

Capstone Statement

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In the latter part of 1978, Dr. Brugh Joy was over to our place several times. The dialogue between us probably equals about twenty hours of taped material covering quite a large number of subjects. Dr. Joy is on a different line from that to which I belong. He's quite sympathetic with the Zen Buddhist point of view. My orientation is to Shankara, as you know, which is a preeminently rational orientation, whereas, the Zen Buddhist, I think, may be called quite correctly highly irrational. Nonetheless, there are different paths which are designed to meet the needs of different human beings, starting from different psychological bases. Dr. Joy has a good deal of clairvoyance, which doesn't mean that it's infallible, but it can hit the nail on the head. He said that I was staying around in order to contribute a capstone to my work here—a winding it up. And his interpretation of the nature of that capstone was to the effect that it would bring in the *chakra* known as *anahata*, which is the heart *chakra*. He interprets my position as being oriented to the crown *chakra*—*sahasrara*. But bear in mind, I am not oriented to the *kundalini* pattern, which is known as the *Tantra*, but rather to the *Trimarga* of the *Bhagavad Gita*, with a special reference to the form of yoga that is known as the yoga of knowledge, or *jnana*. Nonetheless, there are possible correlations with the *tantric* approach which may be valid. I am not, therefore, criticizing them, but I am not *tantric* in my own orientation. I am oriented more to a philosophic approach rather than a biological one. But, I am not, therefore, saying that the *tantric* path is not valid. But we met as representatives of two different schools and exchanged our thought. Only, he gave this interpretation of what he thought would be a step on my part.

Now, in the last two or three weeks, I suddenly saw something that I had missed all along—perhaps because it was so obvious—and it may possibly be my capstone contribution. A certain correlation between a fundamental thesis in the Wolffian philosophy—incidentally, I do not mean Christian Wolff, I mean Franklin Wolff—a certain orientation in it that parallels something that is to be found in Buddhistic philosophy and also in the *Advaita* Vedanta. Those of you who have been familiar with exoteric Buddhism will know these facts: that it is *anatmic*, that it is non-theistic—in other words, no Self, no Divine Being. You also know that Shankara is oriented to that which is called *Brahman*. *Brahman* may be viewed as a principle or as a Divinity, and Sri Aurobindo, again and again, refers to *Brahman* as *He*, which would suggest an entity. I wouldn't say that Shankara does this, for Shankara, rather, orients to *Brahman* as to a principle, and in the *Crest Jewel* he does say that the *Atman* is the status of the *Brahman* in creatures. Now, the *Atman*, as you know, is another name for the Self, the true Self. And the Buddhist position admits no such thing as a true Self, any persistence of that sort. Buddhism sometimes gives the effect of almost being like a materialism in some *sutras*, and certainly is positivistic—which means a denial of any substance behind the appearance.

One of the most important Buddhistic philosophers is the writer—oh, my gosh, it drops out of my mind—Ashvaghosha—*The Awakening of Faith*. There is in the appendix

of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, several items discussed, one of them under the head of “Reality.” In this there is a certain reference to the basic teachings of Ashvaghosha. Ashvaghosha was perhaps the first systematic philosopher among the Buddhists. He was born in the middle of the first century before Christ, and died during the first century after Christ. So he was around that time which was quite early. Now, he affirms that neither the individual nor the world is real. That which is real, he calls the *Suchness*. He’s quite *Mayavadin* in viewing the whole development of worlds and men as unreal. And that, as you know, is characteristic of the philosophy of Shankara—*Brahman* alone is real. With Ashvaghosha, the *Suchness* alone is real.

Now, in the Wolffian philosophy there are three fundamental conceptions: first is that consciousness is original, self-existent, and constitutive of all things. And also, if you’ll turn to the last full paragraph of the discussion in *Pathways* on the High Indifference, you’ll find a statement like this: “I was no more and God was no more, only the ETERNAL remained.”¹ Now, this position grew out of a Realization; it was not speculative. That is the report of something that happened in consciousness, not a speculative statement. As I used the word ‘I’, it meant the Self was no more, and ‘God’, as used there, represented the object, in the highest sense, as representing the whole objective order; the Self as representing the subjective order, even in the highest sense of the *Paramatman*. “I was no more and God was no more, and only the ETERNAL remained.”

Now, think of three terms: the subject to consciousness, the consciousness itself, and the object of consciousness. The statement would imply that the middle term is that which alone is eternally real. You may regard the subject and the object as mere illusions, or *maya*, as is the case with the Buddhists and with Shankara. I use the term ‘derivative’ rather than the term ‘maya’, but there is an agreement there otherwise. I find the *Mayavadin* position not wholly satisfactory. But what is implied is that the ultimate Reality is found in the middle term, not either in the subject to consciousness nor the object of consciousness. The world and the individual, therefore, are not permanent. I wouldn’t go so far as to say they’re only illusion—as is said in Buddhism and is said in the Vedanta—but that they are derivative and have a derivative reality, but not a permanent reality. But, otherwise, there is a strong parallelism between the three positions.

