

# *Beyond Boundaries* \*

by

Dr. Annette L. Heitmann



## **The Lecture's Raison d' être**

An awareness to enhance abiding beyond boundaries, culturally formed or as notions of the own subjective awareness, is intended with this lecture, not only to ease the daily frustration we experience in cultural encounters or personal communications, but as a contribution to peace. It asks for the open-mindedness of listeners to go beyond the daily conditioning.

It has been known for years and for many more than we might know that communication lies at the core of interpersonal being. In the need for it - often self-consciously or unconsciously realised - people talk... sometimes convinced to get across ideas and sometimes doubting its effectiveness.

## **Present Day Conflicts**

Within the boundaries of an engulfed intrinsic self-understanding and the unconscious entrenchment of cultural conditioning communication is trapped in these poisonous fangs of misunderstanding, since it occurs within the limitations of diverseness that adheres to self-defined otherness, a form of ostracism or foreclosure leading to what is known as a

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\* This is the revised version of the *Annual Wilhelm von Pochhammer Memorial Lecture* held in the India International Centre, Delhi, on January 21, 2012.

clash of cultures. Furthermore, communication within the confines of internationally set codes of conversations due to an understanding of a self-existent international culture is bound to be much of the same since its ineffectiveness is proven by the unbecoming picture of a betrayed cultural diversity left behind.

### **Approaching Solutions**

An approach rooted in the reflection of our self-understanding as part of a common cultural heritage East and West share opens a hopeful window to our new envisioning of reality and the language that results thereof. Attending to reality as something we merely conventionally adhere to and talk about has as its basis our understanding of it and the process of our communication flows from it. That this understanding will bring about the success of intercultural and cultural communication lies – as investigated – as close as an object within the functioning eyesight. East and West traditionally share the consensus that reality or truth as inexpressible is painted with the colours of our imaginations about it and communicated with the flow of ever anew created conventions.

No concept bears within the dimension of the daily apprehension and interpretation of reality an intrinsic meaning. Whether we are trying to explain the past or talk about present events or envision the future, we are - within the hermeneutics of our life - constantly recreating life. Trying to reach life proves to be beyond reach, trying to hold on to it proves to be ephemeral, beyond grasp, and trying to envision it life's imagined face appears, the beauty of our own conceptual visions.

Peace lies within this understanding that beyond any empty sensory experience reality, free from any own being (*svabhāva*), is on the conventional plane continuously construed in our thoughts. Seeking the understanding of who we are we constantly recreate notions about our reality. Bringing this process to a halt in the personal moments of inner stillness enhances the naturally occurring insight into it and into its causal, relative, transparent, peaceful, and therefore beautiful nature.



## **Indian and European cultures' entwined traditions**

Before elaborating on this let us have a look at the European and Indian cultural heritage and unearth treasures that will enact to shape our lives.

Though Europeans discovered Indian philosophical thought quite late - as late as the 18<sup>th</sup> century it found its anchor among the presentations of the world's philosophies - the exchange of ideas and mutual impregnations had started many years before, already in pre-Christian days.

### **Early Indian and Greek Thoughts**

Greek men like Parmenides or Plato seemed to have been aware of Indic thought and parallel strains of ideas are assumed by some scholars of Eastern and Western cultural history. Indian appealing nature to base its outlook on life on meditative insight found its parallel with those Greek men inclined to this lifestyle that served not only as source of inspiration but also as the very basis for their understanding of reality or truth.

### **Later Discoveries**

Indian thought was taken notice of in Europe as writings by Edward Bysshe (1615-1679), Ambrose of Milan, and Sebastian Gottfried Stark show. Also Georg Horn's *Historiae philosophicae libri septem* (1620-1670) or French Pierre Bayle's writings (1647-1706) evidence this. Last but not least Jakob Brucker (1696-1770) merits with his *Historia critica philosophiae*. He was the first to mention that wisdom and virtue was learnt from Indians even by the very best of Greek thinkers. The stream of enlightening thoughts about the *philosophia indica* has not ceased ever since.

### **Present Day Research**

Present day endeavours have taken up - not as a matter of curiosity but as a matter of serious research - comparative endeavours to tackle both cultures' entwined traditions.

This has resulted in numerous studies among others with the recognition that what occidental philosophers sometimes say was already said by Indian thinkers of yesterday.

