

# THE PLURALITY OF PHILOSOPHIES AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A UNIVERSAL ONTOLOGY \*

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## Search and Illuminations

There are intellectual concerns which cuts across the whole variety of human beings — their traditions, life styles, languages, disciplines, nationalities, and cultures. The universality of these concerns is due to the fact that they are intertwined with the very phenomenon of our existence in the world. The differences in the spatio-temporal locations of men have not much influenced the quality of inquiries they have made about the meaning of their life, about the origin of their consciousness, the beginning and the ultimate nature of the universe, about what they should do for attaining self-fulfilment and perfection. As long as man is present in the world he will seek to know what is underneath the world process of his experiencing himself as worldly i.e., the archetypal behind the total drama of existence, so to say, and yearn for harmony within himself and with his milieu.

The singular way in which man transcends his passive position in the cosmic scheme is by raising seminal questions. Both philosophers and scientists have raised these questions, although not with the same tenor. What can we make out of the physical and biological world we live in? What is man? How was man given birth to by the cosmic process?

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Did the famous cosmological Big Bang hold him for prosperity? What can we make out of ourselves — our thoughts, self-consciousness, our psyche, our birth and death, our language and symbolism, our experience, and our cogitation? Are we the property, or an epi-phenomenon if you like, of the complicated and not-yet-fully-mapped physical-chemical-biological network? Or are we in some basic sense irreducible to this network? Are we dead and gone when the physician pronounces us so, or do we still survive in some incognito space-time matrix which we are not able to compass in our knowledge still? What do the states of our consciousness, or its fluctuations, alterations, trips, suggests? Are the knowing consciousness and the unknown world ontologically one reality — Being, *Brahman Tao*, God, or spirit — exhibiting a two-fold operation? What are the basics, the original forms, the essence of all that goes on inside and outside ourselves? Shall we ever be able to comprehend them and to verbalize them?

The search for the archetypal, the ultimate that would disclose the unquestionable *raison d'être* of all that goes on as the world, has in a uniquely fastidious way occupied the minds of philosophers of all times. To a person engrossed in the rigmarole of daily life the world does not posit itself as a problem; but to a reflective mind everything concerning its conduct and experience requires an explanation, an apprehensible setting, a place in some self-evident, apodeictic system. Philosophy has undoubtedly originated in the encounter of consciousness with itself and with the world. It embodies man's attempt to know the fundamental, the ultimate, the ontological, i.e. that from which everything flows, and also his attempt to put it in words with a view to sharing its knowledge with others.

Philosophy is an act of inquiry having for its destination the exploration and understanding<sup>1</sup> of man's self — and world-experience. Along this act there are indeed knowledge stages, points of transparence, discernments, *seekings*, certainties, yet these are found to be fragmentary when considered from a comprehensive outlook or with

a view to coordinating them to from the ultimate truth. No single system or discovery in philosophy is so complete that it is able to embrace answers to all questions. Just as there is incessant querying and diversely constructed and reconstructed issues in philosophy, there are in it *illuminations* too; and different philosophers are gripped by their own distinct illuminations. But none of these illuminations would be, in the ultimate analysis, apodeictic to all. Those who examine any one of the from outside — that is, on the basis of a different illumination — are likely to question its validity. As a matter of fact, most of the conflicts and disputes among philosophers in the world can finally be traced to the diversity of illuminations descending in their *Weltanschauungen* necessitating a plurality of linguistic styles for their expression. One of the specific concerns of comparative philosophy today should be to account for multiple *Weltanschauungen*, to make intelligible the nature of the several illuminations, to interpret their assumptive functions by means of various thought-systems, and certainly to develop one single language in which they could be set and exchanged. A comparative philosopher has to develop extraordinary neutrality and openendedness to live in diverse psycho-cultural spaces so that he is able to not only capture the genesis of different philosophies but also to bring them to a unity.

As one reads the works of different philosophers - from idealists and Vedantins, to phenomenologists, logical positivists, existentialists, and linguistic analysts — one might wonder what level of knowledge or truth philosophical thinking tries to attain. What is the aim of philosophy? Could the assumptions, or ontological commitments, of one philosopher or one philosophical school be compared to those of another? And what does one try to achieve by such a comparison?

