

On the Nature of Integral Consciousness

Part 4 of ?

Franklin Merrell-Wolff

April 13, 1952

Last Sunday Dr. Waltmann asked me to undertake some definition of the territory we have so far defined as being held in common. Now, it so happens it is very easy to determine a large and supremely important zone of agreement.

As Dr. Waltmann spoke, there was a strong activation of a field located over the head. I may illustrate something of what is meant by this. If we draw up here, not a closed or elliptic figure, but let us say something a little more in the shape of a hyperbola with this limiting zone below, but no delimitation above. I think of this as representing a field of consciousness that's above the head; and in relationship to that, statements made were in the nature of downward projections, more or less discreet, that is, seemingly unconnected. The defining of the zone of agreement is in part reflected through the impression or the means, the more fundamental means, I derived from his discourse. It seemed to me that here was a field or stream of consciousness in its root and in its own nature unformed, inarticulate, but that from it there descended like lightning strokes of expression various word formations as . . . in more or less discreet relationship to each other, something which we might call conceptual pseudopods—a term by the way which he accepted last Sunday evening as a valid description—and something which was intercalated, or interjected, into a continuum of hidden consciousness which seemed more or less supporting these formations like epiphenomena, even a transitory epiphenomena, upon its back—the formations not being ineluctable or irrefragable, but serving as instruments to evocate a consciousness or a response in the individual who was listening; the response not necessarily being in terms of the same kind of formation, but in such form as was native to the individual's consciousness. It was a discourse that in high degree was impregnatory in the mind, tending to rouse the mind into spontaneous activity. My own experience is that it has produced something like a series of discourses or something that could be elaborated into a book if illustrated and documented. This sort of thing is of the highest value and ordinarily belongs to the field of yoga.

Some things were thrown into relief or clarified that tie in with certain of Sri Aurobindo's psychology. These precipitations of conceptions, and in some cases of ideographs, the ideographs being the drawings on the blackboard which were not wholly reducible to verbal conceptions—these precipitations strike downward suddenly—one here, one there, another there. The external effect is that they seem not to form a continuum, a logically connected whole. But if one was conscious of the movement behind, the continuum rested up here. The action here is a beautiful illustration of what Sri Aurobindo calls the action of "intuition"—lightning strokes that often appear disconnected, though he says that it can be followed up by other series that will bring about the connecting effect. You don't have a mental action here that operates from the external concepts like taking a data from outside and building up a conception from it,

but you have a descent from a field component up here. I use the term ‘field component’ in the sense of being parallel to the meaning in physics where the word has a definite meaning that fits very well.

Now, we can sense, in here, that which corresponds to Aurobindo’s “overmind,” which is already a state of integrated cosmic consciousness with resting above it, that which is called “supermind,” as meaning a dynamic principle that transcends the principle of mind entirely even in the sense of a cosmic mind. Now, it is characteristic of the Overmind, which is represented here, that it embraces what we might call massive conceptions. Features that in our ordinary discourse would seem incompatible or even contradictory stand integrated already in this level. From that massive background, these represent fractional precipitations which could be elaborated indefinitely. Many of you may have had some difficulty in following the discourse to the discussion or the expression. If, however, you orient the consciousness to the movement behind the word that I have illustrated there, it becomes unnecessary to remember the details of actual statements. As a matter of fact, Dr. Waltmann views those statements as being only temporarily valid—sometimes valid perhaps only for an instant, other times and in other extremes valid for a thousands years, to quote or paraphrase what he said to me—but being oriented all the time to that which lies behind.

Now, the keynote that is struck, the single word that would sum up the ground which is essentially common to Dr. Waltmann’s statements and my own point of view is “integration”—a movement towards the integral. This is supremely important, and therefore I shall say something on what we mean by integration and how it arises as an imperative necessity at this time.

If we can imagine an initial state of human consciousness, like that of the newborn infant, we may say of this consciousness that it is already natively integral, but integral in an inchoate or essentially unconscious sense. From that initial stage, the development towards a consciousness which is conscious of itself, which is in other words self-conscious, involves a long interlude of untold thousands of years for the race and of usually many decades in the life of the individual, even though he is a mature individual, during which there is an separation or differentiation of the different components in the total consciousness and the total incarnated being. This differentiation continues until it has reached a certain maturity. There is a time when differentiation produces critical problems. As a matter of fact, we have reached such a time now. I may illustrate it in different fields. For one, consider the field of science. Science has differentiated out into a number of specialties. Individual minds are usually unable to handle more than a small fraction of a science, let alone a whole single science. In order to gain new knowledge, we have a high concentration upon a narrow field. But we come to the point where one specialist cannot communicate what he has to those who are not specialists in the same field. The science tends to become useless, with the result that there’s a crying need for the different components of our science to be brought together. We are not, this world and we are not simply objects of physics, or objects of chemistry, biological objects, psychological objects, and all the rest, but in some sense we are a complex of all of these things and the world is a complex of all of these things. Many pathological conditions are produced by this over-differentiation. But in the scientific

field, in our own day we've come to the problem of how to draw together these things that are separated.

