

II Apavada Darsana, Truth by Constant Refutation of the False

Verse 1

This world, which is of gross and subtle form, comes from consciousness; if it is affirmed, everything is existence through and through; if it is denied, it is consciousness through and through.

12/6/5

This is one of those “simple” verses that sprouts meanings like Heracles’ Hydra. Ostensibly it is Narayana Guru’s presentation of the Cartesian scheme of correlation, though translating two different word-ideas as consciousness makes it harder to notice. The first word is *caitanya*, (c is pronounced as ch in Sanskrit) which with recourse to the Monier-Williams dictionary not only means consciousness, but in the Gita’s day meant intelligence, sensation, soul or spirit, and in the Samkhya philosophy of earlier times the Universal Soul or Spirit, even. In the verse here it stands for the vertical aspect of existence, the overarching consciousness that includes everything.

The second word for consciousness used here is *cit* (*cit ghanam* contracts to *cidghanam*). It has a wealth of meanings, including to perceive, fix the mind upon, attend to; to understand, comprehend, know; to form an idea in the mind, think, reflect upon. This is the domain of wakeful awareness, one of the four conditional states of consciousness. Cit is our mental appreciation of the world we believe we are in contact with. Thus the horizontal

pole ranges from *sat*, existence, on the positive end (affirmed), to *cit*, consciousness, on the negative end (denied).

The horizontal world contains both the gross and subtle, the objective and subjective aspects, which are a product of the overarching consciousness of chaitanya. It's hard to grasp right away that objects that appear so real to us are actually a formulation, an idea in our mind. Coming to understand this is one of the essential achievements of contemplation, which has to overcome a lot of "common sense" resistance. Darsanamala will go into it in depth for a long stretch, so it's premature to get worried about it. Rest assured that everything is exactly as real as it is, and what we believe won't change that a bit. We're only trying to come to know what is real by discarding what isn't. Luckily too, reality can't be accidentally discarded by us in our flailing, or it would already be long gone.

Imagining what we believe is what is real is at the root of our personal and species-wide problems. In his commentary, Nitya gives several examples of disasters stemming from mixing up the objective and subjective sides of the equation. We did an exercise of thinking of cases where this had happened to us or people we knew of. There was a lot of rust on those gears, but eventually they started turning. The Iraq debacle leapt to mind, managed by people who claim "Reality is what we say it is." Only the insane claim anymore that there is any connection between the motivations for war and the actual situation in the country that was invaded. Callousness to the suffering of other people is another learned attitude that is out of step with reality. So is greed, and so much more. When people insist that reality doesn't matter and then crash and burn, it's a caution that there is definitely some objective component to the world, that reality is much more than we say or even think it is.

Thank God.

We worked our way around to ways we believed certain things as children, especially during middle school age, and how those self-destructive mindsets may still be affecting our lives for the worse. This is the area where Apavada can bring much benefit, much cure. I remembered how people would say nasty things to me and I internalized the assumption that everyone despised me. I basically went through life with that as a bedrock assumption, and it warped a lot of experiences. It didn't help that my mother's sympathetic take was "Well, you must've done *something* wrong...." By contrast, my kids have been raised to presume it's the other person's baggage of unhappiness and not necessarily their fault if someone is mean to them. I think it will make a big difference in their lives.

We talked about how kids feel scrutinized by everyone in middle school, and learn to veil themselves and guard their feelings, and this is carried through life with minimal mitigation. Plenty of other places this happens too of course. Again, if I wrote down all the insights, no one would read them. The best thing is to take some time to reflect in your own life on ways you overlay the present situation with learned structures from the past. As Anita pointed out, we might decide to keep some of them, but surely some others we could allow to blow away in the wind. It's for our own good. As Nitya says on page 111: "Despite the psychological origin of such experiences, they cannot easily be brushed aside. [They] can affect one's digestion and appetite, and may even prevent one from sleeping." He could easily have invoked far worse misery than this, but kept it gentle enough. We all have met someone who has internalized so much anger or become so timid that they never can have a healthy interaction with anyone anymore.

