

Commentary

Commentary on Nixon's Guest Editorial in JCER V1(5): Consciousness, Mind and Matter in Indian Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

I am very impressed by the striking similarity of concepts in the Guest Editorial by G. M. Nixon in JCER V1(6) to those of ancient Indian Philosophy on thought, time, and Consciousness. I drew only a few examples from the article to depict the similarity but I am impressed by the elegance of expression and profoundness of concepts in the whole article.

Key Words: self-consciousness, Indian philosophy, time, thought.

Let me first of all point out that Indian Philosophy makes a distinction between two types of consciousness and let me call the first type human or animal consciousness and the second type as Consciousness with big C. The former is what our modern studies of consciousness often focus on; it includes ego consciousness also termed self-consciousness. Unlike human consciousness which comes and goes, Consciousness is always and everywhere present and is independent of space, time and causality. According to this philosophy, free will is a capability of Consciousness but it is not a part of human consciousness as we usually think! Free will is the ability to decide consciously and independently of any reason from the past or present, and without expecting anything in the future. Manifestation of free will is not an unconscious nondeterministic random occurrence. The existence or manifestation of free will does not depend upon any memory, and it is not bound by any rules or logic. On the other hand, when we, humans make choices or decisions, they are very often (but not always as we will see later) motivated by purposes, future goals, desires, and so on, all of which already exist in our memory. Consciousness (with big C) is said to be *nishkarana* in Sanskrit meaning that it is not the effect of any cause. After all, it is free; it would not be free if it depends upon anything else for anything! Thus free will has no origin but is the origin of everything in the universe. A story narrated later in this commentary may help to illustrate how free will is beyond causality.

Here are a few examples to see the striking similarity of Nixon's concepts and those of the ancient philosophy. The abstract of Nixon's article says: "it" is changeless and formless (presumably a dynamic chaos without location or duration) yet with creative potential. Such a field of near-infinite potential energy could have had no beginning and will have no end, yet within it stirs the desire to experience that brings forth singularities ----- This agrees with what Indian Philosophy says about Consciousness, that it has no beginning and no end, and without location, and has infinite (not near-infinite), immeasurable (*aganita* in Sanskrit) creative potential. The philosophy also says that desires and thoughts spring out of Consciousness and bring forth the many individual souls (singularities as Nixon says) in Consciousness which has no location but is everywhere and all the time.

Nixon's abstract says: time and experience are so entangled, they need each other to exist.---

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Again agrees with Indian Philosophy, according to which time is a thought not material; time and thought are required for human experience. Consciousness is said to be experience independent of time, thought and desire and is transcending the "I" thought (called self-consciousness in the terminology of this journal).

Within the article on page 484, Nixon says: Only rarely can we escape the context of self through which our life experience is filtered, and it must be noted that remembering and (self) consciousness may be the same thing. It may be possible to somewhat escape the self-constructed prison of time-past through creative inspiration or spontaneous action in a crisis situation,

Indeed, Ramana Maharshi (known to some in the west) says that the "I" thought or ego is the source of all other thoughts, experience, and all that is remembered. In his own words: To say 'I am not this' or 'I am that' there must be an 'I'. This 'I' is only the ego or the 'I'-thought. After the rising up of this 'I'-thought, all other thoughts arise. The 'I'-thought is therefore the root thought. If the root is pulled out all others are at the same time uprooted.

The following famous story is an example of how creative inspiration or spontaneous action in a crisis situation, which I called free will earlier, overcomes causality and the prison of time-past. Once upon a time, there was a very religious person who spoke nothing but truth all his life. Let us call him Truth Speaker. One day, he was sitting in a grove and doing meditation with closed eyes. Suddenly, he heard the sound of running foot steps. On opening his eyes, he saw a scared man running for his life. The man stopped when he saw Truth Speaker, and said with a gasping breath "I am being chased by robbers. I am running for my life. I cannot run any more. I will hide behind the bushes over here. Please do not reveal my whereabouts to anybody". So saying, the man ran and hid behind the bushes without even waiting for Truth Speaker to reply. Truth speaker went back to meditation. A few minutes later, he again heard thundering foot steps and opened his eyes. He saw some armed men running. When they saw truth Speaker, they too stopped and said "We are looking for a man whom we saw come this way. Did you see anybody running past you a short while ago? If so, do you know which way he went?" Truth Speaker thought that he should never tell a lie. So, he pointed to the robbers the bush where the scared man was hiding. The robbers then caught the man and killed him. After some days, Truth Speaker died but was taken to hell instead of to heaven. There, Truth Speaker asked the ruler of hell (a personification of justice according to Hindu Religion) - why was he brought to hell instead of to heaven where he should have been on account of speaking nothing but truth all his life. The ruler of hell replied "You spoke truth alright but by telling a lie you could have saved the life of the man being chased by robbers. You did not have a tiny bit of compassion. You were carried away by your arrogance of sticking to your principle and your selfishness to go to heaven. That is why you deserve hell." The point in the story is not at all whether Truth Speaker went to heaven or hell after death nor whether there is a heaven or hell. The point is a person's ability to see when to speak truth and when not. Truth Speaker was following a rule which firmly stuck inside his head and his mode of thinking was that of a machine which was programmed to tell truth and therefore never lie. On the other hand, imagine that in the story, Truth Speaker told the robbers that he did not see anybody around earlier that day and they were only the people that he saw until then. In this case, his mind did not execute like a machine, a memorized instruction expected to be carried out. Nor did it care for a future benefit, namely going to heaven. Thus the action of lying was directed neither by the past nor by a future goal. This ability to violate a rule of the past and act on one's own is a self-starter or spontaneous and is

the true free will. This ability refuses to be told what to do and refuses to be told by somebody or something else; it is above and beyond all causality.

References

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