When one philosophizes one is inside a uniquely transce-like state of mind — one thinks through or from behind the given, so to say, break through the domain of appearance in order to grasp reality, transcends what is ordinarily and *naturally* offered to consciousness. Philosophical activity has to be rigorous whichever problem it may be directed

toward. Philosophers have always sought to understand the ultimate nature of the world — whether the world is as it appears to our senses, what the act of knowing is, how experience and language are related to each other, what the destiny of man's existence is, and why and how we are essentially self-transcending beings. Human mind never draws so much away from commonsense and scans its own interior as it does when it is engaged in philosophical reflection. The philosopher has to probe what can be called the geometry of human consciousness, introspect and see what *happens* to consciousness as it perceives the world, grasp how the experience of existence emerges in us.<sup>2</sup> As a seeker of the ultimate truth of things he is persistent in his inquiry. The demands of a philosophical mind are not easily satisfied—its investigation would not end unless illuminations drawn on it that make any further interrogations superfluous.

### The World as Meaning-intuiting

The most original activities of human consciousness vis-à-vis itself and the world are meaning-intuiting and meaning-expressing. To be in the world is itself a meaning experiencing process. The world and man's presence in it can be said to be two interlocked realities neither of which would make any sense without the other. Within the compass of our consciousness, countless impressions spring up as *meant*, i.e. as apprehended, as if the entire cosmic operation were to assert itself through our being aware of them. In order to exist, a thing must be significant to a mind, to an I - locus, to a meaning-intuitior. Meanings are the intentions guiding our experience of the world; they are the structures in consciousness having their referents somewhere outside them.

Taken in a broad sense, the term *meaning* denotes a kind of revelation which accompanies whatever that is *given* to the mind. Meaning is implicit in every knowledge situation. Thus to know a thing is to intuit it as a meaning or a pattern of meanings. The world, funda-

mentally, comprises meanings scattered in time and space, which themselves are meaning-experiences, and unravelled by human consciousness. My existence dawns upon me, *myself* as an embodied being figures in my own awareness, my position *here* and *now* is caught by me, and the ceaseless flow of impressions engages my mind — all like a vortex of meanings. The very nexus between human consciousness and the world must be characterized as the birth of meaningfulness.

Meaning-intuiting is a highly elusive act. It represents the uniquely human and international disposition of our being towards whatever that is offered. Only man — and no other living being — can be said to receive impressions as *meant*. Actually, the main distinction between meaning and non-meaning, or between meaningfulness and meaninglessness, is that while the former is perceived by us as a full, solid, wholesome, and sure state, the latter takes us to a region of hollowness, vacuity, to Nothing, that is, to a mental state where something or other constantly slips from its location. But insofar as a non-meaning situation (a nonsensical combination of words, for example) is still perceived as something absurd or incomprehensible it is a syntactically disorganized whole consisting of meaningful constituents. No situation confronting human consciousness can be totally devoid of meaning, although in notably non-meaning combinations of words or sentences no sense is by itself given to us but is drawn out by us from an inter-relation of the basic meaningful components.

Our very being in the world puts us face to face with meanings in the sense that to-be-conscious-of-the-world and to-experience-meanings cannot be separated. Man cannot *but* be in the world; the sense of living is intuited by us as a positive, continuous, plus-state, consisting of multiple meaning locations. Every meaning location is a cluster of several meanings which at a certain point in the conceptual analysis become too simple to be further analysable. Our world-experience is thus reducible to our meaning-intuitions.

One of the most perceptive interpretations of the consciousness and meaning relation was put forward by Husserl in his theory of intentionality. Husserl maintains that every experience harbors in itself a meaning (*Sinn*) of some sort, or at times several meanings according to which it is capable of being understood. What is called by him *noetic* is that characteristic of experience which is intertwined with the perceiving consciousness and, at the same time, *thrown* onto the perceived. The *noetic* is that which consciousness grasps of the given, i.e., that which comes into being from the very act of perceiving, or from the act of being apprehended, that which discloses itself to consciousness's intentionality.<sup>3</sup>

According to Husserl, human consciousness is fundamentally intentional. It is directed toward or reaches out to objects and posits them as meant. Consciousness-as-intentionality is in itself a meaning-intuiting activity. The meaningfulness of a thing or its experience issues forth from consciousness's intentionality. Husserl says that intentionality is that primordial *glancing-towards* of consciousness by which it contacts an object and brings it within its ambit of cognition. Intentionality makes man's centrality in the world-process possible. It pervades through sensations, perceptions, judgements, desires, and all the rest of the mental functions. It is not only the basic property of our existence but also the fulfilment of our psycho-physical being in the world. Our presence in the world is the manifestation of ourselves as meaning-intuiting, and even meaning-endowing, agents. A thorough scanning of meanings as they find their expression in our cultures is one of the main functions of hermeneutical philosophy today.

