

INDIAN PHILOSOPHY IN ITS DIVERGENCE FROM THE SPIRIT OF THE CONTEMPORARY WEST (I)

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THE philosopher Fichte spoke from deliberate conviction when he variously declared that the kind of philosophy one chooses depends upon the kind of person one is. To him it seemed that, basically, there are two types of men, and two alone. This led him to substitute for the threefold classification of philosophies advanced by Kant, a dual division. Whereas his predecessor had differentiated dogmatic, skeptical and critical philosophies, Fichte insisted that every philosophical system is dominated either by an insistence upon human freedom or by the thesis of universal determinism. Given a man who exhibits intellectual spontaneity and is aware thereof, and who possesses conscious aims which he ardently pursues in the face of physical and mental lethargy and of environmental oppositions; given a man who is genuinely self-conscious, self-directing and self-critical, who sifts data for their truth value and reaches out in intellectual exploration, and who passes judgment upon himself and his world; given a self who is truly in possession of himself, and we have a person who is invincibly committed to a metaphysics and a social philosophy of freedom. Such a person can understand why the one of the contrary type holds to the view he does. He can understand why one who has never with freedom acquired selfhood and spontaneity, and who consequently identifies himself with substances and things, inevitably maintains what Fichte variously characterized as a substantive, a materialistic, and a deterministic world-view. But as to the error of this view the self-consciously free spirit is as fully convinced as he is luminously aware of its causes.

These contentions of Fichte obviously grow out of an interpretation of the self that is essentially individualistic, and the present

writer, for one, finds much of value in them. They should, however, not obscure the fact that for certain purposes it may be more significant to trace differences in world-views along other lines. It may not be gainsaid that philosophy in general feeds upon the concrete facts of life, and reckons with the numerous areas of experience organized through the operation of practical and theoretical interests. Man, for example, requires food, shelter, and safety, and these he must win through practical adjustments to and through manipulation of his environment. The most advanced as well as the most primitive thus possess habits, aptitudes, systems of practices and bodies of ideas that constitute an important sector of life. This sector is social in the sense that it has acquired its character through activities in which the individual has co-operated with his fellows, and through the pressure of traditions and norms sustained by the group. As moulded by the features of the real world in which life is carried on, it may be differentiated from a set of ideas and practices, from myths, tales and taboos, which arise from the play of imagination that is largely uncontrolled by the stubborn actualities of the existing environment, and that assume organization through the forces of fear and other emotions of thwarted and half-formed desires, of hopes and present needs. Still again, in the history of human culture there gradually emerge a variety of activities, a body of ideas, and a characteristic outlook—a sector of experience—that we have come to call aesthetic. This, in turn, may be demarcated from sets of interest that are theoretic and scientific, or more strictly social and ethical, or essentially religious and cosmic.

Now philosophy may not safely neglect any phase of human experience. It becomes significant in proportion to the comprehensiveness, as well, of course, as to the success with which it interprets and synthesizes the facts, and more particularly the organizing interests and categories, of all the departments of individual-social life and thought. But philosophers, like other people, see and achieve only in part. As a matter of fact, their conclusions take shape under the predominating influence now of this and again of another field of concrete experience. According to the latter, therefore, and to the range and degree of the organization of the facts that fall therein, will be the resultant world-view, or at least certain important features of this view that enable us significantly to compare and to contrast it with rival doctrines. Among different

peoples, and at different epochs, however, different areas of activity and interest have tended to exercise the dominant rôle. To the extent that this has occurred, we are apt to find more or less general drifts in those systems of ideals and facts that comprise the world-view.

If we keep in mind these facts, an interesting and a significant contrast is revealed when we compare, in a very large and general way, the contemporary thought currents of the West, and particularly of America, with the outlook which is often broadly characterized as Indian. The former, it becomes clear, have their basis, to a unique degree, in the experiences of practical and ethical life and activity, and find their logical orientation primarily in science, more specifically in the natural sciences; the latter, on the other hand, is peculiarly dominated by features of the religious consciousness. As a confirmatory fact, it might be pointed out that in so far as our own present American philosophy ventures at all beyond the technical consideration of particular problems to broad metaphysical construction, or to a comprehensive social philosophy, it in the main does so without first consulting the deliverances of the specifically religious consciousness. Even philosophical interpretations of religion are in a large measure based upon metaphysical conclusions derived from sources which, however extensive, fail to include the facts of religious experience or the generalizations reached through a comparative, historical or psychological study of them. That religious attitudes and expressions represent facts, and that the comparative, historical, sociological and psychological treatments of them offer considerations, no less significant for the larger tasks of philosophy than other facts and other methodically reached considerations, seems to be quite disregarded by perhaps even the majority of our Western thinkers. In the case of India, on the other hand, the articulation of philosophy and religion seems so close at times as to defy any clear separation of the two. Religion, it would seem, has continued to be perhaps the chief cultural influence, and the primary source of the content as well as the inspiration of philosophy, while the latter has discharged its debt by transforming and yet sustaining, by purging and yet confirming, the pivotal affirmations of the religious consciousness. Garbe has even contended, with respect to India, that "not only has the most absolute freedom of thought always prevailed, but also philosophical speculation, even in its boldest forms, has placed itself in accord with the

