

# **The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object**

A Discussion of the Nature of Transcendental Consciousness

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Part 7 of 25

## **PART II**

### **The Aphorisms on Consciousness-Without-an-Object**

#### **CHAPTER 3**

##### **General Discussion of Consciousness-Without-an-Object**

(continued)

##### **Section 6**

The technique of the higher yoga would seem to imply the isolation of bare subjectivity as Self-consciousness totally devoid of content. The real meaning of this technique is, however, a shifting of the focus of consciousness *toward* bare subjectivity and away from objectivity, with the goal being in the nature of a limit which may be approached with unrestricted closeness of approximation, but which is never actually attained so long as any self remains. Fully to attain the goal is to destroy the subject as well as the object, and then there remains pure Consciousness-without-an-object—a state which is equally pure Consciousness-without-a-subject. But so long as the movement is toward pure subjectivity, the goal is unattainable, just as the last term of an infinite converging series is never reached through a step-by-step process.

The aspirant to yoga starts with consciousness operating in the universe of experience and thought, and in a state of a self entangled with objects. This is the familiar state of human consciousness. The entanglement with objects leads to the superposition upon the self of qualities properly belonging to the objects alone. This state is akin to that of hypnosis, and is real bondage—the great cause of suffering. The first steps in yoga technique have the significance of progressive disentanglement of the self and of dehypnotizing the consciousness. The process is one of radical dissociation of the self from objects. At the completion of the first stage the self stands opposed to and other than the universe of objects. Objects, now, are simply witnessed as something outside, and the identification is dissolved. This stage may be represented by the judgment, “I am other than that”—the “that” referring to all possible objects. The second stage is ushered in by a radical readjustment in which the self shifts to another plane or base, where relations vanish and the self is realized as identical with content of consciousness. Superficially, this may seem like a recurrence of the original participation or entanglement, but such is not the case as there has been a shift of base. The content of consciousness now is the inverse of that with which the aspirant originally started. The difference may be suggested by conceiving all objects in the original state as being vortices or voids in a supersensuous and continuous plenum. The

consciousness with which the yoga process starts is exclusively aware of the vortices or voids—the whole world of supposed things—while the culminating consciousness, thus far, functions in the supersensuous plenum. That plenum is realized as the Self identical with content of consciousness—the state consistently reported by the mystics. It is as though the “I,” which in the original state was like a bare point within the universe and circumscribed by objects, had suddenly transformed itself into a space that comprehended all objects. But there still remains a self that is aware, that maintains its own identity, and may be said to have a content that is the inverse of experience; for such a self certainly realizes values such as bliss, peace, and freedom. The more familiar name for this State is *Nirvana*.

Most of the literature on the subject represents *Nirvana* as the final culmination, but this is an error. *Nirvana* is simply the inverse of the universe—thus not the ultimate transcendence of the pairs of opposites. There is a still more advanced stage in yoga. To facilitate understanding of this stage it may help if we review the significance of the first step, considered as an affective transformation. In affective terms, the first step is frequently called a renunciation of the universe, namely, the breaking of all attachment to objects. The successful accomplishment of the first step brings a very great reward, that is, consciousness operative in a subjective or inverse sense. The realization here is extremely attractive, but attractiveness implies a self that remains identical and which is still influenced by valuation. Now, the final stage of yoga involves the renunciation of *Nirvana*, and that means the renunciation of all attractiveness and reward. Such a renunciation implies the final annulment of all claims of a self which remains in any sense unique. Both consciousness as object and consciousness as subject are now annulled. There remains simply Consciousness-without-an-object which, in turn, comprehends both the universe and *Nirvana* as potentialities. This stage is the culmination of the yoga.

