

CONCEPT, PERCEPT, AND REALITY

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N much of contemporary philosophy the concept, together with all intellectual consciousness, is viewed as instrumental, functional or creative. It is interpreted as meaning an object which, in turn, when arrived at, is an immediately given sensuous presentment. Thus viewed, it is not itself its own value, or its own meaning, or an end-in-itself, but a pointer toward objectives that are essentially sensational in their nature. It is regarded as true when it has succeeded in leading a self to the appropriate object, and then may drop out as no longer needed. Its meaning or value is the percept or is contained in the percept. Thus, for example, a concept of a machine may be likened to the blue-print and specifications of the given machine, developed before the latter is constructed out of the appropriate materials. Once the machine has been builded it becomes a perceptually given existence and the original concept has completed its function and, in a sense, may now be dispensed with. If correctly conceived the machine will perform the service expected of it in the sensational world. The functioning machine was the end sought, while the concept was merely the means leading toward that end. Apparently, in this series, the conceiving was a creative act leading on to something that is other than a concept, *i.e.*, a perceived existence.

Within certain limits, at any rate, this seems to be a valid enough interpretation of the place of concepts in the field of conscious human values. Unquestionably, much in the active phase of human experience reveals a relationship-manifold of concepts and percepts of the type just given. But is this fact enough to justify the definition of concepts as being instrumental toward a perceptual object in the privative or exclusive sense? Some concepts, or concepts sometimes, or concepts in one aspect of their full nature, may be instruments leading toward a concrete and sensible particularity, and yet it may remain true that the whole significance of concepts is not comprehended within this definition. For my own part, I often find the relationship between concepts and percepts the reverse of the above described. On the whole, I do not find percepts adequate as resting points or termini. Characteristically, the bare percept reaches me with the value of an irritant

which demands the awakening of the corresponding concept. When the appropriate concept is aroused, the tension or irritation produced by the percept is resolved and I have the sense of having reached at least a relative terminus or resting point. In such cases the percepts were instrumental to the awakening of a conceptual significance. So the concepts thus stand as, at any rate, relative ends-in-themselves which the percepts indicated or meant. When this point is reached I find that the percept can drop out of consciousness, as having completed its work, and I realize the state of having-arrived in some degree.

I have referred to a typical personal experience as the basis of an argument designed to give an interpretation of concepts that is, in certain respects, the reverse of the pragmatic theory. In the logical sense, any datum of experience must be regarded as an original and undefinable term. The pragmatic argument employs extensively such undefinables and thus, by implication, justifies their use in support of an interpretation of concepts counter to that given by the pragmatists, provided the interpretation is not given privatively. An undefinable given by experience cannot be logically challenged. Thus one experience which controverts the familiar instrumental interpretation of concepts is sufficient to disprove its universal applicability. The comprehensive view of concepts must be such as to include all experienced relationships to concepts and, as well, satisfy the requirements of any extra-experiential knowledge there may be.

The decisive part of undefinables as determinants of philosophical outlooks is becoming increasingly evident. It seems quite clear that these undefinables are known through immediate apprehensions and cannot be logically derived as a result of discursive process. Given two or more thinkers whose immediate apprehensions comprehend substantially congruent undefinables, there is at once established a basis whereby discursive development can lead to essential agreement as to the consequences. But where, on the other hand, the immediately given undefinables for two or more individuals are largely disjunctive, agreement cannot be attained by discourse. In this case, the inevitable consequence is the development of diverse and incommensurable philosophic systems and outlooks. Here discursive conflict between the proponents of

such systems or outlooks inevitably fails to effect agreement as to the consequences, although it may serve to make the respective proponents of the incommensurable outlooks more self-critical with respect to their own philosophical developments.

In my own philosophic readings, recurrently, I find passages which do not arouse in my consciousness any clear meaning, and this difficulty is essentially independent of the skill of the formulator in the art of expression. I find, in addition, sufficient testimony or evidence in the critical writings of others to indicate that this is a fairly general experience. Reflection upon this difficulty has finally convinced me that the primary reason for the failure to achieve understanding in such cases is not due to defects in the ability to follow the consequences of a train of thought—though sometimes this may be the case where the logical acuteness of the writer is of a superior order—but, on the contrary, the real difficulty inheres in an incongruity in the indefinables immediately apprehended and assumed in the discourse and those realized by the reader. On the other hand, when in the course of my reflective life new doors of immediate apprehension have been opened, I have, repeatedly, found clarity and even simplicity in philosophic statements that, previously, had been obscure.