### Ontological Seeing

Philosophical thinking is fundamentally governed by the ontological *seeing* or commitment behind it. Philosophers are anchored in their individual grasps of reality. When it emerges it is an absolutely free commitment. It asserts the individual philosopher's subjectivity

and then motivates his entire style of reasoning almost as a revealed truth does. Moreover, a seeing or grasp of reality forms the ground of justification — the final point of reference — of the philosopher's thoughts structure, the evidence of his system and method. It might be doubted from *outside* but not from within the conceptual scheme supported by it. The ontological commitment it points to is the self-fulfilling vision in the inner space of a philosopher's being and hence the limit of his doubt. In fact the whole spectrum of meanings that goes to constitute the world of a person has its source in this ontological seeing.

A philosopher's task becomes infinitely complicated when he inquires into the nature of the ontological commitments of other philosophers and estimates them vis-à-vis their psycho-cultural space and the idioms through which they are expressed. One cannot look for a proof, an indisputable conclusion, in a philosophical work. What it contains is food for thought, an individual percipient's endeavor to figure out the archetypes of existence and to organize them through logic and language. A philosopher, the genesis of whose meanings and thought — structure is ontological, verbalizing his vision with a view to generalizing it, to seeking others' participation in it. Each of the multiple philosophers or philosophical systems in the world develops in this sense, out of a definite way of encompassing Being, i.e. seeing Being from a vantage point determined by the peculiar psycho-cultural stuff to which the specific philosopher or the philosophical system belongs.

The job of a comparative philosopher, a dispassionate assessor of philosophers' seeings, should not therefore be different from that of an open minded interpreter of the primordial assumptions of different thought structures. He must delineate the particular philosopher's or philosophy's range of vision and find out *how* the edifice of ideas founded on it reflects the perennial truth of human existence. However, this is a complex work and involves, directly or indirectly, the comparative philosopher's examination of his own postulates. What is required on the part of the assessor of a philosophy is the ability of his leaping

out of his own psycho-cultural space and trying to reach the assessed system in the latter's psycho-cultural arena. If this principle is followed there could not really be a repudiation of any philosophy. What there could be is immense curiosity and puzzlement on the part of the investigator to study the possibilities of seeing the *foundation* as others happens to see it.

An ontological commitment has also a persuasive character - that is, a character by which when it is transmitted by one mind to the other, it works, whenever it works, by causing some sort of metamorphosis in the latter's meaning-intuitions and *Weltanschauung*, when this happens as a matter of fact, the commitment gains in the degree of necessity and universality, is regarded by its readers or hearers an apodeictic. The commitment, in other words becomes the beginning and the end, and indeed the central motive of these readers' or hearers' intellectual activity, as it was in the intellectual activity of its author.

Today we often speak of the assumptive commitments of different philosophies in the world. Any claim that a philosophy might make for being totally without any ontological assumptions would sound hollow the moment it is pointed out — and it can be pointed out almost in every case — that the foundation of that philosophy lies deep in a pre-reflective, gnostic knowledge, in an intuitively grasped vision, in trans-intellectual flashes as it were, in a *darsana*.<sup>4</sup> This would even imply that there is simply no criterion for establishing the ultimate validity or otherwise of a philosophical school. All ontological commitments are immune to judgement of proof. If there is too much precision and clarity in a philosopher's language it is largely the result of his exercised discipline not to allow the blurred, pre-reflective intuitions to interfere with his logic. But, on the other hand, highly condensed metaphors, equivocations, and poetry in a thinker's expression need not suggest any demerit regarding their ground. The language of metaphors many a time signifies very profound insights below. Thus when Wittgenstein, the founder of the language philosophies, said that "the limits of my