## Section 7

Modern physics and astronomy have developed a speculative conception which is, in some respects, an inverse reflection of the view elaborated here. This interpretation is derived from certain facts which have come to light in recent decades, partly as the result of development of instrumental aids to observation and partly as the result of progress in interpretative theory. It now appears, quite clearly, that the older conception of matter as being composed of unchanging and indestructible atoms does not faithfully interpret the facts derived through experience.<sup>1</sup> It has become necessary to conceive of the atom as composed of still finer units, such as electrons, protons, positrons, and so forth, and these in turn as being subject to transformation under the appropriate conditions. When the transformation takes place it appears that ponderable matter assumes a state of radiant energy. This process, seemingly, is proceeding in the stars continuously and is the source of the energy derived from them upon the surface of the

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<sup>1</sup> It would be more correct to say that the older conception can no longer interpret the facts as *simply* as the newer conception. It is always possible to make the older conception work by adding intricate interpretations through *ad hoc* hypotheses, but this is done at the price of clumsiness and complication. It is not change in the factual picture that compels change in theory, but the greater logical beauty and efficacy of the new theory.

earth. Apparently, then, the stars are disintegrating in the sense that matter concentrated in bodies at widely separated points in space is being transformed into radiant energy which spreads throughout all space. All of this suggests that the various systems of stars will ultimately disappear as masses of ponderable matter, and in their place will be a space uniformly filled with radiant energy. On the other hand, observation of numerous extragalactic nebulae suggests, very convincingly, that both stars and systems of stars are generated by an aggregation of more or less homogeneous and amorphous matter into concentrated and more or less organized form. These various facts from observation, combined with theory, suggest the following conclusions:

1. That if the history of the stellar universe were traced back far enough in time we would find a stage wherein there were no stars, but only a more or less homogeneous matter and radiation spread uniformly throughout space.<sup>2</sup>
2. That if we could follow the life of the systems of stars far enough into the future, we would come to a time when most matter, if not all, would be reduced or transformed into radiation extending throughout space.
3. That the two notions of conservation of mass and of energy must be united into the conception of a persistent Energy which may appear in the forms either of ponderable mass or of field energy, the latter including that which is termed radiation.

The above conceptions leave us with but one constant or “invariant,” namely, Energy, which may appear at certain times as ponderable matter, and at others as transformed into the state of radiant energy.<sup>3</sup> If now we substitute for ‘Consciousness-without-an-object’ the notion of “Energy”; for the ‘Universe’—in the sense of all objects—the notion of “ponderable matter”; and for ‘*Nirvana*’ the notion of “state of radiation,” we can restate our first aphorisms as follows:

1. [In place of ‘Consciousness-without-an-object is’, we have:] Energy is.
2. Before ponderable matter was, Energy is.
3. Though ponderable matter seems to exist, Energy is.
4. When ponderable matter vanishes, yet remaining through all unaffected, Energy is.
5. Outside of Energy there is no matter.

[And also the same can apply to aphorism 11:]

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<sup>2</sup> According to latest theory, the radiation density at the early highly condensed stage of the expanding universe was much higher than the matter density. What matter there was present, however, [was] spread out uniformly. At a later stage of expansion the radiation density had dropped to equality with that of matter, and at this point “gravitational instability” set in and the galaxies began forming.

<sup>3</sup> Actually, the more generally valid space-time “invariant” concept is that of the directed quantity “Energy-Momentum,” of which “Energy” is merely that part lying along the direction of increasing time. For the sake of simplicity of illustration we use only the more familiar term ‘Energy’.

11. Within Energy lie both ponderable matter and radiant energy, yet for Energy these two are the same.<sup>4</sup>

This physical conception has a high order of theoretical beauty, and I regard it as one of the finer products of scientific art. It effects a very great conceptual simplification, and enables us to picture a wide range of transformation in nature as experienced within the organization of an essentially simple unifying concept. However, what we have is a construction of the creative intellect, in part operating upon a material given through observation, and in part conditioning the observation. We have no right to say that this theory, or any modification which may take place in the future, is nature as it is apart from the consciousness of all thinkers. Any question of the truth or reality-value of the theory must be judged in relationship to a conscious thinker. Further, we have no right to assert dogmatically that, even though for our science this theory should prove to be universally valid, then it must necessarily be valid for any competent thinker whatsoever. In fact, it is entirely possible, nay more, quite probable, that the scientists of an entirely different culture, although of comparable capacity and supplied with comparable resources for investigation, would nonetheless construct an entirely different theoretical structure for the organization of their corresponding experience. Yet, this would not discredit the relative validity of the foregoing theory for our present culture.

