

Abstract of the Philosophy

Part 7 of 14

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January 1, 1975

This is a continuation of the series called "An Abstract of the Philosophy." Although in the beginning I had hoped to make a brief one-tape statement concerning my philosophic point of view, it has developed otherwise, and this now is the seventh tape and I have not yet really entered upon the formulation of the abstract. But this I shall attempt to do this morning; but first a note concerning this particular event of producing something different from that which was originally planned. This is very characteristic of production involving the transcendental function. The personal plan which one may work out by the use of his ordinary faculties or functions may be cancelled made and made over into another line of procedure because of the intervention of the transcendental function. It is as though another and a higher purpose was entering the field of production, and it is my policy to give way before it even though it does involve a degree of embarrassment at times. But now material has begun to develop that fits the formal statement, though I have no assurance that it will take the restricted form that I had originally envisaged.

If we look back at earlier approaches to the question of truth, we would find a time when the question asked an individual would be in the form, "What do you *know*?" It is said that this was the method of approach by those who formulated the Upanishads. It was not a question in the form which would be more characteristic of us today, namely, "What do you *think*?" but rather, "What do you *know*?" Nonetheless, there were different points of view, different levels of apperception or insight so that that which was known by one of those who produced at that time was different from that of another. And to us it would seem at first sight that there was not real knowing if there were differences such as that of a logical incompatibility between two instances of knowing. I found, however, a reconciliation of this. If we are dealing with the action of the higher functions called Realization or Enlightenment, there is a difference of level. What one apprehends through the action of this function does come into the consciousness as positive knowledge, but it is not knowledge in the ordinary way of viewing knowledge in the modern day. It is something that is trans-conceptual and trans-sensational, and that before it can be communicated it must be transcribed, and the product of the transcription does not have the knowledge certainty that applies to the original insight before it is transcribed. Nonetheless, on the level of original insight there can be differences due to difference of level of insight. The knowledge that flows in has the *quale* of certainty, yet there can be difference; and how is this possible?

The answer to this I find is really simple by introducing the notions of difference of perspective or difference of level. The same situation viewed from one perspective as contrasted to another may be apprehended with complete accuracy in both cases, and yet lead to statements that are incompatible. I could recall what I have previously said

concerning the step from the Ptolemaic view of the universe and the Copernican view which with perfect correctness in both cases could lead in one case to the statement that the sun goes around the earth and in the other case that the earth goes around the sun. I will not elaborate more on this point at this moment, but it suggests how it is possible to have the sense of knowing and yet when two or more individuals meet who have equal force of knowing, they produce different statements, and yet there is not a contradiction because there is a difference of perspective or level from which each individual apprehends the field before him.

Today, at least in the West, the primary question we would ask if we were functioning on the level of the qualified philosophical thinker would be not, “*What* do you know?” but, “*How* do you know?” This grows out of the recognition that the knowing process itself conditions the content produced by the knowing process. In an earlier day, and also in the earlier stages of the thought of the individual currently, this question does not arise, in as much as the individual tends to take the impact of a sense of certainty uncritically at its face value. Through many centuries of thought, we finally learned that we cannot take this impact at its face value without falling into error. In other words, criticism is necessary. And here I use ‘criticism’ in the sense that Immanuel Kant used it, as a careful examination of the process of knowing or seeming to know itself in its bearing upon the content of the knowing. It is for this reason that throughout my philosophy I’ve laid great emphasis upon the functions of cognition—to begin with, the two functions that have been well recognized both in Oriental and Western philosophy, namely, sense perception and conceptual cognition; and as one proceeds through the study of philosophic writings, he finds that in most cases these are the only functions that are given recognition. In fact, the logical Buddhist known as Dignaga formulated an aphorism to the effect that there are two and only two functions of cognition, namely, sense perception and conceptual cognition. This of course had certain methodological advantages in that if one could prove that knowledge from one form of cognition was not reliable, then the reliability lay exclusively in the other form. And as the burden of criticism fell upon the conceptual factor in cognition, the ultimate result was that one sought truth in the sensational or aesthetic aspect exclusively. This is a point that I do in my philosophy challenge very emphatically. But we will develop that point at more length later.

