

EXPLORATIONS

CONTEMPORARY VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY, II

GEORGE BURCH

3. *T. R. V. Murti.*¹

The second phase of Professor K. C. Bhattacharya's philosophy is developed in the thought of T. R. V. Murti.² It stresses the epistemological, metaphysical, and religious aspects of alternation, rather than the logical ones. While less organically connected with the Professor's thought, it is more in accord with his published works than is the teaching of Kalidas Bhattacharya.

T. R. V. Murti is a Tamil Brahmin. He was born at Madras in 1902, and educated at Trichinopoly Christian College, which he left before graduating to commence five years of Congress Party work. He was in jail five months. In 1925 he came to Benares, where he studied the Sanskrit classics with pandits and gurus. He then completed his undergraduate course at Benares Hindu University, receiving his A.B. and M.A. together in 1929. From 1929 to 1936 he was a fellow at the Indian Institute of Philosophy at Amalner. Here he came under the influence of Professor K. C. Bhattacharya, and was considered to be, among the philosophers at Amalner, the one who best understood the Professor's teaching. In 1936 he returned to Benares Hindu University for advanced study, and later was appointed Sayaji Rao Gaekwad Professor of Indian Civilization and Culture. He has been there since, except for three years on leave as professor of philosophy at Colombo and one year as Spalding Professor of Oriental Religions at Oxford.

Murti is an orthodox Brahmin, a Saivite in religion, an

¹ For the first part of this study, see this *Review*, IX (March 1956), 485-504.

² He, however, rejects the notion that Bhattacharya's philosophy had phases, maintaining that his later teachings are implicit in his earlier ones.

Advaitin in philosophy. He is a man of striking appearance and forceful personality.³ He is a scholar, both a D.Litt. and an Acharya.⁴ His oral style is vigorous, yet always digressing and seldom following any topic to its conclusion. He is extremely argumentative, and would meet any philosophical remark with the proposal that we argue about it. His thought is never dogmatic, but fluid and organic, and he welcomes criticisms, corrections, or additions which he can incorporate into his system. He is tolerant of all philosophical views, and tries to understand them in their own terms.⁵

He has published one book and several articles. The book, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (D.Litt. Thesis, 1947, published 1955), a historical, systematic, and comparative study of Madhyamika Buddhism, is erudite, subtle, and clear—certainly one of the most important philosophical books to come from India in this century. His most important articles are “Knowing, Feeling and Willing as Functions of Consciousness” (1934), “Illusion as Confusion of Subjective Functions” (1935), “The Nature and Value of Metaphysics” (1941), and “The Philosophy of Spirit” (1952, in *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, where it is erroneously entitled “The Spirit of Philosophy”). In view of the fluidity of his thought, the earlier articles cannot always be taken as representing his present doctrine.

³ G. R. Malkani and R. Das with Murti form a trio of contrasting philosophies and personalities; they are outstanding representatives of speculative, critical and scholarly philosophy, respectively, in India today. Malkani's inflexible habits reflect his rigorous thought, Das's wide friendships reflect his broad interests, and Murti's conventionality reflects his classical scholarship.

⁴ India has two educational systems, the British-established government-accredited universities, teaching in English a curriculum based on Western culture, and giving the graduate degrees of M.A., Ph.D., and D.Litt. (a sort of super-Ph.D.); and the schools of the pandits, teaching in Sanskrit a curriculum based on Indian culture, and giving the degrees of Sastri (equivalent to master) and Acharya (equivalent to doctor).

⁵ He distinguishes seven principal schools in Indian philosophy, each characterized by the fundamental principle on which its doctrine is based: Vedanta (distinction between reality and appearance), Sankhya (fact of change), Nyaya (everything knowable), Madhyamika (awareness of all philosophy as false), Vignanavada (consciousness alone real), Sautantrika (real not permanent), Jainism (reality manifold). ✓

Philosophy arises, Murti says, not from wonder but from the desire to escape suffering. This, the first of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, is the common teaching of all Indian philosophers. Without suffering there would be no motive for philosophy. Theoretical research, whether philosophical or scientific, is for the sake of practical welfare. Philosophy begins with disillusion, the recognition that there is something wrong—for searchers of truth it may be something inconsistent—in the world. This distress or misery—or perhaps intellectual dissatisfaction—is not merely personal, for that could be cured by some specific action, but is cosmic, and can be cured only by being known to be illusory.

