

Objective pictures and impersonal knowledge

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Using theories in practice

Our theories and pictures of the world have two, complementary uses. On the one hand, they calculate results. On the other hand, they help to educate human beings.

For example, a map is a picture that serves to calculate where someone can go, what route to take and how long the journey will be. This calculating function is essentially technical and specialized. It uses special techniques, of map-making and map-reading, to describe and to achieve various limited goals.

But a map does something more than this. It also represents an entire territory, including many possible routes and destinations. Thus it provides a way of stepping back from the calculation of narrow objectives, towards a less partial understanding of the territory as a whole. A map is not just a calculating machine. More essentially, it is a reflective tool that works towards understanding.

The same is true of all our theories and pictures. They have two aspects: of objective calculation and subjective reflection.

- The objective aspect works through particular calculations towards specialized goals. It is inherently inclined towards technicality and specialization.
- The subjective aspect reflects back from narrowed objectives, towards a deeper understanding. It is essentially inclined towards education and integration.

In the modern world, as technological specialization runs wild and plays havoc with our environment, something has obviously gone wrong with the subjective aspect of our learning. Our sciences have, for too long, been ignoring it.

All science seeks impersonal knowledge, detached from the partialities of personality. However, for some time now, our modern sciences have been unquestioningly based upon a habitual, unexamined identification: of the subjective with the personal.

Through this identification, we take it for granted that the words ‘subjective’ and ‘personal’ mean the same thing. As a result, we take it for granted that the only way to make knowledge impersonal is to turn it into an object, by building objective pictures that work independently of understanding.

Since the world is a large and complex place, these objective pictures very quickly lose their transparency. As we build them up, they become so technical and complicated that we can no longer see through them effectively. They lose their essential function of showing us what they represent. So they become mind-boggling machines, for calculating impressive results that we do not properly understand.

Such mind-boggling pictures are not knowledge, but only an objectified travesty of it. Unfortunately, this is a travesty that has undermined our sciences and corrupted our educational institutions.

Our physical sciences are being reduced to a spectacular technology that is tested only through fortune-telling predictions and applied through miracle-working results. Our social and cultural sciences are bogged down in various kinds of opaque jargon, whose main use has been to provide fashionable buzz-words and politically correct ideologies. Our psychological sciences have been reduced either to an arid analysis of behavioural performance or to private and personal introspection. Our philosophical sciences have been reduced to another futile choice: between metaphysical grand-standing on the one hand, and on the other hand a nit-picking technicality that evades all the basic questions as ‘metaphysical speculation’.

Across the board, in various scientific and educational institutions, there has been a pervasive bias towards specialized research, with a corresponding lack of interest in general education. So much so that many scientists and academics tend not to see teaching and education as their primary goal. They tend to see it as a personal burden, on the way to objective goals of theoretical and technological research.

Beneath these many problems of objectified learning, there is a central assumption: that our direct experience of knowledge is essentially personal. It is this assumption that forces us away from our direct, subjective experience, towards indirect pictures of an objective world.

But is this habitual assumption correct? A little examination will show that it is highly questionable.

Subjective experience

When the world is viewed through a person's body, the result is a curiously distorted picture, which is centred around that particular body. In this picture, the body is a knowing island of personal experience, surrounded by a known world. Figure 1 shows an illustration.

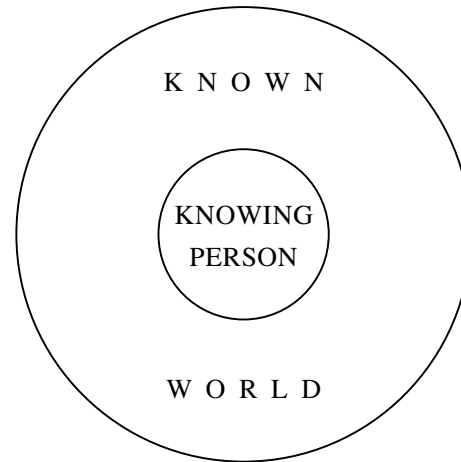


Figure 1

When the world is examined objectively, some of the picture's distortions are questioned and discarded, by objective science. In particular, no person's body is taken as the centre of the world.

When experience is examined subjectively, a similar questioning is possible. In particular, the body is only a physical instrument, which does not know anything in itself. As we experience things subjectively, they are not known *by* the body, but *through* it. So it cannot be the subjective centre of anyone's experience.

When this fact is taken into account, a very different picture emerges. In fact, no surrounding world is ever seen all at once. It is only seen through partial views, which show bits and pieces of perception. These bits and pieces of perception are what we call 'objects'. As time goes by, we see different objects; and we conceive of a world that contains them.

But the world as a whole is never seen. It is only thought about in pictures, which are seen as mental objects. They too are bits of perception, though conceived to co-ordinate other bits. At any given moment of time, a person sees only a particular piece of perception, or in other words a particular object.

In each such perception, the object seen is at the focus of attention. And in this attention is understood everything that is known about the object: its location, its relationship with other objects, and how it is part of a larger world. Thus, while the object is perceived at the front tip of attention, this narrowed perception is built upon a broader basis of understanding, at the background of experience.

For example, suppose a driver notices that his car is sounding a little odd. Many things go into this perception: like how the car sounded be-

fore, the various other things that have been happening with the car, what sort of car it is, the uses for which it is needed, the other people who are going to drive it, the driver's previous experiences with cars and machines and mechanics, and so on. All these things are understood at the background of experience, while attention is focused on the sound of the car. The background understanding provides a subjective basis, upon which the driver listens to the sound.

We have here a mental picture of experience: as rising from an underlying background to focus on a particular object. Figure 2 shows an illustration.

What is this subjective basis, at the background of experience? It is evidently the underlying depth of our minds, beneath the surface of limited mental attention.

