

A CRITIQUE OF S. RADHAKRISHNAN'S METHODOLOGY AS
A SCHOLAR OF RELIGION, USING EUCLIDEAN GEOMETRY
AS A HEURISTIC METALANGUAGE

by

Melodie Doherty

A thesis
presented to the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is situated in the general field concerning methodology of research in Religion. In particular its interest is with Hermeneutics and the problems of understanding and interpretation. With this in view it tangentially makes reference to the contemporary formal discussion of Metascience --science here taken as Wissenschaft-- and considers a possible role for metatheory in the academic study of religion.

The substance of the thesis is a critique of the methodology of the Religious Studies scholar, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975). It involves examining his thought twice, firstly, to evaluate his approach within the framework of Advaita Vedanta, and secondly, to evaluate its significance and contributions within the general framework of Religious Studies. To achieve the latter, Radhakrishnan's thought is translated into the language and logic of Euclidean geometry.

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PART I
BEGINNINGS

Chapter 1
PRELIMINARIES

Scope and Aim of the Thesis

This thesis is situated in the general field concerning methodology of research in Religion. In particular its interest is with Hermeneutics and the problems of understanding and interpretation. With this in view it tangentially makes reference to the contemporary formal discussion of Metascience --science here taken as Wissenschaft-- and considers a possible role for metatheory in the academic study of religion.

The substance of the thesis is a critique of the methodology of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975). Radhakrishnan distinguished himself by his pioneering efforts, along with other scholars,¹ to establish an academic study of religion. The parameters and perspective he provided for such a venture form the axis of the present study; his methodological technique of text-reinterpretation is the focus.

For Radhakrishnan "religion" deals with Reality, that immutable substratum of all experience. For this reason the study of religion must be at base an existential, and only then a formal academic enterprise. Studying religion is not a matter of analyzing doctrinal specimens in isolation or

¹ F.S.C. Northrop and so on.

making static comparisons. Religions reveal themselves, and most meaningfully, against the patent, pragmatic problems of everyday existence. Religion is "not a matter of dialect but a fact of experience", he wrote, and experience is never static. Each and every religion is a "living movement"; because it is such, "no one phase or form of it can lay claim to finality." The corollary is : "No historical religion can be regarded as truth absolute and changeless". Radhakrishnan emphasized that religions isomorphically change with conditions, and yet remain in touch with Truth and Reality itself. Rather than seeking for a synthetic encompassing world religion to be shared by all, he recognized the legitimacy of a multiplicity of world faiths.

In order to see religion as a human experience with its own horizon and to relate all of the world's religious traditions in a comprehensive picture, Radhakrishnan proposed, for Religious Studies, an aerial or a metaview: not the one-tradition-viewing-and-judging-another attitude, but "...a world perspective which will include the philosophical insights of all the world's great traditions." The goal is "...not a single philosophy which would annihilate differences of perspectives but [an understanding where] there must be agreement of basic perspectives and ultimate values."² The platform and universal categories for this metaview, Radhakrishnan claimed, are embodied most clearly in the Hindu scriptures and disclose themselves through reinterpretation. This scheme implies a demythologization of those texts in the light of contemporary issues and the contempo-

² A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy edited by S. Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), [hereafter Sbk IP] p.xxxi.

rary world situation.

"Reinterpretation" is the natural conclusion of his concept of a comprehensive world perspective; reflexively it is also the application of that concept. With this in mind, this critique takes an in-depth look at Radhakrishnan's treatment of the canonical text, the Bhagavadgītā, which, for practical purposes has been narrowed to looking at his analysis of Arjuna's situation. Radhakrishnan's interpretation of the Gītā is of particular interest because it epitomizes his program of "demythologizing" Hinduism; it is also the basis of his assertion that the demythologized, eternal "seed-ideas" of the Gītā present the principal hermeneutic, and indeed the transcendent metaview, with which to understand the essential unity of all religions.

The point of departure for the thesis lies in the observation that Radhakrishnan's writing and speeches (spanning sixty years and almost regardless of the audience) are permeated by a consciousness which frames the totality of his thinking. It is best illustrated in Religion in a Changing World:

Man today is suffering from a bewildering loss of community, a sense of alienation, an assimilation of the human being to a mass man, an organizational man in a technological society. Through a revolution in the conditions of life, man is becoming less and less human and therefore less and less free.³

Further, he writes:

Man is searching for his identity, for the meaning of life, for

³ Religion in a Changing World (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1953), [hereafter RCW] p.141.

the significance of the defeat he suffers by clinging to a reality that crumbles in his hands.

This is the "focal object" --to use Walter Capps' analytical terminology--⁴ of his thought: a world increasingly fragmented with each technology-based contraction, by conflicts of ideas and interests. This fragmentation appears on all levels: international, social and personal, political, economic, cultural and racial, and is especially obvious in the widening gulf between "traditional" and scientific/intellectual matrices of thought. Radhakrishnan writes in An Idealist View of Life, "The present unrest, it is clear, is caused as much by the moral ineffectiveness of religion, its failure to promote the best life, as by the insistent pressure of new knowledge on traditional beliefs."⁵

In fragmentation Radhakrishnan sees the disintegration of mankind, a spiritual decay which denies man's potential --"latent divinity" he calls it-- and hinders his evolution, thereby hindering the evolutionary unfolding of the universe.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan analyzes and resolves the problem thus: the ideas and ideals of economics, politics, science and so on occur on a secondary level, which is rooted in a primary level of thinking. Religion and philosophy, "native to the human mind, integral to human nature itself", rep-

⁴ Walter Capps, Ways of Understanding Religion (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1972), p.4.

⁵ An Idealist View of Life (London: Unwin Books, 1970), [hereafter IVL] p.49.

resent this primary level. "It is to philosophy...that man must turn in his hope to bring the peoples of the world together in mutual understanding and in the intellectual and spiritual harmony without which a unified world will be impossible....The future of civilization depends upon the return of spiritual awareness to the hearts and minds of men."⁶

It should be noted that Radhakrishnan sometimes uses the terms "philosophy" and "religion" synonymously. At other times he draws a distinction while insisting on their inextricable relation as "life and thought, the practical and theoretical" which together form "the eternal rhythm of the spirit". In this symbiotic relationship religion and each individual religious tradition represent "an actual experience of reality". The (accompanying) philosophy represents the apprehension of this experience, that is, its translation into language and formulated expressions. Philosophy becomes religion's "rational support".

This distinctness and mutuality of religion and philosophy is one of the critical hinges of Radhakrishnan's platform as a scholar; he acknowledges no inherent meaning in phenomena, but rather that "interest, meaning, purpose and value are qualifications given to events by the individual mind."⁷ A religious tradition, then, in Radhakrishnan's view, is a composite of insightful experience and its conceptualization and symbolization.

⁶ Sbk IP p.xxxi.

⁷ "My Search for Truth" in Religion in Transition edited by Vergilius T.A. Ferm (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), [hereafter "Search"] p.45.

Radhakrishnan further distinguishes between religion as identified with adherence to dogma, doctrines and observation of ceremonies, and religion as identified with "spiritual life". The former he says "actually fetter man's mind and impede the spiritual quest", but the latter functions to meet coherently the challenges of ever-new experiences and developments in thought. Radhakrishnan's basic feeling is that the future of mankind is linked to the future of religion, and the future of religion lies in its ability to keep pace with and reflect, as much as to determine, the changes in environment, awareness and issues. One of the most significant of these changes is that people of many and different faiths are now neighbours sharing a common destiny. Emphasizing that it is a hermeneutic task to prepare religion to be the appropriate cohesive and progressive force in the world, Radhakrishnan writes in Recovery of Faith: "We need a new and enlarged understanding of the religions. The future of religion is bound up not with the acceptance of one religion by all or a state of conflict or anarchy among religions or vague incongruous eclectism but the acceptance of a fundamental unity with a free differentiation."⁸ In East and West in Religion he writes: "We cannot understand our own religion unless it be in relation to one or more of the faiths. By an intellectual and respectful study of other religions, we gain a new understanding and appreciation of their traditions and our own. Anything which contributes to this growth of harmony of thought deserves to be encouraged." Continuing, he says: "Comparative religion is one of the chief instruments by which the historic consciousness of the spiritual growth of mankind can be

⁸ Recovery of Faith, Vol.IV of World Perspectives Series, edited by Ruth Nanda Ashen (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), [hereafter RF] p.199.

gained."⁹ However, to function as such, scholars must frame for Comparative Religion a coherent system of general ideas which could accommodate the interpretation of the different types of religious experience.¹⁰

Radhakrishnan advances what he believes is this comprehensive, coherent (meta)system, in the form of a demythologized Hinduism (actually a reinterpreted Advaita Vedānta). His convictions and his recommendations are both rooted in a special treatment of the prasthāna traya: the Upaniṣads, Brahma Sūtra, and Bhagavadgītā --the last being regarded as the fulcrum of all wisdom.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's uniqueness of approach does not lie in his "reinterpreting" as such, for these scriptures have been reinterpreted many ways within the Vedāntic tradition.¹¹ The distinction lies in Radhakrishnan's departure from a totally Hindu frame of understanding. In addition to classical Sanskrit terminology he weaves concepts and categories from Western philosophical and religious traditions into his text commentaries. His motive is to reveal the universality and contemporary relevance of the text, and its appropriateness as THE hermeneutical tool for Religious Studies.

⁹ East and West in Religion (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1967), [hereafter EW] p.39.

¹⁰ Cf. "Fragments of a Confession" in The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan edited by Paul Arthur Schilp (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1952), [hereafter "Fragments"] p.27.

¹¹ Illustrated in the various teachings of Śankara, Rāmānuja, Madhva and other Vedāntins.

The main body of this essay proceeds by first tracing out the underlying metaphysic on which Radhakrishnan bases and supports his assertions. Then it focuses on his scheme of demythologization for a meta-religious interpretative frame, and an illustration of that scheme in his reinterpretation of the Bhagavadgītā. Finally it examines the coherence of Radhakrishnan's thought by applying, as a heuristic device, his concept of a metaview to his own method and theory. It concludes with a discussion of his contribution to the enterprise of Religious Studies.

The resources for this critique are sixty years of Radhakrishnan's writings and speeches. In selectively drawing on his thought, a cue has been taken from Radhakrishnan himself: "In all philosophical interpretation the right method is to interpret thinkers at their best, in the light of what they say in their clearest insight."¹²

Biographical Sketch of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was born into a Hindu Brahmin middle-class family on September 5, 1888, near Madras. This area of South India has always been noted for its climate of orthodoxy and its traditionalism. It is significant, therefore, that at eight years of age, in an environment pervaded with Vedic rituals and Vedāntic philosophy, Radhakrishnan began his education in a Lutheran missionary school and continued his education in Christian institutes, to graduate in 1908 with a degree in Western Philos-

¹² Ibid. p.13.

ophy from Madras Christian College.¹³

During his early education his contact with the Christian missionaries was more than superficial. He writes that they freed him from the prejudices of the Indian tradition and restored for him "the primordial situation in which all philosophy is born."¹⁴ However they themselves were not seekers of truth. Radhakrishnan relates the sting of his missionary-teachers' reproaches and defamation of Hinduism:

The criticisms levelled against the Hindu religion were of a twofold character. It is intellectually incoherent and ethically unsound. The theoretical foundations as well as the practical fruits of the religion were challenged. I remember the cold sense of reality, the depressing feeling of defeat that crept over me, as a causal relation between the anaemic Hindu religion and our political failure forced itself onto my mind during those years....How can we make it [Hinduism] somewhat more relevant to the intellectual and social environment of our time? Such were the questions that roused my interest.¹⁵

Consequently he launched himself into a serious and in-depth study of Eastern Religions and Philosophy, including a study of Sanskrit. Focussing on Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina systems of thought, Radhakrishnan eventually took up his own philosophical position within the Vedāntic tradition, specifically as an Advaita Vedāntin. His studies in philosophy continued into his public and professional life.

¹³ His M.A. Thesis is entitled: "The Ethics of Vedānta and Its Metaphysical Presuppositions" (Published by The Guardian Press in 1908).

¹⁴ "Fragments" p.9.

¹⁵ "The Spirit in Man," in Contemporary Indian Philosophers, Edited by S.Radhakrishnan and J.H.Muirhead (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), [hereafter CIP] pp.475-476.

Radhakrishnan formally began his career in 1909, and for the next twenty-six years taught philosophy in various Indian universities. He was twice Vice-Chancellor: of Andhra University in 1931 and Benares University in 1942. Overlapping this period he held the appointment of Spalding Professor of Eastern Religion and Ethics at Oxford, being the first Indian to be appointed to the chair; it was at this time that he became active in the then-developing discipline of Comparative Religion.¹⁶ From 1931-39 Radhakrishnan was a member of the Internal Committee on Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations, and from 1946-50 head of the Indian Delegation to UNESCO, during which time he became a member of UNESCO's Executive board. He was vice-chairman of UNESCO in 1948, chairman in 1949, and became conference President in 1952.

His career in education merged with a political career. Radhakrishnan's involvement extended from being India's Ambassador to the USSR from 1949-52, to two terms as India's Vice-President --the first term spanned 1952-56, the second, 1957-62-- and then her President from 1962-66. He died in 1975 in Madras. At the University of Madras there is now the Dr. S. Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy.¹⁷

¹⁶ Cf. Eric J. Sharpe, Comparative Religion: A History (London: Gerald Duckworth and Company Ltd., 1975), [hereafter Comparative Religion] for an excellent review of the structural development of the academic study of religion and the key personalities who engineered and steered the discipline.

¹⁷ This is the post-graduate Philosophy Department, renamed in Radhakrishnan's honour; Radhakrishnan had served as a professor in the Philosophy Department of Presidency College from 1916 to 1917, which was incorporated along with other Colleges as the University of Madras. The Institute publishes the journal Indian Philosophical Annual. Volume 12 (1977-78) is entitled "Special Number on Radhakrishnan", being the proceedings of the nineteenth All-India Seminar held in Septem-

During his lifetime Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan wrote prolifically. Following are some of his better known publications.

The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy (1920)

Indian Philosophy Volume I (1923), Volume II (1927)

The Hindu View of Life (1929)

An Idealist View of Life (1929)

Kalki - or the Future of Civilization (1929)

East and West in Religion (1933)

Eastern Religions and Western Thought (1939)

Education, Politics and War (1944)

Religion and Society (1947)

Recovery of Faith (1955)

Religion in a Changing World (1967)

The Present Crisis of Faith (1970)

Radhakrishnan also made translations and wrote commentaries on Indian classical literature. Foremost are his treatments of the Vedāntic prasthāna traya, published as: The Bhagavadgītā (1948), The Principal Upaniṣads (1953) and The Brahma Sūtra (1960), and the Buddhist text Dhammapada (1950).

The thrust and emphasis of his thought are not obvious in the titles of his books, but a certain progression materializes, reflecting the influences of historical events and personal involvements. The actual content

ber, 1977 at the University. The theme of the Seminar was "The Philosophy of Radhakrishnan".

of the texts, on the other hand, show an appreciation and assimilation of the Classical Greek and principal European thinkers, particularly Plato, Hegel, Bergson, Kierkegaard and Bradley. It also reveals a reverence for the legacy of Hinduism, particularly the contributions made by Śankara and more contemporaneously Tagore and Gandhi.

Radhakrishnan himself is a striking illustration of the Indian Renaissance born of "East" and "West" juxtaposing themselves. His strategy to reconcile the apparent antinomy was to draw parallels between Eastern and Western philosophers wherever possible and to leave differences incidental. This is most clearly seen in his study of the Bhagavadgītā, which is itself of all his works, the most powerful statement of Radhakrishnan's general frame of mind. The Gītā played a significant role in the development and direction of Radhakrishnan's life, just as it had for Gandhi, Tilak, Tagore and Aurobindo Ghose. All five individuals shared a common period in India's history and had a common sense of personal commitment not only to the political liberation of India, but also to the celebration of the depth and richness of the Hindu culture. Though in the end each developed quite a different statement of how this was to be achieved, each was profoundly moved by the Bhagavadgītā, using it as reference and illustration.¹⁸

¹⁸ In comparing Radhakrishnan to other studies of the Gītā, he could have as easily been grouped under different rubrics with others, ancient or modern, who regarded the text with such intense faith. The impact of the Bhagavadgītā on various bhāsyakāra's, (Radhakrishnan included) is nicely drawn out in Ramesh S. Betai, The Gita and Gandhiji (Ahmedabad: Gujarat Vidyapith, 1970).

Besides the acclaim he inspired as an Indian addressing Indians, Radhakrishnan also was internationally recognized as an academic philosopher. He upheld a deep conviction of his role and duty to illuminate and aid the direction of not only Indian, but human praxis and that in the concrete multi-dimensional context of the contemporary world. The issue which he addressed in most of his writing, and in particular in the Gita commentary, was the immediate fact of a geographically unified but psychologically fragmented globe --fragmented at root by religions and ideologies.

Fellow scholars from the early twentieth century also had tackled this problem. Religion, once "objectified", had been clinically dissected, analyzed and reassembled, the "data" being incorporated under historical, mythological, phenomenological and other rubrics. The most general conclusion regarding religion, and by implication the world situation, was that there existed a fundamental East-West gap in thinking.¹⁹ Attempts to contend with the problems of religious co-existence took various forms. The prominent, positive image of many rivers all flowing to the sea was appropriate and open, allowing a myriad of interpretations as to what the detailed relationship between the "rivers" might be. Comparative Religion as a distinct disciplined approach waxed during this period, one moment inextricably defined by the methods and the intrinsic problems of Phenomenology, and the next moment dominated by unarticulated Hermeneutics.

¹⁹ Two major works on this theme are: Hajime Nakamura, Ways of Thinking of Eastern People (Honolulu: An East-West Center Book, The University Press, 1964 [Nakamura began this study in 1947]), and F.S.C. Northrop, The Meeting of East and West (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1964). Both these scholars are recognized as architects of East-West dialogue.

Radhakrishnan approached religion in the vein of Comparative Studies from a fresh direction. His impulse was to review religion by consciously looking at it through the spectacles of his own human experience. His aim was to uncover scientifically an understanding of religion which did justice to the integrity of religion manifest as religious traditions --with roots and central doctrines, each unique, vital, dynamic-- and to recover the singular integrity of mankind in a world community. In Eric Sharpe's words, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was one of those who "...unhesitatingly identified the concerns of comparative religion with the concerns of world peace, international harmony and universal brotherhood...".²⁰

Comparative Religion was already a growing field, and the idea of a scientific study of religion was in the air at the time Radhakrishnan wrote. His personal contribution, however, was to emphasize the value and validity of consciously involving one's personality in the study of religion, with the recognition that one is a Muslim, Christian, Jain --but above all a person of spiritual faith, interest and intelligence who is seeking truth. He championed the religiosity of study itself, and emphasized inter-faith dialogue.²¹

²⁰ Sharpe, Comparative Religion p.258.

²¹ Primary sources used for this biographical sketch were Radhakrishnan's essays: "My Search for Truth," in Religion in Transition edited by Vergilius Ferm (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), "Fragments of a Confession," in The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan edited by Paul Arthur Schilp (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1952) and "The Spirit in Man," in Contemporary Indian Philosophers edited by S. Radhakrishnan and J.H. Muirhead (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966).

PART II

RADHAKRISHNAN'S THEORY

Today, our trouble is not so much with the infallibility of the Pope or the inerrancy of the Bible, not even with whether Christ or Krishna is God or whether there is a revelation. All these problems have changed their meaning and are dependent on the one and only problem, whether there is or is not behind the phenomena of nature and the drama of history an unseen spiritual power, whether the universe is meaningful or meaningless, whether it is God or chance.²²

²² "The Spirit in Man," in CIP p.483.

Chapter 2

RELIGION AS PERCEPTION OF REALITY

A scholar's methodology is based on his or her theoretical understanding of the subject, and theories are especially personal and subtle in the field of Religious Studies. It is thus important to unfold Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's understanding of religion as a prelude to formally examining his method. Religion, in this context, denotes what it means to be religious, to exist within a religious tradition, and significantly, how to come to creative terms with the coexistence of many world faiths.

Radhakrishnan is clear in stating his ground: the coherence of religion and religious traditions is best understood when seen in the light of the Hindu Advaita Vedānta darśana. The frame for understanding religion, he says, is indicated in the first four sutras, catuḥ sūtrī, of the Vedānta Sūtra:

Athāto Brahmajijñāsā 1.1.1.

Janmādysya yataḥ 1.1.2.

Śāstra yonitvāt 1.1.3.

Tat tu samanvayāt 1.1.4.

These focus on:

"(i.) The need for the knowledge of Ultimate Reality

"(ii.) A rational approach to it

"(iii.) The experience of Reality

"(iv.) Reconciliation of seemingly conflicting formulations of the nature of Ultimate Reality."²³

The first three sūtras Radhakrishnan takes as the pillars for the majority of his writings on religion. The fourth directs him to define a progressive avenue for Religious Studies, the discipline. It is immediately evident in his treatment of the catuḥ sūtrī that Radhakrishnan's reinterpretation of the Sanskrit is a radical departure from traditional Vedāntic treatments of the text.²⁴

For the inquiry into the nature of religion, Radhakrishnan's main textbook was the world around him. In training his attention upon religion in its contemporary matrix rather than in its past forms, he felt there would be no lack of generality in his observations and statements. In fact, religion could adequately testify to itself only insofar as it was alive and part of himself and his fellow creatures. Thus most of Radhakrishnan's writings speak in terms of this century and of his first-hand experience.

²³ The Present Crisis of Faith (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks [a division of Vision Books Pvt. Ltd.], 1970), [hereafter PCE] p.29. Cf. "The Indian Approach to the Religious Problem," in The Indian Mind: Essentials of Indian Philosophy and Culture edited by Charles Moore (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1967) p.173-182.

²⁴ See The Brahma Sūtra : The Philosophy of Spiritual Life Translated with an Introduction and Notes by S. Radhakrishnan (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1960), [hereafter Br Su] pp.227-251. Cf. the bhāṣyas of Śankara, Rāmānuja, Madhva and so on.

The Need for Knowledge of Ultimate Reality (Brahmajijñāsā) : context for the inquiry.

The first sūtra, for Radhakrishnan, imports the context for an inquiry into religion, and various articulations of this "need" appear in his writings. Fundamentally they all express "a profound dissatisfaction with the existing state of humanity" and a concern about "an active preparation for a new life".²⁵ No matter which "hat" he is wearing as a public figure, Radhakrishnan speaks with intensity and insistence about the critical state of human affairs. In An Idealist View of Life (1932) he observes: "Never was man's need to come to an understanding with life more urgent...We have no certain aims and no definite goals...[and we find ourselves] seeking for the more precious meaning of life, its profound reality...".²⁶ A few years later in the first year of World War II, 1939, he writes: "In the souls of men today there are clashing tides of colour and race, nation and religion...that divide mankind into hostile groups. Conflicts in human affairs are due to the divisions in the human soul...[causing a] moral collapse...."²⁷ His Recovery of Faith, published in 1955, restates man's twentieth century dilemma, and by implication, his need, in this way: "The world is undergoing changes so vast that they are hardly comparable to the changes which occurred in the past...We have grown in knowledge and intelligence but not in wisdom and virtue. For lack of the latter, things are interlocked in perpetual strife...the drift

²⁵ "The Spirit in Man," in CIP p.504.

²⁶ IVL p.64.

²⁷ Eastern Religions and Western Thought (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), [hereafter ERWT] pp.2-3.

from religious belief has gone much too far..."²⁸

The constantly changing conditions and circumstances of modernity, Radhakrishnan charges, necessarily challenge man to synchronistically renew his "sense of things", to recast his considerations, and reframe his vision of what life is about. In fact, this reorientation is apparent in the rise to prominence of Humanism, Communism, Nationalism, Pragmatism and so on. These self-proclaimed harbingers of a better future boldly offer their conceptions of life and meaning as alternatives to those of traditional religions which they regard as materially impotent. Radhakrishnan reviews these new model-systems of thought and concludes from their praxis: "The alternatives to religion we have considered do not remove our anxieties, as they stifle the fears and impart courage by making us members of a collective whole, a political party or a confessional church....The distressing feature of our age [he writes this in 1955] is not its atheism but its belief, the strange forms of superstition which it is willing to adopt....The new cults are built on something which is more fundamental than the desire of the truth. It is the desire for faith."²⁹ Because the new ideologies are inherently provincial, he warrants, they can only "breed new illusions" which in turn will lead to new catastrophes, and "new waves of cynical world weariness".

The timeless, fundamental intent of all people, Radhakrishnan says, is

²⁸ Recovery of Faith (N.Y.: Greenwood Press, 1968), [hereafter RF] p.3.

