

# Philosophy

The knowledge which the man of pure intellect prefers to a more active and mundane curiosity, has in its surroundings a certain loftiness and serene detachment that cannot fail in their charm. To withdraw from contact with emotion and life and weave a luminous colourless shadowless web of thought, alone and far away in the infinite azure empyrean of pure ideas, can be an enthralling pastime fit for Titans or even for Gods. The ideas so found have always their value and it is no objection to their truth that, when tested by the rude ordeal of life and experience, they go to pieces. All that inopportune disaster proves is that they are no fit guides to ordinary human conduct; for material life which is the field of conduct is only intellectual on its mountaintops; in the plains and valleys ideas must undergo limitation by unideal conditions and withstand the shock of crude sub-ideal forces.

Nevertheless conduct is a great part of our existence and the mere metaphysical, logical or scientific knowledge that either does not help me to act or even limits my self-manifestation through action, cannot be my only concern. For God has not set me here merely to think, to philosophise, to weave metaphysical systems, to play with words and syllogisms, but to act, love and know. I must act divinely so that I may become divine in being and deed; I must learn to love God not only in Himself but in all beings, appearances, objects, enjoyments, events, whether men call them good or bad, real or mythical, fortunate or calamitous; and I must know Him with the same divine impartiality and completeness in order that I may come to be like Him, perfect, pure and unlimited — that which all sons of Man must one day be. This, I cannot help thinking, is the meaning and purpose of the Lila. It is not true that because I think, I am; but rather because I think, feel and act, and even while I am doing any or all of these things, can transcend the thought, feeling and

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action, therefore I am. Because I manifest, I am, and because I transcend manifestation, I am. The formula is not so clear and catching as the Cartesian, but there is a fuller truth in its greater comprehensiveness.

The man of unalloyed intellect has a very high and difficult function; it is his function to teach men to think clearly and purely. In order to effect that for mankind, to carry reason as far as that somewhat stumbling and hesitating Pegasus will go, he sacrifices all the bypaths of mental enjoyment, the shady alleys and the moonlit gardens of the soul, in order that he may walk in rare air and a cold sunlight, living highly and austere on the peaks of his mind and seeking God severely through knowledge. He treads down his emotions, because emotion distorts reason and replaces it by passions, desires, preferences, prejudices, pre-judgments. He avoids life, because life awakes all his sensational being and puts his reason at the mercy of egoism, of sensational reactions of anger, fear, hope, hunger, ambition, instead of allowing it to act justly and do disinterested work. It becomes merely the paid pleader of a party, a cause, a creed, a dogma, an intellectual faction. Passion and eagerness, even intellectual eagerness, so disfigure the greatest minds that even Shankara becomes a sophist and a word-twister, and even Buddha argues in a circle. The philosopher wishes above all to preserve his intellectual righteousness; he is or should be as careful of his mental rectitude as the saint of his moral stainlessness. Therefore he avoids, as far as the world will let him, the conditions which disturb. But in this way he cuts himself off from experience and only the gods can know without experience. Sieyès said that politics was a subject of which he had made a science. He had, but the pity was that though he knew the science of politics perfectly, he did not know politics itself in the least and when he did enter political life, he had formed too rigidly the logical habit to replace it in any degree by the practical. If he had reversed the order or at least coordinated experiment with his theories before they were formed, he might have succeeded better. His readymade Constitutions are monuments of logical perfection and practical ineffectiveness. They have the weakness

of all logic; — granting your premises, your conclusion is all-triumphant; but then who is going to grant you your premises? There is nothing Fact and Destiny delight in so much as upsetting the logician's major and minor.

The logician thinks he has ensured himself against error when he has made a classification of particular fallacies; but he forgets the supreme and general fallacy, the fallacy of thinking that logic can, as a rule, prove anything but particular and partial propositions dealing with a fragmentary and one-sided truth. Logic? But Truth is not logical; it contains logic, but is not contained by it. A particular syllogism may be true, so far as it goes, covering a sharply limited set of facts, but even a set of syllogisms cannot exhaust truth on a general subject, for the simple reason that they necessarily ignore a number of equally valid premises, facts or possibilities which support a modified or contrary view. If one could arrive first at a conclusion, then at its exact opposite and, finally, harmonise the contradiction, one might arrive at some approach to the truth. But this is a process logic abhors. Its fundamental conception is that two contradictory statements cannot be true at the same time and place & in the same circumstances. Now, Fact and Nature and God laugh aloud when they hear the logician state his fundamental conception. For the universe is based on the simultaneous existence of contradictions covering the same time, place and circumstances. The elementary conception that God is at once One and Many, Finite & Infinite, Formed and Formless and that each attribute is the condition of the existence of its opposite, is a thing metaphysical logic has been boggling over ever since the reign of reason began.

The metaphysician thinks that he has got over the difficulty about the validity of premises by getting to the tattwas, the ideal truths of universal existence. Afterwards, he thinks, there can be no fear of confusion or error and by understanding and fixing them we shall be able to proceed from a sound basis to the rest of our task. He fashions his critique of reason, his system of pramanas, and launches himself into the wide inane. Alas, the tattwas are the very foundation, support and initial reason of this

worldwide contradiction and logically impossible conciliation of opposites in which God has shadowed out some few rays of His luminous & infinite reality, — impossible to bind with the narrow links of a logical chain precisely because it is infinite. As for the pramanas, their manipulation is the instrument of all difference of opinion and the accompaniment to an unending jangle of debate.

