

General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy

Part 4 of 12

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As I have stated repeatedly, the distinguishing characteristic of the philosophy which I have formulated lies in the fact that it recognizes three, instead of two, forms of fundamental cognition. Typically, in our psychology and in the philosophies with which we are familiar, it is assumed that there are two forms of cognition consisting of: (a) the aesthetic component, as formulated by Dr. Northrop, or that which is oriented to sense perception, and along with it the intuition that may be a part of it; and (b) to conceptual cognition, which consists of the whole theoretic component, as conceived by Dr. Northrop. But to these two factors, I add a third which, as I have said before, I named “ntroception”; and, instead of involving experience, I found it necessary to use another term which was suggested by someone else, namely, of ‘imperience’, as characteristic of the cognition in this case, for the opening of this door of cognition involves an inward penetration, or in psychological terms, a deep conscious introversion.¹

The reason for the necessity for formulating a third form of cognition grew out of certain imperiences which were known to my consciousness. Now, these imperiences are obviously influential in the thought of certain philosophers, both explicitly and implicitly. That there is a source of knowledge other than that of our ordinary experience and ordinary thought is evident in the record of the Great Buddha, who, it is said, attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, and from that moment went forth to preach a doctrine or method of liberation from suffering. It is also explicit in the philosophy of Sri Shankaracharya, who, after attaining certain Realizations while a *chela* of the one whom he called Govinda, went forth with a message of liberation from ignorance by the attainment of spiritual knowledge and the retreat from external existence by entering the state of *Moksha*. It is explicit also in the philosophic contributions of Plotinus, who, in certain letters explicitly reported the Consciousness which he attained while in an ecstatic state. That there is such a Consciousness is further evidenced by the report of several others, though typically they did not formulate themselves in a philosophic way; but, it is evident in the case of Jacob Boehme, of Swedenborg, and of several others. And among the philosophers, there are those who seem, by the content of their thinking, to have had such imperience though not expressly acknowledging it. From the content of the philosophies, for instance, of Plato and of Hegel, one would suspect that they had had such imperience. In the case of Plato, confirmation of this is to be found toward the close of his “Seventh Letter” but he, while acknowledging such an ecstatic Realization, remarked that it was something of which one should not speak; yet, nonetheless, it

¹ For the definition of ‘imperience’, see audio recordings “General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy,” part 10 and “On My Philosophy: Extemporaneous Statement.” In speaking of introceptual knowledge, Wolff says, “The third function therefore gives you imperience, not experience. It is akin to sense perception in the sense of being immediate, but is not sensuous.”

unquestionable influenced his thinking, and to one who has the flare for this type of Consciousness, it is evident in his thought. Another figure, nearer to our time, who formulated himself both in philosophic and poetic form, and who made explicit acknowledgment of the fact of a state of Realization as determinant with respect to both the philosophy and the poetry, is Sri Aurobindo. He has discussed the subject of Realization as a source of spiritual cognition, and done so rather exhaustively.

In my own experience, the beginning of the formulation of a system of philosophy was also the result of certain Realizations; in fact, a total of five. Now, these Realizations led to a formulation, and I faced the problem as to whether the basis of the formulation—the epistemological basis of the formulation—could be established. I felt diffident about a reference to a cognitive source which was so private as a state of Realization; yet, it was evident to me that I could not justify the philosophic statement without such a reference. Study of the problem rendered it quite clear that the essential elements of the formulation could not be derived by a reference to experience in the sense of sensuous experience, nor on the basis of a purely logical necessity, nor, finally, by a combination of these two. If, therefore, the epistemologic basis of the thought was to be rendered explicit, it became necessary to present what might be called a psychological confession, and that is what I finally decided to do; although, there are reasons why an individual feels diffident about taking such a step, for it would be much more comfortable if one could impersonally ground his philosophic statement on bases that are universal among men, such as the principles of logic and general experience. But this I saw was impossible. The philosophy could not be grounded on those two elements alone, but required this third factor.

There was a total of five imperiences occurring over a period of fourteen years. Two of them came fairly early and the last three in the span of about three months in 1936. 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 psycho-physical 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 the 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 present case, it was a confirmation of a convincement that was already held but now presented in a form that was overwhelming in its assurance.