### Section 8

The value of a theory or of any conceptual formulation lies in the fact that it gives the intelligent consciousness a basis for orienting itself and for achieving either purposive control of, or intelligent understanding in, the sea of existences. In the strictly metaphysical sense, namely, in the sense that is not related to any concrete thinker, no conceptual formulation is either true or false. It is simply irrelevant. Nor, on the other hand, can experience prove the truth or falsity of any fundamental theory, though it can check the various derivative theories.<sup>5</sup>

If we regard the fundamental theories—the original bases or starting points—as only assumptions, then the whole of science is grounded in uncertainty and affords no security. But if the fundamental theories are grounded in insight—a mystical function—then it is valid for science to proceed with a basic assurance which is essentially of the

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<sup>4</sup> This analogue is not employed to suggest that the aphorisms gain their authority from the physical conception. Physical conceptions change and so constructions based upon them are vulnerable. The real point made is that the aphorisms, as concepts, are not nearly as strange as they may seem at first. The above is a conceptual pattern which already exists and is used, though in a somewhat different sector of human knowledge. Of necessity, any conceptual symbol must be composed in terms of the conceptualism of its milieu, however unthinkable its roots may be in conceptual terms.

<sup>5</sup> In this connection, by fundamental theory I mean one that is a primary assumption of a given type of intellect—its starting point for creative constructions. These fundamental theories are based in faith and really form part of the essential religious belief of a given culture. In order to think, we must always start with something that we cannot prove either by logic or by reference to experience. This something defines the form of experience as it becomes the material of thought, but it is not a derivative from experience. Thus, for example, our science rests upon a faith in the uniformity of nature. Discredit this faith and the science falls as a whole. Indeed, this faith may be perfectly justified, but it precedes science—it does not follow from science. In psychologic terms, the fundamental theory wells out of the unconscious.

same type as that attained through mystical awakening. All of which simply means that science, completely divorced from the religious spirit, is no more than sterile formalism. In point of fact, much of our science is far from sterile, but then there is actually much real religion in it. This factor should be given a larger theoretical recognition and its significance should be more adequately appreciated.

## Section 9

It is not difficult to see that the fundamental theories of science are of the nature of consciousness, since their existence is, for us, in thought alone—and a conscious thought at that. But such theories contain terms pointing to referents which in some sense have an objective existence. At first, one may be disposed to think that these referents must lie outside consciousness. However, it can easily be shown that even here we have actually drawn upon no material from beyond consciousness, though it lies or rests in another compartment of consciousness as contrasted to that of the interpretative theory. We can illustrate this by reference to what is one of the most objective notions of all physical science. This is the notion of “mass.”<sup>6</sup>

When we ask, “What is mass?” we find that it is, in effect, defined in two ways, as follows:

1. Mass is measured by inertia in the field of a force.
2. Mass is measured by weight in the gravitational field of a standard piece of matter, for example, the earth.

“Inertia” is the name given to the resistance which a body opposes to an effort (or “force”) to speed up its motion or to retard its motion. “Weight” is the name for the effort (or “force”) required to hold a body against the so-called force of gravity. But what do we mean by resistance and effort? Here we step out of the conceptual system into the realm of data from experience. Resistance and effort are sensory experiences, particularly involving the kinesthetic sense. Thus, at least in so far as man is concerned, both of these “forces” are existences in consciousness. To predicate that they correspond to existences outside of, and independent of, consciousness in every sense is to create a speculative dogma which in the very nature of the case can never be verified. For verification operates only within the field of consciousness. This is simply another instance of the principle that consciousness can never know absolute unconsciousness, for where consciousness is, unconsciousness is not. Undoubtedly, speculative theory can proceed upon the assumption that there are existences outside consciousness in every sense, but this is the assumption of an “as if” which can never be verified, either mystically or in any other way. The assumption may have a relative value, but it lacks all authority, and properly, may not be invoked to oppose the rational right of anybody to refuse to accept it.

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<sup>6</sup> This is perhaps the most concrete special case of the energy-momentum concept described in a previous footnote.