Both the logician and the philosopher are apt to forget that they are dealing with words and words divorced from experience can be the most terrible misleaders in the world. Precisely because they are capable of giving us so much light, they are also capable of lighting us into impenetrable darkness. *Tato bhuya iva te tamo ya u vidyayam ratah*; “Deeper is the darkness into which they enter who are addicted to knowledge alone.” This sort of word worship and its resultant luminous darkness is very common in India and nowhere more than in the intellectualities of religion, so that when a man talks to me about the One and Maya and the Absolute, I am tempted to ask him, “My friend, how much have you experienced of these things in which you instruct me or how much are you telling me out of a vacuum or merely from intellectual appreciation? If you have merely ideas and no experience, you are no authority for me and your logic is to me but the clashing of cymbals good to deafen an opponent into silence, but of no use for knowledge. If you say you have experienced, then I have to ask you, ‘Are you sure you have measured all possible experience?’ If you have not, then how can you be sure that my contradictory experience is not equally true? If you say you have, then I know you to be deluded or a pretender, one who has experienced a fragment or nothing; for God in His entire being is unknowable, *avijnatam vijanatam*.”

The scientist thinks he has corrected the mistakes of the metaphysician because he refuses to deal with anything but a narrow and limited circle of facts and condemns everything else as hallucination, imposture and imagination. His *parti pris*, his fierce and settled prejudgments, his determined begging of the question are too obvious and well known to need particular illustration. He forgets that all experiences are facts, that ideas are

facts, that subjective knowledge is the one fact of which he can be decently sure and that he knows nothing even of the material world by his senses but only by the use his subjective knowledge makes of the senses. Many a materialist will tell you that only those facts can be accepted as a basis to knowledge which the senses supply, — a position which no man can substantiate and which his science daily denies in practice. These reasoners consent to trust to their sovereign subjective instrument when it settles for them the truths about this world visible to their lower instruments, but the same sovereign instrument is condemned as wholly fallacious and insane when it deals in precisely the same way with another field of perceptions and experiences. When my subjective experience tells him, “I am hungry”, he consents; “Of course, you must be since you say so.” But let it tell him, “I am full of bliss from an immaterial source”; or “By certain higher instruments repeatedly tested I know that I have wandered in regions illuminated by no material sun,” and he answers, “You are only fit for the gaol or the lunatic asylum.” No one has seen the earth whirling round the sun, indeed we see daily the opposite, yet he holds the first opinion obstinately, but if you say “Although God is not seen of men, yet He exists,” he turns from you angrily and stalks into his laboratory.

The practical man avoids error by refusing to think at all. His method at least cannot be right. It is not right even for the practical uses he prefers exclusively to all others. You see him stumbling into some pit because he refuses to walk with a light and then accusing adverse circumstances or his evil fortune, or he shouts, elbows, jostles, tumbles and stumbles himself into a final success and departs at last, satisfied; leaving behind a name in history and a legacy of falsehood, evil and suffering to unborn generations. The method of the practical man is the shortest and most facile, but the least admirable of all.

Truth is an infinitely complex reality and he has the best chance of arriving nearest to it who most recognises but is not daunted by its infinite complexity. We must look at the whole thought-tangle, fact, emotion, idea, truth beyond idea,

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conclusion, contradiction, modification, ideal, practice, possibility, impossibility (which must be yet attempted,) and keeping the soul calm and the eye clear in this mighty flux and gurge of the world, seek everywhere for some word of harmony, not forgetting immediate in ultimate truth, nor ultimate in immediate, but giving each its due place and portion in the Infinite Purpose. Some minds, like Plato, like Vivekananda, feel more than others this mighty complexity and give voice to it. They pour out thought in torrents or in rich and majestic streams. They are not logically careful of consistency, they cannot build up any coherent, yet comprehensive systems, but they quicken men's minds and liberate them from religious, philosophic and scientific dogma and tradition. They leave the world not surer, but freer than when they entered it.

Some men seek to find the truth by imaginative perception. It is a good instrument like logic, but like logic it breaks down before it reaches the goal. Neither ought to be allowed to do more than take us some way and then leave us. Others think that a fine judgment can arrive at the true balance. It does, for a time; but the next generation upsets that fine balancing, consenting to a coarser test or demanding a finer. The religious prefer inspiration, but inspiration is like the lightning, brilliantly illuminating only a given reach of country and leaving the rest in darkness intensified by the sharpness of that light. Vast is our error if we mistake that bit of country for the whole universe. Is there then no instrument of knowledge that can give us the heart of truth and provide us with the key word of existence? I think there is, but the evolution of mankind at large yet falls far short of it; their highest tread only on the border of that illumination. After all pure intellect carries us very high. But neither the scorner of pure intellectual ideation, nor its fanatic and devotee can attain to the knowledge in which not only the senses reflect or the mind thinks about things, but the ideal faculty directly knows them.