Now, my position grew out of a Realization and was not the result of the study of a Shankara philosophy or of Buddhist philosophy, but grew out of a Realization; but the logical pattern, if you’ll notice, is the same, and I only thought of this in the last two weeks. It’s rather obvious, but I failed to see it; perhaps because it was too obvious. And I find this very interesting; and it also seemed to impress me that this is really the capstone of my work: the fact that I’ve arrived at the same logical pattern that you find in Buddhism and that find in the *Advaita* Vedanta. It may occupy a position intermediate between the two.

And here is something very interesting: somewhere I’ve seen, and I do not now remember where, that the Brothers who are responsible for the Theosophic Movement, and who gave expression to the material that is to be found in *The Secret Doctrine* and also in *Isis Unveiled*, are oriented to a position that is also intermediate between

¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *Pathways Through to Space* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1944), 123: “I was no more and God was no more, but only the ETERNAL which sustains all Gods and all Selves.”

Buddhism and the Vedanta.² In fact, it is said that there is one branch of Buddhism that sounds to Buddhists' ears like Vedanta, and there's one branch of Vedanta, namely that of Shankara, which sounds to Vedantists' ears very much like Buddhism, and that it is in this zone that the Theosophia arises. In other words, you might think of Buddhism and the Vedanta as two wings, two wings that bear the central truth. Each is a statement that is one-sided, and it is the combined statement which leads you to the central core. The austerity of the Buddhistic statement is no doubt valid, but you have it softened in the Vedantists statement. Buddhism often sounds like annihilistic materialism, but yet that is not what it means. When the *Shunyata* Buddhists speak, they often make the statement that this is not the *voidness* of nothing at all; it's a *voidness* to the objective consciousness, but not in reality void.

Now, I call your attention to the mandala which I produced as a result of an experience on Eldorado Creek in northern California where it suddenly dawned upon me that there where we see nothing at all, there is substance, and that where we see objects—like trees, mountains, human beings, and so on—we see a relative absence of substance. In other words, apparently empty space is a plenum, and the apparently substantive objects—like this room with all the objects around it, and like these human beings—are relative voids. I use the term 'relative' rather than 'absolute' because there's a difference in density. And, thus, if you took a nuclear sun, which we would regard as the most compact mass of matter imaginable, in that all the mass of a sun like that of our Earth is compacted until it is only about twelve miles across, where the nuclei are virtually tight together, yet retains the same mass as the full-sized sun and, ultimately, they are called dark holes in space, which is a word that is rather astonishing, because that would be just my interpretation of them as being essentially voids. I'd say that that nuclear sun was a very nearly complete absence of substance, and that a very subtle thing, like the robe of the *Dharmakaya*, which is said to be like unto a breath, is actually quite substantial, reversing our ordinary orientation. Now, this implies, then, that space that seems to be empty is where the substance is, and that the objects in it that attract our attention are relative voids—not all of them with the same degree of voidness, but the most void one would be the nuclear sun and the least void one would be the *Dharmakaya* robe.

You have a certain reversal here that seems to fit what is implied in both the Buddhistic and the Vedantic statements. Another thing you'll notice is that it is the middle term between the subject and the object that has the reality. It is the consciousness, not the self, not the world, but the consciousness which ties the two together: I aware of that world. It is the consciousness between. In most philosophies, consciousness is viewed as a

² See the audio recording "Various Philosophical Considerations," part 2:

There is a question not raised explicitly in the letter, but which does arise implicitly, and that is, what is the relation between Buddhism and the Vedanta, especially the *Advaita* Vedanta. In this connection I recall an essay in an early number of *The Theosophist* written, as I remember, by Mohini Chatterji in which he said that there always has been a Buddhism even before the time of Gautama Buddha and there always has been a Vedanta even before the time of the beginning of the Vedanta we now know; that these indeed were two wings of the ultimate truth, two facets that are expressions from a more integral whole. My own experience, or rather my own group of imperiences, would tend, as far as they go, to confirm this position.

relationship. Here it is viewed as a self-existence, the original source from which all things come; that it is the unborn and the undying. But selfhood is born and worlds are born, dependent upon the consciousness and derived from the consciousness; and the consciousness is, thus, not merely a relationship between these two, but is the original Reality corresponding to the *Suchness* of Ashvaghosha and the *Brahman* of Shankara. There is the statement, which I think you can follow, that if two concepts, verbal concepts, lead to the same consequences and have the same relations, then they are the same concept even though the words used may be different. That has been said before. In other words, we're dealing with the same thing, even though Ashvaghosha says *Suchness*, and Shankara says *Brahman*, and I say Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject, or, otherwise, Root Consciousness. My approach might be called more psychological, whereas the other approaches might be called more metaphysical. Psychology seems to be an attitude that the West has introduced, whereas the Orient has tended to speak in metaphysical terms. But we're coming to the same pattern in the end, and that would make these three conceptions really identical.

Now, that may be my final statement in connection with the work, that is, a contribution to it. It's a brief statement, but I think it suggests a fundamental tie-in.

I wonder if it got it.