

Abstract of the Philosophy

Part 3 of 14

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This tape is a continuation of the subject matter of the last tape.

When I started this series of tapes, I had originally planned to give an abstract of my philosophic formulation, but it hasn't developed that way. So far nothing has been said concerning the philosophic statement that grew out of the Realizations. On the contrary, the development was in terms of a discussion of the Realizations and led, ultimately, to Dr. Maurice Bucke's theories concerning the breakthrough of that which he calls Cosmic Consciousness. Now, this illustrates something that is characteristic of all my production since 1936. Analysis of the process reveals this fact: that it is the joint work of two functions, one of which is the intellectual function which is a common property of our humanity here; and the other is that which I call the "transcendental function" which broke forth into activity at the time of the major Realization of 1936.

A word concerning the interaction between these two may very well be of interest. First of all, neither function is the slave of the other. The relationship is as a friendly cooperation between the two—one function having competence in a certain domain, the other in another domain. The intellectual function is competent in the field of presenting the material for formulation, the technique of formulation, which includes not only the whole of language, but the whole knowledge of science and of logic. On the other hand, the transcendental function gives the essential subject matter which in its purity, without the cooperation of the intellectual function, is wordless and appears simply as a kind of flowage in consciousness. I find that they work together, that either will give way to the other when that is necessary. But I often find that when I plan with the resources of the intellectual function a certain course, the transcendental function will intervene and determine a modification of the course of development that may be quite different from that which had been originally envisaged. It is my policy always to give way from the level of the intellectual function to the guidance of this inner function.

Now, it is characteristic of the intellectual function to be oriented to system, to organized form in development that may be logically acceptable. The transcendental function often moves from a level of a different sense of order that does not conform with this. The result is that in none of my production so far have I been able to be fully systematic. Something intervenes from the transcendental function in connection with any systematic effort that forces the abandonment of the system for the inclusion of other material, the relevance of which may not be at first wholly apparent. And so it has happened in the case of this series of tapes. I started to give a formulation in brief abstract form of the principles of my philosophy and found myself discussing the principles, or the manifestation, of this other kind of consciousness which Dr. Bucke has called Cosmic Consciousness.

I find Dr. Bucke's approach to this problem, and his contribution, to be of value, in fact great value, particularly in an attempt to reach the understanding of Western man. It is not the only possible treatment, and it is quite different from the approach that a traditional Oriental would have given. It has limitations as well as positive value. I shall consider both aspects. But first, let us consider the main lines of his theoretical development. First of all, we must remember that he was an alienist. That is the title which was used in his day to designate what we would call today a psychiatrist. He was in charge of an insane asylum, as a matter of fact. But he had an experience, or rather an imperience, of what he called the Brahmic Light, and that produced a revolution in his interest. And he was, in addition, interested in certain literary figures, particularly Walt Whitman. He did not take the course of action that has so often been the case with our modern psychiatrists—but not all of them—which was an attitude of radical disparagement of anything that differed from the norm of ordinary human consciousness. But he took the view that here was something of serious importance and which from his own experience he knew was of superlative value. He is basically a friend of the new Awakening that's involved in the breakthrough in this consciousness, and we have every reason to be grateful for his contribution.

Now then, let us see his standpoint. First, he considers life as emerging out of the inorganic—a view that is characteristic of Western scientific interpretation. He considers that in the beginning this process was unconscious, that there was a living force, a vital principle operating, but operating essentially unconsciously. But that at a certain time, consciousness emerged, and in its first form it manifests as a consciousness which he calls "simple consciousness," which is, as he presents it, in two forms: first as simple perception, and as the animal forms evolve they finally awaken to something in addition to simple perception which he calls "recept," following the terminology of Romanes. The term 'recept' is equivalent to the more generally employed term of 'generic idea' or 'generic image'. The distinction between these two phases may be suggested this way: it is supposed that in early perception of the lower animals—and here bear in mind, we are strictly on speculative ground, for to know this one would have to experience the actual consciousness of these animals. But leaving that aside for the moment, let us assume the position here presented: that in the early stages of this development of consciousness, there were perceptions of objects without any element of identification; they just were perceptions and only that. But in time, out of a mass of perceptions, there grew the recept, or generic image, which would tend to identify certain objects as being of a certain type, though in a non-conceptual sense. Thus, a tree might be recognized and a stone might be recognized as the result of many perceptual impacts. And thus we have the first beginnings of a sort of generalization, but as yet non-conceptual.

