

## Reality and the Principle of Contradiction

Every contradiction involves something that is unreal. At the same time wherever consciousness is there is some reality, and awareness of contradiction of necessity implies the presence of consciousness. Now, contradictions do not exist for the non-cognitive aspects of consciousness. Abstracted from cognition, sensations and also affections simply are what they are and may be said to be simply direct experiential facts without there being any question of consistency or inconsistency. But without cognition neither sensation nor affection carry meaning nor understanding. They simply are facts in an undefined complex of life. But with cognition we have introduced interpretation, understanding and the realization of significance in some measure at least. It is in connection with cognitive interpretation alone that there arises a possibility of contradiction and the contrasts of true and false, real and unreal. It is quite meaningless to speak of <sup>pure</sup> sensations or affections as being true or false, or, real or unreal. So the whole problem here lies in the cognitive mode which comprehends conception, understanding and significance.

In the development of cognitive consciousness whether on the level of the ordinary untrained man, on one hand, or of the scientist and philosopher, on the other, it often happens that the data of experience and the formulations of fundamental principles lead to contradictions. Some interpretate this as implying that reality is not consistent with itself and that the logical principle by which contradiction is recognizable is false. This standpoint is radical anarchy in the most invidious sense and equivalent to a denial that Reality is of

an essentially orderly nature and is understandable. The fact is that the trouble is not introduced by logic but it grows out of an inadequate or false perspective. The so-called facts may be incompletely formulated or they may be formulated from different bases of reference and then regarded as though they were determined from the same base of reference. The same point may apply to the formulation of the principles. But even where the base of reference is carefully maintained and the formulation is as careful and comprehensive as possible from that given base, still some contradictions continue to arise. But even this does not mean that contradictions can be true at the same time and in the same sense, but simply that an inadequate base of reference was assumed. Thus the contradiction becomes a challenge to find the adequate base, and that usually means achieving a higher and more comprehensive level of cognition where the apparent incompatibilities are reconciled. And really effective reconciliation, it must be remembered, implies complete logical coherence, whatever else it may mean in addition.

The achieving of the requisite higher cognitive base is often very difficult, requiring at times the labors of rare and superior kinds of genius. Consequently, it is often necessary in the practical sense to chart a course through a stage of life by working out some rule-of-thumb compromise between incompatibles. But all of this is simply a pragmatic device for getting through an emergency, and so long as it is employed merely as an emergency device it is not to be criticised in principle. But all such methods of living and thinking have simply the value of scaffolding construction

possessed of only temporary utility. They represent, as it were, interludes in the great search for reality, just as an actual scaffold is merely a crude and temporary instrument facilitating the building of a permanent structure.

But it is all wrong to regard ultimate Reality as simply of the nature of ~~merely~~ the mere scaffold-like construction. These scaffolds have no part in the finished metaphysical system and afford no basis for the higher type of philosophy where the objective is nothing less than the realization of Reality Itself. The periods of their use properly should be regarded as times for the suspension of philosophic judgment in the domains of consciousness affected by them. Meanwhile, the effort should be devoted to the breaking into the cognitive level where real reconciliation can be achieved.

The search for absolute coherence or consistence is tantamount to the search for ultimate Reality. He who refuses to rest content with anything less than absolute coherence must ultimately attain the self-conscious realization of Reality. To stop short of that is to throw up the struggle and to bog down in ~~the~~ genuine pessimistic nescience.

Not every system of a high degree of logical coherence is adequate to meet the actualities of the given concrete world. Often only part of the variables and constants are taken into account. This weakness is to be found in every doctrinaire utopian scheme in connection with social organization. These doctrinaires are not at fault in attaching the importance to logic which they quite commonly do, but in their inadequate definition of the problem. They invariably introduce a malicious false simplicity and thus, on the whole, probably do more harm than good when they offer their constructions as authoritative rather than being of merely suggestive value. They often

increase rather than reduce the suffering in the world. The fact is that man has not yet evolved to the intellectual level where a just systematic treatment of the sociological problem is possible. When men have reached the point where they can do that they will find modern mathematical physics to be rather common-place stuff, that is not difficult to understand. In the meantime social problems are better handled in the piecemeal or pragmatic sense rather than systematically.