

THE SOURCE OF SWAMI AKHILANANDA'S REMARKABLE INFLUENCE

Swami Akhilananda joyfully embodied in our midst "the psychic Atman which is the cosmic Brahman without differences" of his Vedantic Hindu religious roots and practices. At Providence, Boston, or New Haven, as well as in Benares or Calcutta, he was its incarnation of the Divine. One's own personal friend yet so spontaneous, open, outgoing, and cosmopolitan as to be *ipse factu* the equally special friend of all. Unqualifiedly of Ramakrishna's non-dualistic Vedantic North India, he was equally relaxed, informed, and at home in the America to which he gave the greater portion of his life. Affirming that "No religion has a monopoly on God", he entered into our Judaic-Christianity from within as well as collaboratively, seeing the best in it from without, while helping us, at our lured initiative, to understand psychologically and experience, practically his own religious psychology and its ways. Thereby, he enriched both approaches to and components of the Divine for cosmic nature as well as his fellow men. Thus, in warming our hearts, he refreshed and enlarged our minds.

This remarkable achievement merits a closer examination of its source comprehended as far as possible in its own terms. This source is *the identity* of (i) "the psychic Atman" and (ii) "the cosmic Brahman" when both are (iii) "without differences". All three terms in this relation of identity are essential. Moreover, when we locate the facts in immediately apprehended cosmic nature as well as one's introspected self to which they refer, this threefold identity becomes both meaningful and factually evident as the case.

Keeping (iii) constantly in mind, let us begin with the identity of (i) and (ii). "Atman" (i) is that factor of all-embracing directly experienced fact which is selfhood. To call it "psychic" is to say that one introspects oneself in this wider factor-or-fact context as possessing feeling awareness. Turning now to the adjective "cosmic" of (ii), the identity of (i) "the psychic

Atman" which is (ii) "the cosmic Brahman" entails that cosmic nature and all factor-of-fact entities within it have feeling awareness also. In short, feeling awareness is not privy merely to persons. Otherwise "Brahman" though cosmic would not be Divine. Nor would the cosmic feeling awareness of the Divine Brahman be imminent in any self-introspected natural entity's being.

What has to be taken seriously here, if we are to be true to anyone's direct radically empirical awareness of immediately experienced nature as well as to our Swami's Vedantic Hindu identity of "the psychic Atman" and "the cosmic Brahman", is that this identity is a symmetrical relation. It holds literally both ways; (ii) literally is (i), and (i) literally is (ii). Stated positively in contemporary Western scientific cosmological terms as well as introspectively, psychological radically empirical ones, this means that feeling awareness, being cosmic as well as psychic, is a field continuum feeling awareness—an irreducible imminent and existential component of anyone and all of nature's entities. To use Kantian language in a way that Kant's synthetic *a priori* epistemology of unity does not permit, it is an imminent *a posteriori* unity of apperception which any cosmic natural entity brings to its differentiated *a posteriori* data of experience.

It is *not* the traditional modern Western irreducibly atomistic and pluralistic notion common to (1) the personalistic pluralists for whom only private introspectively psychic human beings have feeling awareness, and to (2) the naive realistic particle physics absolute mass materialists for whom all natural entities are feelingless. Nor is the nature and source of feeling awareness that of (3) the earlier naive realistic Cartesian and Lockean feelingful mental substances—feelingless matreal substances dualists who combine the atomistic and pluralistic notions of (1) and (2).

From the standpoint of this essay, however, the interesting and important thing about these three incompatible notions of modern psychology, non-mathematically functional physical science and philosophy is not their incompatible difference usually noted, but what they take for granted and have in common—namely their irreducible entity-property atomism and pluralism.

This common factor suggests a common cause, deriving from a common error. Elsewhere² the present writer has (*a*) given

reasons for believing that this error derives from the entity-property indicative sentence syntax of our ordinary language and (b) specified three maxims for so correcting our ordinary language usage that this prevalent common error does not occur. Such a correction is indispensable also for understanding both the Buddha's *Nirvana* and the Vedantic Hindu's identity of the psychic Atman and the cosmic Brahman.

Even so, if left at this point the latter thesis is in part patently false. Why? Because the differentiated qualities of anyone's cosmic field continuum feeling awareness are frequently not those of another person, or even one's own in diverse moods and at different successive moments of time or places in space. Nor are the differentiated colorful qualities sensed by persons of normal color vision identical with those of bees or hummingbirds. Indeed, the latter behavioristically respond to colors correlated with electromagnetic wave lengths beyond the human visual range, to which humans do not respond and do not sense. This has been demonstrated experimentally recently by the Swiss zoologist, Adolf Portman, of the Department of Zoology in the University of Basle.³ This means that it is as much a commission of "the pathetic fallacy" to read nothing but the more poverty stricken differentiated sensed colors of humans into so-called lower animals as it would be for the latter to read their non-humanly sensed colors into man.

