

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF FRANKLIN MERRELL-WOLFF

The philosophy of Franklin Merrell-Wolff is based upon a series of mystical insights—or “realizations”—that Wolff had over a period of fourteen years, and which culminated in two “fundamental” realizations in 1936. Wolff maintained that these realizations contained genuine knowledge about the ultimate nature of reality, but he also recognized that these insights were authoritative only for him. For this reason, he felt diffident about formulating a system of philosophy based on these realizations, and would have been much more comfortable appealing to sources that are universal, “such as the principle of logic and general experience.” In due course, however, he saw that he “could not justify the philosophic statement without such a reference.”¹

Accordingly, Wolff felt obliged “to present what might be called a psychological confession” in the form of a detailed account of his realizations, and to argue that they provide a genuine source of knowledge.² Thus, he affirmed that in addition to sense perception and conceptual cognition, there is a third source of knowledge, “which commonly has been called Enlightenment, Realization, Mystical Unfoldment, and by similar terms.”³ Reflecting their importance to Wolff’s philosophical statement, the first section of this document is a report—in Wolff’s own words—of the five realizations that he used as the foundation of his philosophy.

Shortly after his first fundamental realization, Wolff began to write *Pathways Through to Space*, which documented in journal form the one-hundred-one days that followed. He subsequently produced *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object*, a four-part treatise that contained a philosophical statement founded on his mystical realizations. In the following years, Wolff recorded hundreds of hours of audio essays, all the while deliberating on the best way to present a philosophical expression that encompassed his realizations. Eventually, he distilled this formulation into what he called the “Three Fundamentals” of his philosophy. The second section of this essay contains an explication—again, primarily in his own words—of these three principles of Wolff’s philosophy.

In addition to traditional forms of philosophical expression, Wolff sometimes found it necessary to express himself in the form of poetry and aphorisms. The last section of this exposition presents an example of this form of communication, namely, his “Aphorisms on Consciousness Without an Object.”

Section 1: Franklin Merrell-Wolff’s Five Realizations

In 1922, Franklin Merrell-Wolff had the first of a series of five mystical insights or realizations that would come to serve as the foundation for his philosophy of *Consciousness without an Object and without a Subject*.⁴ Wolff understood these realizations to be authoritative only to himself, which meant that for him “they transcend . . . the authority of any scripture, *sutra*, or *shastra* that already exists; but they do not carry this force for other individuals unless they have similar Realizations.” Moreover, Wolff affirms the “ineffability” of mystical insight—that is, that one cannot properly employ language to describe the transcendent reality encountered in such states. He explains:

The ineffability of the genuinely mystical consciousness is not due to an imperfect knowledge of language on the part of the mystic. While many mystics have had a very defective knowledge of language, and are consequently especially obscure, yet others have not been so limited in their equipment. However, in either case, the ineffable and obscure element remains. The fact is, this ineffability can never be conveyed through language, any more than an irrational number can be completely equated to a rational number. All our language, as such, is based upon the subject-object relationship. Thus, consciousness that transcends that relationship cannot be truly represented through language built upon that base. Therefore, the expressions of the mystics must be regarded as symbols, rather than as concepts that mean what they are defined to mean and no more.⁵

Wolff acknowledges that this deficiency of language applies to his own formulation, and that seemingly incompatible metaphysical formulations might apply equally to a mystical state of “distinction-less content”; therefore, he concludes, language would better serve to symbolically “point” to this state rather than attempt to describe or define it. Moreover, as evidenced by the passage above, Wolff found that his training in mathematics had equipped him with symbols of particular efficacy.

Wolff categorized his five realizations into two types: he regarded the first three realizations as “propaedeutic”—that is, as preparatory steps—to the final two realizations, which he called “transcendental” or “Fundamental Realizations.” The primary difference between these two categories of mystical insight was that the former “do not involve a fundamental shift in one’s essential orientations as, for instance, the shift in the basic sense of ‘I.’” Additionally, they “do not involve anything like the radical self-giving, or surrender, or sacrifice, and the acceptance of the mystical death that is involved in those forms of Realization which I have called transcendental.”⁶ Wolff makes this difference clear in his discussion of the fourth realization, which was a reaffirmation of his first realization, but, as he explains, “in a profounder sense.”⁷

1. First Realization: I am Atman

Wolff’s first propaedeutic realization took place in 1922, while listening to a friend outline Śaṅkara’s method of discrimination or self-analysis. Wolff describes this episode, and the reason why it is properly called a “realization,” as follows:

Fundamental in the technique presented by Sri Shankaracharya for the attainment of Realization is the process known as self-analysis. This is a technique in which one convinces himself that his own identity is not with anything whatsoever that is an object of consciousness. One is supposed to go through all facets of his total concrete nature and recognize the fact that he is not identical with any facet whatsoever, be it gross or subtle, which is objective. Thus, he clearly can determine that he is not this animal body with which he is an operative entity in this field of action, for the body is clearly objective; he cognizes it. And second, he is not identical with any of the subtler aggregates which compose his total psychophysical nature. He is not identical with his feelings; since he can cognize them as subtle objects, they are not ultimately, intimately, a part of himself. They

are states of consciousness which he witnesses. The same applies to his conceptions and to all qualities whatsoever. And ultimately, he faces the problem of breaking his identification with the simple notion of an individual ego which is different from the egos of other entities. This is *ahamkara*, in the Sanskrit. He finds that he is not *ahamkara*. And then, ultimately, he realizes, as a matter of simple analysis, that he is identical with that which is known as *Atman*, the pure Self, the pure Subject to consciousness which can never become an object before consciousness. The proposition here attained is: I am not that which in any way, however subtle, can be an object before consciousness, but only that which is eternally the Subject to consciousness.

Now, I had, at that time, been convinced of the validity of this self-analysis; I had been convinced of the truth that I am *Atman*, but that was not a Realization. Upon the occasion when a friend of mine went through this analysis in a form which he had found useful, it suddenly dawned upon me with a far greater force than my original convincement had been, namely, a sort of *conviction* that I am *Atman* which carried along with it an affective overtone, or undertone, that left a glow persisting for several days and which led to a change in the form of my spontaneous thinking, so that ideas with which I had not been sympathetic before, which seemed strange, spontaneously welled up in my own consciousness. This, in other words, was a Realization that I am *Atman*, following the pattern laid down by Sri Shankaracharya. There was no change in my philosophic outlook because I had already been convinced of this fact, but there was a change in its forcefulness.

