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II

## INTUITION AND REASON

(An Indian Approach)

Aristophanes reports the visit of an Indian philosopher to Socrates. Socrates told the easterner that his work consisted in investigations about the life of men. The Indian philosopher smiled and remarked that no one could understand things human without understanding first things divine. Referring to this alleged dialogue S. Radhakrishnan says that it suggests that "for the whole Western tradition man is essentially a rational being, one who can think logically and act in a utilitarian manner", while the Indian thinkers hold that "we possess a power more interior than intellect by which we become aware of the real in its intimate individuality and not merely in its superficial or discernible aspects."<sup>1</sup> This may sound an over-simplification. But it points to a radical difference in the logical approaches of East and West, regarding the pilgrimage of human reason from time-space bound daily experience to the timeless reality that can be grasped only through intuition.

West has used the method of analysis, synthesis and transcendence while East has generally placed the emphasis on detachment, silence and a process of logic as it were in reverse. However, it cannot be taken in a rigid sense as if either method were totally absent in either tradition. It is a matter of emphasis and preference, depending upon whether one gives importance to the logic of temporality and tries to understand the timeless in reference to the time-bound or vice versa to investigate the time-bound in terms of the timeless.

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1. *An Idealist View of Life*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 4th imp. 2nd ed.), pp. 66, 127.

### Western Rational Approach

Ordinary modal logic which is the preferred tool of the West is the logic of temporality. It analyses experience into subject and object, distinguishes their diverse elements and internal-external relations. Then distinguishing between the contingent and the necessary it formulates the relation between the two. Finally investigating all possible solutions and alternatives it arrives at the transcendent ground of all possibilities, the Timeless, God, whose necessary existence tolerates all creativity, and is compatible with any conceivable state of affairs. This method of approach of reason is rooted in the intentionality structure of the human faculty of knowing. It is the dynamic nature of intellect that it will not stop with any particular object but tends to the infinite as the cause and source of all intelligibles. Particular and finite intelligibles are only intermediary ends in the total teleology of reason. This intentionality is the basic concern of logic in the Western tradition. Socrates countered the relativism of the Sophists by appealing to universal ideas and accurate definitions in which alone meaningful discourse can be held. Plato found the ground of our certain knowledge derived from the experience of transitory material things in the universal ideas. Aristotle appealed to the immutable essences immanent in things as the mainstay of reasoning. Thomas Aquinas found the intentionality of the intellect most cogent reason to prove the existence of God: The intellect in knowing anything tends to the infinite since it can add something more to any finite thing that is grasped. This tendency of the intellect would be in vain unless there be an actual infinite reality, which we call God.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning with Descartes even to our own times the emphasis in Western thinking has shifted from the Greek and Scholastic pre-occupation with nature, object and reality, to knowledge, insight, and consciousness. But even in this concern with the human intuitive experience of reality the accent is on the object of knowledge and the content of experience. Descartes jumped from his "cogito" to the objective reality of the "sum", "I exist". Kant seriously questioned the very possibility of an original intuition apart from sense experience; concept of any other kind of intuition, for him would be devoid of all meaning. Sometimes he took intuition for pure spontaneity, but most often he

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2. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentes*, I, 43,10.

considered it the model of our objective worldly knowledge according to the strict norms of predication and objectivity. According to him "thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind."

Among the Western thinkers Plotinus seems to have adopted a slightly different approach in the rational movement from time-bound to the timeless. Instead of abstracting and absolutising the beauty, goodness, truth etc. of the external world, he exhorts his disciples to enter into their own inner self and from the beauty of the soul rise to the beauty of the world soul, Nous and the One. The Western mystics like Evagrius and pseudo-Dionysius through their apophatic method emphasised this logic of interiority.

### Indian Approach

What was peripheral and incidental to Western thought was central to Indian tradition in its movement from worldly experience to timeless intuition. Radhakrishnan had already noted this radical difference between East and West in his Upton lectures at Oxford in 1926:

The Hindu thinkers bring out the sense of the otherness of the divine by the use of negatives, 'There the eye goes not, speech goes not, nor mind, we know not, we understand not how one would teach it'. (Kena Up. 3). The 'neti' of Yajnavalkya reminds us of the nescio of Bernard, of 'the dim silence where all lovers lose themselves of Ruysbroeck, of the negative descriptions of Dionysius the Areopagite, Eckhart and Boehme.<sup>3</sup>

The reason for this difference is that for the Western thinkers the starting point was the feeling of wonder at the sight of the material universe, while the Eastern thinkers started from suffering and the human self involved in suffering. As Radhakrishnan says "We rise to the timeless making use of the highest categories available to our imagination, and that is of the self-conscious personality."<sup>4</sup> Though man moves in the order of things visible, tangible, measurable in reference to time and space his

3. *The Hindu View of Life*, Upton Lectures, Oxford 1926 (London: George Allen & Unwin 8th imp. 1949) p. 26.