At this point two facts stand out in clear relief. First, when men attain the point of reflective maturity in their lives there are manifest various degrees of congruency and disjunction in the directly apprehended indefinables. When the congruency is considerable the individual thinkers will group themselves within the limits of a philosophic school where the agreements as to outlook are more marked than the differences. In contrast, when the disjunction is of decisive importance, men diverge into incommensurable philosophic schools. In the second place, in later life, there may be an awakening to new immediately given indefinables and, in this case, a broadening of philosophic outlook becomes possible. In fact, for an individual who has had such an awakening, schools of thought which had stood in incommensurable relationship for him, now attain more or less complete reconciliation within a higher integration.

One very important fact that has now become quite clear to me is that the discursive or polemical activity of philosophical

thought is of only secondary value in effecting a higher integration. Something else of decisive importance is required in order to effect that reconciliation, and this seems best expressed by calling it an *awakening* to a more extensive immediate apprehension of indefinables. Now, once it is granted that all philosophies are based upon indefinables and that the ground of divergences in philosophical systems lies in the incongruencies of the sets of indefinables recognized by different men, it at once follows that the most complete apprehension of reality can be attained only by him who has realized the widest immediate recognition of indefinables. This implies further that, after competency in discursive thought has been developed, the most important factor favorable to the attainment of adequate comprehension of reality lies in the extended awakening to progressively wider ranges of recognition of indefinables. Such awakening, then, becomes the prime philosophic need. This leads to the question: Is it possible, by any means, to effect deliberately or by conscious effort progressively wider awakenings?

In the field of western thought I find very inadequate attention given to the problem presented in the foregoing question. Very commonly it is simply taken for granted that men, in general, assume the indefinables which constitute the given base of the particular thinker who, at the time, is writing. Some philosophers, such as William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, do seem to recognize difference of 'vision' as being philosophically important. But I find little recognition of a science or art designed to effect wider awakenings. With the leaders of oriental thought the case is different. If an oriental Sage undertakes to aid an applicant toward the attainment of a more adequate understanding of reality he does not employ discursive method as a primary instrument. On the contrary, he says to the applicant, in effect: 'Follow a certain course of life-conduct and consciousness-polarization, which I shall outline for you, and you will awaken the capacities to apprehend what, in turn, will enable you to attain the understanding which you seek.' The emphasis here is upon the transformation of the man and not upon convincing by discourse, though some of the Sages do recognize a positive secondary value in the discursive method. There is implied in this

a science and art of transformation-adjustment. Now, since the West is largely ignorant of this field of subtle psychological method, I submit that, in this respect, the West must be ready to learn something from the East if it is ever to attain wider reconciling views of reality. If the philosophic goal is the complete comprehension of the real, and not merely a resting satisfied with partial portraits of reality, then methods whereby transformation-adjustments may be effected do become a serious philosophic concern.

What I have to say concerning the relationship of percepts and concepts to reality is largely based upon an immediate recognition of certain indefinables which do not form part of the bases assumed by the current philosophic schools of Naturalism, Neo-realism and Pragmatism. I do recognize a relative validity in all these schools; but each of them falls short, not alone of an ultimately adequate comprehension, but even of such integration as is now an intellectual possibility. While the differences between these schools are important, yet, for my present purposes, they do stand in sufficient agreement with respect to one point to define, in part at least, my primary departure from them in the securing of a larger comprehension. They all accept time and experiential data as primary and irreducible indefinables, or as original given determinants. By 'experience' as assumed in all these philosophies, I understand as meant a 'conscious process regarded as taking place in time and the raw immediacy of phenomena before the action of reflective knowledge'. Thus a timeless and non-phenomenal consciousness would not be a form of experience. Now I assert that I have realized an immediate apprehension of such a timeless and non-phenomenal consciousness as an indefinable; and this, in turn, underlies the present discussion of concepts and percepts.

