

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

A Discussion of the Nature of Transcendental Consciousness

by Franklin Merrell-Wolff

Part 25 of 25

## **PART III**

### **Introceptualism**

#### **CHAPTER 7**

##### **Introceptualism**

###### **Section 1**

In the broadest use of the term, ‘Idealism’ means any interpretation of being or of experience wherein consciousness, in some sense, plays the determinant part. But the manner in which consciousness is determinant varies quite widely with different thinkers. Thus the external universe may be conceived as composed merely of ideas, in the sense of percepts or receipts, as in the case of Berkeley, or it may be a system of Reason as conceived by Hegel, or of a Will lying behind the reason, as with Schopenhauer. Further, the empiric activism of Pragmatism may be conceived essentially in terms of consciousness, as was true in the instance of F.C.S. Schiller. For Kant, the Idealism has an epistemological character in that it defines the form of possible experience and knowledge, without saying anything about the nature of the thing-in-itself. Idealism in this most general sense stands differentiated from Realism in its broadest connotation wherein both primary existence and the constitution of knowledge are conceived as independent of consciousness. But [However] Idealism in the sense of the specific philosophical school known by that name is more definitely defined. In the latter instance, either the Reason or the Will of a universal or absolute SELF constitutes the metaphysical nature of the universe. So the general affirmation that consciousness is a primary determinant is not sufficient, by itself, to lead to the classification of any thinker as an Idealist in the restricted meaning [sense] of the Idealistic school of philosophy. Idealism, in the grand sense, is otherworldly as well as being oriented to the view that consciousness is primary, while in the more general sense [connotation] of the term, the Idealist can also be an Empiricist.

In the philosophic view, of which I am here giving an introductory outline, consciousness is again conceived as primary and constitutive, but the point of departure from the preceding philosophic theories is so considerable that a new classification seems desirable [necessary]. I ground my thesis upon a new function of consciousness, which I have called “introception,” and which implies a way of knowledge differing from both the empiric and the conceptualistic, as those notions are currently understood. It also implies a function more profound than the conative principle of Will as employed

[understood] by Schopenhauer. So I am calling this view “Introceptualism,” and give the word ‘introception’ a dual reference, [in which the word ‘introception’ is given a dual reference] first, to a function of consciousness, and, second, to the content or state of consciousness rendered accessible by the function.

As has been already noted, the validity of the present thesis rests upon the authority [actuality] of the function of introception primarily. Without at least assuming that actuality, the thesis loses its ground as a possibility. But if the function is granted to be real, it does not therefore follow that the theoretical statement is necessarily correct throughout. It may be correct as a matter of fundamental principle, and yet fall short of correct interpretation in detail. This is true for the reason that all philosophic interpretation necessarily involves a correlation of the primary given material with a conceptual organization, with the result that the immediate element may not always be correctly conceived, or the laws of thought may be violated in the development. The latter is a problem for human skill, wherein the thinker is limited by the relativity of his proficiency. It is important that the critic should bear this distinction in mind and not judge the reality of a function by either the weakness or the strength of the proficiency in conceptual interpretation. I am much more concerned that introception should attain recognition as a genuine psychical function than that this system of interpretative ideas should be accepted.

The function of introception has been defined as the Power whereby the Light of Consciousness turns upon Itself towards Its Source. This statement, bare and simple as it is, implies a good deal. For at once we have the implication that human consciousness is not exclusively of such a nature that it is dependent for its existence upon the presence of *two* terms, a subject and an object, that it unites in a relation. As I understand the Neo-Realistic theory of consciousness, the latter [consciousness] is conceived as exclusively a relation between two terms and not a self-existence nor a function of a subject taken in abstraction from all objects. Upon the basis of such a theory, the turning of the Light of Consciousness upon Itself and moving towards Its Source would be a meaningless and fantastic conception. I am, therefore, forced to deny at least the exclusive truth of the Neo-Realistic theory, though it might conceivably have a relative validity as a description of part of the total nature of consciousness.

It is further implied that human consciousness is of such a nature that it may be conceived [of] as flowing or streaming, in part at least, from the subject toward the object. This, again, implies that consciousness is not merely a relation, for a flowing involves the notion of a something or a somewhat that is flowing. Even when we speak of the relationship of flowing we do not mean that the relation of flowing flows, but have merely abstracted a feature from the total situation. So, while consciousness conceived as exclusively a relation might bind subject to object, it could not flow from subject to object. The whole notion of Consciousness turning upon Itself and moving towards Its Source thus implies that consciousness has a substantive character. This I shall later affirm on immediate grounds and not simply [merely] as an implication from a definition. Now, in implying that consciousness is substantive I am giving an affirmative answer to the question which William James asked in the form, “Does consciousness exist?” Since

James gave a negative answer in the sense in which I give an affirmative one, it follows that here I depart radically from James' position.\*

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\* Unfortunately, it does not appear as though Wolff finished recording the text of *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object* beyond this point. The hearer/reader is kindly referred to the original manuscript to read the printed version of Chapters 6 and 7 on "Idealism" and Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11 on "Introceptualism." (In the old white book, Chapter 7 is a continuation of "Idealism" and Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11 are on "Introceptualism.") In addition, the manuscript also includes Part IV "The Psychological Critique of Mysticism" includes Chapter 1 "Judgments of Meaning and Existence," Chapter 2 "Christ, Buddha, and Shankara," Chapter 3 "On the Nature of Mystical Knowledge," and Chapter 4 "The Meaning of the Immediate Qualities of Mystical States." Lastly, the manuscript concludes with a short "Epilogue." – ed.