Not too oddly, the night before this class I was reading a book that mysteriously appeared on my shelf and discovering that it was

directly related to the present material. *Reality Isn't What It Used To Be*, by Walter Truett Anderson, is deconstructionism presented with great clarity and not too much irritating arrogance. Turns out the Gita is a masterpiece of deconstruction (not Anderson's viewpoint). There's a very interesting section on semantics a la Vedanta, though of course these guys are inventing these ideas themselves as far as they know. Here's an excerpt:

General semantics is another intellectual movement that emerged in the period between the two world wars, another pathway into the postmodern era.

In 1933 Count Alfred Korzybski, a Polish mathematician living in the United States, published *Science and Sanity*, in which he presented what he hoped would become a new science of human communication and the key to a new era in human progress.

Korzybski believed that there was a very poor fit between language (at least language as people ordinarily used it) and objective reality—and that this poor fit accounted for most personal psychopathology and produced endless turmoil and unhappiness in societies. He wrote: “Few of us realize the unbelievable traps, some of them of a psychopathological character, which the structure of our language sets before us.... We grope by animalistic trial and error, and by equally animalistic strife, wars, revolutions, etc.”

At the very core of his indictment of language was one small culprit: “is.” He located our most serious semantic problem in the everyday act of naming or describing things: whether we say the earth *is* flat or the earth *is* round, we get ourselves into difficulties that we could avoid by saying the world *appears* flat or that we now *believe* it to be round.

The word is not the thing, said Korzybski, and all the general semanticists who came after him; the map is not the

territory. To confuse word and thing is to commit the act of “identification,” which in his system became sort of original sin: “Identification is found in all known primitive peoples; in all known forms of ‘mental’ ills; and in the great majority of personal, national, and international maladjustments.”

When we consider that language represents the subjective side, the horizontal negative, and “objective reality” the horizontal positive, we see Korzybski is saying exactly what Narayana Guru is teaching us: there needs to be a healthy connection between our ideas and the world, no matter what its actual status may ultimately be. Fuzzy thinking in which we project our desires and opinions on the outside world as well as on ourself is a recipe for disaster.

Korzybski even advances to the subtle understanding of Narayana Guru which was taken almost to extremes by Nataraja Guru, that it’s helpful to include the awareness that we don’t know what anything really “is,” we have only a partial understanding. “Seems” and “appears” are more humble and accurate terms than “is.” Narayana Guru added the more general comprehension that if you say something *is*, it exists as an idea, and if you say *it is not* it still exists as an idea, while Korzybski clings to the distinctly old-fashioned belief in a concrete external reality that we mount partial ideas about. The Guru and the mathematician would both agree, however, that confusion on these matters is a rich source of conflict at every level.

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2/16/16

Apavada Darsana Verse 1

This world, which is of gross
and subtle form, comes from consciousness;

if it is affirmed, everything is existence through and through;
if it is denied, it is consciousness through and through.

Nataraja Guru's translation:

*This world which is both subtle and gross
And what has come to be from living consciousness,
If existent, then everything is Existence;
If non-existent, then it exists as consciousness.*

And now we embark in earnest on the Apavada Darsana, envisioning the Consistent Refutation of the False. That means, not a Selective Refutation, as is much more typical. We don't get to pick and choose what to keep and what to toss. If it's false, it's out.

Paul pointed out the gist in this intriguing first verse. Gross and subtle, which imply outer and inner, objective and subjective, and so on, are two sides of a situation that is grounded in consciousness. Not, that is, grounded in purely physical matter. Or not ungrounded, as with two distinct and separate forms of existence. There is a unifying ground of consciousness and within that ground are two primary elements. Narayana Guru defines them by their most general characteristic of being gross or subtle. In modern terms, physical or metaphysical.