language mean the limits of my world”<sup>5</sup> and “what we cannot speak about we must consign to silence”,<sup>6</sup> “he could not have failed to notice that it is that which consigns to silence that is the *sine qua non* for the understanding and the explanation of what is spoken about. And when D. T. Suzuki, the highly insightful Zen thinker, referred to the *Bodhidharma’s* symbolic “gazing at the wall” as an expression of his more lucid inner state where thoughts cease to operate, he could not certainly have been unaware of the virtue of clarity and precision in the linguistic communication in philosophy. There is something inherently transcendental about the ontological commitments behind various philosophical constructions. They escape thought and words. They emit meaning-intuitions from nowhere, so to say, they elude the system-making imperatives of the minds that endeavor to put them across, because they are intertwined with the psycho-cultural expanse of the subjectivity of their authors themselves. When philosophies are compared to one another, one cannot but eventually direct one’s attention to the *why* and *how* each of them has uncovered the foundation of existence. Could it be that the plurality of philosophical schools are still various naive ways of defining reality, i.e., they are not, really speaking, free from prejudices, and that comparative philosophy has to therefore search for one single unified ontology with its own unified language?

### Weltanschauungen and Language

The exact sphere of the pre-reflective in consciousness has not still been completely surveyed by ontologists. However, a person’s *Weltanschauung* seems to originate from this sphere a — Nothing-like, oceanic, subterranean, and mysterious area characterised by many of the ontologists in the East and the west as pure transcendental Being. How a seeing or meaning-intuitions from this area enter into the field of awareness, in other words how from the state of *darkness* they penetrate into the state of clarity, is a question on which phenomenologists, depth psychologists, and philosophical anthropologists have thrown little light. In any case, seeings and meaning-intuitions emerging from

this pre-linguistic realm posit themselves as the *inside* of consciousness, as the *Weltanschauungen* of one's conscious life, and language functions to embody them. In day-to-day human discourses the linguistic tradition prevalent in the particular society demarcates its meaning-intuitions, scissors them, so to say, and sets them in words and sentences. Naturally, in this process, the liberty, the spontaneity, the existential authenticity, and the creativity of the intuited meanings whose environing psychocultural space is eternally fluvial, are sacrificed for the safeguard of the rule of the spoken and written word.

If we consider, for example, a mystic's or idealist's *Weltanschauungen*, i.e. the mental picture of reality that descends on him almost like a flash of light and guides his meaning-intuitions and meaning-expressions, we observe that language figures in his consciousness only as an unarrestable extension of intuitions welling up inside him. Whether or not such a language is sufficiently communicative, it certainly serves its purpose, viz. to verbalize meanings innermost to his being by letting words play on them. It is in such language constructions that meaning-intuitions transcend the speech act, since the former are deeply embedded in the history, the convention, the culture, and the behavioral mode of the society which the speaker is born in. The linguistic constructions emanating in the manner do not succeed in communicating the speaker's *Weltanschauungen* unless the listener, having a psychic structure and cultural sediments more or less similar to that of the speaker, participates in the domain of being touched by the latter's transcendental awareness. A successful communication suggests that both the speaker and the listener have begun to operate in a universe of seeings shared by both of them. Actually this gives rise to a peculiar circle, a successful communication indicates that the participants, *Weltanschauungen* have coalesced with each other, and unless the latter happens there would be no successful communication.

Really speaking, philosophers' constructions are attempt, to mirror their most creative and elusive meaning-intuitions which invariably

contain an inexpressible intensity of ontological discoveries. Obscurity and ambiguity, flexibility and the overflow of meanings, a multiplicity of the horizons of experience, are always present in linguistic constructions when their author transcends the realm of tacitly and unambiguously describable matters of fact. On the other hand, physical language is nothing more than a collectively accepted way of labelling objects. The language used for such a purpose is sufficiently communicative since its referents are determinable and verifiable in the empirical world.

Since most of the time the knowledge that we acquire is the knowledge of the physical world our linguistic constructions generally refer to this world. Such linguistic constructions are largely free from ambiguity and nebulosity. However, as we transcend the language having empirical references and think in terms of concepts the linguistic act becomes fleeing and vague. This is why in abstract discussions, as among philosophers adopting different points of view, articulation constantly tries to embody what is inwardly seen by each one of the speakers as apodeictic, obvious, self-evident, indubitable. A philosopher endeavours to reach through words and sentences his ontological commitments, i.e., what he regards as truisms, his realization that overflows words. Hardly anybody in such an endeavour is ever able to claim honestly, "What I have *said* incorporates exactly what I *see*".

