

changing consciousness and increasing scientific knowledge. Increasing scientific knowledge is definitely a worthwhile activity. Building this artifact is a worthwhile activity. I'm sure it benefits sentient beings. But appropriating and applying that third person knowledge so that it transforms your private experience in the here and now is perhaps that process that transforms knowledge into wisdom. Thank you.

APPLAUSE

PAUL GAILEY

00:46.51

The next presentation will be by Gary Tubb, a professor of religion here at Columbia.

GARY TUBB

00:47.08

Thank you. I'm always happy to have Bob Thurman as a target. But because, as you've heard, he's currently the chair of my department and salary reviews might be coming up, I'd like to add what a great honor it is to have the opportunity to

respond to him because he is so responsible and generous and wise.

00:47.35

Even so, I'd like to disagree with the first thing he said. I'm not sure that the rejection of authority is the highest form of wisdom. Sometimes the reverse is wisdom as well, because before Bob advised Chris not to organize a conference, I had suggested to Chris that he think about putting one together.

00:48.01

I'd like to comment on a couple of topics that came up in Bob's essay and in Teed Rockwell's response to it. From the point of view of how those topics are treated in the Sanskrit texts of the Advaita Vedanta tradition and in the Upanishadic scriptures that they look to.

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And I'm simply going to offer, not insight, but questions because I'm not an expert on philosophy or on wisdom. I'm simply a teacher of Sanskrit. And in that status I find myself interested in

the focus in both of these papers on systems of education.

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Or of training. And by a convenient coincidence some of the points that come up at the beginning of Bob Thurman's paper are ideas that as far as I know were first recorded in India in the texts that we happen to be reading this semester in my course of intermediate Sanskrit. And that's the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. So I wanted to say a little about that and about the stories in that that talk about the teaching of the sage Yajnavalkya.

00:49.16

And there are many points of similarity. The importance of super-knowing of ultimate reality, for example. Or the necessity of describing ultimate reality in negative terms, which Yajnavalkya expresses with famous conciseness in his phrase, "neti, neti."

00:49.37 But the thing that I'd really like to focus on is the scheme that Bob outlined of three stages of education, which he listed as first, corrective learning, second, critical reflection, and third, concentrated meditation.

00:49.57 These three stages come up in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad in the story of Yajnavalkya's discussion with his learned wife, Maitreyi, where in the course of talking about the pure awareness that the Upanishad refers to as the self, he says to his wife that the self is the thing that one must learn to see.

00:50.18 Bhatmava redresh daviha (ph), which later tradition takes to mean that the self is the thing that must be directly experienced. And as Bob said, it's in this third stage of concentrated awareness that- I mean of concentrated meditation that that direct experience takes place.

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But Yajnavalkya, immediately after saying this, then lists the three stages that are necessary to lead up to that and they're the same three that Bob talked about. He says the self must be heard about, it must be thought about and it must be meditated on. Srotovyo (ph)... [phrase continues]. And these same three things show up in the scheme that Bob talked about.

00:51.05

The same three are developed in later Duaday-Vedanta (ph) in a formal way and they continue in both the Buddhist and Hindu side, down to the present day as we saw this morning in Owen Flanagan's slide quoting His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, as referring to these same three sources of information in the same order.

00:51.23

That is - scripture, reasoning, and experience. As it happens in the intermediate Sanskrit class, we're also looking from time to time at the commentary on the texts. The oldest surviving commentary, which is by the Advaita Vedanta

writer, Sankara, and in another of his works - actually the only independent work that we have from him, which is entitled, "A Thousand Teachings" - in the prose portion of that work, he uses this three-stage scheme to lay out a model program for the enlightenment of a student.

00:51.59

It consists of three chapters that deal with the same three techniques. The first chapter gives examples of the teacher quoting scripture to the student. The second chapter is a debate or a discussion between the student and the teacher using reasoning to deal with the obstacles to the acceptance of the text and to other sorts of obstacles.