Recently, I read a book by Dr. Wiener called *Cybernetics*. In that book, he makes this very important statement. Our knowledge has reached the point where no one single mind can embrace it, hence, the effort is made to bring together groups of minds—men who combine with specialties a general knowledge of all the fields involved so that there can be communication, collaborative production. One of the fruits of this has been the present day development of the instruments of control and communication—instruments that grow out of a combined knowledge of physics, chemistry, neurophysiology, psychology, and preeminently, mathematics, along perhaps with other features. I'm going to, after a bit, make some reference to these new creations in connection with a problem that arose last Sunday in my mind. But we'll go on now to another phase of the demand for integration.

There is the world situation where many of us see that if nations do not transcend themselves and a sense of one world and humanity takes its place as the primary basis of loyalties and of emotional orientation, then, in the light of the instruments of destruction we have now evolved, disaster appears to lie before us. World integration is therefore being forced. I'll note one other point. The keynote of the message of Sri Aurobindo is integration. And he says that nature in a massive sense is willing it, that it must be, and that it will be willy-nilly by means that are comfortable if possible, or by means that are harsh and severe and ruthless if necessary. But integration must be. The order has gone forth in massive nature.

Now, I feel that the thing we are attempting here is part and parcel of this demand which we may say belongs to the *zeitgeist*, or the spirit of the time. But integration does not mean a regimented uniformity. It does not mean the coercion of behavior, with thought, with consciousness into one common, fixed pattern. It rather must mean coordination of vast multiplicities of differences into one continuum, one vast continuum of consciousness. The problem has many facets. It has its application, as I've just said, to the world of human affairs and the political and social life. It has its application in the field of science, as I've pointed out. It has a still more involved application in the integration between the scientific type of consciousness taken as a whole and the other grand facet of consciousness which we may call the "aesthesis"—that total consciousness which is oriented to the immediately given without interpretation, of which the crown is the triple glory of beauty, love, and *ananda*. All of this is something other than science. An integration of science, if successful, would not include this. A further integration is necessary as between the scientific or logocic consciousness and the aesthetic consciousness, which probably means far more to humanity than does the logocic.

We thus face a large order. How is consciousness to move in such grand terms that at one and the same time it embraces all of these facets which to us today seem discreet and separated because we are born into a culture where they are already separated? No, there is no simple answer. No merely human mind without the aid of this *overmind* power in consciousness could effect such integration, but that power is. We had a demonstration, as I said earlier, of its presence here last Sunday. That power is a fact that's working. And therefore the individual, private consciousness need not be concerned because it feels itself inadequate in the face of this vast demand. This is the

zone of the root agreement in the positions that have been formulated here in the present series of talks by Dr. Waltmann and myself.

Now, when we deal with this consciousness, the overhead consciousness or field component, there is no problem of integration. It already is a fact. If one were to rise into that consciousness he'd find himself in a state of integration without effort. It would be a simply existent fact. But integration is not a manifested fact in our consciousness in this world. The practical problem is to bring into an ever growing manifestation a vaster degree of this primary integral consciousness behind. That, as I see it, is the task upon which we are engaged here in our part of it. In this task there are different parts: there is the part of the mind, there is the part of the vital being, and there is the part that bears upon the physical being. Not all of us are called to an equal concentration in all three of these fields. Rather, we must function according to what the Oriental calls our *svadharma*, or our *svabhava*, that is, our self-nature as we are, as we are born to be; and no one can succeed in denying that. If he does, things don't go well within him. Then there is a self-duty determined by that nature. But, while performing one's own *dharma*, or self-duty, to reach to the power of not seeing it as exclusively valid, to realize that there are complementary and quite other self-duties that fit into the total picture, to seek to so far broaden the consciousness, the understanding, and the acceptance that one may include that which is quite different even in seeming conflict with his own essential duty and perspective holding firm to the *dharma*, the necessity which speaks through one, and the reaching out to the recognition of that which speaks through others when it is their *dharma* that is speaking.

We have therefore a natural, an inevitable, and desirable difference of expression. This came out in reference to a certain phase of the lecture last Sunday. Dr. Waltmann was speaking of consciousness as being organic. He made one passing remark to the effect that if it did not come from an organic base then it had to come from an inorganic. That wasn't followed up; but in my own mind, I have been following up some of the implications of that.

