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God and
the Human Consciousness

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God and the Human Consciousness

the most unreal as it can hardly be characterised as "this" rather than "that". For any such characterisation would tend to exclude that which, from the nature of the case, cannot be excluded at all. This, as everybody knows, has led to the denial of any exclusive predication with respect to the ultimate "other" as "not this"; "not this" repeated infinitely or treating it as possessing simultaneously all possible attributes is unsatisfactory to the intellect. For if every attribute has to be denied of ultimate reality then it is no better than Nothing, and if every attribute has to be affirmed, then "other" comes to possess contradictory attributes, which is unacceptable to thought.

The other paradox which arises with the notion of an all-comprehending "other" of which one becomes aware in self-consciousness, derives from the fact that the all-comprehending "other," if it is really "all-comprehending," must comprehend me as well; a situation which is impossible if the "other" is really "the other." Either the "other," then, is not really "the other," or it is not "all-comprehending," as it excludes the consciousness that apprehends the "other" as a necessary correlate of its self-consciousness.

It has been sought to resolve the paradox in diverse ways, as is well known to all who are even slightly familiar with the history of philosophy. Yet, it is equally obvious that all these attempts have proved intellectually unsatisfactory, however much they may have seemed satisfying to those who believed in them. It has been sought to explain the situation by indicating the intrinsic inability of thought to deal with ultimate questions. Because of its very nature, it may meaningfully deal only with determinate, limited objects encounterable in sense experience or at least related to it to some extent. Kant's is, of course, the classic example of such an attempt, but it can be found in analogous form in other thinkers as well.

The problem has been seen in a slightly different way by thinkers, such as K. C. Bhattacharyya, who see the essential indeterminateness in the structure of self-consciousness as providing the grounds for the realisation of alternative possibilities inherent in the situation envisaged as alternative ways of self-consciousness.¹ The logical way out, by postulating a theory of types to solve the analogous paradox arising out of the notion of the

God and the Human Consciousness

where appearance *is* the reality? The appearance of pain *is* pain and the appearing of the "other" is the other. Further, the question of truth or falsity may be raised only with respect to determinate "others," for in their case, to use an old-fashioned terminology, the "what" may be distinguished from the "that" and thus be wrongly classified or categorised. But "the other in its totality" is only a "that" which has no "what" except in a metaphorical or figurative sense.

God, to use the modern terminology, is not a name, or a definite description, or a rapid designator, but just a blank, which each one has to fill, and necessarily so, for himself or herself; and this, not once and for all, but continuously, amending, erasing, changing, altering, in the light of one's own experience and its myriad shades, nuances, varieties. It may therefore have as many names as you please, as many descriptions as you like, yet none of these is or can be rigidly designating or uniquely referential. And it is because of this that the awareness of the "other" in its transcendent indetermination, is as indubitable to self-consciousness as its own appearance to itself.

Of course, in a sense, consciousness too is a blank, a hole, that is filled in by each and every object that appears without losing its character of being a blank, of being fillable for ever and ever by any object whatsoever. Yet there is a difference in that it has a felt, lived quality which one only wishes and hopes for with respect to the "other," of which one is aware as the inevitable correlate of one's self-consciousness. This, in fact, is the heart of the religious aspiration: it wants to feel the "other" as it feels itself—with the same immediacy, intimacy and indubitability.

But the self-consciousness we are aware of is, in a sense, only a series of consciousnesses, each with its own nuance and shade of felt experience, incommunicable except perhaps through music or the literary skill of a great master. Yet, in and through these Humean or Buddhist flows of perpetually-changing self-awarenesses, we are also aware, however dimly, of that which not only envelops and transcends each of them but also abides their rising and falling, coming-into-being and fading-into-non-being.