popular religion to an extent never again realized on earth between these two powers.¹

The contrast thus alleged demands elaboration, and the affirmation of its existence requires defense. Especially is this the case because the allegation is made in the face of a penetrating study which Professor Radhakrishnan has recently published under the title, *The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy*. In this volume, Professor Radhakrishnan deals with the pluralistic systems lately current in Western philosophy. He points out the way in which they diverge from what he considers to be the natural conclusion of sound, impartial philosophizing, namely, monistic idealism. These deviations he then ascribes to what he calls the "reign of religion" but characterizes as "the interference of religious prejudice." It might thus seem that Professor Radhakrishnan finds religion potent precisely where we have just declared it to play a relatively subordinate part; and it might further seem that, whereas he regards as deleterious that impact of religion which he discovers, we shall intimate it to be a loss that the influence of religion upon our thought and culture is not relatively greater than it appears to be. Instead of indicating any strictures we might have upon the conclusions of Professor Radhakrishnan, or of entering upon an examination of the extent to which that which we have already said or may still have to say does ultimately diverge from his conclusions, let us merely point out that, while Professor Radhakrishnan's primary, even though not exclusive, gaze is upon Europe, our point of fixation is America, with Europe as marginal. Moreover, while he singles out for consideration those philosophical systems which expound pluralistic theism, we shall be concerned not with these exclusively but more generally with such liberalistic and humanistic doctrines as seem most clearly to reflect and most directly to affect our present cultural life. Furthermore, and more importantly, the term 'religion' as used by Professor Radhakrishnan does not designate the same form of consciousness or body of facts which we have in mind.

Let us then undertake an inspection of the religious consciousness, directing our attention particularly to some lines of consideration connected with its salient features. While we shall aspire to all possible brevity in our description, some amount of detail and of elaboration will be necessary if we are to realize our aim of preparing the way for what we shall wish to emphasize, in the paper which

¹ Garbe, *The Philosophy of Ancient India*, p. 24.

is to follow, in connection with Indian philosophy. Now, religion, obviously, is psychologically an extremely complicated phenomenon. Anthropologically and sociologically, it has appeared in an enormous variety of forms, widely divergent whether we pay regard to its cognitive, conative, or emotional phases, to its myths and creeds, its cults and impact upon life, or its reverberations in the feelings of its devotees. Historically, it has exhibited change and growth which, though perhaps not as rapid as the transformations in other phases of culture, are nevertheless as deep-going. Religion, in its factual as distinguished from its normative connotation, therefore represents a domain in which every generalization, like all definition, suffers from a certain degree of arbitrariness, and thus lays itself open to possible objection.

Little, therefore, may be predicated of religion if the predication is intended as sweepingly universal. Nevertheless, one may with some assurance insist that in the main, whether in its more primitive or its more advanced forms, the religious consciousness involves as one of its features man's awareness that he is living in a power-world, and that he must orient and adjust himself thereto as best he may. The controlling power or powers, as he indeed with some measure of clearness realizes, are but inadequately understood by him, or are perhaps even deemed to be incomprehensible. Yet he is convinced of their existence, and at every given time he believes that he knows so much of their character as is implied by acts and attitudes to which he has been led, and to which he subsequently feels constrained, in relation to them. Religion, that is to say—at least in the greater number of cases—is an experience in which the individual, as a psychological matter of fact, is conscious of an objective reality, and of the fact that an essential feature of this reality is its extraordinary power, a power supernormal in its degree and portentous in its bearing upon the well-being of the individual and his group. Indeed, subject to the reservations always necessary when speaking of religion in general, one may safely say that it involves man's conscious and practical attitude to the reality that for him is ultimate, and that is peculiarly and mysteriously related to the events of nature and to man's vital concerns.