As I have already noted, a convincement 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 held in one’s consciousness.

This is an important point and it has been discussed by Sri Aurobindo. And I will now refer to his basic statement; it is this: that there is not only one Realization which may be attained, but there is the possibility of many Realizations; that the Realization,

however, is authoritative with respect to the zone it covers; but that zone may be restricted and, in fact, it is entirely possible that there is no Realization that is not in this sense relative to some zone which is transcended by the Realization of a more comprehensive view. Correction, then, of an earlier truth realized in this form of conviction is only possible by a more comprehensive Realization. Argument from evidence alone is not enough to lead to a change, and that is one of the reasons why one should never try to argue with a person with respect to his fundamental convictions. True conviction is grounded in some insight. The insight may be limited, but in its zone it is absolute—not absolutely absolute, as one finds who has gone through a series of Realizations of greater and greater comprehension.

There is a second point made by Aurobindo, namely, that some Realizations are *mental* and some *transcendental*, or one might say spiritual; but, in view of the fact that the word ‘spiritual’ is a very greatly abused term, I avoid it, and I would use the contrast of mental Realization and of transcendental Realization. And while the distinguishing mark between these two as I see it may not be the same as Aurobindo would represent it as being, nonetheless, this I can say: a mental Realization is one such that the essential content of the Realization can be formulated in concepts. The feeling may not be conveyed, the delight associated with it may not be communicable, but the meaningfulness of its content can be communicated with considerable ease; whereas, a truly transcendental Realization is such that the immediate *quale* of its content is incommunicable. Furthermore, there is a difference in the degree of valuation. One would not say of a mental Realization that it was worth any price however high, while such is the case with respect to a transcendental Realization. This Realization, I am *Atman*, I would classify as a mental Realization, thus standing on a lower level than that of a true transcendental Realization. Later there came a transcendental Realization confirming this original position, but it involved so much more that was totally beyond the capacity of formulation that its distinctive character was very clear.

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.² 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.

At first sight, it does not seem probable that the cognitive element known as the *subject* could be viewed as identical with a *state* of consciousness, but in this sense I think we can grasp the meaning: that there is a correspondence between the subjective pole of our consciousness and the state of *Nirvana*; and, likewise, a correspondence between the objective pole, the content of consciousness, and the condition, or zone, or

² Paul A Brunton, *Search in Secret India* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1934), 277-295. Ramana’s name is spelled ‘Maharshi’ in other books.

world, of *Sangsara*, the universe of objects, or the evolution. In our analysis of our basic principle of awareness, we find three components: the *object* which is held by consciousness, the *subject* which is aware of that object, and, as the third factor, the *consciousness* itself. Now, while a correspondence is fairly evident, actually the Realization implied that it was something more than simply an external correspondence, but in the nature of a kind of *identity*.

This leads us to the consideration of the relationship of the macrocosm and the microcosm. The basic thesis in connection with these conceptions is that the microcosm is a reproduction of the macrocosm. The macrocosm represents the Whole, the All; the microcosm, a reproduction of that in the case of the individual. It would be implied here that in every part of the Whole, such as every individual consciousness, there is a representation or presence of every element that is in the Whole. It's like the correspondence which we have in mathematics between, say, the natural number system, the set of numbers from 1, 2, 3, 4, and so forth on to infinity, and another subset drawn from this original set which stands in some relation to the original, such as the doubles of the elements in the original set—as for instance in the case of the doubles, thus, corresponding to 1 there would be 2, to 2 there would be 4, to 3, 6, and so forth. Now, there would be a complete equality between the two sets since one can set up a one to one reciprocal relationship between the two sets. They are, therefore, equal in cardinality. There is no element in the original set which is not reproduced, or has a correspondence in the derived set, yet every element in the derived set is to be found in the original set. Thus we would say of the derived set, it is a microcosmic reproduction of the original set. Now, while we have derived the second set from the first, it is also possible to derive the first set from the second; for, the first set can be derived by dividing every element in the second set by 2. If, then, we use this as a paradigm for our understanding of the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm, we can see how it would follow that by a thorough knowledge of the microcosm, we can attain knowledge of the macrocosm. The All is reproduced in the part. This kind of thinking implies that we are dealing with the infinite, in which every part of that infinite is also infinite. We will have to return to this again as it is very fundamental in the thought.