But to illustrate difficulties involved in connection with a truth determination, even using only these two functions, we find that the sense of certainty is not a sufficient criterion to determine the statement produced out of that sense of certainty is a true statement. The sense of certainty may come from a sense impression, but the sense impression may itself have contained within it an error. The instance of the mirage illustrates this point, and I have developed the effect of the mirage upon our cognition in principle. And the same thing applies to the use of the conceptual function. We know that an apparent development of ideas may take place that seem to produce a ridiculous situation such as the situations created by the imagination of the ancient Greek Sophists, an instance of which would be of this form: you ask an individual, “Do you know your father?” and he answers, “Yes, I know him.” Then you show him a man who is veiled and cloaked and you say, “Do you know this man?” and he says, “No, I do not know this man.” And then the questioner says, “But this man is your father veiled and cloaked here and you have by the contradiction proven that you do not know your father.”

We know today that in a situation of that kind there is a logical error and that there are criteria by which we can identify errors in thinking of such a sort. And we know how to use logic correctly whereby it will give to us a reliable body of truth which can be employed in the production of structures, or situations, or predictions as to the future which are verified by later experience. We have through such criticism of our knowing powers developed a differentiation between a reliable use of them and an unreliable use of them; and we do know that the sense of certainty which one may experience, as in the case of an intuitive insight, is not a sufficient proof that the statement growing out of that insight is itself true. The error could conceivably arise from the misuse or unskilled use of the function of intuition, or it may have arisen from the interpretation; but we know, as the result of much experience, that the feeling of certainty associated with a statement which grows out of the action of the intuitive function does not invariably prove to be valid, and that therefore a critique of the function whereby a distinction between its valid use and its improper use may be distinguished is of very great importance. It is a growth in sophistication concerning the knowing process that has led to the shift from the question, “*What* do you know?” to the question, “*How* do you know?” and I regard this development as one of premiere importance. In my study of the Buddhist logicians, I was particularly impressed with the fact that they had a considerable degree of awareness of this particular problem—the problem which we today recognize as belonging in the field of epistemology. They were aware of it, in fact, 1000 years before Immanuel Kant, although it was not developed by them in the high degree of sophistication which was true in the case of the thought of Immanuel Kant.

In my work *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object*, of which the first two parts are now published under that title, the first part was entitled “The Ground of Knowledge.” This was out of recognition of the importance of the epistemological problem represented by the question, “*How* do you know?” The basis of the knowing in this case was developed more particularly in the second and principle chapter of that part. It referred to a group of five Realizations which I have already referred to at some length in the present series—these Realizations being treated as a form of cognition not reducible to sense perception nor to purely conceptual cognition, but involving something more than these two organs or functions. And this led to the introduction of the idea that there is at least an additional organ or function of cognition. I keep emphasizing this because this is the point that is most critical in all of what I have to say. What I say is not verifiable by reference to sensuous experience nor is it verifiable by a method of logical development such as we have in pure mathematics, therefore not verifiable by conceptual means alone, but does require another way of cognition in order to verify its essential truth. There is a real difficulty here because if we view the history of philosophy, and in this case the history of religion along with it, we find an inadequate recognition of the problem presented by the question, “*How* do you know?” until recent days; and it is upon that question, therefore, I’ve laid my central emphasis.

Now, I’m going to present the problem that is presented here by two illustrations—one quite imaginary and the other drawn from a familiar experience that we have with human beings in this world. Let us take the function of sensation. There is a certain group of sensations familiar to us. Originally they’ve been called five in number, but our present knowledge shows that there are several more than five, as can be seen in the following statement. There is the function of sight or seeing, the function of hearing

related to the perception of sound, the function of smell, the sense function of taste, [and] then we have the functions that are generally listed under the head of touch but which are several in number when a systematic study is made of this field. We have a sense of pressure that can be identified and is reported by certain nerves, a sense of temperature, a sense of pain, and a kinesthetic sense, which is a sense of muscular effort. And indeed this sense is of peculiar importance, as it seems to give the feeling of reality with respect to an object more emphatically than any of the other senses. Then there are certain organic sensations which are reported from the more internal aspect of the organism. I understand that as many as thirteen different sense functions have been isolated.