Now, Dr. Bucke follows the line of theoretical presentation which regards this development as taking place in the step between the lower animals and the higher forms of animals, namely, the mammalian group. Then, beyond this, there comes a time when consciousness takes another step which is a kind of discontinuity into what Dr. Bucke calls "self consciousness." This corresponds with that which I call conceptual consciousness, but he emphasizes, in calling it self consciousness, the fact that it is a consciousness of cognition as distinct from the cognition itself. It is a capacity to be aware of knowing and knowing that one is knowing.

Then over a period of time in which the resources of this kind of consciousness had developed—and it has developed only in man and in none of the animals below man—there came the moment when the preparation was complete for the breakthrough into a different kind of consciousness. And this, according to his thesis, has so far happened only with a very few individuals of the human whole. In fact, in his research he identified only forty-nine individuals that he could pick up out of history and examine from correspondence at the time of his presence here in this world—a very small number out of the total of billions of human Monads who have incarnated in this world. He conceives of this next step as an evolutionary development, a normal stage of breakthrough which involves the operation of another function. Here we may identify the earlier stage of simple consciousness with *perception*, which he does, and which conforms with my own treatment of the subject matter. Then you have the breakthrough of self consciousness—which I call the breakthrough to conceptuality—which renders not only consciousness of consciousness possible, or consciousness of the fact that we have knowledge possible, but also renders language possible and the development of the notion of the universal, of the infinite—something that could not develop on the basis of simple consciousness alone. The function that is primary in connection with this consciousness, he gives as *reasoning*. The next step with the breakthrough into “Cosmic Consciousness”—which in most cases is as yet imperfect, although in a few cases of major proportions—the primary function that operates, he gives as *intuition*. This gives a brief sketch of the process.

Concerning this idea of identifying the Cosmic Consciousness with the function of intuition, I should like to say a word. The implication is that intuition did not exist before. Now, this I regard as very doubtful. There is good ground for thinking that the most primitive creatures of all that are guided by the instinct are really guided by a form of intuition; that rather than being a final development, it is actually the earliest form of cognition that there is. This would conform with Dr. Jung’s definition of intuition as unconscious perception—a perceiving a consequent on the surface which is not traceable in its depth. In contrast, the type of consciousness which breaks forth in high Realization, or what Bucke calls Cosmic Consciousness, while in fact it also is immediate, as is the meaning of intuition as such, instead of being unconscious perception, it is rather a state in which the root of the consciousness is itself conscious so that one would call it fully conscious immediacy. And it would seem that we should devise another term for it. Sri Aurobindo, in this connection, has a footnote in connection with his chapter on the system of the Vedanta in his *Life Divine*, in which he says that the word intuition is inadequate, but that we do not have another to fill its place.¹ For my part, I found it necessary to invent a term which represented this function and I called it “introception,” which is defined as the power whereby the light of consciousness turns upon itself towards its source—in other words, rendering the roots conscious. Like ordinary intuition, it is immediate, but it is immediate in a condition of high illumination, not in the state of unconscious perception where one would be forced to say: I think I know, but I don’t know how I know. Whereas, in the case of introception, one knows how he knows even though he cannot formulate in conceptual terms an adequate explanation.

¹ Aurobindo Ghose, *The Life Divine*, vol. 18 of the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centennial Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 66

There is another of Dr. Bucke's terms that needs a degree of clarification—this is the conception of “self consciousness.” This should not be confused with the conception of Self knowledge as the term is used in the Vedanta, specifically as employed by Sri Shankaracharya, by Ramana Maharshi, and Sri Aurobindo. Self knowledge in this sense is the cognition of the *Atman*, of the Self, and is the critical achievement in *Jnana* yoga. Actually this is only associated with the awakened Consciousness, that which Bucke actually calls Cosmic Consciousness. It is not cognized in the conceptual or perceptual senses, but in a totally different sense, which therefore required me to invent a term for its representation, namely, introception. It is cognized by being identical with the object of cognition. It is not an object before consciousness, but a subject which never becomes an object before consciousness, and therefore the knowledge of it is not knowledge in the ordinary sense. This is not the meaning of “self consciousness” as Dr. Bucke uses that term, but rather a meaning that is peculiar to the Vedanta and is employed in my own formulations.