I am well aware of the difficulty introduced by asserting as an indefinable a recognition or realization which is shared by a decidedly limited portion of the western philosophic public. It may seem like introducing a special and hidden rule into a common game; and, superficially, this does not seem fair. It would be decidedly unfair if philosophy were nothing more than a sort of conventional game. But I believe it to be much more than this.

I conceive it to be a conscientious effort to arrive at as comprehensive an understanding of reality as possible, whatever that reality may prove to be. Therefore, indefinables which constitute the determining base of a line of discussion cannot be ruled out simply because they are not shared by a large proportion of the thoughtful public at the present time. The rare realization of one period of human evolution may become a decisively important determinant in the culture of a later day. Further, I submit, that recognition of the type here introduced has played a decisive part as a determinant in the philosophy and religion of other cultures. For one thing, it is the effective key to the understanding of the more important Indian philosophies and underlies both Buddhism and Brahmanism. Further, it renders intelligible the basic Christian teaching and much in Greek thought. Finally, it is the primary key to the 'vision' of men like Spinoza and Hegel. So I contend that this recognition is not merely a private and unique one, peculiar to me as an individual.

Returning to the main line of discussion, I acknowledge a primary agreement with the pragmatic thesis that ultimate reality is given in immediacy, and not in mediative processes. But I diverge from the further pragmatic assertion that that immediacy must be of the nature of sensation, or of experiential character. In fact, experience may be of mediative significance; and, individually in the end, I do, in fact, very largely find it so. I have already spoken of finding the percept valuable as a mediative agent leading to a concept which had a degree of terminus-value not possessed by the percept. It seems probable that this should prove to be a rather common experience with mathematicians. All of this simply implies that there is such a thing as an immediatism, not inferior to that of the perceptual type, that partakes more nearly, at least, of the nature of concepts than it does of percepts. But while I have found, in general, a greater terminus-value in concepts than in percepts, yet I must acknowledge that, in the end, I have found all concepts, as well as all percepts, mediative to a form or state of consciousness that is neither perceptual nor conceptual. However, for my part, I find this state of consciousness more accessible to the conceptual than to the perceptual mode of awareness. This state transcends both time and experience, and

so I have employed the terms 'recognition' and 'realization' to represent it, it being understood that in this connection these terms are used in the sense that implies 'awakening' to a state of consciousness, but not an experiencing.

I call this timeless and non-experiential state of consciousness 'spiritual'. Such a designation is not an arbitrary selection of a term, but a use already well established in Indian thought. But there is implied a delimitation of the word 'spiritual'. In this sense it does not have the connotation sometimes given, as when some writers speak of 'spiritual experience' or the 'production of a spiritual consciousness'. The 'spiritual state', as I employ the term, is not something that *becomes*, but timelessly *is*.

The most familiar Indian name for this spiritual state is 'Nirvana', a concept which most western scholars find peculiarly difficult to understand. Now, 'Nirvana', as a *concept*, exists within the historic stream of the human race, however much that which 'Nirvana' *means* is anhistorical. This concept is historically important if for no other reason than that an important portion of the human race, both in the historic past and currently, actually centers its philosophical and religious motifs about it. It has had an important effect upon the actual living conduct of the Buddhist community. As it has produced visible effects upon actual living in time, it is clearly significant, even in the pragmatic sense. But though the concept of Nirvana has produced pragmatic effects, the inner meaningful content toward which it points is as thoroughly apragmatic as it is possible for anything to be. Let us search out that meaning, as far as may be possible.

Nirvana is a state of consciousness that is defined, and can be defined, only in almost wholly negative terms. It is non-sentient, non-living, non-temporal, non-relative, and non-dual. At first glance this would seem to suggest a complementary positive definition in the terms, unconscious, dead, timeless, absolute, and monistic; and thus imply a sheer nihilism. But while the cognitive definition is given in negative terms, the affective quality of the state can, in part, be given, and has been given, in positive terms. Thus it is a state of eternal and inconceivable bliss, peace and benevolence. This is incompatible with the nihilistic interpretation. So the positive form of the definition, assumed above, is a

misconception. Nirvana simply is a state of consciousness that cannot be cognitively or perceptually comprehended. It is consciousness outside the range of all relative conditioning.