The output of literary monuments, books such as Thomas MacEvilley's *The Shape of Ancient Thought*<sup>1</sup>, the writings of Wilhelm Halbfass on the history of Asian and occidental ontology, such as *On Being and What There Is*<sup>2</sup>, or Hans-Peter Sturm's study into the nature of Asian Middle Path philosophy *Weder Sein noch Nichtsein*<sup>3</sup> convince of a new surge, the desire to get to know the common and uncommon traits of two cultures that seemed to adhere to a common root. Still many issues remain at stake and the cultures involved have not been done justice yet, since beyond the acknowledgement of parallel formulations about truth and the approximation of similarity in thought, many questions about their mutual relationship remain unanswered.

However, what inspires us and triggers our curiosity is the very fact that in both, East and West, certain formulations adhere to a self-understanding that favours communication beyond any perceivable boundaries.

It is, on the basis of research into the cultures of India and Europe, the aim to point out with as few lines of thought as possible the dispositions in our cultures that imply ways to transcend any limitations that hinder communication and to point to a way that leads to the meeting of minds.

## **Outline of Indian and Western Ideas**

### **Basic Idealistic Patterns**

Indian thought has adhered to a timeless nature in as much as its philosophical thinkers were none other than interpreters of the message that imbued its Vedic heritage. Every

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas MACEVILLEY, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies*. New York 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm Halbfass, *On Being and What There Is*. Classical Vaiśeṣika and the History of Indian Ontology. New York 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Hans P. STURM, *Weder Sein noch Nichtsein*. Der Urteilsvierkant (*catuṣkoṭi*) und seine Korollarrien im östlichen und westlichen Denken. Würzburg 1996. (Spektrum Philosophie, Bd. 2)

formulation has been carefully measured and linked to the well perceived traditionally adhered to truth as the sacred Vedic truth. Also the Buddhist developments are considered by some as revival of the old Vedic lore as it has been accounted for in scriptures from the first written records onwards.

Occidental heritage also shows such a stream of thoughts. It is retaining one very source and its manifold interpretations and reinterpretations entwining around it throughout centuries as the vital source for a cultural self-determination. It parallels the Indic with its unfolding of the analysis into and appropriation of the eternal truth taught within the Christian tradition, an exegetical effort that adheres to the canonical scripture, the Bible, as transmitted via Hebrew, Greek, and the New Testament.

Both philosophical traditions with its idealistic patterns are complemented by monotheistic or polytheistic tendencies. Even forerunners such as the Greek philosopher Parmenides (ca. 6<sup>th</sup> century B. C.), who expressed oneness of being thought in its manifoldness whereby the manifoldness is but appearance, resembles early Indian Upaniṣads, preceding Indian philosophy, speaking of unity within diversity.

What is important is that their idealistic streak accounts for the understanding that the nature of all things perceived has as its source the mind. One may have a look at Vedic and Upaniṣadic thinking and the tradition following it till the writings of Śrī Aurobindo and Paramahansa Yogānanda or at the ideas of Plato till Schelling (1775-1854).

Newplatonism, for example, as part of the Christian tradition spoke that in its nature mind appears in activity, all mind is seen when active, all appearances disappear upon the cessation of mental perception, all reality is therefore mental "energeia" (i.e. activity), also an old Aristotelian thought and well understood by Leibniz's *être capable d'action*, implying the world as a product of cognition.

Also Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), in later days, considered the mind as active creative agent constituting and construing reality. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), beyond this, pointed to the inapprehensible nature of the mind – eventually due to his appreciation of Upaniṣadic thinking.

Scientific disciplines taking nowadays anew into consideration the heritage of traditional thinkers of transcendental philosophy have been established in recent years in order to satisfy highest demands of research, especially those that adhere to medicine, neuro-immunology, psychology, and epistemology. Its expansion in present days tends to embrace the traditional transcendental approach from a new angle, with methods of research that lead to a new understanding of the human potentials.

### **The Hermeneutic Dimensions**

Along with the inquiry not only statements about reality are undertaken, but also questions about the source of inquiry, its means of gaining knowledge and its ways and capacities for determining a truth arise. The seers of old, ancient thinkers, and present day scientists assert the human being as beginning and end of all inquiries, the humans as the beginning and end of all knowledge, be it of self-understanding or claims about so-called "objective" entities that constitute the world. Scientists understanding this basic disposition link the human efforts to a hermeneutic process of interpreting the "facts of life". Therefore also science is considered a subjective force. Hence, for the inquiry into sources of knowledge the individual human mind and its capacity gain insight of a subjective kind.