This recognition that there is something wrong in the world leads to reflection. Rational criticism of experience leads to antinomies, and critical reflection on these leads to the apprehension of a higher reality. For this, faith in revelation is necessary. Reasoning alone does not give insight. Revelation may come from the Veda, a guru,⁶ tradition, or even some non-Hindu source, but it always has a supernatural origin, traceable not to an infinite regress of gurus, as in Jainism, but to an original revelation from God, as in Hinduism. Scripture, however, merely makes a suggestion, which is of no cognitive value without experience. Vedanta gets its *cue* from the doctrine of Brahman as the absolute being revealed in the Veda⁷—whereas Buddhism, lacking this cue, develops the power of unaided human reason, which to be sure does lead to Buddhism.⁸ As a Vedantist, Murti recognizes three steps in spiritual progress: faith, understanding, vision (*sabda*, *manana*, *dhyana*). Only the first and third are absolutely necessary. The second, which is philosophy in the strict sense, is necessary only to dispel intellectual doubts, and may be omitted if you have none. Philosophy thus understood is a regressive

⁶ In whom the absolute being is manifested to us, and who therefore is rightly worshiped as divine.

⁷ Acceptance of the Veda, however, does not determine one's philosophical theory, as the Veda can be interpreted in various ways.

⁸ There are "two main traditions in Indian philosophy": Vedanta, following the Veda, teaches that reality is substance (*atman*); Buddhism following reason, teaches that reality is unsubstantial (*anatman*). Unaided reason does not find any substance behind the phenomena.

movement of consciousness criticizing its own standpoint, while science is the forward movement of consciousness building, predicting, and speculating. Philosophy and religion are alternative paths to the same result, but religion, synthetic and objective, is innate, universal, and easy for all,⁹ while philosophy, analytic and subjective, is a harder but superior discipline demanding a process of abstraction to which few people are inclined.

Philosophy, thus strictly understood, is the rational analysis of experience. Experience is consciousness of, or attention to, some object or content. We can establish a priori that there are just three *conscious functions*, because there are just three possible ways in which consciousness and object can be related. First, content may determine consciousness: this is *knowing*.¹⁰ Second, consciousness may determine content: this is *willing*.¹¹ Third, both may determine each other: this is *feeling*, as seen in the artistic apprehension of beauty, which is neither purely objective nor purely subjective but a union in which each acts on the other.¹² From the standpoint of each conscious function the other two are accidental accretions which may well be rejected. Ordinary experience is a confusion of the three, every mental state involving all three, and for this very reason is *illusory*, for it is neither knowing nor willing nor feeling.¹³ It is possible, however, to purge any one of these of the influence of the others, and so to

⁹ Murti recognizes three criteria of spirituality: identity of means and end, integration of personality, identification of others' good with your own.

¹⁰ Murti is an uncompromising *realist*. He criticizes the subjective idealism of some Vedantists, including Kalidas Bhattacharya, as both false and un-Vedantic; it fails to distinguish between individual and cosmic illusion, involves a denial of God, and gives no explanation of the world. In knowing, the consciousness is passive, discovering the object, not creating it. In ordinary cognition there is to be sure a large subjective or a priori element, but to the extent that this exists such experience fails to be *knowledge*.

¹¹ The object willed, brought into being through the willing, has no being apart from the willing, but is simply *as we will it*.

¹² Feeling, involving non-distinction between consciousness and content, is a mode of experience more basic than, and primitive to, knowing and willing.

¹³ Empirical illusions are partly determinate; primordial illusion is the completely indeterminate confusion characteristic of deep sleep.

arrive at progressively purer knowing or willing or feeling. Each function is purified by a process of reflection in which the other functions are negated—but only one at a time. There are therefore three kinds of pure experience.

We purge our knowledge of its non-cognitive accretions in order to arrive at that which is really known. We have two levels of knowledge: natural knowledge of fact (sensuous, prior in the history of the individual and the race) and cultural knowledge of ideas (non-sensuous—logical, aesthetic, or moral). The latter is dogmatic metaphysics, which thus provides material for philosophical metaphysics. Philosophy or critical reflection begins as reflection on the contrast and alternation of these two levels of knowledge.¹⁴ From this reflection emerges awareness of the reality which underlies both and so of the fact that both are themselves not reality but appearance. Awareness of reality, first apprehended simply as the reality of the appearances, not as subjective or objective, leads us to inquire into its intrinsic nature. Bifurcation into subject and object is engendered as we try to interpret the substantial *that* through the universal adjectival *what*. The search for the intrinsic nature of reality, not reality as related to appearance, continues as the found reality is in turn rejected as illusory in favor of a still deeper reality. The fundamental principle by which this dialectic proceeds is the law that *consciousness of the false and consciousness of the subjective imply each other*.¹⁵ Subjectivity implies falsity because we reflect on our experience only to question or reject it; self-consciousness implies that the content reflected on is considered false, unquestioned experience being un-self-conscious. Falsity implies subjectivity because the unreal object, like the snake for which a rope is mistaken, has no existence apart from our awareness of it. A supplementary principle is that all significant relations (such as reality-appearance,

¹⁴ Murti thus considers philosophy as beginning with the third, instead of the second, of K. C. Bhattacharya's "grades of theoretic consciousness."