Thus, the intention of self in self-consciousness seems on a par with the intimation of the "other" which is also found in it. Both are embedded in self-consciousness which all human

God and the Human Consciousness

awareness. The solutions have ranged from radical identity to radical difference, and the religious and spiritual traditions of the world may be ranged along the continuum formed along these poles. Similarly, the preferred direction of attention has ranged from an increasing inward deepening of self-awareness along with the exclusion or even denial of any "other," including the total and transcendent "other," that is, God, as the complete abnegation of the self before God who alone is regarded as real and thus the sole object of all one's activity whether it be that of knowing, feeling or willing. Adoration, absolute submission to the will of the Lord and constant reflection on his infinite attributes, each infinite in its own nature, constitute the essence of this God-centered alternative that the increasing awareness of the "other" may take.

The two major alternative directions emanating from the polar awareness present in self-consciousness may be called "self-centric" and "other-centric." The terms should be treated more as pointers towards a direction rather than as designating something substantive. The former, for example, would include the Buddhists, even though they deny the substantiality of the self. Similarly, the latter would include almost everyone who is prepared to conceive of the "other" in its unity and totality and tries to become centrally aware of it in some form or other. Normally, the term "God" is used only in the context of the pre-eminent direction that the second alternative emphasizes, and even there it is primarily restricted to certain forms in which the "other" is conceived. Yet however natural the usage and the restriction may seem to those brought up in the Western tradition, it would be seen as a cultural limitation if non-Western traditions of religion and spiritual seeking are also to be taken into account. It is well known that large parts of Hinduism along with the whole tradition of Buddhism and Jainism do not believe in the primacy of the "other" in the sense in which Judaism, Christianity or Islam do. Similarly, to believe that when Einstein said "God does not play dice with men," he was using the term only metaphorically, is not only to do injustice to the integrity of his intellect but also to show a parochial narrowness with respect to the concept of God. One may be asked to recall Spi-

God and the Human Consciousness

out of these different relationships seems almost an impossible enterprise. But its impossibility is perhaps of the same order and emanates from the same sources as that of having any integrated view of the unity of self which encompasses all these different modalities of the dimensions of its being. The seeking for a unified self is perhaps as much an ideal seeking of man as that of having an integrated, unified relationship with the "other."

The openness to future revelations, then, has to be accepted as a perennial feature of the human situation and seen as resulting from its very structure. Yet the denial of such an "openness" has been the central feature of all religions up until now. The absolute finality of the specific revelation on which a particular religion is based is the foundation on which all religions rest, and though some may show a more tolerant attitude than others to revelations earlier than their own, none shows it to revelations later than its own. In fact, the very possibility of any revelation occurring after the revelation on which one's own religion is based, is intrinsically unacceptable to all religions. This, in fact, is as much true of those religions which are non-revelatory in the sense that they do not believe in any God or divine agency which reveals to man as is claimed in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Buddhism and Jainism are the classic examples of such religions. Even Hinduism, which in many of its forms is not supposed to be a revelatory religion on the pattern of Judaism and Christianity, believes in the finality and infallibility of the *Vedas*, at least in its orthodox form. It will be difficult, in fact, to find any religion—major or minor, primitive or advanced—which does not subscribe to this tenet. And yet, if we are to reflect on the contemporary scene and the history of each of the contemporary religions, and move into the future, we have to give up this basic tenet which is held by each of them as the basic article of faith on which they rest.

The claim to finality is defended on the ground that what religion deals with is essentially atemporal and thus not subject to the distinction of past, present, and future or other such distinctions which are based on time. But it is well known that truths of logic and mathematics are also atemporal, yet this does not ensure for them the same status which is claimed by religions for their revealed truths. In a sense, of course, every truth

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God and the Human Consciousness

of the possibilities of one's own self in each of those dimensions also. The spiritual seeking of man will remain central as it emanates from the very structure of his self-consciousness. To ignore it would only be to deny oneself, to limit one's vision to a narrow range of one's possibilities and in the deepest sense, to be alienated from oneself, for God is the name we give to that which is most real and of utmost worth in all that *is*, whether in that which I apprehend as outside myself or in me.

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