To suggest this, we might consider the difference between the meaning of the two terms: *convincement* and *conviction*. Convincement is a result of a convincing which may very well be achieved through argument, the presenting of evidence, the presenting of good reasons. It is the normal process whereby we become convinced of the truth of a proposition, say in mathematics, by the proof or argument that shows that a certain thesis is true, or the evidence presented by a scientific argument, or, finally, by the evidence supporting a philosophic thesis. One is convinced, but he is not in his total being changed; he may be convinced later of a different position as the result of greater evidence or greater acuity of reasoning. Differences upon the level of convincement do not lead to strong feelings, but involves, usually, a certain detachment in judgment. In fact, convincement is the result of a conscious judgment without a change of psychological state. In contrast, conviction involves a deeper element—the kind of factor which involves much greater certainty and a much larger involvement of the total being. Feeling is much stronger in conviction than in convincement. The attitude in convincement may be detached, and aloof, and cool, but conviction tends to involve an element of warmth, of personal identification with the point of view presented or maintained in the conviction. Conviction is essentially a religious function. It is that which tends to be supremely important for the individual. One does not arrive at conviction by means of discursive argument, but some other factor must be involved. Very often it is a result of a conversion from an opposed point of view that was held earlier, but in the case, in the present

case, it was a confirmation of a conviction that was already held but now presented in a form that was overwhelming in its assurance.

As I have already noted, a conviction may be changed by the presentation of more complete evidence or of a subtler and more comprehensive argument. This is not true in the case of a Realization or a conviction. A Realization can be modified only by the force of a profounder, or more sweeping, new Realization. No argument, whatsoever, can modify the force of a given Realization. This point is very important. But, the conviction that grows out of a Realization can lead to a state where a deeper Realization is attained such that the earlier point of view is seen as valid with respect to a limited zone but not universally valid; that there are higher truths which change the perspective of one held in one's consciousness.⁸

2. *Second Realization: I am Nirvana*

Wolff notes that his second realization had a markedly different background than his first, "since it expressed itself in a judgment for which I had not been prepared by prior theoretical acceptance"; Wolff describes it as the recognition that "I am Nirvana."⁹ Here is his account of this insight:

It was either in late 1935, or early 1936, that I came into possession of a volume entitled *A Search in Secret India*, by Paul Brunton. In this, there is a fairly extended reference to his becoming acquainted with an Indian sage known as Ramana or Maharishee. I felt very strongly drawn to this sage, and at one time was brooding rather deeply upon the content of his thought when there suddenly developed in my consciousness the Realization: I am *Nirvana*. This was a startling experience, quite a surprise. This was not a confirmation of a previously held view as in the case of the first Realization; nor was it in the form of a conversion from another point of view that had been held. In fact, I had no clear idea as to the real meaning of *Nirvana*. It was, thus, in the form of an extension of my comprehension, and the results are very interesting.¹⁰

Elsewhere, Wolff explains more fully that prior to this realization, he had thought of Nirvana as a kind of "other world" that stood separate from the objective world of ordinary consciousness. Chiding himself for "intellectual laziness," he notes that this interpretation also placed Nirvana in the objective domain, and that his second realization corrected this error:

The result was that the recognition effected for me a new cognitive discovery as well as a deepening and illumining effect in the dimension of value. I readily saw the reason why so little has been said, and indeed, why so little could be said, concerning Nirvana beyond the assertion of its reality. The inner core of the "I," like Nirvana, is not an objective existence but is, rather, the "thread" upon which the objective material of consciousness is strung. Relative consciousness deals with the objective material but never finds the "thread" as an object. Yet it is that thread that renders all else possible. In fact, it is the most immediate and ever

present reality of all. Nirvana, like the “I,” cannot be located anywhere, as in a distinct place, for it is at once everywhere and nowhere, both in space and time. Upon this “thread,” space and time are strung just as truly as all perceptual experience and all thought consciousness and any other mode of relative consciousness there may be.¹¹

3. *Third Realization: Substantiality is Inversely Proportional to Ponderability*

Wolff’s description of this realization is as follows:

As I remember it, the occasion of this Realization was in July of 1936. I was, at that time, standing by a creek in northern California looking at the sky when suddenly it dawned upon me that a fundamental error in our valuation and attribution of reality lay in the fact that we were oriented to the object of cognition; that in reality that object that appears before consciousness is an absence, or rather a relative absence, of substance and reality; and, that in contrast, there, where no object appears before consciousness, such as empty space, there was, in fact, actual substance or reality. This involved an inversion of valuation, and, in that sense, may be called a conversion from a point of view that had been habitual heretofore, and which is habitual, more or less, with nearly all men and all creatures. However, it was not a conversion in an ethical sense, but a conversion in a philosophical and psychological sense. There was, of course, as is typical in the Realizations known so far, the feeling of something delightful, something like a revelation.

I had not known that any such position had ever been formulated before, and it was not until recent time, on a rereading of *The Voice of the Silence* a certain sentence stood out, namely, “. . . study the voidness [emptiness] of the seeming full, [and] the fullness of the seeming void.” This was not in my mind at that time; although I had read *The Voice of the Silence*, this, like many other statements in that little book, had not made a real impression upon my consciousness, but I cannot exclude the possibility that it may have been effective in an unconscious way. Nonetheless, so far as my conscious field was concerned, this Realization had the force of a major discovery. It took the formulation as follows: Substantiality is inversely proportional to ponderability; or, it could be stated in the form: Reality is inversely proportional to appearance.¹²

Wolff reports that this realization “had such a clarifying effect, relative to the nature of the phenomenal world, that it was decisive in clearing up the remaining intellectual barriers to Recognition”—that is, to his first transcendental or “Fundamental” realization.¹³

4. *Fourth Realization: I am Atman*

Wolff’s fourth realization, and his first transcendental realization, took place on August 7, 1936. He recalls this event as follows:

After having completed the reading of Shankara's discussion of "Liberation," as given in the *System of Vedanta* by Paul Deussen, I entered upon a course of meditative reflection upon the material just read. While engaged in this course of reflection, it suddenly dawned upon me that a common error in meditation—and one which I had been making right along—lay in the seeking of a subtle object or experience. Now, an object or an experience, no matter how subtle, remains a phenomenal time-space existence and therefore is other than the supersensible substantiality. Thus the consciousness to be sought is the state of pure subjectivity without an object. This consideration rendered clear to me the emphasis, repeatedly stated by the manuals, upon the closing out of the modifications of the mind. But I had never found it possible completely to silence thought. So it occurred to me that success might be attained simply by a discriminative isolation of the subjective pole of consciousness, with the focus of consciousness placed upon this aspect, but otherwise leaving the mental processes free to continue in their spontaneous functioning—they, however, remaining in the periphery of the attentive consciousness. Further, I realized that pure subjective consciousness without an object must appear to the relative consciousness to have objects. Hence Recognition did not, of itself, imply a new experiential content in consciousness. I saw that genuine Recognition is simply a realization of Nothing, but a Nothing that is absolutely substantial and identical with the SELF. This was the final turn of the Key that opened the Door. I found myself at once identical with the Voidness, Darkness, and Silence, but realized them as utter, though ineffable, Fullness, in the sense of Substantiality, Light, in the sense of Illumination, and Sound, in the sense of pure formless Meaning and Value. The deepening of consciousness that followed at once is simply inconceivable and quite beyond the possibility of adequate representation.¹⁴

As noted earlier, this realization was an affirmation of his first realization, but in a much profounder sense. Wolff explains:

The difference between the fourth Realization and the first does not lie so much in difference of cognitive content, but rather in the difference of affective value. It involved a breakthrough to a well-nigh inconceivable delight; a sense of an inner sweetness; a quality of beauty that could be projected upon the objective world and render all things to become beautiful; a sense of inner assurance; of the transcendence of the transition known as death. The value was supernal, but the judgment, I am Atman, was conceptually the same; but in a subtle sense there was a difference, in that it involved the breakthrough to a different way of cognition that was non-conceptual. And this Realization did involve the qualities of self-surrender, the sacrifice, the acceptance of the mystic death; and there was here the experience of, or rather imperience of, the mystic death, which was not present in the first Realization which may be viewed as a mental insight rather than a real transformation. The sense of the Self or Atman embracing all that is, so that essentially there was no difference between the Self in me and the Self in other creatures, to an extent where one hardly meant his own person when he said "I,"

that was characteristic of the fourth Realization. But the conceptual adjustment was not radically changed as from the first Realization.