¹⁵ This equivalence of falsity and subjectivity (discussed in K. C. Bhattacharya's "The False and the Subjective" and Murti's "Illusion as Confusion of Subjective Functions") is, Murti insists, the fundamental principle of K. C. Bhattacharya's philosophy, of his own philosophy, and of Vedanta.

Brahman-world, universal-particular, substance-attribute, mind-body, cause-effect) are subordinate, never coordinate, one of the related terms being subordinated to, and so rejectable in favor of, the other. Entities ontologically coordinate or on the same level, notably subject and object, are not related directly but only through the reality underlying both. Consciousness and content are never related coordinately, but either may be subordinated to the other. Reflection occurs only when an experience previously considered unitary is analyzed into a twofold structure of aspects related to each other as reality and appearance. Awareness of the reflective consciousness itself emerges as that from which the two things distinct from each other are both distinct. To know the a priori as such is to be free from it, for consciousness of the a priori is not consciousness *through* the a priori and so is not itself conditioned by it. The dialectical passage is always from appearance to reality. Reality differs from appearance in being universal (capable of various appearances), indefinite (itself like no one appearance), free (not under the necessity of appearing at all), being (complete, not becoming), and self-evident (the ground of all other things). Appearance is not a part or aspect of the real; it implies the real but is not implied by it, and is to be rejected as utterly unreal.¹⁶ Philosophy continues with critical reflection on the distinction between reality and appearance. Knowing is purified more and more as it is freed from creative ignorance, which is willing, and concealing ignorance, which is feeling. It arrives ultimately at the unconditioned object, which is pure being.¹⁷

From the point of view of knowledge, willing and feeling are sources of ignorance which interfere with our knowledge of being as it is. But from the point of view of willing, knowledge, which

¹⁶ The snake is not an aspect of the rope. There is no snake at all, and never was. All Vedanta, Murti says, is contained in the rope-snake metaphor. Identification is mistaken identity, and only the unreal can be identified with the real (as body with self). One may oppose Vedanta by denying that the world is appearance, but should not misinterpret Vedanta by calling the world appearance and still saying that it somehow belongs to Brahman and so cannot be wholly rejected.

¹⁷ The whole process may be summarized in three steps: unreflective perception, reflective judgment, contemplation of pure being.

is surrender to the object, and feeling, which is union with the object, are sources of bondage which interfere with our freedom. And from the point of view of feeling, knowledge, with its objective bias, and willing, with its subjective bias, are sources of separation which interfere with the aesthetic union of consciousness and content. Just as knowing is purified by being freed from all willing and feeling to attain pure objectivity, so willing is purified by being freed from all knowing and feeling to attain pure subjectivity, and feeling is purified by being freed from all knowing and willing to attain pure togetherness. The three forms of reflection proceed by freeing experience from the I, the That, or their Separateness respectively. The dialectic is similar in all three cases.

Pure knowing, freed from all subjectivity, is absolute *Truth* (concrete reality in all its richness). Pure willing, freed from all objectivity, is absolute *Freedom* (goodness with no mixture of evil). Pure feeling, freed from all separateness, is absolute *Bliss* (as contrasted with mere physical pleasure or aesthetic joy).¹⁸ Each is absolute, since each is pure experience free from all illusion resulting from confusion of conscious functions. Yet they are incompatible, incommensurable, and nowise reducible to each other.¹⁹ They are *alternative absolutes*. They appear to be different positively, and alike only negatively as freedom from confusion (*samsara*) or practically as salvation (*moksha*), but strictly speaking they should not be considered different, because as incommensurable and absolute they cannot be distinguished by

¹⁸ The reader will notice that the three advocates of the doctrine of alternative absolutes relate these absolutes differently to the three conscious functions and so propose three different philosophical theories. Knowing, willing, and feeling lead respectively, according to K. C. Bhattacharya, to absolute subjectivity, objectivity, and synthesis; according to Kalidas Bhattacharya, to absolute subjectivity, synthesis, and objectivity; according to Murti, to absolute objectivity, subjectivity, and synthesis.