Present day acknowledgement of the subjective as reality constituting force has been foreshadowed by three great turns in occidental thought. Already they have determined beyond Descartes, Leibniz, and the German idealism, to which Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel belong, the subject as of central importance, as the subject of inquiry and as the source of determining any findings of its inquiry. In Indian philosophical circles this resonates among others in early and classical Sāṃkhya, Vedānta, and in Buddhist circles of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka taking mind or consciousness as the point of departure and source of all reality constituting knowledge.

## Traditional Assertions en détail

### Indian and Greek Tradition

In Vedic scriptures one "substance" is adhered to and the interrelation of its components determined as constituting the cosmos. This was considered reality and as truth it was named *ṛta*. In the same way later oriental and occidental disciplines of natural philosophy or natural science considered the perceived constituents as reality constituting entities. Furthermore, the faculty of cognition was understood as determining agent of what is real and what not, leaving due to its ever expanding nature, plenty of room for speculation and further inquiry.

Indic assertions about what determines reality had started with Vedic thought, continued in Brahmanic circles and resulted in thoughts as known from the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, assuming the mind as the creator of all, the forerunner of all, as the measure stick of all that is.

It might be surprising for some that also early Greek thought - Anaxagoras with his assertion of *nous* finding its continuation with Plato and Plotinus - dwelt on this line. We may therefore safely assume that both, East and West, had already at an early age this common assumption. As an example of this theme reflected in Plato's well-received *Phaedrus* and outlined in the Upaniṣads one may mention the following passage from *Kaṭha-Upaniṣad* 3. 7, verses 3-6 and 9:

"Know the self as a rider in a chariot,  
And the body, aṣ simply a chariot.  
Know the intellect as the charioteer,  
And the mind, as simply the reins.

The senses, they say, are the horses,  
And sense objects are the paths around them.  
He who is linked to the body, senses, and the mind,  
The wise proclaim as the one who enjoys.

When a man lacks understanding,  
And his mind is never controlled  
His senses do not obey him,  
As bad horses a charioteer.

But when a man has understanding,  
And his mind is ever controlled;  
His senses do obey him,  
As good horses a charioteer...

When a man's mind is his reins,  
Intellect, his charioteer;  
He reaches the end of the road...<sup>4</sup>

Also *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* 3.14 speaks in its own poetic voice:

"This self of mine that lies deep within my heart – it is made of mind; the vital functions are its physical form; luminous is its appearance; the real is its intention; space is its essence; it contains all actions, all desires, all smells, and all tastes and it has captured this whole world...".<sup>5</sup>

Even during the time of dreaming, as *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* elegantly says, reality is construed anew with the facts known from wake:

"Now, this person has just two places – this world and the other world. And there is a third, the place of dream where the two meet. Standing there in the place where the two meet, he sees both those places – this world and the other world... This is how he dreams. He takes materials from the entire world and, taking them apart on his own and then on his own putting them back together,

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<sup>4</sup> S. Patrick OLIVELLE, *The Early Upanishads*. New York 1998, p. 389.

<sup>5</sup> S. Patrick OLIVELLE, *The Early Upanishads*. New York 1998, p. 209.

he dreams with his own radiance, with his own light. In that place this person becomes his own light... he creates for himself... - for he is a creator."<sup>6</sup>

On this subject are also the following poetic verses:

"Subduing by sleep the bodily realm,  
Remaining awake, he contemplates  
    The sleeping senses.  
Taking the light, he returns to his place –  
    The golden person!  
    The single goose!

Guarding by breath the lower nest,  
The immortal roams outside the nest;  
The immortal goes wherever he wants-  
    The golden person!  
    The single goose!

Travelling in sleep to places high and low,  
The god creates many a visible form -  
    Now dallying with women,  
    Now laughing,  
    Now seeing frightful things.

All they see is his pleasure grounds;  
But him no one sees at all."<sup>7</sup>

However, on the level of profound meditation or, as *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* says, on the level of deep sleep, the source of all is seen, mind or innate knowing:

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<sup>6</sup> S. Patrick OLIVELLE, *The Early Upanishads*. New York 1998, p. 113.  
<sup>7</sup> S. Patrick OLIVELLE 1998, *The Early Upanishads*. New York, p. 113.

“Nor does he perceive anything here; but although he does not perceive, he is quite capable of perceiving, for it is impossible for the perceiver to lose his capacity to perceive, for it is indestructible. But there isn’t a second reality here that he could perceive as something distinct and separate from himself.”<sup>8</sup>

Also Greek thinking determined an unquestionable *arché* (ἀρχή) preceding being and non-being. Its appearances evidencing its different levels of existence are manifest thinking, rest from thought, conscious awareness or registered unconscious states of being, being awake, and deep sleep.