4. *Ibid* p. 27

being has its roots in the invisible. "It is our duty to become aware of ourselves as spiritual being instead of falsely identifying ourselves with the body, life or mind... Man's evolution is a constant self-transcending until he reaches his potential and ultimate nature which the appearances of life conceal or inadequately express. We are not, through this process, abolishing our individuality but transforming it into a conscious term of the universal being, an utterance of the transcendent divine."<sup>5</sup>

Any experience cannot be taken purely in terms of its immediate factors nor in terms of the diverse aspects of the final goal. It cannot be taken in a purely anthropocentric perspective either, since man is only a particular sphere of the world of reality. Since reality is immutable and permanent, intuition revelative of ultimate reality is not considered primarily under the aspect of the new information gained through it but more in terms of the realization it brings regarding the reality already present. Anything newly acquired may be as well lost, and hence cannot be permanent.

Experience in the Hindu tradition is a substantive matter identical with reality. The *Rigveda* in speaking about the origin of things in the beginning says: "then there was neither non-existence (*asat*) nor existence (*sat*). In the beginning arose desire in the mind, which became the first seed. The sages searching in their hearts discovered that non-existence was the root of existence"<sup>6</sup> *Satapatha Brahmana* commenting on this text finds the original principle as consciousness, which is neither a fullfledged mind nor even express desire but fulness of potentiality which will evolve into a cosmic mind and consciousness. Desire residing in the mind to be grasped only by men of vision in their hearts indicates an origin of things from an original subsistent insight. *Kena Up.* directs its investigation of reality, into an inquiry into the eye of the eye, ear of the ear, speech of the speech and mind of the mind which it defines as Brahman, that can be grasped only through meditative intuition. In the *Mundaka Up.* it is the realization of the one reality knowing which everything else is known.<sup>7</sup> In the *Chandogya Up.* Prajapati leads Indra

5. *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 2nd ed. 1940), p. 37

6. *Rigveda* X, 129.

7. *Mundaka Up.* 1, i, 3; *Brahmasutra Sankara Bhashya* 1. iii, 1; 1, iv, 20

through the states of waking experience, dream and dreamless sleep to the fourth state of pure consciousness as the Atman, the Self. The unity between ultimate reality and ultimate experience is so great that one who knows Brahman becomes even Brahman<sup>8</sup>. But this consciousness is not the ordinary experiencing of seeing, hearing etc., but the seer of the seeing, the hearer of the hearing etc. designated as Brahman, the Supreme Word.<sup>9</sup>

Basing himself on the Vedic approach to consciousness Sankara says that the ultimate experience is Brahman: "Brahman is not an object of experience, because it is experience itself." Sankara locates the problem for this inquiry in the opposition and polarity in experience between the spheres of the subject and the object, the I and the thou. Between these two radically opposing spheres there is no doubt that authenticity and reality should lie in the line of the 'I', the subject. Our knowledge is generally objective, either *pratyksha*, the direct apprehension of something, or *anumāna*, indirect perception through inference. But examined in its revelative aspect it is also perceptive of the knowing self in a direct manner which Sankara terms *aparoksha*, non-indirect.<sup>10</sup>

The self-perceptive intuition does not bring any new information to the experiencer but only makes him aware of what is already present to him. As Sankara says it is not like the information given to a traveller about a distant city of Pataliputra to which he wants to go, but the sudden realization gained by the weary pilgrim who stands in the middle of the holy city and asks where is Pataliputra, when the fact of his already being there is indicated to him.