Let us look at our sciences. Our sciences can be classified into three grand branches. One we may call properly the inorganic, consisting of astronomy, physics, chemistry, and the secondary sciences, derived sciences, geology, meteorology, and so on. And there's another group which we may call the organic or biological, consisting of the biological groups proper, zoology, botany, and so forth, psychology, anthropology, ethnology, reaching on into the social sciences of sociology, economics, and politics. The third group consists of the normative sciences, and these are mathematics, logic, and I would add a discipline that is not exactly a science because it's too difficult and therefore remains in philosophy but of the very first importance, namely, epistemology, which is the study of the nature of knowledge, of the knowing process. It involves the evaluation of that knowledge, the setting of its limits, and so forth. Nothing is more important than just that.

Now, let us take these three groups. Those who have moved in the inorganic sciences have had a strong tendency to interpret everything else in the terms of their science. We thus have the whole class of naturalistic philosophers and materialists who try to interpret life and consciousness in terms of purely inorganic conceptions. It hasn't been a very fruitful effort. And then we have the biologists who have done the same

thing, and we have the great school of Pragmatism and Vitalism that has attempted to interpret the whole field of consciousness as being existence in biological terms. And third, there have been the rationalists who approach it from the standpoint of mathematics and logic as the prime integrative principle and point of view from which to view all things.

Now, actually, my own conclusion is that any one of these attempts must lead to partial and defective results. But they're by no means unjustified. Each attempt has its power. The question though is asked, does consciousness—is it originally derived from an inorganic source or from an organic source is an interesting one. I apply the term inorganic to only that group of sciences that center around physics for instance. You let the normative sciences belong in a grouping that is neither organic nor inorganic.

I've just been reading recently an article on these instruments of control and communication. They grow out of a certain synthesis of the organic and the inorganic on the part of the men that created them, and now look at what they've been able to do. They make machines that not only can calculate over an enormous zone more effectively than a mathematician. They make machines that can duplicate sensory power: can see and hear, can be aware of temperature, and possibly can reproduce any of our senses if they want to go that far, I don't know. But they certainly can see better than we can see, and so on. They can produce machines that can recognize shapes; thus, for instance, a machine that can read a page and type what's reading at the same time, that involves recognizing appropriate shapes in doing that. Machines that can translate impressions into the equivalents of ideas, can give ideas expression in terms of the machine language. We have machines that can duplicate, in some measure, the human voice. A machine that can take written materials and translate it into sounds that are distinctive correspondents to the words so that a blind man can read books through the aid of this machine. It doesn't mean it pronounces the word the same as we do; that's not necessary. Machines that can take, on the other hand, heard things, translate them into visual forms so that a deaf man can "hear" what is being spoken by seeing it spoken. And there is evidence that there is the power of learning from experience that can be built into machines.

Now the question is brought up, do these machines think and are they intelligent? There's a good deal of warmth in the difference of opinion here, but here is the thing, and this is the point I'm coming to, you can take certain of the IQ tests, the intelligence coefficient tests, the devices by which we say we measure intelligence in human beings, can apply them to these machines, and on many if not most of the points the machine would get a 100 percent grading. On the points where it loses, it gets zero. Through five of ten the man went through, the machine got a hundred on four points and zero on one. Now, before the machine was made, on many of these things, or many of these criteria, we said they were marks of intelligence. Is the machine intelligent?

Now, here's something coming over from the inorganic side manifesting features that we associate with intelligent consciousness. How are we to answer the question whether consciousness and intelligence has an inorganic base or an organic base? I'm not going to answer that. Would we call these testings of the machines, the IQ testings, the psychology of the machines? Would we call it psychology? And if not, would we call the similar process in the human beings a kind of physics if we're going to be consistent? Is what we call intelligence only a form of physics? Or is the activity of these man-made

machines essentially a form of psychology? May it happen that in the future when one wants some mental repairing he'll go to some mechanic or perhaps, on the other hand, in the future when a machine needs to be corrected and adjusted we call in the psychologist? Actually, those machines duplicate some of the phenomena of psychoses. I don't think this is a joke. One is inclined to laugh at first. I know my ego got quite a deflation out of all of this. If things, if one could play chess—actually machines can play chess, and they say good chess at that, well why be proud of your winning a game of chess if a machine can match you? They build machines that can master mazes. One device, for instance, that could run down over a series of tracks, certain tracks going into false leads, one track went clear around correctly, but every false lead had a track. The machine could roll down the track, could swing the switch, could go into the false lead, find it was false, back up, adjust the switch and go on to try the next one, 'til it went around the whole works. And after it had gone around the whole works, then it went the correct course always thereafter and never made a mistake. That sounds like learning. That was not an electronic device; that was a mechanical one in that case. What are we dealing with? Most of these wonderful instruments use electronics. Is there consciousness there? Is there deep intelligence there? Something we might call the “inorganic intelligence”?