When we come to the fifth Realization, we have something that was very unexpected and something that was quite radical.¹⁵

5. *Fifth Realization: The High Indifference*

Wolff describes his first transcendental (fourth) realization as a state of “superlative Joy, Peace, Rest, Freedom, and Knowledge,” and notes that there was “nothing more to wish for.” In retrospect, however, he came to understand that a certain tension remained, insofar as this state stood in stark contrast to the realm of ordinary relative consciousness:

There did exist a tension in the sense of attractiveness that was incompatible with the perfection of balance. There was a distinction between being bound to embodied consciousness and not being so bound that made a difference to me. I had to resist the inclination toward the latter state in order to continue in the former. In other words, there are in this earlier phase of Recognition certain tensions that call for a higher resolution.¹⁶

Thirty-three days after his first transcendental realization, Wolff entered a state that resolved this tension, which he came to call “The High Indifference.” He notes that this second transcendental realization was a state of “Satisfaction” wherein all desire was transcended, one where the state of Nirvanic consciousness seemed no more preferable than that of relative consciousness:

This development took place on 8 September, occupying a period of several hours after retiring, as I lay awake. The first stage was in a sense a recapitulation of the values of the previous fundamental Realization. It involved enormous thoroughgoing satisfaction, it was the epitome of all the supernal values; and then, it transformed itself into this state which I called "Indifference," with an evidence of a perfect logic behind it. Now, the Indifference expresses a condition, which might be called that of aloofness, of complete balance or equilibrium, where one is not oriented either to the positive pole of the lofty values that had been presented in the original fundamental Realization of August 7th, nor to the negative values of the opposite side. . . . this state of Indifference, balance or equilibrium was the zero point between the two wings of the positive values on the one side and the negative values on the other, and that from that level of consciousness one looked upon both sets of values with an attitude of complete dispassion.¹⁷

In contrast to his first transcendental realization, Wolff notes that the High Indifference was not

characterized by an intensive or active feeling of felicity. It could be called blissful only in the sense that there is an absence of all pain in any respect whatsoever. But I felt myself to be on a level of consciousness where there is no need of an

active joy. Felicity, together with all other qualities, is part of the blended whole and by the appropriate focusing of individual attention can be isolated from the rest and thus actively realized, if one so desired. But for me, there seemed to be no need of such isolation. The consciousness was so utterly whole that it was unnecessary to administer any affective quality to give it a greater richness. I was superior to all affective modes, as such, and thus could command and manifest any of them that I might choose. I could bless with beneficent qualities or impose the negative ones as a curse. Still, the state itself was too thoroughly void of the element of desire for me to feel any reason why I should bless or curse. For within that perfection, there is no need for any augmentation or diminution.¹⁸

Wolff adds that the quality that best characterizes this state is that of power or authority, for any “entity” in this state stands at a point of balance and

has the capability of moving either way: it can enter into delight or into the suffering of creatures with equal felicity. There is no barrier of preference in this movement. Clearly, this is not a simply human kind of consciousness, but a consciousness of a higher order, for to be human is certainly to have preferences. It is thus not a construct of the speculative imagination, but a report of a discovered element in the structure of ultimate reality.

At the level of the High Indifference, the key word is neither affection nor knowledge, but, *power*. Here again, I am not speculating, I am simply reporting what I found. From the vantage point of equilibrium, one can turn toward delight or toward suffering with equal felicity and so with all the other pairs of opposites. Thus, this level is a place of great dispassion, hence indifference. But since one can so turn, he can invoke, he can bless, and he can curse. It is a place of power preeminently. None of the other Realizations which I have known contributed to the power sense. But here, in this Realization, it was strongly emphasized.¹⁹

The climax of this realization of would come to serve as the foundation for Wolff’s subsequent philosophical endeavors:

[The] culminating point was one in which the supreme pair of opposites was presented. This was the contrast represented by the subject-to-consciousness and the object-of-consciousness. At that supreme point in the imperience, I saw with the eye of the mind the disappearance of the object and the subject into the Consciousness itself, and this is the basis of the *Philosophy of Consciousness Without-an-Object and Without-a-Subject*. It is the foundation stone, a transcendental base from which all problems that concern humankind or any other is approached.²⁰

Section 2: The Three Fundamentals of Franklin Merrell-Wolff’s Philosophy

Wolff held that the “office of great philosophy is to be a Way of Realization, and not solely a monitor of *doing*.”²¹ Working toward this ideal, he based his own philosophy on the five realizations sketched above, which he presented in the hope that they “may be helpful and suggestive for other individuals in seeking to come to an understanding of a

philosophic orientation with respect to life, consciousness, and the Beyond.”²² Since Wolff held that these realizations were authoritative solely for himself, he did not dogmatically assert that the philosophic statement that he based upon these realizations was “something which other people must accept. It is put forth as a suggestion for others to consider, not as an authoritative presentation.”²³ It was, however, his desire that this philosophy would help people “attain the perspective and resources that come from Enlightenment,” and thereby promote the redemption “of humanity as a whole, and in addition, of all creatures whatsoever, however humble they may be.”²⁴

After some years of contemplation, Wolff refined his philosophical statement into three cardinal tenets, which he called the “Three Fundamentals” of his philosophy. This section contains a detailed explication of these principles, which Wolff states as follows:

1. Consciousness is original, self-existent, and constitutive of all things.
2. The subject to consciousness transcends the object of consciousness.
3. There are three and not two fundamental organs, faculties, or functions, of cognition.²⁵

1. First Fundamental: Consciousness is original, self-existent, and constitutive of all things

Ontology is the branch of metaphysics that is the study of being, existence, or reality. Accordingly, Wolff’s First Fundamental is an ontological claim—it asserts, “Consciousness is the original and self-existent Reality.”²⁶ Wolff symbolizes this reality by the term ‘Consciousness-without-an-object’:

The One, nonderivative Reality, is THAT which I have symbolized by ‘Consciousness-without-an-object.’ This is Root Consciousness, per se, to be distinguished from consciousness as content or as state, on the one hand, and from consciousness as an attribute of a Self or Atman, in any sense whatsoever. It is Consciousness of which nothing can be predicated in the privative sense save abstract Being. Upon It all else depends, while It remains self-existent.²⁷