00:52.24

And then in the third chapter, the teacher is no longer there. The student engages in deep meditation on the same, you know, bits of knowledge. And I'd like to say something briefly about these three stages, and particularly the first stage, as they might relate to Bob's

contention that the Buddhist search for enlightenment is basically a scientific enterprise.

00:52.53

I like very much what Teed Rockwell had to say about this and especially the remarks that he made on the difference between knowing how and knowing that. But I think that in both papers there are further problems to be investigated where the first of these stages is involved.

00:53.17

That is the teaching of scripture. Which is a problem even on the Buddhist side. It's not one that Teed Rockwell talked about very much. He did talk about schemes of education and you'll notice he didn't talk about a basketball player who, by himself, learns to play basketball or a musician who by herself learns to play a musical instrument. He talked about an athletic coach and about a music teacher.

00:53.50

And I think what he said about the difference- about how you don't need to know that in order to learn how makes sense, for example, if we're talking about- if we're talking about the search for enlightenment, it may make sense where neuroscience is concerned, but if we judge from the evidence of actual Buddhist practice over the centuries and actual Hindu practice over the centuries, something about the use of scripture seems to be immensely important because they use an immense amount of scripture.

00:54.22

And in fact, the Buddhists despite the various ways in which they seek to devalue the reliance on scripture have transmitted a corpus of scripture which is considerably larger and considerably wordier than the Brahmanical vedic scriptures.

00:54.42

Even so, it's on the Brahmanic vedantic side that the problems in reliance on scripture seem to be most serious because in many ways the practice

that Bob Thurman derides of clinging to slogans is a pretty good description of what Advaita Vedanta, like Sankara, insist on.

00:55.03

Because for him, the most important necessary means to enlightenment is a reliance on what he calls the great statements. The mahavakya of the Upanishads, which for him form part of the Veda. The most important part of the Veda.

00:55.22

But how he conceives of the Veda is a very peculiar thing, which I'll describe only briefly because some of you already know this very well. Whereas for Buddhists, the word of the Buddha is venerable because it is the word of the Buddha, and whereas for the non-Buddhist Naiy_yikas that Steve Phillips was talking about, the Veda is the word of God, for a Vedantan, like Sankara, the Veda is not the word of God or the work of any other author.

00:55.55 It is not a record of the thoughts or the experiences of any person. It is fundamentally impersonal. It consists of statements that have simply always existed. And are therefore, untouchable by any taint of subjectivity.

00:56.11 Which is a very extreme position - not one that is likely to be accepted by people who are not Vedic adherents. Least of all by the Indian Buddhists who lived in danger of attempts to dominate them by the custodians of the Vedic tradition.

00:56.28 But even more peculiar than that is the way in which the Veda was transmitted and used by Sankara and by other Vedantans. And again, this is a story that I don't have time to tell in detail. Many of you know how much intensely focused effort went into the memorization and oral transmission of the Veda on the part of certain group of Brahmins.

00:56.53

And in some ways, it's one of the more remarkable stories of human achievement. But for my purposes, it will suffice to say that the students who came to Sankara, the only sort of students that he was willing to teach were young Brahmins who met a number of other qualifications, but who also came to him with the words of the Veda memorized backwards and forwards.

00:57.16

In a totally secure way. And who came to him having believed and been told all their lives that the possession of the Veda in their memory was their most important treasure. And who had been led to believe that in fact, their very existence on earth was intended to preserve the transmission of the Veda and who, into adulthood, continued to spend a sizable portion of every day maintaining their possession and memory of the Veda, but who almost incredibly very often came to Sankara without ever having had their

attention directed to the content of those Vedas that they had memorized.

00:57.57

They came to him, as I see it, with these nuggets of information from the Upanishads, which they had invested so much time and love and trouble in. They carried them in their brains unused, so far, as a sort of time. And if you look carefully at the way that Sankara used this possession of theirs, this unique, powerful possession of theirs in the first chapter of his book on how to enlighten a student, you can see him very carefully detonating these time bombs in their minds.

00:58.31

And you can try to imagine what that might be like. The revelation, continuous stream of sudden discovery. For me it's almost as hard to imagine as it is to imagine what it would be like to be a bat. But Sankara knew what it was like from his own upbringing in a notoriously zealous caste of Veda-knowing Brahmins.