¹⁹ There is a subtle sense, however, in which attainment of one absolute somehow involves realization of the alternative absolutes, not as arrived at directly but as included in the absolute attained. In Vedanta truth (*sat*) is realized as including freedom (*chit*) and bliss (*ananda*), and in Kashmir Saivism pure freedom or creativity is realized, at least implicitly, as including truth and bliss.

discursive concepts inapplicable to the absolute. Whether they are ultimately identical can be neither affirmed nor denied—a problem transcending philosophy, which culminates in the absolute. One cannot be judged by another, and there is no external position from which one can be preferred to another. Choice among them can only be justified psychologically and depends on individual temperament. The way of knowing is for the intellectual man, the way of willing for the active man, the way of feeling for the artistic man.

Philosophy or reflective consciousness thus culminates in the absolute wherein we are free from the suffering of illusory experience. Since there are alternative absolutes, there are alternative philosophies, mutually incommensurable and equally valid. Historically the philosophy of knowing is manifested in Advaita Vedanta, which culminates in the attainment of absolute Truth, Brahman.²⁰ For the seeker of Truth, Vedanta is the only philosophy adequate either theoretically or practically, as it alone attains the absolute *That* of pure being. Vedanta describes Brahman as “being-consciousness-bliss” (*sat-chit-ananda*), attributes which reflect the three conscious functions, although strictly speaking they are an analysis of absolute Truth rather than a distinction of the alternative absolutes.²¹ The philosophy of willing is manifested

²⁰ Murti discusses the nature of Brahman in his paper “The Two Definitions of Brahman in the Advaita” written for a proposed volume of essays in honor of K. C. Bhattacharya, but this volume was never printed, because the printer mislaid the copy.

²¹ Murti’s views concerning the classical controversial problems of Vedanta may be summarized as follows: Vedanta is realistic and (in the problem of souls) pluralistic; subjectivism and monopsychism are perversions, or at best, unnecessary complications. True Vedanta, as opposed to either theistic or absolutistic Vedanta, teaches both theism and absolutism. The existence of Brahman is proved cosmologically by passing from appearance as given in experience to transcendent reality as the ground of appearance. The essence of Brahman, strictly speaking ineffable, is described negatively as “being” (meaning not non-being), “consciousness” (not matter), and “bliss” (not suffering). Brahman (not the individual soul, which is a product of ignorance) is not only the ground and object, but also the subject, of ignorance, so that we say correctly that Brahman is ignorant, for only consciousness (which is Brahman) can be ignorant. But we should not say that Brahman has knowledge. Only the individual soul (*jiva*) has knowledge, which cancels ignorance. When the individual

historically in Vignanavada Buddhism, which culminates in the attainment of absolute Freedom, Nirvana. Vignanavada accepts consciousness alone (understood as process, not substance) as real, rejecting object and consequently the subject-object relation as unreal, and so identifies absolute reality with absolute consciousness having no content at all.²² In Nirvana there is neither attachment nor aversion, because there is nothing to be attached to or averse from, and so there is perfect freedom. The historical manifestation of the philosophy of feeling, culminating in the attainment of absolute Bliss, is not so clear.²³ In his published works Murti identified the philosophy of feeling with Vignanavada.²⁴ In his conversations with me²⁵ he identified it with Chaitanya Vaishnavism.²⁶ The last time I saw him he identified it with Rasavada.²⁷ In a recent letter he identified it with Hegelianism.²⁸

soul attains knowledge, then ignorance (canceled by knowledge), knowledge (now functionless), and individual soul (a product of ignorance) all cease together, leaving Brahman as pure consciousness with neither ignorance nor knowledge. God (*Ishvara*, or Brahman limited) does not create the illusory world, which is beginningless, but helps us to escape from it. Souls freed from illusion become identical with God, who is a soul not subject to illusion. There are many individual souls (*anekajivavada*). Some have attained release (*moksha*), and all may. When and if all souls are freed, God, whose only function is to free them, will have no further function but together with the souls will simply be Brahman.

²² For Buddhism, Murti remarks, the principle of Vedanta dialectic is reversed, and the false is the *objective*.

²³ The uncertainty concerns the history of philosophy only, and nowise affects Murti's philosophical system.

²⁴ In this context, the philosophy of willing, later identified with Vignanavada, was instead identified with Madhyamika (see below).

²⁵ I suggested (and elaborated the suggestion in a paper for the Pratap Seth Festschrift published in 1954) that absolute feeling might be found in Christianity, thus making Christianity coordinate with Vedanta and Buddhism, but Murti (who has only a moderate regard for Christian philosophy) was reluctant to accept this suggestion.