However, the Nirvanic state can be realized so that its actuality is known to the realizing individual. But this is a recognition, in the most rigorous sense, of an indefinable, which is, therefore, discursively incommunicable, though something of it may be indicated, but not comprehended, in abstract terms. It is at once *all*, and destroys the whole panorama of the experiential time-world, in the sense that a recognition of an illusion destroys a prior seeming-reality. The validity of the categories of the prior seeming-reality is not affected in the restricted sense that they are valid so long as that 'seeming' is taken to be reality. But these categories have lost all claim to persistent significance. It is possible for the realizer of Nirvanic consciousness to 'return'¹ to the time-world field; but this is only true in a sense analogous to that involved when an individual awakens to his ordinary consciousness while in the midst of a dream without obliterating the latter. He would no longer regard that dream as consisting of real relationships but rather as a sort of drama creatively composed.² But it is by such a 'return', and only so, that the concept

¹ The word 'return' is only partly satisfactory, as it suggests a movement from place to place and thus implies the notion of distance, and these notions all lie well within the relative manifold. However, there is a difference between consciousness in the grip of form and consciousness freed from form. Consciousness that has been self-consciously freed from form and then later functions within the form-field seems, from the latter point of view, to have 'returned'.

² This illustration is not merely an imaginative supposition. From my studies of the subject I am led to the conclusion that, while the experience of awakening in a dream is not a common one, yet it is not extremely rare. I have personally had this experience on different occasions with varying degrees of completeness, and find it as satisfactory an illustration of what is meant by the 'return' as is available. Perhaps a description of my experience would help to make the significance of the illustration clearer.

At the time of my first awakening within a dream I was already familiar with the description of a similar experience on the part of a medical friend. This suggested the possibility and aroused in me the desire for a similar experience. But I could find no way for directly and consciously effecting it. However, several months later, at a time when my interests were centered upon physically objective concerns and consideration of the dream-state was occupying no place in my conscious thought, so far as I can recall, the event did happen quite spontaneously. While in the midst of the series of events of a quite ordinary dream during sleep, suddenly I awoke within the dream without interrupting the continuity of the dream, although I knew that I was dreaming. By this awakening I mean that the ordinary relative consciousness, with the familiar consciousness of my own identity, combined

'Nirvana' can be produced within the time-world, in any sense other than a speculative fiction. The actual historical and practical power of the concept should constitute excellent pragmatic evidence that it is not a mere speculative fiction.

with the usual memory of the events and thoughts of waking life, plus the capacity for intellectual analysis and purposive determination, all became suddenly active within the dream-field. I began experimenting and found that I could, with my imagination, direct the course of the dream, at least within certain limits. Soon after this I awoke to my physical environment. I found then and since that it is not easy to maintain the dream-consciousness in the face of the waking consciousness. The dream-consciousness is a sort of twilight with respect to which the waking consciousness is like a concentrated searchlight. It is necessary deliberately to dim the searchlight or it will quickly obliterate the twilight completely. I find this act to be far from easy but possible for brief periods. Now I have discovered that, at the point of awakening in the dream, I had been accepting the dream as a reality in the same matter-of-course way that we commonly accept and assume the reality of the physical environment of ordinary consciousness. But from the moment of awakening I knew the dream to be no more than a dream. Within limits I could permit it to continue and even mold its course. This simply had the effect of reducing it from a seeming-reality to a mere drama, creatively produced.

From the standpoint of Nirvanic consciousness the whole field, together with the events, of relative or ordinary consciousness, undergoes a transformation of significance similar to that which occurs when awakening in a dream. The reality-qualé of ordinary consciousness is completely erased and, in its place, there remains merely a drama having no more than a symbolic significance. The objective or photographic form of the world-field, with its events, is not changed; but the reality-qualé vanishes, and this effects a revolution in the significance of ordinary consciousness.