I'm throwing these out as queries, something on which I'm not going to attempt any definitive answer, something to think about. Are we preparing mechanical instrumental entities that are going to make man quite unnecessary in this world, something that's going to take away from men their jobs—mentally and physically? Wiener who is a leader in this field is very much concerned on that point because he says it means that except for those who are persons of unusual ability in some sense, the individual will have nothing to sell that anybody else wants because the machine takes his place.¹ Now, there is a question, and it's a very mysterious one. How can something rise up from the side of physics that seems so vastly to overlap what we mean by intelligence? Is the conception of organism in the biological sense ultimate, as the Vitalist thinks, or is the conception of the inorganic ultimate, as the inorganic scientist has in the past at least tended to think?

I think neither answer is the final one. I rather incline to the view that in the integration of knowledge, the normative sciences hold the leading position. But that may be just a personal confession, an expression of a personal psychology. At any rate, when I express, when I strike down through these expressive lines, it'll be predominantly in the form of the normative sciences rather than of the biologic or the inorganic. But I will say that whatever the expression is, no expression can be the universal comprehender. No expression, though infinitely extended, can embrace this which lies behind it. Therefore, we may say that every expression whatsoever, whether it be in terms of concepts, of art forms, of activities in the multiform field of possible human activity, no matter what the expression may be, it means essentially a symbol of this which lies in perfection above. I think the difference in expression between Dr. Waltmann and myself in considerable degree is perhaps the difference between one oriented to the normative sciences and one

¹ Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1950).

oriented to the biologic and psychological sciences, but in either case, these are instrumentations and only instrumentations.

The great problem before us, and the one which to my mind is the most interesting of all, is the problem of “transcription.” Here we have this consciousness, overhead consciousness, the thing which one under some conditions can sense dimly. Ordinarily with most human beings that consciousness is superconscious. Penetration into it would be a blank or trance of unconsciousness, like dreamless sleep; but under the appropriate conditions and with the appropriate preparation, there can be a penetration into superconscious states that leaves some sort of awareness. It may be and almost certainly will be at first a very dim awareness of a somewhat, a somewhat that has an indeterminate character, but a strong force of reality. With increased acquaintance, that indeterminateness becomes somewhat less indeterminate. There can be a degree of recognizing of degrees, of facets, of modes in this level of consciousness and bring a dim, perhaps, and shadowy reflection of it down into the outer waking consciousness.

Now, how is one going to make a transcription into this outer field from that inner depth of consciousness? When one through a mystical Realization is brought into the full impact with it there is the sense of something enormously familiar and at the same time utterly strange when contrasted with this differentiated consciousness we have here. Its nature seems to be quite unrelated to this here. It seems incommensurable. There seems no language that can be true to its nature. Now, I have discerned in such a state something which I would call a kind of thought. It’s entirely possible, nay probable, that someone else might find it as a transcendent light, but to my consciousness, it appeared like a thought; but a thought that was a very strange thought. If we think of our ordinary thinking as being a granular construction of concepts, and of words, and of symbols, this thought is a free flow, completely autonomous or spontaneous. And the characteristic of this thought is, the outstanding characteristic is, that though there is a plurality of thoughts, every thought embraces the whole of infinity. We might say there’s a potential infinity of thoughts, every one of which embraces the whole of infinity. Into the ordinary relative consciousness this effect descends as though one had the final richness, the final satisfaction and value of absolutely complete meaning, of, along with it, a completely transcendent beauty, and a delight that is not like what our vital delight, something subtler but much more potent—all this and more at the same time. That value descends into the relative consciousness. It becomes totally unnecessary to think; it becomes unnecessary to act, because of this completeness. There’s no need of any seeking. It’s all full. Now, I’m speaking on a level where there is no symbol, no subtle appearance, no differentiation that is anything like a sensuous or conceptual differentiation.