In any experience the tendency is to ask "what is it?" But the multiplicity, limitation and diversity of things presented should lead one in the opposite direction in quest of the knowing subject, who is able to unify them in his consciousness. The principle of intelligence that makes them intelligible has to be ultimately one, unlimited, pure intelligence. This is the meaning of the *Katha Up.* v, 25, statement: Since it shines, by its light everything else shines along with it. Sankara commenting on the text says: By the light

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8. *Mundaka Up.* III, ii, 9

9. *Kena Up.* I, i, 2-4

10. *Brahmasutra Sankara Bhashya*, Introd.

that is reflected in these diverse things it becomes naturally evident that Brahman is of the nature of intelligence.<sup>11</sup>

One way of determining the validity of this intuitive knowledge according to Sankara is to contrast it with wrong knowledge. Error is not absence of knowledge but a wrong type of knowledge which consists essentially in superimposition, whether it be attributing to one thing a form retained in memory from experience elsewhere, or confusing one quality for another for lack of proper perception, or attributing something diametrically opposed to what is actually there, like seeing silver in the place of the mother of pearl, mistaking a rope for a snake or taking the marriage in the desert for a body of water. Error is always construction and composition. Hence, right intuition is discernment and transcendence; it is perceiving the immutable and indivisible in change and multiplicity.<sup>12</sup>

The final state of human experience according to Sankara is an intuitive realization of Brahman as the sole and whole reality, dissolving thereby the idea of the separateness of beings from Him. This is the meaning he gives to the dissolution of all things in the end of ages in the final deluge. He finds confirmation for this view in the Vedic statements, "Brahman is consciousness"<sup>13</sup> and "All this is Self alone".<sup>14</sup> The Puranas understand *pralaya*, the final deluge in a physical sense that all things will be reduced to their causal elements. "On the other hand what is consciously effected by the knowers of Brahman through their knowledge of it is in fact extreme dissolution which happens through the cessation of ignorance." This final experience has no analogy with the knowledge of other things. Brahman is not a thing among things. He can be experienced only by identity, as the ground and reality of one's being. "The relation of identity, with Brahman has not to be directly established, for it is already there. Everybody always has that identity with it, but it appears to be related to something else. When the identification with other things is gone, that identity with one's own Self which is natural, becomes evident."<sup>15</sup> This is why Brahman is said to be unknowable, because it

11. *Kathopanishad Sankara Bhashya*, V, 25

12. *Brahmasutra Sankara Bhashya*, Introd.

13. *Taitt. Up.* III, 15

14. cf. *Brahmasutra Sankara Bhashya*, III, ii, 32

15. *Ibid.* II, iii, 30

cannot be comprehended through any means, and yet is at the same time known.

We have described at some length Sankara's concept of intuition as an anti-intentional and anti-teleological realization of the ground and ultimate Self of our Being, Brahman, because Sankara is the best known representative of the Vedānta school. In this conception of experience the other Vedānta thinkers agree with him. Even for Ramānuja who considers knowledge as a subject-object relation and views final liberation as a personal union with the Lord retaining the individual identity, the intuition that leads to that is not a synthesis of ideas but *yāthātmyadarśanam*, realization of the Lord as one's substance and soul. It is achieved through Bhaktiyoga, which is a continuous representation or calling to mind that is synonymous with knowledge, worship and meditation on God.<sup>16</sup>

This interioristic procedure from time to the timeless should not be taken as irrational or anti-logical. It is a logic that makes use of a process in the reverse order from that of the logic of temporality. This logic was specially developed by the most ancient school of Indian philosophy, the Samkhya.

### The Samkhyan Approach to Timeless Purusha

In proceeding from the worldly experience of suffering and multiplicity the Samkhyan approach is not abstract like that of Vedānta but concrete and psychological. It does not locate the problem on the abstract level of subject-object opposition, nor strive for any metaphysical or universal solution. It is more concerned with the individual's psyche and finds the problem in the personal experience of suffering. After reducing all the phenomena of change and limitation to the three functions of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, reflection, action and limitation of *prakriti*, the autonomous material principle, Samkhya postulates also an individual spiritual principle Purusha, the counterpart of matter. What interests us here especially is the method of intuitive inference employed by Samkhyan thought. Samkhya makes use of *anumāna* or inference for arriving at the experience of reality. Experience of the empirical personality or of Purusha-in-the-linga is the starting point. In this empirical knowledge, matter and spirit are ascribed equal importance. The phenomena of re-

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16. *Sri Bhashya* I, i, 1; *Vedarthasamgraha* § 10

flection, action and limitation have to find their full meaning of a material principle, in which their ideal condition is one of perfect balance and tranquillity. On the other hand the feeling of selfhood and subjectivity must find its ground in a spirit, which is not subject to change and evolution, but is the pure witness and the subject of attribution.