²⁹ RF p.73. Cf. Religion and Society (London: George Allen and Unwin, second edition, 1959), [hereafter RS] p.16.

spiritual realization. This has an individual component which entails an integration of one's personality, anubhāva, and a collective component which involves individual achievements being directed toward the welfare of the world, lokasāṅgraha.³⁰ At present, however, mankind suffers as a mass of fragmented beings in a convulsively fragmented world. In his own words, "Everywhere round about us we hear the sound of things breaking, of changes in the social, in the political and economic institutions, in the dominant beliefs and ideas, in the fundamental categories of the human mind...[marking]...a crisis that goes to the very roots of our civilization."³¹

History has a teleological importance for Radhakrishnan. It is the medium for the process of evolution.³² He defines evolution as being the evolution of consciousness or Spirit, which articulates itself in more refined and subtle forms in the cosmos, that is, "...from the inorganic to the organic...to the sentient to the rational...". The twentieth century is a milestone in the process, where world civilization, as "rational man", is in transition to the perfection of consciousness (the pinnacle of evolution) in the "spiritual man" or "God-man". It is a period, however, currently marked by incongruities, which are manifest as a multiplicity of human perspectives determining different directions. Radhakrishnan says it is in the consciousness of the next and final stage that man will be able

³⁰ With the psychological unification of the world, normal existence, sam-sāra, is transformed into Brahmaloka, the Kingdom of God. See RF p.88. Also see "My Search for Truth," p.21.

³¹ RS pp.10-11.

³² Cf. "My Search for Truth" pp.39ff.

to understand and interpret these imperfections, but must "struggle to and evolve to this higher stage."³³

The task or challenge for "rational man" --more accurately, all rational individuals-- is to establish an attitude and orientation coincident with spiritual progression. This necessitates a knowledge of Ultimate Reality in its concrete guise as the actual world and the human condition, wherein everything has its place and significance, and with which one can act appropriately. "Religion", according to Radhakrishnan, is both the critical, encompassing vision of reality, Brahmavidyā, and the human faith which prepares for it. As the latter, religion has developed itself as a historical, traditional explanation of the components and meaning of existence in order to provide the matrix for true human integrity.

In the given context, Radhakrishnan emphasizes that a religious tradition must give a "...view that will make sense of life and give to it an intelligent and winning goal."³⁴ Against this criterion he rejects all the world's existing "organized" religions, which he calls "religions without religion". In Religion and Society he writes: "They seem to have exhausted their spiritual power and become dead shells relying on a letter they cannot revivify. They cover their deadness by insistence on the observance of forms and ceremonies, to which habit and usage give more value than they deserve....On the whole they justify the present chaotic condi-

³³ Br Su p.103.

³⁴ RF p.73.

tions, instead of inspiring us with the zeal for changing them."³⁵ The organized religions, Radhakrishnan says, have become removed from their source and life-blood. They no longer speak from the anubhava, "direct experience, [and] active participation in the eternal truth".³⁶

It is useful to pause here to look more closely at how Radhakrishnan relates religion to religions. He distinguishes and connects the two in this way: an actual experience of insight into reality --which defines religion-- is automatically cast or framed into words and ideas, that is, verified in another medium. In the process the experience is given meaning. The identity of "a" religion, its canonical backbone and its continuity, is determined by such specific records of religious experience.³⁷ Religious traditions contradistinguish themselves not in the process, but in the particularized content of the experiences laid down and transmitted; they cohere according to different descriptions of reality. These descriptions, though derived from an original vision, pratyakṣa, are technically "philosophical conceptions" and owe their variety and variations to the mental mechanics involved in conceptualization. (Section Three of this chapter will focus on this complex of mental pattern-making.)

Radhakrishnan's position is that religious traditions each present a peculiar map or systematization of the reality which is. And this defining

³⁵ RS p.50.

³⁶ RF p.151.

³⁷ The canons of each religion document these spiritual experiences. As testimonies, they authorize the flow of the tradition.

map supplies both the frame and the vocabulary, the doctrine or belief, which make a religion recognizably distinct. He maintains that a religious tradition is a conditioned patterning of "religion" in its essential form; its identity lies in its text, and its value is as a vehicle which offers "...supports for a task that is strictly personal."

Radhakrishnan does not downplay or denigrate religious traditions as such, but says that they must constantly legitimize themselves. In Recovery of Faith he writes: "If [a] religion is not dynamic and pervasive, if it does not penetrate every form of human life and influence every type of human activity it is only a veneer and not a reality."³⁸ There is a necessity for "the data of faith" to have an "affinity with the natural knowledge which man has of himself and the world."³⁹

Right from his earliest writings on religion and up to his final publication, The Present Crisis of Faith in 1970, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan repeats that although religion is in fact the greatest force for the disciplining of man's nature, unfortunately for the present it has "lost its value and validity." Why? Because religion (embodied in the many religions) has come to offer only crystallized "patterns of the past" to its contemporary adherents; it is now inefficient, practically speaking, to address the problems and issues raised by the new context, that is, different conditions, language, education, in short, different fundamental

³⁸ RF p.22.

³⁹ "The Present Crisis of Faith," Occasional Speeches and Writings, 4 volumes, (Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, n.d.), [hereafter OSWr] Third Series, p.218. Cf. PCF p.18.

categories of the human mind. Radhakrishnan outlines the "death" of a religious tradition in the following way. Since the expressions of religious experience (refined as a set of beliefs) are as a rule in the vernacular of the cultural and historic conditions in which they occur, naturally the same expressions become obsolete as the latter change. The language of beliefs, insofar as they identify the way and order of things, must therefore be constantly refreshed and readjusted. If undue importance is given to any expression, that is if the (static) form becomes confused with the (dynamic) reality it symbolizes, religion becomes calcified and dogmatic. A religion which is a mere composite of dogma is thus a burden to the individual and to society, and cannot be the liberating force it should be.

Radhakrishnan argues that once the content of a religion --embodied in its canonical writings-- is no longer concordant with reality as the individual finds it, it is no longer pertinent to the problems of the age. Inevitably faith --that special spiritual link with truth-- as it is defined by the religion, will diminish.⁴⁰ The obvious challenge, nay, obligation for contemporary religion is to bridge the apparent gap between the ideas of the ancient traditions and the emerging science/technology-based ethos; of equal importance is establishing a working inter-religion interface; developing coherence in especially these areas is an obvious need of the times.

The present world crisis in all arenas is at root a "present crisis of

⁴⁰ Cf. RF p.36.

faith". Radhakrishnan's The Present Crisis of Faith and Recovery of Faith are totally dedicated to this issue. In the latter he writes: "We conceal from ourselves the true nature of what we do by euphemisms. If we strip away all pretence and are honest with ourselves, we will know that we are fast losing faith in decency. A deep qualitative change for the worse is taking place in the public mind....our conscience is anaesthetised by dogmas."⁴¹ His prescription: "Theory, speculation, dogma, [must] change from time to time as the facts become better understood. Their value is acquired from their adequacy to experience. When forms dissolve and the interpretations are doubted, it is a call to get back to the experience itself and reformulate its content in more suitable terms."⁴²

The real need today is to recover a sense of meaning, direction and identity. Radhakrishnan casts the answer to man's predicament not only in terms of religion, but also in terms of the study of religion, which for him is the study of religious texts. The latter is equally expressive of a commitment to what is real and true.

Radhakrishnan speaks of a reorientation of mankind consequent in a recovery of faith. This recovery of faith in turn must necessarily stem from a fresh, personal insight into, and understanding of, Ultimate Reality, the "a priori from which all living faith starts." Notably faith is "reasoned faith" in Radhakrishnan's scheme. In his own words: "Religious faith cannot take the place of thinking but has to be founded on it. Only

⁴¹ RF pp.28-29.

⁴² IVL p.71 (underscoring mine). Cf. RCW pp.8-9. Cf. also RF p.8.

through thinking is one able to retain one's faith in religion. Faith has to be sustained in inquiry."⁴³ "Faith" is faith that a particular text is authoritative. The obligation is to rethink what in religious writings is valuable, and how.

A Rational Approach (Anumāna) : the means.

Radhakrishnan admits two orders of "thinking" or "reasoning". One is "discursive reasoning" for which he uses the synonyms "intellection", "logical analysis", manana, and pariprasāna. The other is "reflection" for which he uses the synonym "contemplation". Together these two orders are contradistinguished from the term "intuition" which represents direct spiritual perception.

Radhakrishnan relates thinking/reasoning to intuition as two modes of consciousness or awareness. The respective results of intellectual thinking and of intuition are two types of knowledge, namely, conceptual understanding and insight.⁴⁴ These pairs are vitally united in the human mind. He writes: "Intuition is not independent but emphatically dependent upon thought, and is imminent in the very nature of our thinking. It is dynamically continuous with thought and pierces through the conceptual context of knowledge to the living reality under it." Where intuition is "higher than the discursive process from which it issues and on which it super-

⁴³ RCW p.72.

⁴⁴ Cf. IVL pp.114-115.

venes",⁴⁵ intellect is "an indispensable aid to support and clarify"⁴⁶ it.

In S. Radhakrishnan's epistemology, intuition alone is, in principle, sufficient for a complete perception of reality. In An Idealist View of Life in the chapter entitled "Intellect and Intuition" he states: "...what we normally notice through the senses or infer through the intellect can also be known by intuition. We can see objects without the medium of the senses and discern relations spontaneously without building them up laboriously....We can discern every kind of reality directly."⁴⁷ Continuing, he writes: "If all our knowledge were of an intuitive character, if reality bore immediate witness to itself, there would be no need for logical tests [to ascertain the certainty of knowledge]. The unity between the knower and the known would be perfect and our knowledge complete."⁴⁸ But the fact is, reality does not bear immediate witness to itself. It is obscured by the "trembling veil of phenomena",⁴⁹ and piercing insights into the nature of reality, though they occur, are "transitory and intermittent".⁵⁰

So, according to Radhakrishnan, one must for the most part advance one's

⁴⁵ "The Spirit in Man," in CIP, p.486.

⁴⁶ "Reply to Critics," p.794.

⁴⁷ IVL p.112.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p.114. See also p.108 on aparokṣa, non-sensuous, immediate knowledge.

⁴⁹ This "veil" Radhakrishnan names as māyā. Cf. RCW p.89.

⁵⁰ IVL p.74. In addition Radhakrishnan says one must be qualified for that special experience of insight. Cf. RCW pp.104 and 106. Also Br Su p.234.

inquiry by focussing on reality as it appears, and as it is existentially experienced. What must be dealt with, is the "empirical data of the world and of the human self",⁵¹ and in dealing with it rationally and systematically, one prepares oneself for an experience of the ontological foundation on which it is based. At this point it is necessary to have some guidance, something which will help orient the seeker. Religious scriptures become indispensable as maps and patterns for discovery.

This is one of the striking features of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's thought, viz., that a rational approach can indeed provide the frame for an authentic encounter with ultimate reality itself. He writes: "While the truths intuition grasps are self-evident, training, or what Descartes calls method, is necessary to direct our mental vision to the right objects so that our mind can "behold" the objects. Insofar as our minds are not creative of reality but only receptive of it, we must get into contact with reality, outward by perception, inward by intuition, and by means of intellect interpret and understand it."⁵²

Radhakrishnan recalls many thinkers, ancient and modern, and from many cultures, whom he sees supporting a rational approach; but it is the Brahma Sūtra, specifically sūtra 1:1:2 "janmādyā asya yataḥ" which he cites as proof for the correctness of his approach. In his Brahma Sūtra commentary he maintains that this sūtra implies that there is a place for

⁵¹ RF p.103.

⁵² "The Spirit in Man" p.485. A few pages later he repeats "Intuition requires cultivation quite as much as the powers of observation and thought." (p. 487.)

a rational inquiry into "the source from which the world proceeds by which it is maintained and ended" --a source which is, paradoxically, beyond the realm of reason. He writes: "In this sūtra we exclude the appeal to religious experience [direct insight] and take into account facts which are firmly established and universally acknowledged. The world tells its own story and offers its own suggestions."⁵³ That is to say, the world, with its discernable laws, is a testimony of God's presence.

Thus reasoning becomes the link between the descriptions in scriptures and knowledge gleaned from all other empirical sources. The following few quotations from Radhakrishnan's various writings illustrate his application of a rational approach to linking authority and observation:

When we consider the empirical data of the world and of the human self, we are led to the idea of a Supreme who is Pure Being and Free Activity, who dwells in the inmost self of man.⁵⁴

From a study of the universe with its ordered growth and plan which cannot be conceived by the mind, we infer the reality of an omniscient and omnipotent cause.⁵⁵

We cannot jump out of space or time, and we cannot account for space-time structure. The rationality of the universe suggests that the creative power is mind or spirit.⁵⁶

We cannot account for this cosmic process if we do not assume the Divine Reality which sustains and inspires the process. Even as we admit a mystery behind the cosmic process, we recognize a mystery behind the flux of mental states.⁵⁷

⁵³ Br Su p.238.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.103.

⁵⁵ Br Su p.236.

⁵⁶ IVL p.263.

⁵⁷ PCF p.33.

It is the presence of the Infinite that makes us dissatisfied with the finite.⁵⁸

Radhakrishnan sees the entire cosmos not as ultimate, but as temporal being/reality, with limits to its existence.⁵⁹ He further qualifies this by saying that the world is vivarta, or the appearance of the Absolute.⁶⁰ "The eternal is manifest in the temporal and the latter is the pathway to the former. Truth in the finite aspect leads us to the infinite truth"⁶¹ --and there are many ways of viewing the finite.

Religion, like philosophy, is an attempt to span human experience as a whole, as it relates to "...the world of objects...of nature...of individual subjects, their thoughts and feelings, desires and decisions...[and] values...."⁶² Reasoning's part is not so much to prove as to determine the ontological foundation of experience, which gives cogency to all perspectives.⁶³ Radhakrishnan believes implicitly in the "...power of the human

⁵⁸ PCF p.31.

⁵⁹ In The Bhagavadgītā as a commentary to IX.5 he says: "...the world does not possess its specific existence in itself. It has therefore only limited and not absolute being....The cosmic process is not a complete manifestation of the Absolute...though this world is a living manifestation of God." (pp.239-240).

⁶⁰ Cf. "Reply to Critics" p.800. This aligns him with the Vivaraṇa school of Advaita Vedānta, rather than the Bhamātī school which asserts the world to be pariṇāma, a transformation of the Absolute. The former uses the allusion of abalone appearing as silver, the latter refers to the relationship of a spark to fire.

⁶¹ HVL p.57. Further on this, "The unity is the truth and multiplicity is an expression of it and so is a lower truth but not an illusion." Bg (VII.5) p.214.

⁶² RF p.77.

⁶³ Cf. ibid. p.82.

mind to lead us to all truth."⁶⁴ Because it is a mode of consciousness, discursive reasoning is a legitimate way of approaching the real,⁶⁵ and its being a "mode of consciousness" tacitly indicates that what we know as the intellect, is not only an instrument of knowing the Ultimate, but, in fact, it is essentially reality itself, for consciousness is reality! But due to its nature, the role of the intellect is fixed as that of preparing one for the actual experience itself.⁶⁶

Radhakrishnan constantly reiterates that reason and intuition ideally work hand-in-hand --one always within the other or as a part of the other. At one point in Eastern Religion and Western Thought he comments: "The Divine Reality is determined by a number of intellectual co-ordinates; and their justification is in those rare moments when the veil is lifted and we catch a glimpse of the Absolute."⁶⁷ Sympathetically we verify the glimpse, articulate it in symbol, give it meaning. The result is "Natural Theology".

One of the most important points in Radhakrishnan's thought is that (practically speaking) the personal God to whom the worshipper relates is the very Absolute in the world context. It must be remembered, however, that the concept of God is not, ultimately, God.⁶⁸ Radhakrishnan unravels the

⁶⁴ "The Spirit in Man" p.484. Cf. RC p.157: "The underlying structure of reality is accessible to reason because it is the product of reason."

⁶⁵ Cf. IVL p.105. Cf. also Br Su p.105.

⁶⁶ Cf. "Reply to Critics" pp.794-795.

⁶⁷ ERWT p.318.

seeming paradox by saying that all "knowledge" within the world context falls short of completeness, for as long as there is a distinction between the perceiver and what is perceived, "...knowledge of a thing and its being" remains distinct.⁶⁹ It is only in the moment of the intuitive glimpse, or religious insight, that the Absolute, reality, is known in its purity and ultimate nature.⁷⁰

This section has focused upon the status Radhakrishnan accords a rational inquiry into Ultimate Reality, having established the context of need. He writes that a rational approach must necessarily concern itself with the apparent --the world of phenomena and personalities-- and that the intellect as an operative tool for understanding is fused with intuition. As for the mechanics of discovery, from the multiplicity of forms, reason envisions --in various languages-- the reality behind and beyond. Finally, Radhakrishnan emphasizes that although our logical knowledge can give us an approximation to the "fact" of ultimate reality, it does not afford a direct grasp of it, samyajjñāna, and articulation in thought of the nature of anything is quite different from experience of it.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Cf. "The Spirit in Man" p.498.

⁶⁹ Cf. IVL p.114.

⁷⁰ Cf. PCF p.35; also IP Vol 1 pp.38-39.

⁷¹ Cf. RF p.103.

The Experience of Reality (Pratyakṣa/Aparokṣānubhūti) : knowledge by acquaintance.

Spiritual apprehension insists on a participation of the knowing subject in the spiritual reality, a touching (haptus) and tasting (gustus) of the object of knowledge. We see, feel and taste the truth. This is the immediate awareness of Being itself. It is experience by participation, by a renewal of the self....The intimations of this type of experience are to be found...in the realms of metaphysics and religion [and] also in art and communion with nature...we are lifted out of detailed contact with the world of change and succession into an experience of unity and permanence.⁷²

The experience of reality, Radhakrishnan says, is the universal element which embraces all the religions as religion. For the most part he uses the vocabulary of perception to describe the encounter: "What we aim at is not thinking but seeing."⁷³ This vision, darśana, --which signifies vidyā, pratyakṣa,-- is the correlate of salvation, mokṣa.⁷⁴ Of "perception", Radhakrishnan speaks in terms of "consciousness"; as he admits, in his ontological understanding, he basically follows Śankara and the Advaita Vedāntic tradition. It is not within the scope of this thesis to fully treat Radhakrishnan's description of the "field" or content of the experience, although Section 5.1 below includes its major and structural elements.

Radhakrishnan deals most fully with the characteristics, the affirmations,

⁷² RF pp.105-106.

⁷³ Br Su p.108.

⁷⁴ See JVL p.108. A preception and realization of the nature of reality in the objective world is, reflectively, insight into the nature of one's self.

and the expressions of the religious experience, in An Idealist View of Life and in Religion in a Changing World.⁷⁵ He admits that the nature of the experience can only be related in terms of impressions, and observes: "It is a type of experience which is not clearly differentiated into a subject-object state, an integral, undivided consciousness in which not merely this or that side of man's nature but his whole being seems to find itself. It is a condition of consciousness in which feelings are fused, ideas melt into one another, boundaries broken and ordinary distinctions transcended. Past and present fade away in a sense of timeless being. Consciousness and being are not there different from each other. All being is consciousness and all consciousness being. Thought and reality coalesce and a creative merging of subject and object results....the distinction of the knower and the known disappears."⁷⁶

Radhakrishnan draws a line between the spiritual awareness which defines religiosity and other cognitional activities. The latter also give the individual an understanding of facts and phenomena but in a limited and fragmented way.⁷⁷ The "intuitive" --as Radhakrishnan calls it-- or spiritual perception of reality, corresponds to a special "mode" of consciousness.⁷⁸ "...an independent functioning of the human mind...possessing an autonomous character...something inward...which unifies all values and or-

⁷⁵ See IVL pp.72-77, RCW pp.104-106.

⁷⁶ IVL p.72. Cf. Br Su p.244.

⁷⁷ Cf. IVL p.69. Logical, moral, intellectual and aesthetic activities each can give us indirect approximations of the fact of reality, of truth, but not a grasp of it in its wholeness.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p.99.

ganizes all experiences."⁷⁹ The nature of the intuitive experience is an apprehension of the real, a non-discursive, immediate cognition: aparokṣānubhūti lokottarajñāna or pratyakṣa. Herein the perceiver enters into union and communion with the perceived. It is the response of the whole man, the whole personality with its totality of faculties and energies, as the integrated self, to reality as a whole. "Sāmyagdarśana or integral insight" is the phrase Radhakrishnan uses to express the unification of the mind's various activities in "intuition".⁸⁰

The belief that ultimate reality can be immediately apprehended in its unity is a featured proposition of Eastern and Western religions alike, Radhakrishnan emphasizes. His rationale for the existence of this common assertion is that the objects of intuition are recognized, rather than created by the perceiver: both man and the world of experience are expressions of the real. The implication is, that religion may be understood as the real perceiving itself, or as the real being conscious and conscious of itself. Intuition is then its own affirmation.⁸¹ Intuition is "...self-established (svatassiddha) self-evidencing (svasāmvedya) self-luminous (svayam-prakāśa)...it knows and is".⁸²

The language in which the fullest encounter with reality or truth is de-

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.69.

⁸⁰ Cf. "The Spirit in Man" p.487.

⁸¹ There is no room, in this case, for contradiction or sublation. See IVL p.73 and HVL p.13.

⁸² IVL p.73. Cf. RCW p.101 and "Reply to Critics" p.792.

scribed is nebulous, and necessarily so. However, there are also lesser forms of insight. Radhakrishnan notes two reasons for this. One is owing to the fact that the realms of perception themselves admit intermediate degrees and levels of reality.⁸³ The other has to do with the make-up of the perceiving mind. In the introduction to Indian Philosophy, Volume One, Radhakrishnan discusses the various views of reality as they are translated into the philosophical and religious school of both East and West. He writes: "...whether a system [of understanding] turns out to be atheistic or theistic is determined by the attention paid to the absolute under the aegis of which the drama of the universe is enacted."⁸⁴

Thus Radhakrishnan differentiates profound spiritual perceptions --those of the mystics-- and "milder" forms which are more common and marked "...in the experience of all who feel an answering presence in deep devotion or share the spell which great works of art cast." He says: "...when we experience the illumination of new knowledge, the ecstasy of poetry or the subordination of self to something greater,...the self-abandonment of falling in love, we have faint glimpses of mystic moods. Human love probably takes us nearest to them." In his writings Radhakrishnan speaks much of the spiritual power or value of love. It has the power to be "...a portal through which we enter the realm of the sublime."⁸⁵

⁸³ Cf. IP Vol 1, p.40. He also writes: "No element of our experience is illusory, though every element of it has a degree of reality according to the extent to which it succeeds in expressing the nature of the real." (IVL p.265.)

⁸⁴ IP Vol.1, p.41. Radhakrishnan also mentions the effect of various personal "dispositions" producing poetry, art et cetera.

⁸⁵ IVL p.73.

One of the elements of Radhakrishnan's definition of religion-as-perception, is his distinction between the nature of the experience and the expressed content of the experience: the intuition and the interpretation.⁸⁶ "If experience is the soul of religion," he writes in An Idealist View of Life, "expression is that through which it fulfills its destiny."⁸⁷

In the process of the experience being communicated, there is the mental operation of reflection upon the perception; then its translation into a language of image and symbol, within a unified system of thought. The use of images, symbols and concepts is inherent in our mental nature. Our thinking is intimately connected to the world of things around us; one experience is expressed most often in terms of others, though the levels may be quite different. In Recovery of Faith he writes: "We cannot recover the original unity by means of philosophical reflection which interprets the direct experience. The experience cannot be verbalized. Yet as we live in two worlds, the transient and the eternal, we must understand their relationship and express the meaning of the eternal in the terms of the transient."⁸⁸

While poetry, art, and science formulate and relate the milder forms of insight, religious scriptures record the profound intuitions.⁸⁹ As records of depth experiences, they are not simple, isolated narratives or descrip-

⁸⁶ Cf. RF p.144.

⁸⁷ IVL p.144.

⁸⁸ RF pp.144-145 (underscoring mine).

⁸⁹ Cf. PCF p.35.

tions. Rather, each religious experience is interpreted and commonly bound up with a whole complex, a theological system. And this system in toto happens to suggest, direct and effect a re-experiencing of reality by others.⁹⁰ In other words what a tradition's scriptures provide in registering these special visions, is "...a certain metaphysical conception of the nature of the Absolute, the human soul and the world and also a certain way of attaining union with the Absolute or God."⁹¹ That is to say they provide a perceptual frame for the members of that tradition.

Though Radhakrishnan has a dictum that "Intuitions abide, while interpretations change",⁹² he also speaks of the inextricability of intuition and interpretation. Intuition or insight, though spontaneous, unmediated, is at the same time both cultivated and refined by thought.