In the verse we are not being called upon to choose one side over the other, but to recognize the overall fluidity of life. Both sides are essential to reality, and they blend together in various permutations based on how we look at them. It doesn't sound particularly profound, but being able to integrate the apparently different sides brings a sea change in our relationship to the world. We hardly realize how desperately we cling to partisanship.

Nitya uses a well-known arena for conflict to demonstrate the concept: belief in God. Both believers and non-believers have a fixed conception of what God is, and are fully convinced of the

rightness of their view. There isn't really much wrong with this on its face; it's when the other side of the argument is considered wrong and yours right that the fighting starts. Nitya concludes his argument, which we'll look into a little later, in this way:

In both of the above cases concerning the existence of God, the people resorted to the criterion of a normative idea-structure to say yes or no. The God who is asserted to be real and the God who is denied reality are both only byproducts of the reasoning faculty. If the proponents of this argument had known they were quarreling only about the incompatibility of their ideational structures—a merely semantic issue—they might have agreed to suspend hostilities. (112)

The class pondered why it is we feel so compelled to mulishly adhere to our beliefs. Narayana Guru is gently urging us to let go of that compulsion, or what Susan called the need to cling. If we don't cling so tenaciously to what we think, we will discover a new freedom. We begin to live at a deeper level than our ideology in which tolerance and compassion blossom, and kindness replaces enmity.

This simple resolution is made nearly impossible by a social structure that emphasizes being right, of getting the right answer, and even more in not being wrong. Wrong is very bad. We are drilled from the earliest age to correctly agree with the attitudes around us or face punishment. Later our life trajectory is determined by right answers to tests, so the fear of mistakes becomes even more ingrained.

From a psychological standpoint, needing to be right is a trap, a reinforcement of our surface mentality at the expense of our deep wisdom. We presume we're suffering because we don't know the right answer, because we're confused, so we redouble our efforts to figure things out. Usually we latch on to a half-baked

notion and before long treat it as good enough. But to me, certitude causes vastly more suffering than simple uncertainty. It is intensely exclusive. Narayana Guru is telling us our certitude is based on fictions, on partial ideas, so it is always going to lead us astray. On the other hand, if we learn to accept that our understanding is inevitably provisional, we can find common ground with those we disagree with.

Partisanship is the order of the day, however, and you will always get more media attention with conflict, over amity. Religion by no means deserves all the blame in this. Our local alternative newspaper, the Willamette Week, ran a page recently titled The Worlds Most Annoying Atheists. I was glad to see they saw such people as the equivalent of fundamentalist religious types, with the best skewer reserved for my personal *bête noire* Richard Dawkins:

Dawkins is the Donald Trump of “new atheism,” the militant atheist who makes other atheists cringe. He’s stopped (barely) short of calling the faithful “total losers,” but he has equated feminism with religious extremism, and if you take offense, well, you must not know how to think. He’s a walking argument for the idea that, if you reject all possibility of a higher power, you might end up worshipping at the altar of your own ego.

The comparison to the loudmouthed quasi-politician Trump is apt. Most American politicians have abandoned civil discourse, realizing that the wackier you are the more attention you receive, and this translates into votes. It’s one of the more unfortunate consequences of television, and now screens: it’s not what you say or think, but how you look, how attractive you appear at a glance. Your visual image. So it is best to pick a pugnacious position and wring it for all it’s worth. This is the exact opposite of the balanced

wisdom espoused in spiritualized intelligence, where we seek truth rather than approbation. Deb contributed a clip from the book she's currently reading, *The Meursault Investigation*, by Kamel Daoud, about sincere seekers of truth: "I think I can guess why people write true stories. Not to make themselves famous but to make themselves more invisible, and all the while clamoring for a piece of the world's true core." (6)

A spiritual person aims for truth, where a less-concerned person aims for self interest in one form or another. From a detached perspective we can usually spot the charade in other people, but not so readily in ourself. We should remember to always refer these examples back to our self-examination, lest they exaggerate our own imbalance.