It is clear from this passage that the term ‘Consciousness-without-an-object’ also means “Consciousness without a subject.” Thus, it is not “the consciousness of some transcendent being who is aware of content.” Wolff continues:

Herein lies, perhaps, the main difficulty with respect to understanding the idea contained in the symbol of Consciousness-without-an-object. We are in the habit of regarding consciousness as something derivative—a quality possessed by something else or a kind of relationship. It is necessary to abandon this view . . . Let this Consciousness be considered as original, and then both the subject and object become derivative. That which is primary and original, then, is a Great Void of Consciousness, to all consciousness of the type that depends upon the subject-object relationship.²⁸

Elsewhere, Wolff notes that his First Fundamental implies

that the one original fact which is indefinable, although necessary either implicitly or explicitly in the definition of everything else, this one fundamental indefinable is consciousness. It means that the one fact which needs no explanation and cannot be explained is consciousness. It may well be that everything else needs explanation. It may well be that everything else can be defined, but this is the one ultimate indefinable. Yet, nonetheless, we find philosophers and scientists who try to explain consciousness as though it were something derivative. Do they not see that in the very placing of a problem, consciousness is implied? If there were no consciousness, there would be no problem and no resolution of a problem possible. Because this consciousness is the root fact, the subsumption which underlies every specific orientation whatsoever, it is thus the ultimate root from which everything else is derived. That it is the one true and authentic axiom. It is not a mere assumption, for it is implied in the very act of making an assumption. Without consciousness there is nothing whatsoever.²⁹

Wolff grounds his First Fundamental on his fifth realization—"The High Indifference"—which as described above, culminated in "the disappearance of the object and the subject into the Consciousness itself." Hence, Wolff held that one could verify the validity of this principle by "a Recognition transcending the Nirvanic State."³⁰ Moreover, he thought that one could effect a partial or pragmatic verification of this tenet by treating it *as though* it were true, and then drawing the consequences from this assumption. If this assumption leads to greater conceptual clarity, or perhaps to an orientation or view that enriches one's life, then it has been pragmatically justified.

Returning to the assertion itself, it may now be analyzed as follows: Consciousness is "original" implies that Consciousness-without-an-object (and without a subject) is *primary*, that is, prior to all things and selves. This priority is not, however,

a priority in time in the sense that a causal antecedent precedes a consequent. Primordial Consciousness is no more a cause of objects, *in the temporal sense*, than is space a cause of the stellar systems. But without space there could be no stellar systems, and likewise, there could be no objects without the support of Consciousness. Hence Consciousness-without-an-object is, not in the sense of a present that is a mere point in the flow of the future into the past, but in the sense of an Eternal Now. This "isness" is a denial of time. Consciousness-without-an-object is not a cause that determines any particularization, but it is the Causeless-Cause whereby all particularization is possible.³¹

Hence, Consciousness is "self-existent" in the sense that it is not dependant upon anything else for its being—it is THAT which is entirely self-sufficient and complete. In particular, Consciousness-without-an-object does not depend upon, nor is derivative from, matter, energy, or any other substance. On the contrary, all experience and all objects are derivative from Consciousness. Thus, Consciousness is "constitutive of all

things,” which is to say that all things are, in their ultimate nature, nothing but Primordial Consciousness itself.

2. *Second Fundamental: The subject to consciousness transcends the object of consciousness*

Wolff bases his Second Fundamental on his first transcendental (fourth) realization, in which “the object vanishes, while the subject persists.”³² To grasp the nature of this realization, one must first keep in mind that our ordinary experience has the structure of what Wolff refers to as “relative consciousness”—that is, it has the form or structure of consciousness conditioned by both a subject and an object. Thus, our ordinary experience involves a subject that is aware of objects (which may range from the gross objects reported by our senses—trees, rocks, automobiles, and whatnot—to physical sensations, such as a pain in my foot, to even more subtle objects such as memories, thoughts, and emotions). Note that there is an important dependency here: because one cannot reasonably say that an object is in consciousness if it is also not an object of awareness, the existence of any object in consciousness necessarily implies a subject to consciousness. Our ordinary experience therefore rests upon a distinction between subject and object; hence, it is relative consciousness.

Now, recall that Wolff’s first transcendental realization involved the successful isolation of the subjective pole of relative consciousness, which is a state of pure subjectivity without an object. The important point here is that the subjective pole can never be an object for consciousness, for if it were, it must be an object for another subject, “with the result that the supposedly objectified “I” really is no more than an abstract construct of the real “I,” which now is in the position of the new subject.”³³ In *Pathways Through to Space*, Wolff explains this realization in terms of the “point-I” becoming the “Space-I”:

Approached from the usual standpoint of relative consciousness, the “I” seems to be something like a point. This “point” in one man is different from the “I” in another man. One “I” can have interests that are incompatible with the interests of another “I,” and the result is conflict. Further, the purpose of life seems to center around the attainment of enjoyment by the particular I-point which a given individual seems to be. It is true that in one sense the “I” is a point, and the first objective of the discriminative practice is the isolation of this point from all the material filling of relative consciousness, and then restricting self-identity to this point. For my own part, I finally applied this technique with success. But, almost immediately, at the moment of success, a very significant change in the meaning of the “I” began to develop. A sort of process of “spreading out” began that culminated in a kind of spatial self-identity. I found that the “I” had come to mean Space instead of a point. It was a Space that extended everywhere that my consciousness might happen to move. I found nowhere anything beyond Me, save that at the highest stage both “I” and Divinity blended in Being. But all of this process involved both an intensifying and broadening of Consciousness, and most emphatically not a narrowing or “pinching out” of it. . . . There remains, then, an “I” in two senses, which we may call the point-I and the Space-I.³⁴

Wolff also employs zero as a symbol of the pure subjective pole, and to illustrate what it is to realize oneself as identical to this pole:

As a symbol to represent this ultimate and irreducible subject to all consciousness, the “I” element, I know nothing better than zero or an evanescent point. The critical stage in the transformation is the realization of the “I” as zero. But, at once, that “I” spreads out into an unlimited “thickness.” It is as though the “I” became the whole of space. The Self is no longer a pole or focal point, but it sweeps outward, everywhere, in a sort of unpolarized consciousness, which is at once self-identity and the objective content of consciousness. It is an unequivocal transcendence of the subject-object relationship. . . .