The world's religions each represent a valued experience of truth but formulate it differently.⁹³ Also within one religion, when we view different historical periods, we see various formulations or expressions of what is real. The formulations are philosophical, and at best, Radhakrishnan maintains, can "...present an ideal reconstruction." Ultimately the Real, Spirit, transcends all categories.⁹⁴ Each religion's "concept" should

⁹⁰ Cf. ERWT p.320.

⁹¹ RF p.144.

⁹² IVL p.71. Cf. RF p.77.

⁹³ "The different creeds are the historical formulations of the formless truth. While the treasure is one and inviolable, the earthen vessel that contains it takes the shape and colour of its environment." ERWT p.327. Cf. PCF p.56.

therefore be regarded "not in the spirit of logic but of poetry". Inevitably, the "...abstractions of the intellect require to be converted into the actuality of spiritual experience and the concrete vision of the soul."⁹⁵ There knowledge and being coalesce. In Eastern Religion and Western Thought Radhakrishnan writes: "The claim of any religion to validity is the fact that only through it have its followers become what they are. They have grown up with it, and it has become a part of their being."⁹⁶

Reconciliation of the Various Formulations of the Nature of Reality, as Recorded in the Scriptures (Samanvaya) : the goal.

With the understanding that each religious tradition has an "experimental character", one must come to terms with the variety of reports on the nature of reality as presented in the different canons. Some even strikingly contradict each other in their accounts of the Absolute and the mechanics of cosmic order. For Radhakrishnan, part of the knowledge of Ultimate Reality --part of being religious-- is an acknowledgement of the necessity to reconcile the various faiths with each other and with modernity. He writes: "Beliefs that foster and promote the spiritual life of the soul must be in accordance with the nature and the laws of the world of reality with which it is their aim to bring us into harmony."⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Cf. JP Vol. 2, p.43.

⁹⁵ Principle Upanisads p.97.

⁹⁶ ERWT p.327.

The first three sūtras consider scriptural teaching, a rational approach to the content, and the way to "...assimilate into our being the truth heard and reflected upon". The fourth suggests the reconciliation of authority, logic, and life.⁹⁸ Addressing the study of religion, the mandate is to "...preserve the precious substance of religious reality by translating it out of the modes and thoughts of other times into terms and needs of our own day and generation."⁹⁹

Radhakrishnan speaks of ridding religion of "mythological beliefs and dogma"¹⁰⁰ which anesthetize man, but at the same time he recognizes the perennial wisdom at the base of each religion. Modern man must develop discrimination and weed out of religion what is no longer adequate and applicable. In Recovery of Faith he writes: "We are in search of a religious message that is distinctive, universally valid, sufficient and authoritative, one that has an understanding of the fresh sense of truth and the awakened social passion which are the prominent characteristics of the religious situation today....We must present struggling and aspiring humanity with a rational faith...a new vision of God...."¹⁰¹

Radhakrishnan gives the intellectuals the role and duty of working for a

⁹⁷ HVL p.14.

⁹⁸ Cf. "The Indian Approach to the Religious Problem" p.181.

⁹⁹ RF p.8.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. "East and West", An address to the East-West Philosophers Conference, Honolulu, July 1959, in OSW Third series, July 1959-1962 p.234.

¹⁰¹ RF p.74.



universal society, and takes this as his own role and duty in life. To all (professional) philosophers he says: "We should be men of a universal cast of mind, capable of interpreting peoples to one another and developing a faith that is the only antidote to fear."¹⁰² "It is the function of philosophy," he writes in An Idealist View of Life "to provide us with a spiritual rallying centre, a synoptic vision, as Plato loved to call it, a samanvaya, as the Hindu thinkers put it, a philosophy which will serve as a spiritual concordat, which will free the spirit of religion from the disintegrations of doubt and make the warfare of creeds and sects a thing of the past."¹⁰³

¹⁰² PCF p.47. Man is fearful and anxious because he sees the finiteness of his existence, and this is only emphasized by the dehumanization and depersonalization of the technological age. In a speech to the 11th session of the UNESCO General Council in Paris, Nov.1960, Radhakrishnan expresses the same message: "It [the world] will be united only if we learn to reconcile different civilizations and religious traditions, with their different presuppositions and values, with their different economic systems and political responsibilities." OSWr Third series, July 1959-1962, p.99. Cf. RF p.17.

¹⁰³ IVL p.65.

PART III

RADHAKRISHNAN'S METHODOLOGY: DEMYTHOLOGIZATION AS AN
INTERPRETATIVE TOOL

"True knowledge of religion breaks down the barrier between
faith and faith."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Clifford Manshardt, The Mahatma and the Missionary (1949) p.131.
Quoted in "Hinduism", OSW Third Series, July 1959-1962 p.241.

Chapter 3

IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND A HEURISTIC PROPOSAL

Radhakrishnan's most concentrated and forthright statements on the method for study can be found in East and West in Religion (1933), a series of lectures on Comparative Religion given at Oxford in 1929, in the first chapter of Eastern Religions and Western Thought (1939), in his essay "The Religion of the Spirit and the World's Needs: Fragments of a Confession" which is an autobiographical contribution to a volume dedicated to his philosophy,¹⁰⁵ and in a number of lectures and speeches directed to the Union for the Study of Great Religions, the UNESCO General Council, the Sanskrit Visvaparasad, and to numerous universities' and conferences' inaugurations.¹⁰⁶ Most of the above mentioned writings have been prime sources for this chapter, supplemented by other writings, especially the later works Recovery of Faith (1955), Religion in a Changing World (1967) and The Present Crisis of Faith (1970).

¹⁰⁵ The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan edited by Paul Arthur Schillp (1952), The Library of Living Philosophers Series.

¹⁰⁶ The Indian Government has published four volumes of Collected Speeches and Writings. This series covers the period beginning October 1952, when Radhakrishnan was vice-president of India, up till May 1964.

The Study of Religion

Radhakrishnan traces formal studies in the world's religions in East and West in Religion. He addresses it generally as Comparative Religion¹⁰⁷ and notes its beginnings and history in ecclesiastical settings --mostly Christian-- and that its raison d'etre derived from Christian missionary activities and concurrent apologetics.¹⁰⁸ Progression in Comparative Religion was marked generally by a change of setting, and concretely in the works of scholars --mainly linguists and anthropologists-- who opened and presented a lever to a wider, more objective study. Some of the most significant early works in the field that Radhakrishnan mentions are Max Müller's: his editorship of the Sacred Books of the East series and his Introduction to the Science of Religion (1909).

Even with Comparative Religion's move out of the seminaries and into the academy there were still problems associated with too narrow an approach to "other" religions and "other" cultures. This situation was magnified by the ongoing refinement of history and of science. Especially the latter revolutionized commonly accepted ideas concerning man, thought, language, the history of ideas, and the order of things. "The complex ideas of modern science and history seem to have caused a complete inner crisis", he

¹⁰⁷ Radhakrishnan uses the term loosely here. The term "comparative religion" came into use around 1869, initially as a synonym for the "science of religion". The inauguration of this new title for religious studies occurred in the shadow of the Theory of Evolution, and marked a critical turning point in the approach and method of the discipline. See Sharpe, Comparative Religion pp.30-31.

¹⁰⁸ Basically the "method" involved a comparison of two religions. One was held as authority, and the other shown against this foil to be inadequate or unevolved with respect to its capability to "save".

writes in Religion in a Changing World,¹⁰⁹ a crisis challenging or rather demanding a review and rethinking of the pursuit of knowledge, in particular its approach. The immediate effect on Comparative Religion was the realization of how "impressionistic" its conclusions were. It also found itself admitting the necessity of reexamining "...the sources and validity of [personally] accepted views."¹¹⁰

As part of the movement within Comparative Religion, Radhakrishnan himself wrote in 1929: "Science is forcing us into even closer proximity and is weaving mankind into strange new patterns....We realize that there are other worlds and other systems of thought and religion than our own....and it is difficult to shut our eyes to their vitality."¹¹¹ A fresh approach, he pointed out, was not only necessary for the study of "other" traditions, but would also enable a person to recognize his or her own religious tradition as one among many traditions, all of which are in creative transformation. Radhakrishnan was one of the vanguards who insisted on new parameters for Comparative Religion. He spoke of Comparative Religion's aim and educational role as being to unfold the depth and breadth and truth reflected in the claims and content of each religion. It was not in spite of, but through an acknowledgement of their diversity that all religions were to be reconciled as religion. The scholar must guard

¹⁰⁹ RCW p.39.

¹¹⁰ RCW p.36. Cf. "Fragments" p.18.

¹¹¹ EWR p.25. He had written a few pages earlier (p.21): "The change which the recent [c.1929] study of Comparative Religion has brought about is a change equally in the spirit of approach and the exactness of data."

against elevating one tradition and deprecating another as an aberration or a relatively primitive approach. His or her main challenge is to gain a fresh sense of the heart of a religion, that is, its eternal seed ideas and its salvific powers. He spoke of more than intellectual satisfaction in this. "When properly studied," he writes, "Comparative Religion increases our confidence in the Universality of God and our respect for the human race."¹¹² And insofar as this is actualized, study itself becomes sanctified.

The thread on which Radhakrishnan strings the beads of his methodology most obviously runs through Recovery of Faith and "Fragments": "We do not want a new religion but we need a new enlarged understanding of the old religions."¹¹³ "We must endeavour to frame a coherent system of general ideas in terms of which the different types of [religious] experience can be interpreted."¹¹⁴ Radhakrishnan here again emphasizes that the contemporary task for Comparative Religion is not to win the world for this or that faith, but to interpret and reconcile religious differences, thus "...preserving religion itself from the decay which is overtaking existing systems."¹¹⁵ In a speech in 1955¹¹⁶ he acknowledges some of the organizations working to cultivate a fair and free atmosphere for inter-religious

¹¹² EWR p.32.

¹¹³ RF p.199.

¹¹⁴ "Fragments" p.27.

¹¹⁵ EWR p.20.

¹¹⁶ Inaugural Address, Union for the Study of the Great Religions (Indian Branch) May 29, 1955, OSWr Oct.1952-Feb.1959, p.302.

studies, namely, The World Alliance for Friendship through Religion and Church Peace Union (1914), The Society for the Study of Religion (1924), the World Congress of Faiths (1933), World Spiritual Council (1946), and World Brotherhood (1950). He also points to the growing number of extra-theological departments in European universities, and the efforts of UNESCO, in which he himself played a prominent role.¹¹⁷

Studying Religion Scientifically

Basic to understanding Radhakrishnan's redefinition of Comparative Religion is recognizing his conviction of the universality of religion¹¹⁸ and his assumption that the relationship between religions is one not of conflict but of complementarity: samanvaya. He asks Comparative Religion, as a "particular method of treating religion" to establish itself an altitude or metaview so that it may appreciate this. He writes: "Each religion is unique so far as its form is concerned. We can hold that our particular formulation is valid formulation of truth without denying the validity of other forms."¹¹⁹ Taking the lead, what he himself tries to trace out as a Religious Studies scholar is in his words "...a world perspective which will include the philosophical insights of all the world's

¹¹⁷ Reference is made here to his involvement with the League of Nations and UNESCO from 1937 to 1952.

¹¹⁸ Any visible differences among faiths are "...overarched by a fundamental unity of vision and purpose which embraces all mankind." OSWr May 1962-May 1964, p.238.

¹¹⁹ "Religion and Universal Society", OSWr Third series, July 1959-1962 p.223.

great traditions... not a single philosophy which would annihilate differences of perspective, but [an understanding where] there must be agreement on basic perspectives and ultimate values."¹²⁰

Studying religion must become scientific,¹²¹ Radhakrishnan writes. The recommendations for a scientific approach to Religious Studies begin with the observation that Science and Religion have "...an essential similarity of purpose in seeking truth."¹²² The two are also similar in nature. The ideas and concepts which are generated in both disciplines are not exact mirror images of reality. Rather they are symbolic and indicative, forming patterns and categories which order and interrelate observations and experiences. As in religion, Radhakrishnan says, the pronouncements of science include a measure of faith --on the part of the experimenter or explorer-- in the wholeness and continuity of nature.¹²³ The key instrument in establishing knowledge and meaning is reason, and the ultimate test of truth is experimental, experiential verification.¹²⁴ The strength of science as such, in its quest for knowledge, is given to its constant intel-

¹²⁰ Sbk IP p.xxxi. Reference is made to both interreligious and intrareligious reconciliations. Cf. OSWr Vol 1-2 p.335.

¹²¹ One of the first scholars to suggest a scientific approach, in fact, the Science of Religion, was F. Max Müller in 1867; the concepts of Religionswissenschaft and la science des religions had previously been suggested by other scholars, although not to the same effect. Cf. Sharpe, Comparative Religions pp.30-31.

¹²² RCW p.78.

¹²³ Cf. RS p.157. Radhakrishnan holds that there is an imaginary leap from reality to theory and vica-versa, in both science and religion. Cf. RCW p.74.

¹²⁴ The link is via speculation and proposition rather than logical derivation.

lectual questioning, its admission of the provisionality of its judgements and its universality of perspective. All go together to promote international communication and cooperation, and thus contribute to human bonding, as well as the foundation of knowledge.

In regard to method, Science purports to confine itself to an abstract frame, and aims to deal with fact by dealing with observed data. To apply the equation to Comparative Religion, the correlate of fact is reality, and of data, religious experience as recorded in the various scriptures. Although he openly admits the limitations¹²⁵ of a purely analytical/empirical approach to understanding religion, Radhakrishnan approves its application when tempered with a large dash of "intuition", understood as an extension of faith.

Radhakrishnan lauds the "universality" of the scientific community, and looks forward to a fraternity of scientific metaphysicians bound in their attitude of dispassion and non-alignment --yet in openmindedness and empathy-- who are spurred on by a common faith in the significance of humanity and its spiritual evolution.¹²⁶ He emphasizes that to adopt a scientific platform for Comparative Religion is to speak a common language. The sci-

¹²⁵ Radhakrishnan speaks of Science yielding only isolated parcels of knowledge, and of it fostering a narrow mentality in its demand for specialization; in addition, the push for technological advance though initially inspiring man with a sense of awe at his achievements, ironically leaves him feeling his world dehumanized and his link with nature broken. Science, Radhakrishnan says, is not sufficient, but part of a wider concern in understanding.

¹²⁶ Radhakrishnan urges that a psychological oneness is needed to underpin the physical unity of the globe.

entific frame is now part of the outlook of even ordinary men and women, and it plays a significant role in determining the sensibilities of the age. "If systems of philosophy are themselves determined by historical circumstance", he writes, "there is no reason why the methods adopted should not take into account the needs and conditions of the age. Each interpreter [of religion] appeals to his own generation."¹²⁷

Demythologization

In Religion in a Changing World Radhakrishnan clearly lays down his position vis-à-vis the plurality of religions: "There are many descriptions of God, they are points of view [Samvriti]."¹²⁸ The heuristic device he proposes is therefore a comprehensive meta-view of the various traditional descriptions, and one which will respect the richness and diversity of each view. "The issue for religion in our day is not in regard to doctrinal differences or ritual disagreements, but it concerns the very existence of religion."¹²⁹ Each religion is a system of thought rooted in a particular perspective of reality/the Supreme/truth. What must be examined by the student of religion, Radhakrishnan says, are, from a metasystem's point of analysis, the limits within which each tradition unfolds religious experience, in particular, as it is formulated in Scripture.

¹²⁷ "Fragments" p.13.

¹²⁸ RCW p.104. Cf. Br Su p.29, where he translates samvriti as "relative point of view". Radhakrishnan acknowledges ten major religions. Cf. EWR p.37.

¹²⁹ "Fragments" p.25 (underscoring mine).

Bearing in mind that a tradition legitimizes itself in constant growth (and to follow this organic image, constant sloughing off), a religious text must be reexamined to see what is vital, what is atrophic and therefore a burden, what is the universal, perennial core, and what are the temporal, contingent components.

Radhakrishnan maintains that there are certain seed-ideas or eternal truths embedded in the scriptures of all faiths. These are continuously followed by the generations of faithful adherents, and recounted in vocabularies attached to particular times and milieus.¹³⁰ What may be a reasonable account at one time and in one context, may, depending on the psychological idiom, seem unreasonable and unrealistic in another. Nonetheless there is a commonality in the dynamics of religious experience as a phenomenon: a common contact with the Supreme which identifies spiritual life.¹³¹ It is that which must be personally uncovered and rediscovered.

Approaching the study of religion as a hermeneutical concern, Radhakrishnan sets out a programme of demythologization, proposing to strip away all accretions of myth, dogma, and superstition, which clutter and obscure the essential message of the spiritual text, and then to restate that message. He writes: "The living faiths of mankind carry not only the inspiration of centuries but also the encrustations of error."

¹³⁰ "Ideas do not come to birth in vacuo. [Radhakrishnan writes in ERWT]. Their growth is molded by the kind of mind that thinks them and the conditions in which they are thought." p.326.

¹³¹ Cf. RF p.188.

This "error" occurs in the analysis and interpretation of experience¹³² and it is necessary to reinterpret and restate what is traditional and embodied in their texts, and in fresh terms "...more relevant to our own experience, to our own predicament."¹³³ In sharper language: "Religions need to be rid of their irrationality, reactionary social character and of provincialism."¹³⁴ Radhakrishnan says that one must discriminate between dogma and that in a religion which "...insists on a change of consciousness for which all else is the means."¹³⁵

"To appreciate the meaning of a religious idea or symbol, we must find out the value it expresses and achieves",¹³⁶ Radhakrishnan says in articulating the attitude for Comparative Religion. "If we look upon our [that is, each religion's] dogmatic formulations as approximations to the truth and not truth itself, then we must be prepared to modify them if we find other propositions which enter deeper into reality."¹³⁷

The tools which the inquirer is to bring to the study, are what Radhakrishnan considers the best features of Eastern and Western thinking.

¹³² "Reply to Critics" p.794.

¹³³ "Fragments" p.75. Cf. ERWT p.336: "We can understand only so much of the divine truth as has some correspondence with our own nature and its past development."

¹³⁴ OSWr May 1962-May 1964 p.216. cf. also p.222.

¹³⁵ RS p.54.

¹³⁶ EW p.52. The scriptures of religions are to be considered analogous, not literal descriptions of God and the world and so treated in the spirit of poetry, rather than logic. Cf. IVL p.71.

¹³⁷ OSWr Vol 1-2 p.309. Cf. RCW p.43.

From the latter, the inquirer should obtain intellectual integrity, ratiocination and critical analysis; from the former, he should draw intuitive thinking, introspection and detachment.¹³⁸ "History poses our problems, and if we restate old principles in new ways, it is not because we will to do so but because we must.", Radhakrishnan writes in the introduction to his examination of the Bhagavadgītā. He continues: "...a restatement of the truths of eternity in the accents of our time is the only way in which a great scripture can be of living value to mankind."

In the same breath he addresses Hermeneutics per se: "Every scripture has two sides, one temporary and perishable,...and the other eternal and imperishable....The intellectual expression and the psychological idiom [which designate the first] are the products of time while the permanent truths are capable of being lived and seen by a higher than intellectual vision at all times."¹³⁹

This "higher than intellectual vision" is, in his mind, intuitive knowledge mediated by critical analysis.¹⁴⁰ The two complement each other to produce reason. And it is reason, through its relation to actual experience, which provides new categories for a contemporary frame in which to interpret and understand the various religions. For their part, new cat-

¹³⁸ For the scientific student of religion, vairāgya, detachment, is essential. It is this personal aloofness which opens him or her to the spirit of what he or she studies, and to an intuitive knowledge, which may then be transposed into an intellectual notation. See "Reply to Critics" p.793.

¹³⁹ Bg pp.6-7.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. "Reply to Critics" p.794.

egories allow the discovery of new content in the truths of the old traditions.

Demythologization as a comprehensive program is nowhere systematically and extensively formulated by Radhakrishnan, but there are some parameters and considerations for text-reinterpretation found in his writings, which point to it:

Only those parts of the tradition which are logically coherent are to be accepted...and not the whole tradition.¹⁴¹

Our interpretation of religious experience must be in conformity with the findings of science.¹⁴²

When authorities conflict...when, for example, the New Testament and the Qu'ran conflict, we cannot assume that the author of one had better opportunities of knowing the truth than the other, we must turn to some other criterion, e.g. the rationality of their contents.¹⁴³

We discriminate between authentic experience and spurious ones by their conformity with knowledge attained by other means [science for example] and ethical fruitfulness.¹⁴⁴

We should free the concept of the Divine from all objective and anthropomorphic attributes.¹⁴⁵

If the message of religions is to be articulated in relation to the problems of our age, we must give up the view that any one religion contains the final absolute and whole truth, and adopt the eastern attitude that the faith is realized in historic patterns, though no one of these patterns should regard itself as

¹⁴¹ HVL p.16. Radhakrishnan does not deny the value of tradition, for "it has brought us to where we are" but we "must see the past as past".

¹⁴² Ibid. p.16. Cf. "Science and Religion" in OSWr May 1962-May 1964, p.259.

¹⁴³ JVL p.13.

¹⁴⁴ RCW p.108.

¹⁴⁵ RCW p.131.

the sole and exclusive truth for all.¹⁴⁶

We are in search of a religious message that is distinctive, universally valid, sufficient and authoritative, one that has an understanding of the fresh sense of truth and the awakened social passion which are the prominent characteristics of the religious situation today.¹⁴⁷

Adopting An Ideal View of Religion: Superiority of the Hindu Perspective

For all that Radhakrishnan states about the world's religions being "...varied manifestations of the essentials of true religion",¹⁴⁸ each historical view being a "...possible, perfect experience of the Divine, capable not in spite of, but because of its peculiarity of leading us to the highest",¹⁴⁹ his conclusive observation is that in fact the world's religions are related as closer and further approximations of reality, --- but mostly further and mostly partial. The closest and truest approximation is found in the statements and writings of the ancient Indian seers. So it is to the texts which incorporate their insights that the scholar should turn for support in developing the comprehensive world-outlook.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ OSWr Vol 1-2 pp.335-336. Generally, "The test of a true faith is the extent to which it transforms the individual and the social order." PCF p.115. Cf. ERWT p.40 where Radhakrishnan attacks what he sees as now useless elements in Christianity.

¹⁴⁷ RF p.74.

¹⁴⁸ PCF p.56.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. ERWT p.327, IVL p.13, "My Search for Truth" p.36 and Bg p.158.

¹⁵⁰ Radhakrishnan on this point illustrates the "universal" attitude of Indians by referring to the contemporary Indian secular state which "...deals impartially with all religions...[and]...adopts the philosophy of active co-existence among the religions of the World." PCF p.152.

Radhakrishnan contracts his recommendation by saying: "The culture associated with Sanskrit gives us a view which is not exclusive but universal, a kind of religion which is most suited to the modern condition."¹⁵¹ This reference is further narrowed to the Hindu perspective being most capable of reconciling the various religions. By design, Hindu philosophy "...seeks the unity of religion not in a common creed but in a common quest."¹⁵² In view of the attributes and attitudes he has set out for the study of religion, he writes in Eastern Religions and Western Thought: "Hinduism adopts a rationalistic attitude in the matter of religion...It tries to study the facts of human life in a scientific spirit, not only the obvious facts, the triumphs and defeats of men who sleep in spiritual unconsciousness, but the facts of life's depths."¹⁵³ In An Idealist View of Life he notes: "...the Hindu thinkers admit the ineffability of the experience but permit themselves a graduated scale of interpretations from the most "impersonal" to the most "personal"...The Hindu tradition by its very breadth seems to be capable of accommodating varied religious conceptions."¹⁵⁴ The thrust of Indian thought is not toward dogmatization but it is a rational synthesis "...which goes on gathering into itself new conceptions as philosophy progresses...".¹⁵⁵ It respects the value of tradi-

¹⁵¹ OSWr May 1962-May 1964 p.184 (underscoring mine). In the introduction to Sbk IP Radhakrishnan writes "The close relationship between theory and practice, doctrine and life, has always been outstanding in Indian thought. Every Indian system seeks the truth, not as academic "knowledge for its own sake" but "to learn the truth which shall make men free." (p.xxiii).

¹⁵² HVL p.42.

¹⁵³ ERWT p.20.