Hence, it is only with respect to the feeling awareness field continuous *per se*, apart from its differentiated qualities⁴ relative to each natural entity, and each perishing moment or occasion, that the psychic Atman is identical with the cosmic Brahman. This is why the identity of both depends on the (iii) "without differences" requirement being satisfied also, as noted at the outset of this inquiry.

This last requirement entails two other consequences: the one feelingful, the other psychologically and religiously practical. The practical conclusion is that it is only by bringing into the foreground of consciousness the cosmic feeling awareness field continuum *per se* that one experiences feeling awareness which is common to one's fellow men and to all nature's creatures and which is infinitely (since unlimitedly) blissful and joyfully compassionate. The meditative psychological and religious practices

of the Buddhists and the Vedantic Hindus are precisely defined operationally to do this. Their aim is to eliminate one by one the outer and inner sense differentiated qualities of ordinary cosmic and psychical experience until only the psychic Atman-cosmic Brahman feelingful field continuum *per se* remains. To a modern egocentric entity-property feeling and thinking person this would seem to be the achievement of nothing whatever. The question however, is an experimentally operational one. People who have cultivated these Buddhist and Hindu experimentally operational meditative practices assure us that, as one after another of the differentiated qualities of the so-called inner and outer senses are removed, the experience is not void of feeling, but is instead an unlimited and hence infinitely blissful one. Moreover, since time derives from the successive perpetually perishing qualities, the cosmic feelingful field continuum *per se* when stripped of these qualities, "escapes [to use Upanishadic Hindu language] the ravages of death." It was this imminent infinitely blissful feelingfulness *per se* which our Swami Akhilanānd incarnated in our midst.

There is another irreducible cosmic component of any naturalistic entity's scientifically confirmable being. Unlike the undifferentiated Atman which is Brahman *per se*, its nature is timelessly differentiated, relationally invariant for any perceiver or any transformation of co-ordinates and is irreducibly many-entity-termed relational in character.

It was the genius of the three Semitic theistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, to have a premonition of this component of the Divine in any naturalistic entity's being. It was the genius and the remarkable achievement of the Democritean, Platonic, and Stoic Greek mathematical physicists with their epistemological thesis that the differentiated sense world "suggests but does not contain the real [i.e. publicly the same for everyone] world", and their modern mathematically functional successors to have specified the content of what this component of any natural entity's being is, with ever wider generalizations, but always incomplete content and indirect experimental confirmation so far as human knowers are concerned. The Greek scientific and religious name for this component of the Divine, as for *ratio* in Euclid's *Elements*, is *Logos*.

This however is another inquiry only partially done today⁶ and must await fuller treatment. Suffice it to say that this way of knowing is essential for that component of nature and the Divine which the theistic religions of the Middle East and the West require for their meaningfulness and their factual warrant. At this point Judaism, Christianity, and Islam supplement rather than merely re-echo the thesis of Buddhism and our beloved Swami Akhilananda's unqualified non-dualistic Vedantic Hinduism. This, he, with his heartwarming, joyful smile, would welcome and perhaps also want to qualify.

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April 28, 1972.
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NOTES

1. For evidence of the importance of the cosmic field continuum in today's biology, see H. J. Morowitz (Professor of Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry in Yale University), "Biology as a Cosmological Science" in *Main Currents of Modern Thought*, Volume 28 (1972) pp. 151 ff. For the Buddha's Cosmically fellow-feelingful biology, see F. S. C. Northrop, "Naturalistic Realism and Animate Compassion" in *Animals and Morals*, edited by Richard H. Morris, to be published by The Humane Society of the United States (197), Chapter 10.

2. F. S. C. Northrop, "The Relation Between Naturalistic Scientific Knowledge and Humanistic Intrinsic Values in Western Culture" in *Contemporary American Philosophy*, Second Series, edited by J. E. Smith (1970) (London: George Allen and Unwin) (New York: Humanities Press) Chapter 5.

3. Adolf Portman, "Colors of Life" in *Main Currents of Modern Thought*, Volume 23 (1966) pp. 39-46.

4. For the non-elementary character of inner or outer sense qualities and the distinction between Quale and the Itynesses of all sensed qualities, see the F. S. C. Northrop, "The Complexity of the Secondary Quality" in *Science and First Principles* (New York: Macmillan, 1931) and Cambridge at the University Press, England, 1931) Chapter VI, especially pp. 253-262 and 266-269.

5. Northrop, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-125.

6. F. S. C. Northrop, *Man, Nature, and God* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962) Chapters 14-18.