Such being the case, the reality with which the religious consciousness is concerned is by it conceived in terms not alone of power but also of value. This aspect of value, indeed, has of late received increasing recognition. Whether under the influence of

Ritschlians and other post-Kantians, or of Hoeffding's fruitful thesis that religion is essentially faith in the conservation of values, or whether because of voluntaristic psychologies which give to interests a priority over ideas, recent students of religion have even tended to stress its value aspect to the point of one-sidedness.

It is our contention that the object of which the individual is conscious in his religious experience possesses for him the attributes both of power and of value. It is supremely real, if indeed it is not the ultimate being; it is practically significant; it more and more acquires the traits deemed loftiest at the time; eventually it becomes the indissoluble synthesis of the irrefragably real and the truly ideal.

Kant resolved the basic human questions into three: what can I know, what ought I to do, and what may I hope. These questions are all of serious moment to the genuine religious consciousness. In its most highly developed forms, pronouncedly when its mystical element comes to the fore, it insists that absolute truth is attainable (though—be it marked—in the specific sense only that ultimate reality is accessible to man), that duty is not an illusion, and that desire, when conscious of its deepest requirements, may be fundamentally satisfied. A completely ascendent religious mysticism affirms a type of experience which fulfills man's supreme cognitive aims and also his desiderative and volitional life. Difficult paradoxes and intellectual puzzlements here present themselves. These center about the fact that actualities, as Baldwin develops in considerable detail in his *Genetic Logic*, "are what we discover, whether we desire them or not," whereas desire looms large in the texture of ideals. In the teeth of all difficulties, however, religion has tended stubbornly to resist any suggestion that it relinquish in its object the aspect either of actuality or of value. Both power and goodness, it firmly maintains, are essential to its object.

The religious consciousness, therefore, is not to be interpreted, as it so commonly has been of late, in terms of escape from reality. The very contrary is the case. Religion is an earnest and a stubborn quest for truth and reality. It is convinced that any conception which reason shows to be untenable must be discarded, however deeply it may have become rooted in emotion and life. For, it is staunch in the faith that only the real can completely and permanently satisfy that which is deepest in us. In matters of creed, as well as of feeling and practical concern, it voices the determination expressed in Job's tragically heroic resolve that "though He

slay me, yet will I trust Him." The developed religious consciousness would seem to acquiesce only in that which most fully, indeed which completely, satisfies man's deepest requirements. Its object is one believed to interpret the courses of history and of nature, to embody whatever man's self-conscious reason leads him to value and reverence, and to guarantee unalloyed bliss. It may, to repeat, not be denied that such a faith sets to philosophy tasks of extraordinary, if not completely baffling, complexity. And it must be confessed that not even a Plato, and no subsequent philosopher, has as yet resolved with more than partial success the various antinomies presented by religion. Nevertheless, religion continues as a perpetual refusal to divorce power from perfection, reality from ideality.

Nor will religion consent to a severance of its supremely real and worthwhile object from the lives of finite individuals. On the contrary, it declares the possibility of a human existence permeated by the divine spirit; and such an existence it is disposed to require, its conviction being that blindness and sinfulness are involved whenever the finite reserves any remnant of himself in isolation from the divine. To certain religious mystics, indeed, the life of man, in its apical experiences certainly, if not throughout, represents the very pulsations of God. Nevertheless, there are spiritual requirements which impel even the religious mystic to a contrary attitude, to an advocacy of and a struggle for the preservation of selfhood and individuality. Here again paradoxes and moral perplexities are engendered. The intellect is confronted with the perennial question, in one of its aspects, of the one and the many. Morally, there is a tension between the demand for the free determination and exercise of duty on the part of volitional agents and the craving for divine guidance and control, or, at any rate, the need—if life is to be at its fullest—for unreserved dedication to a superfinite which for the individual must be the all in all.

The religious consciousness, thus, holds fast to various affirmations which to it are all fundamental even though they are not easily reconciled. In its impact upon the philosophic quest, therefore, it arouses deep discontent with metaphysical systems which adopt the easy course of singling out and treating as basic certain specific features of reality and of disregarding all that seems incompatible therewith. It challenges the thinker to a more catholic view and to more arduous reflection; it stirs him to persist in the face of all obscurities

and defiant difficulties, in order that his thought may do justice to the fullness of the reality which presents itself to the religious devotee in his most serious and most satisfying experience.