00:58.52

So for him, however strongly he himself may believe in the sanctity and the validity of the Veda, he also knows very well the value of this Veda - this set of scriptures - as a pedagogical and in fact, a serological tool. And that's the way he uses them.

00:59.14

Now, what does this have to do with science? If we accept Thurman's suggestion that this scheme of education involving as it does such an extensive use of scriptural statements that certainly sound dogmatic, as the first step is basically scientific, we have to suppose that these apparently dogmatic statements are being used as hypotheses to be tested.

00:59.44

Although we have to, in Sankara's case, we have to view them in kind of an odd way. I mean, in a strange way, one could almost say that the Veda as he understands it is the opposite of epiphenomenal qualia. Because rather than

involving subjective experiences that have no causal importance, they are for him fundamentally non-subjective statements that are the sole necessary cause of enlightenment. Which is a strange situation.

01:00.12

But even so, there are indications that his use of scripture does use it in a provisional way. And I'll mention these just very briefly. First of all, this is suggested by the fact that the great bulk of the enterprise of transmitting the Veda pays no attention whatsoever to the content of the Vedic statements.

01:00.34

Although as I've said, Sankara deploys the revelation of their meaning in a very skillful way. If we look very briefly at the role of scripture as it plays out in the two successive stages - first of all the stage of reasoning and third, the stage of direct meditation - we see that in the stage of reasoning, for Sankara as for the Buddhists, the statements of the Veda,

whether we view them as propositions or as dogma, are in fact, subjected to very rigorous logical examination.

01:01.07

And Sankara himself famously said that if the Veda told him that fire was cold, he would not believe the Veda. And when we turn then to the last stage, which is that of deep meditation, we find an even stranger situation. Which is that if that final procedure is successful, it means that the original dogmas are blown to smithereens.

01:01.38

Because the final realization is one that involves the direct realization of the ineffability of ultimate reality. So, if for a proposition to be scientific requires that it be disprovable, then in a way, the dogmas of the Upanishads are super scientific because they are disproven if they don't work and they are disproven if they do work.

01:02.05

But either way, the whole enterprise is one that seems to require a special kind of hypothesis. First, because it's obviously a very difficult enterprise or such a great body of scripture would not be necessary in either tradition. And second because it's such a lengthy undertaking, such a long experiment.

01:02.25

Perhaps not if we're talking simply about individual techniques of meditation, which as Teed Rockwell has said, can and have been-

01:02.30

TAPE END

MIND AND REALITY - Day 1

Tape 8 of 8 - Panel on Wisdom

TAPE START

GARY TUBB

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00:00.08 Because the final realization is one that involves the direct realization of the ineffability of ultimate reality. So, if for a proposition to be scientific requires that it be disprovable, then in a way, the dogmas of the Upanishads are super scientific because they are disproven if they don't work and they are disproven if they do work.

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00:00.54

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***** NEW MATERIAL *****

00:01.02

-taught in extraction from their original Hindu or Buddhist setting. But if we're talking about the larger project of gaining enlightenment, that involves such an expenditure of time and effort. I mean, if it turns out not to pan out in the end then it's a very long trip back to the drawing board and the funding may have been used up. At least for this fiscal cycle.

00:01.25

And so, it may be that if this is some sort of scientific experiment that it's simply a kind of experiment that because of its very unusual

nature requires a hypothesis of a particularly potent form. And I don't know whether that's true or not, but I pose it as a question. Thank you.

APPLAUSE

PAUL GAILEY

00:01.57 Our final response will be from Piet Hut who is Professor of Astrophysics at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton.

PEIT HUT

00:02.07 Thank you. It's really wonderful to be here and it's quite a new experience for me as a physicist talking on, at a panel on wisdom. Let alone a panel on super-wisdom, as we now have heard from Bob. I didn't expect anything less from you, Bob.

00:02.27 I also had the wisdom not to tell my colleagues that I was going to talk on a panel of wisdom. Knowing how physicists react. How open-minded they are. But I am a physicist myself, so when I