In one sense the relationship (an unsatisfactory term) between Nirvanic and ordinary consciousness is the reverse of that between the latter and dream-consciousness. Ordinary consciousness may still be likened to a searchlight, as it is focused and under purposive control. But, in contrast, the Nirvanic consciousness is like a boundless and unfocused primordial Light, which is both aloof and extremely intimate. It is a Light within which the self and the object of consciousness are blended in a sort of formless sea. In the presence of this Light the searchlight is weak and faces constantly the liability of being dissolved, like a lump of salt within an ocean of water. This dissolving action can be resisted by the exercise of the will, as there is no problem of a conflict with an opposing will. But the difficulty in doing this lies in the fact that the individual feels no desire to oppose the dissolving force. In fact, in my own case, I found the temptation to let go the burden of egoistic existence very strong. Every purposive objective of ordinary consciousness seemed inconceivably puny in contrast to the utter adequacy, in every sense, of the consciousness represented by the primordial Light. So to arouse the wish to will to 'return' to egoistic consciousness proved to be a matter of critical difficulty. However, I found it could be done.

The difficulty involved in the arousing of the wish to 'return' may be suggested by imagining an individual who is at liberty to place himself upon an operating table or refrain from doing so. He has nothing to gain for himself privately from the operation and the latter is to be performed without anesthetics. The only possible gain from the operation would be knowledge acquired by the operating surgeons that might prove socially useful. The subject of the operation could only choose to face the ordeal because he was more interested in the general value of the knowledge that might be acquired than in his own personal convenience.

The Nirvanic state is one of absolute immediacy. Self-identity and the field of consciousness are completely blended. No perceptual, affective or cognitive state of consciousness can even faintly foreshadow the degree of immediateness of Nirvanic consciousness. Relative states of consciousness can, at best, *mean* the Nirvanic state in the functional sense like, or substantially like, that developed in the pragmatic theory of knowledge. No relative concept can represent or comprehend that state. I submit, then, that the Nirvanic state is truly terminal and the only truly terminal state, and that, with respect to it, sensations and affections, as well as cognitions, are only instrumental, in the last analysis.³ But it does not follow that each of these three modes of consciousness is an equally adumbrative instrumentality. At this point the idiosyncrasies of different individuals may vary and, in fact, do seem to do so quite clearly. In my own recognition the highest level of cognitive abstraction that I have been able to attain had distinctly superior adumbrative and instrumental value, when compared to either sensation or affection. However, there is substantial evidence that this is not the rule; so dogmatizing at this point must be avoided.

³ The question may be raised how it is possible for sensations, affections and cognitions to serve as instrumentalities with respect to Nirvana. The portion of this question related to cognitions is discussed in the latter portion of the present paper, but at this point a reference to a general consideration with respect to all ordinary consciousness may be clarifying. The instrumental value of familiar consciousness is veiled in the Buddhist doctrine of suffering. Unfortunately for us Buddha left this doctrine in a form of confusing simplicity. But it is possible to unearth the deeper meaning. Both Buddhism and Vedantism agree in asserting that all life or ordinary consciousness is suffering, even in the case of the more satisfactory and pleasing experiences. Today, having personally realized the qualé of Nirvanic consciousness, I am forced to agree with this valuation. The most pleasant states of ordinary consciousness are, indeed, painful by contrast. However, I do not agree with a familiar Vedantist conclusion that therefore the production of a universe was a sort of Divine mistake. For pain has a positive office. It tends to arouse to wakefulness. Instances of this action are quite familiar. Ordinarily we are unconscious of the organic processes of the body. But when something goes wrong, as in sickness, typically the individual becomes conscious, in some measure, of portions of his body where he had been unconscious. He is first organically conscious of pain then, later, when the pain is removed, he becomes organically conscious of comfort, whereas previously he had been simply unconscious with respect to the region involved. The total effect is the widening of the field of consciousness. Now the significance of the doctrine of suffering is simply this, that on a broad scale all relative consciousness ultimately serves as an awakening shock, with the result that the individual becomes conscious in a transcendent domain which previously had been indistinguishable from unconsciousness. Thus relative consciousness is instrumental as a catalytic agent.