¹⁵⁴ IVL p.79. Cf. ERWT p.316.

tion, but at the same time it is dedicated to a free development of ideas as "insight and reason" direct.¹⁵⁶

Further, Radhakrishnan holds that the germinal concepts of all forms of Hinduism and every phase of Hinduism's growth are tied to the "common background of Vedānta". Vedānta, with its character of "monistic idealism", Radhakrishnan maintains is "...not a religion but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significance."¹⁵⁷ Vedānta, (embodied in the prasthāna traya: the Upaniṣads, Brahma Sūtra and Bhagavadgītā) is the highest of Indian wisdom, essential "...not only for the revival of the Indian nation but also for the re-education of the human race."¹⁵⁸ Vedānta --and by this Radhakrishnan means Advaita Vedānta-- is THE ideal view, the hermeneutic tool. Its forte lies in the formal recognition that if man is to continue his spiritual development he must "...advance to a new conception of reality."¹⁵⁹ The epitome of Vedānta for Radhakrishnan is the Bhagavadgītā text.

Since his claim to the universality of religion is largely based on his reinterpretation of Hindu scriptures, and centrally the Bhagavadgītā, the next chapter centers on his study of that text. It may be hinted here

¹⁵⁵ IP Vol 1 p.25. Also cf. p.81. Radhakrishnan emphasizes the Indian acceptance of restating and reinterpreting texts, having formalized Hermeneutics in Mīmāṃsā. See Br Su p.21.

¹⁵⁶ Sbk IP p.xxi.

¹⁵⁷ HVL p.18.

¹⁵⁸ "Fragments" p.11.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p.47.

that Radhakrishnan's methodology in Comparative Religion has two phases: firstly he reexamines the Hindu scriptures, and then he submits this reinterpretation as the ideal foil for a comparative study of the content and messages of other religious or spiritual writings, Christian, Buddhist, Greek and so on. His treatment of the Bhagavadgītā is the apex of his demythologization program.

Chapter 4

RADHAKRISHNAN'S REINTERPRETATION OF THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

Value of the Text

As an introductory comment, Radhakrishnan writes in The Bhagavadgītā: "It [the Gītā] represents not any sect of Hinduism but Hinduism as a whole, not merely Hinduism but religion as such, in its universality, without limit of time or space, embracing within its synthesis the whole gamut of the human spirit...". Generally it is "both metaphysics and ethics", "the science of reality and the art of union with reality."¹⁶⁰ By the heterogeneity of its content, and its structural ability to accommodate as well as to reconcile multifarious views, the Bhagavadgītā shines as the eirenicon in this bleak age. Just as it harmonized without destroying the various creeds, codes, and different systems, which formed the matrix of Indian thought in the days of its inception as a text, transforming them "...into aspects of a more inward religion, free, subtle, and profound..."¹⁶¹ so it can address the present situation of religious pluralism.

¹⁶⁰ Bg p.12.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. p.74.

To Radhakrishnan, the Gītā is indubitably the clearest embodiment of the Sanātana Dharma/Philosophia Perennis. Not only does it provide the most accurate account of the Absolute and the cosmic process, but, by emphasizing the personal aspect of the Supreme "...as the personal God who creates the perceptible world by His nature (prakṛti)...[and who] resides in the heart of every being",¹⁶² it lays out a "practical programme" for world redemption.¹⁶³ In line with Indian tradition, Radhakrishnan preserves the literal integrity of the text. However, he emphasizes that the content embodies "suggestions" concerning "the meaning and value of existence", "the sense of eternal values", and "the way in which the ultimate mysteries are illuminated by the light of reason and moral intuition".¹⁶⁴

On the level of scholarly analysis, Radhakrishnan acknowledges the Bhagavadgītā text as a synthetic work composed of many streams of Indian philosophy. In his view, the structural weakness does not devalue the text. Instead, he sees in it, and in Vyāsa's mind, an instance of resolution where apparent conflicts and inconsistencies in human thought do not cancel each other, but converge on some greater understanding. In his critical treatment, he is not concerned with sorting out the various philosophical threads which compose the Gītā's fabric. His concern, rather, is to extract what he believes to be the pith of the text, and to do so by personally participating in its inner dialectics. In the process, he hopes to establish a "restatement of the truths of eternity in the accent

¹⁶² Bg p.25.

¹⁶³ See Bg p.96.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. p.12.

of our time."¹⁶⁵

In 1948 Radhakrishnan published The Bhagavadgītā: "With an Introductory Essay, Sanskrit Text, English Translation and Notes". His study materialized in the wake of numerous Gītā commentaries which themselves spanned the previous twelve centuries or more, and which were authored by a significant number of Indian philosophical giants. Radhakrishnan's idea to reinterpret the Gītā, then, is certainly not original, when he is considered part of the Vedāntic tradition where reinterpretation is the tacit modus operandi of the guruparampara. He is avant-garde, however, in the way he brackets and expresses its contents. His ācārya-predecessors, except for a handful, address their compatriots, if not exclusively the Hindu world, in their expositions, and in a vocabulary associated specifically with the culture of India. Radhakrishnan, on the other hand, writing in the aftermath of the Second World War, and with a developing international profile as scholar and statesman, confines himself neither to theologians nor to the making of an Indian statement. He presents the Bhagavadgītā as a document for global man, and aims to unfold it in a language which is heterogeneous and open-ended. In reworking the ślokas, he admits his hermeneutics are a deliberate attempt and even an irresistible attempt, to demythologize the "old forms" of wisdom -- saving what is pertinent.

The key problem, he says, is boldly the "reconciliation of mankind".¹⁶⁶ In

¹⁶⁵ Bg p.7.

¹⁶⁶ See Bg pp.6-7.

Present Crisis of Faith he writes: "The source of conflicts is not the diversity of religions but the lack of toleration....Toleration is open-mindedness."¹⁶⁷ He offers the Gīta as the foundation for this "new human consciousness".

Radhakrishnan dedicates The Bhagavadgītā to Mahatma Gandhi, whose life epitomized commitment to resolving human conflict, and who had named the teachings of the Gītā as his chief inspiration and strength.¹⁶⁸

To illustrate Radhakrishnan's treatment of the Gītā, the next section focuses on his analysis of Arjuna's situation.

Radhakrishnan's Analysis of Arjuna's Situation : Reframing the Message of the Bhagavadgītā

In his most radical moments, Radhakrishnan views Arjuna's need, on the Kurukṣetra battlefield, as being to "...to cut social ties for the protection of justice and the suppression of lawless violence". For Arjuna to comply is for him to contribute to "the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth".¹⁶⁹ The image of the typical Hindu as aloof, austere, and other-worldly, is a misrepresentation, Radhakrishnan says, for the message of the Bhagavadgītā --one of the most influential of Hindu texts-- is to

¹⁶⁷ PCF p.71.

¹⁶⁸ Radhakrishnan opens his study with the traditional mangala śloka. He adds to it words from Śankara and Gandhi, praising the Bhagavadgītā.

¹⁶⁹ Bg p.88.

"live in the world and save it."¹⁷⁰ "For the Gītā, the world [represented by the battle] is the scene of an active struggle between good and evil in which God is deeply interested."¹⁷¹ When this tension becomes unbalanced in favour of evil, threatening "to destroy human values", the avatāra descends --as illustrated in Kṛṣṇa.

Against the backdrop of a perpetual good-evil counterplay, the whole problem addressed by the Gītā is the problem of action, Radhakrishnan states, and points to IV.16 and IV.18: "What is action? What is inaction? --as to this even the wise are bewildered." "He who in action sees inaction and action in inaction, he is wise among men, he is a yogin and has accomplished all his work."¹⁷² "What is the right course is not generally obvious. (Radhakrishnan writes). The ideas of our time, the prescriptions of tradition, the voice of conscience get mixed up and confuse us." This problem of action is subtle, but not insurmountable. "The wise man seeks a way out by a reference to immutable truths, with the insight of the highest reason."¹⁷³ In the end: "Action done devotedly and wholeheartedly, without attachment to the results makes for perfection."¹⁷⁴ The entire Gītā, embodying "immutable truths", is a Yoga-manual; yoga is skill-in-action.

¹⁷⁰ Bg p.67.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p.25.

¹⁷² śloka IV.16: kiṁ karma kim akarme 'ti/ kavayo 'py atra mohitāh and IV.18: karmany akarma yah paśyed/ akarmani ca karma yah/ sa buddhimañ manusyeṣu/ sa yuktaḥ kṛtsnakarmakṛt. Bg pp.162-163.

¹⁷³ Ibid. p.163, on IV.17.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. p.69.

Looking at the psychology of Arjuna's particular dilemma, Radhakrishnan observes: "He does not wish to buy inward security by submission to the social standard. So long as he looks upon himself as a kṣatriya required to fight, so long as he is chained to his station and its duties, he is unaware of the full possibilities of his individual action....Any sense of satisfaction and security derived by submission to external authority is bought at the price of the integrity of the self."¹⁷⁵ Integrity and human freedom come from living "by the inward rule of free devotion to truth". Radhakrishnan assumes that if any individual --not just Arjuna-- were to develop his potential and act fully aware, that is, without passion or ill will, it would be enough for him to guard against (at best) inappropriate and (at worst) violent actions.

The ideal the Gītā presents for all human action, is ahimsā, non-violence, but Radhakrishnan adds: "In the conflict between the self-affirming law of good and the forms that impede it, force is sometimes necessary to give the law of good a chance of becoming a psychological fact and an historic process."¹⁷⁶ The ideal man of the Gītā is neither swallowed by the activities of the world, nor withdraws. He "reconciles all possibilities in the world without getting involved in it."¹⁷⁷ Radhakrishnan says the text speaks of transcending the law of karma, the "natural order of deed and consequence".¹⁷⁸ He qualifies this by saying: "We are conditioned but not

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. p.44.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. p.69.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p.72.

¹⁷⁸ Radhakrishnan writes in another place that karma is "the creative im-

determined".¹⁷⁹ that is, it is possible to manipulate karma, to actively subpoena it as a free agent (free from the effects of karma) and to direct it. "The Gītā lays stress on the individual's freedom of choice and the way in which he exercises it" Radhakrishnan writes.¹⁸⁰ The way to do this is to know one's real nature and ultimate self, and to "be anchored" in this Eternal Spirit.

In commenting upon Kṛṣṇa's message to Arjuna --"Fight, realize your potential as kṣatriya!"-- Radhakrishnan writes that this "potential" is obscured by Arjuna's distress, duḥkham, and his depression, viśāda, which themselves represent a "self-indulgence" and "sentimentality". And he adds: "The distress of Arjuna is a dramatization of a perpetually recurring predicament. Man on the threshold of higher life, feels disappointed with the glamour of the world and yet illusions cling to him and he cherishes them. He forgets his divine ancestry and becomes attached to his personality and is agitated by the conflicting forces of the world...he has to fight the enemies of selfishness and stupidity, and overcome the dark ignorance of his self-centered ego. Man cut off from spiritual nature has to be restored to it. It is the evolution of the human soul here."¹⁸¹

pulse", the principle of movement in the universe. "The whole cosmic evolution is called karma." (p.227.)

¹⁷⁹ Cf. RCW p.138, where Radhakrishnan points out that although man is conditioned biologically, psychologically, socially, but he is free to choose to resist, modify and transform this conditioning.

¹⁸⁰ Bg p.48.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. p.95, on l.47. In EWR, Radhakrishnan puts it: "So long as one does not realize one's immanent nature one is not entirely oneself. Each of us is like a stringed instrument which will not yield its proper music until the tension of the strings is just."(p. 95.)

Arjuna is suffering a trauma: "When he detaches himself from his social obligations...he has a full awareness of himself as an individual, alone and isolated....The new freedom creates a deep feeling of anxiety, loneliness, doubt and insecurity....[which] must be overcome."¹⁸² Arjuna is "...incapable of decision because of his inability to understand either himself or his fellows or the real nature of the universe in which he is placed."¹⁸³ Mokṣa, release, liberation, lies in "the displacement of a false outlook by a true one", that is avidyā by vidyā. "We [all human beings] must develop the power to see things as a free undistorted intelligence would see them."¹⁸⁴ And then we must act. Radhakrishnan says "liberation", is becoming a vessel, an instrument, a reflection of God and God's purpose. He emphasizes the universality of this notion by quoting Boehme, Jami, St. John of the Cross and others. In Arjuna's case, it is his duty to maintain order by force: Kṛṣṇa is telling Arjuna "For warriors there is no more ennobling duty than a fair fight."¹⁸⁵ And Radhakrishnan shows how this idea of contributing to the rule of justice is to be combined with a disinterestedness or indifference to personal acclaim: "Nothing matters except the good will, the willing fulfillment of the purpose of God."¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Ibid. p.97, on l.47.

¹⁸³ Ibid. p.94, on l.46.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. p.195. Also see p.57: "In stillness...insight is born and man becomes what he is."

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. p.112 (underscoring mine), on ll.31.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. p.119.

In the context of spiritual emancipation, Radhakrishnan speaks of the individual's svadharma, outward life, and svabhāva, inner being. They must "answer to each other"! Therein lies the integration of the human personality. For Arjuna, "protection of right by the acceptance of battle, is necessary". This represents his external social obligation but it is for him to gain an inner personal insight into this, and choose between right and wrong.¹⁸⁷

Actively choosing right is the epitome of life-in-evolution. It effects the individual, and also contributes to the evolution of humanity (in Radhakrishnan's eschatology both form a symbiotic relationship). It is the way of the yogin (the religious man), the panditaṁ budhaḥ (the man of learning), the sthitaprajñā (the sage), the fulfilled or integrated human being, regardless of culture, time, or geography. The ultimate is for a person to live a life of "disinterested service", dedicated to the welfare of all fellow beings and the solidarity of the world, lokasaṁgraha.¹⁸⁸ This distinguishes one as possessing "steady wisdom". In his Bhagavadgita commentary, Radhakrishnan constantly echos śloka IV.38:

¹⁸⁷ Interpreting XVIII.63, Radhakrishnan puts emphasis on vimrśyai'tad aś-esena/ yathe'cchasi tathā kuru: "Arjuna should think for himself and discover for himself. He should not act from simple and blind beliefs acquired from habit or authority....It is...important that the mind should seek rational and experiential justification for its beliefs. Arjuna must have a sense of real integrity, that his ideas are his own and not those imposed on him by his teacher. Teaching is not indoctrination." Ibid. pp.375-76.

¹⁸⁸ This conviction is echoed again and again in Radhakrishnan's writings and speeches. In "Search" salvation is defined by the "complete human being": the person of integrity. To achieve this, we require "... the cultivation of the grace and joy of souls overflowing in love and devotion and free service of a regenerative society." (p.40.)

na hi jñanēna sadṛśam

pavitram iha vidyate

tat svayaṁ yogasāmsiddhah

kālenā'tmani vindati

"There is nothing on earth equal in purity to wisdom. He who becomes perfected by yoga finds this of himself, in his self in course of time."

Wisdom, for Radhakrishnan, is based on insight, and insight in turn on a discipline which includes "purity of heart", cittaśuddhi, and faith, śrad-dhā.¹⁸⁹ "As the aim [of the yogin] is the attainment of purity of vision, it exacts of the mind fineness and steadiness. Our present dimensions are not the ultimate limits of our being. By summoning all the energies of the mind and fixing them on one point, we raise the level of reference from the empirical to the real, from observation to vision and let the spirit take possession of our whole being."¹⁹⁰ This "one point" is not arbitrary. It is Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is the "manifestation of wisdom and righteousness": the foil for understanding the good-evil struggle, whatever its form. The purpose of the avatāra, Radhakrishnan explains, "is to inaugurate a new world, a new dharma. By his teaching and example, he shows how a human being can raise himself to a higher grade of life. The issue between right and wrong is a decisive one. God works on the side of the right."¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Of "faith" Radhakrishnan writes, commenting on XVII.3, "faith is not acceptance of a belief. It is striving after self-realization by concentrating the powers of the mind on a given ideal." Bg p.343.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p.193, on IV.10.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p.155, on IV.7.

The purpose of the incarnation, the avatāraṇa of which Kṛṣṇa is an instance, is in Radhakrishnan's words: "...not simply to uphold the world order but also to help human beings to become perfected in their nature [which is to say, to realize their divinity]. The freed soul becomes on earth a living image of the Infinite. The ascent of man into Godhead is also the purpose of the descent of God into humanity. The aim of the dharma is this perfection of man and the avatar generally declares that He is the truth, the way and the life."¹⁹² Radhakrishnan refers to Kṛṣṇa as "Savior of the world",¹⁹³ as "the fact of redemption in the dark night",¹⁹⁴ and as a "channel of grace".¹⁹⁵ He "saves" as the Supreme Teacher who reveals the wisdom of the ages. Kṛṣṇa also presents himself as the ultimate paradigm, puruṣārtha, the model of what man can become. Radhakrishnan explains: "The teacher slowly guides the pupil to attain the status which he has, mama sādharma", and the pupil, for his part, realizes this through a complete identification with the teacher. Achieving the nature of God --which is as much love and compassion as wholistic vision-- comes through transformation. Radhakrishnan writes: "the ego holds something other than itself, to which it should abandon itself. In this abandonment consists its transfiguration....The divinity claimed by Kṛṣṇa is the common reward of all earnest spiritual seekers....[Kṛṣṇa] is

¹⁹² Ibid. pp.157-158, on IV.10. Cf. Intro., p.32. Although the reality of the Supreme is beyond conceptualization, it becomes accessible through spiritual experience. Kṛṣṇa appears, to mirror the God which is (in) the heart of all beings, hrdyantar jyotiḥ.

¹⁹³ Ibid. p.36.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p.35.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. p.156, on IV.9.

everywhere and in everyone of us, as ready to speak to us now as He ever was to anyone else. He is not a bygone personality but the indwelling spirit, an object for our spiritual consciousness."¹⁹⁶ "The Hindu ideal", Radhakrishnan states in another publication, "affirms that man can attain his immortal destiny here and now."¹⁹⁷ "The fact of descent or avatāraṇa indicates that the Divine is not opposed to a full, vital, and physical manifestation. We can live in the physical body and yet possess the full truth of consciousness. Human nature is not a fetter but can become an instrument of divine life."¹⁹⁸

Speaking of the Gītā's Kṛṣṇa, Radhakrishnan says that it is "of little moment" as to whether he was a historical entity, or "the very god descended into man". What is essential is the "truth or significance" of the teaching. The "historic fact" is but an image of it. Of the concept of avatāraṇa he says: "God is never born in the ordinary sense. Processes of birth and incarnation which imply limitation do not apply to Him. When the Lord is said to manifest Himself at a particular time, on a particular occasion, it only means that it takes place with reference to a finite being....The subjective and the objective processes of the world are only the expressions of the higher and lower natures of the Supreme...". Radhakrishnan continues to explain, that God is more concentrated (i.e. manifested) in whatever is "glorious, beautiful and strong". Furthermore, "When any finite individual develops spiritual qualities and shows large

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. p.31.

¹⁹⁷ ERWT p.45.

¹⁹⁸ Bg. p.35.

insight and charity, he sits in judgement on the world and starts a spiritual and social upheaval and we say that God is born for the protection of the good, the destruction of evil and the establishment of the kingdom of righteousness" --which is what Kṛṣṇa tries to encourage in Arjuna. Kṛṣṇa as an "individual" is therefore but an instance of the myriad of forms which the Universal Spirit may assume.¹⁹⁹

For Radhakrishnan Arjuna is at once Arjuna and all humans. Arjuna is also at once a psycho-physical man, a social man, a man in the painful (spiritual) process of searching out who he really is, and how he fits into the mystery of the universe.

Radhakrishnan's contention is that the Bhagavadgītā is a spiritual text for all mankind. It is to be approached for its symbolic truths, which lie beyond the facade of literal detail. Once "demythologized", the Bhagavadgītā can serve as the religious metaframe for aspirants of all traditions, for it speaks in the language of their common denominator: human experience. It is not to supplant other religious texts and the teachings of other spiritual seers, but as a hermeneutic key it functions to give a greater and deeper meaning to each religious tradition and to each individual a more profound sense of being religious. It is the key to studying religion.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. pp.31-32.

PART IV

TRANSCENDENTAL CRITICISM OF RADHAKRISHNAN'S METHOD AND
THEORY

Chapter 5

IMMANENT COHERENCE OF RADHAKRISHNAN'S THOUGHT

Devising a comprehensive overview and evaluation of Radhakrishnan's approach to Religion is a delicate task. Anyone familiar with the body of his writings will admit that a single thought of his may include a blending of different degrees of abstraction, and that many ideas have not been spun out sufficiently enough to reveal tacit beginnings or concrete applications. Radhakrishnan also writes with a curious combination of terminologies, and very often on the same page subscribes to both traditional and liberal ideas. And yet the overall effect of his observations and his message has been to provoke and to encourage a fresh interest in Comparative Religions in the wider context of human inquiry, as it seeks to create a better life in the present age. Most importantly his writings have left their mark not only in academic circles, but also have (as Radhakrishnan hoped) contributed to popular thinking. In our examination of the inherent coherence of Radhakrishnan's thought, we will be looking at some of his statements twice: first, in this chapter, to evaluate their local significance and contributions within the framework of Advaita Vedānta and, second, in the next chapter, to evaluate their universal significance and contributions within the general framework of religious studies.

The strategy for this chapter is to sum up Radhakrishnan's theory as it has been dealt with so far by concentrating on the two major components of his approach to Religious Studies, viz., his interpretation of religion and his concept of the nature of reality. This is necessary in order to clarify what was hinted in the closing statements of Chapter 3 above.

Radhakrishnan's notion of the nature of reality is, in fact, a reexamination and recasting of Hindu scriptures. His notion of religious experience (or his interpretation of religion) --likewise a reformulation of Hindu thought-- gives significance to the nature of reality in terms of the process of personal discovery. When combined, these two notions become the ideal foil for a special comparative study of the content and message of other religious writings. It has been noted above and must be repeated here that Radhakrishnan claimed to be an Advaitin, and that he adopted, more or less extensively, Śankara's metaphysic. It is Advaitic theory then which shall be reflected upon in the next section of this chapter, although it will be noted where Radhakrishnan diverges from traditional Advaita Vedānta. This occurs where he introduces modernistic or European terminology and where, in the course of his reinterpretation, he shifts the emphasis or twists the meaning of the original Sanskrit. Radhakrishnan's interpretation of religion is the focus of the second section of this chapter. Although his springboard is the catuḥ sūtrī of the Brahma Sūtra and even though he remains within the Advaitic perspective, Radhakrishnan consciously moves from the vocabulary of the Indian world to express his understanding in the language of modernity and humankind.

On the Nature of Reality

The ultimate ontological principle is satya, that is, reality or truth. It has two features: the infinite, Brahman, and the finite. Brahman is also referred to by Radhakrishnan by the traditional terms "Universal Being", "pure consciousness", "the Supreme". At the same time he adds to these the appellations of "Spirit" and "the Divine" which more appropriately belong to Western theologies and so conjure quite different associations. Nonetheless, the Infinite is both amurta, formless, and murta, formed; it is both without qualities, nirguṇa, and qualified, saguna. These two aspects coexist not as opposites in juxtaposition, but as one inherent in the other. They are the "suprapersonal and the personal representations of the real...the absolute and relative ways of expressing the one reality."²⁰⁰ "The Supreme in its non-relational aspect is the Absolute, in its active aspect it is God [Īśvara]."²⁰¹

The Absolute is, by its nature, full and complete silence. Yet in its mystery it is able to reflect itself as Deity (God): the consciousness that informs and sustains the cosmos. God is "...the genius of this world, its ground, which as a thought or a possibility of the Absolute lies beyond the world in the universal consciousness of the Absolute."²⁰²

The finite world of time and space, mind and matter, is a translation of

²⁰⁰ HVL p.24 (underscoring mine).

²⁰¹ "Reply," p.796 (underscoring mine).

²⁰² "The Spirit in Man," in CIP p.498.

the Absolute as God. At the same time it is only one of an infinite number of possibilities. Radhakrishnan follows Śankara and attributes the world a relative reality. He says that it is real in a "secondary sense"; it is vyāvahārika sattā as opposed to prātibhāsika sattā.²⁰³ The world is fundamentally conditioned by māyā and as such it is both derived from and dependent on the Ultimate Reality. Where the Ultimate Reality is immutable, the world has the character of "perpetually passing away".

One of the clearest and most comprehensive discussions of the world as derived being²⁰⁴ is given in "Reply to Critics". There Radhakrishnan speaks of the world and nature as "an expression of the Absolute", more clearly, vivarta, appearance: it is temporal, limited, charged with dualities, multileveled, defined by a subject-object relation, and ever in a process of evolutionary change. Yet it is neither real in an absolute sense nor unreal. It is sad-asad-ātmaka, both real and unreal. It is also sad-asad-vilakṣana, different from real and unreal.²⁰⁵ Here Radhakrishnan has echoed the position of the Vivaraṇa school, which teaches that the universe is the vivarta, figuration or appearance of the Absolute (the formless appears as if having forms). Hence the continuum of events, which we know as the world, is related to or determined by the Absolute as an ap-

²⁰³ Cf. OSWr Oct.1952-Feb.1959, p.322.