We know immediately that consciousness is; but we do not know that mass is, immediately. All that we do know concerning the latter is that systematic constructions involving the concept of mass can be produced that give to man a greater command over nature and establish a greater harmony between conscious man and the apparent environment in which he finds himself. Yet both of these are values within consciousness.<sup>7</sup>

From the basis of Consciousness-without-an-object there is no necessity of predicating absolutely unconscious existences. There would remain a distinction to be drawn between different kinds and levels of consciousness, and in particular, the distinction between consciousness which is not conscious of itself and consciousness which is conscious of itself. This leaves plenty of room for the existence of something beyond “consciousness-which-is-conscious-of-itself,” or “self-consciousness,” and thus there can be a flow into and out of the field of reflective consciousness. This, I submit, is all that science needs to interpret the fractional character of the data from experience. In addition, the view I am offering eliminates the question: How is it possible for that which is wholly outside consciousness, in every sense, to enter consciousness? Primeval Consciousness is the all in all, and only self-consciousness grows.

While it is a theoretical impossibility for consciousness to comprehend that which is absolutely outside consciousness, in every sense, there is no theoretical barrier which stands in the way of self-consciousness spreading out in Primeval Consciousness without limit, for self-consciousness is composed of the very stuff of consciousness itself. An extending comprehension of Primeval Consciousness by self-consciousness is simply a case of light assimilating Light. The light cannot know darkness, because where light goes the darkness vanishes, but light can, in principle, know the Light as it is of its own nature.

Opposed to consciousness as the only existence there stands the counter notion of voidness. In this sense the void is a somewhat which is not, or has no substance. Now, without voids there would be nothing within the Primeval Plenum of Consciousness to arouse self-consciousness into action. The voids may be regarded as zones of tension wherein consciousness negates itself and thus blanks itself out in greater or less degree. Such voids have the value of disturbance in the primeval equilibrium. We may regard this disturbance as acting like an irritant which tends to arouse consciousness to an awareness of itself. It is an instance of *absence* arousing the power to be aware of *presence*. Here, then, we have a basis afforded for interpreting evolutionary development. Instead of that development being a means whereby consciousness is finally evolved out of the mechanical processes of dead nature, we have a progressive unfoldment of self-consciousness within a matrix of Primeval Consciousness. The play and interplay of voids, instead of atoms of an eternal [external] and dead matter, are the background of the universe of objects. The voids arouse attention within consciousness simply because of their pain-value. The focusing power aroused by attention in time becomes self-consciousness, or the power to be conscious of consciousness. The multiform combinations of the voids produce all the configurations of experience and thought, and these in turn have the value of symbols, which in the last analysis are of instrumental

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<sup>7</sup> An implication of the foregoing discussion is that physical science does not give us noumenal, metaphysical, or substantive knowledge. Rather it gives an only positivistic kind of knowledge, but a positivism which is logical as well as aesthetic.

value only. The symbols indicate a pre-existent and formless Meaning. When, for any individual center of consciousness,<sup>8</sup> the Meaning can be assimilated directly without the instrumentality of the symbols, then for that individual the evolution of consciousness within the field of consciousness-of-objects has been completed. But until that time symbols are necessary.

Now we are in a position to see the metaphysical function of science. It is concerned with the progressive development of a system of symbols, the raw material of which is given through experience. Science—at any rate in the sense of physical science—is not concerned with a study of actual existences. Its raw material consists of voids or absences. These are formed into a system of relations that has the value in expanding self-consciousness and in forming a symbol of hidden Meaning. So, from the standpoint of this philosophy, the work of the scientists is quite valid, regardless of the form of the working hypotheses employed. The only point where this view could come into conflict with the thought of any individual scientist would arise in the case where the latter superimposes an extra-scientific interpretation upon the material with which he works and upon his conclusions. The technical functions of science do not require that its materials should be a substantial existence. They only require that that material should fit into an intelligible system of relations.