Dr. Bucke gave eleven characteristics of the Cosmic Consciousness as he studied it, but one characteristic which is of premiere importance he neglected to identify, namely, that is the sense of Liberation. This, in fact, is a very important part of the Oriental interpretation of this transformation in consciousness. The aspirant, when he attains this state, has the sense of being Liberated, of being freed. In Buddhist terminology, he's freed from the wheel of rebirth; he is freed from the bondage to a *sangsaric* state, and may move into a *nirvanic* state of consciousness, or, even, at a more advanced level of Realization, into a state that can move freely between the *sangsaric* and the *nirvanic*. The attainment of this consciousness, therefore, has the value that the chain of causation which causes repeated rebirth in the mundane order is broken, that there is no longer an obligation for such rebirth; although, with certain power it is possible to achieve voluntary rebirth. This meaning is highly important, and seems to have been missed quite completely by Dr. Bucke.

As has been noted, Dr. Bucke treats the development of Cosmic Consciences as a result of evolution. It has been so regarded by the discussion that we find in both *The Secret Doctrine* and in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, and I, for my part, would accept this as essentially valid. But that is not the only approach that we find present in the literature. In fact, in general, the religious approach involves the notion of correction of an error, as William James noted in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Specifically, Buddha, for instance, treated the condition of mankind as a state of suffering, and that the problem before humanity was that of finding a solution of the problem of suffering. And he, himself, successfully achieved the solution by that which is known as Enlightenment, which, in fact, is the real meaning of the word Buddha. Through the Enlightenment, the correction of the condition of suffering was achieved. And as I pointed out before, in the case of Shankara, the condition in the world as we know it in its mundane form is a state of ignorance, or *avidya*, which is corrected by knowledge in the spiritual sense, called *jnana*. And in Christianity we also have the conception of a wrongness, but otherwise interpreted, namely, in the form of a perverse will which must be surrendered. The awakened consciousness, the consciousness that is free from suffering, from ignorance, from the perverse will, is this consciousness known as Enlightenment or Realization.

Now, a question might arise as to whether Dr. Bucke is dealing with the same subject matter; and I think we must conclude that he is because he includes among his cases those who view it in these terms and he does, in fact, identify the Cosmic Consciousness with the state that has been called *Nirvana* by the Buddhists and *Moksha* by the Vedantists. He lists Buddha, himself, and Ramakrishna, as examples of what he calls Cosmic Consciousness. Therefore, I think we're entirely justified in recognizing his position as one dealing with the same event or state that has been the object of the most profound religiosity.

There is a possible contradiction here; there is the implication that in the case of a correction of a wrongness that man simply had slipped overboard away from the line of development which should have been normal with him, and that when he becomes normal, he has this illumined consciousness. That does not express or suggest a normal process of evolution. However, I think that we may conclude that the two positions are not necessarily incompatible, that there may be a wrongness superimposed upon a normal evolutionary process, and that without there having been anything like a fall, there could have been a development through these various stages of consciousness unfoldment, and there would, then, not have been the conception of a wrongness that would have been in need of correction. There is a problem here that needs further consideration, however, I find the idea of an evolutionary development very suggestive and I incline to favor it.

Another respect in which Dr. Bucke's treatment is manifestly deficient lies in his list of the cases of developed or partially developed Cosmic Conscious[ness] unfoldment in that it is very lopsided and leaves out many very important names. I made an analysis of his list and found this to be the case: that with respect to the Far East, he has only three cases, namely, Lao-Tzu from the Chinese, Gautama Buddha and Ramakrishna from the East Indians; and from the Near East, Jesus, Paul, Mohammed, Moses, Gideon, Isaiah—six in all; and from the ancient Greeks, only Socrates and Plotinus—no mention of Plato or Pythagoras; altogether only eleven from the Orient and the ancient Greeks, while thirty-eight are from the West, two or so from the Middle Ages, the rest from the period of the Renaissance into the modern period, and the number of cases grows more numerous as we advance into later years. In fact, something like twenty of forty-nine cases are given as occurring in the nineteenth century. There is a failure to represent the other contributors in China to Chinese yoga such as *The Secret of the Golden Flower*; there is no discussion of the cases that would have been involved among the Vedic Rishis and the composers of the Upanishads; a neglect of figures such as Sri Shankaracharya, Patanjali, and many other Hindu figures; and all of the *Arhats* and *Bodhisattvas* of the Buddhistic milieu; and no mention of the Sufi mystics, who are very largely Persian in character. This is very one-sided, particularly as the orientation to Realization or Enlightenment is much more a primary part of Oriental metaphysical philosophy. It's much more a part of Oriental metaphysical philosophy than it is of Western religiosity. Then he has also missed certain of the mystics of the Middle Ages that are of considerable importance such as Teresa, Catherine, and Saint Francis. And then most especially he neglected the greatest of the mystics of the Middle Ages, namely, Meister Eckhart. Here his work is definitely inadequate.