Speaking of politicians, Scotty gave the example of Judge Scalia, the Supreme Court justice who died last week. He was regarded as intelligent by many, but his intelligence was in the service of the most privileged people and institutions in society, and he used it as a weapon to protect them against legal intrusions. As Scotty phrased it, he was tenaciously opposed to a living Constitution, although he was sworn to uphold it. I guess that's why spiritual people are traditionally poor: the privileged will support dissimulators and undermine truth whenever it suits their self interest. If you intend to be honest to yourself, you are going to miss out on the filthy lucre.

Jan is a lawyer, and she pointed out that a lawyer's job is to first get the facts straight. Making your arguments is where later you bring in the fantasies and manipulate the truth to your advantage. But if you sit with just the facts, often a new theory will emerge from your train of thought, one that feels more like truth. I agreed that letting go of our need to direct the course of events opens us up to the wisdom of our brilliant inner intelligence. We learn best by listening to the authentic inner voice that we have been trained to ignore. Instead of tuning out good internal advice,

we should restrain irrelevancies to allow our wisdom to come through. Again, this is not necessarily a good strategy for making a comfortable living, only for being honest with yourself and maintaining your self-respect.

This reminded Bill of the witnessing mind, where you tune out all the stuff you tend to add to the conversation. Just stop adding things, and see what's really there.

I mentioned that Mike Marinelli has been conversing with me via email about a weekly meditation group he facilitates, and much of what he's written is germane to Bill's point. Note that to Mike, mind is equated with the ego, and is not the whole mind as we try to think of it here. He talks about an idea similar to Bill's:

I find that most of the people that attend my meditation are trying to use their mind to discover who they are. They are pleasantly surprised when they are pointed to see themselves without using their mind. It is very difficult to move ones' identification from the mind to the Absolute True Self. It is indescribable and therefore very difficult to explain. I find the best way is to use Ramana Maharshi's enquiry method "Who is observing?" "Who is perceiving?" etc.

Most guided meditation is talking to the mind so people think the experience they are having is created by their mindful meditation. I like to use the term mindlessness since it shifts this identity to the Absolute. Also, the mind in whatever context you experience it is just a bundle of thoughts that stream thru consciousness, constricting it to conform to what is being dictated. It is a filter superimposed on ones' pure consciousness but the consciousness is really never affected itself.

Paul added that the less you think about yourself—meaning the less you define yourself—the more open you are to your true

nature. The trick is that we find many ways to think about our self as not thinking about our self, and so we remain stuck. We have to give that up too.

Jan affirmed that an important key is to remember that the fact or existence side isn't separate from us. We're trying to decipher and negotiate, and while defending our own interests—as we often have to do—sometimes we forget the bigger picture, that the whole context is us, not just the part that is going to benefit us personally. This is particularly challenging where the person you are negotiating with is fixated on their selfish interest, but you are trying to not be. It may feel like you're teaming up against yourself. We didn't pursue this at the time, but this is a good example of a place where you can survey the entire situation, yet then realize you have to counter the other person's selfishness by standing up for your side. This is not purely selfishness. The main difference is that the aim is to achieve balance rather than inflict defeat. And that's a huge difference!

Jan well knows that this takes plenty of self-reflection. We have to frequently reexamine our position to be sure it remains in balance. We have to pull back from the stream of thought in our head in order to stay on task and make progress. Scotty added that this was a call for vigilance in action. Laziness does not work. (Several of us can confirm this from direct experience!) He supplied us with the quote of the day, from Joseph Campbell: if you see your path laid out before you, know that it is not your path.

