

Cognition as Unconditioned by Perspective

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The present tape will be entitled “Cognition as Unconditioned by Perspective.” The circumstances which led to the present development were in the form of a discussion which followed the presentation of the second tape on “Absolute Consciousness.”¹ A critic kindly presented the thesis that he could not find that there was such a thing as a Consciousness which was not the function of a cognizer. In other words, that the only consciousness which he could find by self-analysis was a consciousness as a function of a knower; thus, that the conception of entity had primacy and that consciousness was derivative. Now, I am well aware that this is the usual interpretation of consciousness and that it is our custom to view entityhood as primary and consciousness as derivative. This I would say is perfectly characteristic of subject-object consciousness, or relative consciousness, or consciousness as *shes-rig*, the kind of consciousness which is aware of phenomena. I am also aware of the fact that Dr. Jung in his “Psychological Commentary” in the volume called *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, in facing the presentation by an oriental philosopher and psychologist which represented the existence of Consciousness as independent of a subject, said that he could not imagine such a Consciousness.² But this was a defective imagination only. It was not an argument against the possibility of the existence of such a Consciousness. And Dr. Jung went on to say that in the case of the psychologic unconscious called the collective unconscious, there is no evidence of a center, that in point of fact it strongly appears that there is no such center that would be called a self or an “I.” And if we combine this statement with one made by Sri Aurobindo to the effect that when we speak of the unconscious we really mean another way of consciousness, then Dr. Jung’s reference to this characteristic of the unconscious would be really a reference to another way of consciousness.³ For one to say that he cannot imagine a Consciousness which is not centered in a self, or to say that by analysis he cannot find a Consciousness which is not centered in a self, and therefore concluding that all consciousness is a function of an entity, has only the force of a personal confession. It in no sense proves the impossibility of such a non-centered Consciousness. The analogue of this would be to take the case of a man born blind, who never had a subjective experience of color, who said that he could not imagine color, or

¹ See the audio recording “Absolute Consciousness,” part 2.

² W. Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), xxxviii-xxxix.

³ Aurobindo Ghose, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, vol. 20 of the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centennial Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 370:

What we call unconsciousness is simply other-consciousness; it is the going in of this surface wave of our mental awareness of outer objects into our subliminal self-awareness and into our awareness too of other planes of existence. We are really no more unconscious when we are asleep or stunned or drugged or “dead” or in any other state, than when we are plunged in inner thought oblivious of our physical selves and our surroundings.

that he could not by analysis of his consciousness discover such a thing as color also has no effect upon the actuality of color. The fact that one cannot imagine blue because he's born blind does not prove that the experience of blue is in principle impossible.

In the total structure of our awareness we find two complementary components. One is the content given by immediacy. The other is the knowledge of relationship between given entities. The relational aspect is the field of the syntactical component, or the reason connecting things, or ultimately the principle of law operating with respect to entities. The entities given immediately correspond to facts and their character may be called categorical. There is no argument about them so long as we introduce no judgmental process at all. A fact in this sense, such as an immediate sensuous experience, is its own authority and it can neither be proven as a result of logical deduction nor can it be reasoned away. This contribution from immediacy is essential to give reality to our relational structures. Now, it's entirely possible to be concerned in a certain discipline with the principles of interrelationship apart from the existence of any entities that may be assumed as present. And here we come into the field of the most formal phases of logic and mathematics, a development that has its validity, but does not cover the whole field of awareness. The immediate element is an essential component when we are concerned with the question of reality. The development of thought in connection with the relational factor gives us possibility, but the immediate element gives us actuality. My own experience concurs with the contention of Dr. Jung and of my critic, that by analysis I could not derive Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject. In this I'll have to take you back to the fourth and fifth Realization.

The fourth Realization was attained by a conscious effort in the field of self-analysis, and I found that I am *Atman*. But there was here something to start with—the sense of I-ness, the sense of ego, the sense that I am—and I could imagine a center of consciousness. It was thus possible to arrive at the conclusion, by analysis, that I am *Atman*. However, the Realization of Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject was not derived by analysis. It was not an arbitrary postulate, but it was the result of a Realization which walked into my consciousness unexpectedly and unsought, but fully welcome. And it came as something which I saw to be true with the eye of the mind. It might be called an initiation into a new kind of awareness, one which I could not have imagined beforehand, one which I could not have derived by analysis, but something which I saw as primal fact, just as would be the case if a man born blind suddenly acquired his sight and then was able to know that there was such an experience as that of the color blue. It is sheer fact immediately apprehended, not rationally deduced. This point is of prime importance. As I've said before, this caused a revolution in my philosophical and psychological, theoretical orientation.

That this imperience of a Consciousness without a subject is not merely a personal vagary or form of psychosis is made clear by the fact that the same principle is affirmed in Oriental philosophy and psychology. It exists, for one thing, in *The Secret Doctrine* under the term 'Absolute Consciousness', as we have pointed out heretofore, and it is affirmed specifically by Padma Sambhava, therefore it is something to be entertained seriously. It is valid for him who cannot imagine it to grant that he does not yet know everything and that there are possibilities which lie beyond our present powers of awareness. Yet, even though we cannot imagine such a Consciousness, even though we cannot find it by self-analysis, yet it is possible to assume that the real

relationship between the knower and the known is not that the Consciousness is a function of a knower, but rather the other way around; that, indeed, the knower and the known are functions of Root Consciousness which is the preexistent reality, at least in so far as we are able now to understand. We can assume this as the truth and the reality and draw many of the consequences which follow. This is a process with which we are well familiar in the higher reaches of mathematical thought. One does not have to first experience to reason upon possibility and see the consequences that follow. And this is not merely a meaningless academic exercise, for there is an intimate relationship between premise and consequent; and though we may not realize the premise as yet, yet, by dwelling upon the consequent and seeing what follows within that consequent we have the possibility of producing a favorable condition for the direct Realization of the premise. It is because of this principle that I spend so much time developing this thesis. It is really a form of yogic method.