In any rigorous study of man's language (and this is an essential part of comparative philosophy) an understanding of the passage of meaning-intuitions, from their pre-reflective state to the state of verbalization is indispensable. What one can know of language as a form of behavior, as a neutral-philosophical expression analysable scientifically, is merely the outer sheath of human existence. Hidden underneath the linguistic behavior, when philosophers picture highly abstruse inward experiences, there are inevitably ontological nuances, most authentic awareness of the primordial meaning-forms, that is, something indeterminate but at the same time *felt* by them as the foundation of their

Being-experience. Meanings originally spring up from the whole repertory of the individual's psychic process. Our inability to have a direct access to them is partly due to our mind's inability to race with their flow and intensity. The ultimate aim of language is to encompass this flow and intensity of the original meaning-experiences. Even in ordinary confessional statements there are layers of nuances concealed deeply behind what one says. They are, to use Noam Chomsky's most expressive phrase, the "Deep structure" of our speech acts.<sup>7</sup> The commonest method of understanding them or making them intelligible to others is by interpreting them, by translating them, or by paraphrasing them. Indeed there is no limit to this process. But this process does not succeed in making transparent the psychic-cultural structures concealed deep within the linguistic space itself. In every interpretation, therefore, something remains uncaptured, unnetted, uncomprehended. There lies spread *behind* or *beyond* what is verbalised an area which, because of its complexity, dynamism, and ceaseless creativity, has to be left to silence forever.

*Weltanschauungen* can hardly be spoken of as static entities. They are zones of certainty and conviction along the stream of consciousness. Their manifestation through definite language structures in accordance with the system or rule — grammatical, logical, syntactical — constitutes our communicative act. Thus language is rightly called the vehicle of meanings whose ultimate canvas is consciousness. The ontological seeing, the meaning-intuitions, the *Weltanschauungen*, and the meaning expression are so strangely interconnected that the last, i.e., language, does not exhaust what can be described as the dynamism possessed by the entire field of consciousness. It is this field of consciousness, in which a philosopher's ontological seeing, his meaning-intuitions, and his *Weltanschauungen* are deeply embedded, that must be reached if he is to be understood. Even in our simple words or sentences that refer to ordinary or day-to-day situations the nature of the meaning-expressing act is such that it is not able to convey the whole cauldron of what strikes the minds as flashes, intuited-meanings, disclosures, or truths. What

Gadamer says about the *unsaid* surrounding the *said* is highly instructive. He writes:

(The speaker) may use only the most common and ordinary words and yet is able just through them to bring to language what is unsaid, the unsaid that needs to be said and here *is* said. He who speaks is proceeding *speculatively* in that his words are not copying anything "real" but are actually expressing a relation to the whole of being and letting it come to expression.<sup>8</sup>

Thus every meaning-intuition overflowing its verbalization. *Brahman* or Being, which is one's original dwelling-place, cannot descend *in toto* in one's thought and communication.

Man's experience of the world as a meaning or a pattern of meanings is so intrinsic to his mental make-up that we cannot conceive of the phenomenon of *being human* without this experience. One could even extend this correlation of human consciousness with its function of world-experiencing further and remark that the whole structural character of the latter is due to the peculiar ontological constitution of the former. Thus the phenomenologists' and existentialists' theory of intentionality has been the most perceptive exercise to show that it is consciousness that bestows meanings on the *givens*, that without this meaning bestowing activity of consciousness there would be no way of cognising Advaita Vedanta<sup>9</sup> had hinted at this basic postulate regarding the foundation of our world-knowledge in its doctrine of *antakharana* (the subtle inward grasping sense of consciousness) and its *vittis* (consciousness' modes of knowing). The doctrine explains that whenever we *know* something consciousness, to to say, focusses its light on it, and alienates it from the entire expanse of the unknown by bringing it under its *net* of awareness.

One's meaning-intuitions need not always (and many a time they simply cannot) find an expression through one's linguistic behaviour.