## Section 10

The most fundamental principle of this philosophy is that consciousness, as such, is original and primary, and thus not merely an attribute of something else. But as here understood, ‘consciousness’ is not a synonym of ‘spirit’, since, generally, the spiritual or idealistic philosophies have regarded “spirit” as primary and represented consciousness as an attribute of spirit. This leaves the possibility that spirit, in some phase of its total character, may be unconscious, so that consciousness is reduced to a partial and derivative aspect. Let this be clear, that here it is not predicated that any spiritual or other kind of being is primary. On the contrary, Consciousness *is*, before any being *became*. Thus, “God,” whether considered as an existence or simply as an integrating concept, is, in any case, derivative. We may very properly view certain levels of consciousness, which transcend the human form of consciousness, as Divine. All terms derived from the notion of Divinity certainly have a very high order of psychological significance, at the very least, and I do make use of them. But I do not regard them as corresponding to the most ultimate values.

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<sup>8</sup> The following questions have been raised: “What is the interpretation of an individual center of consciousness?” “Is it a void too?” First, with respect to the “individual center of consciousness,” it may be said that we mean here the empiric cognizing entities which we commonly view as individuals, without raising at this point the question as to the ultimate status of individuality. But the second question raises problems having profound ramifications which are given serious consideration in the fourth part of this work. The whole issue between the *Atma Vidya* of the Vedantins and the *Anatmic* doctrine of the Buddhists is raised in this question. Briefly, it may be stated that the position taken here occupies an intermediate position. Thus it would be said that in the relative sense the individual center of consciousness is not a void or unreal as compared with the object, but in the absolute sense it may be viewed as a void in the sense of being ultimately derivative. It occupies a position analogous to that of the concept of the parameter as used in mathematics.

It seems to be in accord with well established philosophical usage to regard “spirit” as having the same connotation as either the ‘Self’ or ‘God’. Following this custom we may say, when consciousness-of-objects is born, spirit also is born as the complemental or subjective principle. Objects being taken as the equivalent of matter, then spirit and matter stand as interdependent notions. Neither of these is possible without the other, though spirit may be regarded as positive, while matter is negative.

## Section 11

To predicate that consciousness is original and self-existent does not imply that *Being* is dependent upon *being known*. For while cognition is a mode of consciousness, it is not identical with consciousness as a whole. Thus affective and conative states are essentially non-cognitive, though they are part and parcel of consciousness. I predicate that pure consciousness is the self-existent antecedent of all these modes of ordinary states of consciousness, also of the less familiar mystical states, and likewise of the forms of consciousness characteristic of nonhuman beings. On the other hand, “to know” does *imply* being, but the implication is of an antecedent, not of a consequent. To become aware of knowing is to become aware of the reality—in this case relative reality—of Being. The awareness of this reality is something achieved, but the achievement has not made the reality. However, *to be known* is to *exist*, and this is a true sequential or derivative existence. Being is *antecedent*, existence *derivative*.

To be known is to be an object. Since by ‘universe’ I mean the totality of all possible objects, it then follows that the universe is dependent upon being known for its *existence*. The universe exists for one who experiences or thinks, but for none other. Even the Naturalist, who predicates the existence of *things* apart from all consciousness, actually is dealing with a notion that exists only in his consciousness. He has not arrived at something which lies outside consciousness, and only fools himself when he imagines that he has done so. Knowing is a Light which drives away the darkness, and thus forever fails to comprehend darkness. It is useless to predicate existence in the darkness of total and unresolvable unconsciousness, in every sense, for it is an absolute impossibility to verify any such predication. Such a predication is not only unphilosophic, it is, as well, unscientific, for science requires of all hypotheses that they shall be capable of verification. In fact, science even goes further than the mystic and requires that the verification must be of a type that falls within the range of the modes of consciousness of the ordinary non-mystical man. Thus the scientist who blossoms as a naturalistic philosopher violates his own scientific canons in the most violent manner. It is at this point that the Idealist is rigorous in his methodology, and not the so-called scientific philosopher.

All *things* exist as objects, and only so. Especially is this true for him who experiences or thinks. To anesthetize the powers of experiencing and thinking is to destroy the universe, but this does not imply the annihilation of consciousness in the Gnostic sense. Consciousness remains in the *Nirvanic* State. If self-consciousness has been developed to that degree of strength such that it can persist in the face of the process of anesthetizing, then the resultant is an awakening to realization of the *Nirvanic* State, otherwise this State is like dreamless sleep. But dreamless sleep is to be regarded simply as a state of consciousness where self-consciousness—that is, consciousness that is



conscious of itself—is unawakened. All men are in *Nirvana* in the hinterland of their consciousness. The *Nirvani*, in the technical sense, differs essentially from the ordinary man only in that he has carried self-consciousness over into the hinterland.