²⁰⁴ Cf. also IVL chapters VI, VII and VIII.

²⁰⁵ Cf. "Reply to Critics" pp.800ff. For a more detailed discussion, Cf. Br Su p.33 where he says the world is anirvācanīya, meaning unique. It is not existent in an absolute sense, neither is it non-existent for there is a substratum which persists and is not prone to badhaḥ, sublation. It is being, sat which is the continuum, and not its objective forms. "Being is the basis, adhīsthana of all experience."

parent or reflected image, bimba, is related to its counterpart and source, pratibimba.²⁰⁶ (The Bhāmatī school of Advaita Vedānta holds that the universe is the parināma or modification of the Absolute.) In fact Radhakrishnan seems to follow very closely the Vedāntaparibhāṣya --which is the classical Vivaraṇa treatise on psychology and epistemology-- though he does not actually acknowledge the text as definitive Advaita, nor does he indicate any personal comprehensive study of it.²⁰⁷

The actual link between the finite and the infinite is māyā, an essentially incomprehensible mystery,²⁰⁸ which at best, can only be grasped partially. Radhakrishnan explains that māyā refers to the Absolute's potential to be reflected as God, and thence, in the universe, as the core of being and the impetus of becoming. In discussing the "Theism of the Bhagavad Gītā" Radhakrishnan expresses his understanding of māyā as follows: "Māyā is the power which enables him [God/ Īśvara] to produce mutable nature. It is śakti or the energy of Īśvara, or ātmavibhūti, the power of self-becoming. Īśvara and māyā in this sense are mutually dependent and are both beginningless."²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Cf. HVL p.48.

²⁰⁷ Though it is not within the purview of this thesis to examine the presuppositions of Radhakrishnan's metaphysic (in particular his theory of knowledge) in the light of Dharmarāja Adhvarin's Vedāntaparibhāṣya (17th century), it offers a promising study. See Dharmarāja Adhvarin, Vedāntaparibhāṣya, edited and translated by S.S. Suryanarayana Shastri (Adyar, Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1971).

²⁰⁸ Radhakrishnan equates māyā with līlā, the sport of self expression and self-creativity of God. Cf. HVL p.50. He also speaks of māyā as "...an expression of the freedom of the Absolute." ("The Spirit in Man," p.502).

²⁰⁹ IP Vol I p.547.

Relating God to the Absolute and the cosmic process, Radhakrishnan emphasizes in "The Spirit of Man" that "In its range of expression or degree of expressiveness, the Absolute transcends all finite limits."²¹⁰ Since the Absolute is the totality of being and since there is nothing else,²¹¹ the question of immanence and transcendence of the Absolute is not applicable: "The Absolute is in this world in the sense that the world is only an actualisation of one possibility of the Absolute and yet there is much...beyond this possibility which is in process of realization." He continues: "God is the Absolute with reference to this possibility of which He is the source and creator. Yet at any moment God transcends the cosmic process with its whole contents of space and time."²¹²

In An Idealist View of Life Radhakrishnan speaks of the Absolute, in its ultimate nature "pure consciousness, pure freedom and infinite possibility" (a translation of sat, cit, ānanda), appearing to be God "...from the point of view of one specific possibility which has become actualized." As such, God is organically bound up with the universe, while the Absolute remains unaffected.

Referring to the world of pure being, Radhakrishnan says that it is not depleted by the cosmic process of the Absolute revealing itself. While possibilities within this process are determined by the nature of the Ab-

²¹⁰ "The Spirit in Man" p.501.

²¹¹ The dichotomy of being and non-being may exist in thought and experience, but it is dissolved in a true glimpse of Ultimate Reality.

²¹² "The Spirit in Man" p.501 (underscoring mine).

solute, the actualities or the facts, are "selected" "...by the free activity of the Absolute without any determination whatsoever."²¹³ Again he makes reference to the enigmatic properties of māyā. Focussing on the actual realm of factual objects and events, Radhakrishnan elaborates on its essential characteristic. The world we live in is "...an ordered whole...an unbroken continuity, a complete unity from the changes in the atom to the movements of history. The system of nature is...a system of relationships intimately interdependent. This orderedness expresses itself in different forms of determination according to the level of being that has been attained."²¹⁴ Every individual existent is itself internally organized as a unique entity and relates as a part of a greater whole, viz., of nature, which has as its constituents matter, life, mind and value. Intrinsic to its order, nature is in a continuous evolutionary ascent to higher and higher levels of being which culminate in the perfection of mankind.²¹⁵ Here Radhakrishnan moves on a tangent to Śankara and the Vedāntic convention of downplaying cosmological discussions, in a number of ways: he gives much attention to detailing the structure, content, and

²¹³ IVL p.272. Note in IP Vol I, p.36, Radhakrishnan states that māyā is [along with the ability to do so] also the reflection of reality. "The world process is not so much a translation of immutable being as its inversion." (Underscoring mine.) Māyā is likened to the mirage-phenomenon, in HVL (See p.48).

²¹⁴ IVL p.248.

²¹⁵ Radhakrishnan elaborates on the evolution of being in PCF, p.33: "The gradation from one order of being to another is so imperceptible that it is impossible to draw the line that shall distinctly mark the boundaries of each. Everything in nature is linked together. All beings are connected...by a chain of which we perceive some parts are continuous while others escape our attention." In Br Su, p.128, he says "The world of time and change is ever striving to reach perfection [which defines the Absolute]."

meaning of the empirical world, to pointing out concrete issues, and to speaking in contemporary scientific language. All along, however, he is an Advaitin, relentlessly championing the oneness of all things by stressing the wholistic, systemic nature of nature and man. The heavy emphasis on the process of evolution (history being a "pattern of absolute significance" in revealing it) is also a feature unique to Radhakrishnan's reinterpretation of Vedānta.

Radhakrishnan does not often speak of puruṣa imbedded in prakṛti or of the jīva or the ātman. Instead he speaks of humanity, and says that man is an entity within the world who is intertwined with objective nature. Each person is integral to the universe (which is a system of subsystems) and can be effective in contributing to its organic and moral order (ṛta) and in controlling its future progress (samsāra). Humankind is a "vital agent of civilization" and carries an obligation to make the right decisions (viveka), and to do the right work (karma/akarma) with the right attitude. The right attitude is to cultivate an awareness based in inquiry, and born of detachment/love. This mentality must be actualized in service, (seva), directed to the betterment and to the Spirit-ualization of the world. Here it quite clear that Radhakrishnan departs from the traditional Hindu frame, and expands the meaning of key Sanskrit concepts to the extent that they echo similar principles found in non-Indian philosophies, especially Christian and Buddhist. In this approach Radhakrishnan tries to emphasize the ethical character of Vedāntic thought, although it was never a high profile feature with the conventional interpreters.

Radhakrishnan also speaks of each human being, as being "...both unique and universal. He has in him [as his svabhāva, inner nature] an element of the Divine [the infinite, "Spirit"] and also an element of nature [the finite, the circumstance of existential existence]. When the two things get integrated, then it is that you call him a fulfilled human being."²¹⁶ "Self-actualized" man (the jīva-mukti) is designated as one of "integrated character or personality", and one whose efforts are in tune with the actualities of the evolutionary thrust which is evident in history and in science. The ideal model of perfection is projected in the avatāra-teachings of the Bhagavadgītā. Kṛṣṇa is a revelation of the Spirit which pervades the universe and thus the "demonstration of man's [inner] spiritual resources and latent divinity."²¹⁷ Radhakrishnan purposely shifts the emphasis from Kṛṣṇa as teacher to Kṛṣṇa as paradigm: Kṛṣṇa represents the "exaltation of human nature to the level of God-head". The human potential to become divine is put in real rather than metaphysical terms, thereby giving salvation a sense of earthiness. The condition is that one must search for and choose Goodness, Beauty, Truth (each an embodiment of Spirit) in the human context. And one must realize one's faculties of Reason (which is the instrument for integrating the dynamics of change), of Faith (being rooted in a credible and legitimate tradition), and Love (the sense of justice and self-sacrifice). Suffering, duḥkham, is the medium of growth; it is the learning, healing, purifying process through

²¹⁶ "Science and Religion," An Address at Kabul University, Afganistan, 14 May 1963, in OSWr, May 1962-May 1964, p.136.

²¹⁷ "The problem facing man is the integration of his personality, the development of a divine existence in which the spiritual principle has the mastery over all the powers of soul and body." Bg p.45.

which we "fight for our true nature".

Radhakrishnan says that the recognition and actualization of this personal integration lie in the realm of religious discipline. The main components of this realm include guidebooks in the form of spiritual texts, one's powers of reflection and logic and finally, immediate experience. Salvation, necessarily a rational way of living, must be rooted in the interface of man with the changing world.²¹⁸ Achieving the unity of self (mokṣa), is coincident with living in harmony with others and the world (lokasaṃgraha). The latter resides in understanding the dynamics of religion and its actual manifestation as a plurality of world faiths.

Radhakrishnan's Interpretation of Religion

Basically, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan "universalizes" rather than "resolves" religion. In other words he seeks its generic nature and then relates its particulars. In regard to the existence of the many traditions, he says: "Right round the world, distributed more or less uniformly, we find a mass of faith and ritual, which in spite of apparent variation and individual forms, seems to cohere with respect to certain essential features."²¹⁹ All

²¹⁸ Radhakrishnan all along admits this interface is direct experience, as opposed to mere intellectual recognition, and poignantly presses his point in RF : "The existence of God means the real or the possible experience of this Being. If the genuine standard of knowledge is experience, we must deny the character of knowledge to our ideas of God unless they are traced to the [one's own personal] experience of God." Radhakrishnan recalls Thomas Aquinas' "cognitio dei experimentalis" (p.104).

religions share a "sense of the infinite", of the universe as it is in its absoluteness; however much the Absolute "eludes the machinery of speech and symbol" (the mystics and seers speak of it in silence) the human mind by its very nature interprets the mystery, and automatically transcribes it. Each religious tradition professes, is marked by, and progresses, with its individual transcription (as its doctrinal body).

Radhakrishnan speaks of a common impulse, or of a common aspiration which is present in all religious quests. He delineates this variously as "the desire to find God and understand our relation to Him...", "an attempt to discover the ideal possibilities of human life..." and a quest for the highest possible knowledge of reality. He sees this conscious attempt to link the personal and the cosmic and implicitly to establish a harmonious life, as "a fundamental unity of vision and purpose which embraces all mankind."²²⁰

Radhakrishnan accepts the variety of descriptions which result from the religious quest as both authentic and legitimate. He bases this on the Advaitic premise that "the Infinite is both amurta, formless, and murta, formed"; therefore both "superpersonal" and "personal" representations are valid. They are the absolute and the relative ways of expressing singular, unified, reality. Radhakrishnan explains in the language of Hinduism: "when we emphasize the nature of reality in itself we get the absolute

²¹⁹ EWR p.18.

²²⁰ "Interreligious Cooperation," in OSWR Third series, p.235. (underscoring mine.)

Brahman; when we emphasize its relation to us we get the personal Bhagavan [God]²²¹. In addition, the details of our descriptions of the supreme are determined by the presuppositions of our age and of our particular tradition. In Radhakrishnan's words, the factor which unifies the world's religions is "religious consciousness" --an awareness based upon and constantly renewed by the highest form of human experience: the "insight into the nature of reality", which he otherwise calls "spiritual intuition", pratyakṣa. With this parameter, each religion --Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and the rest-- becomes a particular spin-out or concretization of the fundamental fibre of this (in)depth-perception. This is drawn out figuratively in An Idealist View of Life where Radhakrishnan says that "...if experience is the soul of religion, expression is the body through which it fulfills its destiny"²²². That is to say, the world's religions represent different expressions of the "mystical vision"; they are different darśanas which must be reconciled.

Radhakrishnan interprets the multiformity and multiplexity of religion by means of a cognitional theory which has roots in the Mīmāṃsā Sūtra. He says that even though a religion is rooted in an immediate personal awareness of the highest order, this perceptual experience of reality "...is not the pure unvarnished presentment of the real in itself, but is the presentment of the real already influenced by the ideas and prepossessions of the perceiving mind." Therefore "the variety of the pictures of God is easily intelligible when we realize that religious experience is psycho-

²²¹ HVL p.24.

²²² IVL p.70.

logically mediated."²²³ This "psychological mediation" is one of the clues to properly understanding the occurrence of a plurality of religions. The mind determines the approach to viewing reality (that is, nature, the universe, and so on) and provides a structural frame for perceiving it. The mind also plays a powerful role in systematically bracketing and mapping what is seen, into a language of concepts and ideas which are regarded as representationally true (one may say "symmetrical") to the object of perception. In other words, the image is ideally a type of reflection.

Since objective reality ultimately does not admit divisions but is a unity, the forms and patterns contrived to reflect reality will necessarily fall short. Radhakrishnan writes: "People begin to realize this side of it [the truth, or fact of what is observed] or that side of it, but their views are partial, tentative, hypothetical....[only] one partial aspect of the ultimate truth."²²⁴

The different religions present "alternative readings of reality" which are, Radhakrishnan asserts, "not so much true as significant". In order to really appreciate the meaning of the various religious ideas and symbols the task is to look through them to what lies behind: "We have to think out the metaphysical presuppositions and attain personal experience of the religious a priori, from which all living faith starts."²²⁵ Radhakrishnan

²²³ HVL pp. 19-20.

²²⁴ "Mahavira Jayanti Celebrations, New Delhi," OSWr Oct.1952-Feb.1959, p.301.

²²⁵ RCW p.72.

basically takes his cue from the Indian attitude, which he claims "...insisted on the inadequacy of linguistic symbols and logical concepts to represent the Supreme Reality which [was] encountered in...moments of highest insight....intellectual statements, propositional forms are bound to be varied."²²⁶ Specifically addressing Religious Studies scholars in particular, Radhakrishnan's appeal in his "Fragments of a Confession", is to "frame a coherent system of general ideas in terms of which the different types of experience can be interpreted."²²⁷

Radhakrishnan speaks of this challenge as belonging to the "philosophy of religion" which he defines as "religion come to an understanding of itself".²²⁸ He is repetitive and emphatic in stating that a true meta-religious and transreligious understanding cannot come either from isolated speculation or from theological apologetics. It must be steered by reason, and it must also meet the rigour of rational scientific investigations and conform to their findings --or at least not contradict them. The mandate which Radhakrishnan gives for the inquiry into religion is ultimately this: the enterprise must be sustained by time-honoured principles which are derived from the truly accurate spiritual insights --epitomized by the Vedāntic texts and most clearly illuminated by Śankara-- and given meaning in terms of the twentieth century, with full reference to politics, economics, culture, and so on. The heuristic guides Radhakrishnan offers for Religious Studies are the same as those elements he said were involved in

²²⁶ OSWr Vol.3 p.185.

²²⁷ "Fragments", in Philosophy of S R, p. 27.

²²⁸ IVL p.66.

a religious discipline (discussed above). They strongly suggest the pramānas of the Brahma Sūtra which are employed to systematize various strands of experience and philosophical thought. They are: pratyakṣa, direct observations, anumāna, reflection and reasoning, and āgama, reference to textual authority.

Evaluation

The lodestar for Radhakrishnan's efforts is a "world view which is inclusive of the philosophical insights of all the world's traditions", and one which revolves around "agreement of basic perspectives and ultimate values". These "basic perspectives" he defines within a humanistic, twentieth century structure of global "needs" and spiritual affirmation. The "ultimate values" of which he speaks relate to a particular concept of reality and within it, cosmic evolution, and the guarantee for self-realization. As for the prescribed "world view", Radhakrishnan is convinced that both its necessary platform and universal categories reside in the Hindu scriptures, which, when stripped to their eternal elements, disclose their essential pan-religious, pan-cultural, and trans-temporal character. To give impact to his conviction, he recasts the content of particular texts by departing from a totally Hindu frame of understanding, weaving into his expositions, concepts and categories from within mainly Western philosophical and religious patterns of thought.

Even when not writing as a bhāṣyakāra, his motive continues to be to es-

establish the universality and contemporary relevance of Hindu understanding. His books and speeches consistently include cross-references of Eastern and Western wisdom, translating the former into the latter, and outlining the parallel intent of religious discourse no matter in which tradition it arises. These efforts, it has been pointed out by his critics, have their share of ambiguities, obscurities and apparent contradiction. But this is certainly hardly to Radhakrishnan's discredit; what it does point out is the immensity of the task which he undertook. That task was to meaningfully fill the psychological and spiritual vacuum created by the world wars, the emergence of the scientific era, and the accomplishments of technological advance. This was a global phenomenon and required a unified, global solution, which could only come about through establishing communications on the deepest level, represented in religion and philosophy, and in a meta-language which would do justice to the uniqueness of individual positions.

Out of this general context, Radhakrishnan moves to particulars. He suggests none else but the Indian attitude as the beacon to all people, and the teachings of the Bhagavadgītā as the enchiridion for ecumenical accord and human integrity. As already noted, basically Radhakrishnan is a Vedāntin. The locus of power and meaning for his work as a philosopher is in the prasthāna traya, and upon examination one can see that his thoughts are logically consistent with what he considers the bare bones of Advaitic thought. His task has been to reframe the monistic vision in such a way as to show its eternity and hence applicability to modern day spiritual needs, and by this demonstration, to endorse its self-proclaimed authori-

ty.

Radhakrishnan theoretically gets to these bare bones, these "eternal seed ideas" as he calls them, through a fairly complex process of demythologization. To demythologize is to align at any one historical moment the "data of faith" with "the natural knowledge man has of himself and the world", both in sophistication and in significance.²²⁹ He constantly underscores the ultimate connection between a religious doctrine's legitimacy, and its ability to perform as an integrator of human personality and human endeavors.

In actuality his programme of demythologization brings up many issues and questions about the process itself. The saga of Rudolf Bultmann, who coined the term and applied it to Christianity not so long before Radhakrishnan borrowed the concept, is well known. His writings met a barrage of disclaimers, and he was accused by the orthodox and less orthodox alike of defrauding Christians of the very basis of their spirituality. Without further reference to the particular debate which Bultmann sparked, one must ask what was the significance of Radhakrishnan's reframing of the core of Advaita Vedānta, bearing in mind that he considered himself as being fully within the tradition, even while actively involved in its renewal.

²²⁹ The level of sophistication (complexity and subtlety) of the latter should be reflected in religious inquiry and statements (and the institutions which embody them) if religion is to have impact socially and personally.

On the positive side, Radhakrishnan has indeed contributed to the bridging of the aforementioned "East-West gap" by adding to the understanding on both sides. He has also legitimately articulated the interfaith interface as being a common humanity and a common global destiny. In a slightly different vein Radhakrishnan is successful in establishing the contemporary relevance of the Bhagavadgītā in particular, by taking advantage of the ambivalent nature of Sanskrit words and reworking the ślokas to reveal the Modern Man in Arjuna, and the timeless paradigm in Kṛṣṇa. Without doubt this is a central contribution.²³⁰

But consider Radhakrishnan's aim to preserve the integrity of each religious tradition, in point, the Advaita Vedānta tradition. Even though he feels that most Advaitins do not capture the essential message of the texts (as he blatantly accuses Christians and others of misinterpreting and misrepresenting the purport and import of their canons), the fact remains for Radhakrishnan, that a religion is, as it is lived by its adherents. Many adherents of Advaita Vedānta would claim that he does not do justice to their self-understanding, and their enactment of what they consider the basis of a spiritual lifestyle. Radhakrishnan does show sensitivity to this problem, though, and often seems caught in the predicament, while demythologizing texts, of what is and what is not timelessly true for all mankind. His somewhat vague agenda for the procedure (p.55-56 above) targets i) logical coherence, ii) rationally conforming to the findings of science, iii) elimination of anthropomorphic attributes of the Di-

²³⁰ Another very interesting study on the same theme is Avatāra: the Humanization of Philosophy through the Bhagavad Gītā by Antonio de Nicolas (New York, Nicolas Hayes Ltd.; 1976).

vine, iv) concepts which express and fulfill present global needs, among other things. And yet, one frequently finds him criticizing Indians for clinging to outdated formulae (as he proceeds to radically reformulate certain typical, exclusively Hindu ideas), while he himself harbours a streak of conservatism which shows up in his idealization of the caste system, of the sannyāsin, and of the times of Śankara, for example.

On the other hand, other Hindus, other Advaitins, are happy to have a fresh look at themselves, and to see an active exploration of the relation between the abstract wisdom of antiquity and the concrete existential conditions which form their living reality. As Radhakrishnan clarified Vedānta for Westerners by translating it into the languages of other traditions, so also, in the process, those Western traditions became reflectively more understandable to Vedāntins.

This dilemma of finding a place between a rigid orthodoxy with a fixed interpretation of authority on the one side, and the risk of "throwing out the baby with the bathwater" in a progressive reinterpretation on the other, is inherent in any attempt at demythologization. So, too, is the inevitable query 'What lies between de-mythologization and re-mythologization?' Is it a space? A line? Or do the two melt into each other where one myth dies and the other finds meaning? Such considerations naturally lead to a fuller discussion relating tradition, myth, and also meaning, metaphors, models and so on. Though the investigation of these interrelations is not within the chosen boundaries of this thesis, they must be eventually considered to tackle the question. Paul Ricoeur, Michael Polanyi, and

Ian G. Barbour are but a few scholars doing advanced work in this field.²³¹ One also must consider whether what is referred to as "demythologization" by Radhakrishnan, might not be more accurately described as "dedogmatization".

Radhakrishnan's demythologization programme, because of the issues it raises as well as by his attempts to refresh Advaitic wisdom, has a central and lasting value in provoking a rethinking and reevaluation of the role and content of a religious tradition. It also inquires into what contributes to the mechanics of its inner change and its ability to be a transforming force for humanity. Many questions surrounding demythologization have been left unresolved by Radhakrishnan, but in the light of our last comment, yet another look will be given to his method and theory in the next chapter, to evaluate its significance on another level of investigation, namely in regard to Religious Studies.

²³¹ See Bibliography for complete references.

Chapter 6

VALIDITY WITHIN A LARGER FRAMEWORK

The present deep-seated concern in the academic study of religion, is to reconcile, without collapsing into each other, the plurality of Faiths. Each major religious tradition claims a sort of a priori-ity (authorized by historical instances of revelation, intuition, or illumination) and scholars together with many theologians recognize the mandate for developing a way of adequately treating the issue. Radhakrishnan's approach, despite its already noted weaknesses, is leading in this challenge.

Euclidean Geometry as a Heuristic Metalanguage

The format of the next section of the critical analysis is a formal model, which will not only embrace and mediate Radhakrishnan's metaphysic, but which will also allow a closer look at the philosophical and methodological implications of his demythologization scheme. This model utilizes the visual language of Euclidean geometry, and involves translating concepts from their verbal form and linear logic, to a commensurate level of abstraction which is graphic, and which is under the rule of geometric logic.²³² Generally, Radhakrishnan's epistemological and ontological ideas

²³² For an interesting study of the concept of "geometric" logic as it is

are made to assume, as far as is necessary for the demonstration, the characteristics, in feature and proportion, of basic Euclidean geometry --for our purposes, plane geometry. The actual use of the model best explains itself.

Why develop a model? Firstly it serves as a metaview or synoptic platform, which Radhakrishnan claims is central to a universal research strategy. This being so, it performs two functions. It illustrates the principles of his theory by assembling a conspectus of his ideas (on the nature of reality, on the nature of religion and so on), and, in doing so, allows a critical evaluation of how true are his own applications of a metaview of religious systems. The use of a working model has yet another role here. It is a conscious attempt to link the contemporary discussions in the enterprise of Religious Studies with the relatively new field of General Systems Theory (Metatheory) and its offspring, Systems Philosophy and Metascience, which are in the business of articulating and offering solutions to precisely what is of concern here.²³³ It is therefore an experiment in incorporating the disciplined understanding of religion into the wider context of human investigation and the general pursuit of knowledge.

related to the Tibetan mandalas, see Ter Ellinson-Waugh, "Algebraic and Geometric Logic," Philosophy East and West, Vol. XXIV. Jan. 1974. pp.23-40.

²³³ This field is presented in the writings of Ludwig von Bertalanffy (biologist), the father of General Systems Theory --which he developed in the thirties and forties; in the works of Ervin Laszlo (philosopher), who articulated the parameters for a Systems Philosophy; and in a host of others (coming from various disciplines), who are indexed in Gerard Radnitsky's Contemporary Schools of Metascience. Radnitsky discusses in Volume II the Hermeneutic-Dialectic intellectual tradition and its structure for the metascience of human sciences. See bibliography for complete references.

Had Radhakrishnan been aware of the developments in Metaphilosophy and Metascience, especially such contributions as Ervin Laszlo's The Systems View of the World,²³⁴ he would have appreciated its place in this critique. Indeed, much of what Radhakrishnan observes on the structure, function, and versatility of religious traditions is echoed in Laszlo's general theory of systems.