²⁶ The religious philosophy of the sixteenth century saint Chaitanya, based on loving devotion to Krishna, in which feeling appears on the lower levels as love but on the absolute level, where duality is transcended, as bliss.

²⁷ Literally "flavorism" (from *rasa*, flavor), a school of aesthetics.

²⁸ Thus returning to the identification made by K. C. Bhattacharya. Murti writes: "If we schematise feeling as the whole of both subject and object in union, the Absolute would be a state where there is not only a

Since there are only three conscious functions, there are only three alternative absolutes (or alternative forms of the absolute) arrived at by an analysis of experience.²⁹ But there may be still other alternative absolutes arrived at by other equally valid philosophical systems. One such system is the *sabdadvaita* (word-monism) exemplified historically in the *Sphotavada* (linguistic) school. This is a semantic dialectic based not on any analysis of experience but on a critical analysis of language, and so concerned with symbols rather than with symbolized content. In Sphotavada thought, the word itself is the essential nature of the thing (including the mantras which are the essential nature of the various gods) and is the cause of the meaning, which flows from the word as a consequence. From critical reflection on the contrast and alternation of word and meaning emerges awareness of the reality underlying them, which is the speaking activity, and this, considered in its intrinsic nature apart from its appearances, is the absolute *Word* (*Sabda-brahman*).³⁰

All this, critical reflection proceeding dialectically to the absolute, is the lower-level philosophy. Beyond it is a second or higher-level philosophy, which takes as its starting point not experience but the historical existence of philosophical theories about experience. Critical reflection on the opposition and alternation among philosophical systems, especially the radically opposed extremes of Vedanta substantialism and Buddhist unsubstantialism, proceeds dialectically, on a higher level of reflective

togetherness of the two, but the possibility of their separate existence is ruled out. Abstraction should be abhorred as the worst sin one could commit. Hegel's philosophy preeminently carries out this demand. His Absolute is, on our scheme, an Ultimate of feeling. The ghost of Hegel may well turn in his grave to hear me characterise his very logical Absolute as Absolute of feeling. It however happens that Hegel's Knowledge (Thought, Idea, Judgment, etc.) is my Feeling."

²⁹ There may be further alternation, however, in the way of understanding any one of these. Purification of the will as understood in Buddhism, that is, impersonal will, leads to absolute Consciousness as exemplified in Vignanavada, while purification of the will as understood in Hinduism, that is, personal will, leads to absolute Freedom as exemplified in Kashmir Saivism.

³⁰ This also has alternative interpretations, static and dynamic (absolute Word as substantive or as verb).

consciousness, to awareness of the *indefinite* which underlies these systems. This leads ultimately to the absolute Indefinite, called *prajna-paramita* (infinite wisdom), which is the Indefinite in itself, described as knowledge freed from the extremes of being and non-being.³¹ This is absolute Wisdom, the last word of philosophy. It has no theory of the intrinsic nature of the absolute, like Vedanta or Buddhism, but describes the absolute only in its relation to what is not absolute. It is called *Sunyavada*, literally, theory of the void (*sunya*). This means not that reality is non-existent or void, but that phenomena are void and reality is devoid of all conceivable attributes. It transcends all thought, and can be realized only in the "non-dual" knowledge of intuition (*prajna*); and this intuition is itself the absolute. Reality transcending thought can be known only by denial of the determinations which the various systems ascribe to it. Sunyavada dialectic, consequently, is purely analytic, not synthetic; critical, not speculative. Its negation of all views is the despair of thought but the beginning of wisdom. Sunyavada is not a theory but a critique of all theories, which it rejects as falsification of the real.³² It is best expressed by silence—but by a silence which results from critical reflection on all speakable theories, not a silence which is mere refusal to consider them.

The classical exemplar of this silence is the Buddha. The three (so-called fourteen) questions which he refused to answer (Is the world limited in time or space? Is the body the self? Does the Buddha exist after death?) are basic metaphysical problems, and his refusal to answer them meant that no answer, that is, no metaphysical theory, can be accepted on the higher level of reflective consciousness which criticizes them all. The historical manifestation of this attitude in all its fullness, however, is the Buddhist school of *Madhyamika* (the "Middle Way") founded by the Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna in the second century. Nagarjuna's devastating dialectic disproves, by *reductio ad absurdum*,

³¹ Or, to express it in the Indian fashion, freed from the four extremes of is, is-not, both-is-and-is-not, and neither-is-nor-is-not.