Paul said that transparency of vision (one of our favorite Gurukula concepts) emerges from consciousness balancing existence and vice versa. He's right that it's essential to fine tune our attitude to both the gross and subtle aspects, so that our ideas and the actual facts—Deb reminded us they are “facts” in quotes—correct each other. Nitya agrees that this is a crucial meaning of the verse:

It is evident that man can be affected by both gross and subtle entities. Events in the gross world of objectivity and psychological factors in the subtle world of subjectivity can in both cases upset equanimity and even coherence. These distinctions between gross and subtle should not be held too rigidly. Clearly, although these distinctions can be drawn, they are in fact and in operation experienced by the same consciousness. And both are generated by modifications of the awareness of the consciousness. Hence Narayana Guru says, “This world, which is of gross and subtle form, comes from consciousness.” (111)

So instead of a rigid dichotomy between subject and object, we have a (horizontal) pole where they grade into each other gradually. The middle ground is not excluded. We can still distinguish a tree from our idea of a tree, yet no matter how we slice it both extremes exist within our consciousness.

Susan had been talking to her brother earlier in the day about a similar subject. He was very upset about certain business issues with a former girlfriend, and she told him he had to subtract all his excessive feelings and just stick to the essential facts of the problem. All his misery, which was mainly a historical artifact from when they were a couple, was poisoning his ability to deal with the situation.

Deb knows that if you lay out all the facts, in place of your heavy opinions a new understanding arises, because you’ve let go of the history. Susan agreed that clinging to your confusion guarantees you will block new solutions.

Some definite distinctions must be made clearly, and in others any distinction is to some degree false, so it should be regarded with caution. Though the gross and the subtle interpenetrate much more than we often realize, we have to be

careful that we don't pervert reality by substituting our hopes and fears for whatever we can know of it. For this reason Nitya adds:

When the question of conscious awareness at the gross and subtle levels is considered, it is necessary that one should have a proper understanding of what is truly existent and what is merely fanciful imagery of the mind. The difference between what is existent and what is fancy should never become blurred in our experience of events or situations, or in our assessment of individuals and our relationships with them, if we are to retain psychological health. This is even more important if we are to have any hope of penetrating the mysteries of the esoteric. What is hidden from us now will remain so if we cannot distinguish between what exists and what does not.
(114)

This is a classic dialectic: we don't hold rigidly to our distinctions, meaning they can be a bit blurry, yet the line between the subtle and the gross should never become blurred. Put that in your pipe and smoke it!

I offered that one of the main myths of popular spirituality is that by having a breakthrough you will come to be all-knowing. Yet within manifestation there is no resting place where you can think, "I've got it." The minute you do you have dropped your good sense. Spiritual investigation is a way of life, not a blueprint for achieving some monolithic goal. There is no bull hiding in the forest for you to capture. Seeking truth means being alert and alive at all times. The minute you think you've arrived, you're asking for trouble. Pride cometh before a fall and all that.

We will be returning to some of these ideas all through our study. Almost all of Darsanamala is about "the consistent refutation of the false." The second darsana is named that, but it's an ongoing process throughout. Still, Nitya expressed some of the key points

in this verse as well as we will ever see them, so let me reprint one we discussed in detail last night:

Before the existence of a thing can be denied, one must first conceptualize the existence of it in order to be able to deny it. In the subjective and objective worlds of consciousness what does not exist cannot be said to be in a condition of nonexistence. Only after the act of conceptualization can one say that nothing is present which warrants the cognition corresponding to that particular concept. Such a statement cannot arise from a mental vacuum. The whole statement therefore belongs to the subjective world of pure concepts.

When people say, "God exists," they have in mind a normative idea and belief-structure of what God is. They experience in their emotional life a sense of wonder and adoration toward the concept of God, and in the external manifestation of inner values they see a perfect correspondence with the subjective concept. For them the one-to-one correspondence between the normative idea-structure and the objective existential experience is accepted as the existence and very often the proof of existence of God.