There is another point in connection with this work on the subject of Cosmic Consciousness which needs serious attention. I'll introduce this by bringing out the

following point. There is an introduction to the book, written in 1946 by George Moreby Acklom, in which the following statement appears. I cannot give the page as this portion of the book has no pagination at all, but the introduction is relatively brief and this can be found readily. The quotation is as follows:

Cosmic Consciousness is a book very difficult to classify. It does not fall definitely into any of the regular categories. This is due to the fact that Illumination or Ecstasy, of which it treats, is generally thought to belong to the realm of Religion or of Mysticism, or of Magic and the Occult—or even, by some ultra-materialists, to the domain of insanity. In Christian Mysticism, Illumination is the acknowledged third stage of the mystic's progress, coming after the two preliminary stages of Awakening and Purification. In both Brahmanism and Buddhism it is the reward of long and rigid self-discipline and effort.

Now note this especially:

But to Bucke it had nothing whatever to do with mysticism or formal religion, or with conscious preparation and intention. He was a student of the human mind, a psychologist, and he treated Illumination from the standpoint of psychology, as a very rare but definite and recognizable mental condition, of which many well-authenticated instances are on record and available for examination.²

I cannot wholly agree with the statement of this writer as to Bucke's not having any interest in helping the development of this state of consciousness. I find statements in the text that indicate otherwise, and that would mean that something of help can be given, or is implied in Bucke's thought, to the individual who may be on the edge of awakening to Cosmic Consciousness. As to the idea that it has "nothing to do with mysticism" or with "conscious preparation and intention," I must demur in the strongest possible terms. This would be equivalent to saying that all of yoga is simply hokum and only a fool, an uninformed fool, could say that. Yoga is, in point of fact, the very heart of Oriental religiosity, and the object of yoga is awakening to the state of Illumination. And the implication of all yogic methodology is that conscious intention can play an effective role, and furthermore, that aid can be given to the aspirant by the guru, or spiritual director. There is an enormous tradition supporting this position and to casually throw it aside as hokum is an act of the grossest of ignorance. To be sure, the approach is from the point of view of a scientist, a psychologist in this case, and in addition one who is a psychiatrist, and the line of interest is different from that of the religious devotee. All of this is granted. I welcome scientific interest in the field, but I must also make certain points with respect to the inadequacy of a purely scientific treatment.

The scientific interest is that of an observation of what takes place, not that of a potential practitioner, of an individual seeking redemption or Illumination as a practical event, as something to be achieved. The approaches are different. The scientific approach

² Richard Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1970).

is secular, and to a degree it has a cheapening effect in that it leaves out a very important element which is that which we would call the sense of sacredness in connection with the Awakening itself. It tends to secularize the sacred, and here is a realm in which one should deal gently and with respect for a very vital and important state of consciousness. This takes me back to a point made by Immanuel Kant in his ethics: that the maxim of thy volition should be treated as a law universal and that man should never be treated as a means alone but always as an end. If we deal with this state of consciousness only as an object of scientific curiosity, we forget that we are actually dealing with something that is the most important end-in-itself and not a subject simply of intellectual curiosity. The pig may look upon the robes of a god, but the pig could never comprehend the god.

I would say that the essential precondition favorable to the Awakening in consciousness is a profound religious attitude, but an attitude that is shorn or freed from all religious dogma and formalism. I would agree that religious formalism is more apt to be a barrier than an aid, or if not a barrier to the psychological event, it is a force of distortion in the meaningful interpretation of the event. Yes, I would say that it is important to discard religious formalism since there is much in religious form and dogma that seems to be designed to capture for its own purposes the fruits of a truly mystical or cosmic conscious Awakening. It captures, thus, the interpretation that may come forth from it, predetermines a form which it may take, instead of the true attitude of listening with open mind to the meaningful content of the state. It is religious in the truest sense of the word, not in the formal sense of the word.