But why is the metalanguage stated in the vocabulary of Euclidean geometry? Of course, a geometric model is not the only option. However, there are interesting recommendations for it here. First, the vocabulary of geometry has a link with Radhakrishnan's vocabulary. The terms and categories which Radhakrishnan uses in speaking about religion reside as predominantly in the realm of concepts associated with spatial awareness or vision as do those of Euclidean geometry. Radhakrishnan also uses geometric concepts; he speaks of "experiencing" and "perceiving" synonymously, of "relative points of view", of a "narrow" or "twisted perspective", of "reflection" (the Absolute being "reflected" in the world), of "images" and "illusions", of "translation" and "symmetry". A logical connection is also present, insofar as Radhakrishnan develops his arguments in a geometrical way which may be visualized. For instance, the meaning and significance of religious symbols rest in the concept of symmetry rather than metaphysical, ontological or theological discussions. So the translation of Radhakrishnan into quasi-mathematical notions is not as inappropriate as it may initially seem.

²³⁴ Ervin Laszlo, The Systems View of the World (New York: George Braziller, 1972).

Second, Radhakrishnan accepts traditional Advaitic analysis, and Euclidean geometry has certain propositions close to Śankara's. The principles of both Advaita and geometry are accepted as unsublatable, for example. They are self-evident and do not admit contradiction or refutation. Both are built of universal categories. Both yield a unified, comprehensive picture. Both are said to be ultra precise as signifiers of the highest order.

A third recommendation comes from Descartes' "philosophia more geometrico". Descartes built a whole new system of thought based upon his vision that the language of nature is mathematics. Since the structure of the universe is mathematical, a geometric exposition is its logical equivalence. That is, geometric images correspond exactly to what they represent, and in turn, the "signified" can be defined and proved within the system of geometry. And since it was a given for Descartes, that principles of geometry were irrefutable, exhaustive and inherently logical,²³⁵ geometry became the methodological model par excellence. It is interesting to note that Radhakrishnan does make Cartesian assumptions in his hermeneutic scheme. He is concerned more with Descartes' ordo cognoscendi --in the quest for knowledge of truth, the order (process and pattern) of discovery begins with considering existence and the mind-- than with the ordo essendi and ontological propositions. The method of Radhakrishnan, also, can be seen as Cartesian. He first analyzes or resolves the complexity of religions into the simplicity of religion (as embodied in eternal seed-ideas), which gives "intuition" free play. He then allows reason to operate

²³⁵ See Appendix A.

on these seed-ideas and to synthesize a comprehensive understanding of all religious traditions. Both Radhakrishnan and Descartes presume that the use of the proper method is the key to discovering truth --which is merely waiting to be discovered. Both merge metaphysics and logic, and partner intuition and reason.

In conclusion it should be noted that besides the obvious interface, and despite certain limitations to graphic expression, a pictorial model allows a simultaneous treatment of many premises, including some ideas which have hitherto remained unarticulated. A geometric model therefore offers the possibility of a consistent and conceptually clear review of Radhakrishnan's hermeneutical work, in a system which is relatively simpler, objective, and coherent.

Diagrammatic Translation and Exposition

What follows is a series of geometrical line drawings which function to establish a metaview of Radhakrishnan's methodology. The drawings indicate the Advaita Vedānta categorical definitions and terminology which serve him in his examination of the "data" of Comparative Religion and Religious Studies. As the drawings progress, they "build up" a picture of Radhakrishnan's mindframe in such a way as to clarify theological premises, methodological premises, and the interconnection and interplay of the two.

The text accompanying each diagram does a number of things. First, there is the title of the diagram. Each individual title serves as an encapsulated guide to reading each geometric diagram. In series, the titles become an index of the phases of Radhakrishnan's theory of religion. After each diagram, there is a verbal replay of Radhakrishnan's thinking, and a connection with its geometric metaphrase. This is to "ground" the model, and also leads to a more in-depth examination of Radhakrishnan's postulates, his conclusions, and their implications.

FIGS. 1 & 2

FIG. 1

The nature of Ultimate Reality : on the one hand undifferentiated, unlimited, immutable, on the other, has an innate urge to reflect itself as the world or cosmos.

"Behind the development of this universe there is the Reality of a being, consciousness, bliss, sat, cit, ānanda."²³⁶ The ground of all being is the Absolute, which is undifferentiated, all pervasive, immutable, and named variously as Brahman, Spirit, the Supreme, Ultimate Reality.

Part of the nature of the Absolute is its ability to reflect itself, that is, to be actualized. The principle of actualization --or axis of reflection-- is māyā. Māyā is the mysterious connection between the empirical world and the Absolute Reality on which it rests.²³⁷ Māyā is līlā, the sport of self-expression. The Absolute, Spirit, then, becomes the source, pratibimba, and in its active aspect is Īśvara, God.

Enigmatically Ultimate Reality contains its field of expression. The "world of becoming" (shaded area) is the potential and dynamic playground in which and out of which all things are realized. This is nature, the medium for the incarnation of Spirit.²³⁸ It is the world of time and change, the realm of māyā. Māyā indicates the essential temporality of

²³⁶ RCW p.87.

²³⁷ Cf. HVL p.48.

²³⁸ "Nature is an essentially unanalyzable and individual process of change in which certain formal attributes called space-time and certain material characteristics called objects, as matter, life, etc. exhibit themselves as standing in many relations to each other and the whole." IVL, p.183.

the world and also refers to creative power.²³⁹ It is part and parcel of the "eternal" manifesting in the "temporal". The cosmos is attributed a "relative reality". As the reflection, bimba, of Brahman, the Absolute, it is "...not a mere illusion, but it is not as real as the fundamental, Ultimate Reality of Brahman."²⁴⁰ It is the "appearance" of the infinite. ("The Absolute alone has non-created divine reality. All else is dependent, created reality.")²⁴¹

As apparent being, the world (shaded area) has an order and an evolutionary thrust. From physical matter to mind all things are related in a system of "intimate interdependence"; each thing is unique according to its "level of being" and degree of consciousness. For example, living organisms share characteristic features of the physical world, but, being individual wholes which are integrated into the environment, represent a different, higher order of fact (*vis-à-vis* atomic systems) and so are nearer to reflecting or revealing reality. However, "Even at the physical level, reality is not a collection of independent things but a whole, and as such it has a structure which prescribes the relations as well as the properties of the parts....We can infer from one part to another since events form a world of intercourse and association. At any one stage the whole universe represents a cosmic situation, and any part of it represents the whole background."²⁴² The cosmos is a continuum of fact. It is relative,

²³⁹ Cf. "Reply to Critics," p.801.

²⁴⁰ "Reconciliation and Harmony," Speech at Civil Reception, Trivandrum, 29 September, 1963, in OSWr Vol.IV p.74.

²⁴¹ "Fragments", p.14.

perceptual truth, characterized by perpetual change.

FIG. 2

Both man and nature, including inanimate objects, are a reflection of Ultimate Reality, which itself remains pristine and unchanged. Man and nature, in the language of experience, become mind: the self as subject (the experiencer or seer), and objective reality (that which is seen or the field of perception).

"The human self is an emergent aspect of the world process and is not a substantive different from the process". Here the "human self" is arbitrarily represented by the darker plane, and further by ABCD (Geometry holds that without loss of generality any plane may be represented by any three or more points.). In the frame at hand this is mind: the self as subject. And if the Absolute is considered sat-cit-ānanda, being, consciousness, bliss, the mind mostly reflects and expresses cit. It is cit-ta, individualized consciousness or intelligence. It may also be considered the "seer", dr̥k.

Outside the mind is objective reality, dr̥śya. Following the above train of thought it may be considered the reflection of the Absolute as sat. Sat becomes (in the medium of māyā) satya, which is the designation for all modes of existence. Objective reality includes all that is actual and perceptible. Most obviously it is the empirical world but extends to include such subtle constituents as values. Generally speaking it may be referred to as the continuum of events, that is, history. Again, as part of the cosmos it is subject to change. In Fig.2 objective reality is repre-

sented by the lighter plane, henceforth ABEF. Note the planes ABCD and ABEF are not to be taken literally. They point to differentiation within the same substratum, and that substratum is consciousness or Spirit-infused nature. As a consequence of their common ground, "There is an affinity between the structure of the world and the mind of man."²⁴³ Both are "poles of the one reality". Also note that the points C,D,E, are not col-linear!

²⁴³ IVL p.264.

FIG. 3

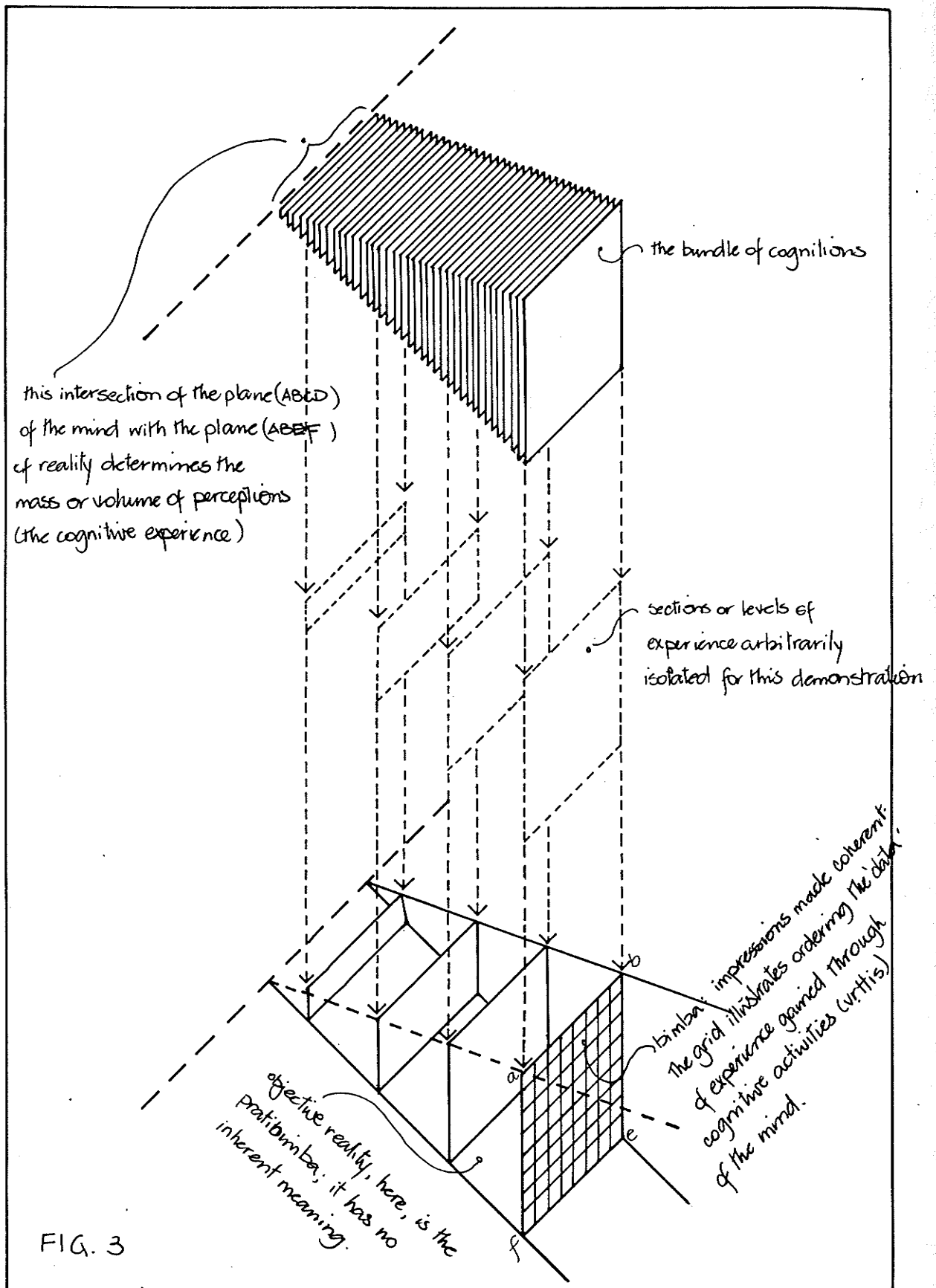


FIG. 3

FIG. 3

Experience, the mind's apprehension of objective reality is another way of indicating the link between the personal and the cosmic.

It is perception that establishes the connection between mind and objective reality, that is, between subject and object or "seer" and "scene". This cognitional activity or "experiencing" forms an interface and is here shown as the volume created by the interception of mind, ABCD, with objective reality, ABEF. The "angle of perception" or perspective, as can be observed in the diagram, is to a great extent a function of the "slant" of the mind. This volume, which represents the "mass" of experience, can be bracketed. (One can zero in on a particular segment or type of experience.)

Neither the universe of experience nor the individual consciousness in themselves are stratified, or partitioned, or defined, nor are they chaotic by nature. Each one has an intrinsic, internal structure which identifies itself and is discriminated in the action of perception. The mind's chief characteristic is awareness, which is further distinguished as the faculties of manas, the senses-mind, vijñāna, logical intelligence, and ānanda, intuition. The last has two products: perceptual knowledge and integral insight.²⁴⁴ These faculties in various combinations are receptive to and operate upon particular aspects of the object-field. The result, "experience", is a reflection of the latter, a reflection which despite there being no inherent meaning in the "scene" so-to-speak, is formatted as a coherent pattern involving interest, purpose, meaning, and numerous

²⁴⁴ "Reply", p.791.

qualifications. This ordering --shown in the bottom part of the diagram in a grid-- is an inherent activity of the mind, though, it shall be seen, not always contributing to an accurate reflection of objective reality.

The grid represents the sum of impressions at a particular (more or less arbitrary) level of consciousness --which correspondingly apprehends a certain level of reality.²⁴⁵ The grid refers to a reflection, bimba, of the universe (which in this relationship is the pratibimba) on the mind. This "seeing" or registration has concealed within itself not only an immediate awareness of what is before it, but also an inferential awareness determined by such activities as reflection, modes of discernment and so on, which together give significance to impressions (for instance as sounds are synthesized into melodies). In the process, "...life becomes intense and ordered and revolves about a steady center."²⁴⁶ Even with the synthesis, "...our sense perceptions, our logical concepts, our intuitive apprehensions are not forms superinduced on reality, but are determinate forms of reality itself."²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Each of these "levels of consciousness" are constituted by various faculties operation on the field of perception. The "levels of reality" range from the microscopic to the macroscopic, and from the material to the subtle.

²⁴⁶ EWR p.96.

²⁴⁷ IVL p. 264. (Underscoring not in text.)



FIGS. 4 & 5

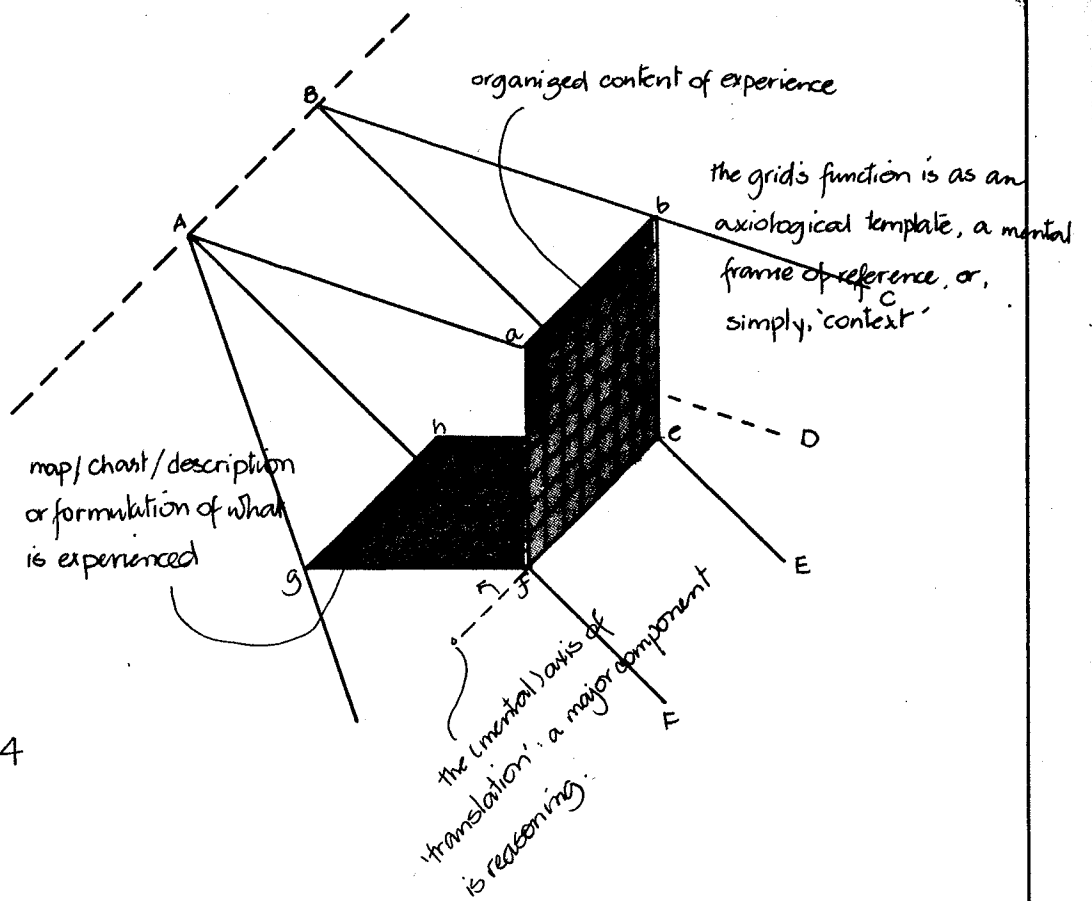


FIG. 4

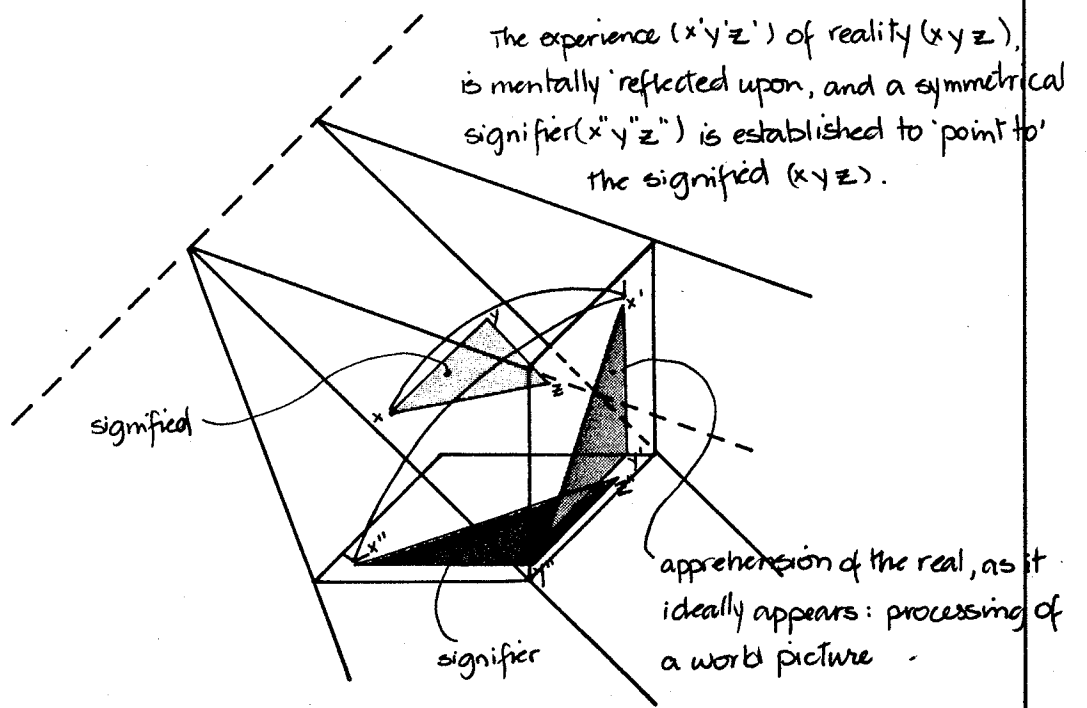


FIG. 5

FIG. 4

Ideally the mind creates an isomorphism of experience and knowledge.

What is experienced, abef, is automatically "mapped" in a specific language --illustrated as efgh. In the diagram, ef signifies those mental operations which account for and communicate the elements of experience. ef, then, is the axis of translation into the medium of concept and symbol. It signifies the "processing of a world picture", wherein impressions are organized by the perceiver into permanent entities, and framed as a knowledge-system. Intrinsic to this is an equally synthetic language of expression which could be verbal, sensual, notational, and so on.

efgh with its grid illustrates a concept-vocabulary, that is, a language map of reality which rests on thought, and which in turn rests on a direct experience. efgh could be a musical score, a painting, poem, algebraic or geometric statement, hologram, colour code, graph, and so forth. It could also be a religious doctrine embodied as a canonical text.

FIG. 5

Symmetrical transformation of reality into its image.

The nature of the mind --the self as perceiver-- as an innate affinity with the objective field of perception (both are consciousness/Spirit infused). Therefore the mind is immediately able to grasp the objective world and to make sense of it or to understand it.

Ideally there should exist a symmetry between objective reality, which, though indefinite, is here designated as xyz, and the content of experi-

ence, x'y'z', also between the latter and its formulation or description, x"y"z".²⁴⁸ Symmetry, rather than identity, is the rule, because there is a constant change of the medium of reflection or expression. "Admitting that the concept plan of reality revealed to thought is true, still,...thought is not identical with reality...we do not go beyond concepts."²⁴⁹ In the case of religious perception, "...intuitions [experiences of direct apprehension] inspire the accounts of reflection, which only confirm what has been apprehended in another way. The reflections are pure and true to the extent that they refer to the intuited facts. There is a perpetual disquiet because Ultimate Being is not an object. Reflective accounts are thus only approximations."²⁵⁰ As an orderly chart, efgh sets the conditions for re-experiencing reality under a particular rubric, and a dialogue is set up between the image of the scene, the seer/mind, and the scene/matter itself. Things are consequently "real" and "true" if they cohere in identity, behaviour, patterns of change and relation, to the formula established, in the linguistic system established as efgh. It should be tacitly understood that the underpinning of what is experienced is not itself what is experienced, nor is the language of experience, that is, the conception of fact, fact itself. The reconstructions serve the valuable purpose of mapping the original experience. It may even be considered as a "foil" for reality --like the silver

²⁴⁸ Cf. Gerard Radnitzsky's "Ideal Language" which will "map the logical form of the world", in Contemporary Schools of Metascience, (Chicago: Regnery; 1973). p.21.

²⁴⁹ IP Vol.1 p.40.

²⁵⁰ "Fragments", p.63.

back of a mirror which "catches" the image of the thing before it.²⁵¹

The descriptions of facts and the actual facts exist in a symbiotic interplay regulated by attitudes or interests, and, it could be said, given thrust by "faith" (crede ut intelligas). What this means is that: "When we test the claims of the experience of truth [x'y'z'] we are really discussing the claims of the forms or propositions in which the nature of the experience is unfolded [x''y''z'']".²⁵² In science, for instance, the latter are the formulae, the descriptive equations; in religion, beliefs are the x''y''z''s. To say that something exists, and with particular features, implies not only that experience of it is (experimentally) possible, but that such experience will jibe with other observations. The ultimate test even of religious conceptions, then, is to apply them to or overlay them on what one has personally experienced. This involves both intuition and logic. If beliefs are to be truly meaningful, they "must be in accordance with the nature and the laws of the world of reality with which it is their aim to bring into harmony."²⁵³

²⁵¹ Cf. Bradley in his introduction to Appearance and Reality: "I am so bold as to believe that we have a knowledge of the Absolute, certain and real, though I am sure that our comprehension is miserably incomplete. But I dissent emphatically from the conclusion that because imperfect, it is worthless." F.G. Bradley, Appearance and Reality, p.3.

²⁵² IVL p.77. Also cf. p.195: "In concrete experience mind and matter are in relation but the concreteness of the relation is prejudiced by the assimilation of one to the other. Matter and mind both belong to nature, but matter is not mind. It's otherness to mind is unaffected, however much it may be etherealized."

²⁵³ HVL p.14.