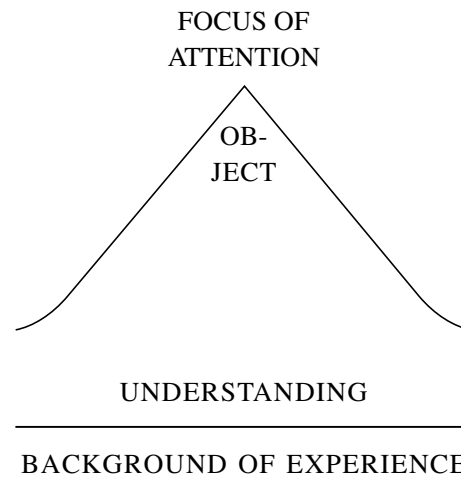
As attention turns to different objects, they appear one after another at the surface of our minds, in a changing stream of limited perceptions. But we know more than this limited and changing surface. As we see an apparent object, we somehow take other things into account, in our understanding of what is seen. So we do not just *see* things at the front tip of the mind's attention. We also *understand* them, and thus take different things into account, at the background of experience.

In effect, we seem to have two different kinds of knowledge in our minds.

- On the surface, we have a limited and changing perception, through which particular objects appear and disappear.
- Beneath the changing surface, there is a background knowledge that continues quietly, without distracting attention from the apparent objects which come and go at the surface. This quiet, continuing knowledge enables us to take into account what our minds do not make appear.

In psychology, the second, quiet knowledge is sometimes called the 'unconscious'. It is usually considered to be a mental storehouse: of hidden memories, perceptions, thoughts and feelings. Thus we come to view

Figure 2



consciousness as the apparent activity of our personal minds, which manifest an unconscious store of hidden mental activity.

But a little examination shows an inherent confusion in this habitual view. Like our bodies, our minds are only instruments of knowledge. A person's mind does not know anything in itself. As we experience things subjectively, they are not known *by* the mind, but only *through* it. Consciousness is not an activity of any mind. Instead, it is that knowing light by which the mind's activities are illuminated.

When this fact is taken into account, our experience is understood rather differently. The mind is simply that personal activity which produces the changing appearances of different objects. No unconscious store of hidden mind is ever experienced as such. It would not be 'hidden' if it were. At most it is an imagined concept, trying to explain how appearances are produced.

What we call 'unconscious mind' is only a mental object, appearing when it is perceived and disappearing when it is not. It can never amount to the quiet knowledge that continues at the basis of the mind, while perceived objects appear and disappear at the surface.

This quiet knowledge is 'unconscious' in two essential ways.

- First, it cannot be known as any kind of apparent object. It can only be known by reflecting back from appearances, into the underlying depth from which they rise.
- And second, it is not conscious of any apparent object. At the surface of mental attention, objects appear perceived; and so consciousness appears to be mixed with apparent objects. But, at the underlying background of experience, there are no appearances. There is only a quiet, unselfconscious knowing, quite detached from anything else.

Examined in this way, the 'unconscious' basis of our minds turns out to be pure consciousness, unmixed with any objects. It is not dark, or mysterious or inaccessible, as it is sometimes thought to be. Instead, it is plain and simple, and immediately self-evident: as the illuminating basis of consciousness that is common to all our changing and differing experiences.

This subjective basis is utterly impersonal. For all personal characteristics and variations belong only to the surface. At the illuminating ground of consciousness, in every person's experience, there is no personality. There is no appearance of body or mind, nor of any physical or mental characteristic that might vary from one person to another, or from one

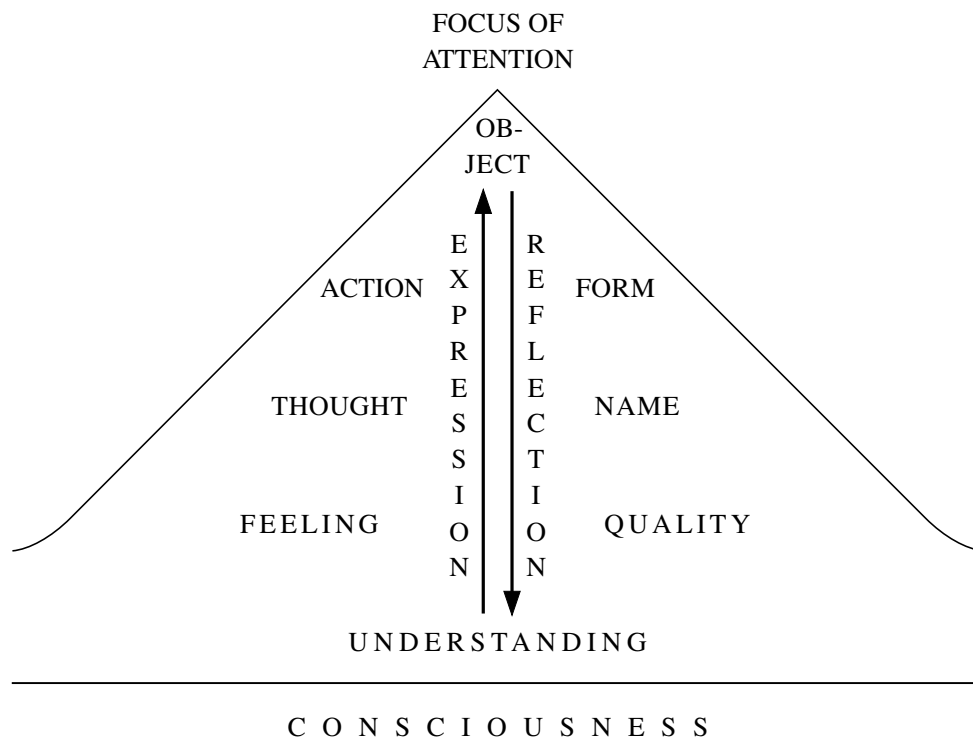
moment to another.