We are now ready to consider a compound interpretation of cognitive function. As noted in the first paragraph of this article, concepts may mean concrete, perceptually given, objects, such as the machine which was a resultant of a concept. In this case the concept may very well be regarded as possessing a creative functionality. But a concept⁴ such as Nirvana points in quite a different direction, and is non-creative. It points to a superexperiential and supertemporal state, *i.e.*, to that which *is* and does not *become*. It is immediate as no experience ever can be, and is absolutely terminal. In this case the conceptual function is discriminative and serves as a kind of pruning away of the fungus-growth of the time-field, but it is not creative. All of which indicates that concepts have at least a twofold functionality in senses that are almost, if not quite, antagonistic, *i.e.*, creative and discriminative.

Finally, what is reality and how is it arrived at? Clearly, 'reality' may be, and has been, used with quite diverse meanings. I submit that in the ultimate sense that is most real which is most nearly terminal, and that absolute reality is alone that which is absolutely terminal. In this sense Nirvana alone constitutes the final reality, in any sense that final reality can be at all envisaged by relative consciousness. Now, although this state of necessity transcends concepts, none the less it may be attained by means of concepts, that is, by means of a certain kind of functional power resident in concepts or, at least, in some concepts. This functional power, as noted above, is discriminative and not creative. From this it follows that the road to reality, in the highest sense, is through discriminative and not creative conceptualism.

I am aware that there seems to be a contradiction in stating that a non-conceptual and non-experiential state of consciousness, such as Nirvana, may be attained by means of concepts. For how can a non-relative and non-temporal state be realized as an effect

⁴ Apparently it is inconsistent to speak of the concept of Nirvana when I have previously stated that Nirvana is a state that cannot be cognitively or perceptually comprehended. This point I believe is clarified later in this paper. The significant point is that the term 'Nirvana' is to be taken in two senses. On one hand, it is a concept within the historic stream and as such has the meaning of the annihilation of relative consciousness. This idea is conceivable. But in the positive sense it is a sign or symbol pointing toward an inconceivable state of consciousness. This consciousness is of necessity inconceivable in its actuality, since it transcends the subject-object relationship and the latter is an apodictic condition of conceptual consciousness as such.

of a relative process? In its essential and positive sense, Nirvana is a state that cannot be conceived. In this sense it is not attained through concepts or by any other relative instrumentality. But the term 'Nirvana', in the negative sense, is a concept having the etymological meaning of 'blown-out'; and is employed in the sense of annihilation of relative consciousness. It is Nirvana in the latter sense that may be attained through concepts. This is, in fact, a process of the systematic negation of all concepts by means of concepts.

Any concept whatsoever involves its own contradictory. To be able to conceive of any concept is to be able to isolate it from that which it is not, and this implies some sort of concept of the contradictory. In general, all cognitive consciousness stands in contrast to all non-cognitive consciousness. The latter includes those elements of consciousness that come from the senses and the affections. Apparently these three modes of consciousness in various combinations form the sum-total of the familiar non-mystical human consciousness. But it cannot be said that they form the totality of all possible consciousness. The ordinary consciousness I call 'relative consciousness', for two reasons. First, it involves the basic relationship of a subject that is aware in some sense of an object; and, second, its different phases or parts stand in some relationship to each other. To conceive of this relative consciousness as a sum-total implies the power to conceive of a non-relative consciousness, however vague the latter concept may be.⁵

The opposite of the concept of relative consciousness is absolute consciousness, while the contradictory is non-relative consciousness. I do not identify Nirvana with absolute consciousness. To do so, I think, would be to fall into an error made by the absolute idealists. I simply predicate that Nirvanic consciousness is non-relative consciousness, but not that non-relative consciousness is necessarily Nirvana. Consequently I do not define 'Nirvana' as simply a synonym of mystical consciousness. If we grant the reality of mystical states of consciousness, as I think we must

⁵ I am not here reverting to the old ontological argument that the idea necessarily implies the reality of its object, but simply asserting the power to think the concept of the non-relative, without, for the moment, raising the question of its reality.

from an unprejudiced study of the evidence, if for no other reason, then the available reports from the mystics indicate the existence of a number of levels or states of consciousness, most of which could not be called Nirvanic. However, if we regard all non-relative consciousness as mystical, then Nirvana is one of the mystical states.