FIGS. 6 a, b

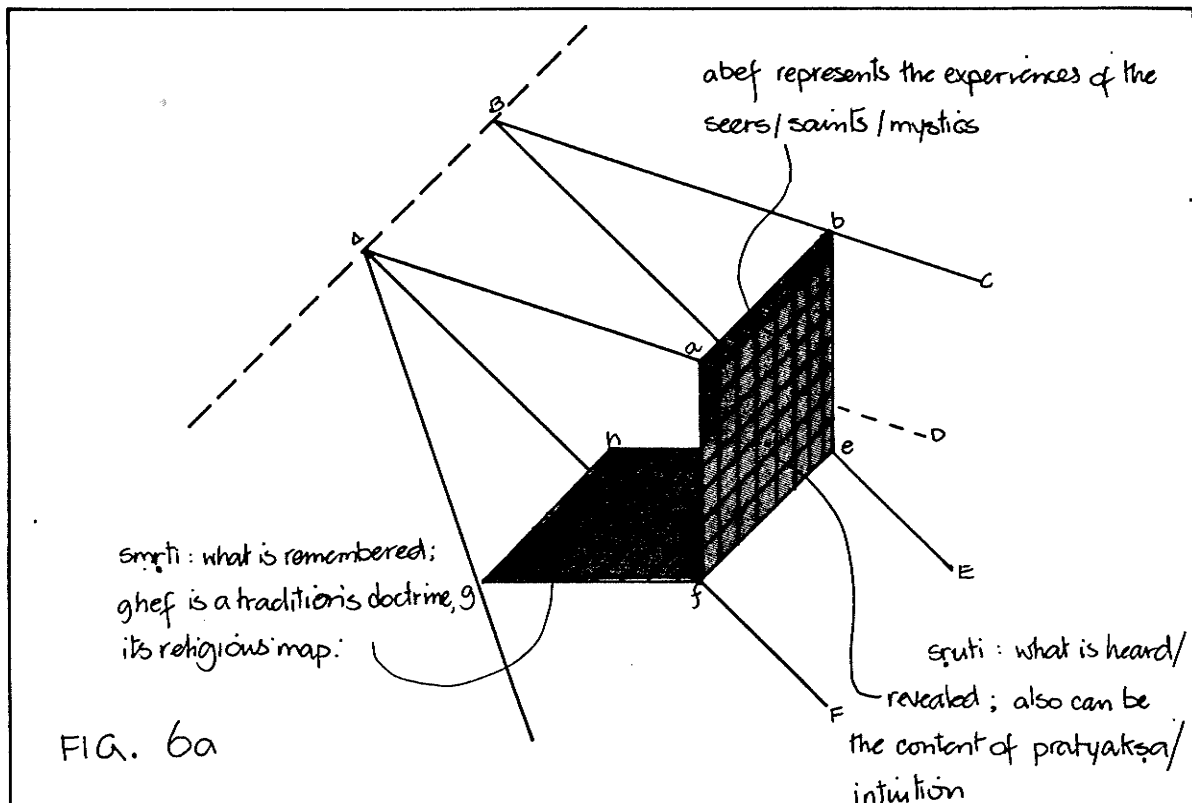


FIG. 6a

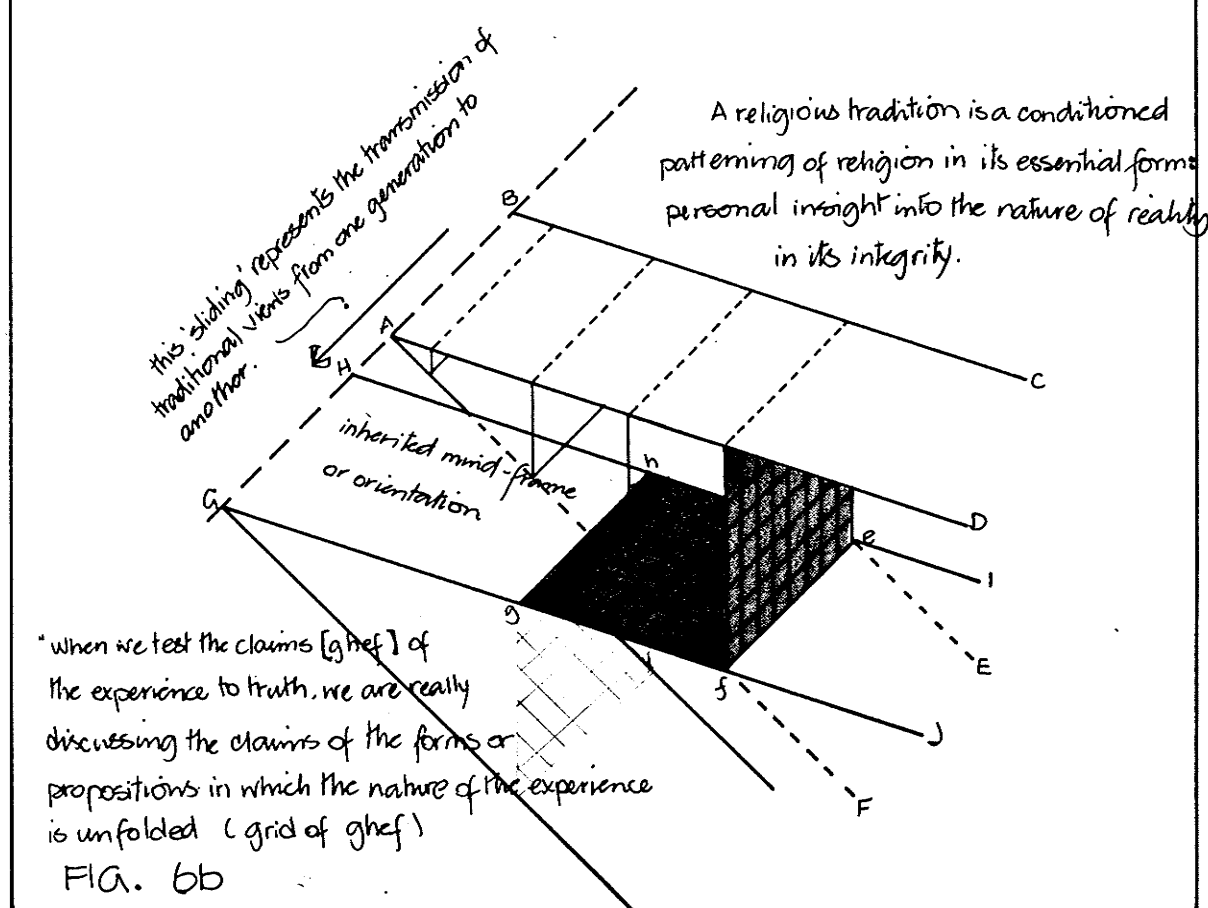


FIG. 6b

FIGS. 6 a & b

A religious tradition is basically the transmission of a specific ontological and epistemological orientation to objective reality.

"There is no such thing as pure experience, raw and undigested. It is always mixed up with layers of interpretation."²⁵⁴ In speaking in terms of religion it may be said that "Religious experience is not the pure unvarnished presentment of the real in itself, but the presentment of the real already influenced by the ideas and presuppositions of the perceiving mind."²⁵⁵ The dialectics of the mind and the objective world is what understanding and the progress in knowledge is all about. Each successive generation inherits a mind-frame in a system of concepts which to a greater or lesser extent determines its general attitude to reality. This transmission of ideas and values is indicated in the term "tradition", and is shown in Fig.6 as the "sliding" to GHIJ. As reality is characteristically constantly changing, the "right view" is not so much a matter of details --the grid of efgh-- as of the more general disposition it provides. In fact the more abstract or ambiguous or universal the efgh is, the more accomodating it is to new and fresh experience, insights, reinterpretation, and recasting.²⁵⁶ This is necessary for understanding, because the "face" of reality (the ultimate nature of things) is constantly changing.

Continuity in a tradition is shown in Fig. 6 as the preservation of a par-

²⁵⁴ IVL p.78.

²⁵⁵ HVL p.19.

²⁵⁶ Radhakrishnan says that tradition and environment condition both the vision of Reality and its presentation, therefore these expressions cannot be stationary.

ticular perspective (angle of view) determined by the frame of reference, efgh.²⁵⁷ Dynamism or vitality in a tradition, by the same token is embodied in the creative transformation of the pattern/grid within the frame. This transformation is a response to, and also an attempt to address particular, existential (historical sociological, linguistic) human circumstances.²⁵⁸ Each religion, in the final analysis, is such a composite system! "Traditional continuity is no mechanical reproduction; it is creative transformation, an increasing approximation to the ideal of truth."²⁵⁹

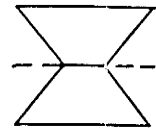
²⁵⁷ Radhakrishnan says the religious traditions contradistinguish themselves by the "content" of specific terms by which their separate inquiry proceeds. This is embodied in scriptures, rituals, ceremonies and values (the grid of efgh).

²⁵⁸ Radhakrishnan writes in IVL (p.189) "The two striking features of the physical world are continuity and change. Every event has not only a retrospective but a prospective reference."

²⁵⁹ "Fragments," p.10.

FIGS. 7a,b,c

FRONTAL ELEVATION



critical angle of view

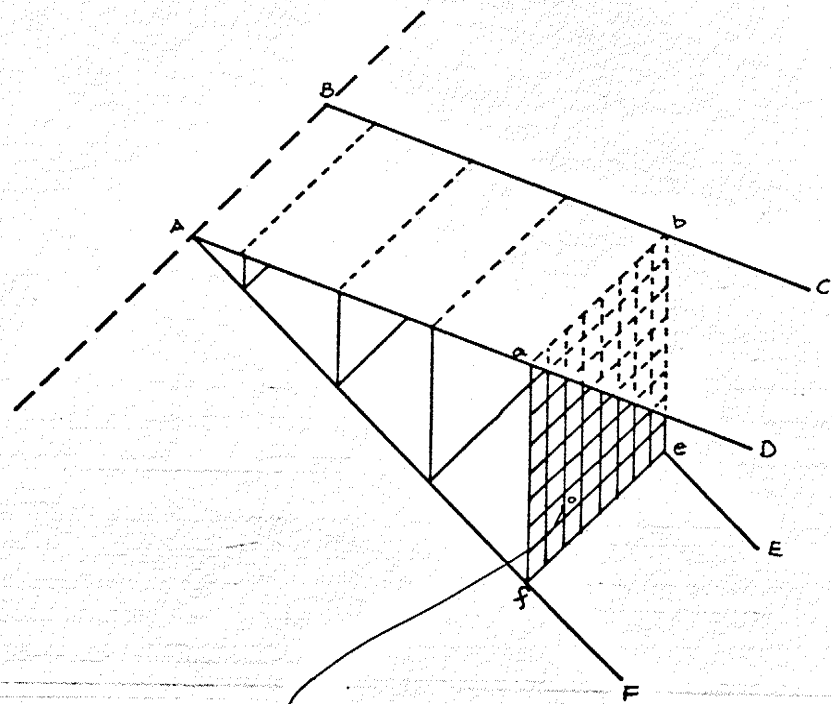


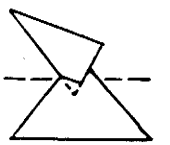
FIG. 7a

the mind has apprehended the field of perception (ABEF) in its entirety. Therefore a comprehensive, coherent, true experience results (abef)

Effects of the biases of the mind on perception.

a slanted mind cannot grasp reality in its integrity. An area/dimension is missing from ones field of vision, though it is crucial to informing and giving true meaning to the picture.

FRONTAL ELEVATION



slanted angle of view

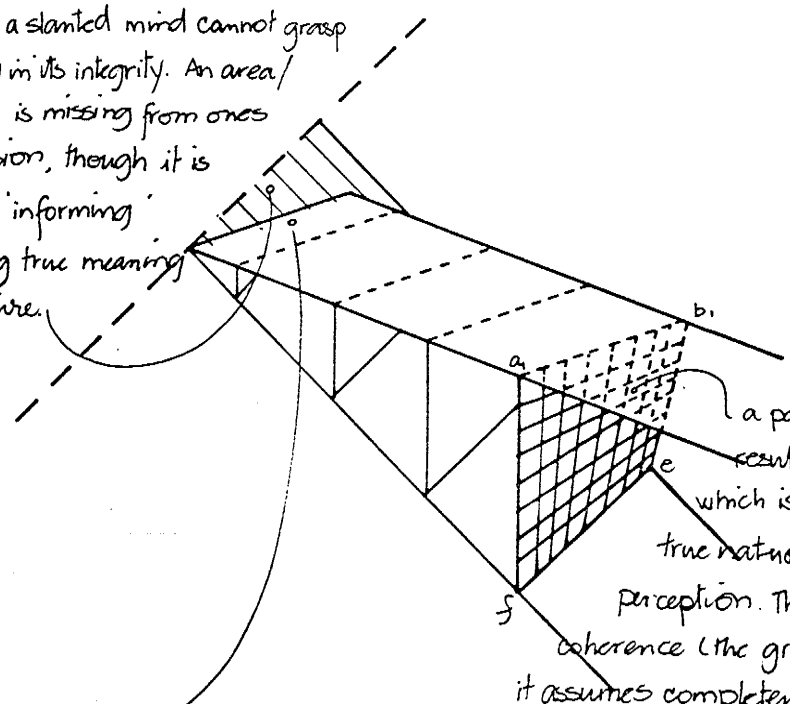
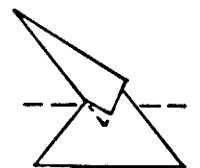


FIG. 7b.

a partial view of reality results in an experience which is a warping of the true nature of the field of perception. The mind forces coherence (the grid of a,b,ef), i.e., it assumes completeness, though it deals with only a part.

ones approach to the field of perception (perspective) may be biased by (specialized) interest or motives, by an inaccurate guide, by emotions, or a malfunction of mental activities.

FRONTAL ELEVATION



extremely slanted angle of view

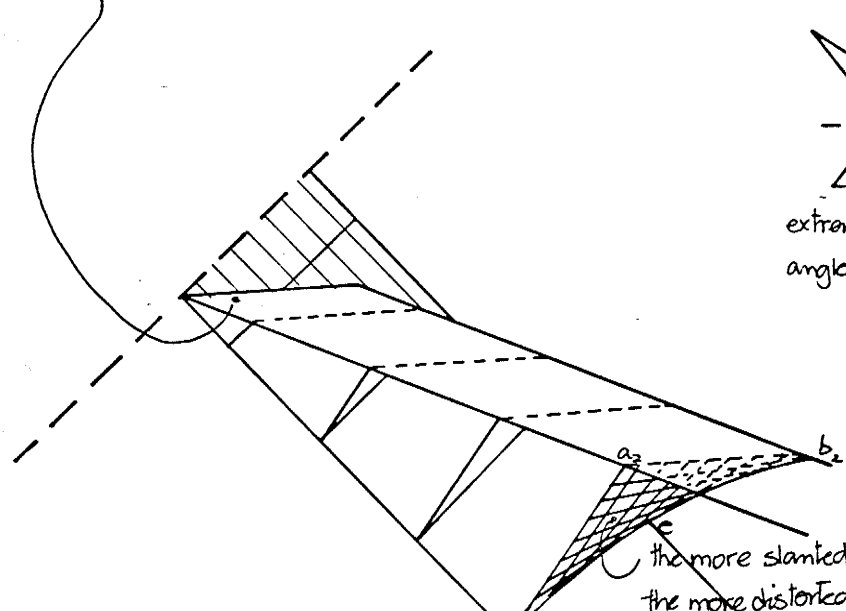


FIG. 7c.

the more slanted the approach, the more distorted the experience is (with respect to a potentially true experience (FIG. 7a: abef))

FIGS. 7 a, b & c

Perspectives of reality are ruled by the bias of the mind. The more biased the mind, the more the perception is a distortion of the field.

These three diagrams illustrate the critical angle of perception (Fig. 7) together with two arbitrary degrees of a "slanted" view (Figs. 8 and 9). The upper right corner of each diagram is the corresponding frontal elevation of the mind in each case piercing reality. Fig. 7 represents the unbiased mind as discussed in the previous figures. Radhakrishnan would call this the intuitive mind capable of direct perception, pratyakṣa or insight. It is clear from the geometric translation, that in such an attitude the mind or the self as subject (as it is referred to in Fig. 2) is able to apprehend objective reality in its totality, and ideally to reconstruct/reflect a symmetrical image in an appropriate language. This is the metarepresentation of the most powerful instance of what Radhakrishnan refers to as anubhava, the "direct experience and active participation in the eternal truth." The phenomenal world is a reflection of the Absolute. In capturing the integrity of the cosmos, one glimpses its ultimate underpinning.

Figs. 7a and 7b represent other subjective dispositions, constituted and characterized by a particular set of interests, motives, needs, and so on. The effect of a slanted approach to the objective world is a partial view, shown here to be an actual warping of the potential experience or perception, and, by implication, (refer to Fig.4), an inaccurate account of the field of perception is the end product. The cause is not the inability to see clearly. Rather, the geometry reveals that reality is intercepted in such a way, that there is a portion which is simply not accessible (see

the striped area). Therefore what is experienced is a distortion, precluding an accurate, comprehensive understanding of the underlying order of things, since all things are related in a system of "intimate interdependence". Also since the true and the real is reached through the actual, it, too, becomes inaccessible in its entirety. Of course, that which is within the boundaries of vision is given continuity and meaning --for the nature of the mind is to give coherence to the data of experience. But meaning and definition are to greater and lesser extents contrived or attributed rather than observed, and so are ultimately confused. The intrinsic, internal characteristics of reality remain concealed, because the angle of perception inhibits the perceiver from truly appreciating them.²⁶⁰

²⁶⁰ A classical example of an extremely twisted perspective is that of the paranoid. Everything he/she perceives is interpreted in terms of a threat to the person's security, and may have little to do with the actual situation.

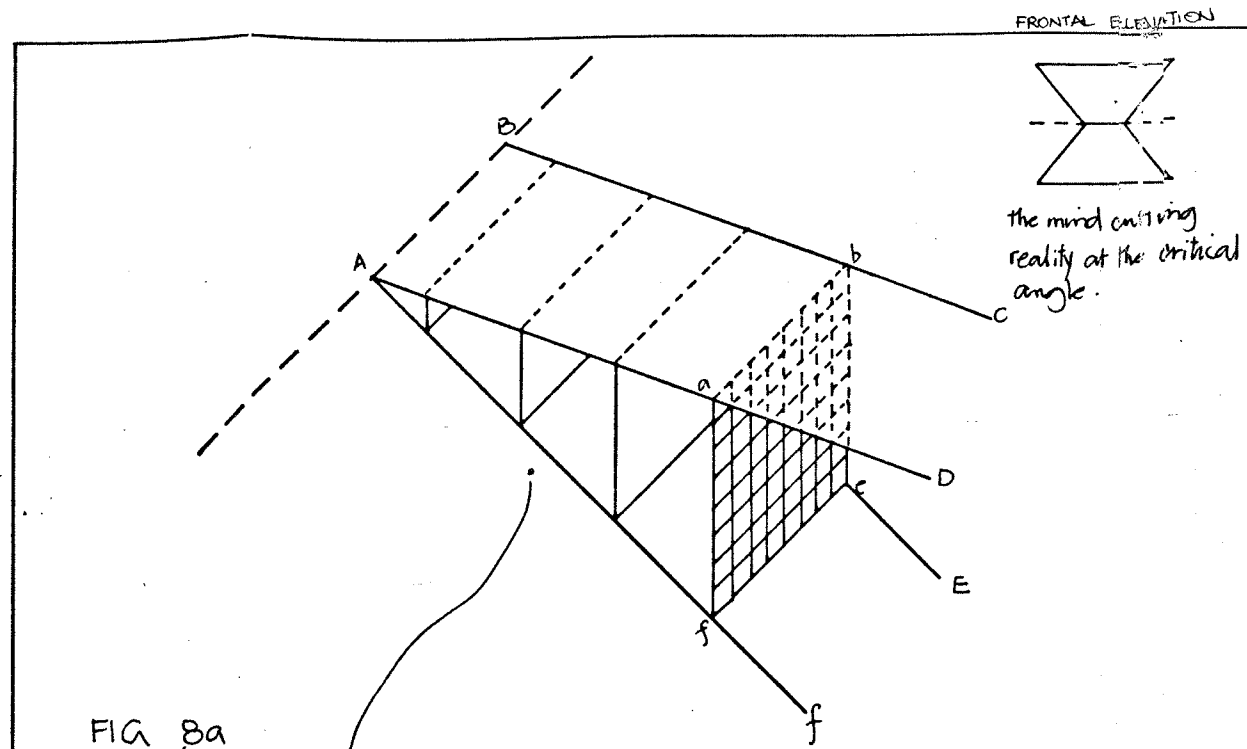


FIG 8a

same as 7a: the critical angle of perception, allowing a wholeistic apprehension of the universe.

Effects of the biases / limits of the mind on perception / cognition.

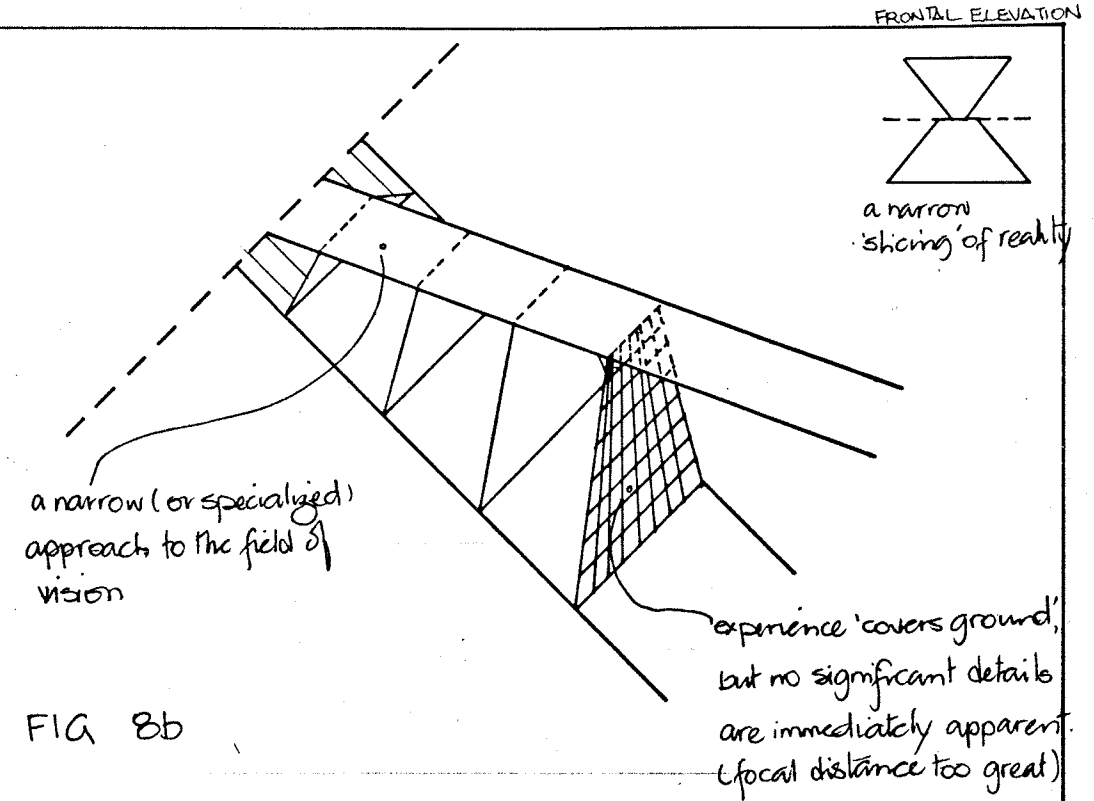


FIG 8b

a narrow and slanted orientation of the mind.