With this we pass to another of the lines of consideration alluded to above. Religion, as just noted, disallows to philosophy any ready acquiescence in results achieved through the neglect of central features of experience. Thus it prods the philosopher on to perpetual efforts. This it does also through a further influence to which we now advert. Religion involves a consciousness that the ultimate object transcends present comprehension. To quote from Rudolf Otto's *Naturalism and Religion*, "religion seeks depth in things, reaches out toward what is concealed, uncomprehended, mysterious. It is more than humility; it is piety. And piety is experience of mystery." Religion has repeatedly proclaimed that the ways of the Divine are not our ways, as we have come to understand them; nor are its thoughts our thoughts. For it, the nature of the Divine is not fully—or perhaps, as it is sometimes alleged, not at all—learned by observation or analysis of any particular reality that has come within our ken. Hence the Sorbonne was acting in defense of one of the convictions of the religious consciousness at the time when it rejected as heresy the doctrine that it is possible to "know" God. Instructive at this point it is to note that Wundt's extensive researches and penetrating psychological analyses as reported in his *Völkerpsychologie* led him to the doctrine that the god of religion is a synthesis of the hero with that mysterious creation of the emotions which he designated the 'demon.' The distinguished American psychologist of religion Leuba has also insisted that "mysteriousness and awefulness always belong to gods, and man's relations with gods will be more or less deeply colored with awe." Let the Divine receive embodiment in specific imagery or material representation, or let it acquire definite formulation in a creed, and there is bound shortly to arise a vital religious spirit to declare that that which was accepted as Divine is but an idol, a figment of an all too limited experience and of a religious need but imperfectly conscious of its own requirements.

It is reported that Paul, coming in his long missionary journeys to Athens, found there among its several temples devoted to the gods of Greek mythology, one dedicated to the unknown God. The latter he sought to make known unto the people. But even his all but consummate genius failed. Of the Athenians, only a very few

seemed convinced; some mocked, and others, though stating that they would hear him again on these matters, were left so unillumined, and therefore apparently so indifferent, that Paul, in seeming discouragement, departed from among them, leaving the folk and their philosophers with the unknown God. We allude to this incident only for purposes of illustration. Is it not the case that, whenever any advanced people have found themselves with specifically imaged gods, or with such as were with considerable completeness understood by them, they have become profoundly dissatisfied, and have felt an irresistible impulse either to reject their deities or to supplement them with a further god essentially unknown?

True it is that all religions living for long in the spirits of men, have affirmed various attributes of their gods as they have come to know them through one form or another of revelation, or it matters not how. But no less true is it that in one way or another, and at some point or another, they have persistently and stoutly declared that no human thoughts or finite consciousness may express the nature of the religious object, that the Divine in its essential nature as such is qualitatively other than the limited realities accessible to our comprehension, is somehow genuinely transcendent of finite existence and of human apprehension.

It has often been noted that religion has been fed by man's sense of the mysterious. Here we are concerned merely to suggest that religion has in turn sustained that by which it has been nourished. For the life of philosophy, this, as we shall in our concluding paper observe, is a fact of no little moment. Epochs and peoples that preserve a living nexus or osmosis between religion and philosophy possess not only a religion but likewise a philosophy essentially other than is to be found where the connection is weakened or severed.

In its most characteristic and lofty forms, then, the religious consciousness postulates a reality that synthesizes being and value; it insists upon a union of the human and the divine; and it is sensitively alive to the fact of an uncomprehended, if not incomprehensible, presence, and to the lure of the mysterious in nature and human experience. Its source is in the stirrings of a dissatisfied or rent soul; its emphasis oscillates between the attitude of the self to its world and the bearing of the world upon the self; its promise is salvation and realization.

To be sure, the term religion covers a great variety of phenomena. In part the variations are due to the fact that in its

relation to other elements of the cultural life, as well as to philosophy, religion has in some cases been primarily active and formative, and has therefore preserved its essential integrity; whereas, in other cases, the conditions are reversed—numerous cultural elements have developed in considerable independence of religion and have in the course of time put their stamp upon the latter. Thus, the religious outlook of India has pretty much preserved its unique—and not merely its traditional—quality, and its essential integrity; that of present day America, on the other hand, is strongly dominated by the influences of industrialism, of the democratic ideal of society, and of ethical requirements. In the former case, religion's function is connected with man's endeavor to transcend the world and his own present state of being; in the latter case, it is widely held that the proper aim of religion (as indeed only less fully that of philosophy) is to effect desirable changes in the physical and the social environment.

Generalizations, to be sure, are perilous and they become doubly so when employed in the drawing of contrasts or even of comparisons. Yet, when we consider what is typically Indian in relation to what is today generally prevalent in America, certain important differences emerge, at least in degree of emphasis, as respects the relations of philosophy and culture to religion.

How the features of the religious consciousness as sketched above have reflected themselves in the philosophy of India and have thus led to a divergence of the latter from the spirit of the contemporary West, will appear in some detail in the second part of our study.