There is nothing here that could possibly enable us to distinguish the consciousness that is found in one person's experience from the consciousness that is found in another's. Nor, in anyone's experience, is there anything that could make consciousness different at different moments of time. One same, impersonal consciousness is found in everyone's experience, at all times.

Whenever people communicate, they understand each other through a reflection back to their common basis of consciousness. Whenever anything is perceived, it is understood through a reflection back to this same underlying consciousness: which enables knowledge to continue from past experience, because it is shared in common by different moments of time.

This same consciousness is expressed in all our feelings, thoughts and actions, towards objects in the world. At each moment of experience, a person's attention is focused – through feeling, thought and action – upon a particular object, which thus appears perceived. And then, the perception reflects back – through the object's form, its name and its quality – to underlying consciousness. Accordingly, we can conceive of the mind

Figure 3



as expressing and reflecting consciousness: through a series of levels that rise from a broad base of understanding to a narrow tip of objective attention. Such a conceptual picture is shown in figure 3.

In this picture, mind is shown above the horizontal line and consciousness is shown below. But it should be understood that all the levels shown above the line are only mental appearances, which are perceived fitfully at the surface. The whole picture of different levels is just another conception. And the line that separates consciousness from anything else is only an imagined element of conceptual description, used when one is looking back towards consciousness from the mind. When reflection passes back through understanding and crosses this conceptual line into consciousness, all lines and pictures disappear.

For all pictures and dividing lines are only appearances that occur in the mind. There are no such appearances in consciousness, which is quite unpictured and undivided.

Each of the mind's pictures is divided within itself; and it is also divided off from other pictures. Each picture is thus divided into pieces of perception; and in its turn it shows only a partial view, divided off from other pictures that show something else about what is perceived.

To make perception more accurate and more complete, we need an impartial base: detached from the distortions of partial perception, and continuing through different views so that differing pieces of perception can be taken into account. This impartial base is consciousness, detached from all personality and shared in common by all experiences.

It is only by returning here, to one's own ground of consciousness, that impartial knowledge can be found. It is only from here that experience can be rightly examined and mistakes corrected, so that things can be more accurately and completely known.

Levels of investigation

To make a more accurate and complete investigation of the world, one has to fall deeper back into experience, towards the underlying ground of consciousness. A progressive examination thus uncovers a series of deeper and deeper levels at which reality appears. At each level, the world is perceived through an instrument of personality, which is contained in that level. By way of an illustration, a series of such levels is pictured in figure 4 (next page).

In this picture, a group of disciplines is shown corresponding to each particular level. But of course, one does not have to pass formally through

Figure 4

<u>Appearance of reality</u>	<u>Perceiving instrument</u>	<u>Examining disciplines</u>	<u>Level of physics</u>
Pieces of matter	Physical body	Physical sciences	Material objects
Patterns of energy	Living organism	Biological sciences	Transforming configurations
Meaningful information	Conceiving intellect	Cultural sciences	Relative descriptions
Conditioned character	Intuitive judgement	Psychological sciences	Field conditioning
Continuing existence	Reflective reason	Philosophical enquiry	Space-time continuum

Non-dual consciousness

different disciplines in order to examine things more deeply. This can be done within a particular discipline, as it can within a particular person's experience. So within each discipline, a similar series of levels can be found, uncovering progressively deeper views of reality. Such a series of levels is shown pictured for physics, which is perhaps the best developed of modern scientific disciplines.

The five levels shown in figure 4 are a modern version of the traditional 'five elements', conceived in classical Indian and European thought. Of course, this is only one possible analysis among many others. No particular analysis is universal, but only the ground of consciousness and reality: where all analyses and levels finally end.

Pieces of matter: Through force of ingrained habit, most people see the world as made up of various objects, which have somehow been differently placed in space. Through its particular location in space, each object is differentiated as a definite piece of matter, with boundaries that distinguish it from other objects elsewhere.

Each person perceives this world of matter through a particular body: which is itself a piece of matter, among others in the world. Thus perception is conceived here as an interaction between the body and various material objects.

This material conception of the world is specifically studied and developed in physical sciences: like physics and chemistry. In particular, the science of Newtonian physics has developed a highly mathematical picture of the world as a mechanical system of material objects, interacting through the forces that they exert upon one another.

Patterns of energy: Though the material world seems at first solid, it is only an instant snapshot: a momentary picture seen at a particular instant of time. As moments pass, time flows; and the world is not frozen in this flow of time. Instead, the distribution of matter changes; and so does the formation of objects in the world. Our solid seeming world of matter is in fact a changing picture that does not last even for a moment. Each moment that we look at it, what we have seen keeps vanishing, transformed into something else.

If changing time is taken into account, a second, more fluid picture emerges. Instead of a snapshot world of momentarily frozen objects, there is now a moving picture: of transforming energy. Instead of picturing objects, as pieces of matter distributed in space, we now observe patterns of activity, functioning through the flow of events in space and time.

We observe these patterns of energy through a combination of physical and mental activities in our bodies and minds. Together, a person's physical and mental activities form a living organism which manifests the same energies that it perceives in the world at large. Thus a living organism recognizes patterns in the observed world, through similar patterns that occur in itself. Here, perception is a matter of mutual functioning: of co-ordination and correspondence between the perceiving organism and what it perceives.

This organic conception of the world is specifically examined and developed in 'life' sciences: like biology and medicine.

Moreover, modern physics develops an organic conception of its own: when it progresses from considering individual objects, acted on by outside forces, to a consideration of configurations, as transforming in accordance with the laws of energy and momentum conservation.

Two developments in modern physics have particularly strengthened its organic level of conception: first, the relativistic principle of equiva-

lence between mass and energy; and second, the consideration, in quantum theory, of physical objects as configurations of co-ordinated energy, which get disturbed by observation and other actions from outside. But the question left unanswered is how our observing instruments and our bodies and brains can be considered thus, as configurations of interacting energy.