There are meaning-experiences which could, but actually do not, manifest themselves through speech acts. In fact as soon as man developed the techniques of symbolization he communicated meanings in ways other than linguistic. At this stage of human development meanings were pre-linguistically understood and non-linguistically expressed. As a matter of fact, the non-linguistic ways of meaning-expressing can be used and are employed by us constantly as a device complementary or linguistic communication. These ways, no doubt, heighten the degree of the speaker's expressiveness and the effect of what he communicates, on his listener. James Edie puts this most poignantly when he writes:

man is necessarily expressive. Man is expressive even before he speaks: in his corporeal attitudes, in behavior, in gestures, in rhythmic movements and tonal utterances, in the creation of artifacts, works of art, and social institutions of all kinds. Man is expressive by his very existence. Speech is but one form, doubtless a late and derived form, of expression, and persons who lost the ability to speak have not for all that lost the ability to express themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Consciousness's focussing-of-the-light on whatever the world offers to it, or on the very worldliness of the world, appears to be the starting-point of consciousness's disclosure to itself that the world is *there*. Diverse philosophies and *Weltanschauungen* and ideologies and knowledge systems indicate that there are many modes of this focussing-of-the-light. Again there are also many ways of communicating *how* the world has been *seen*. Perhaps, intellectually the most piercing project of comparative philosophy, if it conducts itself as one single and unified meta-philosophy, would be to comprehend the diverse modes of consciousness's focussing and communicating, perceiving and describing, intuiting and symbolizing. It is these diverse modes of consciousness that have generated the whole galaxy of philosophical movements and systems in our time.

### Philosophers in Communication

A compelling feature of contemporary philosophies is their distinction to have a flight from the reality of the empirical world, which is the domain science has sufficiently explored and brought under human control by devising technologies. And yet philosophical reflection carried out in different philosophies and by different philosopher is not a homogenous exercise. This is because, as we have seen philosophers occupy various ontological vantage-grounds and operate on them impellingly. Their very penetration into the basics of existence and their style of systematizing and verbalizing them is guided by seeings and assumptions which cannot be easily standardized and universalized. There seem to be therefore different possibilities of interpreting the universe (science and religion being such eminent possibilities) because the human mind could approach the universe as a whole from various levels or horizons of awareness — from ordinary sensation to the supernatural or divine order, from reason and logical to the certainty of transcendental seeing, from crass objectively to the solipsistic play, *māyā* or illusion.

What is lacking in philosophies in general today is the attempt on the part of the followers of one philosophy to understand the ontological grounds of other philosophies. For instance, if the Western intellectuals are to understand the Eastern intellectuals' *Weltanschauungen* they must try to reach the latter without displacing it from its *natural* habitat, i.e. without disturbing it from its own ontological and psycho-cultural soil. There has to be at some point the design of complementarity on the part of one philosopher when he evaluates another. The logic dominated paradigm of the scientific philosophers must somehow reach a unison, a mutually enriching portrayal or reality, a unified ontology verbalizable by means of a unified language. And from these unified ontology and unified language science and the language of science cannot be allowed to be left out.

The goal of philosophers' interaction should be to develop a comprehensive intellectual system in which all the element of our total experience are woven, a consistent and yet open and inclusive pattern is generated, what seems to be foreign is set within an all inclusive whole or being without uprooting it from what may be its ontological and psycho-cultural space. The ultimate goal of such an endeavour is to comprehend Being and the ways of its self expression, including the phenomenon of man. This is why the creation of new patterns of language is very often necessary in philosophies. Something is *seen* by a philosopher as the constitution of Being and typical linguistic structures are used and at times created by him to communicate. If a philosopher makes it his discipline to strictly adhere to the rules of expression he would miss the essence of what is captured by him in a uniquely profound manner.

What Wittgenstein calls the *language games* are in a sense an unavoidable aspect of the philosophical activity. The language game played by a philosopher is such that patterns of symbols are employed by him to approximate to the pre-reflective essences in his mind. In a complete and unified ontology the apparently fleeting flow of seeing the ultimate on which all intuitions are founded must be contained and organized for communication.

The language of philosophies and the language of physical sciences are obviously distinct. And yet there is no doubt that both the languages have for their frame of reference one transcendental foundation. It is this foundation that must be grasped by comparative philosophy, i.e., by all those who care to answer the question: What is the genesis of the whole mind-and-the-world compound?