Here I am introducing nothing that cannot be verified, for, by taking the appropriate steps, men can actually take self-consciousness across into the hinterland. Admittedly, this is not easy to do. It involves a good deal more than the process of verification adequate for the checking of ordinary scientific hypotheses. But it has been done. I have done it, and I find there is an abundant literature furnishing the testimony of others who have claimed to have done so. This literature springs up at all periods, as far as we have historic records, and through it all there is a common thread of meaning underlying a wide range of more or less incompatible over-belief. Representative men of all cultures, races, and creeds have supplied this common testimony. They agree with respect to a certain consciousness-qualia and that the basis of this consciousness was direct, individual realization, transcending both faith and authority. Thus, in the present thesis, there is no violation of the scientific demand that a judgment of actuality or reality must be capable of verification. But the verification does require going beyond the ordinary modes of consciousness, and thus does transcend the secondary requirement of Western physical science. However, this secondary requirement restricts our science to a delimited field and is of only pragmatic value so long as it cannot be proved that the ordinary modes of human consciousness are the only modes there can possibly be. No such proof exists, nor can it be made, for the most that any man could possibly say is that, so far, he, individually, has found no other ways of consciousness; and that proves nothing concerning consciousness *per se*.

## Section 12

Modern psychology distinguishes between objects which it calls real and objects which it calls hallucinations. From the standpoint of Consciousness-without-an-object there is no important difference between these two sets of objects. The so-called real objects are experienced by groups of men in common, while the hallucinations are generally private. This is merely a social criterion of reality and has no logical force. Essentially it is as meaningless as determining physical laws by popular vote. Doubtless, if a Newton, with all his insight and intellectual power unimpaired, were transplanted to the environment of a primitive society and judged by his milieu, he would be regarded as a fool whose consciousness was filled with hallucinations. The social judgment of reality would be against him. Our society has reached a level where it can verify the insight of Newton, in considerable degree, but the validity of that insight exists independently of the social power to verify it. All of which simply means that the fact that objects exist for a given individual *privately* is not sufficient either to credit them with reality or to discredit them by calling them unreal hallucinations. The problem of reality is not to be handled in any such simple offhand manner. In fact, such a method is sheer intellectual tyranny. It is entirely possible that society, and not the individual man, is the greater fool. I am inclined to think so.

Objects, whether of the common social type or the so-called hallucinations, exist for the powers of experiencing and thinking, and thus both are derivative. If by 'Reality' we mean the non-derivative, then both types of objects are unreal. In the narrower or pragmatic sense, the one type of object may be more real than the other, when taken in

relation to a given purpose. It may well be that in the narrow sense of the purpose of Western physical science, the social object is more real, but from the religious standpoint, in certain instances at any rate, the reverse valuation is far more likely to be true. But here we have no more than valuation with respect to specific purpose.

Some mystical states, probably the greater number, involve the experiencing of subtle objects of the type which the psychologist calls hallucination. Practically, this has the effect of classifying the mystic with the psychotic, apparently with the intent of common depreciation. Such a course involves both intellectual laziness and a failure in discrimination. Since "hallucination" merely means private experience as opposed to social experience, it constitutes no true judgment of value. There is often a world of difference between one and another so-called hallucination. The difference between the state of consciousness of a drunkard, enjoying delirium tremens, and that of a seer like Swedenborg, is as far apart as the poles. All too often the psychologist calls both merely states of hallucination, and acts as though he thought that by giving a name he had solved the whole problem. As a matter of fact, the real problem here is one of valuation, just as it is with the social objects. The vital question in either case is: How far and on what level do the objects arouse the realization of Meaning? The objects which do this in higher degree and on a higher level may properly be regarded as possessing the greater relative reality. Thus, in a given case, the so-called hallucination may far outreach any social object in the relative reality. In any case, the type of the object, whether social or private, is not by itself, any measure of its value or reality. Neither type has non-derivative Reality or Meaning.