Let us now deal with some of the consequences. In our ordinary cognition we find our knowledge is conditioned in at least three ways: it is conditioned by the perspective from which we view the world without and the world within; it is conditioned by the time sequence of events; and it is conditioned by the dualistic form of our consciousness. What we produce in this way is not the truth as it would appear from the standpoint of a nondualistic consciousness; it is not the truth as it would appear if there were no time conditioning; and it is not the truth as it would appear in the absence of the limitation of perspective. I shall pay special attention to the latter point, but first consider what is meant by perspective. In its first and most common usage it is the viewpoint of an object as seen by the sense of sight. When we look, for instance, at that great painting of Leonardo da Vinci called “The Last Supper” and look at the room, it has the quality of depth very strongly evident. It represents the third dimension in very clear terms. In point of fact, Leonardo, in his awareness of perspective psychology came close to an understanding of what later became projective geometry. The only essential difference between *perspective* geometry, the relationships in the world as seen from the eye, and *projective* geometry is that in perspective geometry we take a point of observation at a finite distance from the object and proceed, in the field of art, to make the appropriate construction. In projective geometry, we take a point of assumed observation at infinity; otherwise the two disciplines are very similar. Now, this contrasts from a characteristic of the earliest Eastern art, which is two-dimensional and has no perspective at all—a position that may be superficial, but it also might be very profound, as we may see later.

Now, in all of our thinking we involve this principle of perspective in a form which is very commonly called taking a base of reference—viewing a subject matter from a certain point of view. And here again I will refer to the familiar example of the difference between the Ptolemaic picture of the planetary universe and the Copernican picture of the planetary universe. As I have handled this in other tapes, I’ll only briefly recall the difference to our minds. In the Ptolemaic system, we took as base of reference the earth; and, assuming the earth as the fixed point of our coordinates, we find that the sun goes around the earth. But in the Ptolemaic system⁴ we shifted to the sun and the ecliptic as the base of reference, and from that perspective the earth goes around the sun. And from the different bases of reference, perspectives, or systems of coordinates, both

⁴ Wolff obviously meant to say, “. . . in the Copernican system . . .”

statements are true with respect to the bases assumed—a very important point. It is not abstractly true to say that essentially either, apart from base of reference, either the earth goes around the sun or the sun goes around the earth. The statements are true only with respect to the base of reference chosen, not absolutely true; and in point of fact, if we take a third base of reference which is oriented to the Milky Way, we will find that with respect to that the sun is not a fixed center but is an object rotating about a certain point in our galaxy, and that the earth does not actually follow a path which is an ellipse of low eccentricity or nearly a circle with certain perturbations, but follows a course which is something like a spiral. The picture becomes different as we take different bases of reference. This applies not only to a planetary or a sidereal problem, but to all of the actions of all of our cognitions in our ordinary relative consciousness. We always take, ultimately, as the base of reference a center which we call “I” and relate ourselves to the world without and the world within from that perspective. The knowledge we derive, therefore, is relative only to that perspective. It is not truth as it is in itself.

Now, the point that I am leading to begins to emerge, that if we are to know the reality concerning the All as it is in itself, it must be apprehended as freed from the conditioning of a centered consciousness, of a time organization, and from the dualistic form of things as they appear to us here. But with respect to the point concerning the orientation freed from perspective, only a Consciousness without a subject could give reality as it is in itself. This would be the Consciousness which is called Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject, or Absolute Consciousness, or *Rig-pa*, where the knowledge is by a fusion of the knower and the known so that there is no relational factor to confuse or deform the picture. One would know by the subject being identical with the object. It would be *knowledge through identity*.

Now, the point may be made that Consciousness-without-an-object, or Absolute Consciousness, or *Rig-pa* is not a knowledge of phenomena; it is Consciousness without content. And in the light of the principle that *substantiality is inversely proportional to ponderability*, it would follow that this uncentered Consciousness without content would be a Consciousness filled with utter fullness of Substance—objects being no more than relative voids. The Realization of the ultimate reality, the ultimate substantial essence, is a state of no relativity as between a knower and a known, but a pure existence or being in Consciousness. Unimaginable as we are now conditioned, but which we can conceive of abstractly. Thus alone can we know the true truth in the non-relative sense.

An interesting point may be made from considering a certain fact that has been noted in the investigation of subatomic physics. It has been reported that in the very act of observing this level of phenomena, the introjection of the observer distorts the observed picture of events. Only by a Consciousness unconditioned by perspective, as of a centered consciousness, undistorted by time conditioning, and undistorted by the principle of duality, would be a true Realization where there is no contrast of representation with respect to that which is represented, but a sheer identity between the knowing and the known. One would know only when one no longer exists, but only is fused in the All.