³² This is not nihilism. It is a confusion, though a common one, to regard this "no views of the real" attitude as a "no reality" view.

both sides of every issue. Unlike Zeno, for example, he disproves both motion and rest. The follower of Madhyamika, like the Buddha, has no views. Like all Indian philosophies, Madhyamika is primarily practical. Denial of views about reality is the means of attaining reality. Freedom from pain is achieved by the elimination of the passions which impel us toward attachment, and these are eliminated by the enlightenment of intuitive wisdom.

Murti expounds and defends the Madhyamika philosophy in his book *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*.³³ He points out that here also the *equivalence of the false and the subjective* is the fundamental principle.

It has been shown that to be aware of a *drishti* (view), we must be aware of its falsity. Reflective consciousness is necessarily the consciousness of the false. As the Madhyamika dialectic relentlessly exposes the falsity of every philosophical view, each of which pretends to give a complete and only picture of all things, it curbs the speculative disposition of dogmatic Reason. It is a reversal of the natural process of looking at things through set ideas, the disabusing of the mind of *a priori* notions which are the mainsprings of our empirical ways of life. The essence of the Madhyamika attitude, his philosophy, consists in not allowing oneself to be entangled in views and theories, but just to observe the nature of things without standpoints.³⁴

Theories may be valid in science, where they can be verified empirically, but not in philosophy, where they inevitably breed dissension. Only Madhyamika absolutism, he says, can provide a philosophical basis for a possible world-culture, and even a theoretic understanding of it might be a preparation for the spiritual regeneration of the world.

All these philosophies, both the various first-level ones and the second-level one, have the same logical structure. This structure can be studied by itself in abstraction from any of the philosophies which exemplify it.³⁵ This study may be

³³ Murti, although a Vedantist on the lower level of philosophy, is a follower of Madhyamika on the higher, and so might be called a Buddhist, but not in a significant sense, because Madhyamika, while it appears historically as a school of Buddhism, is really, he says, a higher-level philosophy transcending both Vedanta and Buddhism.

³⁴ P. 209.

³⁵ This is not a third level of philosophy because, since it involves

called *logic* in contrast with first-level *metaphysics* and second-level *dialectic*. The abstract structure (exemplified in K. C. Bhattacharya's "grades of theoretic consciousness") consists of four steps: (1) that which is first given, (2) that which is given later, (3) the reality of which both the preceding are appearances, (4) that reality considered in itself as transcending its appearances, that is, as absolute.

Professor Murti's doctrine has its roots in Advaita Vedanta, Madhyamika Buddhism, and K. C. Bhattacharya's philosophy, but derives its form from his own original and comprehensive thought. It combines historical scholarship and metaphysical speculation in a fertile union where each guides and enriches the other.

4. P. J. Chaudhury.

The first phase of K. C. Bhattacharya's philosophy is being developed by P. J. Chaudhury. His philosophy is more conservative than that of Kalidas Bhattacharya or Murti in that it is closer to classical Vedanta, while it is more original than theirs in that it is less closely connected with K. C. Bhattacharya's. Chaudhury took the concept of planes of reality from K. C. Bhattacharya and made it the basis of his own philosophy, but in its details his doctrine has little in common with that of his teacher.³⁶

Pravas Jivan Chaudhury, a Bengali Brahmin, was born at Howrah near Calcutta in 1916. His mother was K. C. Bhattacharya's sister. As a child he was interested in Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy—that we should enjoy the world in a disinterested way, for it is God who enjoys it through us. In college he became a physicist. After studying at Agra, Patna, and Calcutta, he taught physics at Shillong in Assam two years and at Visvabharati University (which developed from Tagore's ashram) five years, received a P. R. Scholarship and his Ph.D. at Calcutta, and later devoted two years to research in aesthetics. Meanwhile

no conflict, it is not philosophy at all, and it does not lead to another alternative form of the absolute.

³⁶ Chaudhury was not influenced by the later phases of K. C. Bhattacharya's philosophy, and does not accept the doctrine of alternative absolutes.

conversations with his uncle were turning his interest from Western science to Indian philosophy. He says his uncle taught him that philosophy is meditation—so he meditates—and direct vision of things—so he seeks to know them. In 1953 he was appointed professor of philosophy and department head at Presidency College in Calcutta. He approaches philosophy with the background of his training in modern science.

His two books, *The Philosophy of Science* (P. R. Scholarship thesis, extended for Ph.D. thesis, 1951, published 1955) and *Studies in Comparative Aesthetics* (1953), and his various articles (several in American periodicals) are concerned mostly with aesthetics and philosophy of science. He has published nothing on his own philosophical system, but his recent paper "The Relation of Philosophy to Psychology" (1953) suggests the way in which this system will be developed.

