

The answer to this position in the form of a major criticism was presented by what has been known as the English school of *empiricists*, the principle name among which is that of John Locke, who, incidentally, was the prime philosophic source of the American theory of government. But he maintained in his major thought that our conceptions are dependent upon our experience, and that unless their actuality is determined by their empiric base, they are not dependable. There was, however, still maintained by John Locke a feature that was characteristic of the rationalists, namely, the conception of a substance underlying all things, a substance which was not an object of any sensation or any perception, but was conceived as the existence underlying all sensations that produced for us an object.

The first weakness in this theory was recognized by the second figure, namely, Bishop Berkeley, and he developed the idea that the notion of material substances could be completely abandoned, and in place of that he substituted this notion: that God presented the ideas that formed the basis of the sensational experiences that we have. The material substances were only the ideas of God. But he still retained the idea that there were mental substances, something corresponding to the selves or entities which we call human beings. But then there appeared upon the scene the brilliant Scotsman David Hume who carried the analysis further and dispensed with the idea of mental substances as well as material substances, and then all that we had was a play of sensations and ideas without any certainty of any law interconnecting this play, nor any certainty of perceiving entities that had any durability. It was the last word in nihilistic skepticism. The story of philosophy at this point had brought us to the point of despair.

And now as the hour has drawn to a close, I'll leave you in this state of despair to contemplate it for the coming week so that you may imagine, if you can, some way of release.