But now let us suppose that one individual appeared in this world who had developed in him a sense function that was not present in the equipment of the mass of human beings, and yet of an importance equal to that of what we call the higher functions, namely, seeing and hearing. If, then, we assume that he had the full conceptual equipment which rendered communication possible and he were to make a report of the content derived from this new sense form, which we'll call the "x-sense," he would make statements that would have no meaning in terms of the other senses. If he spoke in terms of the other senses exclusively, he would be understandable to us because we would have shared those senses with him, but when he spoke in terms of this other sense that was unique with him personally, his statement would not be intelligible to us. He might even seem pathological. We might tend to call him crazy, and we might even feel that he should be institutionalized because he made so many statements that were completely meaningless to our common understanding. This is an imaginary hypothetical case. I can illustrate the point from real experience by supposing the individual who was born without one of the sense functions which are commonly possessed by human beings, namely, let us say the sense of sight. Now, he would have a commonality with the rest of us based upon the sense functions that we held in common, but with respect to those experiences for which sight is a necessity, such as the experiences of color, we could not communicate to him what we mean when we refer to color. There would be a void in his mind with respect to the reference there.

There is a term introduced by Korzybski in his *Science and Sanity* which is of real value here. He called it the "referent," namely, that which is meant by a concept when it is apprehended sensorially. Thus, the referent of the concept 'table' would be the sensuous experience of a certain kind of object which was meant by that concept. This would be something very different from the dictionary definition of the concept 'table'. Referent was the term he applied to this sensuous existence corresponding to a given concept. Thus when we talk to the individual who was born blind, and we speak of color and its effects upon us and the interrelationships between different colors, since he lacks the referent, he would not know what we mean at all. If he were in the majority, the rest of us who have the experience of sight and therefore the experience of color might be regarded as abnormal and therefore as individuals who should be institutionalized; but since in general the man born without the sense of sight is the exception to the rule, he is unable to enforce this kind of treatment with respect to the majority that surrounds him. This is a point I suggest the psychiatrist might give some—this is a point to which I suggest the psychiatrist might give some serious reflection.

Let us proceed now to a serious consideration of the primary principles of this philosophy. The first is that concerning its primary ground. This ground consists of the five Realizations which have been earlier described in this series of tapes. It is taken as a primary position that these tapes are, so far as they are applicable, are given as fundamentally true. But they are not therefore implied as something which is necessarily entertained as true by anyone else. They are true for me in the sense that they take primacy over any other source in so far as they are relevant. By any other source I mean any statement that comes from psychological sources, philosophic sources, or religious sources. There are those forms of literature known as scripture, *shastra*, and *sutra*, which are the fundamental bases of different religious orientations. These I treat with respect as being suggestive and as opening up possibility, but they do not have for me and for this philosophy the authority that is carried by these five Realizations. That point should be understood as fundamental.

I take the position that a statement merely because it exists in written or oral form does not carry authority as being true simply because it exists in written or oral form; and this applies not only to ordinary statements, but to all statements that have formed the basis of the various religious orientations that have existed in history, and this statement is maintained without exception. Nonetheless, since there exists such forms of literature which have had important influence upon the attitudes and orientations of human beings, they are treated with respect and entertained when they are considered. Nothing here is considered as true merely because it is written in a book no matter what that book may be, no matter how greatly that book may have been honored. The fact that it is written in a book justifies only this statement, "Thus I have read," or if the statement has come to me in auditory form it is, "Thus I have heard," and it may be entertained, it may be checked; but, while it may be accepted, there is no statement that is exempt from the possibility of its being rejected. This is fundamental as to the attitude of approach. All such sources may be useful aids, but they may be also distortions, and nothing whatsoever of such sort should be accepted by anybody blindly. I think that I have taken here a position that is in conformity with the formula left to us by the Blessed One, which may be paraphrased in this form: never assert as true something which comes from honored sources, be they men of distinction, be they those that are believed to be the gods, or even a statement given by the Blessed One himself, unless the individual has verified that truth for himself. Otherwise always say, "Thus I have heard," or, "Thus I have read." I accept this formula wholeheartedly and I am here reaffirming it.

This leaves the mind open and unenslaved, and it is a tragic fact that in religious history the enslavement of the mind has been far too common, particularly in the religious history of the ben-Israel group of religions. I take here positive stand against this enslavement of the mind as a matter of the very highest importance. It is the right of the investigator to question every statement whatsoever regardless of source which may come his way. On the other hand, it is his obligation equally to listen and entertain that which may be carrying an unexpected truth. If on one hand it is our duty to question the statements which come from sources which we generally regard as noble, it is equally true that our minds should be open to a possible emergence of truth from sources that are humble and an improbable door for the emergence of new knowledge. The mind should be open and not closed—critical and discriminating at all times, but accepting that which stands the test.