Now, it seems that there is something like a . . . demand that value from this level shall be brought into the relative field. I find no demand from the level above requiring this. I find merely a quality that permits it and equally permits non-manifestation. It’s aloof, complete as it stands. But suppose you undertake the problem of transcription, of cross-correlation, here’s something that we face. I’m going to present this as a cross-correlation or transcription in conceptual terms, bearing in mind it can be in other terms as well. This is the phase with which I have most interest, am most familiar. You take a process of rising in consciousness—this is a labor, partly spontaneous, partly a labor—but say you rise, when you’re rising, we’ll say, above the peaks of intellective

consciousness, of all relative phases of consciousness before you strike this zone. At this point, an inversion takes place, a reversal of consciousness. I used the term in my own writing, and then I later found the same word used by Sri Aurobindo confirming the point that it is a general principle we have here . . . here lies . . . and then . . . a flipping over, continuity of consciousness couldn't be maintained across there.² That's like a barrier. When you come back, there's that break in there, break of continuity. There's a continuity up here, there's a continuity we have here, and a break in this form. The break is as though the self-identity even ceased and then was found again, reestablished. It's my experience that it's instantaneous movement, very quick. I struggled at times to try to narrow the zone, somewhat successfully, pushing in here and holding to this; it was a . . . of what's possible to make the crossing. The idea in my mind was that this barrier to the inflow of this consciousness lay largely because of this. The problem was how to get across there, to make a line of communication as it were. Bear in mind that the unity of all life, of all worlds, the cosmos, and so forth, is a fact in an inconscient sense in what we might call a great trance of nature, but on the side of evolved consciousness the problem is how to establish a conscious correlation between this zone and the zone below. If there is to be a descent from this, the enlightened zone, of its values into the relative field, the problem is the crossing of this barrier in there. Here you can organize your concepts. They may be subtle concepts; you may have to use symbols in place of words, but they can have form, you can guide them, at least with great effort. They no longer apply up there. That pattern doesn't apply anymore. Nor do any of our other patterns apply there. How are you going to then convey and bring it across?

First of all, to make this crossing does call for an act of faith. You can't get away from that. It is as though you threw yourself upon the threat of an extinction more fundamental than ordinary physical death, and the trust was that all was well. You don't know at first, that instantaneously thereafter the identity is rediscovered, established in this other zone. That is the mystical crisis, right crossing at that particular point. Then you may learn something of the skill of crossing back and forth. The appropriate stimulus often causes the sudden rising up, or it happens spontaneously when you don't expect it. I find that it is possible always to swing back, after having learned how to do it the first time.

Now, up in this zone there is this flowing thought—every thought infinite, a constant flow, not a flow from the past to the future though, so you have to stretch your conceptions now. It's a flow that is self-contained in the sense that it never violates the unity. Here are conceptions that are articulate down here. Let's just build some sort of square, a rectilinear figure to indicate that. These are definitive conceptions that we can develop down below. Our perfect conception below is the conception that becomes completely determinate through a finite number of specifications, closed in, locked. We indicate that by the square. These conceptions are indeterminate, fully. The transcribing conception that may reach between these two orders would have to have the dual character of being indeterminate in one dimension of its nature and determinate in another dimension of its nature. We can't work with conceptions that are not in some degree determinate, that means "definable"—can be determined by specifications of one kind or another. We have to have that character to work with them. But what we've got to evolve for the crossing

² There apparently was a tape recorder malfunction at this point.

here as the intermediate level for transcription is the conception that on its one border is definitive and remains undetermined in its other border, reaching into the infinite.

Now, when it comes to the act of transcription, here you have a flow, you want to make a capture, the only thing that I see that was possible was something like making a cut in the flow—a capture of that cut, which the moment after capture already became a falsification in part because the flow was going on. And bear in mind, this is not because it's a cut, a finite conception; it is also infinite. That is then drawn down through a shadowy intermediate type of conception which I'll indicate this way: determinate on its lower level and indeterminate above until you cast in down into, again into a lower form, perhaps two or three transcriptions before you get it into the field of the intellectual mind. Now, that's one part of the problem which we are facing; how to generate this kind of conception as the agency of transcription between this above and this below. Once that's done, then the stepping down, stepping down into the field of particularized consciousness and action becomes possible in progressive degrees.

Now, one final statement, while I have been speaking in terms of a conceptual transcription, bear in mind this thought above is also a dynamic energy, it is also a substance—that when it is drawn down through the conception, it's not an empty conception, it's a dynamic, substantial conception and that dynamic and substantial quality remains even when we get it reasonably square; that means reasonably understandable. So when you're listening to a process like that, you don't have to worry about the fact that intellectually you will probably not understand what's going on, because we are dealing with processes that are at the very limit of the intellectual power in man, and we're trying to crowd that a bit beyond itself. And that's not going to be grasped. You're not going to be able to hold that. But you can experience the effect of the inflow that becomes possible and that's the important thing for the individual.

I think that'll be enough for tonight. May we have . . .?