Meaningful information: When we look at different parts of the world, we see different patterns of energy; and we picture the world by putting these different patterns together. But even when looking at the same part of the world, different observers see very different patterns, from different points of view.

For example, a waterfall shows one pattern to someone who looks from the side, but rather different patterns to others who look from above or in front. And very different patterns appear to someone who gets under the falling water; or to someone who shoots the waterfall by travelling with the flow of turbulent water from top to bottom.

We may of course try to put these different views together by conceiving a three-dimensional pattern of flow. But this is only another appearance: a conceptual one, from an abstract mathematical point of view that misses much of what appears to someone who perceives the waterfall more directly. The fact remains that all patterns are perceived appearances, which show only a partial representation of what is perceived.

When this partiality of perception is taken into account, a third, more indirect picture emerges. Instead of a patterned world of transforming energy, there is now a represented world: which appears indirectly, through various kinds of meaningful information. Instead of observing patterns of functioning activity, we now interpret information that comes through various partial views.

We interpret information through our conceiving intellects, which use names and symbols to construct fuller representations of what is perceived. Information is interpreted by fitting it into existing representations, which are thus filled out. If some information does not fit, this shows something wrong with the existing representations, which then need to be corrected and revised. In turn, the revised representations mean a revised interpretation of the information that gets fitted into them. The conceiving mind thus examines the world indirectly, by trying to develop fuller and more accurate representations and interpretations.

This conceptual level of experience is specifically studied in cultural

and symbolic sciences: like the history of thought, the anthropology of culture, and many of the humanities.

In modern physics, this same conceptual level has been powerfully developed by the theory of relativity: with its conception of space, time, mass and energy as only varying descriptions of an invariant reality, seen in common by different observers. So far, relativity theory has been limited by considering information only as a propagating effect, like a pattern of light, that travels at a finite speed. However, there are signs that a more profound consideration may be developing, of information as the tell-tale manifestation of an inherent correspondence between different parts of space and time.

In particular, chaos and complexity theories have started developing a concept of ‘self-similarity’, whereby a whole pattern may be mirrored (through an inherent correspondence) in the parts that it contains. This is of course a new version of the old macrocosm-microcosm correspondence that has long been conceived through philosophical reasoning. However, the mathematics for a modern conception of ‘self-similarity’ will take some developing (since it contradicts the standard assumption, of eventual simplicity at small scales of size, which has been the basis of the differential calculus and hence of much modern mathematics).

Conditioned character: As the world is conceived through representations, attention turns from one place to another, and the characteristics of different places are compared.

For example, as people travel about the world, the places they visit get compared as hotter or cooler than other places. This characteristic of temperature is represented most immediately by qualitative bodily sensations of heat and cold; but it is also represented, at a further remove, by quantitative thermometer readings. A conceptual representation of such temperature variations can be put together on a map: with temperature shown qualitatively by intensity of colour, or quantitatively by numbers put next to particular places or to isothermic lines.

This conceptual representation on a map is essentially comparative, just like travelling about the world. For one reads a map by turning attention from one part to another, and by thus comparing the different characteristics – like colour or shape or number – that one finds at each part.

When the comparative nature of representation is taken into account, a fourth, more qualitative picture emerges. Instead of a conceived world represented by information, there is now a conditioned environment,

qualified by compared characteristics. Instead of constructing representations from names and symbols, we now compare qualities that change in the course of time and vary from place to place.

We compare qualities through our intuitive judgements, which distinguish between opposites and estimate relative degrees of value in between. Thus we distinguish light from dark, right from wrong, truth from falsity, happiness from misery. And we distinguish relative mixtures in between: which have more or less light in them than darkness, which are more or less right or wrong, more or less true or false, more or less happy or miserable.

This level of comparative conditioning is specifically studied in psychological sciences: like ethics and psychotherapy and sciences of meditation and mind-development.

In modern physics, this same comparative level is developed in the 'dematerializing' concept of fields: where a conditioning value is attributed to each point of space and time. The aim is to bypass traditional concepts of matter and force, by explaining physical phenomena as manifestations of a mathematically described conditioning of space and time.

Modern physicists have proceeded quite some way towards this goal; but along two rather different paths. The first is the general theory of relativity: which describes large-scale phenomena of gravity and inertia as manifestations of a geometric conditioning, in a fundamentally fixed and definite continuity of space-time. The second is quantum field theory: which describes small-scale atomic and subatomic phenomena as manifestations of an essentially fluctuating and indeterminate conditioning, through a statistical interchange of discontinuous energy quanta between subatomic particles. These two very different approaches will evidently require some major developments to reconcile them.

Continuing existence: As characteristics change from one place and time to another, this variation implies a continuing basis upon which the comparison takes place. For example, different places and times may be hotter or cooler than one another, but this comparison implies a continuing principle of temperature that is common to the various places and times that are being compared.

When this continuity is taken into account, a fourth, more comprehensive picture emerges. Instead of a conditioned environment that manifests a changing and differentiated world, there is now a continuing existence that is shared in common by different places and times. Instead of

judging manifest qualities, we look back towards the underlying basis that continues through their changes and differences.

We look back down, towards this basis, through reflective reason. The search here is for a comprehensive existence, which includes within itself the potential for manifesting different characteristics.

For example, consider the phenomenon of temperature. If someone thinks only about being hot as opposed to being cold, or cold as opposed to being hot, this focusing on one or the other opposite is not going to bring about a comprehensive understanding of temperature. For that, one has to reflect back from particular feelings of heat and cold, in order to realize that each opposite implies the other.