. . . As the substantial, spatial, and transcendent “I,” I knew that I sustained the whole phenomenal universe, and that time, space, and law are simply the Self-imposed forms whereby I am enabled to apprehend in the relative sense. I, thus, am not dependent upon the space-time manifold, but, on the contrary, that manifold is dependent upon the Self with which I am identical.³⁵

In this last paragraph, one finds the core of the Second Fundamental, which, Wolff remarks,

implies a reversal of our ordinary view that we are here in an already preexistent external environment of essentially non-conscious things in which somehow, whether accidentally or by reason of a law, life arose and subsequently consciousness which then became aware of an environment. It means rather that the subject to consciousness precedes, in the ontological sense whether or not in the temporal sense, the manifestation of an external order. It means that manifestation is a process from within out, from the subject to an external manifestation which we call the object. No doubt, as we start in our adventure with consciousness here in this world, it appears to us first that we are surrounded by objects and that these objects make impacts upon our consciousness and that from that our knowledge grows. But this that makes impacts upon our relative consciousness is a feedback and not a message from the original source. It is a feedback from that which originally was a projection from the subject to consciousness. This parallels, I think, the meaning of Sri Aurobindo when he says that the evolution is an unfolding of that which was infolded or involuted first of all. It appears, thus, to us that consciousness develops as something which is a result of an awareness of external objects, whereas the truth, the ultimate truth, is the other way around. We are dealing here with a feedback world, and this is all that empiric science is studying. Thus empiric science is not giving us ultimate truth, but simply an incidental effect, a study of a feedback. And this is all that the apparent world about us really means. We, as the ultimate “I,” projected this world, this universe, from within and then experienced it as though it were without and was already there when we began to know, in the relative sense.³⁶

If, as Wolff's Second Fundamental asserts, the subject occupies a position in consciousness that is transcendent to that of the object, there follow consequences of the "highest importance," not only for philosophy and religion, but also for sociology:

The objective situation dominates only those who are weak and deluded, which, unfortunately, comprises the vast majority of humanity. Metaphorically stated, the beggar (object) in life has usurped the royal throne, while the true ruler (the self) has permitted himself to become the scullion who seeks largesse of the real beggar who appears in royal robes. One who has great compassion may pity the true royalty who imagines himself to be only the scullion. However, since the latter has no one to blame but himself, and could reaffirm his status at any time, he really merits only contempt. When all this is clearly understood, our whole conception of social organization and method will be radically altered. Today, because we have permitted ourselves to fall under the hypnotic domination of the object, we conceive of government in terms that fit only the psychology of the deluded scullion.³⁷

Philosophy is even more culpable, and "has fallen far from its high estate when it sells itself to the object. That physical science should do this is not so surprising, but one expects more from philosophy."³⁸

3. *Third Fundamental: There are three and not two fundamental organs, faculties, or functions, of cognition*

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that studies knowledge, and three primary questions asked by epistemologists are: (1) What are the principal sources or grounds of our knowledge? (2) How certain can we properly be of what we think we know? (3) Are there limits to our knowledge, that is, areas to which we cannot reasonably hope to extend knowledge? Wolff's Third Fundamental is his formulation of the "noetic thesis"—the idea that mystical states are a source of knowledge—and it has implications for all three of these questions.

Philosophical debate on the first question has historically revolved around the relative epistemological roles of unaided reason and of perception through the senses. *Rationalists* are philosophers who tout the role of unaided reason as the principal source of knowledge; *empiricists* emphasize the role of the physical senses. The second and third questions have received many different answers, although rationalists often tend to the view that certain knowledge is available of almost anything that we want to know—be it the existence of God, moral laws, physical laws, or the ultimate nature of reality. Most rationalist philosophers have been deeply impressed by mathematics, and have argued that the mental faculties used to discover the truths of mathematics are sufficient to discover truth in other areas of human inquiry; moreover, they claim that genuine knowledge in these areas is as certain as mathematical truths. Empiricists, on the other hand, do not consider certainty attainable outside of mathematics and logic. Indeed, many empiricists have denied the possibility of acquiring reliable knowledge at all about moral

law or the nature of ultimate reality. Most insist that knowledge of physical laws is at best probable.

Wolff viewed Immanuel Kant's resolution of this debate as the work of "the greatest synthesizing . . . force in the whole history of human thought," although he does remark that all of Kant's "specific conceptions may have to be modified in light of a later and fuller comprehension."³⁹ Kant argued that we must recognize that the mind is not, as the empiricist John Locke assumed, merely a "blank tablet" upon which experience alone writes, but that the mind legislates to, rather than merely records, experience. In other words, Kant held that the human mind has a fixed structure—and thus, whatever enters human experience will exhibit patterns imposed by that structure. For this reason, we may attain certain knowledge about our experience (that is, we may be certain about the *form* of our experience), but as to the world as it is independently of our experience, we can have no knowledge other than it exists. Accordingly, the rationalists were right in that unaided reason may be employed to find certain knowledge about (the form of) our experience, but the empiricists were correct in insisting that reason cannot yield knowledge about the ultimate nature of reality.

Wolff accepts Kant's conclusion, which he assesses as follows:

Kant's great philosophical achievement consists of two parts, one positive and the other negative. He supplies a basis whereby we are able to have confidence in the orderliness of experience, which is the necessary condition of any possibility of science. However, on the negative side, he shows that pure reason or pure conception can never lead to a knowledge of metaphysical reality. Nevertheless, the yearning for metaphysical certainty is not only the greatest driving motivation of the philosopher, it also equally underlies the religious feeling. Clearly, Kant personally feels the desire for this certainty no less than others; he comes to his negative conclusions solely as an act of intellectual honesty. Yet, while he is forced to conclude that pure conception cannot prove a metaphysical existence, it is equally impossible for reason to prove the nonexistence of a metaphysical reality. The incompetency, in this case, is merely such as that of the pure reason operating by itself. The possibility of some other way of knowing, whereby metaphysical knowledge may be the certain Realization of humanity, is not excluded. Therefore, in the absence of this other way of knowing, one has a right to faith that pure reason is incompetent to deny, so long as the faith is oriented to a moral or a spiritual order. Even so, faith alone justifies only the postulating of a metaphysical reality. It is less than knowledge, and so conceivably may be grounded on nothing more than fantasy. Kant, like [William] James, gives us a right to believe, but no real ground of spiritual security.⁴⁰

Wolff's Third Fundamental affirms that there is a way of knowing that leads to metaphysical knowledge, and thus, there is

a way of reaching beyond the limitations that Kant found imposed by a cognition which is limited to sense perception and conceptual cognition. I accept his determination that if we are limited to these two organs of cognition, a knowledge of a supermundane, or of the metaphysical, or of that which is truly transcendent

is impossible; but if the third organ . . . is awakened, we overcome this difficulty which is imposed by Kant's compelling analysis. Sense perception and cognition together are incapable of determining that there is a supermundane. Its factuality can be determined only by the awakening of another cognitive power. Now, the basis of all religion in the world lies in the belief, at least, if not the actual Realization, that another domain exists and that it is possible by the effort which we commonly regard as religious to enter into an authentic Realization of this domain. The fact of religion is not enough to prove its factuality, but the enormous strength of appeal upon the human being that is produced by the religious orientation is evidence that there may be something beyond. I affirm that by Enlightenment or Fundamental Realization proof of the factuality of this supermundane zone can be achieved.⁴¹