In this connection, there is a principle in connection with the transformation which may be well-nigh impossible for the scientific or academic mind to appreciate and especially difficult for that mind to accept, yet this point lies at the very center of the process of transformation. This principle has three facets, namely, the sacrifice, the surrender, and the mystic death. As a perfect theoretical statement of the requirement in this connection for the transformation, we may say that the sacrifice extends to everything that the *sadhaka* has acquired and values in his journey through the self-conscious life; and the surrender of all command that may be claimed by his personal ego or by his intellectual power; and the willingness to accept the equivalent of a death more profound than that of the ordinary physical death, for if the sacrifice and surrender implied that on Awakening the individual lost to his consciousness the continuum of all his previous experience and thought so that he no longer knew himself to be that individual which had passed through that experience and continuum, then he would have died in the essential sense, even though the body would continue as before and he would be known among men who knew him before. The *sadhaka* does not know that if he makes the sacrifice and surrender that it will not be accepted completely and that he will be severed from that continuum of his previous consciousness in the *adhar*.³ By his study of the reports of those who have gone through the transformation, he may have a certain confidence by knowing that they have not so lost the memory of that previous continuum, and he may receive reassurance from his guru, or spiritual guide, nonetheless, this may give only a belief, not complete assurance. And his attitude

³ Aurobindo Ghose, *Letters on Yoga*, vol. 23 of the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centennial Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 1128: “The Adhara is that in which the consciousness is now contained—mind-life-body.”

should be so perfect that he would accept this complete break with all he was before even the loss of the memory of that past. This is the theoretically perfect sacrifice and surrender, but in practice it may center only upon that which is most valued; and if he can encompass this sacrifice and surrender with that which is most valued, in principle, he has done enough, for the rest would be very simple indeed.

And this is not merely an abstract, theoretical formulation, for I can say from my own experience that with the breakthrough, the view back to the *adhar* gave the valuation that all that lay in the *adhar* was only an illusion, a meaningless phantasmagoria, and in addition, at one point, even the memory of the passage through that *adhar* started to be lost. Instantly I recognized that if this forgetting continued there would be a break with all that past and the mystic death would have been very thorough-going, but by a simple act of will, I stopped the process of forgetting and held on to the memory which is so essential for maintaining one's sense of self-identity with the earlier processes of the life preceding the breakthrough. This is the true meaning of the mystic death which could be a very thorough-going death indeed; although, beyond lay a vastly richer consciousness that rendered all the values of the *adhar* to be utterly trivial.

And right here may be part of the meaning of the so-called renunciation of *The Voice of the Silence* and of the Kwan-Yin vow: that by renouncing the just attained glory, one indeed adds to it the continuum of memory and conscious functioning with that past in the *adhar* so that it too is added unto him. This sacrifice, surrender, and acceptance of the mystic death, is more difficult for those who have garnered the richer and larger values of the *adhar*, and therefore it is that Christ has said that it is very difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. For the poor man, the group of values that wealth can command are few in number, and it is easy to renounce them. But for him who has wealth, the command of these values may be very large indeed, and the tendency, therefore, to be attached to them would be correspondingly large; and he faces a more difficult problem of renunciation, but such renunciation is possible.

Now, material wealth is not the only wealth that may be attained in the *adhar*; there is the greater wealth of knowledge, the wealth that is the prime possession of the academician and the scientist, a kind of wealth which cannot be commanded by the man of money. Indeed, the latter can command the services of an applied scientist, but his wealth is totally ineffective in giving him command, in his own proper person, of the wealth achieved by knowledge. This, he too, must earn by his own effort and cannot buy with money. It is a greater wealth, and, therefore, the problem of the academician and of the scientist who would seek the breakthrough is far more difficult than the problem of the man who is rich only in material terms.

I know this problem directly. The demand calls for the deepest kind of searching. For the academician and scientist, the royal function lies in the intellect, and this is his commanding power. It is the king, and the requirement is that this king shall abdicate. Will he, in fact, lose the capacities he has built? Will he become a simpleton in the outer field, although rich in inner values? And as he has not yet known those inner values, he does not know that they comprehend much more than that which he has renounced. It would seem like facing a real death where no longer would he be able to think as the academician and the scientist.

Now, I can say that what happens, as I know it, is that the intellect does sacrifice its apparent royalty, but in turn it becomes a viceroy who is more potent than the old inferior royalty. The transcendental function becomes the royal function, and by its cooperation with the lower mental powers, those powers are enhanced in their resources. Nothing has been lost of the inferior powers, but they have been added to far beyond their own indigenous reserves. But he, the candidate who faces the transition, cannot really know this until he has gone through the process of being born again. Only the religious motivation is strong enough to take this step. There is no shortcut. There is no success possible if one devotes only a minor part of himself to the enterprise. He must give all, not knowing whether he will receive a return. There can be nothing causal about this. This is no cheap matter that can be handled by the taking of a poisonous chemical substance. What is achieved by such means is only a counterfeit, not a real transformation. Those who seek to attain by that means are fools who can only denigrate their futures by such improper indulgences. The goal, the true goal, is only achieved by the most ultimate development of the religious attitude of sacrifice, surrender, and acceptance of the mystical death.