The principle of temperature is not itself either hot or cold, nor any particular mixture of the two; nor is it any particular degree between the two extremes. All heat and cold and all their differing degrees are varying manifestations of one common principle of temperature. This single principle has in itself the potential to manifest all appearances of heat and cold. Without a reasoned reflection back towards this principle, there would be no science of temperature, nor any meaningful thermometers. And much worse, we would have no way of getting past our various personal impressions of feeling hot or cold.

It is the same with all phenomena, all qualities and all opposites: like light and dark, right and wrong, truth and falsity, happiness and misery. To understand them clearly, there has to be a detachment from personal, particularized perception; and with this detachment, there must be a reflection back to a continuing existence that has the potential to manifest different appearances.

It is not enough to think of 'light' as opposed to 'darkness', or 'right' as opposed to 'wrong', or 'truth' as opposed to 'falsity', or 'happiness' as opposed to 'misery'. Instead, one has to reflect back: towards a principle of light that is manifested in all shades of light and dark. Similarly, one has to reflect back towards principles of correctness, or truth, or happiness: which are manifested in all degrees of right and wrong, truth and falsity, happiness and misery.

And further, to relate different phenomena, like temperature and light, or truth and happiness, there must be a reflection back to an underlying existence that finally continues through everything, and thus manifests all appearances.

This comprehensive level of existence is specifically studied in the discipline of philosophy. But philosophical enquiry is not confined to

any particular discipline or group of disciplines. It occurs essentially in all disciplines and in all learning; whenever something is found not to fit into current ideas, so that there is a questioning of underlying principles.

Through such reflective questioning, modern physics has developed an expansive conception of continuing existence: as a four-dimensional space-time continuum, of which all events and happenings are partial manifestations seen differently by different observers.

Non-dual consciousness: As attention reflects back towards continuing existence, beneath the changes of appearance, all pictures disappear. There is then nothing left but pure, unpictured consciousness.

This consciousness is not any kind of awareness that is opposed to lack of awareness. It is not any kind of illumination or knowledge that is opposed to obscurity or ignorance. Instead, it is the continuing principle that is manifested in all appearances of awareness and ‘unconsciousness’, in all degrees of illumination and obscurity, in all states of knowledge and ignorance. It is the underlying principle that is manifested in all states of anyone’s experience.

In this consciousness, there is no difference between knowing and being. Its very being is to know. It does not know by doing anything: by putting on any kind of act which changes it or affects it in any way. It knows simply by its inherent nature of pure illumination. Its illumination is just what it *is*, as it continues unaffected through all experiences. In everyone’s experience, as appearances come and go, they are all illuminated by this changeless, unaffected being of consciousness.

This same changeless being, of pure consciousness, is the ground of all reality: which each appearance ultimately shows. For consciousness and reality are always present together, underlying all appearances. So there is no way of distinguishing them. They are just two words for the same thing. When we look back into subjective experience, we think of it as that which knows; and so we call it ‘consciousness’. When we look out into the objective world, we think of it as that which is known; and then we call it ‘reality’.

But in truth, there is no duality between what knows and what is known. There is only non-dual consciousness, which is identical with all reality. All appearances arise from this non-dual consciousness, and they are really nothing other than it.

Learning from experience

What does it mean to say that ‘Consciousness is the ground of all reality’? How can such a philosophical statement be tested, and how is it applied?

From an everyday point of view, this kind of statement is distastefully final and absolute. It tries to describe an unqualified truth that applies everywhere, regardless of all relative conditions. Since it is such a sweeping and unconditioned statement, it clearly needs to be tested by an equally sweeping and unconditioned scepticism. If it is true, its meaning cannot be conditional upon any assumed claims. Its language is of course conditioned by cultural concepts and our assumptions about them. So its meaning can only be found by a thorough questioning of its conditioned words and our claims to understand them.

The trouble with concepts like ‘consciousness’ and ‘reality’ is that we are not clear what they mean. And yet we keep using them, implicitly or explicitly, thus spreading confusion through our experience. In a philosophical statement, or in a philosophical picture, such concepts are used in a way that throws their meaning into question. The intended result is a reflective enquiry that examines underlying assumptions, in search of clearer understanding. This reflective enquiry is the practice through which philosophical statements and pictures are applied. And the test of success is simply the clarity of understanding attained.

Thus, philosophy works essentially through education. It is always reflectively aimed, towards understanding. Where philosophy is genuine, the calculating and prescribing element is entirely absent. Correctly speaking, it is not the business of philosophy to prescribe hypotheses or foundation statements upon which theoretical descriptions and calculations are built. Nor is it to prescribe paradigms or framework pictures, whose details are to be filled in by scientific or other specializations. Such foundation statements and framework pictures may well be inspired by philosophical enquiry; but the inspiration is essentially a spontaneous expression of clarified understanding, not a prescribed calculation.

Though a foundation statement or a framework picture may use words and language from the philosophy that inspired it, the meaning is no longer philosophical. The words are no longer being used in a way that throws their meaning up for question. Instead, their meaning is now culturally and axiomatically assumed, as they are used to help construct some further description of the world. They can no longer point back to a com-

mon, underlying truth; but now prescribe a differentiated and conditioned point of view. The direction of attention has reversed: from asking reflectively down, towards building constructively up. The direct concern is no longer with clarifying understanding, but with constructing perceived appearances. Pure philosophy (Parmenides' 'way of truth') has been left behind, for the formulation of doctrine and world view (Parmenides' 'way of belief').

If philosophy thus ends with a clarification of understanding, how does it apply to the world of perceived appearances? How does it apply to everyday life and to the various fields of experience that are opened up by scientific and cultural disciplines? The answer lies in the nature of what is meant here by 'understanding'.

A theory is only an artificial construction, built up from ideas and concepts. As such, it has no meaning or value in itself. It does not inherently apply itself, but requires some additional practice to apply it. It is only thus, through some special practice of application, that a theory acquires meaning and value.