Philosophy, Chaudhury maintains, is neither synthesis of science nor something unrelated to science, but a higher level of thought which is implied by science and to which only uncritical scientists fail to be led. While scientific psychology describes objects on a certain level of awareness, philosophy or transcendental psychology analyzes the awareness itself and distinguishes its various levels. A *plane of reality* (unlike degrees of reality, which exist simultaneously, as in neo-Platonism) is a level of awareness from which all higher levels are ignored as completely unknown and all lower levels rejected as completely unreal.³⁷ Illusion is not something to be accepted as real in its own inferior way or to be criticized because of inherent inconsistencies, but is rejected as utterly insignificant. This concept of planes of reality is a classical concept of Advaita Vedanta, with its emphasis on the distinction between appearance and reality, but there is disagreement as to the number of planes. According to the acosmists, like Gauḍapada, the founder of Advaita Vedanta, there is only one plane,

³⁷ The distinction of planes is most clearly seen in the ordinary experience of waking up from a dream. There is no relation between the objects seen in the dream and those seen when awake. When dreaming we are completely unaware of the facts of the waking world, and when awake we reject the events of the dream as unreal events having no relevance to real facts.

since the world does not exist even as illusion. According to the subjectivists, like Prakashananda, the advocate of monopsychism, there are two planes, illusion and reality. According to the realists, like Sankara, the most famous Vedanta philosopher,³⁸ there are three planes—empirical illusion, cosmic illusion (empirically real), and reality. According to K. C. Bhattacharya, there are four planes. But according to Chaudhury there are seven. Four are basic,³⁹ while the other three are transitional, equally actual as levels of awareness but intelligible only in terms of the planes immediately above and below. We can know the existence of planes higher than our own by the testimony of those who have this experience, as reported in mystical literature, and we can try to understand these planes by analogy with our own experience. Chaudhury rejects revelation, but respects the Upanishads as testimony of their authors' experience.

The planes of reality are as follows. (1) The lowest plane (rejected on all others as unreal) is that of dreams, and other such illusions, created by the individual mind. (2) The second (first transitional) plane is the state of waking up, when the dream images still persist but are recognized as unreal. Daydreaming is also on this plane. (3) The third plane is ordinary waking experience. Dream images rejected as unreal are forgotten and so no longer exist even as illusions. The objects of this plane constitute the common empirical world, created not by the individual but by God. (4) The fourth (second transitional) plane is that of spiritual wakening, the state of the Vedantic sage who is aware of the unreality of the world.⁴⁰ He realizes gradually, first by faith, then by intellect, finally by insight, that the world is illusion. Perception of empirical objects, however, including his own body, persists, so that he still sees the world

³⁸ Sankara's writings allow some scope for interpretation, however, and Advaitins of various schools tend to assimilate him, because of his prestige, to their own views.

³⁹ These cannot, however, be identified with K. C. Bhattacharya's four planes.

⁴⁰ The so-called *jivan-mukta*, but Chaudhury rejects the classical Advaita doctrine of *jivan-mukti* (complete release from the world while apparently still in it).

and himself as an individual in it, and acts accordingly, although he knows better. (5) The fifth plane is that of release from illusion (*moksha* or *videha-mukti*), when all empirical objects, together with the world, time, and individuality, are not only rejected as unreal but completely forgotten and so no longer exist even as illusions. The individual body is freely given up and so dies empirically. Only the self (*jiva*, defined as Brahman distinguished into subjective and objective) remains. It is eternal, since there is no time, and one, since there is no distinction of individuals. Monopsychism (*ekajivavada*), implicit on the fourth plane, is explicit on the fifth, and the one self is God (*Ishvara*). Nevertheless, although all objects are gone, objectivity, which is the possibility of objects, remains; the form of objects, although not their matter, remains; the distinction of subject and object, although not the distinction of individuals, remains; in short, the objective attitude remains.⁴¹ Deep dreamless sleep is temporary ascent to this plane. (6) The sixth (third transitional) plane is the state of expecting, although not realizing, objectivity. It is best understood in the descending direction as Brahman's stirring ("Brahman felt alone," as the Upanishads say)—the anticipation of, or in the ascending direction the negation of, that feeling of loneliness which characterizes the fifth plane. This is Brahman (not *jiva* or *Ishvara*), but Brahman subject to illusion. (7) The highest plane is absolute awareness. Objectivity vanishes, and with it all distinction whatsoever. The only reality is absolute being-consciousness-bliss, Brahman.⁴²

Each plane has its internal ethics, but the transcendental ethical principle is the duty of self-fulfillment by rising to a higher plane. Whatever conduces to this is good. On the third plane this is altruism. There are no inter-plane obligations. While dreaming we may feel an obligation to help our fellow sufferers in the dream, but after waking it would be absurd to suppose an obligation to go back to sleep and recover the dream in order to

⁴¹ The discrimination of this plane is Chaudhury's most original contribution to Vedanta philosophy.