We are now in a position to deal with a very disturbing paradox that is to be found in the literature. This statement found in the literature is to the effect that no causes set up in the *Sangsara*, or the universe of objects, can lead to the *nirvanic* state, that is, that no meritoriousness of life, no efforts in the direction of human betterment, of compassion, and so on, will lead to a state of *Nirvana*. Indeed, it may well lead to the *karmic* result of the enjoyment of some heaven world, but that heaven world would be merely a finer zone, a more ideal zone, in the *Sangsara*. This, then, would appear to render the Realization of *Nirvana* impossible, for it is also said in the literature, that only he can attain *Nirvana* who is a *Nirvani* already. But the Realization in this case taking the form, I am *Nirvana*, implies that I already, as subject, abide in *Nirvana*; but, generally, with most of us, we are unconscious of this fact. It is possible, then, to attach a meaning to the conception 'attainment of *Nirvana*' by interpreting it as a becoming conscious, or self-conscious, of an eternal fact. And this applies to every entity whatsoever. As subject every entity already dwells in *Nirvana*, but generally, in this world, does not know it. The *attainment* is becoming knowledgeable of this fact in an immediate sense. It is that which is objective, that which applies to action in *Sangsara*, of which it is true that no effort put

forth in the objective sense can lead to *nirvanic* Realization. What it can lead to is the attention of the *guru*, who already knows that he abides in *Nirvana* permanently, that he never attained it, but merely realized it as an eternal fact, and, therefore, is now conscious of it. It will lead the seeker to the attention of such a one who can, by the power of induction, awaken the Realization in the seeker.³ Merit, therefore, is important, but it must not be thought that that merit, by itself, opens the door to *Nirvana*, but it leads to the attention of one who knows he is a *Nirvani* already, and who can therefore open the door, or can place the *sadhaka* face to face with the ultimate Realization. This, then, the Realization I am *Nirvana*, is the means for the resolving of that paradox. It also clarifies the ancient aphorism: man know thyself; know thyself not simply as a creature, who is objective in this world, having certain organs, and functions, and so forth, but know thyself as the subject, as the Self, not as the person merely. By knowing thyself as the subject, one becomes aware of the truths of the macrocosm, for they are already present in the secret arcana of the microcosm.

The relevance of the mathematics of the infinite as a logical paradigm to aid in the understanding of occult philosophy can be illustrated by a quotation taken from *The Mahatma Letters*. This is Letter No. 15, and your attention is directed to a portion of the paragraph on p. 89. Note especially the properties that are akin to those of the mathematics of the infinite in this quotation:

The great difficulty in grasping the idea in the above process lies in the liability to form more or less incomplete mental conceptions of the working of the *one* element, of its inevitable presence in every imponderable atom, and its subsequent ceaseless and almost illimitable multiplication of new centers of activity without affecting in the least its own original quantity. Let us take such an aggregation of atoms destined to form our globe and follow, throwing a cursory look at the whole, the special work of such atoms. We will call the primordial atom A. This being not a circumscribed centre of activity but the initial point of a manwantaric whirl of evolution, gives birth to new centres which we may term B, C, D, etc., incomputably. Each of these capital points gives birth to minor centres, a, b, c, etc. And the latter in the course of evolution and involution in time develop into A's, B's, C's, etc., and so form the roots or are the developing causes of new genera, species, classes, etc., ad infinitum. Now neither the primordial A and its companion atoms, nor their derived a's, b's, c's, have lost one tittle of their original force or life-essence by the evolution of their derivatives.⁴

Now compare this with the mathematicians' statement that an infinite set or class is such that an infinite number of infinite subsets can be subtracted from it without reducing its cardinality at all, and the same may be said of any one of these subsets. The representation here is to different entities, it is admitted, but what I wish to call attention

³ For a clarification of the term 'induction', see the audio recordings, "Induction Talk" and "On Tulku," part 2.

⁴ A. T. Barker, ed., *The Mahatma Letters* (Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1923), 88.

to is the logical paradigm. In other words, the study of the mathematics of the infinite is a key to the understanding of the hidden truth if we assume the correctness of the philosophy formulated in *The Mahatma Letters*. This is a key in the sense of a logical paradigm. I am not referring to its specific subject matter.