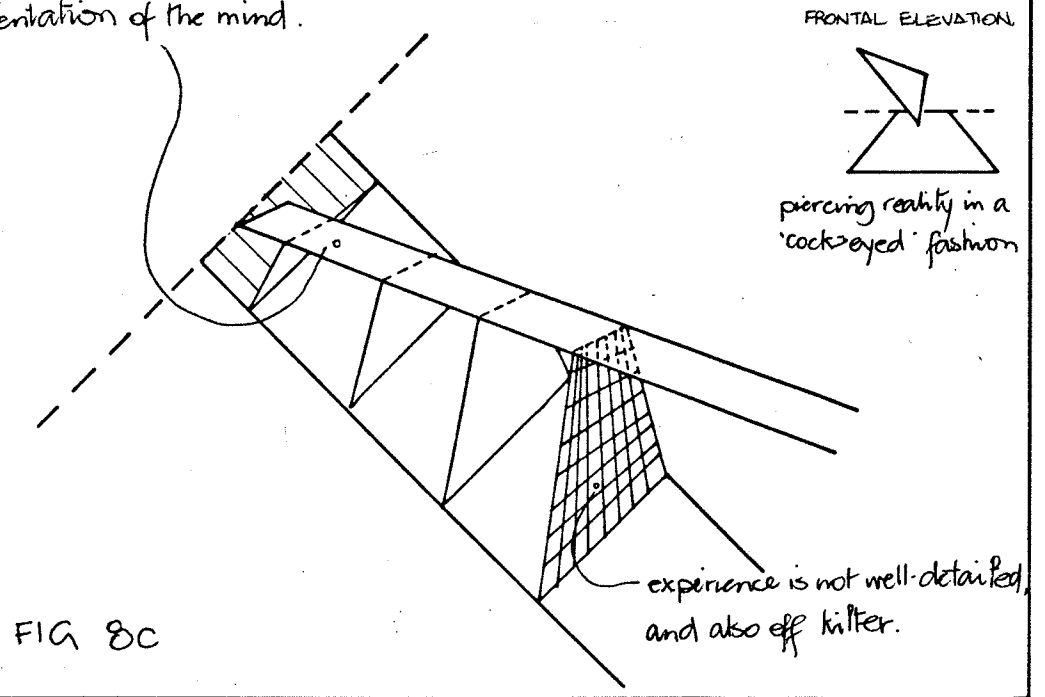


FIG 8c

FIGS.
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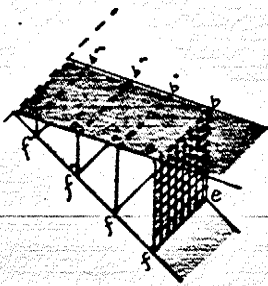
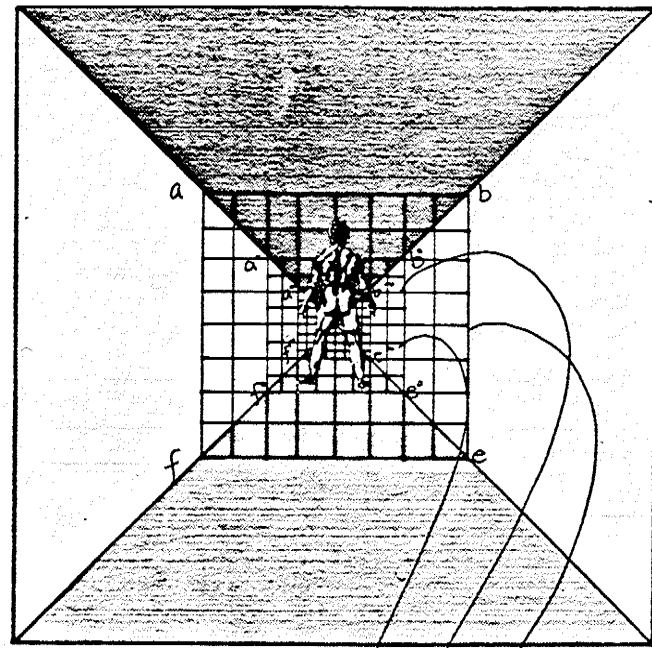
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FIGS. 8 a, b & c

The implications of tunnel vision, and of a narrow, slanted view respectively.

Not so much to append as to reinforce the above observations on how attitudes affect perception, the next two diagrams illustrate "narrow-mindedness" (Fig. 8b) and an attitude which is both narrow and skewed (Fig. 8c). Again what is perceived is a misrepresentation or aberration of what is viewed. In Fig. 8b perception is not so much twisted as it is unclear. It is virtually impossible to detect articulation and subtlety --as, for example, when a torch-beam is shown on a distant tree. This is not necessarily negative; it can and does have a practical if limited usefulness. All of the formal academic enterprises, both in science and the arts, represent narrowed approaches to the understanding of the nature of things. Their investigations do produce insights in their respective fields. However, these parcels of information are necessarily tentative. The problems inherent in a perspective which is both narrow and slanted are self-evident.

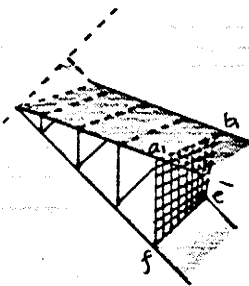
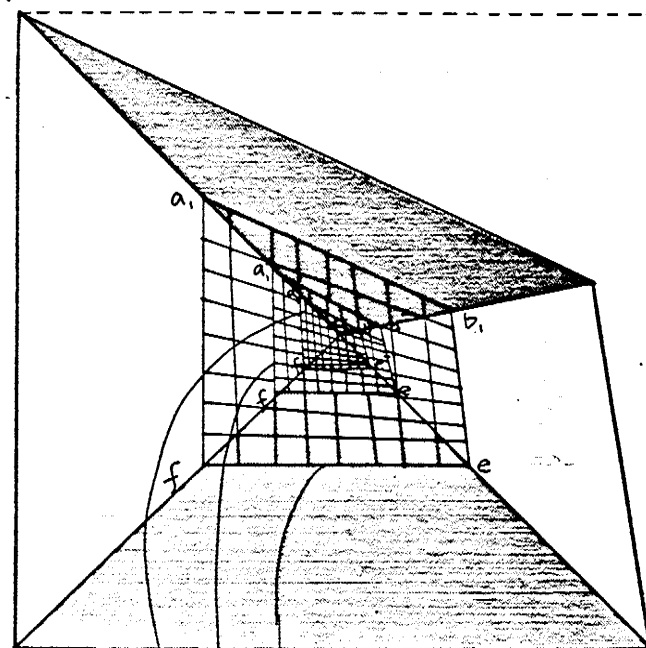
FIGS. 9a,b



a 'critical perspective'

FIG. 9a

with the proper perspective, the understanding of one level of reality is coherent with those of other levels.



a 'slanted view'

FIG. 9b

the 'pattern of understanding' corresponding to one level of reality. (a, b, e, f's grid) does not reinforce or 'cohere' logically with patterns of understanding (the sense of order) regarding other levels (the grids of a, b, e, f and a1, b1, e, f)

This is a cue that the angle of perception, and the influences which determine it, are inaccurate/inappropriate.

FIG. 9c

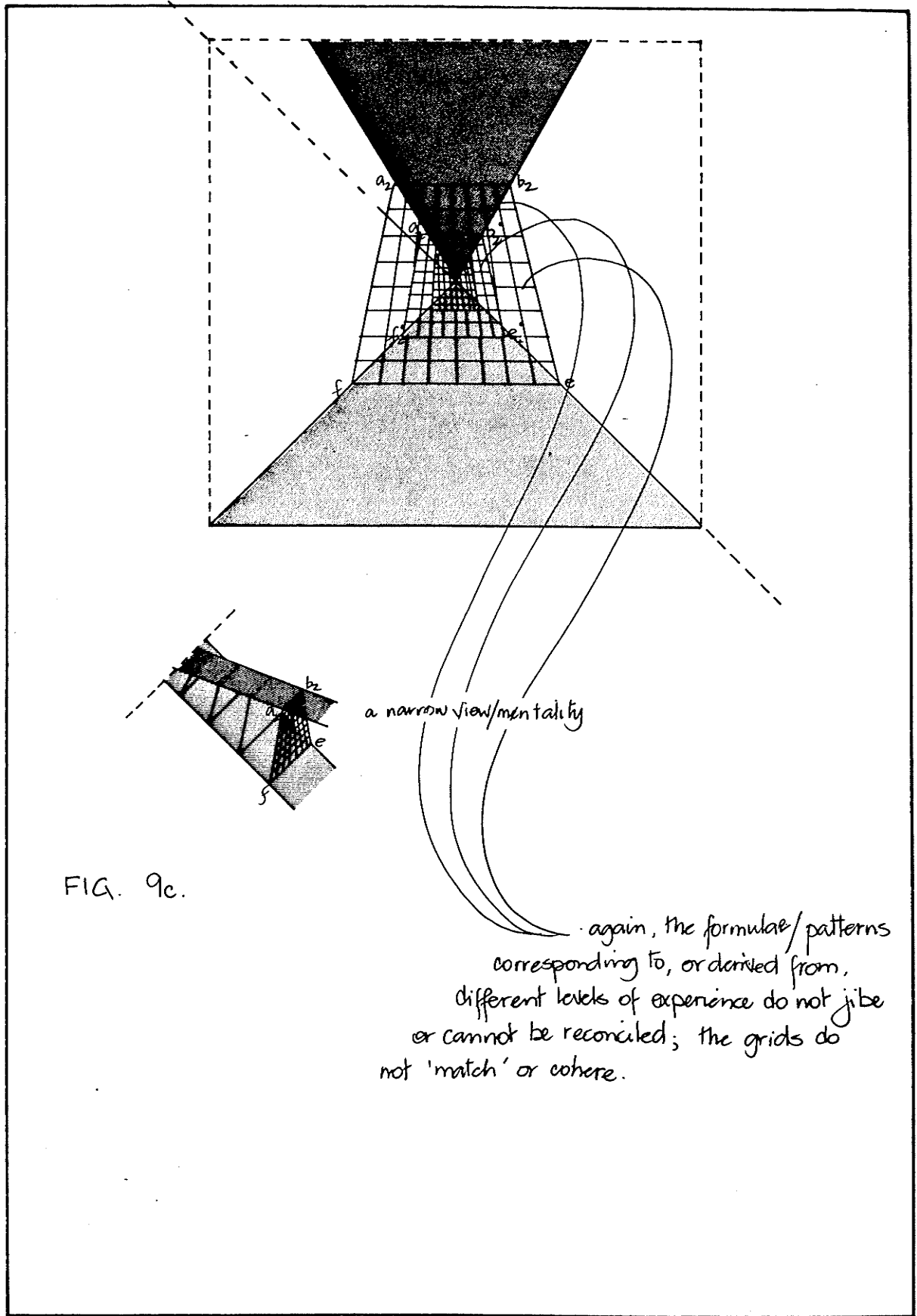


FIG. 9c.

a narrow view/mentality

again, the formulae/patterns corresponding to, or derived from, different levels of experience do not jibe or cannot be reconciled; the grids do not 'match' or cohere.

FIGS. 9 a, b & c

The natural tendency of the mind is to order what is before it, to make sense of it within a given context.

If one considers the entire picture, that is to say openly inquires into reality in its wholeness (represented in Fig. 9a as the critical angle of approach), the integrity of the objective world reveals itself. All levels of experience, from material to subtle, are inherently coherent, and will be seen as such. Diagrammatically, the grid --or logic-- of one level of observation (represented as a cross-section) lines up with all others. Implicitly, characteristic of a wholistic view, it is a wholistic and symmetrically accurate map or discourse, which potentially leads another perceiver to the same clear experience. (refer to Figs. 4 & 5 above).²⁶¹ Consequently thought and action based on a comprehensive understanding will always be appropriate, i.e. right or in tune with reality as it is. However, a slanted (Fig. 9b) or narrow (Fig. 9c) orientation can only ensure a partial view and therefore partial comprehension. In this, the difficulty is not that the view is partial, for a partial understanding of the universe which is to a great extent inclusive of many levels of experience has a self adjusting factor. That is, it performs as a useful and valid means for a clearer and more comprehensive grasp. However there is also another problem which must be noted. Generally when one is within

²⁶¹ Consider this illustration, though it has its limitations. A person hears a whole, complex piece of music. Being a gifted musician, he or she is able to both appreciate the composition in its entirety (and its intent) and this enables that same musician --assuming his patience-- to accurately transcribe in musical notation, his original experience, thus making it accessible again in its entirety to those who are trained to read such maps. With some reservations this illustration may be seen as an analogy for Radhakrishnan's discussions on transmitting religious experience.

a system (imagine yourself in the place of Da Vinci's man [shown in Fig. 9a]), it is very difficult to see its outer limits. The only clue is in the visible self contradictions since the internal networks of explanations (that is, the various grids) do not match at all. Although this is a cue to questioning the entire system of inquiry, the actual lack of the coordination among the ideas is often not provocative, because to the adherent of the system this lack of coordination is not recognizable. It seems that given a mass of perceptual data, there is a natural and almost compulsive demand on the perceiver to fit everything into the frame to the point of "fudging" sense into it. Where a narrow or slanted attitude is obvious, there is an opportunity to shift the frame and the categories of the perceiving mind. Even so, such shifts are mentally difficult and are most often met with resistance. The additional consideration here (and it is not easily represented in the geometric model, although it is a basis idea in Radhakrishnan's theory) is that the ground of perception is constantly shifting, that is, the conditions of the world are constantly in flux.

Thus in speaking of religious systems, for the participants the obligation is constantly to reorient the spiritual message embodied in the canons to their living context. This as Radhakrishnan maintains, includes the mandate for global harmony and global emancipation from a spectrum of harsh conditions while maintaining a direct link and whole perception with reality (as it appears in Fig. 10). Every religious tradition, though distinct in its patterning, affords the same opportunity. To Radhakrishnan the world's religions are "alternate readings of reality". They are "dif-

ferent windows through which God's light shines into man's soul". Each has a specialized approach conditioned by tradition and environment and this yields varying expressions of the same truth.²⁶² Although there may be many differences, the culmination of each religion is in a personal encounter with the supreme reality translated into a truly spiritual life. "Religion [he writes] is the way in which the individual organizes his inward being and responds to what is envisioned by him as the Ultimate Reality. It is essentially the intensification of experience, the replacement of triviality by intensity."²⁶³

²⁶² To illustrate this Radhakrishnan quotes the Bhagavata (iii.32.33): "Just as one substance with many qualities becomes manifold through the apprehension of the senses working in different ways, even so the one Supreme is conceived in different ways through different scriptural traditions." See ERWT p.319.

²⁶³ "Fragments", p.68.

FIG. 10

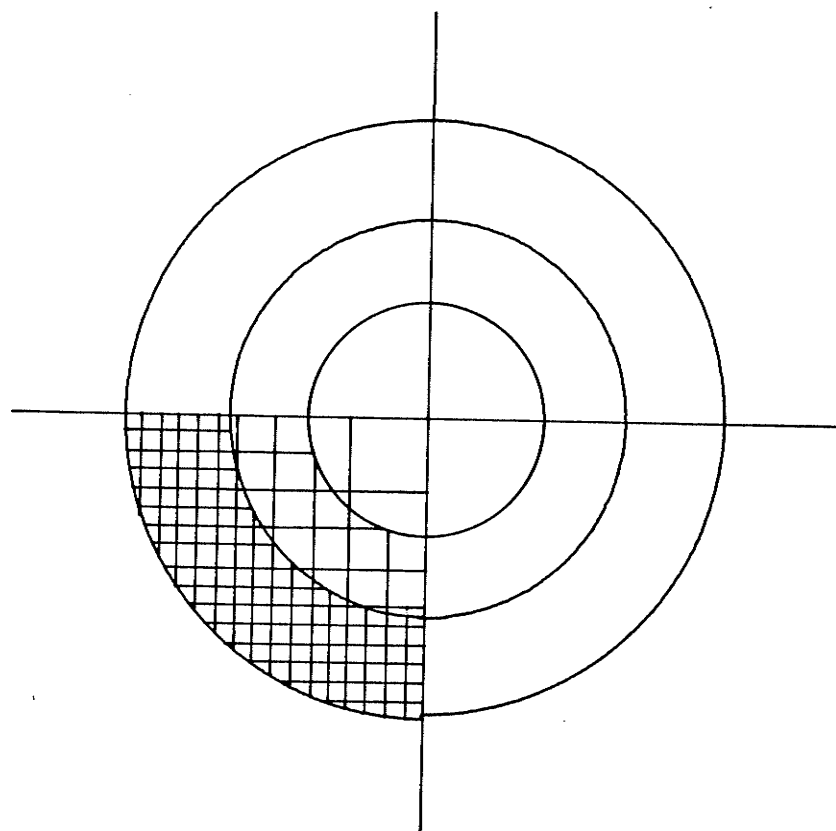


FIG. 10

Evaluation

Functionally, Radhakrishnan's theory is logically consistent and coherent within the precincts of the geometric metaframe. He is true to the rules of reflection, translation, and symmetry. He aptly recognizes different layers and types of experience, the dynamics of traditional preservation and change, and also the integrity of religions in a way that makes sense, and invites further general exploration.

As for the truth value, one ultimately has to admit that the Advaitic ontological position he assumes is theological and idiosyncratic -- though it is not essential to support his reading of religion.

Though Radhakrishnan purports to have achieved an elevated perspective of all traditions, he maintains that the Vedas are the ultimate rule and referential authority; the Brahma Sūtra is the standard of reconciliation; the Mīmāṃsā remains the standard for a discrimination inquiry; and the Bhagavadgītā is the closest (bordering on the absolute) approximation --in its modern, revamped style-- of truth.

It is thus a given that a central aim of Radhakrishnan the scholar is to convince both the academic discipline and the general reader of the superiority of demythologized Hinduism as an embracing hermeneutic, and he must be credited for the way he plays out his conviction. However, the crux of his entire methodology is that it is not self-evident that Hinduism --despite the relatively abstract categories which network it-- or for that matter, any other religious tradition, is the closest approximation

of the critical view of reality.

In the final analysis, two linked ideas remain especially prominent and provocative in Radhakrishnan's approach. One is that "religion" signifies a perception of reality of the highest order, and the world's religions represent relative points of view, while functioning each as an integral system of thought. The other is that each religious system is organic. Its vitality and dynamism lies in its openness and ability to incorporate new knowledge, while maintaining both coherence and relevance. Vitality is maintained by systematically purging redundant and obsolete beliefs which surface in the living dialogue between the tradition and existential themes and possibilities, most especially those related to "emancipation". This constant demythologization process, as Radhakrishnan calls it, is both necessary and natural.

Chapter 7

EPILOGUE

As a scholar of Comparative Religion and Religious Studies, Radhakrishnan takes a polymethodic approach. He invokes both critique (the discussions on metaviews and how to reconcile the multiplicity of religious faiths) and hermeneutic (demythologization as a special technique of reinterpreting and reformulating the messages of particular traditions) simultaneously, with the result of one vitiating the other. But this is not so much a flaw in his methodology as the dilemma which is inherent in reinterpretation. It is the contentious hermeneutic circle.

When one separates Radhakrishnan's ideals of method-in-research from their practical application, one sees that the weakness is not in the structure of his approach. The idea of developing a heuristic metaview and metalanguage, and the idea of searching out the relevance and the spiritual significance of the content of a religious tradition by viewing it in the light of the present human context and its numerous issues, are both innovative and optimistic turns. His Achilles heel resides in his arguing for the need of a metasystemic and metatheological approach, in the outlining of some of the parameters for an appropriate systems philosophy, and then doing an about-face and enrolling one of the things viewed as the viewer.

Even if the demythologized Advaita Vedānta, which Radhakrishnan proposes is sufficiently open-ended, universal in purport and so on, it is on a different level from the undemythologized Advaita Vedānta tradition, which is one of the many religious systems to be viewed. The fact remains that this recast form was the result of a demythologization process which employed concepts from the Christian, Buddhist, and other companion systems of thought in the first place. This is an inconsistency and internal contradiction in Radhakrishnan's Demythologization programme -- which he never recognizes.

But how far can one actually separate how to know from what to know? Cognitional theory exercises a fundamental influence not only on what is stated as a fact in formal research endeavors, but also tacitly in every personal experience, although with varying effects. So, too, the content of one's memory --be it personal, cultural, or religious-- directs one's looking, and, one's seeing. It seems impossible for insight, especially at the level of an insight into insights, which is what a metaview in Religious Studies suggests, to completely break away and be both totally content free and reflective of the depth of all religious traditions and their insights.

Returning to Radhakrishnan, a final optimistic note is due on his contribution to personal reflection. His work to bridge the world's Faiths by reinterpreting them to each other, and to aim them all at global emancipation, gave his contemporaries and continues to give the present generations a fresh and stimulating opportunity to reappraise where they are as

human beings. His work also encourages a new self-understanding, and a renewed sense of what it is to be spiritual. It stands to be repeated here that his inability to coordinate all ideas in trying to creatively and critically cope with the various Faiths does not so much reflect on his abilities as a scholar, but rather reveals the immensity of the task itself.

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Appendix A

A COMMENT ON THE HEURISTIC TOOL

Geometric graphics have been used variously by Occultists such as the Kabbalists, Rosicrucians, Magicians, Hermetists and Masons, and by virtually all the early scientists, particularly those working in Architecture, Astronomy, Crystallography and Chemistry, to represent the order of the universe. Initially, the elements and principles of geometry were believed to be ideal and inherent in the cosmos; they were merely uncovered and revealed by Euclid's Greek forerunners Thales of Miletus (640-546 BC), Pythagoras (580-500 BC) and Eudoxus (408-355 BC). Plato also contributed to establishing the absoluteness of geometry as it was known by the ancient Greeks, and he set the stage for Euclid by emphasizing that though cosmic, these principles had to be rigorously demonstrated. The systematic study of geometry apexed in Euclid's Elements, where the science was cogently presented in term definitions, five postulates, four axioms and four hundred and sixty-five propositions.²⁶⁴

Prior to the nineteenth century, Euclidean geometry was accepted as the only geometry, the physics of creation. For almost two thousand years it influenced the historical development of thought and shaped its vocabu-

²⁶⁴ Elements was written between 318 and 320 BC, and was comprised of thirteen books; the Egyptians and Babylonians had earlier developed geometry, but not as a comprehensive system.

lary. Its irrevocability was sustained by Immanuel Kant; in A Modern View of Geometry, the author, Leonard Blumenthal, quips : "...though Plato had said merely that God geometrizes, Kant asserted, in effect, that God geometrizes according to Euclid's Elements."²⁶⁵

A turning point came in the work of the 19th century mathematicians Karl Friedrich Gauss (German: 1775-1855), Janos Bolyai (Hungarian: 1802-1860) and Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky (Russian: 1793-1856). Individually they focussed on Euclid's assumption of the fifth postulate. The "parallel postulate", as it was called, struck them, as it had many others, as being neither as terse nor as comprehensible as the other four postulates; nor did it have the "ring of truth" qualifying a postulate and differentiating it from a proposition which had to be proved. Gauss, who is credited with being the first to have a clear notion of non-Euclidean geometry, developed an alternative to the "parallel" postulate while maintaining the other four. The amputation of Euclid's fifth postulate was a clean one. Gauss showed it was independent and also not deducible from the other four. The annexation of an alternative fifth, created a non-Euclidean geometry, which heralded a fresh approach to understanding space. Bolyai and Lobachevsky each also discovered this particular non-Euclidean geometry; since the latter was the first to actually publish his findings in 1829-1830, it came to be called Lobachevskian geometry. A second non-Euclidean geometry was discovered and discussed by Bernard Riemann (1826-1866), a student of Gauss', and was distinguished by methods of dif-

²⁶⁵ Leonard Blumenthal, A Modern View of Geometry (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1961), p.13.

ferential geometry, rather than the previously employed methods of elementary synthetic geometry; it too, as with Lobachevskian geometry, was a consistent alternative to the Euclidean system. The "new" geometries, while some of their derived theorems contradicted the theorems in Euclidean geometry, themselves were each free of internal contradictions. The most serious implication of now having not one but (at least) three coherent geometries of space, was that it was no longer self-evident that Euclidean geometry was necessarily true. Gauss and Lobachevski both observed that of the geometries, Euclidean most accurately described the empirical world, but a posteriori. Gauss wrote: "I keep coming closer to the conviction that the necessary truth of our geometry cannot be proved, at least by the human intellect for the human intellect. Perhaps...we shall arrive at other insights into the nature of space...Until then we must place geometry on an equal basis, not with arithmetic, which has a purely a priori foundation, but with mechanics".²⁶⁶ Riemann too recognized the function of Euclidean geometry for explaining physical space, but he suggested physical space was a special case, a triply-extended magnitude of a conceivably multiply-extended situation, which Euclidean geometry was not powerful enough (too limited) to deal with. Euclidean geometry wasn't appropriate for measuring the spatial relations of the macrocosm or the microcosm. Admitting the theoretical validity of other than Euclidean geometry effected a revolution in Mathematical Logic, and also in Philosophy where "intuition" as a criterion of truth became a central issue of debate.

²⁶⁶ Harold Wolfe, Introduction to Non-Euclidean Geometry (New York: Dryden Press 1945) p.57. quoted in Howard DeLong, A Profile of Mathematical Logic (Don Mills, Ontario: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company; 1970) p.50.

The developments in Geometry and the question of the relation of "provability-within-a-system" to the necessary truth of notions of space, may be seen as an analogy to what is occurring in the confrontation of religions. Each brings with it a conviction that it represents THE theological and teleological understanding --based upon claims of revelation, intuition or insight.

In the course of its saga, Geometry went from a priori knowledge to an artificial enterprise; its "truth" became conditional. However, despite their development, non-Euclidean geometries remain, for the most part, familiar and referential to only select and special interests --the most well known of these being Einstein's Theory of Relativity.