⁴² Realism is the correct epistemological theory on the first, third, and fifth planes; idealism, on the second, fourth, and sixth; neither, on the seventh.

help the persons in it. Likewise, while we have an obligation to help our fellows in the empirical world, it would be absurd to acknowledge any obligation to them after spiritual awakening has shown the unreality of that world and all the individuals in it. Chaudhury, like most Vedantists, rejects the Buddhist concept of the *bodhisattva* (the freed man devoted to the welfare of those still bound) as self-contradictory.

The two principal problems of philosophy are how we rise to a higher plane and how we fall to a lower plane. We rise from the first to the second plane, that is, wake up from a dream, through any one of three causes. (1) Some violent perception from the empirical world, such as a loud sound, may intrude into the dream and shatter it. (2) A critical analysis of the dream experience from within may show that its fantastic content can be understood only as unreal illusion. (3) In the absence of either of these causes we shall in any case wake up spontaneously after a short time, as time is reckoned in the waking world, though this may be a long time as reckoned within the dream. We rise to the third plane by accepting the consequences of the rejection of the dream images and so forgetting them. We rise to the fourth plane by causes analogous to those by which we rise to the second. (1) Some stimulus from the higher plane may intrude into the lower one. This is the religious way. "The subtle workings of the higher grade of consciousness in the lower one in order to rouse and raise the subject in the latter is the essence of divine grace,"⁴³ and this *grace* may be mediated through a guru or through any of the other methods known to religion. (2) A *critical analysis* of ordinary experience, in accordance with the well known arguments of idealist philosophy, may convince the person who is willing to attend to these arguments that the world is not real but phenomenal. This is the philosophical way. (3) We may in any case come *spontaneously* to see the unreality of the world, but only after a long time as time is reckoned within the world (the "end of the kalpa"). This is the natural way. It presupposes the individual's continued existence by reincarnation. We rise to the fifth plane by accepting the consequences of the

⁴³ *Aesthetics—a Vedantic View*, p. 6.

negation of the phenomenal world and so forgetting it. We rise to the sixth plane by critical analysis of the subject-object relation. We rise to the seventh plane by insight into reality. In every case the progress is accomplished by *knowledge*, action or emotion playing a subordinate role if any.

Why Brahman should fall to lower planes is an insoluble problem, since there is no reason for it, yet we can describe the six steps of the process in terms of *maya* and *lila*, two basic concepts of Vedanta philosophy. *Maya*, illusion, analogous to evil in Christian philosophy, is essentially inexplicable, but is the cause of the world as we see it. It may have an end, and so a cause of ceasing to be, as discussed in the preceding paragraph, but it has no beginning, and so no cause of coming into being. A dream ends on waking, but within the dream it seems to have been going on from the indefinite past, and likewise with the waking world. *Lila*, sport, analogous to creation in Christian philosophy, is also inexplicable rationally. Western philosophy thinks of the Creator after the analogy of a human artisan, and so conceives him as creating the world by imposing form (usually thought of as itself an aspect of the Creator) on matter (usually thought of as itself previously created *ex nihilo*) for some purpose, thus raising the difficult but fascinating theological problem of what this purpose might be. Hindu philosophy thinks of the Creator after the analogy of man not working but playing, and so conceives creation as the Creator's spontaneous and purposeless play or sport manifesting his intrinsic exuberance. Brahman, according to Chaudhury, falls to the sixth plane by *maya* suggesting the idea of objectivity, the primordial illusion. It descends to the fifth plane by *lila* positing the objectivity so suggested. It descends to the fourth plane by *maya* suggesting objects made possible by the posited objectivity. It descends to the third plane (the phenomenal world) by *lila* positing such objects, including the bodies by which individual selves are distinguished from one another, in accordance with the rules of the *game*, which are the laws of nature, especially *karma*, the law of causality. Any individual falls to the second plane by *maya* defying these laws to suggest objects not determined by them. The individual falls to the first plane by *lila* positing such unregulated objects.

This elaboration of Advaita Vedanta, by a scholar who is a student of modern science rather than of the Sanskrit classics, is further evidence that Vedanta is still a living philosophy. It draws to its school some of the best minds of India, and it challenges the contemporary philosophies of other traditions as an account of the world and of ourselves.⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ A third, concluding part of this study is now being prepared, and will be published in an early issue of this *Review*.