Unquestionably, concepts do affect the individual's affective and perceptual consciousness in greater or less degree. Some concepts are psychical entities or forces that have so much power over the lives of individuals and groups of men as to be almost, if not quite, hypnotoidal in their power. If, then, a concept that has such superlative power is opposed by its opposite (not its contradictory), in a way that is effective, the individual who has done this will experience a shock analogous to that of a sudden awakening. An illustration of this process is afforded by modern physics. The physicists tell us that the effect of bringing an electron and a positron into direct contact is their mutual annihilation. The resultant, however, is not sheer nothingness but a flash of radiation, a totally different state of matter-energy. The electron is not converted into a positron nor *vice versa*, but the two become something that is not matter as matter was conceived in nineteenth-century physics.

The foregoing illustration I find to be of fundamental value for suggesting the meaning of Nirvanic consciousness. The older physicists could conceive of the annihilation of the ultimate units of matter, as is revealed by the fact that they denied that such could happen in the so-called law of the conservation of matter. But could they have conceived of these ultimate units being destroyed and yet continuing to be? The modern physicist, at least, can do this, for he conceives of these units as being capable of annihilation and yet continuing to be as radiation. Now, let the flash of radiation correspond to Nirvana in the positive sense; then Nirvana, as viewed from the perspective of relative consciousness, would seem to be annihilation, as the older physicists would have probably viewed the disappearance of the electron and the positron.

If a concept that is fundamental to relative consciousness as such is opposed by its own opposite, as suggested above, and this

is done in such a way as to be effective, the resultant from the relative point of view would be the annihilation of relative consciousness, even though the effect was of very brief duration. It would be natural for the typical man, who is bound to relative consciousness, to regard this as simply extinction of all consciousness. He could conceive of this extinction and could work toward it with the instrumentalities of his relative consciousness, though doubtless most men would not desire to do this. For he could not conceive of the positive resultant state which has its analogue in the flash of radiation. We cannot say that through the logical use of concepts the Nirvanic consciousness, represented by the flash of radiation, is attained as a deduction. Something is introduced here that is quite outside the command of relative consciousness. This something, I think, we must regard as spontaneous and transcendent. The individual man may have a faith that *it is*, but he cannot infer its actuality by rational process from the premises of relative consciousness. But in view of the fact that he could conceivably work toward and achieve the annihilation of relative consciousness, the precedent condition of the spontaneous and transcendent element, there is thus a sense in which it is correct to say that Nirvanic consciousness may be attained by concepts.

A beautiful analogue of the above process is to be found in modern mathematics. The concepts of infinity, of infinite manifolds, and of series converging and diverging without limit, play a vitally important part in current mathematics. However, we cannot say that relative consciousness is capable of comprehending the infinite. So we are unable to deal with the infinite by direct operation, but we have the means of doing so indirectly. The reciprocal of infinity is zero, and this is a number within the range of conceptual comprehension. Thus, when a mathematician has to deal with an expression which when reduced becomes infinity, and further analytic developments are necessary, he can often so transform the expression that his analysis deals with zero and the operation is then under his conceptual control. In this illustration zero would represent Nirvana in the negative sense of annihilation, while infinity would stand for Nirvana as a positive and transcendent consciousness.

Assuming that I have succeeded in establishing the case that the attainment of Nirvanic consciousness through the use of concepts, or by the negation of a mode of consciousness through its opposite, is a logical possibility, there remains the question whether such actually has ever been accomplished. This leads us to a problem of evidence rather than of logic. What I have to offer in this connection is partly historical and partly personal. If we could draw upon a record of the actual subjective steps taken by Gautama Buddha in his own transformation of consciousness we would have material of inestimable value, but unfortunately no such record seems to exist. There remains, however, a clear record of the practical discipline Buddha prescribed for general use. This discipline is less cognitive than ethical. Its immediate objective was the destruction of the desire for sentient existence, not only as a conscious desire, but likewise as an automatic force working through the unconscious. This is the equivalent of seeking annihilation or the zero state, the negative condition of the positive Nirvanic state. To achieve this end the rules of the Sangha prescribed a radical cultivation of altruism combined with an attitude of indifference towards one's self as a personal sentient entity. The logical significance of this course is the nullification of natural egoism, the force which maintains the desire for personal sentient existence, by its opposite, altruism. The records indicate that this method worked successfully in the case of a number of Buddha's followers, *i.e.*, those who attained Arhatship. In the Buddhist community as a whole it has produced a human group less addicted to the curse of war than any other in the world, and within which the state of happiness seems to be more the rule than with any other large body of human beings.