In the inter-personal verbal exchange among the thinking people, or among philosophers committed to different seeings, nothing is more pressing than the endeavour on the part of each to enter into the psycho-cultural self of the other. We are born and shaped in a world divided by



ideologies, religions, value-assumptions, syntaxes, grammars, languages, and what have you. Underneath this diversity however, science and philosophy figure as human quests which impose on themselves minimum operational constraints. This is surely because the intellectual urge from which they have emerged and by which they are constantly invigorated is open-ended, ceaselessly self-corrective and insatiable.

The prevalent plurality of philosophies in our time cannot be avoided. They are probably the styles consciousness (when it is put on the ascent toward transcendental experience) displays vis-à-vis its world — experience. What could be and should be done is comparative philosophy in the method of unified ontology, a hermeneutical exercise to comprehend the assumptions at the core of different philosophies, different visions of reality, different ontological commitments and *Weltanschauungen*, different languages, different *truths*.

The zones of agreement and the zones of difference between one philosophical explanation (one philosophical movement or school or theory) and another in a given time, or between a philosophy of our time and an ancient, traditional philosophy, ought to be studied. The essence of a philosophy (whatever time or place it may belong to) consists of a set of truths, self-justifying ontology it spread, its doctrine about life and death, emanate. These truths are self-evident in the eyes of the followers of the respective philosophy — they are for them the ultimate vision of Being, so to say, i.e. the reach of the human self to Being arranging its own language.

A hermeneutical attempt to comprehend the original assumptions of a philosophy, ancient or modern does not permit the de-contextualization of that philosophy. I cannot be fair to the study of Jesus's Nagarjuna's, or Sankara's thoughts, or for that matter to the thoughts of Heidegger or Gandhi, if I do not try to get into the inner space of their lives and times, into the basic assumptions and insights deep down in the projects they formulated. This is indeed a difficult task for the

comparative philosophy to undertake, since every act of interpretation, is somehow tied to the interpreter's interests, cultural background, mode of perception, his presuppositionlessness, and so on. And yet, it is essential for a comparative student to overcome his anchorages and to have a direct grasp of the other employers' horizons of consciousness, the very ways they have adopted to portray the wholeness of Being. To attempt to do this is in a way to leap out of one's own individuality, to let one's own self be in communion with Being, so that a universal ontology, a basic grammar of human consciousness as such is the outcome.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The term *understanding* is used in the article to denote what some of the eminent phenomenologists have meant by it. For instance, for Dilthey it is "the process by which we come to know something of mental life through the perceptible signs which manifest it". For "Gadamer" the problem of the right understanding can no longer be solved by a simple return to the alleged intentions of the author." According to those who follow Schleiermacher, understanding is "the capacity to transpose oneself into another." See Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (John Thompson, Ed.,) New York, 1981, p.14; p.50; pp.150 ff.
2. See my "Philosophy — A Journey Towards the Archetypes" in *Across the Golden Threshold, Indian Philosophical Congress-Golden Jubilee Papers*, (Vidya Subramanian, Ed.) Hyderabad, 1985, pp.90-96.
3. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas*, New York, 1962, pp.237 ff.
4. Traditional Indian metaphysicians equated philosophy with *darsana*. The word *darsana* conveys the sense of seeing, that which dawns on one as the ultimate nature of things or as the eternal truth.

5. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, P.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (trans), London , 1961, p.115.
6. Ibid., p.151.
7. Noam Chomsky distinguishes between the “deep structure” and the “surface structure” of sentences. The former, according to him, is the underlying abstract structure in linguistic formulations and represents the essence hidden in the speaker’s thought. It is the “deep structure” in our language that requires interpretation. See Noam Chomsky. *Cartesian Linguistics*, New York, 1966, pp.31-51.
8. Quoted by Richard E. Palmar in *Hermeneutics*, Evanston, 1969, p. 210.
9. This is the school of philosophy founded by Sankara (9th century A.D.). It advocates a well-integrated monism (a unified ontology?) in which the world and the human individuals are regarded as only a *veil* of the Absolute. See my *The Structure of Indian Thought*, Illinois, 1970 and New Delhi, 1984, pp.131 ff.
10. See James Edie’s “Expression and Metaphor”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. XXIII, No.4, 1963 pp.539-40.