But philosophy reflects back from conceptual theories to the understanding on which they are built. And here, the word 'understanding' does not refer to any artificial construction, but to the natural basis from which feelings, thoughts and actions arise. It does inherently apply itself, through its inherent expression in the feelings, thoughts and actions that rise from it. It does not need any special, deliberated practice to apply it; for by its very nature, it is expressed in both spontaneity and deliberation.

Thus, where philosophical enquiry comes to a genuine clarification of understanding, that clarification gets naturally applied in the subsequent development of values, ideas and capabilities. There is then no need for any contrived practices of philosophical application, engineering prescribed plans towards preconceived ideals of ethical, intellectual and technical development.

Precisely because it needs no specialized application, philosophy applies everywhere; not only where it is explicit, but more often implicitly. It applies in everyone's experience, throughout the process of learning that keeps taking place. As illustrated by the up and down arrows in figure 3 (on page 6), this process of learning consists in a repeated cycle of expression and reflection: whereby appearances keep rising up from underlying consciousness, and getting absorbed back there again.

At each moment of experience, current understanding is expressed in

thoughts and feelings that picture the world and motivate actions towards particular objects. It is thus that each particular object is perceived. Then, through perception and interpretation, the object's form, name and quality are absorbed into understanding, which assimilates the particular experience into continuing knowledge. A new understanding results: from which the cycle repeats, and goes on repeating in the course of time.

Usually, the reflective part of the cycle passes unnoticed, as perceptions are absorbed into understanding. But when a perception shows up something that jarringly does not fit, or conflicts unacceptably with what one wants; then the reflection becomes much more noticeable, through a questioning of underlying assumptions and attitudes that can no longer be taken for granted.

Such a reflection is basically philosophical; not only in the formal discipline of philosophy, but also in other disciplines of art, science, technology, and in ordinary life. Without such philosophical reflection, there could be no significant development or creativity in any discipline, nor in ordinary life. Without reflecting back, into underlying consciousness, there could be no genuine learning from experience.

Motivation

When consciousness is seen as our common ground, identical with all reality, then all activities and happenings are understood as arising from there. In anyone's experience, all activities and happenings are perceived appearances, which naturally express the consciousness from which they have arisen. This expression of underlying consciousness is the inherent nature of all appearances, in everyone's experience. It is essentially implied in what's meant by the word 'appearance'.

Seen thus, consciousness and nature go always together, throughout experience. 'Consciousness' is the continuing ground; 'nature' is its inherent expression, in the changing appearances that are manifested at the surface of perception. Here, nature is seen as both physical and mental, both external and internal. It does not consist only of external happenings in the perceived world. It also includes the internal activities, of sensation, thought and feeling, through which the world is perceived. External happenings do not produce appearances by themselves, in anyone's experience. For anything to appear, some perceiving activity must take place. To understand the nature of appearances, external happenings are insufficient. Perceiving activities, of sensation, thought and feeling, must also be taken into account. When this is done, it becomes clear that

consciousness is universally expressed. It is expressed in all appearances, in all happenings and in all objects, including those that are considered 'external'.

At first, such a universal expression of consciousness seems to go against common sense. It is easy to see how human beings and some living creatures express consciousness. And by a stretch of imagination, perhaps this expression can be dimly seen to extend through all forms of life, including even plants, in some rudimentary way. But what about an inanimate object like a rock? How could any consciousness be expressed in that?

A little examination shows, however, that no matter what we look at, we may or may not see it as expressing consciousness. The way we see it depends on how we look. If a human face is seen only as a formal arrangement of features in external space and time, then it is seen as a lifeless object, devoid of any consciousness that it might express. To see consciousness expressed in a person's face, there must be a reference back into one's own consciousness, from where one sees meaning and value in the formal arrangement of features. Through such meaning and value, which arise in one's own experience, one somehow sees consciousness expressed in other people's bodies and their actions in the world.

It is the same with an inanimate object like a rock. Seen as a formal arrangement of features, no expression of consciousness appears in it. But if the rock were sculpted into an expressive face, and if one saw it as such, then it would obviously express consciousness. But whose consciousness? Evidently, the sculptor's and one's own; and other people's too, at least when they recognize its sculpted meaning.

What then of a natural rock, where no person has imprinted an artificial meaning? Here too, one can look beyond mere formality, to see the rock as part of some meaningful order that is found in nature. For a scientist or anyone else to understand the rock, it has to mean more than what superficially appears. And when one sees a rock to have meaning like this, as part of nature's order, the meaning expresses consciousness. When any object, animate or inanimate, is seen to be meaningful or valuable in any way, the object expresses consciousness, through the meaning or value seen in it.

Whose consciousness? Clearly one's own; but other people's too, for they too see meaning and value in things, as an inherent part of perception. Whenever one understands what anyone has expressed, the external expression is taken back, through one's own experience, into one's own

subjective ground. From this ground arise all notions: whether of one's own person, or of other persons, or of other objects. As one keeps going back to this subjective ground, where one's perceptions keep being absorbed, it remains the underlying basis on which one communicates and makes sense of things.

Its unchanging sameness is the basis on which each person perceives any change or difference, and hence conceives notions of other people and other things. Without it, there would be no continuing basis on which to know that any change or difference has occurred. So there could be no differentiated notions: of differing things and differing people in the world. To be logically consistent, one has either to give up all notions entirely, or to accept the unchanging sameness of consciousness, beneath our differing experiences. In the latter case, all different people and different things are understood as changing expressions, of one same consciousness.

As activities and happenings appear in experience, it can be conceived that they are naturally motivated by their expression of consciousness. This 'natural motivation' is quite different from the driven action of an instrument. In an instrumental action, one object acts, as an instrument, upon other objects. In its turn, the instrumental object has been acted upon; so it is only a currently visible link in an endless chain of action and reaction, extending indefinitely back into the past and forward into the future.