In my own case the technique was predominantly cognitive. In the course of my reflection I discovered that the seeming objects which arouse, or are otherwise connected with, sensations, affections and cognitions are regarded as substantial existences as a matter of deep-seated habit, regardless of whatever metaphysical theory we may have concerning them. Constantly we say, through our actions as well as our speech, that these objects *are* and that where there is cognitive, affective and sensory silence nothing is. I simply reversed this valuation at a moment of insight, and then

in the course of a few weeks I had convincing realization of an ineffable substantiality in a field of consciousness quite other than any phase of relative consciousness. With respect to the latter the ineffable field of consciousness seemed like a boundless matrix containing within it as an extremely limited and essentially vacuous manifold the totality of all relative consciousness. This consciousness had a noetic value reflected as an assurance of such a superlative intensity that nothing I have ever experienced could even faintly approximate it. Relatively, even mathematical demonstration gives uncertainty. Both metaphysical and religious doubt were resolved unequivocally and faith was replaced by certainty. The affective consequences were, if anything, even more startling, probably for the reason that the focus of my personal interest was more centered upon the cognitive elements than the affective. At any rate, I was quickly aware of an almost overpowering joy and had a profound sense of peace; also I felt that at last I was free in the fullest meaning of the word. From out of this state experienced effects were realized by me as a personality within the time-field, that have had extensive and enduring consequences. Among these was a sort of melting of all physiological and psychical tensions. So the sense of peace and happiness was not merely a distant and transcendental quality having no effect upon the personal life within the time-world.

The pragmatic epistemology holds that a difference of truth must effect a difference of fact somewhere within the field of experience. Without affirming the adequacy of this criterion, I wish to point out that both in the cases where the Nirvanic state of consciousness has been a personal realization and also where it has stood as an ideal to be attained, there has been effected a difference of fact that can be noted. Thus, even in the pragmatic sense, the concept or symbol which 'Nirvana' is, becomes a force that cannot be ignored.

At an earlier point in this paper I stated that Nirvana alone constituted final reality, since it only was ultimately terminal. Possibly there is suggested in this an absolutism that goes further than I intend. If I may be permitted to use an expression which at first sight would seem contradictory, I would say that the Nirvanic state is relatively absolute. I find the term 'transfinite', as employed

in mathematics, a more effective means of conveying my idea than the more general and sweeping 'infinity' frequently found in philosophical and religious literature. Modern mathematics employs the notion of transfinite numbers to represent a class of numbers every case of which is greater than any finite number however large. These transfinite numbers are of different degrees, such that a transfinite number of the second degree transcends one of the first degree just as completely as the latter transcends finite numbers. This series of degrees progresses without limit. What I mean when I say that Nirvana is relatively absolute is that it bears an analogous relation (a faulty term) with respect to ordinary consciousness to that which exists between transfinite and finite numbers. We may regard the transfinite number of first degree as final, terminal, transcendent, and, even in a sense, absolute with respect to finite numbers. But as there are transfinite numbers of higher degree, the transfinite of lowest degree is not absolutely absolute. This illustration suggests degrees of Nirvanic consciousness, a higher degree transcending a lower as the latter transcends ordinary relative consciousness. That such is the case is part of the teaching of northern Buddhism. In my own cycle of recognition I was aware of two such deepening phases. I am, therefore, disposed to drop the notion of 'absoluteness' as not having a valid place in systematic thought. In place of 'absoluteness' I would substitute the notion of non-relative or primordial consciousness, and refrain from setting bounds upon this.

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