This last point serves as the ultimate foundation of Wolff's philosophy, and is not to be regarded

simply as a speculative thesis worked out by the imagination, but because there has been a group of Realizations that lead to this formulation; and that leads to one of the most primary points underlying the whole philosophy: that there is a third way of cognition that has been operative in the consciousness of a limited proportion of our present humanity and even in the consciousness of the humanity of the past. It is not a function that is active with the vast majority of the human beings, but I am asserting it as the primary basis of this whole philosophy, that there is such a thing as Realization or Enlightenment, that this is a name for a function of consciousness other than sense perception and conceptual cognition, and that through this function of consciousness it is possible to achieve a knowledge of a transcendent or metaphysical subject matter which is not available to the two organs of sense perception and conceptual cognition as Immanuel Kant pointed out long ago. And the importance of this third organ of cognition lies in the fact that it opens the Door to knowledge of the very domain that is of primary religious significance. To begin with we may have an intuition that leads to faith and confidence that the ultimate reality behind all that is is indeed a friend and that we can achieve answers to the questions that dog us in our life. But such a faith and confidence is not sufficient to justify any dogmatic assertion concerning the nature of ultimate reality; but it is sufficient to justify a search for that reality, a search for a knowledge that is certain and definitive.⁴²

To emphasize the fact that his transcendental realizations involve a different way of cognition than our ordinary forms of sense perception and conceptual cognition, Wolff coined the word 'introception' to refer to this type of knowledge, which he notes, has the form of *knowledge through identity*—that is, it is "a knowing by being identical with that which is known." As was seen above, this way of knowing is underlying Wolff's successful isolation of the subjective pole of consciousness—that is, the Self—without turning it into an object:

I have suggested elsewhere that this Realization of the Self may be represented by a point which has position but has no mass or volume. In other words, mass and volume can suggest an objective existence, something that can be objectively known; that being a pure point symbolizes the fact that it can be known only through identity and not by being aware of an object in any sense before consciousness. It is a subtle other way of cognition. I am the pure subject; everything else that may be associated, no matter how intimately, with this person, is an object before this consciousness and therefore is not I.

It was his sense of identity, Wolff continues, that underwent a profound change in the midst of this realization:

There is a certain transformation that can take place in it, and which I have *imperienced*, and that is, that it can go through a transformation such that the self, the self-identity, becomes like an illimitable sphere which is the universal container of the whole universe. I have known, also, that it is possible by a movement in consciousness to shift from the position of the self as a point to the Self as an illimitable sphere and back again, that one moves into totally different ways of cognition as he passes through this transformation. The world relationship we have in the mundane order is one in which the self-identity is a purely subjective point surrounded by a universe of objects, and that that universe of objects is totally other; and that there then is an inner, or transcendental state of consciousness in which the universe is seen as contained by the Self so that there is an essential identity between the Self and that whole universe, so that one could say, I am That, also implying that every representation of the Self, or reflection of the Self, within the universe can equally well say, I am That. It is not a purely private statement with respect to one individual and not to others, but something that is potentially realizable by any individual whatsoever; it involves, therefore, no personal inflation.⁴³

In what sense, then, does this third form of cognition lead to metaphysical knowledge? And in what sense is this knowledge "certain and definitive"? Wolff prefaces these questions with the following:

The general definition of the term *cognition* is "the being aware of an object." In the well-developed mystical state, subject and object fuse or coalesce, so that the normal relationship of experience and thought does not exist. It follows that cognition, or knowledge, in the sense of being aware of an object, as distinct from a subject, is not a mystical kind of knowledge. The term *Knowledge* in the sense of *Gnosis*, or *Jnana*, is knowledge of a different sort. It falls outside current philosophical definition. Yet, the use of the term in this sense may be traced to the ancient Greeks and East Indians, and thus has a hoary justification. 'Knowledge' in the sense of 'Nous', and the corresponding adjective 'Noetic', has the essential meaning of 'Gnosis' and 'Jnana', a nondiscursive knowledge in which the knowledge and the thing known are identical. The denial of Nous is a denial of mystical knowledge, and vice versa.⁴⁴

Returning the first question above, we may now reformulate it as this: Are we justified in viewing a state of consciousness in which there is a coalescence of subject and object, of knowledge and thing known, as a case of knowledge? Wolff responds:

So long as the state stands in *complete* separation from relative consciousness, the response must be negative. However, we equally cannot predicate affection or conation of such a state. It is simply beyond all relative predication, so it can only be defined by universal negation. Fortunately, the pure mystical state may impinge upon relative consciousness, in greater or lesser degree, producing effects for the latter. This results in a compound consciousness in which either the mystical and relative form an impure effect, or the two forms of consciousness exist side by side. In either case, relative consciousness is affected. It is relative consciousness that experiences Bliss or Beatitude, reorientation of the will, and a new noetic orientation and content. In terms of content, relative consciousness now knows, as an object, the state of consciousness in which merge both subject and object, as well as knowledge and thing known. This is an increase of relative knowledge having most profound significance, both in the theoretical and pragmatic senses, insofar as it tends to make an enormous difference in life and conduct, and in valuation and meaning. The new orientation is like changing the base of reference in mathematical analysis. The material of relative consciousness enters into a new perspective that tends toward radical difference in theoretical organization. In this way there is addition to knowledge in the conceptual sense, with respect to content as well as altered theoretical organization.⁴⁵

Here we find, on the first pass, that the mystic “knows, as an object, the state of consciousness in which merge both subject and object.” This knowledge is similar to knowledge by acquaintance, in the sense that one says, for example, “I know the statute at the corner of Elm and Main Streets.” Although this is a rather weak sense of ‘knowledge’, Wolff notes here that it can have a enormous pragmatic effect in that it can induce a profound change in an individual’s life and conduct.

Wolff goes on to introduce three theoretical effects the mystical state may have on relative consciousness. The first is that the mystic knows “from the objective standpoint, the ultimate is the point of universal negation of everything relative.” Wolff claims that this is genuine knowledge because “to know as *negation* is as truly knowledge as *affirmation*,” and he remarks that the situation is analogous to the knowledge whereby a person comes understand that objects thought to be perceived are really a mirage. Thus, for example, suppose that a person comes to believe the following statement: “I am viewing a lake with boats upon it and trees along its border.” Later, this person realizes that this was mirage, and says, “There is no lake, and no boats nor trees.” Wolff points out that this is similar to

the mystical negation of all discursive concepts and all sensible perceptions. Clearly, it is an accession of knowledge even though, relative to the earlier state that cognized a lake, boats and trees, it is knowledge as pure negation. In our common practice in such a situation, we definitely do not regard whoever cognizes a lake, boats and trees as the person possessing knowledge. Rather,

whoever realizes that it is only a mirage is the true knower and discriminator. Here attainment of knowledge is equivalent to absolute negation of the earlier state. To *become aware of the reality of the nonbeing of that which was formerly believed in as being is attainment of true Knowledge.*⁴⁶

A second noetic effect is a “change in the base of reference,” analogous to the shift in worldview brought about by the Copernican revolution. The Copernican change in astronomy moved the base of reference for ordering the objects of our solar system to the sun instead of the earth. This did not change the objects in the solar system, but rather, changed our “orientation” to these objects. So too, the mystic’s orientation to relative cognition is altered. Wolff explains:

One who has passed through the mystical transformation has shifted his center of self-reference. In mystical language, he has perished and been born again. Strictly speaking, this is not change of content of cognition, but change of the base of orientation to cognition, and therefore is not experience. Again, disregarding the relationship of the newborn to the *proper* content of the mystical consciousness, we have to consider the effect of the change of base of self-identity to relative cognition. Henceforth, from the time of the new birth, when thinking in terms of his essential reality thought—but not in his more or less frequent “as if” thinking from the base of the old ego—the mystic integrates the whole of relative cognition about a new center or base of reference. This is equivalent to a radical alteration in the significance of the whole body of relative cognition. Shift in significance is a noetic alteration and, hence, accession of knowledge.⁴⁷

The third form of noetic value that Wolff argues may be predicated of mystical consciousness is a kind of “self-flowing thought” that precipitates from the mystical state into relative consciousness. As Wolff describes it, this “inner Thought is spontaneous in that it happens of itself in so far as the objective or personal thinker is concerned. It is not the product of a consciously willed effort by the personal ego. Further, it is not a content which stands out as clearly differentiated from the self. Rather, the self and content are blended in identity, a state which is very difficult to conceive from the objective point of view.”⁴⁸ Moreover, this “transcendental thought” may be “precipitated in such a way as to determine a pattern of relative thought, using word-conception; which thought, however, has an exclusive or predominant transcendental, rather than a perceptual, reference.”⁴⁹ This is the process that led to Wolff’s poetry and his formulation of the *Aphorisms on Consciousness Without an Object*, both of which he describes as a product of the fusion of conceptual and transcendental thought.

There remains one question: In what sense can the knowledge gleaned from a mystical state be said to be “certain and definitive”? Once again, Wolff insists that one must distinguish the immediacy of the content of the mystical state from the attempt to express this content in conceptual form. Insofar as the former is a state in which there is a coalescence of subject and object, there is no cognitive distance between the knower and the known, and so no possibility of error:

In the case of ordinary knowledge, the knower stands in a relation of distance or difference from the object of his knowledge. He has, therefore, no ground of certainty with respect to the content of his knowledge. But, in contrast to ordinary knowledge, [mystical] cognition is in the form of an identity between the knower and the known. Thus, the certainty-destroying factor of distance or difference is eliminated, with the consequence that [mystical] cognition is absolutely certain on its own level. Undoubtedly, subsequent error can be introduced when one proceeds to a conceptual interpretation of the [mystical] content, but such error does not attach to the pure [mystical] cognition itself.⁵⁰

Thus, it is only when the mystic sets out to convey the content of the mystical state that error is possible, a “process [that] can be more or less in error, and, withal, is never wholly accurate.”⁵¹

Although the formulation of the content of the mystical state is “never wholly accurate,” Wolff believed that such expression is valuable insofar as it may evoke “the perspective and resources that come from Enlightenment.”⁵² Moreover, a mystic may be more or less skillful at this task; a task that Wolff often found required the use of aphorisms and poetry.

Section 3: Aphorisms on Consciousness Without an Object

In addition to traditional forms of philosophical expression, Wolff sometimes found it necessary to express himself in the form of aphorisms and poetry, which, as mentioned above, is meant to evoke “the perspective and resources that come from Enlightenment.” Wolff considered this form of communication to be “conceptual thought and transcendental thought combine[d] in mutual action”:

The best of poetry has much of this kind of thought. It is the poetry that stirs the souls rather than the senses of men. It is the poetry of content rather than of form. But most of all, from this level of thought are born the aphorisms, that strange kind of thought that is both poetry and something more. For it stirs the thinking as well as the feeling and thus integrates the best of the whole man. Mystery is an inextricable part of this thought.⁵³

The aphorisms presented here were an immediate production of the Wolff’s fifth realization (“The High Indifference”), and he notes they afford

a prime example of production as sheer delight. One might say that these aphorisms virtually wrote themselves. They were produced with the greatest of ease. Later, I undertook the task of writing commentaries on them, which ultimately became the principal part of *The Philosophy of Consciousness without an Object*. The commentaries, in contrast, often called for the severest kind of intellectual effort, whereas the original aphorisms virtually called for no effort at all, and were written down in an hour or two.⁵⁴

Wolff points out that there are two lines of approach to, and employment of, the aphorisms:

They may be regarded as seeds to be taken into the meditative state, in which case they will tend to arouse the essentially inexpressible Meaning and Realization which they symbolize. This we may call their mystical value. On the other hand, they may be regarded as primary indefinables upon which a systematic philosophy of the universe and its negation, Nirvana, may be developed. In this case, they may be viewed as a base of reference from which all thought and experience may be evaluated.⁵⁵

APHORISMS ON CONSCIOUSNESS WITHOUT AN OBJECT

1 . . . Consciousness-without-an-object is.

•

2 . . . Before objects were,
Consciousness-without-an-object is.

•

3 . . . Though objects seem to exist,
Consciousness-without-an-object is.

•

4 . . . When objects vanish,
yet remaining through all unaffected,
Consciousness-without-an-object is.

•

5 . . . Outside of Consciousness-without-an-object
nothing is.

•

6 . . . Within the bosom of
Consciousness-without-an-object lies
the power of awareness that projects objects.

•

7 . . . When objects are projected,
the power of awareness as subject is presupposed,
yet Consciousness-without-an-object
remains unchanged.

•

8 . . . When consciousness of objects is born, then,
likewise, consciousness of absence of objects arises.

•

9 . . . Consciousness of objects is the Universe.

•

10 . . . Consciousness of absence of objects
is Nirvana.

•

11 . . . Within Consciousness-without-an-object
lie both the Universe and Nirvana,
yet to Consciousness-without-an-object
these two are the same.

•

12 . . . Within Consciousness-without-an-object
lies the seed of Time.

•

13 . . . When awareness cognizes Time then
knowledge of Timelessness is born.

•

14 . . . To be aware of Time is to be aware of
the Universe, and to be aware of the Universe
is to be aware of Time.

•

15 . . . To realize Timelessness is to attain Nirvana.

•

16 . . . But for Consciousness-without-an-object
there is no difference between
Time and Timelessness.

•

17 . . . Within Consciousness-without-an-object
lies the seed of the world-containing Space.

•

18 . . . When awareness cognizes the
world-containing Space then knowledge of
the Spatial Void is born.

•

19 . . . To be aware of the world-containing Space
is to be aware of the Universe of Objects.

•

20 . . . To realize the Spatial Void
is to awaken to Nirvanic Consciousness.

•

21 . . . But for Consciousness-without-an-object
there is no difference between the world-containing
Space and the Spatial Void.

•

22 . . . Within Consciousness-without-an-object
lies the Seed of Law.

•

23 . . . When consciousness of objects is born
the Law is invoked as a Force
tending ever toward Equilibrium.

•

24 . . . All objects exist as tensions within
Consciousness-without-an-object that tend ever
to flow into their own complements or others.

•

25 . . . The ultimate effect of the flow of all objects
into their complements is mutual cancellation
in complete Equilibrium.

•

26 . . . Consciousness of the field of tensions
is the Universe.

•

27 . . . Consciousness of Equilibrium is Nirvana.

•

28 . . . But for Consciousness-without-an-object
there is neither tension nor Equilibrium.

•

29 . . . The state of tensions is the state of
ever-becoming.