The method of procedure is *sesbavadanumāna*, a special type of inference that moves from the complex to the simple. There are three kinds of inference, *pūrvavat* (a-priori), *sesbavat* (a-posteriori) and *sāmanyatodrsta* (based on general observation). It is again divided into *vita* (affirmative) and *avita* (negative). The negative inference a posteriori which is applied here operates by contrast from the present experience and its limitations to the authentic condition that should be supposed. This basic principle of authentic experience in opposition to ordinary knowledge is stated in the second *karika*, of Iswarakrishna: That which is connected with the Scriptures is obvious and joined with impurity, decay and inequality. What is opposed to it is better since it proceeds from the discernment of the Manifested, Unmanifest and Knower.<sup>17</sup> Thus the underlying unmanifest material principle is postulated because the condition of evolved multiplicity demands an underlying unity and simplicity. But what is particularly important in this line of inverse inference is the insight into the nature of the Spirit. The fundamental principle is that the spirit, Purusha, must be the opposite in character to matter. This principle is elaborated into five reasons postulating an individual spiritual self: (1) Whatever is composed of parts should be for the sake of another. (2) The ideal of unity is not fully achieved even by reducing the external phenomena to their subtle conditions in the three *gunās*, but only in a counter principle serving as an ideal of unity. (3) The world of multiplicity needs a principle of support and direction. (4) No experience is intelligible without a subject to which it may be attributed. (5) Finally, the very idea of liberation supposes someone to attain liberation and independence.

In this perspective, intuition which is the highest point of human experience is not looking at an extraneous reality, an absolute being outside the individual person, but a realization of the authentic reality of man himself. This is also the ideal of

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17. *Samkhya Karika* 2



any religious search which is not for the benefit of God but for the fulfilment of man. The problem of human life is in the mixed up, painful experience of the "Purusha in the linga" confusing the roles of spirit and matter. The ideal of true experience is to discern the roles of the two principles in life, bring matter to a balance of its functions and realize the transcendence and isolation of the Purusha. Purusha's *kaivalya* or isolation is the goal and essence of true experience. *Kaivalya*, is not separation, but the transcendent role of subjectivity as the unaffected witness and responsible subject of attribution. *Prakriti* or matter is not isolated, but attains its identity when it is integrated in subordination to the spirit, but this does not imply any change or action on the part of the spirit.

Final intuition is not anything artificial. It is the realization of the dynamism of our whole existence. Spirit and matter are not two separate things. They work for their mutual benefit like the halt and the blind.<sup>18</sup> The Spirit that is not realized as the self of the whole individual is lame and inoperative; matter engaged in activity by itself is blind. Matter had an inner teleology working towards self-realization of the spirit in the same way as a dancer dances for the benefit of the audience and as the cow gives milk for the benefit of the calf. Its ideal state is reached when its purpose has been accomplished and it returns to the balance of the gunas, drawn to the mode of existence of the spirit. When the bodily experiences yield their natural result of self-awareness it is recognised for what it is, matter and its phenomena. *Kaivalya*, or isolation of purusha is *purushārtha*, the goal of the person, when it realizes that it is not prakriti, nor its manifestations and changes anything essential to the person. It is the authentic condition of the spirit existing by its own light, the focus of personal existence. This for Samkhya is the meaning of final intuitive experience which is the end of the spiritual pilgrimage.

### The Buddhist Concept of Intuition

The Samkhyan concept of the liberated Purusha comes very close to the Buddhist concept of Buddha. However, Buddhism did not want to absolutise the liberated individual and to make it the converging point of the dynamism implied in the phenomenal

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18. *Ibid.* 18

existence. It demanded a total reversal an *āsrayaparāvrtti*, a revolution of our psychosomatic support and of the whole collective unconscious, *ālayavijnāna*. But it agreed with Samkhya that liberative experience is not the contemplation of an external absolute but a self-resolving process within the empirical existence of man, thereby revealing the ineffable authentic condition of man. Phenomenal existence is a combination of parts, that have to be dissolved, a sickness that should be got rid of, a mask which has to be removed. The energies of our unconscious tendencies or *samsāra* should be turned back on themselves. The chain of ignorance, dynamic residues of past actions, birth, old age, death, and the other links in the chain of *samsara*, constitute a system apart from man. The elimination of this system that should constitute *nirvāna* or liberation cannot be achieved by following its logic of objective search and knowledge. *Bodhi*, the pure lucidity of Buddha and his consciousness without any taint may be realized only through a denial of intentionality. It must be a reverse process of non-intentionality, the intuition without subject and object.