### **A Twofold Reality**

Basically two levels of truth encompassing the variety of levels of existence have been maintained throughout Greek and Indian intellectual history of thinking. Expressis verbis this was announced in earliest Buddhist texts as *satyadvaya* and in Indic Vedānta, for example in the *Gauḍapadakārikā* reiterating *Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad*, as a twofold reality that includes mind as creator and an impermanent conjured existence.

By now this disposition is known to all religions recognisable in this world, it found expression within the anthropology of being, and - as surprising as it may be - has become subject of scientific research at Harvard University, of Joan Borysenko, Herbert Benson, Jon Kabat-Zinn, and others, also of European medical circles, for many years.

### **Résumé of Traditional Thought**

It has become obvious that within the framework of historic thought beyond the mere process of apperception, notions about layers of reality are communicated due to consciously formed investigations, a sign of great metaphysical endeavours of philosophy and science inquiring at the borders of the knowable. The basic stance of it is that it is mind as the sole source of inquiry and mind as non-objectifiable truth.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Patrick OLIVELLE 1998, *The Early Upanishads*. New York, p. 117.

As Vedāntic thought has saturated the oriental intellectual und spiritual life so has Platonic the occidental till the present like the vital life-stream of blood the human body. Both adhere to reality as a transcendental flow within its own unity allowing diverse levels of insight and reality constituting agents. In its pristine nature reality was considered as nothing but truth itself, in its diverse aspect a relative or conventional reality or truth was adhered to.

Vedāntic thought has survived as a dominating force because it offers a way to apprehend being without having to negate the absolute or the relative, conventional side of it, holding the door open for further exploration beyond every day experiences. Though all thought cannot – according to traditional heritage - reach the inexpressible, still the realm of expression as part of its "extension" enlivens constantly through proper insight conventional communication. Based on insight language is but an expression of it.

Thinking adhering to communication as convention and as mere nominal convention mirrors the basic conviction that reality has no own, eternal substance. Vedānta and Madhyamaka, a Buddhist Middle Path philosophy originating in the 1st or 2nd cen. A.D. and the insight of the Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna, adhere to it. Madhyamaka denies all dispositions that reality exists, does not exist, neither exists nor does not exist, nor any other than that, and advocates mere linguistic convention communicated on the basis of nominal adherence to reality. Nothing is posited at all with mere language convention. The persistent experience of a perceived reality is due to subjective notions and has as its only verifiable truth no other than a subjective truth.

This is also the basic stance touching on any subject-object relationship; it cannot be objectified and is merely the communicative process between two subjects. The nominal character of our communication as a reality constituting factor in our interactions has been adhered to in the philosophical traditions of both cultures, East and West, till the present day.

With this in mind present day discussions of Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914), Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Nicolai Hartmann (1882-1950), Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), and others are brought to our attention and enlivened

in light of the ancient Indic Vedānta and Madhyamaka thought. The modern ambassadors of contemporary anti-realism pronounce one basic notion, that nominalism can on the one hand account for so-called phenomena and on the other hand is not positing anything at all beyond mere language convention. This implies that conventional phenomena are nothing but the percepts of mind, are based on subjective notions for their reality, and depend on conceptualisation for their being communicated. It includes those postulations we know of since the Linguistic Turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ludwig Wittgenstein elaborated what the Indian Nāgārjuna had already stated, that concepts or notions depend on being defined and that beyond the mere notion no own being can be found. Even syntactical entities, those basic to juridical law and governmental procedures, prove to be nothing beyond conventional wordings adhering to rules of syntax.



As it resonates in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*<sup>9</sup> that nothing beyond names can be found, it should suffice to reiterate the basic Vedānta and Madhyamaka assertion that since there is no own being whatsoever one adheres to reality constituting linguistic conventions for daily life.

The realm of created and ever recreated names goes beyond cultural diversity, allows for communication especially beyond any cultural boundaries. Realizing this one may never be entrapped in thought and constantly seek the thought process as an ever vitalizing fountain of youth, the constant process of ever-changing ideas constituting our shared reality.

To go beyond by means of defining or redefining in daily conversations the thoughts about a shared existence is the opportunity one may seize. Cultural boundaries are no obstacle to this due to the very fact that as long as we adhere to the nominal character of reality communication remains our core issue.

@Annette L. Heitmann

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<sup>9</sup> John Stuart MILL, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*. Vol. IX – An Examination of William Hamilton’s Philosophy. Ed. John M. Robson. Toronto/London 1979.