All our mental faculties, of judgement, conception and will, are only instrumental objects. They are just currently visible links, in chains of interlinked happening that network with unending complexity through space and time. Our mental acts, of judging, conceiving and willing, are driven by previous happenings, so as to result in further happenings. Consciousness is quite different from such mental activities. It is not driven by the past, nor attracted by future results. It is no little piece of happening, but the ground beneath each perceived piece and all patterned pictures that put different pieces of happening together.

Thus, consciousness is not an interfering instrument, which acts with force from outside. As activities rise from consciousness, it is not expressed by any forced intervention from outside, but through an inner inspiration. All activities and happenings rise, of their own accord, with an inherent sense of meaning and value that expresses consciousness, explicitly or implicitly. In the personalities of living creatures, the expression is explicit; for it is understood through an explicit interpretation

that it represents consciousness, just like the expressions that one experiences in one's own personality. In the impersonal functioning of nature, the expression is implicit; for it is understood through an intuition of impersonally meaningful order, which makes an implicit, but profound reference back into the impersonal depth of one's own consciousness.

In either case, whether through personality or through the meaningful impersonality of natural order, consciousness may be conceived as the underlying source of all motivation. It is the inner source of all the meaning and value that we see, in both animate and inanimate things. To borrow a traditional manner of description, while in itself it remains unmoved and unchanged, it is that for which all things are done.

Individual freedom

It is all very well to talk of 'consciousness', as the unperceived basis of all perception; but this is only a general definition, which conjectures that there must be such a thing, so as to enable perception. If it can't be perceived as an object of mind and senses, then what specifically is it? How can it be definitely known?

Such doubt and questioning is a way of knowing consciousness. Since every doubt and question requires consciousness, it cannot be doubted or questioned away. All doubts and questions and other appearances need illumination by consciousness; but it illuminates itself, without an intermediary. It is our one immediate experience: which everyone knows directly, as one's own self.

Thus, consciousness is the true nature of each person's self. To know it definitely, beyond all doubt, one has only to return home, to one's true nature, beneath all the ideas and pretensions through which one regards oneself.

Most people habitually identify themselves as individual persons. But actually, this personal identity is just a confusion of two contradictory things: personality and self.

- On the one hand, a personality consists of a particular body, a particular set of senses, and a particular mind. It is situated in an external world, of which it is a dependent part, driven from outside itself. As account is taken of its dependence on other things, the boundaries of its seeming individuality become less and less clear. As its own constitution is examined more closely, it is shown to be a changing collection of changing things, with no true continuity or individuality of its own.

- On the other hand, the word 'self' refers to an independent unit at the centre of everyone's experience. It is each person's continuing individuality, with its own inner unity, uniquely distinguished from everything else. It continues through time as the knowing subject of experience: motivating feelings, thoughts and actions, and assimilating perceptions into knowledge.

Though our personalities are manifestly dependent objects, we habitually think of them as our subjective selves, somehow endowed with the consciousness to know things and the independence to motivate actions. Thus we look for knowledge in our personal faculties of mind, and we look for freedom in the personal choices that we make through our acts of will.

In one sense, it is quite futile to look for knowledge and freedom like this, in our personalities. Our personal faculties, of mind and will, are not conscious in themselves. They are only objective activities, which are driven to produce appearances and to make apparent choices that depend on past conditioning. Their seeming freedom is limited by their conditioning. The more we find out about how they are conditioned, the more it turns out that they are not really free, but only appear so because of our ignorance.

And yet, our personalities express a positive sense of independent knowledge and individual freedom, which is vital to each person's living identity. This sense of freedom is exercised by not just depending passively on external circumstances; but instead relying upon one's own self, as the inner source from which one's actions rise.

To the extent that one confuses oneself with something personal, the confusion clouds understanding. What's taken for knowledge is confused with the distorted partiality of personal perception. What's taken for freedom is confused with the driven pettiness of personal will. With this misunderstanding, when one thinks one is relying on oneself, one has fallen back only into the dependent conditioning of personal impressions and inclinations.

To the extent that one distinguishes oneself from everything personal, understanding is clarified. All personality is understood as only a partial and confused appearance through which one regards oneself. The appearance cannot of course be conscious or free, but it expresses a consciousness and freedom that is found by returning to the reality beneath. Self-reliance means standing back, with a clear understanding, in that reality; and acting freely from there.

Love

By confusing self with personality, there arises the false appearance of a conditioned ego: a personal 'I' consisting of a body, a set of senses and a mind. This ego claims consciousness, as its personal possession. It thinks: 'I have consciousness.' Thus consciousness appears as a personal faculty: changing from moment to moment, qualified by the limited perceptions, thoughts and feelings that come and go in our minds.

But the ego's claim is mistaken. Consciousness is not just an apparent faculty or attribute, manifested by personal ego. In fact, it is the other way around. The ego is only an appearance, which arises in consciousness. Instead of consciousness being a possession of the ego, it is the ego that is possessed by consciousness. Like everything else that appears in experience, each ego is only a partial manifestation, or a limited expression, of underlying consciousness.

Used in this way, to indicate an ultimate, subjective principle that is manifested everywhere, 'consciousness' is just another word for what is also called 'God'. But the difference of words implies a change of emphasis: from an individual to a universal approach. Where the word 'God' is used, there is a sense of universal belonging, to which all personal possessiveness must be surrendered, in order to find truth. As the Īsha Upanishad puts it (in a somewhat free translation):

All this entire universe
belongs to God: who lives in it,
in every smallest bit of it.

Thus giving up all things to God,
whatever changes in this changing
universe may be enjoyed:

untainted by possessiveness,
uncompromised by wanting it.