The Buddhist method of right mindfulness and concentration indicate the nature of this inverse intentionality. Briefly, it is to isolate, analyze and disown each experience. Each object and experience is viewed in itself and seen to be ultimately made up of five elements, earth, water, air, fire and ether, and then further reduced to pure thusness or *tathata*. This is the opposite of the ordinary act of affirmation which through intentionality achieves a logical synthesis between concepts (subject and predicate), a predicative synthesis between the knowing subject and the known object, an objective synthesis between the individual object and its essence, a veritative or transcendental synthesis between the individual object and the order of existence. Buddhist approach is essentially analytic. It has much in common with the process of psycho-analysis. By reducing all material forms, sensation, perception, the psychic construction and consciousness itself to their pure thusness and removing them from oneself with the thought "this is not mine, this is not I, this is not myself" concentration is attained. The elements of earth, water, air, fire and the colours blue, yellow, red and white, space and consciousness indicate the *mandalās*, through which one is led from the lower stages of needing an object or image, thought or reasoning, to the pure intuition, coupled with joy born of deep tranquillity. But in the final stage of intuition even joy and happiness as well as its opposite, misery, are left behind in equanimity and mindfulness.

Here the inevitable question concerning the nature and content of this intuition arises. But the question itself seems to be badly put since it would imply a distinction between the container and the content. It is not an intuition of someone or something. It does not belong to the sage either, since he is himself pierced by it; it, in a way, denies him at the same time as it affirms him. Perfect wisdom is in perfect giving. Perfect giving is when gift, giver and receiver are all given up.

### Complementarity of the Three Positions

Vedānta, Sāṃkhya and Buddhism may appear radically different in their approach to the transtemporal reality. Though their conception of that ultimate reality may be different there is a certain similarity of procedure among them and a certain complementarity of their conceptions. All of them start with the common sense realism concerning the external objects and try to understand the meaning of the experience for man himself. Things falling within experience, things known, as well as the knower, are not absolute entities but pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. When a puzzle is solved we get an integrated whole. But greater reality belongs to the one who stands outside the puzzle and solves it.

This is the reason why in the East in describing the phenomenal world great emphasis is placed on *lila* or game, *māya* or unreality and *sūnyatā* or essential emptiness. Experience itself should be treated as a game with its own rules. Buddhism, Sāṃkhya and Vedānta are only three stages in this anti-intentionalist, inverse inference. Siddhartha Gautama Buddha was not a philosopher, but presented the common sense approach to the predicament of man: Man is mortally wounded by suffering. Just discussing essence, nature, truth, soul, God and other metaphysical concepts is not going to be very useful. What is necessary is to draw out the poisonous arrow which is desire and ignorance. Nāgārjuna is the typical philosopher of this stage of approach to experience. His eightfold negation shows how existence should be isolated and analysed as something essentially empty: reality is capable of no origination, no destruction, no annihilation, no persistence, no unity, no plurality, no coming and no going forth. Distinctions and causality have to be denied. Conditioned and unconditioned should not be distinguished as two levels of reality. Entities presented in experience should be reduced to their essential emptiness. In this procedure *nirvāna* and *Tathagata* are relative terms useful to indicate complete spiritual release only if

they do not refer to absolute entities and objects for grasping. Emptiness is not nothingness either. Nothingness can be affirmed only as an object. Whatever notions are assumed to possess self-sufficient reality, even misunderstanding is a misunderstanding if conceived in an absolute way. The close similarity between this and the psychoanalytic approach that reduces all experience to subconscious and unconscious, dynamically charged psychic elements or archetypes.

Samkhya goes a step further and shows that this empty shell of experience reducible to the three functions of reflection, action and concretization cannot be understood without a real centre in contrast to which alone they can be assumed to be empty. This centre of subjectivity and meaning alone can make a balance of functions of Prakriti really understandable. Subordinating all the factors of experience to this centre of individual authentic consciousness constitutes a sufficient spiritual and religious goal.

The Vedanta completes this movement of interiority when it points out that this inner centre of authenticity opens out into an infinite subsistent immutable consciousness, Brahman, the ultimate ground of selfhood. These three convergent and complementary approaches to experience constitute a valid alternative to Platonic and Aristotelian understanding of experience centred in intentionality.