•

30 . . . Ever-becoming is endless-dying.

•

31 . . . So the state of consciousness of objects
is a state of ever-renewing promises
that pass into death at the moment of fulfillment.

•

32 . . . Thus when consciousness is attached to
objects the agony of birth and death never ceases.

•

33 . . . In the state of Equilibrium
where birth cancels death
the deathless Bliss of Nirvana is realized.

•

34 . . . But Consciousness-without-an-object
is neither agony nor bliss.

•

35 . . . Out of the Great Void,
which is Consciousness-without-an-object,
the Universe is creatively projected.

•

36 . . . The Universe as experienced is the
created negation that ever resists.

•

37 . . . The creative act is bliss,
the resistance, unending pain.

•

38 . . . Endless resistance is the
Universe of experience; the agony of crucifixion.

•

39 . . . Ceaseless creativeness is Nirvana,
the Bliss beyond human conceiving.

•

40 . . . But for Consciousness-without-an-object
there is neither creativeness nor resistance.

•

41 . . . Ever-becoming and ever-ceasing-to-be
are endless action.

•

42 . . . When ever-becoming cancels the
ever-ceasing-to-be then Rest is realized.

•

43 . . . Ceaseless action is the Universe.

•

44 . . . Unending Rest is Nirvana.

•

45 . . . But Consciousness-without-an-object
is neither Action nor Rest.

•

46 . . . When consciousness is attached to objects
it is restricted through the forms imposed by
the world-containing Space, by Time, and by Law.

•

47 . . . When consciousness is disengaged from
objects, Liberation from the forms of the
world-containing Space, of Time, and of Law
is attained.

•

48 . . . Attachment to objects is
consciousness bound within the Universe.

•

49 . . . Liberation from such attachment is
the State of unlimited Nirvanic Freedom.

•

50 . . . But Consciousness-without-an-object
is neither bondage nor freedom.

•

51 . . . Consciousness-without-an-object
may be symbolized by a SPACE that is
unaffected by the presence or absence of objects,
for which there is neither Time nor Timelessness;
neither a world-containing Space nor a Spatial Void;
neither Tension nor Equilibrium;
neither Resistance nor Creativeness;
neither Agony nor Bliss;
neither Action nor Rest;
and neither Restriction nor Freedom.

•

52 . . . As the GREAT SPACE is not to be
identified with the Universe,
so neither is It to be identified with any Self.

•

53 . . . The GREAT SPACE is not God,
but the comprehender of all Gods,
as well as of all lesser creatures.

•

54 . . . The GREAT SPACE, or
Consciousness-without-an-object, is the
Sole Reality upon which all objects
and all selves depend and derive their existence.

•

55 . . . The GREAT SPACE comprehends both the
Path of the Universe and the Path of Nirvana.

•

56 . . . Beside the GREAT SPACE there is none other.

•

OM TAT SAT

ENDNOTES

¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy,” part 4 (Lone Pine, Calif.: February 1972), audio recording, 2.

² Ibid.

³ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy,” part 7 (Lone Pine, Calif.: March 23, 1972), audio recording, 1.

⁴ Wolff defines ‘realization’ as “awakening to the Transcendent or Cosmic Consciousness. . . . Realization is not a development of consciousness in the subject-object sense. It implies a radical event involving a shifting of the level of consciousness. Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy: A Personal Record of Transformation and a Discussion of Transcendental Consciousness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 422.

⁵ Ibid., 369.

⁶ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “One Reel Statement of My Philosophy” (Lone Pine, Calif.: July 12, 1975), audio recording, 1. In part 7 of “General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy” (p. 1), Wolff notes that his first three realizations are what Aurobindo referred to as “mental realizations.”

⁷ Wolff, “One Reel Statement,” 1.

⁸ Wolff, “General Discourse,” part 4, 2-3.

⁹ Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy*, 259.

¹⁰ Wolff, “General Discourse,” part 4, 4.

¹¹ Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy*, 259.

¹² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy,” part 5 (Lone Pine, Calif.: March 1972), audio recording, 1.

¹³ Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy*, 133. Wolff did not categorize this statement as the product of a “realization” until after some years of reflection. Thus, in *Pathways Through to Space* and *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object*, both of which were written relatively soon after his transcendental realizations, one finds that Wolff reports that there two not three realizations prior to his transcendental realizations.

¹⁴ Ibid., 263.

¹⁵ Wolff, “One Reel Statement,” 5. The word ‘imperience’ that occurs in this passage refers to mystical awareness, and is meant to with the word ‘experience’. Both experience and imperience are alike in the sense that they refer to a content that is immediate in character. Wolff, however, often restricts his use of ‘experience’ to the immediacy that comes through the physical senses, whereas he uses ‘imperience’ to refer to the non-sensuous immediacy encountered in Fundamental Realization. See Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy,” part 10 (Lone Pine, Calif.: April 17, 1972), audio recording, 5ff.

¹⁶ Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy*, 279.

¹⁷ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “On The High Indifference” (Lone Pine, Calif.: April 30, 1975), audio recording, 3.

¹⁸ Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy*, 282.

¹⁹ Wolff, “On The High Indifference,” 4.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy*, 241.

²² Wolff, “One Reel Statement,” 1.

²³ Ibid., 2.

²⁴ Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy*, ix, x.

²⁵ See the Franklin Merrell-Wolff audio recordings, “Three Fundamentals of the Introceptive Philosophy,” parts 1–16 (Lone Pine, Calif.: November 5, 1973–April 28, 1974) for a comprehensive discussion of the three fundamentals of Wolff’s philosophy.

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- ²⁶ Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy*, 356.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 350.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 356.
- ²⁹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Abstract of the Philosophy,” part 8 (Lone Pine, Calif.: February 1, 1975), audio recording, 1.
- ³⁰ Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy*, 357.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 360.
- ³² Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *Transformations in Consciousness: The Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 184
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 151.
- ³⁴ Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy*, 187.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 265-6.
- ³⁶ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “Abstract of the Philosophy,” part 10: “Second and Third Fundamentals” (Lone Pine, Calif.: March 11, 1975), audio recording, 3.
- ³⁷ Wolff, *Transformations in Consciousness*, 185.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 87, 86.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 137-8.
- ⁴¹ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “A Western Contribution to Yogic Method” (Lone Pine, Calif.: February 28, 1977), audio recording, 4.
- ⁴² Wolff, “Abstract of the Philosophy,” part 10, 1-2.
- ⁴³ Wolff, “One Reel Statement,” 3.
- ⁴⁴ Wolff, *Transformations in Consciousness*, 248.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 248-9.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 280.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 280-1.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 132-3.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 282.
- ⁵⁰ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, *Introceptualism: The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object* vol. 2 (Phoenix: Phoenix Philosophical Press, 1980), 188-9.
- ⁵¹ Wolff, *Transformations in Consciousness*, 133.
- ⁵² Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy*, ix.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 308.
- ⁵⁴ Franklin Merrell-Wolff, “General Discourse on My Philosophy,” part 12 (Lone Pine, Calif.: May 18, 1972), audio recording, 1-2.
- ⁵⁵ Wolff, *Experience and Philosophy*, 315.