Whatever there may be to claim,
to whom, in truth, does it belong?

from

1

The English word 'God' here translates the Sanskrit 'īsha', which specifically indicates mastery and ownership, power and possession. The opposite of 'īsha' is 'anīsha', which specifically indicates helplessness and dispossession. In the face of God, a worshipper must surrender all sense of personal ego, with all its delusions of personal power and pos-

session. God is 'isha', the underlying principle of all help and guidance, and of all belonging. Without God, the worshipper's personality is 'anisha', utterly helpless and dispossessed. It is an illusory nonentity, which has no power of its own and belongs nowhere.

But in religious worship, it is highly problematic to think of God as identical with oneself. Where worship remains in any way personal, the personally worshipping 'I' must be considered worthless, in contrast to God's ultimate worth. The religious approach is to cultivate love for God, through personally valued forms of worship and personally accepted concepts of belief. In order to ask about the ultimate nature of self, all religious and other cultivation has to be put aside; in a reflective, individual questioning of what one's own concepts and values mean, as one uses them in the present.

Such an individual enquiry is described in the Muṇḍaka Upanishad, where ego and self are described as a pair of birds, on the tree of life.

Two birds, in close companionship,
are perched upon a single tree.
Of these, one eats and tastes the fruit. *from*
The other does not eat, but just looks on. *3.1.1*

There is an obvious parallel here, with the biblical story of Adam and Eve. There is a tree of life, with fruit on it. And a question is implied, about eating the fruit. However, unlike the usual interpretation of the biblical story, this is not a religious myth about the fall of man, into temptation and sin. Instead, it is a philosophical description, of each person's current experience.

Of the two birds, the first is the personal ego. Through its faculties of perception and enjoyment, it 'eats and tastes' the fruits of various happenings, in which it is involved. By virtue of this eating and tasting, it mistakenly claims to possess experience. But in fact it is possessed *by* experience, which drives all personal faculties and activities, through the various happenings in which the ego is caught.

The second bird is the real self, whose nature is pure consciousness. It is quite unaffected by all happenings and activities. It only witnesses them: in the sense that they are illuminated by its light, as they appear and disappear.

The subsequent stanza tells how a person seems caught in misery and gets freed into happiness.

On this same tree, a person gets
depressed and suffers grief: deluded
by a sense of seeming helplessness,
and feeling thus quite dispossessed.

But when one sees what's truly loved –
as that which stands beyond all else,
as one's own boundlessness, from where
help comes, where everything belongs –

there one is freed from misery.

from

3.1.2

Misery is essentially a state of duality: in which one feels at odds with what one knows. This is just a result of the delusion that one is a personal ego; dispossessed of desired objects, and helplessly caught in a world of changing acts.

When a desired object is achieved, dissatisfaction ceases for a while and feelings of division come to an end, as the desiring mind dissolves in happiness. Here, subject and object are at one; so there is no sense of dispossession. One has returned to one's own home ground, free from the delusions of duality that ego thinks are real.

In the original Sanskrit, the opposition between 'anīsha' and 'īsha' is explicitly used, but in a philosophical way. It is not applied here to devotee and God, but to ego and self. Personal suffering is characterized by the helplessness and dispossession of 'anīsha'; but that is just a delusion of ego. The ego's suffering is only a conditioned expression of love for the unconditioned self that it really and truly is. The real self is 'īsha', the boundless source of all help, all guidance, all belonging. Beneath its deluded fancies, the dispossessed ego loves only its true self: where it belongs, and where all happiness is found.

When questions are asked about philosophical truth, the asking starts with ego's conditioned ideas and its petty desires for personal gain. How can any such search proceed towards an unconditioned, impersonal truth? The conditioned, personal ego must somehow be given up.

As the search gets genuine, it goes beneath conceived ideas and burns up petty fancies and desires; until it reaches a depth of love where no trace of ego remains. It then turns out that this love is itself the truth which was sought. It was always there, motivating the whole search and all apparent desires.

Thus, finding truth is not a matter of making any change in personality

or world, nor of reaching any altered state. Instead, truth can only be found by returning back to that which is always unaltered and unchanged: as the pure light of consciousness that underlies all changing appearances, and as the unconditioned love that underlies all changing desires.

In a philosophical enquiry, what takes one from dry ideas to living truth may be called 'love'. It is the truth itself, with the word 'love' being used now because the approach has passed through superficial thought into deeper feeling. To know someone or something deeply, one has to be at one with what is known. That oneness is objectless love, found always at the depth of knowledge: where ego and appearances are known dissolved in the light of which they are made. Where there is love, appearances and ego burn away in truth; not only in some specially altered states of meditation and worship, but throughout the natural course of our lives and our relationships with other people.

In the Brihadāraṇyaka Upanishad (4.5), when Yājnyavalkya is leaving home, he offers his wife Maitreyī a settlement. She says she is not interested in a material settlement, since that will not lead to deathlessness. Instead, she asks him: 'Teach me what you know.' This search for 'deathlessness' may seem mystical to some, but his answer makes it clear that he does not look at it like that. He only shows her how to reason back, towards the source of our common experience.

First, he tells her that he has always loved her, and what she asks him now makes her even dearer to him. Then he points out that what anyone loves in someone else can only be the inner core of knowing self. As he says (a little paraphrased from the original Sanskrit):

'What does a wife love in her husband?

Is it just that he's a husband?

If it's that, it isn't love.

All she can love in him is self.

'And when a husband loves his wife,

is it love if she's just a wife?

All he can love in her is self.

'So also love of children, friends,

living creatures, places, objects,

love of power, love of knowledge.

All that's loved is only self.'

from

4.5.6

But how is Maitreyī to realize the true nature of this essential self? How

is she to find out what she really is? Yājñavalkya does not tell her to meditate, nor to practise any techniques of character purification or mind development, nor to seek any mind-expanded state of mystical experience. Instead, he explains things to her a little, in a way that sets her thinking. And he finally leaves her with a single question, which he says will take her to deathlessness. The question is typically short and simple: 'How can that which knows be known?'