When others say, "There is no God," they too conceptualize an idea structure to use as a criterion to verify the possible existence of God. In this they will include such items as perfect order, uncompromising justice, a clear revelation of absolute truthfulness, the compassionate protection of all beings, and so on. After forming this structure and including in it other values of a purely conceptual nature, they look for a one-to-one correspondence in the world of objectivity. Unfortunately, what they have structured in their minds as God has little or nothing corresponding to it in the external world, so they vehemently deny the existence of God. Their experience is a purely subjective awareness of ideas also. (111-12)

From this it is plain that the heated arguments whether God exists or not are all beside the point. Yet you can lose your head over the matter, quite literally even. Much of what moves us to agitation lies in this same semantic category. We are called to deconstruct our certainties, which brings us not to confusion but to openness, tolerance, and loving kindness. I can have a belief in God that makes me a terrific person, and I can still see that you are terrific too, even though you don't share my belief. We might even find we believe in the same things, even though we call them by different names.

Stumbling over semantic issues plays out in all-too-familiar ways. Karen noted how words like democracy and socialism are used to either praise or castigate people, without any real connection to who they are. Or they are worn by others as badges of pride. What they actually signify isn't part of the discussion. Political discourse, at least in America, has degenerated into little more than name-calling. It's a great way to foster conflict, if that's what you're after. Nitya laments this divide-and-conquer strategy:

When the people who were indigenous to the area called Arabia propounded the great truth in their own language, *la ilah il Allah*, its complementary truth was uttered by the seers of India, *sarva khalvidam brahma*. Unfortunately, these nearly identical doctrines pronouncing the truth of one Divine Principle have given rise not to a unity of peoples, but to hostility and bloodshed. Even today India is a country divided against itself as the result of fanatical partisanship to one presentation or the other of the same truth. Throughout recorded world history terrible things have been done by man to man in the name of religion, and words have usually been the medium used to inflame unworthy passions.

Words such as “democracy” and “socialism” are the expressions of hypostatic concepts which have only a subsistential verity but which are treated as existential realities. This type of misunderstanding gave rise to the recent tragedy of war in Vietnam. American and Vietnamese youths by the hundreds of thousands fought, and many died, for the preservation of hypostatic concepts. The whole ridiculous and tragic confrontation was to decide the meanings of the words democracy and socialism. It is not surprising that the issue remains undecided. (112-13)

Narayana Guru reminds us that our beliefs are just that: beliefs. We very much want them to be true, but we should accept them as provisional estimations. We can share our best assessments with others who are working to understand, and then we will get along. This is the way of peace that seers of all ages have advocated. In a species always on the brink of madness, such wisdom can help turn the tide, not by forcing any issue, but merely by exemplifying a peaceful and dignified orientation.

Part II

Swami Vidyananda’s commentary:

This world, while seen as having both a subtle and a gross form, has come out of the Lord, who is of the form of consciousness. In other words, it is the Lord who appears as the world. (But) the world does not really exist. This world which is none other than the Lord, if we should say it is real, it consists of existence (*sat*). If we should say, on the contrary, that it does not exist because it still remains in the form of knowledge, it consists of the stuff of consciousness. Because it is both existent and made of consciousness it is none other than what the Lord is. Therefore,

whether we say the world is existent or non-existent, we have to admit that it is not different from the Lord; this is because the world is merely superimposed (*adhyasta*) on the Lord who is existence-subsistence-value (*sat-cit-ànanda*). It has no real existence and that which really exists is the foundation which is the Lord alone.

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Beverley shared a cute comment on the myth Nitya related: “I suppose ‘the king and the harlot’ story has a certain charm as told in parable or traditional story-telling style. Maybe it is to calm down someone whose mind is reeling with ‘subsistential’ and ‘hypostatic’!”

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Michael shared a visual representation of the ground of being, writing “This too is a fine visual of that essential core. I’d love to have one installed in my home ;)”
<http://www.ignant.de/2015/05/29/anish-kapoors-perpetual-black-water-whirlpool/>.