And remember that this rule applies fully to everything which I have written or said, as well as in every other relationship. What I have said applies not only to religious and philosophical authority or sources, but also to all scientific determinations. Elsewhere I've undertaken a critique of the methods of empiric science and show how they give only probable truth. Many things have proven to be of considerable value that have come forth by the methods of empiric science, but this method is not infallible. That is the lesson taught by the final failure of the Newtonian integrations after they had functioned successfully for a period of 200 years, and if this is true with respect to the form of empiric knowledge which we have that is most certain, then all the more does it apply to our other empiric determinations.

Let us turn now to a consideration of the conceptualization of the Realizations. First, the Realization, I am *Atman*. This was the very first Realization of all and was reaffirmed in a profounder sense in the fourth Realization. But what does this mean? In as much as the word '*Atman*' is translated as the Self, it would appear that the achievement was simply the statement, "I am I," and this is only a tautology. And that seems like a very restricted fruit coming forth from a twenty-four year search involving the abandonment of a projected academic career. It reminds one of the old saying that "the mountain labored and brought forth a mouse," only a mouse would be much more than a tautology. But this is only a surface appearance. The referent of 'I', the word 'I', ordinarily is to a person in our common usage, and the 'I' that appears in the predicate of the proposition 'I am I' is not a reference to a person in reality, but something more fundamental than that and a great deal more universal. The tautological appearance is a delusion; in point of fact, a real admission of limitation in our language. Ordinarily, in our common usage, 'I' refers to an entity that is visible and is recognizable as another person or as this person, and can be rendered objective in speech by using the word 'you'. I here am aware of you there. But if he who is referred to by the 'you' speaks, he would refer to himself also as "I," meaning the same thing that I mean when I say "you." But the 'I' in the predicate is always nominative, is always a subject and never a predicate. This forces us to strain our use of language. The 'I' representing the *Atman* is a pointer to a permanent subject, in some sense, or, as will become apparent later, a relatively permanent subject. This, then, is not a person. The person consists of the sum total of what the Buddhists call the aggregates, which make up the physical entity and the psychical complex associated with that physical entity, and in our ordinary usage, 'I' refers to this. But the 'I' which is a translation of the *Atman* is not that which can be an object at any time. This physical person is objective. These psychical complexes which enter into his constitution are not sensuously objective, but they are conceptually objective. They can be identified as a subject matter; but the pure I, which is *Atman*, is never a subject matter. It is the eternal cognizer of a subject matter which does not itself become a subject matter. To be sure, a symbol may be used to represent this pure subjective "I" and that symbol may become a subject matter, but the distinction must be borne in mind that it is only the symbol that becomes a subject matter, not that which the symbol represents. Therefore, the statement in reality is not a tautology, but the fruit of a fundamental search which has always been one of very great difficulty. Difficult even because the fact that comes forth is so obvious that it is everlastingly overlooked and not accepted—not recognized rather.

What is implied in this is that I am that which transcends all the domain of the external world, that I am that which is not to be found in that external world. I am that which is not contained in the two branches of the logical dichotomy, and therefore actually abides in the so-called excluded middle. I am that which cognizes the logical dichotomy, which runs in the form: all is either *a* or *not-a*. I am neither in the class represented by *a* nor in the class represented by *not-a*, although everything whatsoever, every idea whatsoever, every state whatsoever is comprehended by that dichotomy. It does not comprehend the I or Self which cognizes it and is equally involved in the perception and apperception of both branches of the dichotomy.

This is a matter of great importance and an enormous number of consequences follow from it. One of which is the attitudes towards the transition known as death. Death is a process involving the contents of consciousness. They are all subject to transformation. They come into being and vanish from our perception and apperception. But the I remains unmoved as the persistent witness of all this. This, then, that happens in death is a transition involving the contents of consciousness, particularly that content which I call my organism, but the transitions involving the organism leave unaffected that witness which I am. And the result, then, is that one who has attained this Realization, among other things, attains the assurance of superiority to the dying process, a freedom from the fundamental fear which most people feel with respect to this dying process. Just as one may take off a suit of clothes and put upon himself another, yet he himself remains permanent and persistent through all this, so one may take off a group of functions or attributes and replace them with other functions and attributes and remain unchanged, the permanent witness through it all. This, then, is the hidden meaning of the apparent tautology, "I am I." It is an enormous step to have achieved this certainty.